GECDSB

Dismantling Anti-Black Racism

BACKGROUND REPORT

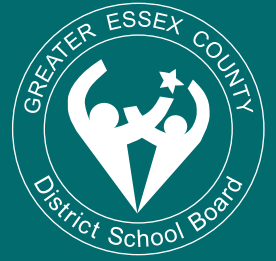**2022 -2027**

GREATER ESSEX COUNTY District School Board

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Letter from the Black Community

People of African descent have lived in Windsor-Essex County since the 18th century and have consistently advocated for better schooling options for their children since that time. Despite this multi-generational activism among Black students, staff, and community members, their voices have gone unheard and have ultimately been silenced.

Anti-Black racism in Canada is systemic, as evidenced by the hundreds of years of legalized enslavement of African peoples, the enslaved and free children of African descent who were refused an education, the steadfast way in which segregated schools in Windsor-Essex and Ontario remained in operation well into the 1960s, the disappearance of Black studies courses offered at the local public school board in 1975,[1] and Black people's erasure throughout Canadian curricula. Because of its pervasiveness, anti-Black racism continues to be a defining feature of Ontario's education system, greatly affecting the schooling of Black students and the work environments of Black staff.

For generations, students of Black, African, and Caribbean descent have been subjected to harmful, traumatic, and discriminatory educational practices that have impacted their ability to access equal learning opportunities. Despite how persistently Black students, staff, and educators have been in sharing what Black students and families require to feel safe and to thrive in learning spaces—their voices have not been heard by the school board. And so the Black community has continued advocating for a public education system that honours the rights of all students to the same education and opportunities.

The Black Community in Windsor-Essex continues to strive and build on the significant contributions and sacrifice of those who have paved the way for Black students to thrive, engage in their right to learn, and pursue their educational potential. We honour the ancestors and education trailblazers who came before us, including Patricia Alexander, Vivian Chavis, Beulah Cuzzens, Martha Elliott-Tolson, Justin Jackson, Shelley Harding-Smith, Verlyn Ladd, Spurgeon Montague, Abram Shreve, Dr. Colin Smith, and Dr. Henry D. Taylor. We also recognize we stand on the shoulders of these living giants, Nancy Allen, Phil Alexander, Lee Chase, Gaston Franklin, Kenny Gbadebo, Lois Larkin, Cleata Morris, Patricia Neely-McCurdy, Clayton Talbert Sr, Jim Walls and the countless who go unnamed.

Canada's legacy of white supremacy, colonialism, and anti-Black racism are reflected in the region's history of segregated schools. In fact, Windsor-Essex closed the last segregated

[1] Pioneer course prompts praise. (1975, April 23). The Windsor Star, p. 5.

school in Ontario, SS#11 in Colchester, in 1965, barely 60 years ago.[2] This legacy permeates every corridor of the GECDSB, showing up in the hallways, classrooms, offices, culture, policies, and practices of the Board. This legacy is likewise reflected in the disproportionate suspension rates for Black students and the streaming of Black students into lower-level academic courses.

As a defining feature of Ontario's education system, Anti-Black racism continues to harm Black students and staff, compromising their learning and work experiences. Black children endure systemic and interpersonal anti-Black racism, often ruining their relationship with education. Black staff are subjected to harmful anti-Black environments in schools. The success of Black students and staff within these oppressive schools, despite anti-Black systemic barriers and anti-Black racism, is a testament to the fortitude and tenacity of the communities and peoples of African descent.

This report speaks to the need for GECDSB to prioritize the dismantling of anti-Black racism and the creation of Black-affirming working, learning, and schooling environments.

The Anti-Black Racism Steering Committee was formed in 2021 out of the mounting pressures applied to the school board by various community organizations after the murder of George Floyd. This review is the culmination of the community's concern about the lack of consultation by GECDSB Trustees on decisions impacting Black students, persistent advocacy by Black Women of Forward Action, letters to the school board from the Windsor Black Educators Association, meetings with the Ministry of Education with members of The Black Council of Windsor-Essex, and engagement with local and provincial members of parliament. The double pandemic of anti-Black racism and the global pandemic of COVID-19 magnified the fissures and gaps in supports for Black students and staff at GECDSB. In response to these advocacy efforts, the GECDSB agreed to conduct consultations and develop this strategy.

The Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy—co-developed by the Black community, Black staff, and the GECDSB—for the first time hands responsibility for tackling anti-Black racism to the school board. This background report captures the stories of Black students, staff, and

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[2] Henry, N. (2019, May). Anti-Black racism in Ontario schools: A historical perspective. Research & Policy Brief. Issue No. 1. https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/policy_brief_no_1_may_2019.pdf

parents, and we are hopeful that hearing these stories will lead to systemic change at the GECDSB. The report captures the myriad of experiences of anti-Black racism at the GECDSB, from the Black newcomer student who was not afforded the right to be called by their own name, to Black students who expressed concern about the presence of police in schools, to Black staff who articulated the culture of retaliation when they spoke up against injustices in their schools. These experiences clearly illustrate the systemic and longstanding nature of anti-Black racism at this school board. This report provides a clear way forward for the GECDSB and the Black community as partners in effecting real change in GECDSB schools.

This important landmark strategy is being developed as we near the end of the recognition of the United Nations International Decade for Persons of African Descent (2015–2024). Canada, and now Windsor-Essex, has recognized the need to address anti-Black racism. We hope that GECDSB also recognizes the urgency of addressing these longstanding issues that have had life-altering and far-reaching impacts on students and staff of Black, African, and Caribbean heritage.

If implemented with the urgency and boldness that the issues deserve, this strategy will be life-changing for the Black students and staff currently in the system as well as those yet to come. But its impact will only be as powerful as the Board's implementation of the strategy, the allocation of appropriate financial and human resources, and the accountability measures put in place.

It is time to move beyond talk, hollow promises, performative gestures, and ineffective restructuring of oppressive, colonialist systems. Instead, it is time to press forward towards meaningful change at the GECDSB. Members of the Steering Committee look forward to continuing to work with the GECDSB to ensure that this strategy is the beginning of systemic change at the Board.

We remain committed to partnering with the GECDSB to achieve these gains and wish to thank Turner Consulting Group for advancing this historically significant strategy. We truly look forward to partnering with the GECDSB to implement the Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy and engaging in the meaningful, but tough, work ahead.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the many people who have contributed to and supported the development of this strategy. We would like to acknowledge the many Black and non-Black students, staff, and community members who shared their perspectives and experiences through the online survey and focus groups.

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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are on land and surrounded by water, originally inhabited by Indigenous Peoples who have travelled this area since time immemorial.

This territory is within the lands honoured by the Wampum Treaties; agreements between the Anishinaabe (Ah-nish-e-naa-bay), Haudenosaunee (Hoe-den-oh-show-nee), Lenni (Len-eh) Lenape (Le-naw-pay) and allied Nations to peacefully share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Specifically, we would like to acknowledge the presence of the Three Fires Confederacy (Ojibwe (Oh-jib-way), Odawa (Oh-dah-wah), Potawatomi (Paw-taw-watt-oh-me) and Huron/Wendat (Wen-dat) Peoples. We are dedicated to honouring Indigenous history and culture while remaining committed to moving forward respectfully with all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

Africentric Land Acknowledgement

The land was stolen from Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans were brought en masse to build these cities. This is occupied Indigenous territories of many nations and these cities are built with stolen African labour and resources. One cannot be remembered without the other. We invite you into a tradition with us of acknowledging and remembering whose territory you are on wherever you are in the Americas (from the North to the Caribbean and to the South) and, also remembering and acknowledging that these countries were built with stolen African and Black labour and resources as well.

Adapted from Blackness Between Us Collective ~ Bishara & Ashai

SECTION 1:
Background

1.1 | INTRODUCTION

The systemic nature of racism and oppression has been recognized by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry now requires that school boards identify issues of equity through both staff and student census surveys and Employment Systems Reviews, and address the issues through requirements of Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017)[1] the new Board Improvement and Equity Plan.

Largely as a result of community advocacy, a number of school boards across Ontario have recognized the systemic nature of anti-Black racism and are developing strategies to proactively create learning and working environments that are free from discrimination and in which Black students equitably benefit from an education system lauded around the world.

In the fall of 2021, Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB, the Board) embarked on a process to understand how anti-Black racism manifests within the Board by holding a series of community consultations with students, parents/caregivers, community members, and staff. The goal was for the findings from these consultations, documented in this report, to inform the development of the Board's first Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy.

This report builds on the work completed in 2020, The Black Student Voices Matter (BSVM) project, which was undertaken to "elicit the authentic voices of Black students attending secondary school within the GECDSB."[2] BSVM intended to use a youth participatory action

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[1] Ministry of Education. (2017). Ontario's Education Equity Plan.
https://files.ontario.ca/edu-1_0/edu-Ontario-Education-Equity-Action-Plan-en-2021-08-04.pdf

[2] Greater Essex Country District School Board. (2020). The Black Student Voices Matter (BVSM) project.
https://schools.publicboard.ca/News/ourstories/TheBlackStudentVoicesMatterProject/Documents/Jan.%20 2020%20-%20BSVM%20Report%20Final.pdf

research approach to collect and analyze the data to explore the experiences of Black students at GECDSB. Unfortunately, the original plan was disrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the end, 12 Black students were interviewed to explore identity, school belonging, school safety, healthy relationships, health and well-being, and future prospects.

This strategy also coincides with other work at GECDSB that will drive the Board's equity journey over the coming years, including the recently completed Staff Census and the upcoming Employment Systems Review. A Student Census survey is also planned, which will provide the critical data for establishing the baseline for Black student achievement and well-being and will be used to measure the impact of this strategy. In addition, the Ministry of Education has recently revoked Regulation 274 which focused on hiring teachers into Long-Term Occasional and permanent positions based on seniority. The new Policy/Program Memorandum provides guidance to principals on hiring based on merit, diversity, and the unique needs of the school while also providing protocols to avoid nepotism.

In addition, the Ontario College of Teachers has released a Professional Advisory on Anti-Black racism[3] and developed a new Additional Qualification guideline to address anti-Black racism.[4] The provincial government has also updated the Professional Misconduct regulation of the Ontario College of Teachers Act to include "making remarks or engaging in behaviours that expose any person or class of persons to hatred on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination under Part I of the Human Rights Code." Allegations of racism will now be subject to the College's established practice of investigation and, if warranted, public hearing and resolution.[5]

These initiatives are changing the education sector and establishing new structures through which anti-Black racism can be addressed. The initiatives will support the important journey that GECDSB is embarking upon.

