

INDIGENOUS RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Indigenous Voices Matter:

*"I always wished that I could be white"
"how dirty and stupid I was made to feel being an Indian". "You're just another dumb Indian"
"just go back to the reserve where you belong"
"I used to scrub my skin with bleach to try and be white"*

Racism in Schools: A Barrier to Education among Indigenous Students

Indigenous racism exists. It has existed historically and continues to be embedded within communities and individuals. It has deeply harmed countless people and communities. It has been operationalized in all systems, including systems of education. White people and settlers have benefited from these systems of exclusion so learning about how systems discriminate and exclude through existing rules and procedures is also essential. Sometimes these are easily identified, and sometimes they are more implicit. Many reports exist condemning the state of Indigenous education in Canada and calling for system wide efforts to improve conditions and outcomes for Indigenous students. This work will not be easy, but it must happen. It requires ongoing commitment to actively review and then enact processes that are inclusive. The Board of Education ("Board") commits to eliminating Indigenous racism in all of its forms.

"It is difficult to imagine how an Indian child attending an ordinary public school could develop anything but a negative self-image. First, there is nothing from his culture represented in the school or valued by it. Second, the Indian child often gains the impression that nothing he or other Indians do is right when compared to what non-Indian children are doing... They have little reason to like or to be interested in the school in any way, in or out of the classroom, and it does not provide a path to the jobs some expect from it" (Hawthorn, 1967, p.6, 142).

"For the most part, the school represents a new and strange cultural atmosphere to which they cannot easily adapt. In addition, many Native youngsters face a crisis in terms of their identity and must suffer the low esteem in which they are held by the majority of their classmates" (Sullivan, 1988, p.207).

A decade later, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) reiterated the myriad ways in which public schools fail their Aboriginal students, including: racism; the use of biased standardized assessments; guiding Aboriginal students away from rigorous academic programs; the absence of Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum; a lack of Aboriginal teachers, staff, administrators and decision-makers; and inadequate funding. Five years later, the BC Human Rights Commission (2001) reported that: "It is obvious from the literature and observation of the situation in British Columbia that Aboriginal children and youth still do not receive equal education" (p.9).

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BC's Auditor General reported recently that, although there has been some progress, the BC government's commitment to close the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal gaps in education by 2015 has not been fulfilled. Persistent gaps remain and Aboriginal students continue to face barriers to success in public schools—including racism. (Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, LLP, p.4-5).

"Our public education system needs to influence behaviour by undertaking to teach our children—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—how to speak respectfully to, and about, each other in the future" (TRC Background & Elaboration).

Building a foundation for change by removing barriers in employment, justice, and social participation. We need to promote a district where every person is able to fully participate and have an equal opportunity to succeed. Building a district that is free of racism requires ongoing commitment from people at all levels. If we demonstrate Leadership in this work, and we empower communities, we can build awareness and change attitudes. We need to increase public awareness and understanding of the historical roots of racism and its different impacts on Indigenous people.

The Board is committed to working with its community to ensure all Indigenous identities are valued and that Indigenous people feel safe, included, and belong. The Board is committed to humbly acknowledge that we must listen and learn about Indigenous experiences – and then take actions that honour the wisdom and experience of Indigenous communities. We must authentically and purposely respond to the calls for action and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples of Canada.

The Board recognizes that Indigenous students, staff and school community members experience racism. It also recognizes that racism and stereotyping is harmful to everyone in the educational community, and requires a deep, shared commitment with persistent, ongoing actions to dismantle its effects on Indigenous people.

Racism presents itself in many forms. The racism of low expectations has been identified as a pattern in BC schools, where Indigenous children/learners are assumed to need remediation or extra help because of their culture or family practices. It also exists in systems – such as assigning Indigenous children into an English as a second language class or providing Indigenous children English Language Learning support without assessment to demonstrate the need for such support. Racism isn't always intentional: but it always harms.

The Board recognizes its obligations in the context of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the BC Human Rights Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples (UNDRIP), the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) and accepts its responsibility to live to the spirit and intentions of these legislative tools.

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Apology and Recognition of Harm

The Board recognizes its current and historical role in discriminating against people of Indigenous backgrounds. In particular, it recognizes that education has been an instrument of significant harm to Indigenous peoples.

As a Board, we apologize for our complicity with these discriminatory practices, acknowledge the significant and ongoing harm experienced as a result of members of Indigenous communities, and commit to leading and empowering all members of our community in ensuring we create inclusive and safe spaces for Indigenous people. The Board commits to addressing all educational recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Report and ensure that the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (BC) are adopted.

Preamble

The Indigenous Racial Reconciliation policy will set the groundwork to help disrupt and dismantle systemic racial discrimination, and promote anti-racism work in the District. The Indigenous Racial Reconciliation policy objectives will be, but not limited, to the following:

- Being proactive in dismantling practices and structures that are racist and discriminatory
- Entrench the recognition of the longstanding inequities that Indigenous have experienced in the District
- Establish common language and implement anti-racism work to address inequitable outcomes for Indigenous communities

This policy will attempt to disrupt processes and practices that most negatively impact Indigenous students, staff and communities.

The Indigenous Racial Reconciliation policy intersects with all areas of the Board's Strategic Plan and will have a positive impact in the area of accountability ensuring such acts are named and reported. This policy will address disparities and disproportionalities in areas such as student discipline and streaming.

To build the relationship with Indigenous communities, the Board's entrustment to the local First Nations to develop this policy was critical. The creation of this policy will honour the lived experiences of the Indigenous people from the local First Nations communities. This demonstrates the important role that the First Nations of this land play in the development of this policy.

