Education Resource Guide for Parents & Caregivers in Ontario

PARENT AMBASSADOR PROJECT

Developed by the Working Women Community Centre

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About Working Women Community Centre

Working Women Community Centre (WWCC) is a women-focused settlement agency that provides support to newcomers in Toronto. Since 1974, we have been making a difference in the lives of immigrant women and their families.

For over 40 years, we have worked to provide access to programs and services that build healthy communities. These include settlement counselling, community engagement initiatives, economic development programs, English language instruction, and education supports for parents, caregivers, children and youth.

We currently offer three educational programs, our **Parent Ambassador Program (PAP)**, **Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY)** which offers early literacy programming for mothers with children ages 3-5, and the **On Your Mark Program (OYM)** which provides tutoring and mentoring for students in grades 1 to 12.

Acknowledgements

The **Parent Ambassador Project (PAP)** would not have been possible without the commitment of Latinx, Black, Indigenous and racialized parents and caregivers dedicated to challenging the status quo, disrupting unjust education practices and advancing equitable opportunities for students in Ontario.

We are sincerely thankful to the Latinx, Black, racialized, immigrant and newcomer parents and caregivers who participated in the parent ambassador training, committed their time and generously shared their experiences during the training project.

Thank you to our volunteers, collaborators, community leaders, sponsors and funders who supported the implementation and execution of this project. We would like to extend a special acknowledgement to the Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education (CASE) and Parents of Black Children (PoBC) for their ongoing support of this project.

Lastly, we are grateful for the generosity, invaluable expertise, insights and knowledge sharing from our guest speakers through all of our sessions. In addition to this education resource guide, the Parent Ambassador Project developed a series of equity knowledge-based webinars called "Education Interrupted: Parent Engagement for Liberation". This is an additional tool for parents, scholars and community leaders to engage in meaningful dialogue and advance an anti-racist model of parent engagement that is inclusive of all families.

The series of webinars for this project were in partnership with:

The Centre for Integrative
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Project Background

Based on the knowledge gained from working with parents and caregivers through the On Your Mark (OYM) tutoring and mentoring program, Working Women Community Centre's (WWCC), identified that parents need further information and tools to better navigate the education system and become effective advocates for their children. The Parent Ambassador Project (PAP) was created as part of the Community Legacy Fund established after the PanAm/Parapan Am Games held in Toronto in 2015. The Community Legacy Initiative invests in projects that profile and provide longer-term economic and/or social infrastructure benefits for Toronto's Latin American, South American, and Caribbean communities.

The three-year program initially launched as the Latinx Parents for Change – Parent Ambassador Project and ran in partnership with the Mennonite New Life Centre (MLCT), the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto District Catholic School Board (TDCSB).

Using a participatory community needs assessment that included interviews, focus groups and a pilot project, the implementation of Latinx Parents for Change PAP program, demonstrated that Latinx parents and caregivers faced multiple systemic barriers when engaging in structural and traditional parent involvement initiatives. The need to create spaces for parents and caregivers to engage meaningfully was clear.

The following qualitative feedback from the Latinx community informed these findings:

- The three most significant barriers to access were related to comprehension of the curricula were 1) language/jargon 2) access to computer/internet and 3) time.
- Latinx parents did not feel informed about options for applied courses vs. academic courses in high school.

- Although most parents value higher education, their lack of understanding of the system limited their chances to support their children in deciding what courses to take.

- Uncertainty and disappointment were expressed from Latinx parents whose children were streamed and they felt unclear of the future impact of their choices.

- Latinx parents/caregivers with economic barriers such as precarious employment and low-income, experienced challenges when engaging in parent involvement activities that required long-term commitments such as participation in the school council. For instance, parents recounted how low-wage jobs meant parents were required to take unplanned shifts to make ends meet, resulting in their availability for participation being unpredictable.

- Latinx parents expressed experiences of frustration when engaged in volunteer activities at the school. The tasks they were given did not allow them to showcase their talents or demonstrate their skills in action. Volunteer opportunities were limited to serving snacks, food preparation and cleaning after school programs resulting in the feeling that their engagement with the school was meaningless.

- Some Latinx parents shared lived experiences of racism and discrimination and felt this extended to their children. They perceived their children as being judged solely based on assumptions, bias or prejudice, their intersectionalities such as race, identity and ethnicity, often being denied. Individual cases of discrimination in the classroom were shared among parents and there were reported incidents of racist statements made to students by school administration.

With significant foundational learnings from the Latinx Parents for Change PAP project, WWCC expanded the PAP project to include additional communities facing systemic barriers to participation. In 2021, WWCC created a seven-week, 21 hour training program for parents and families of school-aged children who are immigrants, newcomers, Black, Indigenous and racialized. The program invites parents, caregivers and community leaders as guest speakers to exchange knowledge and experiences, and share practices of action towards a more inclusive and accessible school system.

Program Goals

- To provide parents, caregivers, and guardians with an in-depth understanding of the public education system in Ontario;

- to foster the development of local, formal and informal networks of parents and caregivers;

- to learn about existing formal and/or informal parent coalitions and collectives working locally and provincially in public education advocacy;

- to challenge and encourage critical reflection about traditional models of parent involvement in Ontario's public education system; and

- to provide tools and resources for newcomers, Black, Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant parents, caregivers, and guardians to navigate the public education system in Ontario.

About this Resource Guide

WWCC created this guide as a complementary resource to the PAP training; it includes the information and resources shared throughout training sessions. This guide is not meant to replace official education documents provided by provincial or municipal education policymakers, stakeholders or partners.

This guide is designed to create learning spaces for parents and caregivers to reflect on their own experiences with the public education system, to exchange knowledge, and to foster the development of local and informal parent-based networks that can support other parents in doing this work. We encourage parents and caregivers to use and share this resource with their respective school councils. We also encourage educators and school administrators to benefit from the reflections in this guide and use them to further collaboration with parents, caregivers and families.

Making the Best Use of this Guide

- This resource guide responds to the concerns expressed by parents and caregivers about the difficulties they have faced navigating their children's education and it was developed in collaboration with parents and caregivers committed to public education

- This resource guide will support parents and caregivers to critically reflect on current realities, develop transferable skills, exchange knowledge and experiences, and share practices of action and solidarity towards an equitable school system. It focuses on enhancing the leadership skills of caregivers and parents while strengthening their understanding of Ontario's education system.

- This resource guide offers learning tools to explore topics such as school governance, parent and caregiver engagement, special education, anti-racism, anti-Black racism, equity, and social justice within schooling.

- This resource guide includes hyperlinked resources and references where possible. Each section includes an interactive slide deck that can be used in combination with the guide or as a stand-alone tool.

- Facilitators using this resource guide are encouraged to adapt any of these elements according to the needs of participants, program delivery, or the facilitators' own experiences.

Who is this Guide for?

- Any parent, caregiver and guardian who has a child within the Ontario public education system and has an interest in learning more about school governance, parent and caregiver engagement, special education, anti-racism, anti-Black racism, equity, and social justice within schooling.

- Parents, caregivers and guardians of children who are immigrants and newcomers, Black, Indigenous and racialized in Ontario's public education system

- School councils of elementary and secondary schools within the Ontario public education system

- Coalitions and collectives working locally and provincially in Ontario public education advocacy

- Community organizations, community leaders, agencies and workers who support parents, caregivers, and families of Black, Indigenous, racialized, immigrant and newcomers

- Educators and school administrators who have an interest in learning more about parent and caregiver engagement, anti-racism, anti-Black racism, equity, and social justice within schooling

- Parents, caregivers and guardians of children with special educational needs in Ontario's public education system

Section Content

Section	Learning Objectives
Section 1 Understanding the Education System in Ontario	• Understand different components of the education system in Ontario • Discover key partners and the roles they play within Ontario's education system • Identify the different types of school boards and programs offered within Ontario • Understand how funding is allocated to school boards in Ontario
Section 2 Understanding the Education System in Ontario	• Understand the roles and responsibilities of various types of school governance bodies • Learn how to vote for a school trustee and how to become a school trustee • Identify opportunities to participate in school decision-making processes • Understand how school board and council meetings operate
Section 3 From Parent Involvement to Parent Engagement that Matters	• Develop an understanding of dominant and alternative parent engagement models • Identify strategies for parents to effectively communicate with school staff, teachers, principals, board staff, trustees and other parent communities • Strengthen parent capacity to navigate the education system and advocate for their child/children • Learn about what delegations are and how they function

Section 4	• Learn, identify and define systemic oppression and barriers
Navigating Systemic Barriers to Education: An Anti-Racism Approach	• Understand and identify racism and other forms of discrimination • Develop strategies to work with other parents and community members to address racism in schooling
Section 5 Understanding and Identifying Challenges Faced by Racialized Students Part I	• Identify common challenges experienced by racialized students • Understand special education programs and Individual Education Plans (IEP's) • Understand academic streaming and impact on students' success • Learn about suspensions, expulsions and how to appeal them • Gain strategies to support student's success
Section 6 Understanding and Identifying Challenges Faced by Racialized Students Part II	• Learn about the right to access education for students with precarious immigration status • Understand bullying, its impacts and how to report it • Strengthen knowledge of alternative conflict resolution models and restorative justice practices
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Understanding the Education System in Ontario

Learning objectives:

1. To develop an understanding of the different components of the education system in Ontario

2. To discover the key partners and the roles that they play within Ontario's education system

3. To gain an understanding of how funding is allocated to school boards in Ontario

4. To identify the different types of school boards and the programs which they offer within Ontario

Interactive Learning Link for Section 1

The Government of Ontario and the Education Act

In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility. Each province has its own education laws and Ministry of Education. In Ontario, education is governed by the *Ontario Education Act, 1990* and its regulations. The *Education Act, 1990* has 25 parts that outline the duties and responsibilities of all partners in Ontario's education system, including:

- the Minister of Education
- school boards
- trustees
- principals

- teachers
- parents
- caregivers
- students

Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education is the governing body of the education system. The Premier of Ontario appoints the Minister of Education (MOE). The MOE is an elected Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP).

Responsibilities include:

- Oversees all aspects of Ontario's public education system

- Allocates funds to school boards using government funding formula

- Develops a provincial curriculum (what students will learn each grade)

- Sets policies and guidelines for school boards

- Sets regulations and requirements for diplomas and certificates

- Approves textbooks and other mandated learning materials

Remember!

The French Board, the Catholic French Board and Catholic District School Board across are publicly funded boards by the Ministry of Education (schools in these boards are not private or exclusive).

The Ministry of Education has six district offices to assist Ontario's school boards, schools and students. These are located in Barrie, London, North Bay/Sudbury, Ottawa, Thunder Bay and Toronto.

Ministry of Education Responsibilities

Allocate Funds

Develop Curriculum

Set Policies & Guidelines

Set Regulations For Diplomas & Certificates

Approve Textbooks & Other Materials

Partners in Ontario's Education System

Minister of Education

Directors of Education

School Boards

School Super-intendents

Ministry of Education

Students & Parents

Trustees

Principals

School Advisory Council

Teachers

When we think of the education system, we often think of the people, places, and programs that support students and their families. In addition to schools and teachers, parents and caregivers play a vital role in their children's development and educational success. In fact, students, and their parents and caregivers are the centre of the education system and its key partner. Other partners include teachers, principals, trustees, directors, and the Ministry of Education. While each partner has a particular experience and role, they are all highly interdependent.

When partners across the education system have shared values, it promotes academic success and well-being for all students.

Overview of Ontario School Boards

Ontario's school boards are responsible for the operation and administration of the province's publicly-funded schools. School boards also administer government funding they receive for their schools. There are four kinds of school boards in Ontario: English Public, English Catholic, French Public, and French Catholic, all of which are publicly funded.

The 72 Ontario school boards are divided as follows:

31	29	4	8
English Public	English Catholic	French Public	French Catholic

As of **2019-2020**, there were **3,967** elementary and **877** secondary schools in Ontario.**

School Board Duties

What they must do:

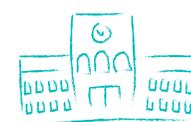Operate Schools According to Legislation · Have a Vision · Develop Programs · Set Budget · Implement Curriculum · Maintain Buildings · Monitor Policies and Achievements

What they can do:

Offer Transportation · Offer Libraries · Operate Playgrounds · Operate Cafeterias · Offer Qualified Guidance Teachers · Offer Continuing Education · Offer Benefits/Insurance

The Funding Formula

The Ministry of Education provides the majority of operating funding to Ontario's 72 district school boards through the annual Grants for Students Needs (GSN), also known as "the funding formula". The GSN are a collection of annual grants described in detail in the *Education Act, 1990*. There are two major components of the GSN:

Foundation Grants: cover the basic cost of an educational experience that is common to all students. It is allocated based on student enrolment and the number of schools.

Special Purpose Grants: address the unique needs of students, schools and school boards related to location, identified student and school needs, and a board's demographic profile.

Depending on the structure of each GSN, funding for school boards can be generated per-student, per-school, or per-board basis. However, most funding allocated to schools is determined by enrollment. This includes funding for teachers, educational support staff, textbooks, learning materials and supplies, technology, library services, and more. When enrollment goes down, funding also decreases.

Local school boards have flexibility in how they use funding in recognition that conditions vary widely across Ontario and the funding formula cannot take every situation into account.
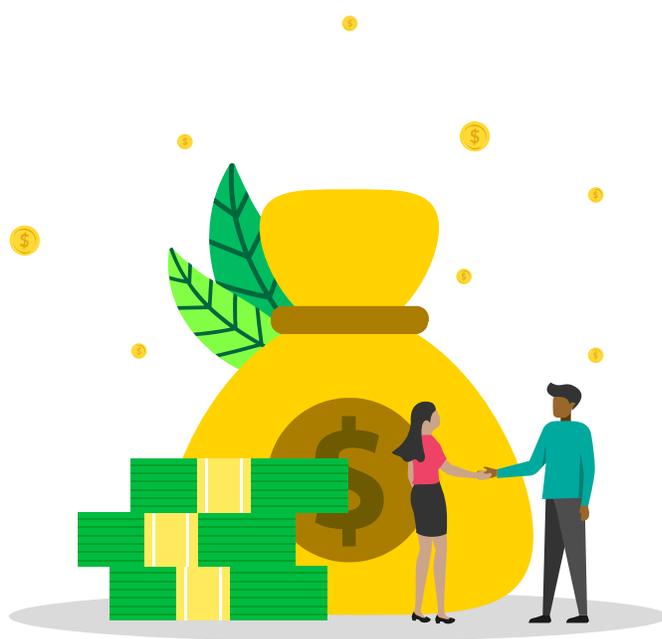
Ontario Public Schools Boards

Ontario's English and French public school boards provide universally accessible education for all students, regardless of their ethnic, racial, or cultural backgrounds; social or economic status; gender; first language; disability; or religion. Public school boards, both French and English, are secular.