[3] Ontario College of Teachers. (2021). Professional advisory on anti-Black racism.
   https://www.oct.ca/resources/advisories/anti-black-racism

[4] Ontario College of Teachers. (2020, June 16). College addresses anti-Black racism.
   https://www.oct.ca/public/media/announcements/college-addresses-anti-black-racism

[5] Ontario College of Teachers. (2020, November 6). Professional misconduct recognizes hateful remarks
   and behaviour. https://www.oct.ca/public/media/press-releases/2020/20201106_3

1.2 | ABOUT THE BACKGROUND REPORT AND STRATEGY

In response to continued advocacy on the part of the local community, GECDSB contracted with Turner Consulting Group in October 2021 to assess the issues of anti-Black racism at the Board and develop a strategy that will guide the Board over the coming 5 years.

This strategy includes two parts. This Background Report is Part 1 and documents the need and context for a strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism. Part 2 consists of the Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy.

Section 1 of this report provides contextual information about the development of the strategy and the methodology for gathering the information for this report. This section also provides information on the importance of developing a plan to guide the implementation of the strategy. While the development of this strategy is a key first step, it will need to be thoughtfully implemented and appropriately resourced if it is to make the desired change.

Section 2 recognizes the long history of anti-Black racism in education in Windsor and Essex County. It explores what is known about anti-Black racism in education, both historically and presently, and then defines anti-Black racism.

Section 3 summarizes the findings from the consultations to explain how anti-Black racism currently manifests within GECDSB and impacts students and staff. These findings inform the priorities and actions included in the strategy.

While the final strategy is important for setting the direction for the organization, this Background Report is critical reading that supports the strategy in a number of ways. First, this report provides the needed context and understanding in order for the strategy to be effectively implemented within GECDSB. The report will be an effective tool to help all members of the GECDSB school community understand how anti-Black racism manifests within the Board's learning and working environments. This report also shines a light on the school system itself and how it contributes to poor outcomes for Black students and staff, thereby disrupting the narrative that these outcomes are the result of the perceived deficiencies of Black children and their families or that of Black staff.

Second, this report will be critical in helping those tasked with implementing the strategy to understand the issues and why change is needed. Real and lasting change requires a change to Board systems, structures, and culture. This requires that trustees, school board leaders, school

leaders, and other staff have a deep understanding of how anti-Black racism operates and how it is embedded and maintained throughout the Board.

Third, this report captures institutional memory of what has been learned in the development of the strategy.

Finally, because the strategy is meant to be a living document that will be adjusted as needed through accountability structures, this report will function as a resource when adjustments to the strategy are to be made.

GOAL

The goal of this strategy is to achieve racial equity within the GECDSB school board for Black students and staff.

Racial equity is defined as the elimination of racial disproportionalities so that race can no longer be used to predict success.[6] This includes focusing on both academic achievement and well-being by closing opportunity gaps and creating identity-affirming and racism-free learning and working environments. The GECDSB recognizes that the systems and structures that harm Black communities fail everyone. Addressing anti-Black racism in education creates more equitable systems that support the academic achievement and well-being of all students. As such, this strategy to achieve racial equity at GECDSB is to the collective benefit of everyone in Windsor and Essex County.

OBJECTIVES

The strategy has six key objectives:

1. Normalize conversation about anti-Black racism

In order to dismantle anti-Black racism, it must be named and its systemic nature discussed. The visible disproportionalities and disparities that Black students and staff experience allow people to adopt racist beliefs about Black students, their families, and their communities. Rather than discussing the policies and practices that recreate and maintain racial inequities, oftentimes, supporting the student on an individual basis is made the sole focus of efforts to achieve race

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[6] Government Alliance on Race and Equity. (n.d.). Racial equity strategy. https://www.racialequityalliance.org/faq/racial-equity-strategy/.

equity. This keeps the focus on individual students and ignores the policies, practices, and systems that keep producing disproportionate outcomes for these students.

This strategy will support the GECDSB to define and discuss anti-Black racism and how it is manifested within the Board's learning and working environments. This strategy will also support conversations on the many forms that anti-Black racism takes, including ideological, structural, cultural, systemic/institutional, interpersonal, and internalized.

2. Operationalize anti-racism

The inequities experienced by Black students and staff are not random and will not disappear on their own. While they have been created and sustained by the people, policies, and practices within the school board, they reflect the ideology of White supremacy born from the idea of racial inferiority created to justify the enslavement of Black people. As such, the Board cannot be colour-blind or non-racist, but must take an anti-racist stance if it is to achieve race equity. This requires that staff are supported to be anti-racist and that anti-racist policies and practices be consistently implemented throughout the organization.

3. Measure inequities and progress

Identity-based data must be collected and analyzed if the Board is to understand the issues facing Black students and staff and to establish a baseline against which change will be measured. The analysis of the data collected through the Board's Student and Staff Census surveys will be critical to tracking progress, holding the organization and individuals accountable, focusing the Board's time and resources, and measuring the success of the strategy.

4. Build organizational capacity

All schools and departments must be committed to the breadth and depth of institutional transformation needed to achieve and sustain equitable outcomes for Black students and staff. While the commitment of trustees and senior leadership is critical, change for Black students takes place in the classroom, and change for Black staff at their worksites. As such, this strategy aims to build organizational capacity that changes how and what educators teach, how Black students are seen and supported, how Black families and communities are engaged, and how Black staff are hired and supported.

5. Build capacity and commitment within Windsor and Essex County

This strategy recognizes that anti-Black racism is structural and is informed and reinforced by the ways in which institutions interact with each other. As such, it aims to have the GECDSB courageously use its influence to work with other institutions, as well as the larger community, to normalize conversations about racism, operationalize new ways of working together, and work in partnership across sectors and with the community to confront and dismantle anti-Black racism.

6. Evidence-based

Finally, this strategy is grounded in research and what the evidence tells us about anti-Black racism. As such, this strategy supports a strong, coordinated, and focused start to dismantling anti-Black racism. Ongoing evaluation, which includes an ongoing assessment of the impact of the strategy, will allow the Board to assess the strategy's impact and refine the strategy along the way.

1.3 | METHODOLOGY

This strategy was developed through a collaborative approach between GECDSB and the Black community, facilitated by the consultant, Turner Consulting Group. The consultants worked with the Board and the community—through the Anti-Black Racism Steering Committee and a Working Group, from October to April—to develop a consultation strategy, conduct the consultations, prepare the background report, and draft and finalize the strategy.

The Anti-Black Racism Steering Committee consisted of members from various community organizations as well as school board staff. This committee was responsible for:

- Providing overarching guidance on the consultation process
- Providing input into the strategy's priorities and actions, and
- Reviewing and approving the background report and strategy.

A Working Group of 20 people from the Steering Committee was formed to work closely with the consultants to review the data collected from the consultations and develop the strategy. The final strategy was reviewed and approved by the larger committee.

To inform the development of the strategy, the Steering Committee felt that it was important to understand the experiences of Black students, parents/caregivers, the community, and Black

staff. A consultation strategy was developed to enable all members of the school community to anonymously share their experiences with the consultants through an online survey and virtual focus groups. Over the months of December 2021 through February 2022, the following consultations were held:

- Online survey (603 respondents)
- Focus groups and interviews (77 people)
  - Youth consultations (4 sessions)
  - Community consultations (7 sessions)
  - Staff consultations and interviews (7 sessions)

To provide a safe space for participants to share their perspectives, separate focus groups were held for Black and non-Black students, parents/caregivers and community members, and staff. Some individuals did not feel safe participating through a focus group and instead contacted the consultants to participate through a one-on-one telephone interview.

The consultation included Black and non-Black people from the following groups who completed the online survey and participated in the focus groups and interviews:

- 40 students
- 173 parents/caregivers and community members
- 409 staff

An additional 58 people participated in the online survey and did not specify the group to which they belong.

The consultations gathered input in the following areas:

- **Key issues:** What are the key issues facing Black students that the strategy should address?What are the key issues facing Black staff that the strategy should address?
- **Solutions:** What should be included in the strategy to address these issues?
- **Implementation:** What resources and supports need to be in place to ensure implementation?

1.4 | DEVELOPING THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

While a strategy is critical to provide direction and guide organizational change, it is only the first step. This strategy needs to be followed by an implementation plan that is thoughtfully organized and supported by the appropriate allocation of financial and human resources. While the strategy is important, it is through the implementation plan that the Board will operationalize its commitment to dismantling anti-Black racism. While the strategy will identify priorities and actions, the implementation plan will specify when, how, and by whom the actions will be implemented. These actions will also need to be scaffolded and staged to ensure that the foundations are being built to change organizational culture so that lasting change is created.

GECDSB itself will need to boldly maintain its focus on the implementation of this strategy while also responding to a dramatically changing environment in the midst of a global pandemic. The Board will need to communicate expectations to educators, school administrators, and all staff and ensure that they have the needed understanding, tools, and resources to meet these expectations. As the Board communicates its message that implementing this strategy is not optional, it will need to simultaneously foster a culture that celebrates staff who emerge as strategy champions, and document and share best practices across the system.

SECTION 2:

Anti-Black Racism in Education

Anti-Black racism has been a part of this country's history since the first African person was enslaved in Canada. While Canada is often viewed as a safe haven from slavery by African Americans, slavery was also a reality for Black and Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In addition, while African Americans fled enslavement by coming to Canada, they were met with anti-Black racism from individual White people, White communities, as well as the government. The historical record, which is largely untaught in Canadian history classes, suggests that Black people in Canada were generally treated with disdain and hostility in all aspects of society, including education, housing, policing, child welfare, and employment.[7]

Without situating anti-Black racism within this historical context and acknowledging that anti-Black racism is inherently Canadian, present-day racial inequities can be dismissed by blaming Black people for the inequities they experience. As such, this section is intended to establish the historical and present context for anti-Black racism in Canada. It then goes on to define anti-Black racism to provide a common framework and language through which to understand the findings from the consultations.

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[7] Maynard, R. (2017). *Policing Black lives: State violence in Canada from slavery to the present*. Fernwood Publishing.

2.1 | HISTORY OF ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN EDUCATION IN WINDSOR AND ESSEX COUNTY

People of African descent have long resided in what is now Essex County, going back to the 1770s when slavery was a fact of life for Black people and Indigenous Peoples in the region. The Detroit River borderland was a contradictory space of slavery and freedom that influenced the movement of Black people and Black life. At the turn of the nineteenth century, enslaved Black people on the Canadian side fled to the northern United States to gain freedom. Shortly after the War of 1812, African American freedom seekers began trickling into Upper Canada (now Ontario) in pursuit of their liberty. An integral part of the pursuit of freedom for enslaved Black people was obtaining an education.[8]

There has been a long history of limited educational opportunities for Black children and advocacy for education equity by Black communities in Windsor and other parts of Essex County. During slavery, which was legal in Canada until 1834, enslaved children were denied access to education because of their status as property. When Ontario's public education system was being established in the early 1840s, Black children quickly began to be marginalized and excluded, despite this exclusion being counter to the *Common School Act* of 1843, which made it illegal for school board officials to refuse access to education to "any class or description of persons resident within the school district to which such common school may belong."[9]

As the Black community began to grow in Southern Ontario after slavery was abolished in Canada, there was growing opposition from White parents to their children attending school with Black children. The minutes of a meeting of the Coloured Ratepayers of Amherstburg in 1846 referred to White local trustees and parents who expressed that "sooner than they will send to school with [N-word] they will cut their children's heads off and throw them into the roadside ditch."[10]

The prevailing attitudes and beliefs held by many White settlers was that Black people were socially and intellectually inferior, and in order to preserve Anglo-Saxon racial purity, White and Black people should not commingle. This included their opposition to Black children attending

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[8] Henry, N. (2010). Emancipation Day: *Celebrating freedom in Canada*. Dunburn Press.

[9] McLaren, K. (2003). British-Canadian myths of purity and segregated schools in mid-nineteenth century Canada west. *Historical Papers.*

[10] Isaac Rice et al. to Egerton Ryerson, cited in Hodgins, Documentary History, Volume VI: 1846, p. 294.

school with White children.[11] Although segregated schools were against the law prior to 1850, public school officials continued to deny Black students' admission to publicly funded schools.[12]

The superintendent of schools for Canada West, Egerton Ryerson, complied with the demands of White parents, codifying racially segregated schools in Canada West in the *Common Schools Act* of 1850, thus allowing for separate schools based on race and religion. The legislation allowed for Catholics and Black people to request a separate school based on need and numbers. It also allowed White school trustees to decide to form separate schools for these groups, even if they objected.

There were at least five separate schools for Black students in Essex County—in Colchester (including Gilgal), Sandwich East, Windsor, Amherstburg, and Harrow. The King Street School in Amherstburg was established in the early 1850s and served Black students for 60 years. The first separate school for Black students in Windsor opened in 1862. The Marble Village School S. S. #1 in Anderdon was established in 1856. It was a regular common school attended by Black children and adults that was funded by a White settler who held abolitionist views.[13] While the taxes paid by members of the Black community supported all common schools, the conditions and resources for the separate schools for Black students were often substandard.

Black students in separate schools were taught primarily by Black teachers, which many Black parents felt was a redeeming quality of racial exclusion in public education.[14] The Black teachers employed resistive pedagogies that were intended to instill academic skills and knowledge, demonstrate belief in their students' capabilities, nurture confidence, foster racial pride, and also uplift the Black community.

Black parents sought alternatives for their children to receive an education and fought for integration. Private schools funded by Black community members, White abolitionist missionaries, or established churches offered options to the common schools that excluded Black children. Sunday schools also provided opportunities for children and adults to learn to read and write.

[11] Backhouse, C. (2007). *Colour-coded: A legal history of racism in Canada, 1900—1950.* University of Toronto Press.

[12] Walker, B. (2012). The African Canadian legal odyssey: Historical Essays. University of Toronto Press; Winks, R. (1997). The Blacks in Canada: A history (2nd ed.). McGill-Queen's University Press.

[13] Marsh Collection Society. (1996). Amherstburg, 1796 – 1996: The New Town on Garrison Grounds Amherstburg Bicentennial Book Committee.

[14] Aladejebi, F. (2012). "I didn't want to be anything special. I just wanted to teach school": A case study of Black female educators in Colchester, Ontario, 1960. Southern Journal of Canadian Studies, 5(1–2), 146–159; Cooper, A. (1994). Black teachers in Canada West, In We're rooted here and they can't pull us up: Essays in African Canadian women's history (pp. 143–170). University of Toronto Press.

Isaac Rice, a White missionary with the American Missionary Association (AMA) who was appointed to Amherstburg in 1833, set up a school for freedom seekers in 1838. It was the first school in the township for Black children. The Colonial Church and School Society conducted mission schools in Amherstburg and Sandwich during the 1850s.[15] Mary Bibb opened a school in her home in Sandwich in 1850 to serve the growing Black community. When Bibb and her husband, Black abolitionist Henry Bibb, moved to Windsor in 1852, Mary opened an independent school. In 1851, Mary Ann Shadd Cary established a racially integrated school in Windsor and received partial funding from the AMA. It remained open for just over 1 year.[16] The African Methodist Episcopal Church had established five schools by 1852, which included a number in Essex County, educating more than 250 students.[17]

St. Alphonsus Roman Catholic Church's coloured mission began in 1887 out of the efforts of the Very Reverend James Theodore Wagner, Dean of Windsor, Ontario, to serve disadvantaged Black children in the town. The mission included a free day school that was taught by nuns from the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM) religious order. The school offered academic and Christian instruction as well as training in domestic work for girls and the trades for boys until 1893.[18]

Many parents challenged the fact that their taxes were collected to support public schools that their children could not attend because of their race. Some Black parents in Essex County filed lawsuits against school board officials to contest racial segregation in public education, push for desegregation, and demand equal funding. In 1859, a committee of Black residents in Windsor unsuccessfully petitioned Egerton Ryerson to intervene in the practice of racial exclusion in public schools after Clayborn Harris's request to have his son attend a nearby school was rejected by White school trustees. Twenty-four years later, in 1883, businessman James L. Dunn unsuccessfully sued the school trustees in Windsor to allow his daughter to be admitted to Central School, the new high school.[19]

[15] McLaren, K. (2004). We had no desire to be set apart. *Social History*, 37(73), 27–50.

[16] Shadd, A. (n.d.). Mary Ann Shadd Cary: History. Library and Archives Canada.

[17] Frost, K. S., & Tucker, V. S. (2016). A fluid frontier: Slavery, resistance, and the underground railroad in the Detroit river borderland. Wayne State University Press.

[18] Henry, N. (2015). Report on the St. Alphonsus Catholic Colored Mission. Ontario Heritage Trust.

[19] Winks, R. (1997). The Blacks in Canada: A history (2nd ed.). McGill-Queen's University Press; Knapp, J. (2013). "On the Importance of Education... it is as necessary as the light—it should be as common as water, and as free as air... ": Perpetuating racial discrimination through education in nineteenth century Windsor and Sandwich The Great Lakes Journal of Undergraduate History, 1(1), article 2.

Between 1850 and 1885, at least six lawsuits were launched by Black parents in the province. In all but one case, the practice of excluding Black children from public schools was upheld by the Superior Court of Canada West (Ontario). The court ruling in favour of only one Black family is demonstrative of how entrenched and acceptable racism in education was. Separate schools for Black children in Essex County continued until 1891 in Windsor, 1893 in Sandwich, 1907 in Harrow, 1917 in Amherstburg, and 1965 in North Colchester and Essex counties.[20]

The South Essex Citizenship Advancement Association, a community-based organization, was instrumental in lobbying the government to repeal the Separate Schools Clause. Leonard Braithwaite, the first elected Black Member of Provincial Parliament, raised the issue in his maiden speech, leading to the Minister of Education ordering the clause's removal and the closure of the last segregated school in Colchester in 1965.

2.2 | ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN ONTARIO'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Since its inception, the Ontario public school system has not been designed to serve all students equitably. Instead, the school system has been a tool of assimilation and continued oppression for some communities. Although explicit forms of discrimination have largely been removed from education policies, racist and colonial ideologies and behaviours continue to be issues in the education system, as they have become embedded within school policies and practices, the curriculum, teaching practices, and teacher attitudes. As Robyn Maynard writes:[21]

> For many Black students, though, schools are places where they experience degradation, harm, and psychological violence. Even as education environments continue to under-serve many communities from different backgrounds, there are unique dimensions to the experiences of Black youth, who experience schools as carceral places characterized by neglect, heightened surveillance, and arbitrary and often extreme punishment for any perceived disobedience. Because Black youth are so often not seen or treated as children, schools too often become their first encounter with the organized and systemic devaluation of Blackness present in society at large.

[20] Walker, B. (2012). The African Canadian legal odyssey: Historical Essays. University of Toronto Press.

[21] Maynard, R. (2017, November 29). Canadian education is steeped in anti-Black racism. The Walrus. https://thewalrus.ca/canadian-education-is-steeped-in-anti-black-racism/

Various studies have confirmed that Black students do not fare as well as their White peers in Ontario's public education system. The report Towards Race Equity in Education analyzed the data available from the Toronto District School Board (the only Ontario school board that collected race-based student data at the time) and supplemented the data with the perspectives and experiences of Black students, parents, and educators throughout the Greater Toronto Area to explore anti-Black racism in education and make recommendations for change.[22] The analysis of student achievement data for the 2006–2011 high school cohort showed that:

- *Black students were more likely to be in the Applied and Essentials programs of study than in the Academic program of study.* While 81% of White students were in the Academic program of study, this was true for only 53% of Black students. Conversely, Black students were over twice as likely to be enrolled in the Applied program (39% compared with 16% of White students) and three times as likely to be in the Essentials program (9% versus 3% of White students).

- *Black students were less likely to have graduated from high school.* At the end of the 5-year period, 84% of White students had graduated from high school. By contrast, only 69% of their Black peers had graduated from high school during this 5-year period.

- *Black students were more likely to have dropped out of high school.* After 5 years of high school, Black students were twice as likely to have dropped out (20%) compared with White (11%) students.

- *Black students were less likely to go on to university.* Almost half (47%) of the White students in this cohort applied to and were accepted by an Ontario university. By contrast, only a quarter of Black students (25%) had applied to and were accepted by an Ontario university.

- *Black students were more likely to be identified as having non-gifted special education needs.* A greater proportion of Black than White students were identified as having non-gifted exceptionalities (14% versus 10%, respectively) and non-identified special needs and/or an Individual Education Plan (12% versus 5%, respectively).

- *Black students were less likely to be identified as gifted.* Of the White students in this cohort, 4% were identified as gifted compared with only 0.4% of Black students. This means that of the 5,679 TDSB Black high school students in the 2006–2011 cohort, only 23 had been identified as gifted. If Black high school students were identified as gifted at the same rate, there would be 227 gifted Black students.

[22]James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area. York University. https://edu.yorku.ca/files/2017/04/Towards-Race-Equity-in-Education-April-2017.pdf

- *Black students twice as likely as their White peers to have been suspended at least once during high school.* In fact, by the time they finished high school, 42% of all Black students had been suspended at least once compared with only 18% of White students.

- *Black students comprised almost half of all students expelled during this time.* Of the 213 students who were expelled over the 5-year period (2011–2012 to 2015–2016), 48% were Black, yet Black students comprised only 12% of all high school students.

