



ACCT FOUNDATION &  
ACT2ENDRACISM

# SYSTEMIC RACISM IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

SEPTEMBER 2021

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END  
RACISM

ACCT  
Foundation



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The public education system in Canada must address racism embedded in its hiring and promotion practices, education curricula and school policies. Race-related bullying and racially motivated incidents against students perpetrated by other students and educators remain unaddressed by school administrators.

The ACCT Foundation and ACT2endracism call on governments, teachers' unions, teachers' colleges and decision-makers to take immediate actions to increase racial equity, diversity and inclusion through inclusive, anti-racism policies, training, promotion, recruitment, support programs, curriculum reform, accountability metrics, and engagement of racialized students and parents.



# ISSUES BACKGROUND



Canada has a long history of systemic racism against Asian-Canadians, and in 2020, we have seen a dramatic increase in anti-Asian racism across Canada. Asian-Canadians reported one of the highest increases in racially motivated harassment or attacks since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The history and contributions of Asian-Canadians are not taught in public education, contributing to the perception of Asians as “perpetual foreigners,” regardless of their long presence in Canada and their enormous contributions to Canadian society. Systemic racism in the Canadian public education system also continues to negatively impact Asian-Canadians within the system.

We call on governments, school boards, teachers’ unions and educators to take actions to address anti-Asian racism in the Canadian public school system.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

**1** Anti-Asian racism has been present in Canada since Confederation, and schools are not exempt from this reality. Between 2018 to 2020, race-related complaints were 69% of all reported hate incidents in the Toronto District School Board. Anti-Asian sentiment grew by more than four-fold within two years. The history of anti-Asian racism in Canada is both long, from the Chinese Head Tax to the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II, and continuing, as we have seen a 717% resurgence in anti-Asian hate crimes. However, this history is still not well understood or taught in school curricula. There remains no mandatory anti-racism course content in the public school system. There is still no mandatory course requirement that teaches students the full extent of the history of racism and cultural assimilation in Canada. Petitions that gathered over 40,000 signatures in less than a week have called for a mandatory high school course on race and ethnicity in Ontario schools while similar petitions were started in Nova Scotia, British Columbia and Quebec.

**2** Sadly, racism continues to exist and is embedded in the Canadian public school system. Activities as varied as academic advancement to the disciplinary system are all implicated. Although white students are a third of the student population, they represent more than 50% of those labelled “gifted.” In 2017, a Montreal school refused to take concerted action to address virulent racism from white students against racialized children. Although white hostility against other students is granted leniency, minor infractions by Black and racialized students are treated as serious offences that can result in calls to the police, who in one case handcuffed a 6-year old child in Mississauga, Ontario. A survey of Alberta educators between 2017 to 2018 found that 52% believed that students engage in racism at school.

Public education is a bedrock of Canadian society. It is a legislated, fundamental social good that develops the minds of Canadian youth and facilitates their advancement in society. It is the breeding ground for good citizenship and the institution of moral and ethical values. However, the Canadian education system continues to underserve racialized communities, including Asian-Canadians. Too often, student reports of racism are not addressed or are inadequately addressed. Students who experience racism are left unprotected and even harmed by the school system.

**3** There remains a lack of representation and racial diversity in educators and school administration. Black and racialized students do not see themselves reflected in school curriculums or in school staff and leadership. In particular, Quebec continues to miss low targets for racial diversity for its educators, who are majority white. Ontario’s educators continue to be majority white, even in Toronto where over 50% of the population belongs to a racialized group. Fewer than 10% of Ontario’s educators identified as a visible minority in 2006, and this had only risen to 20% by 2014, a severe underrepresentation compared to the general population. This underrepresentation of non-white educators limits the number of positive role models for racialized students. Besides, school principals, who are overwhelmingly white, do not receive mandatory anti-racism bias training. They also use educator recruitment processes that can vary depending on the school, leaving the hiring process open to personal and unconscious biases. Too much power remains in the hands of school principals who hire educators based on highly subjective decisions and who make 75% of decisions in the recruitment and hiring process.

Although there are individual initiatives that address racism in Canadian schools, these efforts need to take place within institutional transformations to tackle the systemic racism found in our public school system. The Toronto District School Board voted unanimously in 2019 to develop a formal policy on reporting and responding to racism and hate incidents involving or impacting students in schools. It is time to stop waiting for change, and it falls on provincial governments to implement mandatory requirements for anti-racism and inclusive content in public schools across Canada.



# COMMUNITY & EXPERT CONSULTATION

Systemic institutionalized racism has been occurring in education and has not been broken yet. Within school sites, understanding the experience and voices of students alongside the families and supportive administration, leadership and teachers are all very important to break the cycles of racism. To improve accountability and transparency, representation in schools is required; race-based data is currently missing; funding is needed with a race and equity lens from the grassroots in classrooms to the curriculum; a reporting system at workplace is needed for teachers and families to report racism; and leadership at school must be accountable to respond to racism.

