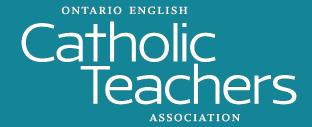# SUBMISSION ON ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN EDUCATION

TO THE ONTARIO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

September 2023

ONTARIO ENGLISH

Catholic
Teachers

ASSOCIATION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents the 45,000 passionate and qualified teachers in Ontario's publicly funded English Catholic schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

René Jansen in de Wal
President

David Church
General Secretary

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1.   INTRODUCTION

1.01   The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute input as the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) develops its anti-Black racism in education action plan.

1.02   As the Association representing the 45,000 professionals who teach Kindergarten to Grade 12 in publicly funded English Catholic schools, we are able to provide perspectives from some of the frontline workers in Ontario's classrooms. We can give insight as to how the realities and consequences of anti-Black racism manifest in children, as young as four and five years old. And we are acutely aware of how persistent underfunding in education perpetuates and exacerbates barriers and creates resource shortages, which prevent Black students – and others from equity-deserving populations – from having the opportunity to realize their full potential.

1.03   Catholic teachers remain firmly committed to the principles of accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity (AIDE), within our union, our schools, and society more broadly. And we continue to lend the strength of our voice to confront and dismantle systemic barriers, such as those related to anti-Black racism.

1.04   Our positions are firmly grounded in research, evidence, and experience about what teachers and students need to meaningfully confront and address anti-Black racism in education. Some of these recommendations echo those submitted to the government through the pre-budget and Grants for Student Needs consultations. These papers are available in the "Where we Stand" section at **catholicteachers.ca**.

1.05 As much as the recommendations outlined in this submission draw upon academic literature, they are also informed by conversations with Black Catholic teachers about their lived experiences, through venues such as our Diversity Advisory Board's ongoing "Connecting with Members" forum series, which provides Catholic teachers who identify as belonging to equity-deserving groups a safe space in which to share their experiences.

1.06 We recognize and acknowledge the many, varied, and systemic ways that anti-Black racism manifests and is reproduced in all our social institutions, including publicly funded education. And we understand the consequences such harms have on Black students, teachers, education workers, and families in the short and long terms.

1.07 However, to translate recommendations into reality requires a real and proper investment by the Ontario government, and a willingness for the government to work meaningfully with all education stakeholders, as well as experts and community groups. It also requires a program for implementation and accountability – a plan that includes clear objectives, tools, training, and ongoing measurement to ensure effective implementation.

1.08 It is only through a dedicated and concerted effort that Ontario's publicly funded education system will work toward achieving institutional and systemic change, and creating organizational cultures that are welcoming and inclusive of all Black students, teachers, education workers, and staff.

1.09 The recommendations that follow are organized based on the structure and questions proposed in the OHRC's *Anti-Black Racism in Education: Engagement Guide*.

2. SUCCESSFUL PATHWAYS FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

1. What successful pathways have Black students and Black parents used to navigate the education system to increase positive outcomes?

2.01 Despite experiencing significant barriers due to anti-Black racism in schools, Black learners have been successful in accessing past and current pathways to move through the education system. However, years of data demonstrate that Black learners in Ontario have been disproportionately disciplined, streamed, and pushed out of school (Ontario College of Teachers 2021).

2.02 For more Black learners to be successful in the current pathways available, children and their families need to be able to access all options, resources, and educational opportunities – including those currently available and those that require development. For instance, the YouthREX report, Doing Right Together for Black Youth, offers tremendous insights into issues facing Black youth and their families, best practices for engaging Black youth in meaningfully shaping the development and implementation of Ontario Black Youth Action Plan projects, as well as the important characteristics of organizations that can meet the needs of Black youth (YouthREX 2017). Resources such as these are invaluable, and must be made easily accessible to Black students and Black parents.

2.03 Having access to Black-identifying education staff in a variety of roles (i.e., classroom teachers, educational assistants, child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, mental health support workers, guidance counsellors, office support staff, vice-principals, and principals) is helpful in guiding students through school. Studies show there is a significant increase in both graduation rates and post-

secondary enrollment when Black learners who have access to Black teachers and education staff. This requires a dedicated and sustained effort to encourage the recruitment of Black students into faculties of education, as well as strategies for retaining Black teachers and staff within the publicly funded education system.

2.04 External advocacy organizations, like Parents of Black Children, also play a role in assisting students in navigating the education system – as well as advocating on behalf of Black students, teachers, and education workers. These external stakeholder organizations have province-wide networks that have facilitated parents' ability to connect and collectively address systemic anti-Black racism in schools.