Ontario Catholic School Boards

Under the *Education Act, 1990*, English Catholic and French Catholic school boards have the same obligations, duties, rights, and privileges as the public school boards. In addition, however, Catholic boards strive to create a faith community where religious instruction, religious practice, value formation, and faith development are integrated within every area of the curriculum. Publicly funded Catholic schools are protected under section 93 of The Constitution. Students must be Catholic to attend Catholic elementary schools, but they do not have to be Catholic to attend Catholic high schools.

French-Language Education in Ontario

There are twelve French-language school boards in Ontario, with more than 450 French-language schools. In these schools, the curriculum is taught exclusively in French, with the exception of English language courses. French-language schools in Ontario have a mandate to protect, enhance and transmit the French language and culture.

French-language schools serve students whose parents are "French-language rights-holders", according to section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Learn more about the requirements and options for English students studying French as a Second Language.

Remember!

There are four types of publicly-funded school boards on Ontario: English, French, English Catholic and French Catholic (in other countries, Catholic and language choice schools are private but, in Canada, these schools are publicly funded).

French-Language Programs in English Boards

Each board has their own process for administering French-language programs. Below are two examples from Toronto-region school boards.

Toronto District School Board French Programs

The TDSB offers a variety of French as a Second Language (FSL) programs in elementary and secondary schools. In addition to the core French program provided in all schools, the TDSB offers two specialized French programs: French Immersion (FI) (French-language learning begins in Senior Kindergarten) and Extended French (EF) (French-language learning begins in Grade 4). Applications are open to all students not already enrolled in an FSL program. Applications to these programs are made online the year the student is in JK (for FI) or Grade 3 (for EF). While admission to a TDSB French Immersion/Extended French program is guaranteed to on-time applicants, admission to a specific school is not guaranteed if the school reaches capacity.

Core French: French as a Second Language is a mandatory part of the core elementary school program. In addition, at least one credit in FSL is required for completion of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). For students in the regular program, this requirement is fulfilled by participation in the Core French program. All students on track to obtaining their OSSD must participate in Core French.

In English-language elementary schools, learning programs must include the following disciplines: the Arts; French as a Second Language (Core French; boards may also offer Extended or Immersion French); Health and Physical Education; Language; Mathematics; Science and Technology; and Social Studies (in Grades 1 to 6) and History and Geography (in Grades 7 and 8).

Did you know?

Historically, the settler-state of Canada was made up of competing groups of English Protestants and French Catholics. As these groups came to form the Federation of Canada and develop its constitution, there were laws created to preserve the language, culture, and institutions of the French Catholic minority. These laws are still upheld by section 93 of the Canadian Constitution, securing the establishment and funding of public Catholic and French-language schools. The historical context that led to the creation of these laws is inherently colonial. Catholic boards are the only publicly funded boards based on faith and French boards are the only publicly funded boards in a language other than English.

Toronto Catholic District School Board

The TCDSB has several programs for teaching French as a Second Language (FSL) in its 200 schools.

Core French: The Core French program is offered from grades 1 to 8. Classes are 30 minutes long. By the end of Grade 8, students will have received a minimum of 600 hours of French instruction. Options vary in the secondary schools, but a student must earn at least one credit in French to obtain an OSSD.

French Immersion (Elementary): French Immersion was established in 1982 for Senior Kindergarten and has been extended by one grade each year. Instruction is entirely in French until the end of Grade 2; English Language and Arts are added in Grade 3. From Grade 5 to Grade 8, instruction is split equally between French and English.

Alternatives to Education in Toronto Public School Boards

There are **39** alternative schools in the **TDSB**. **20** secondary schools, **18** elementary and **1** K-12 school. According to the TDSB website, alternative schools offer students and parents something different from mainstream schooling. Each alternative school, whether elementary or secondary is unique, with a distinct identity and approach to curriculum delivery. They usually feature a small student population, a commitment to innovative and experimental programs, and volunteer commitment from parents/guardians and other community members. While alternative schools offer Ministry-approved courses, they are delivered in learning environments that are flexible and meet the needs of individual students.

To attend an alternative school, students must enter in a lottery application process outlined in the Optional Attendance Policy. This policy **allows students to apply to a school that is not their "Home School"** (students who reside within the City of Toronto have the right to attend a school which is designated to serve their residential address. This is known as a student's home school). Currently the application process varies from school-to-school.

As an example of alternative schools, both the TDSB and TCDSB have a number of arts-based elementary schools that focus on drama, dance, music, visual and digital arts. Through the arts, students learn to think imaginatively, identify and solve problems, empathize with others, think critically, communicate effectively and appreciate the skills and accomplishments of others.

TDSB also offers Elementary Academies, designed for students with a passion for sports or music.

Did you know?

A 2014 report from the Toronto District School Board, highlights:

- Students who attend alternative elementary and secondary schools are less likely to be cited for discipline problems and absenteeism

- Alternative schools tend to be less racially diverse

- Students attending alternative schools are more likely to come from non-immigrant, dual-income families with higher levels of education and socio-economic status

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All Elementary Academies are full-day schools, not extra extracurricular or after-school programs.

Alternative schools in the TDSB are not widely advertised and are typically located in higher-income neighbourhoods. This often limits the opportunities for low-income, racialized, and students with disabilities to participate in alternative schooling. In an effort to address inequities and underrepresentation of racialized students in alternative schools, the TDSB Alternative Schools Community Advisory Committee passed a motion in 2021 to review and standardize application processes. This review includes a pilot project to offer priority enrollment to students who self-identify as a member of an underrepresented group (e.g., gender, race, etc.) The goal is to allocate a percentage of open spots to these students in order to increase student diversity in alternative schools.

Homeschooling

Homeschooling is teaching your child at home. Visit the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents for more information about homeschooling and related resources.

Many community agencies can help you find information about school for your children. To find help, go to Services Near Me and search for "settlement services" in your area.

Private / Independent Schools

Private or independent schools also offer elementary and secondary education. These schools **do not** receive government funding. Typically, students must pay to attend them. These schools may focus on religion, culture, language, or specific approaches to teaching. The Ministry of Education maintains an up-to-date list of private schools in Ontario.

In Ontario, private schools operate as businesses or non-profit organizations independent of the Ministry of Education. However, they must meet the legal requirements established by the *Education Act, 1990*.

The Ministry does not regulate, licence, accredit or otherwise oversee the operation of private schools. Parents/caregivers and students must do their research before registering for private schools.

Remember!

When considering private education, it is important to note that under provincial law, **only public school boards** in Ontario are required to gather detailed criminal, police and professional background information on all school staff and even volunteers, therefore, there is nothing legally preventing someone convicted of a crime or stripped of their teaching licence from working at a private school.

References

Sinay, E. (2014). *Programs of choice in the TDSB: characteristics of students in French immersion, alternative schools, and other specialized schools and programs*. Toronto District School Board.

Understanding School Governance Bodies

Learning objectives:

1. Understand the roles and responsibilities of various types of school governance bodies

2. Learn how to vote for a school trustee and how to become a school trustee

3. Identify opportunities to participate in school decision-making processes

4. Understand how school board and council meetings operate

**Interactive Learning Link for Section 2**

School Governance Bodies

Navigating the education system can be complex. It is important for parents and caregivers to know the multiple structures and governance bodies that influence decision-making in their children's education. When parents and caregivers engage with the education system at various levels, it ensures that these structures are held accountable and supports the needs of students.

Directors

- The Director of Education (DOE) is, in essence, the Chief Executive Officer of the school board.

- They report directly to the board of trustees and are accountable to the Minister of Education.

- The DOE must meet the rules and objectives set out by the Ministry.

- All school board staff report either directly or indirectly to the DOE.

- Some of the DOE's responsibilities include advising the board on operational matters; implementing board policies, and establishing the board's priorities.

- The DOE has a significant influence on the board by allocating resources, managing staff and making sure advice and information is properly delivered to trustees to ensure they have the information they need to make decisions.

- DOE have their own advisory council.

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education/Conseil ontarien des directions de l'education (CODE) is a professional organization, an advisory and consultative organization composed of CEO's of each of the 72 school boards in Ontario.
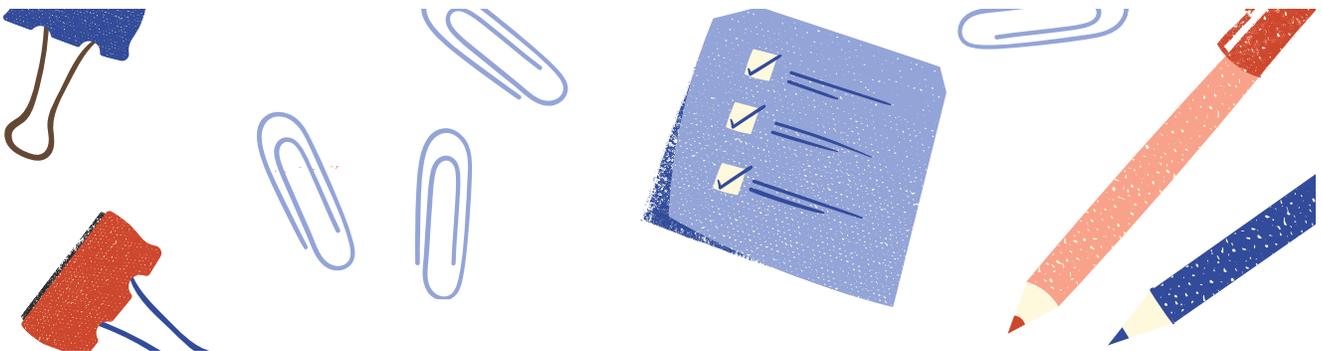
Did you know?

In 2020, Bill 197 was passed to remove the requirement that a DOE must be a former teacher and supervisory officer.

A DOE who is not a certified teacher will not be subject to the authority of the Ontario College of Teachers, or bound by the College's Ethical Standards or Standards of Practice.

In other words, any CEO on Bay street can become the DOE and manage education as a business, which puts our public education system at risk of privatization-like structures. Knowing who your current DOE is and their qualifications can be used as an important advocacy tool for influencing decision making processes.

School Board Trustees

Trustees are elected every four years to the school board during municipal elections.

- They represent the interest of parents, caregivers and students in their area (ward)

- They sit on committees regarding expelling students and make decisions about the school board budget

- Trustees are members of the school board. As members of the board, they provide an important link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their constituents to board discussions and decision-making

- Boards of trustees join their own advisory associations, either the Ontario Public School Boards' Association or the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association.

To find out who your trustee is, check your district school board website or ask your school administration for their contact information.

Who can vote for school trustee?
If you are a resident of a municipality, you are eligible to vote for school trustees. This includes if you are the owner or tenant (or spouse of an owner or tenant) of a residential property in a municipality.

Note: School boards can cover large areas of the province and include many municipalities. You are only allowed to vote for the trustee specific to the school board you are registered to support (see definition for "supporter" below).

Below are the voter eligibility requirements for trustee selection based on each board:

1. English-language public school board. This is the default - unless you are qualified to vote for a Catholic or French board, you will vote for the English public school board trustee in your area.

2. English-language Catholic school board. You must be a Roman Catholic, and you must be a separate school board supporter or the spouse of a separate school board supporter to vote for the English Language Catholic school board trustee. If your spouse is a Roman Catholic and you are not, you are not eligible.

3. French-language public school board. You must be a French-language rights holder, and you must be a supporter (or the spouse of a supporter) of the French-language public school board to vote for the French-language public school board trustee.

4. French-language Catholic school board. You must be a Roman Catholic and a French-language rights holder, and you must be a supporter (or the spouse of a supporter) of the French Catholic school board to vote for the French-language Catholic school board trustee. If your spouse is a Roman Catholic and you are not, you are not eligible.

"Supporter" refers to which school board the school portion of your property taxes goes to. The default is the public school system. In order to be a Catholic school supporter you must direct your taxes to the Catholic school system. Contact the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (1-866-296-MPAC {6722}) for more information.

"French-language rights holder" is set out in section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and refers to the right of citizens whose first language is French to receive educational instruction in French.
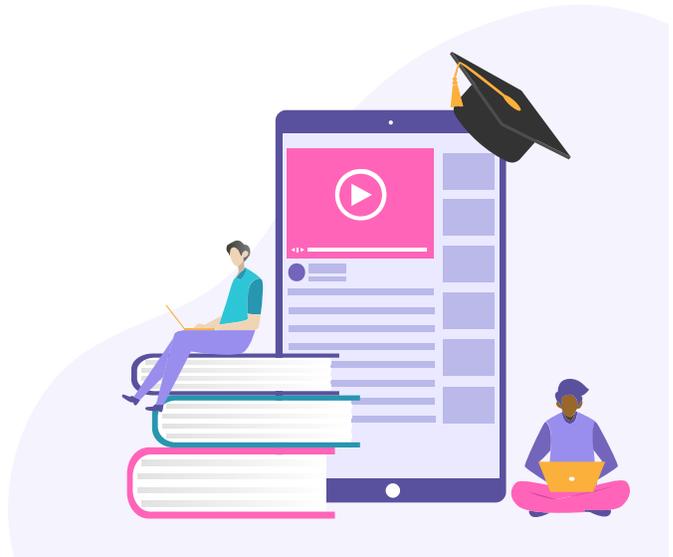
Who can become a school trustee?

Any parent or caregiver can be nominated as a school trustee. If you are qualified to vote in a school board election and you are a resident of a school district, then you are qualified to be elected. Trustee candidates do not need to have a background in education. However, understanding governance policies, bylaws and educational structures are important assets for candidates. Much of this knowledge can be learned in the process.

Did you know!

Trustees' campaigns are a great platform for those interested in pursuing political careers.

Thinking of running?
Municipal elections are held every four years, nominations are held between May & July.

Remember!

Any parent/caregiver can put their name on the ballot and run for school trustee in their ward.

Because Mayors and Councillors are elected at the same time as school trustees during municipal elections, trustee elections are overshadowed making it hard for school trustee candidates to get noticed. As a result, incumbents, and people with a lot of name recognition may get more easily elected over challengers. School trustees often campaign in small networks of parents and caregivers connected to particular schools they have strong relationships with.

Most trustees use social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) to communicate with their constituents. Follow yours so you can get a better idea of their political views and how they support your school community.

By law, trustees are paid a small honourarium and as a result, may have another job. This may result in trustees having a limited amount of time to review materials, conduct any independent research or discuss issues with each other or other people. As a result, they are dependent on staff for information and advice. This may also mean trustees may have difficulties keeping up with the demands from their constituents in the limited time they have available. As a parent, in order to receive a response from your trustee, **following up might be necessary**!

Remember!

Get to know your school trustee by visiting your school website or calling the school.

