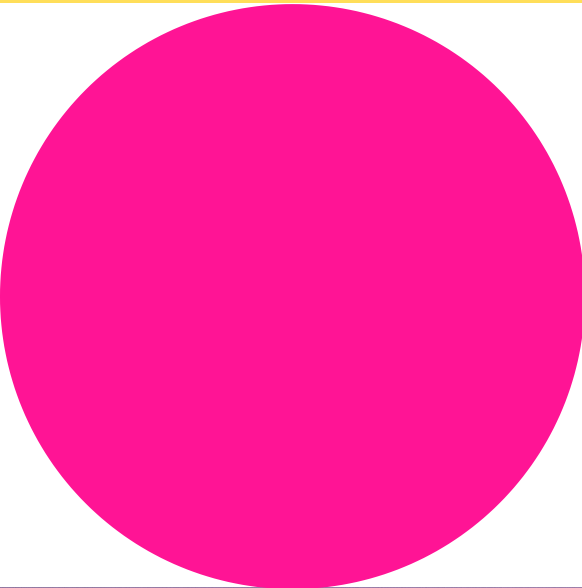


Anti-Black Racism for Educators

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"Schools are not immune from the perpetuation of anti-Black racism. Many students, parents, and teachers have long argued that schools are rampant with acts of anti-Black racism. Schools can and should be better. And they must be part of the solution in racial reckoning and healing."

Tyrone C. Howard



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Purpose



The **purpose** of this toolkit is to give educators a general understanding of how **anti-Black racism** works in the Canadian education system and various ways that they can start to address it within their personal teaching practices.

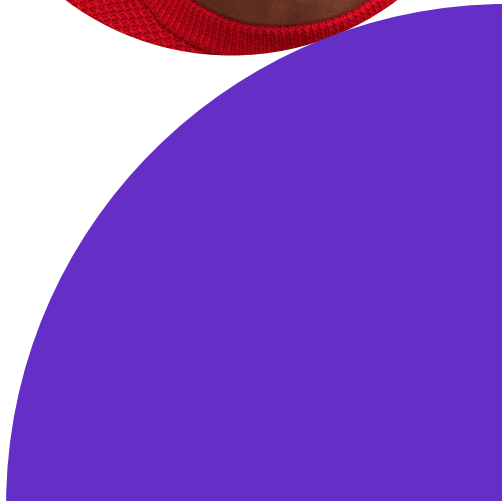


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GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ANTI-BLACK RACISM

The term "**Anti-Black Racism**" is credited to Dr. Akua Benjamin, a Ryerson Social Work Professor. It seeks to acknowledge the history of slavery and colonization of Black people in Canada and their unique experience of **systemic racism** in relation to other racialized communities' experiences of racism.

Anti-Black racism is such a regular, taken for granted part of Canadian society that it can be difficult for the average Canadian to see the extent of its systemic and widespread nature.



All Canadian institutions, such as government, education, health care and the justice system, perpetuate attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and **discrimination** towards Black people.

This has led to Black people having social, **economic and political disadvantages**. It is experienced as a lack of opportunity, poor health and mental health outcomes, poor education outcomes, higher precarious employment and unemployment rates, significant poverty, and overrepresentation in criminal justice, mental health, and child welfare systems. (*Toronto District School Board, 2014*).

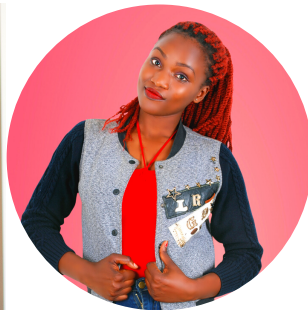
It is important to recognize that the education system is only one of many institutions in Canadian society that is steeped in anti-Black racism.

Anti-Black racism has been a part of Canadian life before the institution of public schools, and it is important to know because those attitudes and policies have laid the foundation of **anti-Black racism** that currently exists in schools.

CANADA'S HISTORY OF SEGREGATION



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The Canadian Encyclopedia defines **racial segregation** as "the separation of people, or groups of people, based on race in everyday life" (*Historica Canada*, 2021).

Canada has a history of segregation that persists today, with Black people being excluded from or not having equal access to opportunities and services such as education, employment, justice, housing, transportation, immigration, health care and commercial establishments.

This **segregation** has been enforced through official means such as **discriminatory laws** and also through informal practices that were or have become social norms.