The data shows large gaps in the academic outcomes for Black students. The consultations in the Greater Toronto Area with Black students, parents, and educators highlighted that these gaps do not represent a gap in ability or ambition, but are instead gaps created in large part by the stereotypes held by teachers about the abilities of Black children. The report notes that stereotypes about the abilities of Black children and the racism of low expectations begin in kindergarten and continue into high school, with Black students being streamed into Applied programs of study, special education classes, and even English as a Second Language classes without appropriate testing to confirm their need for those classes or programs.

The response to the report highlighted that the experiences documented in Towards Race Equity in Education reflect the experience of many past and current students throughout Ontario and the systemic issues in the education system. In particular, the racism of low expectations, which fuels the streaming of Black students into programs of study below their abilities, struck a chord with many who started a conversation on Twitter (#streamedtofail).

Marlene Hyacinth Gaynair, who is currently a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard, attended TDSB schools from kindergarten to graduation and recognized her own experience in the Twitter conversation. She recounted her experience with a guidance counsellor who encouraged her to attend trade school despite Marlene's having the desire and the grades to attend university, writing that:[23]

> As I sat down with my guidance counsellor, he told me that trade school would be suitable for my perceived skills. He did not even look at my transcript. I asked him which trade, since I did not take any technology courses. He then looked at my file and proceeded to stumble over his words to find something to say. I asked him about the possibility of taking the SATs, and he laughed as though I had just told a joke. I left his office without gaining anything helpful or encouraging about my future. I commiserated with other students who were treated the same; their futures easily dismissed and disrespected. Apparently, most of the students pushed away from university by these counsellors were people of colour.

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[23] Gaynair, M. H. (2017, May 23). Learning while Black: I was streamed to fail. Huffpost.com. https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/m-hyacinth-gaynair/learning-while-black_b_16706474.html

As documented in the previous section, the issues of anti-Black racism in education are not new. The Black community has long been speaking out about the issues and advocating for equitable access to and outcomes from the public school system. These issues were also documented in the 1992 Stephen Lewis report on race relations in the province following the "Yonge Street Riot" in Toronto. He held consultations across the province, including Windsor, to identify issues facing Black youth and to make provide-wide recommendations. Many of issues discussed in that report regarding education echo what was heard throughout these consultations and documented in this report:[24]

> Everywhere, the refrain of the Toronto students... was essentially the refrain of all students. Where are the courses in Black history? Where are the visible minority teachers? Why are there so few role models? Why do our white guidance counsellors know so little of different cultural backgrounds? Why are racist incidents and epithets tolerated? Why are there double standards of discipline? Why are minority students streamed? Why do they discourage us from University? Where are we going to find jobs? What's the use of having an education if there's no employment? How long does it take to change the curriculum so that we're part of it?

At that time, he commented on the lack of progress made by school boards to reflect their racially diverse student population:

> Undoubtedly, some progress has been made. But often, as I listen to students of all ages and all backgrounds speak out at the many gatherings we had, it was through we were back to square one. The lack of real progress is shocking. And I believe it signals the most intractable dilemma, around race relations, in contemporary education: How do you get the best policies and programs into the individual classrooms? It raises searching questions of communications and accountability.

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[24] Lewis, S. (1992, June 9). The Report of the Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario Bob Rae.
https://www.siu.on.ca/pdfs/report_of_the_advisor_on_race_relations_to_the_premier_of_ontario_bob_rae.pdf

2.3 | DEFINING ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Anti-Black racism is defined by the Black Legal Action Centre as prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, and discrimination directed at people of African descent.[25] While all racialized people experience racism, anti-Black racism is different from the racism experienced by other racialized groups because it has roots in the unique history and experience of enslavement and colonialism.

The term anti-Black racism was coined in the 1990s by the Black community and expressed through Dr. Akua Benjamin's work. It was then used in a government report for the first time in 1992 by Stephen Lewis in his report:[26]

> First, what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-Black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping-out, it is housing communities with large concentrations of Black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is Black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of 'multiculturalism' cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target.

While the Black Canadian population consists of a diverse mix of cultures, religions, backgrounds, and identities, they have in common the experience of anti-Black racism directed at people of African descent. As such, while people of African descent may be impacted by interpersonal and systemic anti-Black racism, each person differs in the way they experience and navigate it. Strong racial and cultural identities are protective factors and allow some people to better resist the impact of anti-Black racism. Some may recognize anti-Black racism when it is overt, but not when it is embedded within organizational policies and practices.

In the education system, some Black students and staff may be high achievers and may experience anti-Black racism to differing degrees and in different ways. In fact, the trauma of racism may go unrecognized because Black students' achievements are sometimes mistaken for

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[25] Black Legal Action Centre. (2015). About BLAC. https://www.blacklegalactioncentre.ca/about/about-blac/
[26] Lewis, S. (1992, June 9). The Report of the Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario Bob Rae.

resilience.[27] Regardless of their own personal experience, these high-achieving individuals are also susceptible to vicarious trauma and thus may be impacted by the emotional residue of the trauma experienced by their Black peers.

While anti-Black racism is evident at both the micro (individual) and the macro (system) levels, micro-level racism—consisting of interpersonal behaviours that occur at a specific moment in time—is often thought to be temporary and insignificant. Once the interaction is over, many think that the impact of racism has passed. However, anti-Black racism is more than an act; it is a structure. It is "a network of social relations at social, political, economic, and ideological levels that shapes the life chances of [people of African descent]."[28]

> " **Racism is a structure, not an event.** "
>
> **~ J. Kehaulani Kauanui**

In addition, anti-Black racism operates independently from the intentions of individuals within organizations or within society, which creates forces and barriers "that are not accidental, occasional, or avoidable. These forces are systematically related to each other in ways that restrict [Black Canadians'] movement."[29] Consequently, to properly understand the issues and challenges facing Black youth in Canada, these issues and challenges need to be understood within the context of the four dimensions of anti-Black racism at the macro, or system, level: ideological, cultural, structural, and systemic oppression.

An ideology is a collection of ideas that affects how we see and understand the world around us. Any oppressive system has at its core the ideology that one group is better than another and has the right to control others. Such an ideology describes the dominant group as more intelligent, harder working, more capable, more deserving, superior, and so on, with the opposite qualities attributed to marginalized

Ideological Oppression

Any oppressive system has at its core the ideology that one group is better than another and has the right to control others.

Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training

[27] Simmons, D. (2020). Confronting inequity / The trauma we don't see. Learning and the Brain, 77(8), 88–89.

[28] Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America (p. 18). Rowman & Littlefield.

[29] DiAngelo, R. (2018). White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism (p. 24). Beacon Press.

groups.[30] The dominant group holds this idea about itself and communicates this ideology through the dominant culture, including news and entertainment media, books, religion, as well as the education, criminal justice, and health care systems. This ideology informs laws, government policy, government funding decisions, as well as organizational policies, practices, and procedures. Ideology is used to justify the creation and maintenance of oppressive systems that not only discriminate against people, but also subject them to physical and psychological violence.

White supremacy is the ideology that supports anti-Black racism. It was born out of the transatlantic slave trade to make Europe's efforts to colonize and conquer the world seem like a "natural" process, wherein "superior" White races would dominate "inferior" African people.[31] The dehumanization of African people was essential to maintaining the institution of slavery, and so a separate and inferior "Black race" was created while simultaneously creating a superior "White race," and along with it, the ideology of white supremacy.[32] As such, racial classifications and the idea of racial inferiority were created to justify the enslavement of African people. As author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates has stated, "Race is the child of racism, not the father." By that he means that, first, Europeans exploited African people for their resources and labour, not based on how they looked. Then, Europeans created the ideology of inferior races to justify this exploitation.[33]

Similarly, historian Ibram X. Kendi explains that "The beneficiaries of slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration have produced racist ideas of Black people being best suited for or deserving of slavery, segregation, or the jail cell. Consumers of these racist ideas have been led to believe there is something wrong with Black people, and not the policies that have enslaved, oppressed, and confined so many Black people."[34] Kendi goes on to argue that if we believed that all humans were equal, then we would look to anti-Black racism as the cause of the racial disparities we see in society, rather than the idea that anything is inherently wrong with Black people or Black communities. The ideology of white supremacy rationalizes racial inequality as the outcome of a natural order resulting from either genetics or individual effort or talent. It says that those who do not succeed are not as naturally capable, deserving, or hardworking as those who do succeed.

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[30] Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training. (n.d.). Four I's of oppression.
https://www.grcc.edu/sites/default/files/docs/diversity/the_four_is_of_oppression.pdf

[31] DeVega, C. (2014, April 23). 10 things everyone should know about white supremacy. Alternet.
https://www.alternet.org/2014/04/10-things-everyone-should-know-about-white-supremacy/

[32] DiAngelo, R. (2018). White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism (p. 91). Beacon Press.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Kendi, I. X. (2016). Stamped from the beginning. Nation Books.

White supremacy is the ideology that White people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of White people are superior to racialized people and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions.[35] In this context, White supremacy does not refer to individual White people and their individual beliefs or actions. Instead, it refers to an overarching political, economic, and social system of domination.[36] White supremacy communicates that White people, White culture, and everything associated with whiteness is superior to the people, culture, and everything associated with racialized people. This ideology has been infused within Canada's education, economic, child welfare, health care, criminal justice, and political systems and works to maintain the dominant and relative superior position of White people and the marginalization of Black people.

Cultural oppression comes about when the experiences of the dominant group are taken to be universal and a baseline against which others are evaluated.[37] The dominant culture normalizes and communicates this ideology of the superiority of White people through language, news and entertainment media, books, toys, and religion. It is also communicated through the education, health care, child welfare, and criminal justice systems.

> **Cultural Oppression**
>
> Cultural oppression comes about when the experiences of the dominant group are taken to be universal and a baseline against which others are evaluated.
>
> *Mullaly & West, 2018*

Culture sends strong messages about who belongs, who is important, and who is not. Canadians are born and socialized into a culture that conditions us into accepting this ideology because it is reinforced across society in schools and textbooks, movies, advertising, and everyday words and expressions. Because these ideas are constantly reinforced, they are easily believed and internalized by their targets.[38]

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[35] Showing Up for Racial Justice. (n.d.). White supremacy culture.
https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/uploads/4/3/5/7/43579015/okun_-_white_sup_culture_2020.pdf

[36] DiAngelo, R. (2018). White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism (p. 28). Beacon Press.

[37] Mullaly, B., & West, J. (2018). Challenging oppression and confronting privilege (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

[38] Ibid, 21.