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Definitions:

“Racism” Defining racism as “a series of persistent practices that systemically and unjustly allocate advantages to certain groups and individuals” (Ran, 1998, p.2) acknowledges both the harm that results from racism perpetuated in the context of power imbalance and the systematic nature of power-based racism. The role of power and inequitable distributions of privilege in racism has been acknowledged by many other scholars, who refer to exploitative intergroup relations (Miles, 1989), the propagation and justification of unequal treatment (Essed, 1990), producing disparities in life chances (Pettman, 1986), and maintaining or exacerbating inequality of opportunity (Berman & Paradies, 2010).

There are several categories of racism, including verbal attacks, psychological abuse, low expectations, low attendance, social isolation and marginalization, professional indifference, systemic racism, and denial of racism and its effects.

“Anti-racist Education” (also called racism awareness) addresses racism directly through discussion of past and present racism and by examining the economic, structural and historical roots of inequality. It also includes self-examination to identify internal biases and unacknowledged race based privilege. The purpose of anti-racist education is to develop an understanding of the dynamics of racism and to build capacity to respond to racism.

“Indigenous Racism” is the ongoing race-based discrimination, negative stereotyping, and injustice experienced by Indigenous Peoples within Canada. It includes ideas and practices that establish, maintain and perpetuate power imbalances, systemic barriers, and inequitable outcomes that stem from the legacy of colonial practices in Canada.

Prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of Indigenous ancestry and is rooted in their history and experience of colonization. Systemic Indigenous racism is evident in discriminatory federal policies such as the Indian Act and the residential school system. It is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies and practices, such that Indigenous racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger non-Indigenous society. Indigenous racism is manifested in the legacy of the current social, economic, and political marginalization of Indigenous people in society such as the lack of opportunities, lower socio-economic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates, inequitable outcomes in education, well-being, health, and an over representation in the criminal justice system and child welfare systems. (from Black racism definition). Individual lived experiences of Indigenous racism can be seen in the rise in acts of hostility and violence directed at Indigenous people.

“Cultural Safety” recognizes and strives to address power imbalances pervasive and inherent in society. It results in anti-racist environments, where everyone feels safe and a sense of belonging. We must actively honour the lived experiences of our diverse students, staff, and community members, including economic, religious, linguistic, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), and other intersectional factors. This action requires self-reflection, examination of our privilege, our bias, and our behaviour.

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Board of Education Commitments:

The Board commits to championing Indigenous racial reconciliation and leading bold and courageous conversations in order to end racism, marginalization, bias and exclusion of Indigenous people by incorporating the following principles and values:

1. The district will celebrate, recognize, honour, develop and support an environment that affirms, respects, reflects and celebrates the Indigenous ways of Knowing and Being and will honour the diversity the Indigenous communities have to offer our society. The District is committed to increasing knowledge and understanding of the histories, cultures and experiences of Indigenous people as the First Peoples of Canada, with a focus on First Peoples British Columbia and the affects of the Indian Residential School System. The District will commit to using quality teaching and assessment practices and resources that are culturally inclusive.
2. Ensuring commitments to reconciliation and Indigenization are incorporated into our shared responsibilities and accountabilities.
3. The District considers Indigenous racial reconciliation to be an important goal. Alleged harassment by staff or students will be investigated promptly, thoroughly and in a sensitive manner, adhering to the principles of confidentiality and due process.
4. This policy will not be exclusive of those provisions relating to multiculturalism, racial harmony and anti-racism that have already been adopted by the Board. Policies entitled Rights and Responsibilities, District Code of Student Conduct, Selection of Learning Resources and Controversial Learning Resources, as well as the District's Statement of Philosophy and Goals, include statements that encourage the development of awareness, understanding and respect for others of different ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritages.
5. Principals shall not knowingly admit to the school or classroom any person, group or association whose intent it is to discriminate, imply discrimination, stereotype, show prejudice and/or hate to others based on Indigenous ancestry. Ensuring equity for all by identifying and removing barriers of exclusion, overcoming implicit and explicit bias, stereotyping, creating Indigenous anti-racism, inclusive programming and creating cultures of belonging in every school and worksite in the district.
6. The Board will support educational equity through the provision of quality programs that will support our Indigenous Learners to success. The District values the skills, experiences and knowledge of Indigenous people and will increase the participation and retention of Indigenous students in schools. The District is committed to implementing Indigenous studies programs, Indigenous language programs, Indigenous cross-curricular content within schools, and Indigenous perspectives in education.
7. Ensuring individuals who are targets of prejudice, discrimination, hate and/or racism are offered support following an incident.

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8. Ensuring trauma-informed practices, reconciliation, cultural humility and restorative justice are core features of all approaches to personal and collective forms of learning about Indigenous racism.
9. The District is committed to ensure that all schools' Codes of Conducts make explicit reference to the prohibited grounds of discrimination in the BC Human Rights Code.
10. The District shall support employment equity, through the provision of effective processes to recruit, retain and develop all staff of Indigenous ancestry.
11. The Board is committed to creating a workplace environment that values the Indigenous people of this land. The District is committed to collaborative decision making with Indigenous Peoples, parents, caregivers, families and their communities. The District recognizes the Indigenous Education Leadership Table with representatives from the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation (LTFN) and McLeod Lake Indian Band (MLIB) as an advisory body to District on Indigenous education at all levels and in all stages of planning and decision making.
12. Ensuring accountability and measures of success in implementing this policy are developed and fully integrated into public and ongoing reporting mechanism.
13. For the purpose of being responsive and current this policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

References: British Columbia Human Rights Code,
Multiculturalism Act,
B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act,
Canadian Human Rights Act,
Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action
Bill C-15 An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom