

Date: Thursday, July 9, 2020,

Subject: Ontario's Action Plan to Address Systemic Racism in Schools

Memorandum to: Chairs of District School Boards
Directors of Education
Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities

From: Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

Subject: **Ontario's Action Plan to Address Systemic Racism in Schools**

We are pleased to inform you of Ontario's system-wide actions to break down barriers facing Black, Indigenous and racialized students so they are better supported to succeed and flourish in school.

We know that because of systemic racism, discrimination and inequality in the education system, certain students — including Black, Indigenous, and racialized students, and students living in low-income households — are more likely to be enrolled in Applied or Locally Developed Compulsory Credit courses.

These actions are focused on replacing policies and practices that may have led to inequities in the education system by:

1. ending early streaming in secondary;
2. taking steps to eliminate discretionary suspensions in Kindergarten to Grade 3;
3. implementing human rights and anti-racism training and professional development;
4. implementing stronger measures to address educators' discriminatory and racist behaviour and remarks; and
5. supporting identity-based data collection.

Early Streaming

The ministry will phase out early streaming beginning with the development of a Grade 9 foundational math course that will be aligned with the recently released Grade 1-8 math curriculum. This course will be released for September 2021 to support school boards to begin transitioning students to a de-streamed Grade 9 math program.

We know that students in Applied courses are over four times more likely not to graduate. We also know that 33 per cent of students who took Grade 9 Applied courses

transitioned directly into college or university, compared to 73 per cent of students who took the Academic courses. Students who are Indigenous, Black, from lower-income families and/or have special education needs are disproportionately enrolled in Applied and Locally Developed Compulsory courses.

We know that students benefit when they learn together with students of all abilities and interests. Eliminating early streaming will give all students a better chance to be future-ready and prepared for any pathway they choose.

The ministry will engage with school boards to establish board readiness to transition to a de-streamed Grade 9 math program and the supports needed to ensure that all students can be successful in the new Grade 9 foundational math course.

Suspensions

The ministry is taking steps to remove the discretionary power of principals to suspend students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 for infractions set out in section 306 of the *Education Act* which, subject to the approval of amendments to the *Education Act* and regulations, would come into effect in September 2020.

This will make sure the youngest learners are not unnecessarily and unfairly suspended, while still maintaining the safety of students.

To help educators and school boards with the training and supports they need to transition from the use of suspensions in primary grades, the ministry will support human rights and anti-racism training for principals, educators, and trustees, and develop a policy framework to guide boards to prevent and proactively address instances where the default position would have been for a principal to suspend a student. We look forward to working with our education partners to develop and implement a new policy framework in the near future.

Professional Development

Beginning in the 2020-21 school year, the ministry will explore strategies to help ensure that Directors of Education, teachers and board staff reflect the diversity of their schools and have the training and resources to promote more equitable school environments.

We will develop new training, resources and supports for educators, principals, senior staff and school-based mental health professionals by February 2021.

Discriminatory and Racist Behaviour and Remarks

To ensure that students can feel accepted in discrimination-free classrooms, the government will provide clear expectations and processes for responding to remarks or behaviour of a racist nature in the education system. The government will work with the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) to provide professional advice to teachers and to

school boards on compliance. This could also include amendments to the OCT regulations to reinforce teachers' professional conduct obligations.

To support educators, the ministry has also proposed additional anti-racism and anti-discrimination training before the end of the calendar year. The government is currently consulting with teachers' federations, education workers' unions, and trustees' associations on the implementation of this critical initiative.

Identity-Based Data Collection

Although these initiatives are bold and transformative steps toward a more inclusive education system, we also know that Indigenous, Black, racialized and under-resourced communities demand accountability from their government on the implementation of equity-building strategies.

We are committed to working with all boards to expedite and ensure more substantive and regularized identity-based data collection at the board level to monitor the implementation and success of these initiatives.

When combined, these changes represent Ontario's initial steps to enable our education system to give all students equitable opportunities for academic success and help them graduate with the skills and confidence they need to be successful on whatever path they choose.

Our shared goal is an education system that is safer and more inclusive, and that promotes success for every student.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

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