Systemic oppression occurs when a dominant ideology gets embedded within the systems and structures of organizations—including educational institutions, the criminal justice system, and the child welfare system—to produce discriminatory treatment, unfair policies, and inequitable opportunities and outcomes. Systemic (or institutional) oppression occurs when systems, policies, practices, or procedures within organizations result in unequal access or outcomes for some groups.[39]

> ### 📖 Systemic Oppression
>
> Systemic (or institutional) oppression occurs when systems, policies, practices, or procedures within organizations result in unequal access or outcomes for some groups.
>
> *Government of Canada*

Various academics refer to systemic racism as the "new racism," a contemporary racial inequality produced through institutional policies and practices that are subtle, systemic, and apparently race-neutral. In addition, racial inequality is maintained and reproduced even as Canadian society is becoming increasingly diverse as well as more welcoming and inclusive. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva refers to this phenomenon as "racism without racists," which "aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards."[40]

Structural oppression refers to the ways in which institutions interact and work across society to produce and maintain inequality, even in the absence of oppressive intent by individuals who work in these systems. Structural oppression occurs and is reinforced across multiple institutions and systems, systematically creating advantage for the dominant group and disadvantage for oppressed groups. Structural oppression lies underneath, all around, and throughout society. It includes the history of inequality that provides the foundation for present-day inequality. It also includes the interconnected institutions and policies, key relationships, and rules across society that legitimize, reinforce, and perpetuate oppression.

> ### 📖 Structural Oppression
>
> Structural oppression refers to the ways in which institutions interact and work across society to produce and maintain social inequality, even in the absence of oppressive intent.

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[39] Canada Research Chairs. (2019). Institutional equity, diversity and inclusion action plans: A best practices guide. Government of Canada. https://www.chairs-chaires.gc.ca/program-programme/equity-equite/index-eng.aspx

[40] Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America. Rowman & Littlefield.

SECTION 3:

Findings from the Consultations

Close to 700 people participated in the consultations: 603 individuals completed the online survey, including 98 who identified as a Black student, parent, staff, or community member; 445 students, parents, and community members who identified as non-Black; and 60 who chose not to specify. This section graphs the survey responses to scaled questions which asked employees to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with various statements. Responses to the open-ended questions are included in the analysis of the findings from the focus groups in the sections that follow.

This section summarizes a great deal of the feedback that was shared through the online survey and focus groups. In this section, the consultants have chosen to include many quotes from consultation participants. We do this for a number of reasons. First, we do this to amplify the voices of these individuals, many of whom were afraid to share their experiences or who have previously spoken up about their experiences of harassment and discrimination, only to be ignored. Second, we do this so that GECDSB can hear directly from Black members of their school community. Consultation participants shared their pain and experiences in such powerful and clear ways that we felt it was essential for GECDSB to hear from them directly, in their own words.

We also want to honour the voices of the individuals who courageously chose to participate in the focus groups and online survey. By sharing the many comments from these individuals, we want GECDSB to understand that these issues were not raised by a few people, but rather reflect experiences of Black students, parents/caregivers, and employees in many schools—experiences that have undermined student learning and employee work experiences and effectiveness.
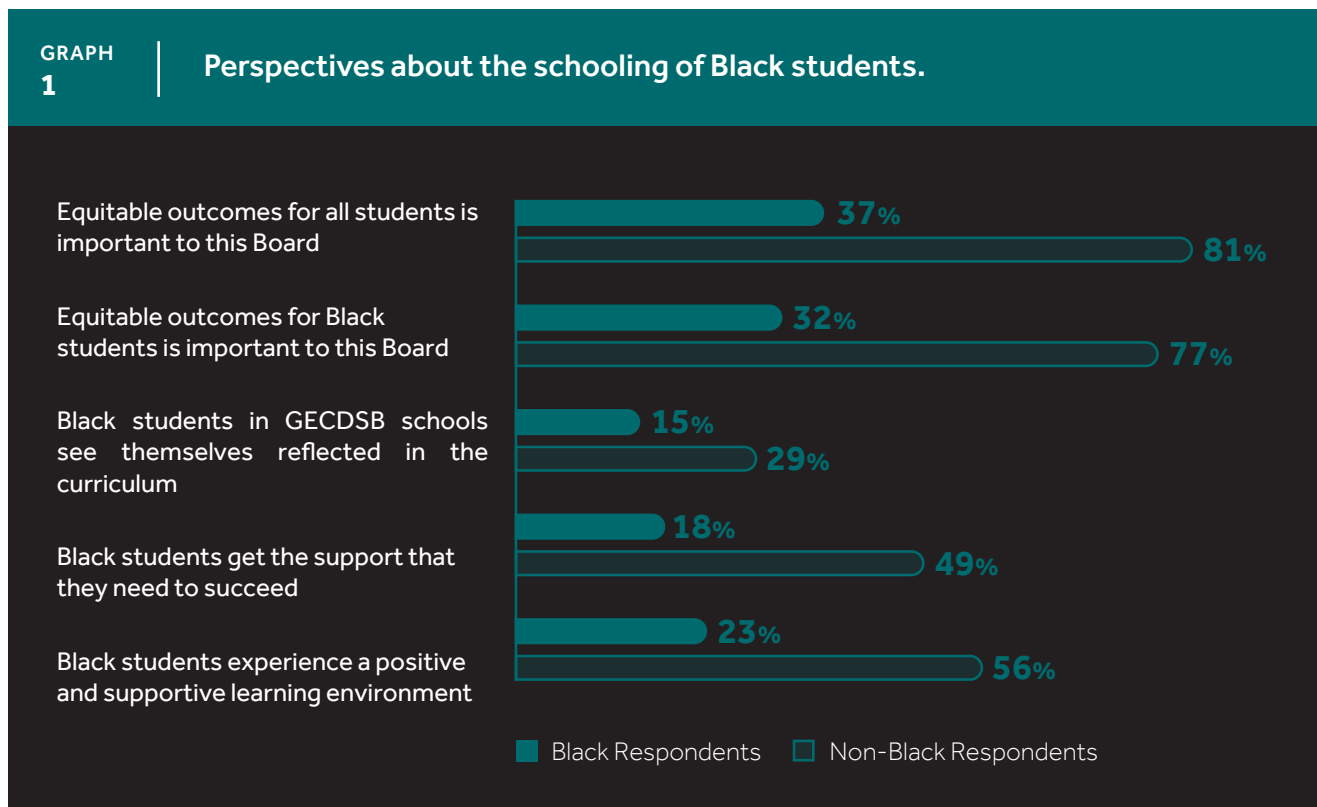
We also hope that by hearing directly from members of the GECDSB school community, senior leaders will understand the need for bold and urgent change to create inclusive learning and

working environments and produce better outcomes for both students and staff.

While we share many quotes directly from consultation participants, we have also edited many of them to remove any identifying information. In addition, there are many quotes and examples that we have chosen not to use to preserve the anonymity of these participants. In fact, many focus group participants cautioned the facilitator on what information they could use and the extent to which their comments could be quoted. Many spoke about their fears of job loss and the possibility of reprisal from teachers, school administrators, and co-workers for honestly sharing their perceptions and personal experiences at GECDSB.

3.1 | PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE SCHOOLING OF BLACK STUDENTS

The online survey asked all respondents about their perceptions of the experiences of Black students.

GRAPH 1

Perspectives about the schooling of Black students.

Equitable outcomes for all students is important to this Board
- 37%
- 81%

Equitable outcomes for Black students is important to this Board
- 32%
- 77%

Black students in GECDSB schools see themselves reflected in the curriculum
- 15%
- 29%

Black students get the support that they need to succeed
- 18%
- 49%

Black students experience a positive and supportive learning environment
- 23%
- 56%

■ Black Respondents   □ Non-Black Respondents

As Graph 1 shows, Black survey respondents were far less positive about the schooling of Black students than were non-Black survey respondents.

While 81% of non-Black survey respondents felt that equitable outcomes for all students is important to the Board and 77% agreed that equitable outcomes for Black students is important to the Board, only 37% and 32%, respectively, of Black respondents agreed with these statements.

In addition, while only 29% of non-Black respondents feel that Black students in GECDSB schools see themselves reflected in the curriculum, a much smaller proportion of Black respondents (15%) feel that way.

Similarly, while only about half of non-Black survey respondents agreed that Black students get the supports they need to succeed (49%) and experience a positive and supportive learning environment (56%), only 18% and 23%, respectively, of Black respondents felt the same.

A number of themes emerged through the open-ended survey questions and discussions in the focus groups about the school experiences of Black students. These themes are discussed below.

Lack of caring adults in the school

In the comments to the online survey and throughout the focus groups, participants shared their perceptions and experiences that Black students often do not have a caring adult in their school. They felt that GECDSB educators are predominantly White and do not have the knowledge, and in some cases lack the desire, to adequately support the learning and well-being of Black students.

Those teachers that are making an effort to connect with and engage Black students have found that Black students were reaching out and seeking their help and support. They found that Black students are not only seeking help with their school work, but were also seeking a safe space within their school where they could be themselves and connect with a caring adult.

> *I would hold these meetings after school or these tutoring sessions. And overwhelmingly majority of the students that showed up, which was completely voluntary, were Black students. And it spoke volumes to me... And sometimes it was doing school work, sometimes it wasn't. It was just giving them a space to be who they need to be, to relax, talk and feel like this is a place for them. This is a place where they don't need to be masked, they don't need to hide. They are looking for this connection with their teachers, and it doesn't need to be a Black person because again, I'm not Black. And that goes to tell you, you don't need to be Black specifically to connect with these students.*

He's created a very safe space in his classroom for students to go into whether there's an issue or even just to go in there for lunch. Some of us will eat our lunches in there and he's a teacher that I feel confident, and I feel I can really trust because he's someone that has taken that extra step to create a relationship with each individual student. A lot of teachers don't necessarily do that. I think a lot of teachers are so stuck with just teaching by the books, just teaching right out of the curriculum. It's not so much that they don't create a safe space for students to learn.

Black educators also shared how Black students and parents/caregivers seek them out for information and support, which they don't feel these students are getting from their classroom teachers.

The Black students, and even the kids that are not Black in the school, all know who I am. It doesn't even matter if they've never had me. They know who I am… And I find that parents will come on parent teacher nights and they will come to me. They'll seek me out and they'll ask me for advice for their Black kids… They should have more people that they could talk to that looked like them, that they could feel more comfortable with. This is such a glaring issue in a school where there is no representation at all.

While many Black educators shared their willingness to do this important work, they felt that it puts their job and relationship with the school administrators at risk. They shared that while they are contributing this extra labour to GECDSB, it often goes unrecognized, and some of them are penalized because they become the go-to person for Black families, which not all school administrators value. They also shared that it is additional work created because White colleagues fail to make important connections with Black students and their families.