When municipal elections are called, find out who the candidates are and consider: do they prioritize issues of equity? What is their commitment to communities? Have they been supportive and responsive to your requests in the past?

Did you know!

To help parents of Black children stay informed, the advocacy organization Parents of Black Children (PoBC) created a tracking tool to track trustees from school boards across the province with the Ontario trustee tracker.

School Superintendents

- School superintendents are hired by and report to the school board as staff responsible for groups of schools within each school board.

- They might be involved in suspension appeals, special education meetings, and requests to attend a school other than the home school.

- They oversee board wide-programs.

- You can contact your school superintendent if you cannot get the help you need from the school principal.

Principals

- Principals are responsible for the management of individual schools including hiring, and supervising teachers and other staff.

- They oversee the teaching and curriculum in their respective school and make decisions about the school improvement plan.

- Other functions of the principal include:

  - student admission and placement;

  - working with the school council to encourage parent involvement, assist in decisions about fundraising and develop new policies;

  - ensuring report cards are sent to parents;

  - making recommendations to the school board on the appointment, promotion, demotion and dismissal of teachers; and

  - selecting textbooks and other learning materials from the approved ministry of education list, with the support of teachers.

Teachers

- In the Ontario public education system, teachers must have a recognized teaching certificate in order to teach students.

- They must be a member in good standing with the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF)

- They prepare lessons, teach classes, and evaluate students' progress

Did you know!

All teachers are required by law to belong to the Ontario Teachers' Federation OTF as a condition of teaching in the publicly funded schools of Ontario. Unlike the unions, OTF does not negotiate teacher salaries. However, OTF does take positions to support teachers' ability to offer the best professional service and speaks out on general educational policy issues.

There are four teacher unions that are affiliates of OTF: l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF).

Remember!

While unions engage in collective bargaining and advocate for their members, they are also committed to mobilizing against the privatization and commercialization of public education.

Regulatory Bodies

There are formal regulatory bodies in the education system in Ontario that are set up to ensure that school boards are following mandated regulations. This involves creating requirements, setting the standard for activities, and making sure they are followed.

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) regulates the teaching profession. They have a number of responsibilities including establishing the requirements for a teaching certificate, setting standards for teacher training programs and investigating complaints against teachers.

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is an independent government body that oversees the province-wide standardized testing in grades 3, 6, 9 and 10. They are responsible for developing and administering tests in reading, writing and mathematics.

Formal Parent Involvement Structures in Schools in Ontario

The Ministry of Education in Ontario acknowledges the importance of involving parents in the education system. Allocation of funding and establishing formal structures in school boards are mandated by the Ministry to support these efforts.

Ontario's Parent Engagement Policy

Ontario's Parent Engagement Policy acknowledges the important role that parents play in ensuring success both for their own children and for Ontario's public education system as a whole.

The policy takes into consideration the following elements:

- Recognizes and supports the important role parents have in contributing to their children's learning at home and at school

- Recognizes, encourages and supports many forms of parent engagement

- Identifies strategies to remove barriers to parent involvement (e.g. communications and language)

- Supports parents to acquire skills and knowledge they need to be engaged and involved in their child's learning

- Provides a parent voice at the local level (e.g. parent involvement committees and school councils as well as individual parents talking to teachers and principals)

The Ministry of Education mandates that each board must have the following statutory committees:

- **Parent Involvement Committee (PIC)**: PICs are formed by parents, caregivers, community representatives, the director of education, a school board trustee and school staff members. The co-chairs of the committee are parent representatives.

- **Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**:In accordance with Reg. 464/97 in the *Education Act, 1990*: "Every district school board shall establish a special education advisory committee."

This section will breakdown the formal ways in which parents and caregivers can participate that are standard across the province.

Parent Involvement Committees (PIC) in Ontario

In Ontario, every school board is required to establish a PIC. The Ministry provides funding to support the work of this committee. It is important to note that while school councils represent only one school, PICs represent all the schools of a public board.

PICs are an advisory body to local school boards and a vehicle for parent and caregiver participation at the board level. Their purpose is to support, encourage and enhance meaningful parent involvement to improve student achievement and well-being throughout the board and its schools.

PICs are parent-led committees; the chair/co-chairs and the majority of members are parents. The DOE, a trustee of the board and up to three community representatives are members of the PIC. Subject to board by-laws, a PIC can include a principal, teacher and/or support staff.

Did you know!

Regulation 612/00 gives clear direction on the purpose of these committees and outlines their composition, mandate and function.

The regulation reinforces the important link between parents and a board's DOE and trustees. It is an important part of the government's commitment to improving student achievement and well-being, closing the gap in student achievement, and building public confidence in publicly funded education.

The Ministry of Education has created resources to support PICs including a Fact Sheet, Tips for Running Effective PIC Meetings and a Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) Handbook.

What do Parent Involvement Committees (PIC) do?

While school councils are school-based advisory structures, PICs focus on matters that affect more than one school. The PIC provides information and advice to the board on effective parent engagement strategies and practices. PICs also communicate with and support school councils, and undertake activities to help parents support their children's learning at home and at school.

Regulation 612/00 also states that the Ministry may solicit the advice of PICs on matters that relate to student achievement and well-being. PICs can assist school boards by identifying strategies to increase parent engagement, including outreach to parents who find involvement more challenging due to language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to the system or other factors.

PICs can promote the initiatives of school councils, encourage dialogue on relevant board policies and help share effective practices that support parent engagement. They can also help identify parent and school council training needs within a district and contribute to the development of workshops, forums and conferences to address these needs.

Additional Advisory Community Advisory Committees

In addition to the Ministry mandated committees, school boards can establish advisory councils or committees according to the programs they offer and the communities that each board serves. For example, the TDSB has the following community advisory committees:

Alternative Schools (ASCAC),

Black Student Achievement (BSACAC),

Community Use of Schools (CUSCAC),

Early Years (EYCAC),

Environmental Sustainability (ESCAC),

Equity Policy (EPCAC),

French as a Second Language (FSLCAC),

Inner City (ICCAC),

Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans-Sexual, Queer, 2-Spirited (LGBTQ2S), and Urban Indigenous (UICAC).

Remember!

Ontario schools are mandated to implement a parent engagement policy and establish formal structures for parent involvement at a board level. Although these formal governance spaces may seem unwelcoming or intimidating, they offer an opportunity for parents to influence decisions impacting their children's education.

The chart below presents an example of the structural approach to parent involvement. It features two Toronto boards and illustrates structures at a local and provincial level.

```
                    Ministry
                  of Education
                        |
                 Ontario School
                     Boards
                        |
        ┌───────────────┴───────────────┐
 Toronto Catholic               Toronto District
 District School Board           School Board
      TCDSB                         TDSB
        |                             |
 Catholic School              School Advisory Council
 Parent Council                      SAC
      CSPC                            |
        |                      Parent Involvement
 Catholic Parent              Advisory Committee
 Involvement Committee               PIAC
      CPIC                            |
        |                      Community Liaison
 Ontario Association of Parent        Groups
 in Catholic Education
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School Councils

What is the purpose of School Councils?

The purpose of school councils is to improve student achievement and to enhance the accountability of the education system through the active participation of parents.

School councils provide an avenue for consultation, advice, and information sharing among all members of the school community. School councils are encouraged to represent and share the views of their community and to establish open, inclusive practices that invite participation. School councils may provide advice on any matter to the school principal and, where appropriate, to the school board. School boards and principals are obligated to consider and respond to each recommendation made by a school council.

School councils may advise the principal or the school board on:

- school year calendars;

- codes of students behaviour;

- curriculum priorities (not curriculum content as this is set by the Ministry);

- programs and strategies to improve school performance on provincial and school board tests;

- safe arrival program (elementary school);

- communications to parents and the school community;

- community use of the school;

- community programs and services provided at the school through school community partnerships;

- school board policies that will affect the school;

- and the selection of principals.

To assist members of the school council, the Ministry of Education has published a guide to school councils.
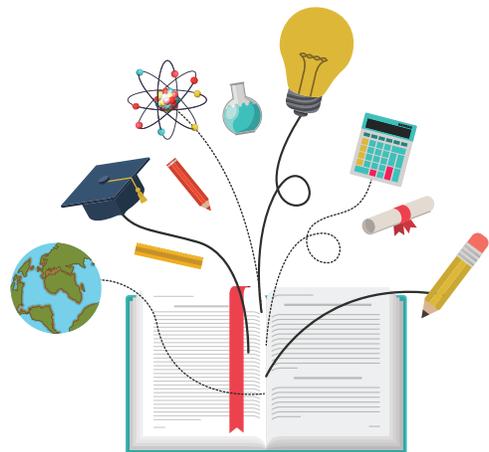
How are school councils formed?

According to the Education Act, 1990 (*amendment 612/00*), school council elections must be held annually, within the first thirty (30) calendar days of the start of the school year. Any parent or caregiver who is interested in the school council election process or participating as a member on the school council has the opportunity to do so. Elections are held at the beginning of the school year to ensure that even parents and caregivers who are new to the school community will be able to participate in the election of their representative.

Every school must have a school council. Members include:

- parents

- the principal

- a teacher

- a student (in high schools)

- a non-teaching member

- a community representative

Many school councils are also actively involved in organizing social events for the school community and fundraising.

Remember!

Any parent/caregiver can be involved in the school council!
You can nominate yourself to be a voting member or you can attend meetings and have a say without being a voting member.

School meetings are usually held periodically (4-8 weeks depending on schools). Being part of your child/children's school council is another way to be informed about what happens in their school community.

Sometimes school councils may not seem very welcoming, this makes being involved even more important as we need to work towards building spaces where people feel represented and welcome.

How does a meeting run?

- Traditionally the chair and co-chair set the meeting agenda based on input from the community.

- Anyone can submit an item to the agenda, including families, administration, students, teachers, and sometimes community members by sending an email to the chairs.

- Sub-committees of the council may have time on the agenda to report on their initiatives. A subcommittee is a group of people who want to work on a particular common goal. Examples of sub-committees include Equity and Social Justice Committee, Health & Wellness Committee, Caring and Safety Committee, Community Engagement Committee etc. A subcommittee can be created by any interested group as long as at least one person has a voting position on the council.

- There are often standing agenda items that are always included such as the administration's report.

- The timing of the meetings depends on the school, but are held approximately monthly or bi/monthly throughout the school year.

- School administration usually provide dates and times to upcoming meetings by email.

Did you know!

In Ontario, the majority of school advisory council and board committee meetings run using Robert's Rules of Order. As any parent knows, without rules, things can get out of hand really quickly.

Robert's Rules of Order set out guidelines for behaviour—called parliamentary procedure—for organizations that discuss and decide issues as a group. It is widely viewed as a way to run meetings fairly and efficiently. Robert's rules were written in 1876 by Major Henry M. Robert, to this day, it is used by the United Nations, Unions, and U.S. Congress, among others.

While useful and popular, Roberts Rules of Order are a Eurocentric form of meeting management that stems from colonial origins. School councils can opt for decolonized methods for conducting meetings that are more friendly and welcoming to those who may not be familiar with Eurocentric procedures.

Decoding school council meetings

Most school councils rely on rules of order to help operate effectively. School councils can establish rules of order according to their needs and culture, however sometimes the language used can be complex and not accessible. Becoming familiar with the terms may make it easier to navigate and participate in school council meetings. Below are some of the commonly used terms from Robert's Rules of Order for meetings.

Glossary of most commonly used terms in council meetings

Adjourn: to hold a meeting over until a later date

Adopt minutes: minutes are 'adopted' when accepted by members and signed up by the chair

Advisory: providing advice or suggestion, not taking action

Administration: school administrators carry out different administrative tasks that keep a school running smoothly, such as school operations, safety and budget. School administration is typically led by a Principal and Vice-Principal

Agenda: a schedule of items drawn up for discussion at a meeting

Attendance list: during in-person meetings, a list is passed round to be signed as a record of attendance

By-laws: rules regulating the council's activities

Casting vote: by convention, in some cases, the chairs may use a 'casting vote' to reach a decision if votes are equally divided

Collective Responsibility: a convention by which all committee members agree to abide by a majority decision

Committee: a group of people usually elected or appointed who meet to conduct agreed collective decisions on a given issue (i.e. health and safety committee)

Consensus: agreement by general consent with no formal vote being taken

Constitution: a set of rules governing activities of a school council

Convene: to call a meeting

Decision: resolution minutes are sometimes called 'decision minutes'

Eject: remove someone (by force if necessary) from a meeting

Executive: leadership that has the power to act upon taken decisions

Meeting Chair: leader or person given authority to conduct a meeting

Minutes: the written record of a meeting

Motion: the name given to a 'proposal' when it is being discussed at a meeting

Mover: a person who speaks on behalf of a motion

Opposer: one who speaks against a motion

Other business: either items leftover from a previous meeting, or items discussed after the main business of a meeting

Proposal: the name given to a submitted item for discussion (usually written) before a meeting takes place

Quorum: the number of people needed to be in attendance for a meeting to be legitimate and to commence

Refer back: to pass an item back for further consideration

Resolution: the name given to a 'motion' which has been passed or carried; used after the decision has been reached

Seconder: one who supports the 'proposer' of a motion or proposal by 'seconding' it (i.e. Chair says: Could I get a motion to approve last week's minutes? Council member A says "Moved!" and the secretary notes that you moved to approve last week's minutes. Council member B says "Seconded!" and they are recorded as seconding the motion)

Secretary: committee official responsible for the internal and external administration of a committee

Shelve: to drop a motion which has no support

Table: to introduce a paper or schedule for noting

Taken as read: to save time, it is assumed the members have already read the minutes

Treasurer: committee official responsible for its financial records and transactions

Unanimous: all being in favour

From Parent Involvement to Parent Engagement that Matters

Learning objectives:

1. Develop an understanding of dominant and alternative parent engagement models

2. Identify strategies for parents to effectively communicate with school staff, teachers, principals, board staff, trustees and other parent communities

3. Strengthen parent capacity to navigate the education system and advocate for their child/children

4. Learn about what delegations are and how they function

Interactive Learning Link for Section 3

Parent Involvement vs. Parent Engagement

The establishment of school and home partnerships are beneficial to students' healthy development and successful learning. There are multiple ways in which parents and caregivers can demonstrate involvement at home that supports in-school learning for example: reading to children, helping with homework, discussing and attending school events, volunteering in the classroom and attending field trips.

Doing *for* instead of Doing *with*

The main difference between parent involvement and parent engagement is that involvement usually implies schools leading, while engagement is a collaborative partnership where parents and caregivers are seen as **assets**. When meaningful parent engagement is achieved, parents and caregivers are valued as bringing a wealth of ideas, expertise, and energy to school communities.

Effective parent engagement can be defined as the active, ongoing participation of a parent/caregiver in the education of their child. To be effective, engagement efforts must be **collaborative, inclusive and culturally relevant**.

Remember!

Parents/Caregivers are a gift to their school communities!

Conventional parent engagement practices often treat Black and racialized parents as if they are intentionally under-engaged or disinterested with their children's education (James, & Turner 2017). This assumption continues to impact how administrators engage with Black and racialized parents. However, this has been proven to be far from the truth. Black parents and families have valued, supported and engaged in various forms of education-based advocacy and activism in Canada. In fact, anti-racism educational strategies in Canada emerged thanks to the organizing work of Black families and community activists (Aladejebi, 2021, p.5).

Remember!

If you are interested in supporting school fundraising, look for deeper opportunities for involvement. Baking cookies or pizza days is not the only way to be involved!

Black, Indigenous and racialized parents are involved in their children's education and contribute to their academic success in ways that are often overlooked!

Effective and culturally relevant parent engagement models must honour the knowledge, histories, communicative styles and culture of students and their families that have been historically minoritized.

What are some examples of parent engagement models?

Informal Engagement: Reading to your child, asking questions about school activities, speaking to your child in your native language, and joining social media conversations

School Engagement: Parent/teacher interviews, attending school council meetings, speaking with school staff, volunteering, and speaking with other parents and caregivers at school

Board Engagement: Becoming a member of a Community Advisory Committee

Beyond a Deficit-Based Approach

Families have different approaches to parent engagement, however, it is often only the dominant models of parent engagement that are recognized by educators. For example, while volunteering in classrooms or participating in bake sales are valuable, reading to children in a second or third language or advocating against racist school policies is just as important. Schools typically expect parents and caregivers to engage with the school system in ways consistent with White, middle-class parenting culture.

> Deficit-based approaches to parent involvement that view parents as obstacles to their children's education must be challenged and transformed to become **asset-based**, collaborative approaches to parent involvement that use parent and community strengths to effect change.

Here are some examples of deficit-based approaches:

- Black, Indigenous and racialized cultural capital (social, academic and linguistic) is not valued in the same way that White cultural capital is.
- A parent speaking English as a second language is seen as a problem instead of an asset.
- Educators base expectations for parent involvement on specific acts of engagement such as helping children with their homework, volunteering at school-sponsored events, or attending parent–teacher conferences (Jeynes, 2010).

What happens next?

- Parents/caregivers do not feel that they can contribute to their child's education and/or school community
- Parents/caregivers believe their involvement is not needed
- Parents/caregivers believe their involvement is not welcomed
- Parent/caregiver and teacher expectations are not communicated clearly (e.g. parents' homework expectations)
- Parents/caregivers lack confidence in the school, in the teacher, and in themselves
- Parents/caregivers lack trust

Strategies for building a positive parent/caregiver and teacher partnership:

- Don't be shy to email your child's teacher to introduce yourself, to ask questions, share concerns, do check-ins, and share resources you come across.

- **Ask** for advice and help when needed, but also **offer** advice and help when you can. You can provide more support in the classroom than you are aware.

- Send follow-up emails like thank you notes and next steps (for example after parent-teacher interviews).

- Ask how you can support learning at home through in-home learning and culturally relevant experiences.

- See something positive, say something positive! This allows you to build good rapport with teachers and show appreciation, while also building a foundation for more critical engagements.

- Seek academic support for your child as soon as you think they need them such as asking for referrals if you think they are needed.

Building relationships between parents/caregivers and schools: Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Be present and visible.

- Develop a **mutual** understanding of the strengths and needs of your child.

- Build consensus regarding communication such as, how often to do check-ins and preferred communication methods.

- Discuss the best way YOU can contribute to the school community (e.g. passion for social justice, artistic skills, second or third languages, storytelling, etc.).

- Get to know your school's Principal and Vice Principal, administrative staff and librarian, as they also interact with and support your child/children.

Don't:

- Don't assume. Ask for clarification and explanation when needed.

- Don't remain silent. Disclose your child's/children's needs. Teachers are legally required to put a plan in place once they realize a student needs accommodation. If you do not speak up, teachers might not develop plans which are in your children's best interest.

- Don't be afraid to ask for help from teachers. Be upfront and clear about your challenges and find out about the resources at the school and how the school can support your child/children.

- Don't forget to follow-up. Teachers and school administrators can be busy. If you have not heard from them, follow-up with a quick message.

- Don't forget to take notes. Especially during phone calls and meetings with teachers and Principals/VP's, it is important to take notes for future reference. If needed, use your notes to follow-up with an email after a verbal conversation.

Understanding Your Children's School Based-Assignments

Many parents from different cultural backgrounds and education levels might not feel confident helping their children with their schoolwork. Here are some strategies that can help:

- Ask the teacher to explain the schoolwork and point to resources to help you understand the assignment.

- You can request that instructions and rubrics for success be shared with you in a clear detailed form.

- You can use translators or translation programs to help you understand the assignment.

- The Toronto public library (TPL) has an extensive selection of resources for parents, caregivers and teachers to support students. Visit TPL

Here are some articles to further support children with reading assignments:

At at loss for words

What the words say

Hard words
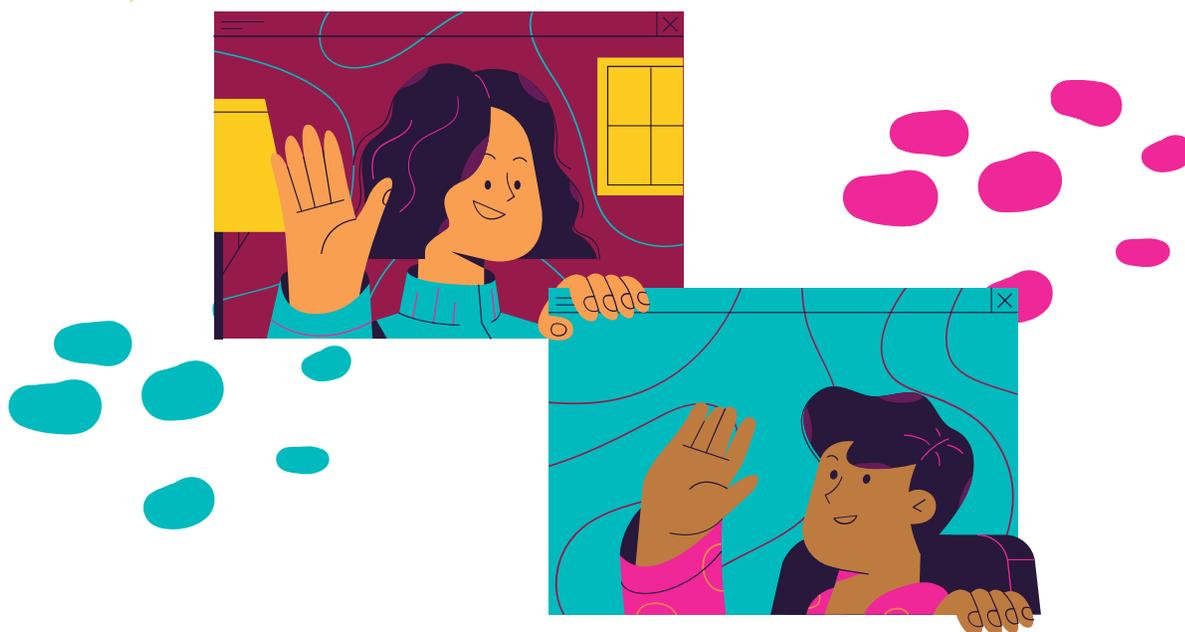
Addressing Concerns with Teachers and School Officials

1 **What can be addressed with your child's teacher?**
- Any issues pertaining to the classroom. For example class content, curriculum, teaching materials, literature, student interactions regarding your child
- Homework assignments
- Questions you might have about your child progress and report cards
- Bullying incidents
- Anything related to child's well-being, learning and expectations

2 **What can be addressed with your school principal?**
- Any of the above issues if you are unsatisfied with the teacher's response
- School student registration
- Student schedules
- Student suspensions
- Report card concerns
- Teacher's conduct
- School safety and security
- School code of behaviour
- School budget and fundraising
- School council issues

3 **What can be addressed with your superintendent?**
- Any of the above issues, if you are unsatisfied with the principal's response
- Alternate attendance requests
- Suspensions appeals
- Issues of Equity

4 **What can be addressed with your trustee?**
- Any of the above issues if you are unsatisfied with both the principal's and school superintendent's responses
- Any item on a board agenda
- Board policies under review
- Board budget
- Issues in the community
- News reports
- Ideas for new board initiatives

Remember!

- Document all your communication with the school.

- Ask for an interpreter if you need one.

- If possible, bring a family member, a community member or a friend to any school meeting where you feel you need support. It can make a big difference!

