

# York Region District School Board

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## Human Rights Office (HRO)

### Annual Report 2022-2023

A report on the important and ongoing work of the Human Rights Office in addressing human rights complaints and supporting accessible learning and working environments that are free of discrimination and harassment.



## How do I access the HRO Annual Report?

The HRO Annual Report is available in any of the following ways:

- **Online to the public:** Go to [HRO Annual Reports](#) on the YRDSB web page.
- **By email:** [human.right@yrdsb.ca](mailto:human.right@yrdsb.ca).
- **By telephone:** Leave a voicemail at 905-884-2046 ext. 255
- **In an alternate format upon request.**

## How do I provide feedback?

To provide feedback or send questions about any section of this annual report, please contact the Human Rights Office at:

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York Region District School Board

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Phone: 905-884-2046 ext. 255

Email: [human.rights@yrdsb.ca](mailto:human.rights@yrdsb.ca)

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# 1.0 The Human Rights Office

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## 1.1 Introduction and Purpose

The Human Rights Office (HRO) is deeply committed to building respectful learning, teaching, and working environments that are free from discrimination and harassment. The work of the HRO is guided by ensuring the Board’s commitment to and compliance with its legal obligations in addressing issues of Code-based discrimination and harassment under [Board Policy #240.0: Human Rights: Code-Related Harassment and Discrimination](#) (Human Rights Policy #240).

Human Rights Policy #240 is based on Ontario’s Human Rights Code, which provides equal treatment without discrimination based on the following 17 Code protected grounds:

Age	Disability	Marital Status	Record of Offences (employment)
Ancestry	Ethnic Origin	Place of Origin	Sex (incl. pregnancy)
Citizenship	Family Status	Race	Sexual Orientation
Colour	Gender Identity	Receipt of Public Assistance (housing)	
Creed	Gender Expression		

The HRO has prepared this Annual Report to highlight the important and ongoing work in addressing human rights matters and supporting the YRDSB system through professional development during the reporting period of **September 1, 2022, to August 31, 2023**.

The HRO Annual Report is presented to the Executive Council and subsequently to the Learning, Equity and Well-Being Standing Committee. For the 2022-2023 reporting year, the HRO Annual Report is presented jointly with the [Annual Accessibility Report](#). The HRO Annual Report is posted online and made available to the public on the [HRO Annual Reports webpage](#).

## 1.2 Commitment to Human Rights

The Board's commitment to human rights is carried out through the two primary priorities of the HRO:

1. To act upon complaints confidentially, fairly and in a timely manner; and
2. To support the prevention of discrimination and harassment through human rights and accessibility education, learning and professional development.

### A Coordinated Commitment to the Director's Action Plan

The HRO goals are aligned with the [Director's Action Plan](#) goals to support staff and students who are underserved and underperforming through a commitment to:

#### Foster Well-Being and Mental Health

with a goal to build safe, inclusive and accessible learning and working environments where all feel they matter and belong based on principles of human rights.

#### Champion Equity and Inclusivity

with a goal to increase our shared understanding of human rights, accessibility and the ongoing impact of colonialism through education, learning and outreach.

#### Build Collaborative Relationships

with a goal to build trust with staff, students and families through confidential and respectful communication as well as responsive actions.

#### Empower Ethical Leadership

with a goal to championing human rights and accessibility beyond legal compliance and in a way that elevates lived experiences and voices within the Board community.



## HRO Governing Principles

The work of the HRO is shaped by five governing principles that have been developed throughout its six years of operation:

1. **Arm's Length**
2. **Confidentiality**
3. **Respect**
4. **Impartiality**
5. **Accessibility**



While the HRO is committed to championing equity and inclusivity, matters specific to equity engagement within schools are addressed through Inclusive Schools and Community Service (ISCS).

### 1.3 HRO Mandate

The HRO's mandate is centred on human rights and accessibility compliance and education. Our responsibilities to the YRDSB community include (but are not limited to):

- Receiving and responding to human rights concerns brought forward by a member of the Board's community;
- Overseeing the Board's compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA);
- Supporting preventative actions through delivering and developing human rights and accessibility education, training and outreach;
- Providing leadership on Board policies and procedures specific to human rights (Policy #240) and accessibility (Policy #407);
- Managing the Barrier Buster's electronic reporting tool that allows community members to communicate any barriers within the learning and/or working environments of YRDSB; and
- Advising the Board's senior leadership team on its strategic goals and actions through a human rights and accessibility lens.