Throughout the consultations, staff shared that there are significant differences between teachers and Black students, including differences in culture and lived experience—gaps that haven't been bridged by sufficient professional learning. They also shared that these educators also demonstrate a lack of willingness to build relationships with or even to teach Black students. Some shared that they feel that these educators don't feel that Black students are worthy of their time. They shared numerous examples of how this shows up in classrooms and the harm it does to the academic achievement and well-being of Black students. One teacher shared having an experience with a fellow teacher who refused to learn the name of a Black student:

[As an occasional teacher] I went into a classroom with a little boy, grade one or two, very new to Canada and went through the attendance. And when I said his name, he didn't respond at

all. Other students said, "oh, yeah, that's him". He's there, kind of sad, so I spent some time talking to him and found out he did have quite a good grasp of the language and that the name listed in the attendance was not his name. It was not his name at all. It was not a name that had been given by the parents to use for his name. It was a name that his teacher had chosen because she was not able to pronounce his name... The teacher was actually present in the school for training. And I approached her about it. And in that conversation, she expressed an adamant refusal to use his name.

Educators and parents shared their perceptions that those in schools or classrooms with few Black students are particularly unsafe. They also shared that little attention is given to the harm that the education system has done and is instead given to penalizing Black students when this harm is reflected in their behaviours:

One kid who's been here for a long time since maybe kindergarten, he's in grade [x] now, but been here since kindergarten and the kid doesn't know how to read or write. Teachers are complaining that he's obnoxious, he doesn't listen, he's making kids laugh and he speaks English very well. So I said to the teacher, "No wonder he is bothering everybody. He doesn't know how to read or write and he's in grade [x]. What do you expect him to do?" She said, "We have to tell his mom that he is going to be suspended if he doesn't listen."

A number of the Black students who participated in the consultations shared their experiences of not having a caring adult in their schools and the impact this has on them. They shared that they are often viewed through a racist lens and are treated much more harshly than their White peers:

They don't care about Black students. I should be able to go to any teacher and find comfort in talking to someone who's supposed to be like a mentor, who's supposed to be teaching me how to continue in life, not just go to class, learn and walk out.

Teachers, VPs and principals do not care about Black students. They see us as bad kids and are ready to give us harsh punishment for the same things White students are not punished for. We are not valued and we are dismissed when we report things.

Why try, when the teachers don't care about us?

Teacher perceptions of Black students

Throughout the consultations, participants shared that educators expressed and acted on very negative perceptions of Black students, including their perception that Black students are athletically but not academic gifted, and pathologized their behaviours.

Many Black educators and parents shared their perceptions and experiences of their school's interest in capitalizing on the athletic abilities of Black youth while compromising the youth's education. Some educators shared seeing Black students encouraged to participate in athletics and supported to reach their potential, yet not given the same support to achieve academically. In fact, they feel that simply due to the physical stature of Black males, they are seen as not capable of high academic achievement and are instead encouraged to go into a trade.

> A lot of our Black boys, especially if you're big, strong, tall and you play sports, are told that they can't go to university. Sometimes they'll be told "You can't do college, just go into a trade." They will stream Black youth at grade 9 into trades versus academic.

Many also shared their perspective that Black students are overrepresented among students identified as having behavioural issues and special education needs. They shared that Black students are often simply being children, yet are described by educators or professional staff such as social workers and psychologists as "feral" or "wild." They felt that Black students who are English language learners (ELL) are put into classes for students with special needs and that Black students are over-identified as having intellectual disabilities. We also heard that many Black children are streamed into ELL programs even if they are English speaking and Canadian-born.

Consultation participants also shared that Black students are often not seen as capable of learning and are therefore ignored in the classroom by the teachers. If they do act out in response, they are seen as having a behavioural problem or special education needs and moved into these classrooms.

> We put Black children in the worst classrooms and set them up for failure. Their issues are often because of their school environment and how they are treated. If they didn't have a special education need before they came to us, they do now.

> We hear codified language being used to describe Black students who are struggling with meeting expectations of behaviour in the classroom or any students of colour in the

classroom. It's very different than the language I hear from administrators or staff about their White counterparts. This has been something pervasive for me since early in my career.

The school environment is adverse for Black students. Black students can not assume any of the necessary safety, inclusion, positive interaction, recognition for talent and abilities or guidance toward desired learning that makes education effective and minimizes harm. This is the daily environment they enter into and that they spend enormous energy learning to cope with.

In my experiences the language and descriptions used for students who are Black, a lot of language is making statements like "they are wild". I have heard of one student being referred to as "feral" when [that student] was just struggling to meet the expectations of the environment. Rather than identifying that a student struggling with transition from preferred items to non-preferred, there's a quality we see. I have had conversations with [administrators] who are also evaluating the home life as a factor that contributes to their problem behaviour rather than looking at what is happening within the context of the school environment. They look outside and they want to place the blame somewhere else. It is really heavy work to support these staff and students when people are placing this blame on external factors that come from a very biased place.

Some teachers shared that they are often the difference between Black students remaining in mainstream learning environments and being streamed into special education programs. One French teacher shared how they had six Black boys in their class, all of whom were doing well. After she came back from a leave of absence, she learned that they were all moved into special education classes, however, based on her experience with these students, they had no special education needs:

When I was a French teacher I had 6 Black boys in my class who were doing well. I went on leave and when I returned, they were all gone. None of them were in my French classes. I said, "Where'd they all go? Did they all move?" The response was, "Oh, no, they're in Spec Ed so they're exempt from French now."

In addition, once these labels have been placed on a Black child and recorded in their school records, this information informs how they are seen and treated by subsequent teachers and professionals. As a result, being seen through a biased lens by one teacher can change the trajectory of their education and their life.

Some educators also identified that Black students are exposed to microaggressions from their teachers and in their learning environment on a daily basis, which can have a significant impact on students:

> *I was mortified to walk down the main hallway of [this school] and still see those huge portraits of all White men in a school that is much more diverse. As a woman, it hit me, and with an awareness of cultural diversity, I find this tradition quite outdated. It exists in other schools but this one really hit me in a school where there are Arabic signs posted for students.*

> *A teacher commented on a student's hair and asked to touch her hair extensions and the student just smiled and said ok. How do you tell a colleague that it is not ok to touch the kids' hair? The hair touching is a novel experience at someone else's expense.*

Low expectations / streaming

Throughout the consultations, we heard repeatedly that teachers simply do not believe that Black students are capable of academic excellence and going on to university. As a result, teachers lower their expectations of these students or simply ignore them in class.

> *According to the IEP this student was working on grade five level goals in grade eight. But he was capable of more. I knew he was capable of more. He knew he was capable of more. But it took a lot of advocacy to move his goals from a modified grade level to a modified number of curriculum expectations. We did get him to working at grade eight level goals, which both his mom and I were very happy about. And he did well. He was able to be successful at that level, but it shouldn't take that much work to get a student who's capable to be recognized as being capable.*

> *I also quite frequently see a lowering of expectations from educators with Black and Brown students. A lot of the Black and Brown students that I worked with were also new to Canada, and part of my job was helping teachers modify the curriculum to meet the students' needs. A lot of times, I felt like educators decided that's too much work for them to figure out, so decide "I'm just gonna put them at a grade one level" when they should be in grade six class— just because that would be easier.*

They shared that many teachers don't care about and therefore do not support the learning of Black students, resulting in some Black students graduating from GECDSB and being unable to

read or write. They shared how this limits their options as adults, with some learning to read and write once they have graduated from high school.

> *There are a few students who, once they graduated, I had to help them learn to read and write because they went through the whole school system functionally illiterate and graduated.*

Also related to low expectations is how Black students are frequently removed from the learning environment by being asked to run errands or through suspensions, then not given the supports to catch up with their school work:

> *Black students seem to be frequently removed from the learning environment, causing gaps in learning, and then expected to "catch up" on their own. They seem to be further pushed out of schools because they fall behind because of adult decisions.*

Low expectations lead teachers to actively stream Black students into programs of study below their level of ability. In addition, school board staff raised concerns that despite an assessment process for students to be placed in special education classes or into programs for English Language Learners, Black students were also being streamed into these programs, when they don't have an identified need.

> *Applied stream classes are predominantly kids of colour, Black or Indigenous kids. Their Grade 8 teachers recommend that they are in applied. But the applied teachers are asking, "Why isn't this kid in academic?" If we can, we move them, but it's hard to move from applied to academic. The Grade 8 teacher has a lot of weight on the decision of where the student is placed.*

> *Bias from teachers when helping students choose appropriate pathways is an issue. For example, grade 7 and 8 teachers direct Black students to the applied stream because they don't have high expectations for Black students or don't provide the appropriate supports to help with their learning.*

> *Teachers shared that once students are in these programs, it is extremely difficult to move into the academic stream. Teachers shared that from what they've observed, Black students make up a large proportion of students in applied or locally developed programs of study, including programs for students with intellectual disabilities. Many school board staff shared that streaming is deliberate and systemic and impacts a great deal of Black students. They shared that it is often the advocacy of a teacher who is an ally or a Black teacher that is required if students want to move into the academic stream. He was a young Black kid and*

he was bored in his classes. And I was explaining that we are keeping the bar low for him. If my student is asking for this and I am seeing this in him and so many others, then why are we keeping him in applied? ... We fought for two years. He only was able to move when we got a new principal. Once the new principal came, that was it. He helped me help the student get to another school in order to be in a different pathway. And he became an honor roll student at that school. So I think we're setting our bar low very much for our Black students, especially our Black male students.

I do think that Black students are really just being funneled into [our programs for students with intellectual disabilities], especially for students who are English Language Learners. When we have Black immigrant students coming in and they are struggling, I've seen a few instances of these students being put into [these programs]. And when students graduate from these programs, they actually don't get a diploma, they get a certificate. So this is a major life decision that we've made for them... [These programs] are good and very necessary. We have so many successes in that program because there are students who need that pace of learning, and it works really well for them. But streaming Black kids into these programs has become a way to deal with not meeting their needs. Yes, their needs are layered and complicated. I think that the intersection of being Black and being an immigrant and being a language learner is a place where we're underserving our kids.

A few expressed concern about how the de-streaming changes announced by the Ministry of Education will be implemented because they've heard from White colleagues that they don't believe in de-streaming and don't understand the need for it. They also shared that while the de-streaming efforts technically begin in high school, the de-streaming changes will not address how the racism of low expectations, which begins in elementary school, and oftentimes leave Black students unprepared for the academic program of study in high school. Some consultation participants also shared how the low expectations and treatment by teachers can be internalized by Black children, resulting in internalized anti-Black racism and lack of confidence in their abilities.

Elementary school has kind of instilled a bunch of thoughts in us. We learn anti-Black tendencies, really oppressive tendencies, too. Especially students normalizing stereotypes. A lot of students bring those things with them.

Focus group participants shared that streaming means that Black students are unsupported to go on to university and even given incorrect information about the prerequisites they need to get into their desired university program.