2. *How can schools and education systems better engage with and support Black parents in their children's education? How can they ensure that Black students have access to the resources and support they need to succeed?*

2.05 Schools and education systems can better engage with and support Black parents in their children's education by holding education staff accountable for building relationships with Black families and/or parents of Black-identifying children. They can also better engage and support Black communities when they know and understand the diverse ethnicities and cultures that represent the Black families and the unique needs of the individuals in the local and school community. To that end, equity training for teachers and all staff in schools is a must to ensure that everyone in the school has the ability to empathize and understand the lived experience of Black students and families, so they are not invalidated or ignored, but rather acknowledged and explored. This training must be provided by school boards and properly funded by the government.

2.06 There are a number of ways to work toward achieving this goal, and a number of questions that can be asked to determine engagement levels and effectiveness. For instance, if there is a school council in a community with a high proportion of Black families, are principals required to report to their equity superintendent how many parents are actively involved? In addition, how, and in which ways, are/can school principals be supported and encouraged to hold affinity spaces, meetings, and information events to support Black families, either as a board, family of schools, or individual school?

2.07 Schools and education systems can also ensure that Black students have access to the resources and supports they need, through taking actions such as:

- Intentional, strategic, multi-modal, and multilingual communication and access to both information about the school, resources available, and events occurring at the school and board level.

- Ensuring that in the school's annual strategic plan, principals include the goal of increased parent engagement and clear communication regarding available resources specifically designed to reach and engage Black learners and their families.

- Encouraging principals to support teachers in providing language, easy-to use, and ready-to-use resources, and coaching regarding communications strategies with parents.

- Education staff can ask parents for feedback regarding improvements to resources and support services that exist and action the feedback to improve access and use.

- Teachers, education workers, and school staff need to be made aware that many parents, regardless of race, need to be guided through many aspects of the school system.
    - Principals, teachers, and support staff need to have – and be provided with – the necessary time to explain processes, terminology, and acronyms. They must also include reminders, share opportunities, and create learning communities, where all people who access the school can ask questions, provide input, and feel welcome.

- Conduct detailed anti-Black racism surveys to understand how racism impacts students in school planning, policy development and implementation, operations, and more, at the school level. This should include intersectionality, as Black children who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ and those living with disabilities often do not have those additional barriers acknowledged.

- Work with parents of Black students, service providers, and students to create culturally relevant education and support services for parents of Black 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

3. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND BLACK JOY

1. How can schools better support Black student achievement and prioritize Black Joy? What are some examples of practices or policies that have successfully supported both?

3.01 The Association encourages the OHRC to consult the *Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism, 2021*, prepared by the Ontario College of Teachers, for a list of practices and policies that have successfully supported Black student achievement and prioritized Black Joy.
Some broad examples include:

- Opportunities for educators to engage in self-directed critical reflection on their professional practice, especially with respect to contemplating and discussing who is being omitted from curriculum design, classroom culture, extracurricular programming, and other learning opportunities.

- Teacher-led professional development courses, such as Additional Qualifications courses on anti-Black racism, including our Association's offering, "Equitable and Inclusive Schools."

3.02 Recently, the government introduced de-streamed courses for students in Grade 9. This was billed as an opportunity to better promote equity of and improve achievement for students, including Black students, given the overrepresentation of Black students streamed into non-academic pathways. However, the government's implementation was severely lacking.

3.03 De-streamed courses were introduced without proper resources or training for teachers, who were given no time to orientate themselves to the new curriculum and course material before having to deliver the courses to students. Nor did the government provide students with the necessary academic and mental health supports, to promote success.

3.04 Furthermore, the government refused to address the issue of lowering class sizes for de-streamed courses, which limits the ability of teachers to meet students' individual needs. If de-streaming is to be successful, and promote student achievement, it will require more resources and attention to the supports that students are receiving.

2. *How can educators and schools foster a sense of community and belonging for Black students?*

3.05 Educators and schools can foster a sense of community and belonging for Black students through a variety of activities. For instance, system and school leaders can support teachers and education staff to centre the humanity of Black learners. This means ensuring, through curriculum content development, policy implementation, and pedagogy and practice, that Black learners from Kindergarten to Grade 12 are seen and treated as people.

3.06 More specifically, Black students must be allowed to make mistakes, disciplined with dignity, allowed to question, use their voice, be challenged academically, have high expectations for learning and leading, experience culturally responsive teaching, and access spaces where who they are is affirmed and supported in the classroom and school.

3.07 It is also critical for teachers and educators to transfer the use of soft skills and professional competencies – traits that have historically advantaged white learners in education systems – to Black learners.

3.08 Undergirding these specific examples is the need for administrators and teachers to communicate a stronger commitment to better protecting Black students, and ensuring a safe and effective learning environment for Black students.

    3. *How can schools and education systems measure and evaluate Black student achievement and Black Joy?*

3.09 Schools and education systems can measure and elevate Black student achievement in a variety of ways, for instance:

- System and school leaders can gather anecdotal data around the use of, and inclusion in, special education supports, and English language learner supports, French immersion, IB and AP, and alternative education placements.

- System and school leaders can track graduation rates, pathway placements, and post-secondary applications. Labour Force Survey data can also be accessed to better understand medium- and long-term trends.

3.10 The *Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism, 2021*, prepared by the Ontario College of Teachers, has some promising real-world examples of ways that school boards and education systems can measure and elevate Black Joy. Some additional suggestions include:

- Consulting a variety of Black learners, both formally and informally, to find out what brings them Joy in a school setting, actioning their suggestions, and letting learners lead.

- Providing affinity spaces, formal and informal, both extracurricular and curricular, which centre Black Joy.

- Reviewing content and curriculum to include Black Joy to ensure it is intersectional.

- Being mindful of systems use of "Black excellence" as a descriptor, for messaging, and as an expectation for all Black learners to be seen and heard.
  - This is a positive concept, but we must ask ourselves who does this exclude? Who defines what excellence is for Black learners in school systems – are they involved in deciding what success and excellence looks like for them? Considering Ontario students are expected to meet ministry standard level 3 (average) to be considered successful, what implicit message is being communicated to Black children by saying they are expected to be excellent to be included at school? School boards should, at minimum, reflect on this messaging and add nuance to this branding or discussion to ensure it is not upholding white supremacy.

- Informal audits of which affinity spaces and leadership opportunities Black learners are not represented in, and actioning solutions to include as many learners as possible.

- Offering a variety of experiential opportunities for learners to experience Black Joy.

3.11 In considering ways that schools and education systems can measure and evaluate Black student achievement and Black Joy, we must resist the temptation to create a blanket understanding or approach. The risk in such an approach is accepting the assumption that all Black children find joy the same way. Thus, there is a critical need to acknowledge that joy is relative and based on a student's lived experiences – a factor that must be reflected in developing any tools or actions.

4. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATOR SUPPORT

1. What role can educators, guidance counsellors, non-teaching staff, administrators and trustees play in creating and promoting equitable and inclusive work cultures within their schools?

4.01 The role teachers, education workers, guidance counsellors, non-teaching staff, administrators, and trustees can play in creating and promoting equitable and inclusive work cultures within their schools can be found in most school boards' strategic plan or equity plan/statements, as well as in the Ontario College of Teachers' *Standards of Practice and Ethical Standards*.

4.02 We also encourage the OHRC to consult the American School Counselor Association's resource, "The School Counselor and Anti-Racist Practices," for some best practices to anti-racist approaches.

> **2.** *What examples of successful professional development programs or initiatives have effectively addressed issues of equity, human rights, anti-bias, anti-racism, and anti-Black racism?*

4.03 Some examples of successful professional development programs or initiatives that have effectively addressed issues of equity, human rights, anti-bias, anti-racism, and anti-Black racism include:

- Additional Qualification courses offered by unions, and faculties of education.
  - These sorts of programs, both for certified and qualified teachers and teacher-candidates, provide vital training in a range of areas related to anti-bias, anti-racism, and anti-Black racism. At the faculty of education level, such initiatives should be mandatory and be made available province-wide. Other programs include Anti-Black Racism Additional Qualification courses offered by some education providers, Equitable and Inclusive Schools, Part 1 offered by OECTA, and workshops by OECTA's Professional Development Network, facilitated by classroom teachers.

- Training sessions offered by organized labour (i.e., the Canadian Labour Congress and Ontario Federation of Labour workshops, "train the trainer" series, or labour schools). Training sessions offered by community organizations, such as the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (ONABSE) or Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR). Training sessions offered by parent organizations (i.e., Parents for Diversity, Parents of Black Children).

4.04 Please also note successful initiatives mentioned in the Ontario College of Teachers' *Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism, 2021*.

3. *How can boards ensure that professional development and educator support initiatives are sustainable and ongoing, lead to changes in organizational culture, and are not just one-off events or initiatives?*

4.05 School boards can ensure that professional development and educator support initiatives are sustainable and ongoing, lead to changes in organizational culture, and are not just one-off events or initiatives by being more proactive rather than reactive when centring learning on how to foster healthy education spaces for Black learners.

4.06 Centring Black learners' needs should not only happen as a response to incidents of anti-Black racism. Strategic plans, professional development days, and other proactive resources and events need to provide meaningful opportunities for learning. Co-ordinating with local and provincial union representatives to take advantage of professional learning is also an effective option. Giving teachers time to review and incorporate school board resources, by working with experienced staff or teacher consultants on an ongoing basis, would be very helpful.

4. *How can educators build networks and support systems that navigate safety and equity issues within the education system?*

4.07 Educators can build networks and support systems that navigate safety and equity issues within the education system through their unions/associations, such as OECTA's Diversity Advisory Board "Connecting with Members" series forums, which provide safe spaces for Catholic teachers who identify as Black to meet and discuss openly.

4.08   These networks and support systems can also be developed through teacher and education workers' school boards, such as the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board's Black Educators network, or through community groups. It is also important that school boards have equity officers available where teachers and others can bring forward their issues and concerns to be addressed, with the confidence that they will be treated with the seriousness they deserve.

4.09   It is imperative to have Black educators in director, superintendent, principal, and vice-principal positions, but, more importantly, it is essential to ensure that they are supported, listened to, and permitted to grow and lead in their role. It is important that systems do not co-opt networks, exclude, create division, burnout, or pushout amongst Black education staff.

4.10   As such, it is critical that recruitment and retention efforts be explicitly considered and developed, in order to identify, understand, and address the barriers to the recruitment and retention of Black teachers, administrators, senior team members, mental health staff, and other staff – this must include succession planning with an equity lens.

5.   PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND OUTCOMES

1.   What strategies have been identified and implemented to address and improve disproportionalities related to literacy, graduation, and numeracy rates for Black students? To what extent are these strategies achieving the desired outcome?

5.01   Ontario school boards all have system strategic goals, and specific school goals connected to all literacy, graduation, and numeracy rates for Black students, and

these should be monitored, updated, and reviewed regularly in consultation with educators, families, and the students themselves.

2. What role do educators, guidance counsellors, non-teaching staff, administrators and trustees play in addressing and eliminating disproportionalities for Black students?

5.02 For information on the role that educators, guidance counsellors, non-teaching staff, administrators, and trustees play in addressing and eliminating disproportionalities for Black students, we encourage the OHRC to review the Ontario College of Teachers *Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism, 2021* and People for Education's *Progress report on anti-racism policy across Canada, 2023* – both of which offer examples of best practices with respect to data collection.

6. DATA COLLECTION

1. What data is currently being collected? What data should school boards collect?

6.01 An overview of data that is currently being collected can be found in People for Education's *Anti-Racism Report, 2023*.

6.02 With respect to what data should be collected, it is critical that whatever avenue is pursued, school boards should consult race-based surveys that have already been developed, vetted, and used to ensure accuracy and reliability. At the same time, school boards should connect with anti-racist research teams and external consultants to create unbiased and accessible surveys.

6.03   In this process, school boards should explore and determine local needs and provincial anti-racism policies to guide survey creation.

6.04   It is also important that school boards not discourage the collection or reporting of data, for fear that results could paint the school or board culture in a negative light. In reality, data collection can be a critical tool to identify issues and develop plans to address them.

2.   How can data collection be used as a tool for reducing discrimination?

6.05   Data collection can be used as a tool for reducing discrimination if that data is shared with community, staff, school, and system leaders, as well as with the public. Transparency and the unbiased dissemination of the data is paramount.

6.06   It is important to identify and track relevant racial discrimination indicators for Black students (e.g., reported cases using the "N-word," etc.).

3.   What monitoring and evaluation standards should be put in place to ensure that data collection and monitoring efforts are effective, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of Black students and families?

6.07   Education systems that have not collected data, or that have not publicly shared data in a transparent manner, should be required to do so. However, data is meant to inform education systems not only about what learners are experiencing and producing, but also about where and how teachers and education workers should develop. Data is only useful if findings produce actionable change.

6.08 In developing systems for monitoring Black racism, it is essential that this starts with analyses of the trends prevalent within a school – tracking systems can be put in place with periodic reporting to show progress. In doing so, best practices should be modelled on existing examples, with good data collection and tracking initiatives that are related to reporting and responding to racism and hate incidences, involving and impacting students in schools.

7. ENFORCEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

1. What is accountability?

7.01 At a broad level, accountability provides clear standards of practice for all involved stakeholders that anti-Black racism will not be tolerated. This involves rigorously establishing data patterns to build a baseline to work towards setting reduction targets and meeting them.

7.02 In a practical sense, accountability requires the creation of a clear, fair, and transparent protocol regarding how a school board or system addresses allegations of racism and oppression – including a potential model for discipline.

7.03 The development of an accountability framework should contain some or all of the following principles:

- Apply an Anti-Black racism lens, as part of a broader commitment to accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and equity (AIDE), to inequities, effect positive transformation, and normalize a racial equity culture.

- Ensure leadership is accountable for driving and co-ordinating anti-Black racism.

- Offer clarity and direction to anti-Black racism actions, resulting in maximum impact and sustained momentum.

- Establish measures and data sources to track and monitor progress.

- Provide regular reporting to and communication regarding results and challenges.

- Enhance trust in the goals of anti-Black racism actions, bring together stakeholders to assess the risks to success, and galvanize support for better outcomes.

2. *To what extent and how should accountability measures or issues be reported to the public? And by whom?*

7.04 According to best practices, and drawing from recent work by the Toronto Catholic District School Board, some factors to include in making decisions on accountability reporting involve:

- Bi-annual reporting of the number of reported incidents of anti-Black racism and the respective responses.

- Statistics gathered bi-annually to understand trends.

- Create, implement, and report on data collected.

8.   OPERATIONAL DRIVERS

1. What mechanisms or structures must be adapted or created to better support Black students and families? What are they, and how can they be implemented?

8.01   One example of an operational driver that can better support Black students and families would be to reduce and eliminate over-surveillance, disproportionate discipline, suspensions, and expulsions of Black students by providing an intensive focus on restorative justice training (TCDSB 2023). This could be assisted by conducting equity audits of student disciplinary practices at the school level and of board policies regarding discipline. Monitoring would be required on an ongoing basis, through mechanisms such as independent reviews.

9.   RELATIONSHIPS, POLICY, AND ADVOCACY DRIVERS

1. How can relationships between various stakeholders in the education space be improved to promote information flow and facilitate the identification and implementation of solutions to anti-Black racism in education?

2. What are the potential barriers to advocating for and implementing policy change to address anti-Black racism in education and improve outcomes for Black students, and how can these barriers be overcome?

3. What role can community organizations and advocacy groups play in promoting equity and inclusion in education, and how can they work collaboratively with educators, administrators, and other stakeholders to effect change and improve

outcomes for Black students?

9.01   These questions are helpful to consider in tandem, to better understand a fundamental and underlying factor that must be addressed – namely, the need to strengthen trust and engagement with the Black community, and Black community partners.

9.02   Achieving this goal requires dedicated and sustained attention, and authentic listening to the families of Black students and Black stakeholder groups in order to prioritize and resolve any emerging concerns. This should include a feedback loop for regular and ongoing communications.

9.03   Building and strengthening partnerships with Black community members is best promoted through active engagement. For instance, school boards can host parent/guardian Webinars throughout the year to support families of Black children. As well, school boards and teachers and education workers can maintain open dialogue with advocacy groups to build trust and collaboration.

9.04   This requires ongoing monitoring and reporting, including a potential survey of relevant stakeholders – as well as accountability measures that share relevant data and analysis with stakeholders, and gain feedback from those stakeholders to solicit feedback on whether recommendations are being effectively implemented, and school and system leaders are listening authentically and gaining more trust from community partners.

10. CONCLUSION

10.01 Catholic teachers have always supported efforts to eliminate racism, discrimination, and all systemic barriers in our schools, and we will continue to advocate for action, offering our perspectives on how to work toward achieving this critical goal.

10.02 The reality is that good intentions will not suffice. As the OHRC develops an anti-Black racism in education action plan, it will be essential that the provincial government dedicate the resources and supports, including proper financial investment, to ensure the successful application of any such plan.

10.03 Sadly, we have already seen the Ford Conservative government's tendency to cherry-pick certain aspects of OHRC reports, while conspicuously ignoring any recommendation that would require investment. We have also seen the government refuse to fund proposals that would combat systemic racism in the education system. This cannot happen if we are to translate an action plan into reality.

10.04 Catholic teachers call for bold action to eliminate the systemic anti-Black racism that is deeply entrenched in all societal institutions. That action begins with a holistic approach that involves the necessary structures, resources, and supports for students, teachers, and education workers who have faced systemic barriers in the past and continue to do so. The time for action is now.

10.05 We thank the OHRC for the opportunity to provide feedback, and we are available for further discussion upon request.

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