- Dr. Sonja Aujla-Bhullar, public teacher in Calgary

We need to move beyond diversity celebration to tackle racism and equity issues, understand racism in the Canadian history and current situations, challenge extremism and hate, take actions and work with communities.

- Dr. Darren E. Lund, professor at University of Calgary, researcher on social justice

Education ministries and school boards should have in place anti-racist and racial equality policies and related operational procedures, involve racialized members in school councils, promote a positive school environment and address racial diversity in personnel, study programs, support services, communication, professional development and community collaboration.

- Dr. Hieu Van Ngo, Associate professor in the Faculty of Social Work at University of Calgary

Throughout 2020, ACT2endracism conducted community consultations focused on five key areas: race-based data (July 28, 2020), racism in public education (Aug 5, 2020), systemic racism and policing (Aug 13, 2020), hate crimes and incidents (Aug 20, 2020), and human rights commissions and systemic change (Aug 27, 2020). Speakers with expertise in these topics gave presentations and public feedback was recorded into a series of consultation reports.

There were 39 participants from across Canada who took part in the "racism in public education" consultation. The vast majority (80%) of the participants were concerned about bullying in the upcoming school year, and 60% have witnessed or experienced student-student or educator-student racism. Participants highlighted the reallocation of police funding to public education initiatives, such as programs for marginalized students. Participants also noted the need for sustainable funding sources for initiatives addressing anti-Asian racism, which tend to disappear when educator-advocates change schools. Other findings from the consultation included: more support for students who report racism, more representation of minority educators, more diversity on School Councils and the need for mandatory anti-racism course material.



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### **BASED ON OUR CONSULTATIONS, WE RECOMMEND:**

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- That anti-racism and inclusive content be mandatory in K-12 education, including recognizing the negative impacts of anti-Asian racism throughout Canadian history.
- That the current euro-centric curriculums be updated and replaced with ones that teach the complete history of Canada, including the histories and contributions of all peoples, Indigenous, Black, Asian, etc., as well as European colonizers and settlers, and that the concept be instilled to the minds of students that Asian-Canadians are full and equal Canadian citizens and Asian-Canadian history is an integral part of Canadian history.
- That cultural diversity be fully accepted, respected and celebrated, and that curriculum developers and educators be sensitized to not inflict shame on non-European cultures, which is a major source of internalized racism among racialized students and adults.





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- That school boards across Canada take immediate and substantive measures to address the underrepresentation of Asian-Canadians and other racialized groups in teaching, school administration, and senior leadership position, with a goal of achieving proportional representation in a reasonable time.
- That anti-racism and equity, diversity and inclusion training be mandatory, regular and ongoing for the whole spectrum of school staff, from the Director to support staff.
- That schools across Canada establish anti-bullying, anti-racism policies, policies on reporting and responding to racism and hate incidents involving or impacting students in schools, and policies and programs that support racialized students and educators alike in dealing with racism and related issues, such as mental health needs.



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- That school policies on bullying be amended to include special consideration for race-based incidents, with additional disciplinary measures, and that racial bullying data and metrics of improvement be tracked to ensure accountability and progress.
- That schools set targets and take immediate steps to recruit Asian-Canadians to school councils to give a voice to Asian-Canadian students at decision-making tables, including holding annual information and educational sessions on school council operation and actively inviting Asian parents to participate through letters to parents.





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- That progress in equity, diversity and inclusion, as measured by metrics involving all aspects of education and operation including diversity of leadership, promotion, recruitment, inclusiveness of curriculum, support for racialized students and staff, engagement with racialized students and parents, students' experience, cultural competency of staff, and annual reports, etc., be a compulsory measure of accountability and qualifications for advancement to senior management.

# ACCT FOUNDATION & ACT2ENDRACISM



The **Action, Chinese Canadians Together (ACCT) Foundation** builds the capacity of Chinese Canadian leaders committed to creating a more equitable society in Canada. We facilitate capacity building programs across the country, host leadership conferences, and provide a platform where work in academia can inform work in the community. We bring together established and emerging Chinese Canadian leaders to collaborate on identifying and breaking down systemic barriers to the full and equal participation of ethno-cultural leaders in Canadian society.

The **ACT2endracism** initiative is a coalition of concerned citizens and community groups of Asian descent. We aim to focus on Canadians affected by COVID-19 triggered related racism. We work on activities and campaigns targeted at anti-racism. ACT2endracism provides anti-racism resources and tools for the general public, community organizations and survivors of racism.

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