## 2.0 Human Rights Office - Case Management

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**HRO Priority #1:** To act upon complaints confidentially, fairly and in a timely manner.

A core mandate of the HRO is to address issues of discrimination and/or harassment that violate the Human Rights Code. Human rights concerns are typically reported directly through a confidential [Reporting Form](#) or by email at [human.rights@yrdsb.ca](mailto:human.rights@yrdsb.ca).

Each matter is reviewed and assessed to determine if the reported incident connects to a protected ground of discrimination under the Code.

The HRO does not take on human rights complaints that are actively being addressed by another department, even if they may be Code-based. Management may consult with or refer a human rights complaint/investigation to the HRO.

The HRO also provides general information to Board community members on their rights and responsibilities under the Code. When appropriate, the HRO promotes early dispute resolution options to resolve complaints.

### 2.1 Human Rights Office File Summary

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During the 2022-2023 reporting year, the HRO received a total of **108 new files\*** from September 1, 2022 to August 31, 2023.

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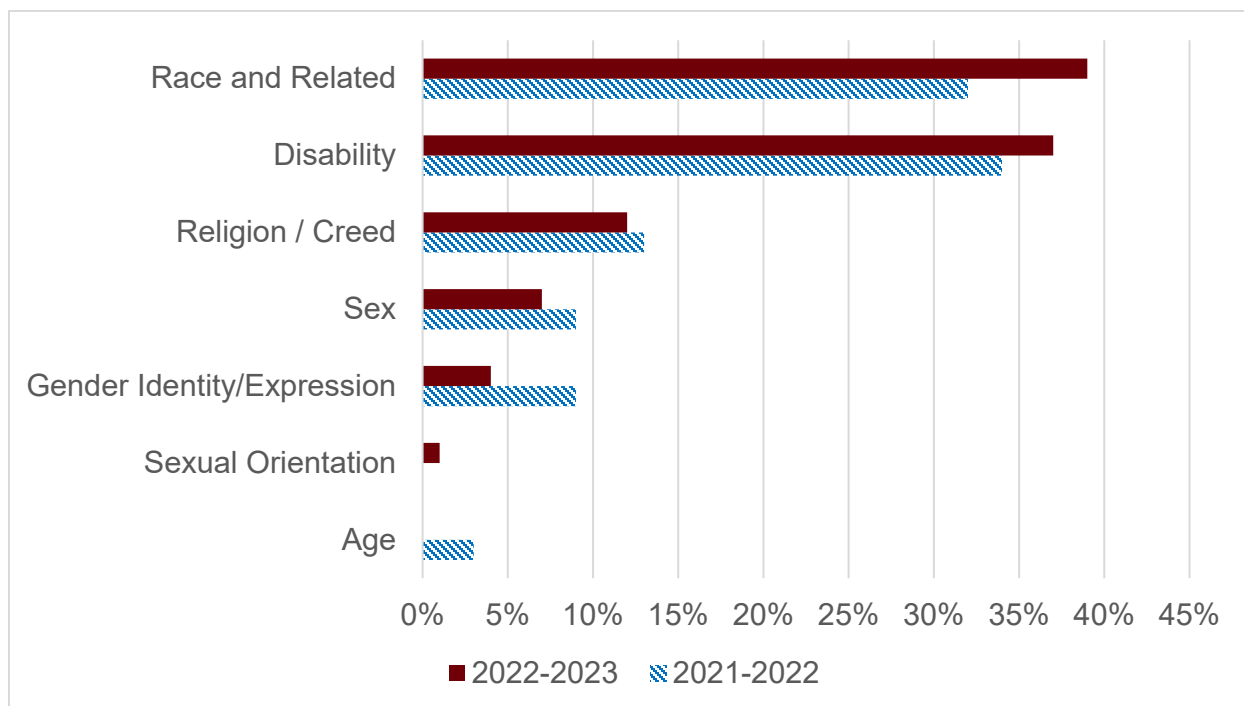
\*File tracking and classification changed within the reporting year and therefore file numbers cannot be compared to previous reporting years.

The HRO addressed 103 complaints and requests for guidance by:

- providing guidance and information on human rights;
- fact finding;
- early resolution; or
- referral to the appropriate department

The remaining 5 files were requests for information misdirected to the HRO. These files were responded to and directed to the appropriate department.