Regarding **segregation** in Canadian schools, it has only been official in two provinces, Ontario and Nova Scotia. In the early 19th century, the governments of Ontario and Nova Scotia created legally segregated common schools, also known as public schools. In the early 1840s, when the school system was being formed, Ontario school trustees created separate schools for **Black children** in certain parts of southwestern Ontario, particularly where there were high concentrations of recently arrived **freedom seekers** (*The Aeolian Hall*, 2020).

With that said, just because it was not official in other provinces, it does not mean that it did not happen. For instance, in other provinces such as Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, it was not uncommon for white families to **block Black families** from accessing available local public education. This was done by terrorizing Black families and using various forms of **intimidation to discourage** them from sending their children or forcing Black families to create their own schools.

As a result, **racially segregated schools** were gradually closed mainly due to the activism of Black parents. In Ontario and Nova Scotia, the last officially segregated schools closed in 1965 and 1983, respectively.



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ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN SCHOOLS TODAY

Although changes in Canadian schools have been made over the past several decades, schools still continue to fail in providing **inclusive** learning opportunities for **Black students** that are comparable to their white counterparts.

Most of the gains made have been hard fought by **Black teachers**, families, allies and community activists who have been demanding something be done about the **systemic** nature of **anti-Black racism** within schools.



Canada as a whole does not have much data in regards to demographics. For instance, it is **not mandatory** for school boards to collect demographic information of students, their families, and employee data in Ontario.

Only the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Peel District School Board (PDSB) collect detailed **demographic information** (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020).

The **demographic statistics** that are available highlight the disparities in academic outcomes. In Toronto, the dropout rate for **Black students** is 23%, compared to 12% for white students.

A study also found that **teachers in Ontario** were twice as likely to rate a white student as “excellent” than a **Black student** on their report card – even when those students had the **same standardized EQAO scores** (DasGupta et al., 2021).

STREAMING



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Throughout the history of our education system, the **streaming** of students has always been an issue.

Although the system claims to be neutral when it comes to class, gender and race, Canadian schools continue to **stream** students based on race.

It is important to recognize that although with **intersectionality**, the understanding that everyone has multiple identities that make up who they are, Black students are a **diverse group**, but as a whole, they do have a unique experience of **discrimination** within the school system.

While race and class are intertwined, with Black families being among the poorest in Canada, it would be a mistake to reduce the **streaming** of Black students to an issue of class.

Black youth continue to be **disproportionately streamed** into lower education tracks as a result of both individual prejudice and systemic factors. Racial stereotypes held by teachers play a significant role in the **streaming of Black students**.

In Toronto, Black students make up **13 percent** of the student body but only **3 percent** of those labelled "gifted," compared to white students, who are one-third of the student population but more than half of those labelled "gifted" (*Maynard, 2017*).

Meanwhile, Black students are **2.5 times** more likely than white students to be **streamed** into non-academic "applied" programs in Toronto, which in turn affects everything from graduation rates to post-secondary opportunities (*DasGupta et al., 2021*).

Streaming students into different tracks is demonstrably **inequitable**, as students in higher tracks are generally afforded more resources as well as a wider variety of teaching methods. Maynard states that "the practice cements **inequalities** rather than challenging them" (*Maynard, 2017*).

Being taught by largely white instructors and, therefore, **being denied** positive Black role models within institutions of learning only further **cements** the lower status of Black students.



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DISCIPLINE

In regards to discipline, Black students are consistently **punished** more often and more severely than their white peers.

Black students are not only treated as if they are inferior, but they are also frequently treated as if they are a threat inside of education settings (*Maynard, 2017*).

The presence of **Black children** and youth remains unwelcome and treated as undesirable in many public schools, and their movements are closely **monitored** and subject to correction.



While **racism** and **harassment** from other students have long played a vital role in making Black youth and children feel unwanted in many Canadian public schools, school **disciplinary policies** have helped cement the treatment of undesirability of Black students that is apparent within the education system.

Black youth face **heightened surveillance** and disciplinary measures at massively **disproportionate rates** compared to their white peers (*Maynard, 2017*).

Suspension and **expulsion** play an important role in diminishing Black youths' participation in schools, particularly young Black males. Across many Canadian cities, the youth of African descent are suspended or expelled at **disproportionately high rates**.

In schools, as elsewhere in society, race plays an important role in the administration of **punishment**, even in the case of similar offences (*Maynard, 2017*).



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DISCIPLINE

Systemic racism and **discrimination**, as opposed to a propensity for “bad behaviour,” explain the significant differences in how Black and white students are **disciplined**.

For example, in Toronto, between 2011–2012 and 2015–2016, **almost half** of the students **expelled** from the Toronto District School Board were Black, and **only 10 percent** of those **expelled** were white students (Maynard, 2017).

This is a perfect example of how Black students **disproportionately** are punished in **harsher** ways for the same infractions as their white peers.



Not only are Black students **targeted** by unfair disciplinary practices but so are their parents. Maynard asserts that “parents, particularly **Black women**, are often **met with hostility** and **aggression**” (Maynard, 2017).

In comparison to white parents, **Black parents** trying to **advocate** for their children are often seen as “violent, hysterical and threatening” and end up on the **receiving end** of trespassing orders and being **reported to the Children’s Aid Society** for “offences” (Maynard, 2017).

WHAT YOU CAN DO



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Here is a list of steps that you can take as an educator to address **anti-Black racism** within your school:

Educate yourself

One of the first things you need to focus on is **educating yourself**. There are many ways that you can go about doing this.

For example, Niagara College suggests that you “engage with the work of **BIPOC** [Black, Indigenous and other people of colour] authors, scholars, activists, and educators who speak to how institutional structures and systems operate to **perpetuate racism** and how individuals are **complicit** within those structures and systems” (*Niagara College Canada, 2021*).



Although **white allies** are important, it is also imperative to **center the voices** of the marginalized groups you are seeking to understand. If reading a whole book is too much, social media may be a good place to start. Many influencers are quite adept at providing helpful information in bite-sized, manageable pieces. But, again, this is meant to be a **starting point** to figure out where you might want to start doing more reading.

Name Anti-Black Racism For What It Is

Calling an instance of **racism bullying**, “kids being kids,” or anything other than racism is a form of **erasure** and supports the status quo of racism in your school environment (*Howard, 2020*).

It lets all students and staff know that acts of racism will **not be addressed** or taken seriously when they arise. It is important to articulate why something is racist and why it will not be tolerated in these situations. When an instance of racism comes to your attention, it is **your responsibility** to address it as **immediately** as possible.

If you do not know the history around why something may be racist but know that it is, it is okay to **address the behaviour**, do the research and return to the conversation at a later time. To be clear, this is also essential in addressing other types of **discrimination** that happens in schools, such as homophobia and sexism.

Learn About and Use Restorative Justice Practices

A promising approach to improving Black students' school experience involves training teachers to use **restorative justice**, focusing on preventative strategies instead of **punitive discipline**.

In a notable example from Maryland, a set of "Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies" using restorative practices led to a **50% reduction** in suspensions and a **95% reduction** in referrals to the principal's office.

Most remarkably, when disciplinary action was required, these strategies resulted in an **even distribution** of discipline among students of different races. (*DasGupta et al., 2021*).



Believe Black Students

It is important to **listen and believe** Black students when they speak up about their experiences of **racism** within your class or school, whether it is about unfair treatment. First, it is important to note that the fact that they are speaking up about it in the first place is a **courageous act** given how students are generally treated when bringing up such issues.

When **Black students** speak about issues of race, racism, discrimination, exclusion, and prejudice, **believe** their stories. When they state that they have been subjected to lower expectations, **hostile teachers**, different standards, and unfair discipline, **believe** them, **advocate** for them, and **challenge** your colleagues who are skeptical.

While Black youth and children face **heightened surveillance** and extremely limited tolerance for even minor disobedience, the racist hostility of white students appears to be granted far more **leniency**. (Maynard)

Identify And Speak About Black Excellence

The **current curriculum** and materials in most Canadian schools do not celebrate **Black excellence**.

This means that as an **educator**, you probably will need to go “**out of your way**” to find resources that speak about Black excellence.

Yes, stories about **slavery in Canada**, Africville and Viola Desmond are important to talk about in our classes. Still, they **are not** the only examples of Black people’s experiences and **contributions** to Canada.



So much of **anti-Blackness** is “steeped in the pathological **depiction** of and belief in the **inferiority** of Black people, culture, and history” (Howard, 2020). Therefore, it is **vital** for teachers, school staff, and school leaders to identify and discuss **Black excellence**, brilliant Black parents, and high-achieving Black students.

Create An Open Dialogue At Your School

Based on your school's **climate** in regards to having **difficult conversations** and investing in professional development, you can start informal or formal groups around learning about and addressing **anti-Black racism**.

For example, formally, some schools provide resources to **teachers** such as buying books, holding staff meetings to discuss addressing anti-Black racism, hiring **anti-oppression** facilitators and paying for teachers to go to conferences centred on addressing anti-Black racism.

However, if your school is **not receptive** to formal approaches, you can still choose to find other coworkers who would be interested and do it on your own informally (Howard, 2020).



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SUGGESTED READING LIST



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