- If you don't hear back for more than 48 hours, follow-up with another email, using the subject: follow-up, date and issue.

- Follow up, follow up, follow up!

Presenting Concerns at a School Board Meeting

As mentioned earlier, most school board committee meetings are open to the public. School boards are eager to hear from the community about issues that concern students and their families. Members of the public are able to bring forward issues at school board meetings through a delegation; which means addressing a committee of the Board of Trustees by speaking or submitting a written statement. To find out about your board process, check the website of your respective school board.

What is a delegation?

Parents and any residents who are interested in education are always welcome to attend public sessions of board and committee meetings. Each meeting agenda has time set aside to hear delegations. These are brief verbal presentations from parents and others who wish to inform the Board of Trustees about a concern, idea or initiative at the local or boardwide level. The speaker is viewed as being "delegated" by his/her school community or organization with the authority to speak on their behalf.

Time allotted

The length of time allotted for presentation by a delegation will be up to five (5) minutes. If a delegation involves more than one speaker, the maximum time allotted remains at five (5) minutes. Normally delegations take place at the beginning of the meeting.

What happens at the meeting?

Delegations are invited to address the Board of Trustees in the order in which they registered. This portion of the meeting takes place early on in the proceedings.

Once the delegation finishes the presentation, Trustees have an opportunity to ask questions so that they can fully understand the concerns/ideas expressed. They may also have some further inquiries for staff with respect to the presentation they have heard.

After each delegation the Trustees will do one of the following:

1. Receive the presentation (this means that the presentation becomes part of the formal record of the meeting but no further action is required)

2. Receive and refer to staff for report (this means that Trustees feel the issue needs further exploration and discussion and want to see a report brought back to them for consideration. Timelines should be specified so that the delegate knows when the report will come before the Board)

3. Receive and refer to staff for a follow up with the delegate (this means the Trustees feel that the matter can be resolved through the appropriate department or staff member(s) without a report coming back to board)

References:

Aladejebi, F. (2021). *Schooling the system : a history of Black women teachers*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Jeynes, W. (2010). *Parental involvement and academic success*. Routledge.

Navigating Systemic Barriers: An Anti-Racism Approach

Learning objectives:

1. Learn, identify and define systemic oppression and barriers

2. Understand and identify racism and other forms of discrimination

3. Develop strategies to work with other parents and community members to address racism in schooling

Interactive Learning Link for Section 4

Systems of Oppression

To better understand equity and social justice, we must become aware of existing oppressive systems. There are many oppressive forces that discriminate against people based on their race, gender, ability, sexuality, immigration status and more. In education, equity and justice including the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges are important because schools are often not welcoming spaces for all.

A just society is one where all human beings are valued and respected. In order to work towards that, we must first understand the historical contexts that allow for the different types of oppression that continue to exist today. It is important that our educational institutions become spaces that work to promote and protect equity and social justice for their students and families.

Systems of oppression run through our language, and shape the way we act and do things in our culture. They are built around what are understood to be "norms" in our societies. A norm signifies what is "normal," acceptable, and desirable and is something that is valued and supported in society. It is also given a position of dominance, privilege, and power over what is defined as non-dominant, abnormal, and therefore, invaluable or marginal.

We hope that the following terms will help readers understand existing forms of oppression and the ongoing effects of colonization, coloniality and racism. Understanding this can support organizing new forms of resistance against unfair and oppressive educational practices.

Four I's of Oppression
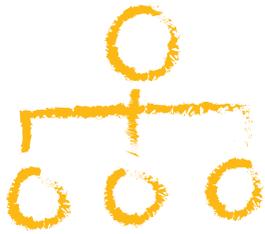
Ideological Oppression

A system of beliefs and ideas held by the dominant group, which sustains that one group is better than the rest. Negative qualities are attributed to other groups as a result.

Interpersonal Oppression

Based on the idea that one group is better than another. Examples include racist jokes, stereotypes, physical harm and harassment, threats, etc.

Institutional Oppression

Occurs when ideas that one group is better than others get embedded in institutions. Examples include when the legal system, the education system, the medical system, public policy, etc. are used to sustain ideologies of superiority and power imbalances.

Internalized Oppression

Internalized negative messages, and horizontal violence occurs when the oppressor no longer has to exert pressure on the oppressed because the oppressed group now does it to themselves and to each other.

Equity vs Equality

Equality: Ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity and based on the principles of sameness and fairness. It means providing equal access to everyone irrespective of their backgrounds.

Equity: Equity is at the heart of all gap-closing measures, since it is based on providing different access to resources depending on people's needs. It means doing whatever it takes to ensure everyone gets to the same place.

Inclusion: A way of thinking and acting that demonstrates a commitment to ensure all people are included and their opinions, worldviews, experiences, and perspectives are respected and meaningfully present.
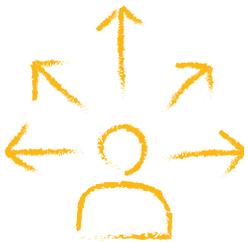
Reflecting Critically

Does our education system serve all children equally?

Justice and Liberation in Education

Justice: Justice means that the root cause of oppression is removed or dismantled and everyone is treated in a way that is fair, balanced and equal. Justice takes more of a system-wide approach in addressing inequity.

Liberation: Liberation is based on the notion that students with all needs should actively participate in the education system without restrictions.

European Colonization

European colonizers physically and culturally exterminated millions of Indigenous peoples across the Americas and founded theTrans-Atlantic Slave trade. The consequences of colonization are still felt today. In particular, the systemic racism and discrimination towards Indigenous and Black and Afro-descendant peoples. Knowing the history of racist colonial violence helps us understand the racial configurations of today's society.

Racial categories were formed as a result of and in order to justify colonial projects and European expansion. Since colonization, (White) European settlers believed they were inherently superior to Indigenous, Black, Chinese, and other racialized peoples in this land.

White Privilege & White Supremacy

White supremacy: An ideology that maintains that White people, their ideas, and their ways of life, are superior to Black, Indigenous, and racialized peoples'.

White privilege: Unearned advantages that White people enjoy and that allow them to have access to resources which is unequal to any other racial group in Canada.

White privilege reveals itself in schools when White students learn about the successes of their ancestors, see other White people in textbooks, are treated fairly by White teachers, and can take time off school for major holidays such as Christmas and Easter, to name a few examples.

Did you know?

In schools, White supremacy makes Whiteness the standard of human experience. This allows White students and their families to navigate school systems feeling "normal". Being "normal" allows people who identify as White to ignore race, because they are not perceived to belong to a race group.

As a result, Whiteness and those with proximity to Whiteness enjoy the benefits of access to power and control, exercising "rights" to exclude, dispose and deny innocence to Black students. This perpetuates anti-Black and intersecting racism in the Ontario education system (Shah & Grimaldos, forthcoming).

Remember!

White privilege does not mean that White people do not work hard. It means that they enjoy unseen and unconscious advantages that allow them to have greater access to systems and structures including post-secondary education, health, professional development, and better housing.

What is Racism?

Racism is based on the idea that some races are inferior or superior to others. Racism is founded on the notion that a person's race determines their human capabilities, leading to the discrimination of people based on their skin colour, language or culture. In practice, racism is the oppression of non-White people based on an invented hierarchy of race that privileges White people.

In Canada, we can see the effects of racism in economic, social and cultural inequalities. Black students are four times more likely to be expelled from a Toronto high school than White students. According to the same research, Black university graduates earn only 80 cents for every dollar earned by White university graduates despite having the same credentials.

Racism is a systemic practice embedded in many of our society's institutions, this is known as systemic racism. **Systemic racism** is a key driver of inequities in education, employment, housing, and health for Black Canadians and Indigenous people.

When parents help their children have a positive racial identity it helps them address racism and think critically about issues of race.

What is Anti-Black Racism?

Anti-Black racism is a specific kind of racial prejudice towards Black and people of African descent. It operates within society to disadvantage, oppress and dehumanize Black people. Anti-Black racism is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement (followed by colonization).

Anti-Black racism has a long history in Canada. In fact, anti-Black racism has been declared a public health emergency. Anti-Black racism manifests in all institutions, such as schools, health care and the legal system; it is a key driver of inequalities in education, housing, employment, and health for Black Canadians. For instance, Black people are more likely to be killed, struck or shot by police. In addition, in Ontario, Black high school students are more likely to be streamed into special education and applied programs than White students.

What is Anti-Indigenous Racism?

Anti-Indigenous racism is the ongoing race-based discrimination, negative stereotyping, and injustice experienced by Indigenous communities in Canada. This includes ideas and practices that establish, maintain and perpetuate systemic barriers, and inequitable outcomes that stem from the legacy of colonial policies and practices in Canada.

Discriminatory federal policies such as the *Indian Act, 1985* and the residential school system are examples of systemic anti-Indigenous racism. It is also manifests in the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in provincial criminal justice and child welfare systems, as well as inequitable outcomes in education, well-being, and health.

Remember!

Anti-Black racism is a global problem. Non-White communities can also perpetuate anti-Blackness and it is important to remain accountable. Even though there is a wealth of shared experiences that run through all people who are racialized, being Black in Canada is not the same as being any other race.

Non-Black racialized communities play an important role interrupting anti-Blackness within their own circles and families, and standing in solidarity with Black people.

What is Anti-Asian Racism?

Canadians with Asian ancestry are diverse, evolving and one of the largest communities of colour in Canada. Anti-Asian racism is prejudice, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of Asian descent.

Anti-Asian racism and discrimination are not new phenomenon. It has deep social, political and institutional roots in Canada's history. Over the last year reports of discriminatory incidents have more than tripled across the country.

The exclusion and racism experienced by Asians were and continues to be impacted by colonization.

The TDSB in partnership with ETFO developed a resource tool *Addressing Anti-Asian Racism: A Resource for Educators*, to empower educators to take action against anti-Asian racism. This tool is a great resource for parents and caregivers to enhance their knowledge in anti-racist approach to education.

What is Anti-Muslim Racism or Islamophobia?

Anti-Muslim racism or Islamophobia is the unfounded fear or hatred of Islam and Muslims (or people who are believed to be Muslim) instigating violence and systemic discrimination. It is important to note that Islamophobia intersects with other forms of racism, leading to the compounding of effects; for instance, a Black Muslim woman experiences anti-Black racism, as well as anti-Muslim racism and sexism.

According to The Tessellate Institute, from the existing accounts of Muslim students' experiences in Ontario public schools, three major themes emerge:

1. feelings of isolation and alienation;
2. lack of awareness about Islam and Muslims among peers and teachers; and
3. lack of representation of Muslims in teaching and curriculum.

Dominant Culture, White Dominance and Education

The dominant culture is the group of people in society who hold the most power and are sometimes (but not always) in the majority. In Canada, people who are White, middle class, Christian, cisgender and abled-bodied are often considered the dominant culture. They are in charge of institutions and have established behaviours, institutional cultures with values and traditions that are considered acceptable and the "norm".

Understanding and unraveling White dominance in educational settings is necessary so that teachers and administrators can challenge Eurocentric views in education (Howard, 1999). When educators, and school administrators are not aware of their social positionality - that is, how they experience the world from their own social position of dominance, they may perpetuate harm unintentionally.

A History of Racism in Canadian Education

Students from the S.S. #11 school in 1965.
(Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society)

To understand the inequities of our current education system, we must recognize the historical context in which the Canadian education system was built on. Inequitable access to education has existed since the 1800s.

In early 1850, a clause in the *Common Schools Act, 1850* was instituted by Egerton Ryerson; an educator that contributed to the design of the public education system in Ontario. The Act allowed for the creation of separate schools leading to provincially funded Catholic schools and racially segregated schools. Ryerson legislated separate schools for Black children. Black families were soon forced into separate schools even when they wished to attend common schools.

Ryerson's racist and colonial Eurocentric views were influential to the creation of the Canadian Indian Residential Schools, his recommendations would shape a system that amounted to cultural genocide in Canada. More than 150,000 children attended Indian residential schools. Many never returned. The damages inflicted by residential schools continue to this day.

Racism in Canadian schools is well-documented and it began with the establishment of residential schools in 1883.

Based on the recommendations of the Davin Report, Sir John A. Macdonald authorized the creation of the residential school system, designed to isolate Indigenous children from their families and cut all ties to their culture

Last Federally Operated Residential School Closed in 1996

In May of 2021, the remains of the bodies of 215 Indigenous children were found buried on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Since then, more unmarked gravesites have been found, providing previews of investigations by Canada's First Nations into the deaths of residential school students. A rising tally of these graves (more than 1,100 so far) has triggered a national reckoning over Canada's legacy of residential schools.
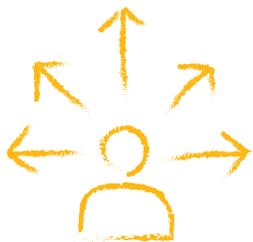
Reflecting Critically

How can you stand in solidarity with all Indigenous communities?

Racism in Ontario

Toronto District School Board

TDSB census data from 2006-2012 reveals that students who self-identify as Black, Latin American, Mixed, or Middle Eastern have relatively higher suspension rates than White students and students from other racial backgrounds.

Durham School District School Board

In a 2014 racial discrimination claim against the Durham Catholic District School Board, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (HRTO) found no discrimination. However, it did find that there were significant racial disparities in suspensions and recommended the school board conduct a review.

Peel District School Board

It is reported that in the Peel District School Board (PDSB), anti-Black racism is part of the Black students' daily lived experiences. According to a recent report, Black students are only 10.2 per cent of the secondary school population, but about 22.5 per cent of the students receive suspensions.

Reflecting Critically

What forms of social injustice and/or inequity have you identified or witnessed in your child(ren)'s school?

What is Anti-Racism?

Racism is part of Canada's history, as well as its foundation as a nation-state. Racism is embedded in Canadian institutions such as schooling, the judicial system, healthcare and policing. Because racism and White supremacy are part of Canadian culture, being 'non-racist' is not enough; instead, we must actively interrupt racism and White supremacy.

Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices on a daily basis. These choices require ongoing self-awareness and self-reflection as we move through life.

When we do not make antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of White supremacy, white-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society.

Interactive Learning - Other Resources

The Race Talk a Toolkit for Parents and Caregivers

Schools and Racial Inequality Video

Anti-Racism Education in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia

ABR Resource Guide (utoronto.ca)

Addressing Anti-Asian Racism: A Resource for Educators A Resource for Educators

The Anti-racist Educators Toolkit

Residential schools in Canada: a Timeline Video

Human Rights and Newcomers - video series

References:

Howard, G. R. (1999). *We can't teach what we don't know : white teachers, multiracial schools*. Teachers College Press.

Shah, V. & Grimaldos. D. (forthcoming) Lies, denials and cover-ups: The Pervasiveness of Whiteness in school district relations with Black parents and racialized parents.

Understanding and Identifying Challenges Faced by Racialized Students Part I

Learning objectives:

1. Identify common challenges experienced by racialized students

2. Understand special education programs and Individual Education Plans (IEP's)

3. Understand academic streaming and impact on students' success

4. Learn about suspensions, expulsions and how to appeal them

5. Gain strategies to support student's success.

Interactive Learning Link for Section 5

Structural barriers for racialized students

Students across Ontario **have the right to free primary and secondary education** regardless of who they are or where they come from. This section identifies some of the multiple challenges faced particularly by Black, Indigenous, and racialized students and students with disabilities in Ontario schools, which includes special education, individual education plans (IEPs), processes, implementation, and the rights of students and families. Lastly, this section looks at suspensions, academic streaming and bullying.

What is special education?

The Ministry of Education acknowledges that a one-size-fits-all model of teaching does not benefit all students. It defines special education as "programs and services [that] primarily consist of instruction and assessments that are different from those provided to the general student population. These may take the form of accommodations (such as specific teaching strategies, preferential seating, and assistive technology) and/or an educational program that is modified from the age-appropriate grade level expectations in a particular course or subject", as outlined in the Ministry of Education's curriculum policy documents.

All students require support from teachers, classmates, family, and friends in order to thrive and to gain the full benefit of their school experience. Some students have special needs that require support beyond those ordinarily received in the school setting. In Ontario, students who have behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities, may have educational needs that cannot be met through regular instructional and assessment practices. These needs may be met through accommodations, and/or an educational program that is modified above or below the age-appropriate grade level expectations for a particular subject or course. Such students may be formally identified as **exceptional**.

Types of exceptionalities:

- **Behaviour** including the inability to maintain interpersonal relationships, compulsive reaction tendency, etc.

- **Communication** including Autism, Deaf and hard of hearing, language impairment and learning disabilities

- **Intellectual** including giftedness, mild intellectual disability and developmental disability

- **Physical** including physical disability and Blind and low vision

- **Multiple** including multiple exceptionalities

There are wide disparities in disability identification by race. In general, Black, Indigenous and racialized students are disproportionately overrepresented with having disabilities.

It is important to note that learning disabilities are NOT the result of: socio-economic factors, cultural differences, second language, or gaps in school attendance. However, English Language Learner (ELL) children tend to be over-identified and under-identified with disabilities.

Remember!

Understanding these and other special education matters faced by racialized students can have a long lasting impact in a child's education because:

- We expect the best educational outcomes for our children, but navigating without understanding the educational system is difficult

- Communicating with our children and the school about their education is important

- This information will equip us to support our children's success

Identifying inclusive terminology to support advocacy on special education is an important step in advancing conversations about special education and interrupting practices that further the marginalization of Black, Indigenous and racialized students. Below is some terminology to approach neurodiversity, as a way to recognize that both brain function and behavioral traits are simply indicators of how diverse the human population is. However, when communicating with educators and school administrators the terminology they use refers to exceptionalities.
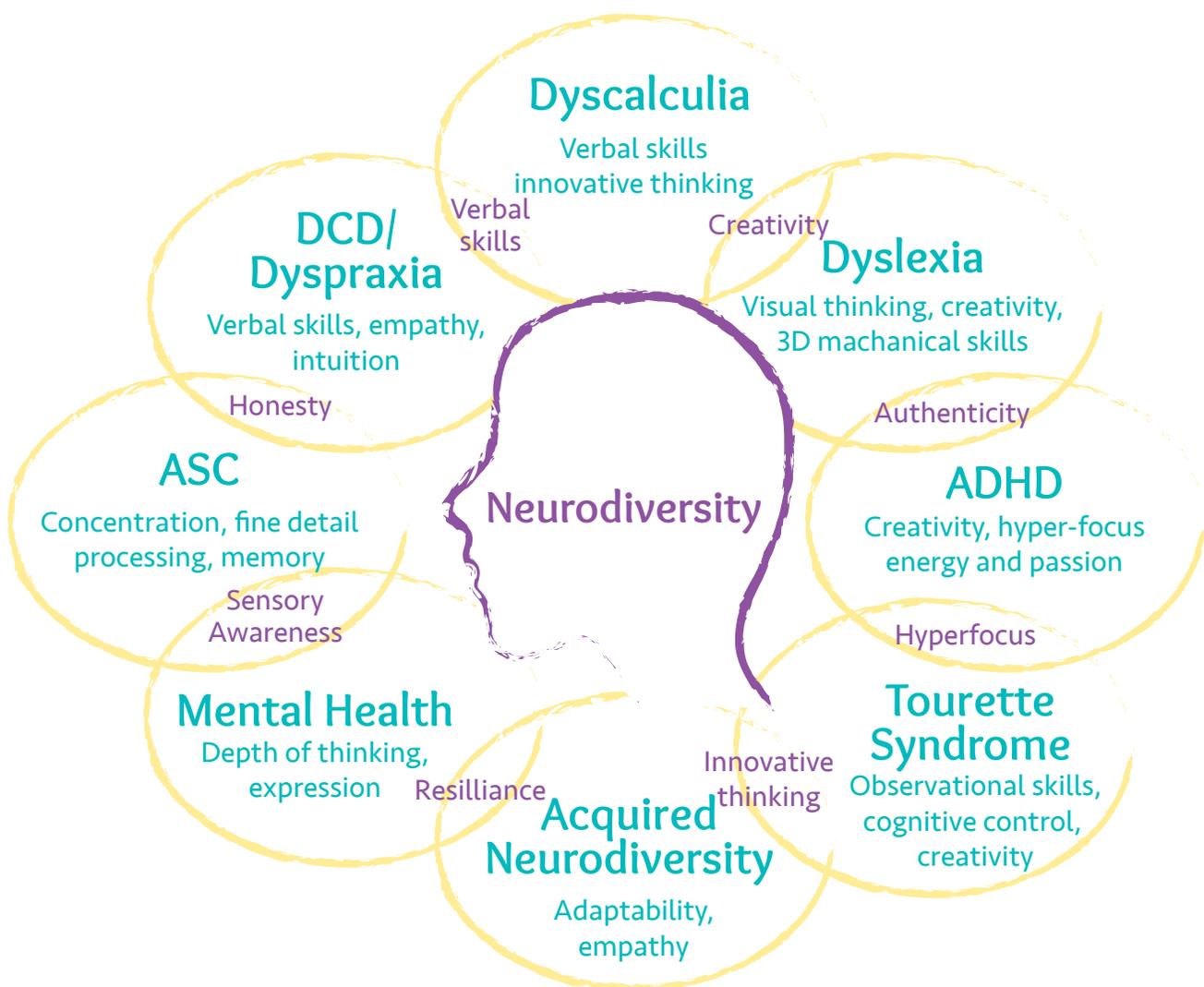
Neurodivergence: Neurodivergence is the term for when someone's brain processes, learns, and/or behaves differently from what is considered "typical."

Neurodiversity: recognizes that not all brains think or feel the same way, and that these differences are natural variations of the human population. A group of people are neurodiverse, an individual is not.

Neurodivergent: refers to an individual who has less typical brain process variations such as Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia etc. These will be considered exceptionalities by the Ministry of Education.

Neurotypical: refers to individuals of typical development, and intellectual/cognitive functioning.

Dyscalculia
Verbal skills
innovative thinking

Verbal skills

Creativity

Dyslexia
Visual thinking, creativity,
3D machanical skills

DCD/Dyspraxia
Verbal skills, empathy,
intuition

Honesty

Authenticity

ASC
Concentration, fine detail
processing, memory

Neurodiversity

ADHD
Creativity, hyper-focus
energy and passion

Sensory
Awareness

Hyperfocus

Mental Health
Depth of thinking,
expression

Resilliance

Innovative
thinking

Tourette Syndrome
Observational skills,
cognitive control,
creativity

Acquired Neurodiversity
Adaptability,
empathy

Dr. Nancy Doyle, based on the work of Mary Colley.
*Source: The Overlapping Strengths of Neurodiversity Forbes.com*

Did you know?

Ableism can be described as discrimination in favour of non-disabled and non-neurodivergent people. A school building without braille on signs or built-in ramps, or mocking people with disabilities are examples of ableism.

Ableism impacts Black and other racialized students differently.

We cannot address ableism without addressing race.
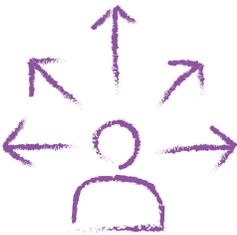
Reflecting critically

- What are the challenges faced by students with disabilities?

- How should schools address these challenges?

Race and special education

In Ontario, there is a disproportionate representation of students in non-gifted special education who are racialized or come from poverty. According to a TDSB Research Report this placement can lead to disadvantages such as streaming into non-academic pathways of study, limiting their opportunities of furthering their education goals. Further in this section we discuss streaming and its impact.

Perceptions of individual ability with identity factors like race and socio-economic class often lead to placement in non-gifted special education, therefore it is important for parents and caregivers of racialized students to keep this in mind if their children are placed in such programs.

Remember!

If your child requires special education support, consider:

• Ask your child if there are particular things that are consistently difficult at school

• Ask the teacher if they think your child needs extra support and if the teacher can provide the extra help without a formal placement

• Some medical conditions may affect learning (e.g. hearing impairments, sight problems, etc.) it might help to talk to your child's doctor

• Talk to other parents about the learning experiences in the classroom. At times the challenges that students face are related to their teachers' pedagogies and perceptions of your child's ability. "Comparing notes" would allow you to identify areas of need for your children and their progress

• Ask the teacher for referrals to community programs, such as mentoring, tutoring or free resources

• If you are a newcomer to Canada, school boards have a designated settlement worker under the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program. You can inquire about yours directly in your child's school. Talk to them and ask about further resources, they offer referrals about programs specifically for newcomer support

Actions to take: Meeting with the school staff

• If you think your child needs more support, ask the principal or vice-principal to hold a meeting with other school staff to talk about your child

• You can request an interpreter (the school must be able to provide you with one) or you can bring your own interpreter (e.g. family member, friend)

• You can bring a community support person (e.g. friend, family member, community centre staff) to help you take notes and to listen in. This can give you more confidence as you prepare to advocate for your child

Prepare for the meeting: It helps to write down questions, such as:

• What kinds of support or programs would help my child succeed?

• What is available in the school?

• Will my child have to wait a long time to get into the right program?

At the School Team Meeting the school staff may recommend one or more of the following options:

• That the teacher continues to provide support in the classroom

• That the teacher/team develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student

• That a student be formally "assessed" to find out if he or she has special needs and what those needs are and/ or that the school holds a more formal special education meeting called an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC)

The Individual Education Plan

Individual Education Plan (IEP): a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student. An IEP must identify learning expectations that are modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject or course, and/or any accommodations and special education services needed to assist the student in achieving his or her learning expectations. The plan must be developed in consultation with parents and caregivers.

Remember!

The IEP is not a daily lesson plan itemizing every detail of the student's education.

The IEP is a written and evolving plan for a student who has (usually) been formally identified by the IPRC. However, a student does not need to be formally assessed to have an IEP.

The IEP is a legally binding document:

- The Ontario Human Rights Commission recognizes that without needed accommodations, students are often unable to access educational opportunities equally.

- Education providers have a duty to accommodate students with disabilities.

- Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities says "whether or not a student with a disability falls within the Ministry's definition of "exceptional pupil," and whether or not the student has gone through a formal IPRC process, or has an IEP".

- An IEP is not public information. It is part of school board records.

- IEPs are updated/created for active students within 30 days of the student's first day of placement/IPRC, and the principal must ensure that you receive a copy of it.

- Special Equipment Accommodations (SEA) claims: equipment for students.

- The IEP must be reviewed in each reporting period.

Types of accommodations

When a student has an IEP, it is likely that they will require accommodations. An accommodation changes how the student learns the material. There are three types of accommodations and it is important to know the difference:

Instructional:
How teachers teach and the instructional tools they use to do that.

Environmental:
Classroom set-up, including organization of furniture and people.

Assessment:
What is given as assessments and how they are carried out (may overlap with instructional)?

Some examples of accommodations are: providing extended time for students to complete assignments, providing text-to-speech computer based systems for students with visual impairments or sign language interpreters for students who are deaf.

Sometimes the school team will recommend the school hold an IPRC which is a meeting to officially identify a student's special needs (often called "exceptionalities").

An IPRC may be requested by the parents or the school. Once parents have made a request in writing, an IPRC must be held. The school must inform the parents about an IPRC, and it is very important for parents to attend.

The IPRC will officially decide:

• If a student has special learning needs
• What kind of learning needs the student has
• The best placement and program for the student

The IPRC meeting usually includes the student's teacher and/or guidance counsellor, the principal, a psychologist, a school board representative and the parents.

Using information from the staff and parents, the committee will recommend a placement for the student, and the parents will be asked to sign a document agreeing to the committee's recommendations. You may take the document home and think it over before deciding whether to sign it.

Tips for your IPRC meeting:

- You can bring a family member, a friend or someone from a support association to the meeting.

- Bring any doctor's notes or assessments about your child's medical condition or about his or her learning skills.

- Take a photograph of your child to help the committee remember who they're talking about.

- If a particular placement is recommended, you may ask to visit it.

- If you disagree with the decision of the IPRC, you may appeal it, but there is a time limit for the appeal. Your principal can explain the process.

- The IPRC process may seem very formal, but it means that you and your child will have a legal right to request ongoing support, which will help him or her succeed in school.

Remember!

- Your child's placement will be reviewed at least once in every school year. You can always ask for changes or for more information at the review.

- Some issues can be solved by the teacher in the classroom, so speak to the teacher first if you are worried about your child's progress. Always document and follow up on your conversations.

- Needing special education support is not a bad thing, all students learn differently, some just need different kinds of support to succeed.

- Just because your child does not speak English as their first language, it does not mean that they will need special education support. Some problems are a normal part of adjusting to a new language and school. It may help to provide the principal with information about your child's academic skills in their first language.

- Some parts of the process for getting special education support can feel confusing and it may have many unfamiliar names. Always ask questions if there are things you don't understand. If you are not comfortable in English, ask for an interpreter.

- Parents/caregivers play an important role in special education. Don't give up! It is all right to ask for support for your child.
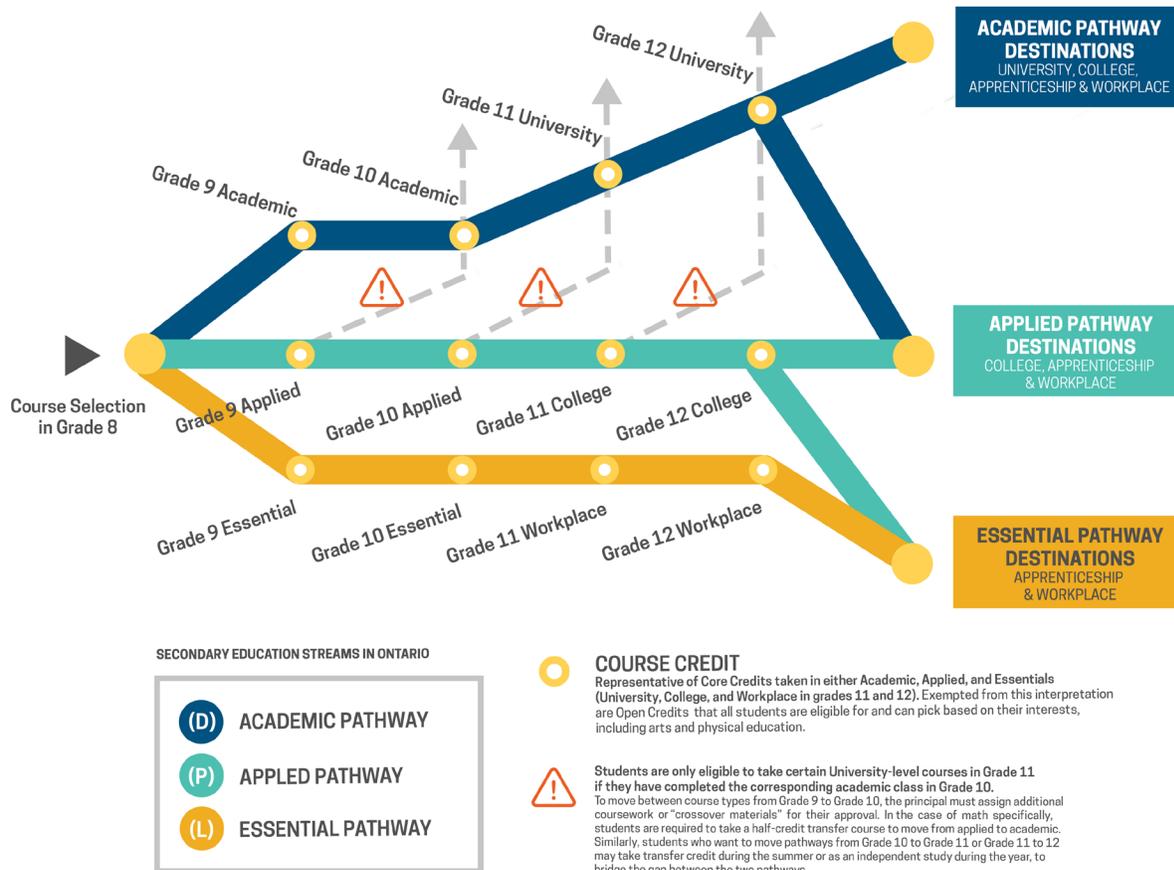
Academic Streaming

Academic streaming is referred to as the practice of separating students into distinct and unequal pathways based on perceived ability, leading to academic and non-academic (applied) courses beginning in Grade 9. Ontario is the only province in Canada that divides/sorts students as early as Grade 9. Entering high school comes with many overwhelming feelings of transitions, changes and new learning opportunities, and yet, at the age of 13, the Ontario education system is asking children and families to make a decision that will impact them for the rest of their life.

Students begin being separated into academic or applied pathways as soon as they enter the classroom. Many of these divisions are due to teacher and/or guidance counsellor biases and often begin as early as kindergarten. With lower expectations, a disproportionate number of students from low-income families, Black students, racialized students, Indigenous students and students with special education needs, are enrolled in 'applied' courses and are significantly underrepresented among students who graduate and go on to pursue post-secondary education.

Recommendations about course selection are influenced by teachers and guidance counselors, they use distinct tools to determine academic performance and oftentimes those markers are based on perceived ability, these include IEPs, gifted programs and other special education programs to mark students before course selection in Grade 8. Students and families who are in applied are then left with limited opportunities to learn, and with fewer post- secondary options, it is clear that students in applied streams are disadvantaged. These actions create divisions between students based on race and social class. Academic streaming also contributes to the unequal access to specialized programs such as, french immersion, alternative schools, arts high school, and elite sports academics (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017)

Trajectory

SECONDARY EDUCATION STREAMS IN ONTARIO

- (D) ACADEMIC PATHWAY
- (P) APPLED PATHWAY
- (L) ESSENTIAL PATHWAY

COURSE CREDIT
Representative of Core Credits taken in either Academic, Applied, and Essentials (University, College, and Workplace in grades 11 and 12). Exempted from this interpretation are Open Credits that all students are eligible for and can pick based on their interests, including arts and physical education.

Students are only eligible to take certain University-level courses in Grade 11 if they have completed the corresponding academic class in Grade 10.
To move between course types from Grade 9 to Grade 10, the principal must assign additional coursework or "crossover materials" for their approval. In the case of math specifically, students are required to take a half-credit transfer course to move from applied to academic. Similarly, students who want to move pathways from Grade 10 to Grade 11 or Grade 11 to 12 may take transfer credit during the summer or as an independent study during the year, to bridge the gap between the two pathways.

Student Trajectory in Ontario Education System

Graduation Rates

Students streamed into applied courses in Grade 9 graduate at lower rates than their peers in the academic stream.

- Over a quarter (**26%**) of students in the applied stream do not meet the requirements for graduation within five years of entering high school; compared to only **5%** of students in the academic stream.

As post-secondary education and/or training has become increasingly important for today's job market, students enrolled in applied courses are more limited in their post-graduation options. Just 33% of students who take applied math and language courses in Grade 9 continue on to post-secondary education following graduation, compared to 73% of those in academic courses. The disparity in university enrolment is even more stark, with only 3% of students who take applied courses in Grade 9 making it to university.

Did you know?

- Students in low-income communities are 1.5 times more likely to be in applied courses.

- Black students are 2 times more likely to be in applied courses.

Why is academic streaming harmful?

The research is clear: streaming students into lower-track courses leads to worse learning outcomes and limited post-secondary options.

Students in applied English and math classes were less likely to:

- meet the provincial standards on math and reading tests

- graduate high school, and

- attend post-secondary education