## HRO Complaint and Consult Files by Code Ground



In the 2022-2023 reporting year, race and disability were the highest reported Code grounds to the HRO. This is consistent with previous reporting years.

**Race-based complaints:** The HRO received complaints from parents, students and staff alleging discrimination based on race and related grounds. From the race-based allegations, files relating to incidents of Anti-Black Racism were received in higher numbers compared to other racialized or Indigenous identities. The HRO engaged with the Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy implementation team for support and/or referred matters related to anti-Black racism.

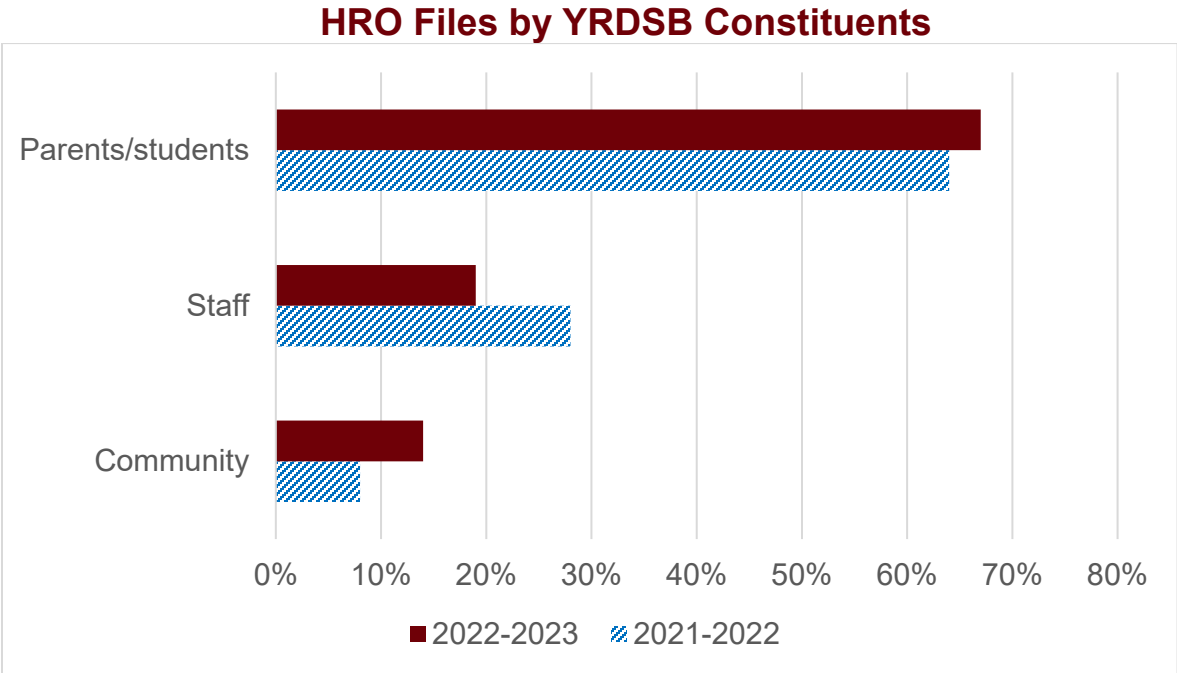
**Disability-based complaints (including mental health):** Most disability-based complaints from staff and parents/students relate to allegations of a failure to accommodate specific disability-related needs. During this reporting period, the Human Rights Office received several complaints about the new YRDSB de-streamed math curriculum. Many parents of students with learning disabilities or IEPs were concerned that the Board only offered academic math. The HRO facilitated conversations with Student Services and other areas of the Board to see how the complaints might be resolved. Beginning in September 2023, based on a student's individual needs, YRDSB offered Grade 10 applied math.



**Gender identity and/or expression-based matters:** The HRO’s engagement on issues related to gender identity and/or expression were mostly consultative. In 2022-2023, the HRO received complaints about staff misgendering students and staff making disparaging remarks about preferred pronouns. Discussions were focused on the rights of students to express their preferred gender identity with or without parental consent.

### 2.3 HRO Files by YRDSB Constituents

The following bar graph illustrates which YRDSB constituents filed complaints to the HRO. Most complaints were filed by parents of students.