Once they get into grade 12, that's when they realize they haven't been taking the right courses all along. They've been taking all of those courses that were advised to them by their teachers and guidance counselors knowing they have the skills and ability and the mindset to be able to go into their desired university program. You can see right there that they were being streamed below their skills and abilities when they have the self efficacy, everything to go to university. Even when I had the opportunity to see their transcripts, even those who were in a position to take those courses that would get them into university, I would tell them, "You have the courses and the marks to attend university". They would say to me "No, ma'am, I will go this route instead because that's what my teachers have been telling me"... their options have been limited by what information the teachers and the guidance counselors have given them.

Students I have encountered who have expressed that they were heading in one direction and then were told, "No, don't do that. It's going to be too hard. Do this instead." For example, they want to be a teacher, they're told to do ECE. They wanted to be a dentist, they're told to do dental assisting, and things of that nature. I hear those stories every year and it has become something that's really quite distressing because over the years I have not seen much improvement in that respect at all despite many suggestions to the board that they should do better.

We also heard of some Black students being actively discouraged from pursuing a university education. Some shared that teachers have even stopped Black students from taking part in presentations about attending university that are happening in the school. Some staff also shared that even when they know that Black students are doing really well in applied courses and should be in the academic stream, they are prevented from speaking to students and their parents.

This results in costly detours for many Black students, who now must incur the cost of finding their way to university through college, rather than directly from high school.

I regularly encounter students who have found their way to college who have been very much misdirected, provided with frankly misleading information. There are students who are taking on an additional year of post secondary studies, an additional year of student debt, trying to make up the prerequisite that they should have had at the high school level. To jump into the college system and try to suddenly upskill your math or your sciences when you should have had four years of high school to gradually acquire that level of knowledge is really unjust, inequitable very unfortunate and often debilitating and really alters the trajectory of people's lives. I'm not saying that it can't be done, but it's an extra burden that shouldn't have to be.

Policing of Black student behaviours and over-disciplining of Black students

While no data currently exists that explores discipline or the impact of police in schools within GECDSB schools, there is a great deal of research in both the United States and Canada that explores the over-disciplining of Black students, the presence of police in schools, and how both impact outcomes for Black students.

One study by Yale University researchers found that deeply engrained biases caused kindergarten teachers to focus their attention on Black students, which helps explain why Black students tend to be suspended at higher rates than their White counterparts.[41] In both Canada and the United States, data shows that Black students are more likely to be suspended than their White peers, with Black students often being suspended for discretionary reasons such as refusing to remove a hat, wearing hoodies, and wearing hoop earrings.[42]

Studies also found that suspensions do little to change behaviour and instead increase the disengagement from school and the likelihood that the student will not complete high school. Various studies have found that being suspended just one time increases the risk of dropping out of high school.[43] Another study found that each additional suspension increases the risk of dropping out by 10%.[44]

In addition, many research studies have assessed the presence of police in schools. These studies have found that School Resource Officers (SROs) have no positive impact on students' safety and in fact may decrease the safety of Black students and decrease their sense of safety.[45]

[41] Reyes, C. (2016, November 7). Implicit bias in early education: Is it as black and white? http://bold.expert/implicit-bias-in-early-education-is-it-as-black-and-white/

[42] Rumbolt, R. (2022, January 4). Black students at Mississauga and Brampton schools suspended at a much higher rate than their peers: Report. https://www.insauga.com/black-students-at-mississauga-and-brampton-schools-suspended-at-a-much-higher-rate-than-their-peers-report/; Pufall Jones, E. (2018, September 5). The link between suspensions, expulsions, and dropout rates. https://www.americaspromise.org/opinion/link-between-suspensions-expulsions-and-dropout-rates

[43] Balfanz, R., Byrnes, V., & Fox, J. Sent home and put off-track: The antecedents, disproportionalities, and consequences of being suspended in the ninth grade. Center for Civil Rights Remedies and the Research-to-Practice Collaborative, National Conference on Race and Gender Disparities in Discipline. https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/state-reports/sent-home-and-put-off-track-the-antecedents-disproportionalities-and-consequences-of-being-suspended-in-the-ninth-grade/balfanz-sent-home-ccrr-conf-2013.pdf

[44] Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2014). More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. Equity & Excellence in Education, 47(4), 546–564.

[45] Connery, C. (2020, October 27). The prevalence and the price of police in schools. University of Connecticut. https://education.uconn.edu/2020/10/27/the-prevalence-and-the-price-of-police-in-schools/

Police in schools leave Black students feeling surveilled, racially profiled, intimidated, and harassed by the SROs. Dr. Natasha Browne, a Toronto-based psychologist, explains why this can have a profoundly negative effect on some students:[46]

> When you have an authority figure in a learning environment, who, for our youth, has been a symbol of trauma, abuse of power and fear, it can evoke symptoms within the youth that may hinder their ability to succeed.

This can result in increased anger, anxiety, social withdrawal, or a reduction in self-esteem and self-worth. So, the presence of SROs could undermine students' feelings of safety as well as their ability to learn, which may lead students to turn to coping strategies such as skipping school, becoming disengaged, or numbing the fear and bad feelings with drugs and alcohol. These studies, coupled with the findings from local consultations with the school communities, have resulted in school boards across the country discontinuing their SRO programs.

These programs often operate with no oversight by the school system, no public reporting of SRO interactions with students, no input from students about their impact, and no evaluation of their impact on students, particular Black students. One recent analysis of the SRO data in Edmonton public schools, obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request, shows that SROs have been a significant contributor to the suspensions, expulsions, and criminalization of Edmonton youth.[47] Over a 10-year period, SROs made more than 2,000 arrests and were involved in more than 5,000 suspensions and nearly 700 expulsions. Over this time almost 21,000 students were designated as offenders.

Those with whom we consulted shared observations that are consistent with this research. They shared that there is a hypervigilance among some teachers and school administrators, who are constantly watching Black students' behaviours and looking for reasons to discipline them. They shared their experiences of seeing Black students being harshly punished for even minor age-appropriate behaviours—when they saw similar behaviours exhibited by their White peers, they were dealt with differently. In some cases, there are educators actively policing the hallways, singling out Black youth and accusing them of wrongdoing and sometimes wrongly identifying the Black students as being at fault.

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[46] Boampong, J. (2018, January 24). Pencils down, hands up. Shameless. https://shamelessmag.com/blog/entry/pencils-down-hands-up

[47] The Edmonton SRO Research Project. https://www.sroresearchproject.ca/

They also highlighted the ways in which police are used in high schools to surveil Black students and criminalize their behaviours, and providing incorrect information to racialized students. One staff member reported witnessing a presentation by VIP officers in which they told students that they are not permitted to use their cell phones to film police. Other staff shared incidents where the police have been called to deal with Black students over seemingly minor incidents when more serious behaviours by White students have been easily and effectively addressed by the teacher and/or school administrator. They also shared experiences of SROs arresting students, which brought fear to other students, impacting their sense of safety at school. These experiences raise questions about when, why, for whom, and how often police are called into schools to deal with student behaviours.

An experience of police being called to deal with a student who had been suspended was also shared, which ended with the student being tasered. In addition to the impact on the students involved, staff described it was also traumatic for other students and evidence of the school-to-prison pipeline:

> *The after effects of that tasering incident of a Black student resonated throughout the whole school. Staff and students were crying, trauma was present. That student was arrested and put into the system. If the community hadn't wrapped their arms around that student, they would not have gone on to post secondary school and or graduated high school. The school to prison pipeline is a real, tangible thing. Education institutions should not be a source of supporting the school to prison pipeline.*

Students and staff shared that having police in schools, regardless of their role and purpose, creates unsafe environments for Black students. Others felt that the mere presence of police, which has been an oppressive force for Black Canadians, creates a toxic environment for Black students and further undermines their ability to learn. As a few participants commented:

> *I'm positive that my Black son was identified by the police in grade six. It kind of helped along his path of being the first on many occasions to be accused of certain things. I understand that a lot of teachers think the VIP Program is great for community building. But it's terrifying for students that are new to Canada that have come from war torn countries where the police have killed their family members. Some teachers think that they'll get to see how good our police are here. But that's not the case.*

> *There's been conversation about the VIP program. Police officers come in and speak. It's a big part of grade 6 curriculum. My understanding is it is a scary and depressing experience for Black students. An action step would be to take it out of the schools.*

Consultation participants also shared their experiences of Black students be disproportionately disciplined compared to their non-Black counterparts:

> *From my perspective it seems there is a larger percentage of Black students who are receiving disciplinary action and suspension than non-Black students.*

> *I think they face extreme sorts of expulsions and suspensions and instead of trying to figure out and intervene in a way that might be keeping them within a building and having them work within our buildings so that they can catch up on their work and still be in there because that's where they belong and that's where they're needed and that's where they actually want to be. We're pushing them out.*

> *I'm thinking of one student that I had in particular. He was a gem. He was absolutely too frequently suspended, especially by his bus driver. He would be excluded from the bus. But with a single mom and limited family in the area, being excluded from the bus meant he couldn't get to school, and his younger brother wouldn't go to school if his older brother wasn't attending school.*

> *I was speaking with a student, a high school student, just before Christmas break winter break and he said the one thing that he liked about his school was that you got in trouble for what you did, not who you are.*

> *I've watched a group of girls get into a fight and the Black students were suspended and eventually moved to another school. This happened even though the situation was caused by the White girls calling them a derogatory name. I don't think the girls that made the comments were dealt with in the same way.*

Consultation participants also shared many stories of Black children being punished for defending themselves against racist slurs. While teachers and school administrators are not addressing racist bullying and racist behaviours, Black students are expected to manage these situations on their own and effectively regulate their emotions in the face of open racism, including being called the N-word and assaulted by racist remarks and name-calling where they are described as "dirty-skinned" or referred to as "jungle animals." Some Black students also shared the impact on their mental health from experiencing racism on a daily basis.

You are told to bottle up your emotions and keep it moving. Then when you bottle it up, it explodes and they treat you differently for it. Your reputation is ruined and as a young man, who acted out because he feels unseen and unheard and nobody wanted to understand. Personally, that's my story. Talking to [two teachers] has been huge for me because they can relate to a lot of things I'm going through.

When Black students defend themselves and make attempts to stop the racist bullying, they are penalized, while the White student often walks away unpunished. This approach sends the message that racist bullying is acceptable behaviour and emboldens students to continue the behaviour without fear of discipline. In some cases, we heard that the victimized Black student is required to go back into the same classroom as their aggressor, who has not been disciplined.

A number of Black parents shared that when speaking with school administrators about the discipline that their children are facing, the parents felt that decisions had already been made regarding the issues at hand or that their children would be found at fault regardless of any mitigating factors. They shared that altercations involving a Black student would result in suspension, expulsion, or arrest of that student, even when the incident was racially motivated and incited by a White student and witnessed by others. This includes when racist bullying was previously brought to the attention of teachers or school administrators and dismissed. In many cases, the White student would not receive any consequences or minimal consequences. Black parents talked about the responses from administrators sounding like "scripted responses," with no follow-up to parents' concerns and without any concern for their children's education or well-being.