- Schools with more applied classes are disproportionately attended by students from families with lower incomes compared to schools with more academic classes (James & Turner, 2017).

- Black students are disproportionately streamed into applied courses, which lead to fewer university pathways (James & Turner, 2017).

- In 2016, 63% of Grade 9 and 10 Black students were enrolled in academic courses compared to 85% of white students.

- In 2019, the number of Grade 9 and 10 Black students enrolled in academic courses rose by 15 percentage points to 78%. However, this is still 12 percentage points below the 90% of White students enrolled in academic courses (CASE Fact Sheet & Recommendations).
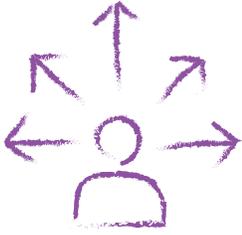
Reflecting critically

Some are hopeful that once placed in applied streams, they can transition to academic, however this is unlikely to happen.

Are pathways really pathways, or roadblocks?
Academic streaming is not truly a family choice: educators often make decisions based on judgement of students' abilities.

As parents and caregivers, what are some of your strategies to challenge these practices in school?

Recent changes to streaming in Ontario

In July 2020 the Minister of Education announced a shift to de-streamed classes in Grade 9 that would be introduced for the first time in September 2021. The following year on June 8, 2021, he announced the destreaming would start with the new Grade 9 math course that will feature coding, data and financial literacy, mathematical modelling and elements of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). It will also look at the importance of mathematics across cultures.

Did you know?

"Mathematics is a gatekeeper for many post-secondary opportunities. Black and Indigenous students in Ontario are disproportionately placed in lower-streamed math courses, preventing them from accessing STEM programs in college or university and obtaining many high income-earning careers. This disproportionality both creates and perpetuates a subtle narrative that it is normal for Black and Indigenous students to not be good at math, and so rather than trying to remedy the situation, we can accept it and just make the most of it. The creation of a de-streamed math course is meant to disrupt this oppressive norm."

Jason To, *Math educator*

Destreaming math is a good step in the right direction, but optimism should be taken with caution as streaming takes up many forms. Conscious effort and investment needs to be in place to support school boards and staff into fully transitioning.

More Resources about Academic Streaming:

A resource guide "Stop Streaming Students" by Ramon San Vicente

Streaming and Educational Pathways: RSEKN Equity Podcast

Teachers Talking about De-streaming

A Path Without a Choice: Academic Streaming

CASE Advocacy Tool Kit

References:

Gaztambide-Fernández, R., & Parekh, G. (2017). Market "choices" or structured pathways? How specialized arts education contributes to the reproduction of inequality. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 25, 41–. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.25.2716

James, C.E., & Turner, T. (2017). Towards Race Equity In Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: York University. Parek, 2021

Understanding and Identifying Challenges Faced by Racialized Students Part II

Learning objectives:

1. Learn about the right to access education for students with precarious immigration status

2. To provide an overview of bullying, its impacts and how to report it

3. Strengthen knowledge of alternative conflict resolution models and restorative justice practices

Interactive Learning Link for Section 6

Understanding Bullying

Types of bullying

Bullying is a recurring and deliberate abuse of power

It can take many forms:

- **Physical**: hitting, shoving, damaging or stealing property

- **Verbal**: name-calling, mocking, or making sexist, racist or homophobic comments

- **Social**: excluding others from a group or spreading gossip or rumours about them, this includes written notes or signs that are hurtful or insulting

- **Electronic** (commonly known as cyber-bullying): spreading rumours and hurtful comments through the use of social media, e-mail, text messaging

A **bully** is a person who shows a pattern of aggressive behaviour meant to hurt or cause discomfort to another person.

A **bystander** is a person who is neither the bully nor the victim but who witnesses the bullying behaviour.

A **cyberbully** is a person who bullies anonymously through online social media with the intent to harm or humiliate another person.

An **intervention** is an **action** that is undertaken, generally by an adult, to stop and/or prevent bullying behaviour.

Don't forget!

Talking to children about race and racism helps our communities put an end to racism! Staying silent can send the message that racism is 'not a big deal' or 'not our problem'. Always report incidents of bullying and racist bullying incidents need to be noted as such.

Racist Bullying: occurs when a student is being mocked, undervalued, shamed, or humiliated because of their physical appearance, religious or cultural practices, ethnic background or the way they dress. Racist bullying can include religious vilification.

All instances of racist bullying in schools are racist incidents. However, not all racist incidents are necessarily instances of racist bullying. For example:

- if a student says something racist about a community during class discussion, that is considered a **racist incident**. It did not target a student in particular, it was not persistent and, not intended to cause harm or intimidate to a student in particular.

- if a visibly Muslim student is persistently teased, dismissed, or mocked because of her hijab, that would be considered **racist bullying**.

Did you know?

The TDSB has a procedure for reporting and responding to racism and hate incidents, including racist bullying. The PR728 form helps respond to and track racist incidents.

Teaching Racial Literacy

Developed by sociologist France Winddance Twine (2010), racial literacy refers to a form of racial socialization and anti-racism training that Black and African-descent parents practice in order to protect their children against racism and anti-Blackness. Helping children develop racial literacy equips Black, Indigenous and racialized children to recognize and respond to various forms of racism.

Supporting Race Conversations at Home

For Black, Indigenous and racialized families, conversations about race and racism are inevitable. For others, it is a privilege to avoid the topic. Either way, we know the topic of racism is a difficult one. Recognizing that everyone is a part of the solution is a good start. Here is a resource guide with videos, and hyperlink resources to further support families in understanding race, racism and racial justice, and to equip parents and caregivers when having the race talk with their children and within their family.

Don't forget!

"There are many talks that take place along the journey of raising a child. You know the ones: The importance of kindness and sharing, the physical changes that occur while growing up, why it's important to be smart about dating and sex. There is, however, a unique talk that takes place in households where children of color are being raised." Khama Ennis, MD

The impacts of bullying:

The effects of bullying on the bully and the victim can be far reaching, impacting family and peer relationships, and schoolwork. The impact can be psychological and physical well-being. Some of the impacts on the bullied can be:

- They may not want to go to school or may cry or feel sick on school days.

- They may not want to take part in activities or social events with other students.

- They may act differently than they normally do.

- They might suddenly begin to lose money or personal items, or come home with torn clothes or broken possessions, and offer explanations that don't make sense.

- Teens who are bullied and/or harassed may also start talking about dropping out of school and begin skipping activities that involve other students.

Most often, when addressing bullying, principals use a **progressive discipline approach**. Ontario's progressive discipline policy allows a principal to choose from a range of options to address the behaviour and help the student learn from his or her choices. Some examples include:

- An apology for a hurtful or disrespectful comment

- A review of the expectations for the student

- A meeting with parents/guardians

- Anger management counselling

- Having the student suspended from school

- Having a student expelled from school (the most drastic measure)

What to do if your child is being bullied in schools?

- Listen to your child and assure them that they have the right to be safe.

- Make notes about what happened and when it happened.

- Help your child see the value of reporting. It takes courage to report. Reporting is done to protect all students.

- Email your child's teacher to report the incident. It is important to document the communication between you and the teacher/principal or vice principal at all times.

- Make an appointment to talk to your child's teacher, another teacher that your child trusts or the principal or vice-principal of the school.

- Stay on course. Keep an eye on your child's behaviour. If your meetings with school staff haven't made the bullying stop, go back and talk to the principal.

- If a meeting is arranged, bring someone with you that can offer you emotional support and can be a witness of your conversation. Sometimes it helps having someone else observing and taking notes in case you miss something important.

- Follow up on the steps that were agreed to at the meeting.

Suspensions

A suspension means students are removed from school temporarily for a specific period of time. Students may be suspended for a period of time ranging from one school day and up to 20 school days. Students cannot go to school or take part in regular school activities or events while on suspension.
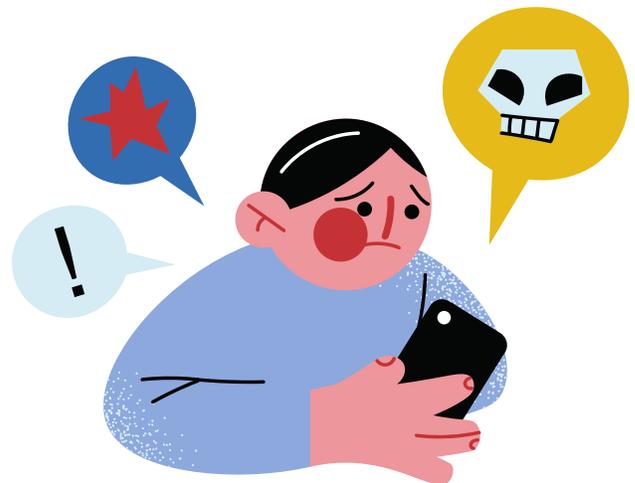
Some history

- In April 2000: then Minister of Education released a Code of Conduct for Ontario schools along with changes to the *Education Act, 1990* which gave educators more authority to suspend and expel students.

- The zero tolerance policy led to expulsions and suspensions for minor incidents and for dealing more harshly with Black students (see Towards Race Equity in Education).

- Black and other racialized communities filed a complaint with the TDSB and Ontario Human Rights Commission.

- Ontario ended the Zero Tolerance Policy in 2007 and replaced it with progressive discipline.

Today's suspension

Since July 2020, the Ministry of Education has changed conditions for K-3 students to align with Ontario's Action Plan to address Systemic Racism in Schools. The new regulation removes the discretion of the principal to suspend students in junior kindergarten to Grade 3. Behaviours should be addressed with the appropriate positive behaviour supports in the school setting. Activities listed in subsection 310(1) will still be subject to mandatory suspensions, pending the results of an investigation.

It is important to note that there are racial disparities in school-based disciplinary actions, whereby Black students are subject to disciplinary action at rates much higher than their White peers. In Ontario's two largest school boards (Toronto District School Board and Peel District School Board), Black students make up 11 per cent and 10 percent of the student population but represent over 34 percent and 22 percent of students receiving suspensions, respectively.

Can suspensions be appealed?

A suspension can be appealed to the school board. Written notice of the request for an appeal must be sent to the superintendent of the school board within 10 school days of the start of the suspension.

The appeal must be heard within 15 school days of the board receiving the notice of appeal, unless the parents and board have agreed to an extension. If parents have questions about the appeal, they can contact the superintendent of the school board.

Remember!

- Some behaviours like swearing, vandalism, and bullying are no longer suspendable behaviours. Instead, the school is supposed to provide support like conflict resolution strategies, in-kind restitution, and counselling.

- Students can still be suspended for more serious behaviours.

Expulsion

Students who are expelled from school must be provided with opportunities to continue their education and must be offered additional non-academic supports such as counselling, to help promote positive behaviour.

What is expulsion?

An expulsion is different from a suspension. An expulsion does not have a time limit. Expelled students are removed from school for an indefinite time period. Students are suspended first, while expulsion is being considered.

Students can be expelled from their own school or they can be expelled from all schools in their school board.

Students expelled from all schools in their school board cannot go to school or take part in regular school activities or events. For example, expelled students cannot go on field trips or take part in school team events.

Can an expulsion be appealed?

An expulsion can be appealed to the Child and Family Services Review Board within 30 school days after the expulsion notice has been received. Information on how to appeal the decision will be included in the notice of expulsion.

Resolving Conflict Through Restorative Justice

Restorative justice uses peer mediation, healing circles and, at its most formal, group conferences. These methods can address a wide range of issues: bullying and harassment, vandalism, swearing at teachers, fighting, assault, theft and weapon offences.

At its core, restorative justice frames the problem as a violation of relationships, rather than a violation of an institution's rules. Restorative justice understands that suspension and expulsion may lack effectiveness because these deny the bully and the victim opportunities for dialogue to better understand underlying issues.

Implementing restorative justice models in schools is a process that requires internal commitment and sometimes external support. Parents and educators can advocate for restorative practices to be implemented in their schools.

5 Myths about Restorative justice

Restorative Justice Practices:

• Build Relationships

• Strive to be respectful

• Provide opportunity for equitable dialogue and participatory decision-making

• Involve all relevant stakeholders

• Addresses harm, needs, obligation and causes of conflict and harm

• Encourages all to take responsibility

Remember!

Parents of Black Children, an advocacy group formed to support Black students and their families, has launched an anonymous anti-Black racism reporting tool. The submission of this form is merely a method to share your story.

Education for Students without Immigration Status

Access to public education for all children and youth under 18 in Ontario is both a right and a requirement under provincial law. The *Ontario Education Act, 1990* explicitly states that no child can be denied access to schools because they, or their parent(s), lack immigration status in Canada. However, if they are undocumented and have not applied for refugee status, they need to wait 6 months before they can enroll without paying international student fees.

Public boards cannot deny the enrollment of students whose parents are without immigration status.

In 2007, the TDSB's "Don't ask Don't tell" policy prevents schools from discriminating against undocumented people and encouraging schools to create inclusive spaces for non-status students. This new practice was implemented to prevent schools from asking families about their immigration status.

Did you know?

- Undocumented residents are often discriminated against because of harmful misinformation and stereotypes.

- In 2013 Toronto became a Sanctuary City, where no one can be refused from public services because of their immigration status.

- After much debate, Toronto City Council voted on more recommendations to further implement training to city staff and revising policies to reflect that undocumented people should not be discriminated against when trying to access any city service.

- In 2021, City of Toronto launches new 'Toronto For All' Campaign to support undocumented residents.

In Ontario, students with precarious immigration status have the right to public education, but some families may not know this or may be afraid to register their children. According to the *Education Act, 1990* a person who is otherwise entitled to be admitted to a school and who is less than eighteen years of age shall not be refused admission because the person or the persons parent or guardian is unlawfully in Canada (*Education Act, 1990*, section 49). If the family is here on a visitor permit, they have to wait 6 months before they can enroll without paying international student fees. Proof of residency is required.

Each board must admit students living in their communities who are without immigrantion status in Canada. Every school board has specific documents that are required in order to register child(ren) in school. Here is an example of the requirements in two Toronto school boards:

TDSB

• Proof of age (a birth certificate or baptismal record or passport)

• Proof of address

• Immunization Record

• Health Card

TCDSB

• Birth Certificate

• Proof of Catholicity might be required (child's baptismal certificate or parent baptismal certificate)

• A letter of enrolment to the R.C.I.A./ R.C.I.C. program

• Proof of Address

• Immunization Record

Did you know?

An Ontario photo card (Ontario ID) can be issued without any immigration requirement.

A rental agreement can be used as a proof of address.

An affidavit or signed letter of confirmation from a person of recognized standing in the Toronto community (e.g. family doctor, community shelter director, and faith leader) may be used to support verification.

Remember!

As a parent, you are not obligated to inform school staff of your legal status nor of your immigration process. However, proof of residency for more than 6 months may be required.

If you are denied access to schools anywhere in Ontario contact: noneisillegal@riseup.net

For more info visit: www.toronto.nooneisillegal.org

References:

Twine, F. W. (2010). A white side of black Britain: interracial intimacy and racial literacy. Duke University Press.

A Parent Ambassador Model & Enacting Collective Care with Communities & Resources

Learning objectives:

1. Understand the Ambassador Model, its principles and how to be an effective parent ambassador

2. Develop skills and strategies for effective public speaking

3. Gain insight into the principles of community organizing

4. Learn how to build successful coalitions

5. Recognize the importance of solidarity

6. Understand how COVID19 has impacted the education system

Interactive Learning Link for Section 7

The Ambassador Model

The Parent Ambassador Model is grounded in principles of community care and well-being. It focuses on enhancing caregivers' and parents' leadership skills and understanding the complexity of the education system. Our model invites parents and caregivers to critically reflect on their children's schooling experiences, providing tools and accessible language to navigate and identify racial inequities in the education system. By taking this training, or reading this resource guide, you are invited to join our advocacy efforts to advance equitable education and experiencing family engagement in a new way.