## 3.0 Human Rights Education and Outreach

**HRO Priority #2:** To support the prevention of discrimination and harassment through human rights and accessibility education, learning and professional development.

During the 2022-2023 reporting period, the HRO developed and facilitated human rights and accessibility training sessions and other professional development engagements throughout the YRDSB community. Engagements and participation with relevant external stakeholders are also listed in this section.

### 3.1 Human Rights Professional Development

The HRO continues to develop and facilitate professional development and learning opportunities for YRDSB staff to build awareness and understanding of the importance of human rights. During the 2022-2023 school year, the HRO delivered 13 training sessions on the following topics:

- Human Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Bias
- Investigations
- Introduction to Human Rights

These training sessions were delivered to individuals from:

- Senior Leadership;
- Principals;
- Vice Principals;
- Managers;
- Caring and Safe Schools;
- Elementary and Secondary School support staff; and
- Parent, Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee (PEAC).

The HRO developed an online course on Human Rights, Anti-Discrimination and Bias. This course is now available on demand through the internal YRDSB Connect2Learn portal (C2L).

In addition to training, the HRO created awareness through the following initiatives:

- YRDSB Twitter Feed – During Human Rights Week, the HRO developed facts and snippets for daily communications on Twitter
- Consultation with Equity Department – The HRO consulted on the Every Student Counts survey

### 3.2 Committees (internal and external) / Networks

#### **Human Rights and Equity Advisors Community of Practice Committee**

The Ministry of Education facilitates a community of practice with Human Rights and Equity Advisors (HREAs) and other human rights practitioners working at school boards

across the province. The purpose of this community is to share resources, discuss systemic human rights issues, and provide support.

### **Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group (MDIG)**

MDIG brings together 20 member organizations that serve people who live, work and play in York Region. The Group consists of municipalities, police services, hospitals, school boards, conservation authorities and agencies. The goal of this Group is to promote inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) within York Region. YRDSB has committed to upholding the values of and promote IDEA through training opportunities and ensuring employees maintain professional conduct.

### **External Research Review Committee (ERRC)**

YRDSB supports research studies that align with priorities outlined in Board Plans. The YRDSB External Research Review Committee (ERRC) is responsible for reviewing research requests by institutions, agencies, staff members, or other individuals who wish to conduct research within the Board. All research that is not initiated by the Board must be approved by the ERRC.

## **4.0 Accessibility Portfolio**

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The HRO leads the Board’s commitment to accessibility. This commitment to accessibility is aligned with the four MYSP priorities and are carried out through four Multi-Year Accessibility Goals.

### **4.1 Multi-Year Accessibility Goals**



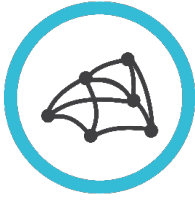
#### **Provide Accessible Customer Service**

Provide customer service excellence by promoting accessibility best practices that give meaningful access to all students and staff, including those with disabilities.



#### **Understand Accessibility as a Process**

Provide accessibility training, education and outreach to build awareness, knowledge and attitudes to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility.



### **Engage the AODA Advisory Committee**

Engage the AODA Advisory Committee that operates through shared responsibilities and inter-departmental collaboration, while also engaging people with disabilities.



### **Publish an Annual Accessibility Report**

Complete and publish an Annual Accessibility Report to demonstrate accountability for the Board's progress in implementing the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan.

## **4.2 Annual Accessibility Report 2022-2023**

As required under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), an Annual Accessibility Report is prepared as a separate document from the HRO Annual Report. The Annual Accessibility Report describes the measures that YRDSB has taken in the 2022-2023 school year to identify, remove and prevent barriers for students, staff and people with disabilities.

The Annual Accessibility Report describes the various Multi-Year Accessibility Goals and objectives achieved in the reporting year. The five sections of the Annual Accessibility Report are outlined below:

1. General Requirements Achieved in 2022-2023
2. Customer Service Standards Achieved in 2022-2023
3. Information and Communication Standards Achieved in 2022-2023
4. Standards for the Built Environment Achieved in 2022-2023
5. Employment Standards Achieved in 2022-2023

Feedback or questions about the Annual Accessibility Report is both encouraged and essential for advancing accessibility at YRDSB in a way that recognizes the needs of all learners and people with disabilities. Contact the HRO to provide feedback via email at [aoda@yrdsb.ca](mailto:aoda@yrdsb.ca).