The Ambassador Model offers tools and alternatives for families to identify the intersecting ways in which systemic oppression operates in education. This approach foregrounds critical perspectives on traditional structures of parent engagement that constrain meaningful family engagement. This is done by providing an overview of the provincial education system structures, decoding educational jargon, offering core racial literacy concepts, and more. The goal is to confront, interrupt, and dismantle racism in schooling, while also improving educational opportunities for Black, Indigenous and racialized students.

Remember!

There are many ways to engage in your community and take leadership roles to motivate, engage and advocate. Advocacy can take many forms, from organizing events, signing a petition, talking to others about an issue to making a delegation etc.

The Ambassadors model offers:

- Information about processes and structures in education;

- Learning opportunities from "experts": anchored in the idea that parents hold experiential knowledge, parent and caregiver experts share their experiences

- Connections to other community leaders, parents and advocates who are disrupting, interrupting and dismantling oppressive systems

- Critical questions for reflection

- Practical tools for advocacy

- Community networks

- Local resources

- Peer support

- Relationship building

- Communication skills

Put simply, a parent or caregiver ambassador is a community leader; one that is invested in education and would like to take their leadership to the next level. This section breaks down some of the principles that can support ambassadors in furthering their skills and sharing their learning within their own networks.

Motivator questions for Parent Ambassadors

- What kind of changes/improvements would you like to see in your school community?

- How might you create a sense of responsibility/ownership in your school community?

- How can you help foster relations and support other parents and caregivers ?

- What communication channels would you find most effective?

- What community groups have you identified that can help support your process?

- How can you influence others to help your cause?

- Are there any community leaders that inspire you and your community?

- Are you the leader that inspires others?

Principle 1: Getting the word out: Outreach

An important tool for ambassadors is community outreach and networking. Outreach is a term that is commonly used to describe a wide range of activities, from delivering services to dissemination of information. Outreach can also help expand access to community services, practices or products. Agencies and organizations often rely on outreach to provide information on programming and services; this helps families in the community who are either unaware of existing programs or do not realize they are eligible to attend or to benefit from.

What is the purpose of Outreach?	What are some tools for effective outreach?
• Raise awareness (e.g. for meetings, events, town halls, programs and services)	• Meet parents/caregivers and families where they are
• Learn new ways to mobilize the community	• Celebrate the differences
• Reach out to vulnerable and isolated members of the community	• Listen to your community
• Learn about the community characteristics, needs, strengths and resources	• Build trust and relationships; people feel more comfortable getting involved if they already have a connection with someone
• Strengthen referral networks for needed services	• Build a strong network (in-person, Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter)
• Engage other parents, caregivers and community members	• Make written information clear, friendly and easy to understand
• Build a solid support system of parents, caregivers and community members	• If possible, provide information in the primary language of those who will use the service.
• Strengthen relationships	• Invite, invite and invite!
• Foster collaboration	• Follow-up, follow-up and follow-up!

Where can outreach be conducted?

- Community Centres
- Schools (after school)
- School events (concerts, cultural events, fundraisers, potluck dinners)
- Classrooms
- In an online community (e.g.Facebook, WhatsApp or Twitter)
- TTC stops/streets
- Malls
- Places of worship (e.g.churches, mosques, temples, synagogues)

- Public parks
- Social gatherings
- Apartment buildings
- Laundry rooms/ Laundromat
- Playground/Playscapes
- Community events
- Fundraisers
- Parades
- Fairs
- Information booths

How can outreach be conducted?

- Handing out flyers
- Talking to people face-to-face
- Setting up information tables at the school
- Creating online petitions
- Pledge cards
- Websites
- Social media
- Commercials
- Newspaper articles
- Bus advertising
- Radio interviews
- Podcasts calls, emails and text messages

Principle 2: Becoming a Public speaker

Public speaking can often seem intimidating. However, we do it constantly without even noticing; from talking in team meetings to telling a story to a friend. As a parent and caregiver you can build on essential skills to become a public speaker in your school and community, from talking about your child's education to other parents, participating in school or community meetings or inspiring other parents or community members.

Why public speaking?

- To speak up against injustices
- You have something to say
- You represent the voice of a community or group
- You want to share your knowledge or experience
- To show support or encouragement

Before you speak

- Become comfortable hearing your own voice
- Make notes/use cue cards
- Know your environment
- Know your audience
- Know how much time you have and time your speech (100 words equals approximately one minute)

Practice: While you speak

- Pace yourself
- Remember to breath and use pauses to enhance your speaking
- Start with your strongest points
- Make eye contact
- Use body language to enhance your speaking
- Keep your mind in a positive, calm place

After you speak

- Focus on the positive
- Review what was good
- Keep flexing your public speaking muscle. It will only keep getting stronger!

Ambassadors are great communicators

- Being a great communicator helps to build on self-confidence and provides many other benefits for improving your relationships with others (in school and community) and in other areas of your life as well.
- Good communication includes active listening, paraphrasing and asking questions back to ensure you are understanding what is being said.
- Developing your communication skills starts with a good understanding of who you are and a belief in the value you bring.

Principle 3: Community Organizing

Community organizing is leadership that enables people to turn the resources they have into the power they need to make the change they want.

PEOPLE:

- Strong relationships are the foundation of successful organizing efforts.

- Community organizing is not about solving a community's problems or advocating on its behalf. It is about enabling the people with the problem to mobilize their own resources to solve it (and keep it solved).

- The first question an organizer asks is "Who are my people?" not "What is my issue?"

- Community organizing transforms a group of people who share common values or interests into a community of people who are standing together to realize a common purpose.

POWER:

- Power is the influence that is created by the relationship between interests and resources. Interests are what people need or want (e.g. to protect a river, to stay in public office, to make money), while resources are assets (e.g. people, energy, knowledge, relationships, and money) that can be readily used to, achieve the change you need or want.

- In community organizing, importance is given to who has power, who doesn't, and how to build enough of it to shift the power relationship and bring about change.

CHANGE:

- Organizing is not about 'raising awareness' or speech-making (though these may contribute to an organizing effort). It is about specifying a clear goal and mobilizing your resources to achieve it.

- In organizing, change must be specific, concrete, and significant.

Five leadership practices in community organizing:

1   Being able to articulate a story of why we are called to lead, a story of the community we hope to mobilize and why we're united, and a story of why we must act.

2   Building intentional relationships as the foundation of purposeful collective actions.

3   Creating structures that distribute power and responsibility and prioritizes leadership development.

4   Using strategic planning to turn your resources into the power to achieve clear goals.

5   Translating strategy into measurable, motivational, and effective action.

Principle 4: Solidarity

Solidarity leads to the sustainable development of people. Collective actions stimulate solidarity among groups of people and individuals. Solidarity in education involves a collective responsibility for the well-being of members of all school communities, all students and their families and all school staff.

Why is solidarity important in the community?

- The core virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice
- Solidarity relies on building relations of personal commitment with one another
- Solidarity fosters hope and we need hope to build better and more equitable educational conditions

Active Participation for Parents and Caregivers with an Anti-Racism & Justice Lens

1. Volunteering and Strategic Volunteering

Families and community members are encouraged to participate in volunteer activities in their schools and support programs and services to help students succeed. Volunteering at your child's school is a way to learn more about how the school system works and potentially build stronger relationships with school staff and other families.

Despite the idiosyncratic role of parent/caregiver-volunteer involvement within schools, their skills and assets are not always strategically maximized to the advantage of students. Often, newcomer parents/caregivers are encouraged to volunteer at lunchrooms or as safety guards, instead of volunteer roles that allow newcomers to share their unique skills, for instance their language skills.

There are many ways of volunteering strategically in schools, sections 2 and 3 describe governance models for parents and caregivers such as school councils, school advisory committees, and PICs. These governance spaces are not often represented with racialized bodies, attending these spaces is a great way to disrupt the status quo and contribute to decision making processes that directly influence your school or school board.

Volunteering at organizations with a focus on education is another way to influence your children's education. Most parent coalitions are always looking for new members to support advocacy efforts. In the section below about coalitions, there are some recommendations.

Active Volunteering Through Activism

Activism is taking direct action to effect social change, either in support, or in opposition to, a social or political policy; this can occur in a variety of forms. Activism is often concerned with 'how to change the world' through social, political, economic or environmental change. Asking what actions can directly confront and challenge current systems of injustice is what most activists do. This can be led by individuals but is often done collectively through social movements.

Active Volunteering Through Advocacy

Advocacy is described as "speaking truth to power", because it is focused on challenging people in power to change their beliefs and actions by communicating the real-life experience of those who are demanding the change.

To be an advocate is to speak and learn about social and political issues. It is to bring attention to injustice, subsequently aiding the activists in their fight against that same injustice.

Canada's Black and African-Canadian parents, caregivers and students have long protested the inequities that have contributed to past and present educational conditions. In Ontario most recently, Parents of Black Children, an advocacy group formed to support Black students and their families, has launched an anonymous anti-Black racism reporting tool. Their advocacy work is an example of Black parents' leadership in educational racial justice.

Did you know?

Black Canadian women have been at the forefront of educational advocacy work. In fact, Black Canadians have been fighting for educational equality for more than a century, working tirelessly to address anti-Black racism in Canadian schools and increase educational equity for Black and racialized children (Aladejebi, 2021, p.5)

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2. Coalition Building for Educational Equity

A coalition is a group of individuals representing a diverse range of organizations or constituencies who agree to work together to achieve a common goal. Coalitions have different memberships and patterns of formation. They generally define goals and identify their mission and vision early on in their development. In order to achieve their goals, coalitions devise plans and activities to help them spread the word about their mission and attain their goals.

How to build a coalition

Anybody can start a coalition, below are some questions to guide initial steps:

1. What is the purpose of your coalition?

2. Coalition goals, mission and vision must be clear.

3. How is the coalition going to be structured? Identify possible committees, outline bylaws, and define ways of communication.

4. How often is the coalition membership meeting? Develop clear agendas, make meetings accessible, provide childcare, etc.

5. How is the coalition going to communicate and outreach? Newsletters, surveys, and social media are important avenues.

6. What activities will help you achieve your mission and goals? Define clear targets, be creative about planning and stay focused on the mission of the coalition.

7. Use research to support coalition work.

8. Ground your work in the community.

Did you know?

"Collectivization helps individual families recognize that their children's experiences are part of a much broader, more systemic issue of anti-Black racism in schooling. It reduces shame and stigma, allows deep relationships to form, promotes the development of a more coherent strategy, and garners greater power in challenging racist provincial or school board policies and practices." (Shah & Grimaldos, 2020)

There are coalitions in Ontario fighting for public education and equity:

- [Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education](#)

- [Middle Childhood Coalition Matter](#)

- [Ontario Education Workers United](#)

- [York Communities for Public Education](#)

- [Ontario Parent Action Network](#)

- [Student and Family Advocate](#)

- [LAEN, Latinx Afro-Latin-America Abya Yala Education Network](#)

The Impact of COVID19 on the Education System

COVID19 has significantly impacted and disrupted education in Ontario. Communities that have been disproportionately negatively affected by COVID19 in education include students with disabilities; low-income families; Black, Indigenous and racialized families; newcomers and immigrants. With local and province-wide school closures, parents and caregivers bore the brunt of the responsibility of educating and supporting students.

The global COVID19 pandemic has led to significant education disruption in Ontario

The science [table advisory for Ontario](#) reports that from March 2020 up until the end of June 2021, most Ontario schools were closed for at least 20 weeks of regular class; more than any other school system in the country. Inequities in the education system have been highlighted by frequent school closures, gaps in supports for students, and the fall-out and inadequacy of emergency remote models of instruction. During the 2020-21 school year, school boards were left to independently decide, plan and implement their own educational delivery methods. The result was widely varying school experiences, with several different models of educational delivery offered across Ontario ranging from fully dedicated in-person, face-to-face; fully remote/virtual online; and a blended or hybrid model of simultaneous online and in-person model.

The diverse models of educational delivery and school closures have impacted students with disabilities the most, compounding existing gaps in special education. The unequal distribution of school closures and pandemic-related inequities, particularly affecting low-income families in which racialized and Indigenous groups, newcomers and people with disabilities are

overrepresented, appear to be deepening and accelerating inequities in education outcomes.

- Closures, as well as periods of education disruption have increased absenteeism, which is a measure of engagement in education and the ability of schools to meet students' needs.

- School closures disrupted access to specialized educational services and programs for students with disabilities as well as English language learners.

- Closures have affected students' educational transitions, which affect students' later outcomes.

- There is evidence of decreased enrollment in kindergarten and reduced access to developmental services.

- There are concerns about increased streaming and whether students are 'on track' in early high school, as well as students' ability to access College or employment after graduation.

- There are health risks associated with closures including significant physical, mental health and safety harms for students and children. Modelling suggests long-term impacts on students' lifetime earnings and the national economy.

- Many students have been set back in social and emotional learning and mental health. Some have experienced grief, financial strain, isolation. Students who were already underserved may be set back most severely, but all have been affected.

Immediate Impact of Disruptions caused by School Closures

The far-reaching impact of disruption necessitates explicit educational recovery strategies. According to the science table advisory for Ontario, Two key strategies can minimize the impact of COVID19 related disruptions on schooling.

1. First, a strong priority, as expressed by numerous Medical Officers of Health, on keeping schools open wherever circumstances allow – a 'last closed, first open' policy. Keeping schools open in the context of new, more transmissible and more deadly variants of concern requires renewed and intensified commitment to a range of safety practices and accelerated vaccination of all education workers, parents and children as vaccines are shown to be safe and effective.

2. Education recovery strategies need dedicated funding in addition to regular schooling budgets. Strategies may include active measures to ensure appropriate universal responses (overall curriculum adaptations, instruction, and student supports), and targeted intensive accelerated learning programs for groups that have been most disadvantaged by health and education effects of COVID19.

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