Experiences of racism

Throughout the consultations, participants recounted numerous examples of racism from GECDSB directed at either Black staff or students, including the following:

- Principals, teachers, and students using the N-word or saying discriminatory things without consequence.
- A White teacher described her Black student as a "drug dealer" when the youth attended class dressed for career day.
- A White educator suggested that a Black parent did not have the financial means to send their child to a high-ranking post-secondary institution.

- A participant shared one example where her daughter, who identifies as Black, was told by a supply teacher that she's better off not telling people that because she has very fair skin. She was in Grade 2.

- Using terms such as "darky."

- Remarks made by a teacher, such as when students did PowerPoint presentations. When it came time for a Black child to do his presentation, the children reminded the teacher to turn off the light, to which she replied, "Then we won't be able to see [the Black student]."

- "Slave days" resulting from competition between two classes, with the losing class required to be the "slaves for a day."

Consultation participants also shared other experiences of racism at GECDSB, including events such as Crazy Hair Day, dress codes, and mascots. Some also noted that while many of these issues has been raised with the Board for decades, they have persisted without appropriate intervention and have continued to create a hostile learning environment for Black students:

> There are also things that sound so miniscule like Crazy Hair Day. There should never be a Crazy Hair Day. Even when I've tried to explain to people why it is discriminatory, I hear things like "You're trying to be too politically correct" and "We can't get rid of all the fun" and "Most kids like it." No! It's upsetting to some kids and needs to stop.

> Black students experience microaggressions, lack of representation at administrative levels and anti-Black racism in the curriculum, lessons, displays and special events throughout schools.

We also heard many stories of teachers and school administrators repeatedly using the N-word in the teaching of certain novels, the recounting of stories in which students used the word, and in professional development sessions about the N-word and how harmful it is.

> This instance was from only three weeks ago where a teacher thought that they can continue to use the N-word in class if they're reading from a text. I said, "No, you absolutely cannot." And they had this puzzled look of like, but why? Even though this has been a clear policy that the board has been communicating, it is still optional. So I find that the fundamental issues that we're having right now are that people think that these issues are choices. They are not willing to examine their behaviour, so they're going to continue to perpetuate harm.

> I've had students come to me and say that in their classroom within the last few years that their teacher had said the N-word. I've had a staff member come up to us this year and get

upset because their students told them before they were even about to say it, that they couldn't say the word. The student said to her that she was not allowed to say that word. And these weren't just Black students. They were also other racialized and White students saying that she shouldn't say that word. And then she came into our space to ask us why she couldn't say it and why we thought she shouldn't say it. And so it's about having to have those conversations over and over again with these people.

Issues not addressed when raised / Retaliation for raising issues

Compounding the experiences of systemic and interpersonal anti-Black racism that Black students experience is the lack of attention in addressing the issues when they do occur or are brought to the attention of teachers, school administrators, and school board leaders.

Black parents and community members shared that many of the systemic changes that they would like to see are changes that were identified when they were in high school decades earlier. In addition, they shared that when they or their children have raised issues of racism with a teacher or school administrator, they are oftentimes simply ignored, and the situation is permitted to continue. However, as noted previously, they feel that the school is quick to punish their children when they respond to ongoing racist bullying.

There have been many instances of the N-word being used, along with bullying about clothing... Teachers were notified, and nothing was taken seriously.

My daughter has been supported by the teachers at her school; however, the principal has not addressed some of the issues she has brought up to him regarding other kids calling her derogatory names. He also seems to focus on the mistakes she makes and calling her on it when he does not do this with other students doing the same thing. The optics make it appear that he is targeting her due to her race. My daughter and I have brought it up to him, but he is oblivious of his actions.

Having worked with a number of organizations that represent and support parents as they're going through these matters, there's this persistent, pervasive tendency anytime someone comes forward and expresses concerns that this closed little nepotistic club of professionals will insist, 'oh, no, you've misunderstood. There's no racism. This is a wonderful person. I've known him[/her] for years. That's the line that's often given.

> *Even if something is escalated all the way to the Superintendent, there's this tendency to just refuse to hear anything that sounds as though there could possibly be a race-based issue. It's always a misunderstanding and that colleague is always a 'wonderful colleague,' and this is just the ways that parents are spoken to.*

Some also shared their perspective that while the pandemic has been challenging, Black students have benefited from online learning because it has offered them some safety from racist bullying.

> *I have been teaching virtually for almost 2 years and almost all of my students that identify as being part of a marginalized or racialized community have reported to me that they feel safe in the virtual school setting. Initially, I thought they meant from COVID-19, but they each clarified that they feel safe from bullies when in virtual school. Many expanded by saying that they didn't feel believed when they told the adults in their brick and mortar schools that they had been bullied, and some reported that they had gotten in trouble at the school if they took matters into their own hands when the school didn't help them.*

Although many consultation participants shared that they have experienced overt acts of racism and non-Black staff shared witnessing these incidents, we heard of very few occasions in which White staff stepped forward to intervene or object to racism. This inaction sends the message to White staff and students that these behaviours are permitted and in fact are condoned by the Board.

Parents also shared their experiences and fear of retaliation for raising their concerns with teachers and school administrators. There were concerns that further harm could come to their children if they advocated for their children. This impacted their decision to participate in these consultations and what to share with the consultants. As one person commented as they completed the anonymous online survey:

> *I personally have felt retaliation from the Board and educators for drawing attention to acts of anti-Black racism and I am truly fearful of hitting the done button below.*

Curriculum

A great deal of research points to the need for students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Yet, many consultation participants felt that Black people continue not to be reflected in the curriculum, despite the long and rich history of Black people in Windsor and Essex County.

While GECDSB has worked with Black educators to develop an important resource, Roads to Freedom, many shared that while the resource was launched, they don't know where to access it and are concerned that there are no expectations and ongoing supports to ensure that the resource is used and that Black history is embedded throughout the curriculum. In addition, while the Board did provide guidance to school administrators regarding professional learning about this resource, teachers shared with us that it did not occur consistently within all schools. As such, teachers shared that much more needs to be done to ensure that Black students see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

> *It seemed there is a formula to the way that we teach, but now [I'm] more aware that the formula does not work for all students. There are different priorities, or we're teaching a curriculum that also is missing the attention or the acknowledgement of Black Canadians' contributions to any of the subjects that we're teaching in curriculum. I'm teaching almost the exact same way that my grade five teacher taught me.*

Black parents/caregivers and community members agreed that a brief and shallow inclusion of their history in schools during Black History Month is not sufficient to address this issue. They shared that more should be done to include narratives of Black resistance and excellence as well as learning about anti-Black racism and how it operates within Canadian society.

Others shared that harmful books such as To Kill a Mockingbird continue to be read as part of the curriculum, causing harm to Black students when teachers repeatedly utter the N-word in class while teaching the book. This creates a hostile and unsafe learning environment for Black students.

> *We have teachers that are very much old school teachers that believe in those literary canons. And you can't tell them not to use the text because it has the N-word in it. They've taught it for 20 or 30 years. They don't want to reinvent the wheel and it's something that they know and are familiar with... Let's face it, prepping to teach a new text is a lot of work. It's a lot of work to get the lessons to meet the curriculum expectations. It's a lot of work.*

A number of educators also shared that the curriculum almost never exposes students to authors who are not White. Some shared that when they have requested funds to purchase books from racialized authors, they are frequently given the reason that there are no funds for this or "what we're doing is already fine."

Lack of respect for the Muslim faith

Focus group participants shared stories about how the lack of knowledge about and respect for students from different cultures has been reflected in how teachers perceive and accommodate Muslim students. Some shared that there is a disregard for their dietary restrictions. One person shared that when they asked about the food being served at a school event, one person responded saying "just tell them it is halal." Another shared that when discussing a Black student's lack of focus, the teacher shared that it was because "he was starving himself right now."

Lack of community and parent engagement

In addition to the direct experiences of Black students within GECDSB schools is the experience of the larger Black community and Black parents when trying to engage with the Board. A number of consultation participants noted that the school board is not known for engaging with the communities it serves. They shared that while these issues are being discussed in relation to the Black community, they felt that this lack of engagement exists for all other cultural communities. They shared that they feel there is almost a disdain for the community, which then negates the voices of Black parents when they try to advocate for their children or systemic change.

Participants also shared that newcomer parents often don't understand how the education system works and are frequently given inaccurate information. In particular, we heard a number of stories about parents being told that their children are taking the right courses to apply to university, only for these parents to find out later—when their child is already in Grade 12—that they do not in fact have the necessary courses to apply.

Some also shared the intimidation that parents experience when they have an issue or are attempting to advocate for their children:

> Some of these parents, especially … immigrants, don't seem to understand the way the system works. I remember few times I had to meet with the Superintendent. I could not believe how they brought the principal, the social worker, the psychologist and all the others. How can a parent, a poor immigrant parent who doesn't speak English very well, how can she or he understand the whole system if nobody is there to advocate for them?

> There's also considerable intimidation that parents have faced when they try to engage with teachers, with administration, with senior administration and so on. It's really deeply unfair and unjust.

Black parents and community members who participated in the focus groups spoke in detail about their experiences with administrators and educators who minimized or ignored the complaints of Black parents regarding their children. They shared that they are often portrayed by White administrators and senior leaders as "over-sensitive" when they identify issues of anti-Black racism or "aggressive" when advocating for change.

3.2 | EXPERIENCES OF BLACK STAFF

The survey asked those who indicated that they are GECDSB staff to share their perspectives about the challenges that Black staff face. A total of 312 survey respondents identified as GECDSB staff, including 39 who identified as Black, 273 who identified as non-Black, and 3 who chose not to identify.

GRAPH 2 | **Perspectives from experiences of Black staff.**

GECDSB makes a concerted effort to recruit, hire and retain qualified Black teachers
- 17% (Black Respondents)
- 25% (Non-Black Respondents)

Black staff get the supports that they need to succeed
- 14% (Black Respondents)
- 25% (Non-Black Respondents)

Black staff experience a positive and supportive working environment
- 31% (Black Respondents)
- 39% (Non-Black Respondents)

When issues of workplace anti-Black racism arise, they are effectively addressed
- 17% (Black Respondents)
- 27% (Non-Black Respondents)

Managers and school administrators understand workplace anti-Black racism and how to address it
- 14% (Black Respondents)
- 32% (Non-Black Respondents)

■ Black Respondents   □ Non-Black Respondents

As Graph 2 shows, both Black and non-Black respondents were not overly positive about the experiences of Black employees, with Black staff being far less positive about their experiences than their non-Black colleagues.

Only one-quarter of non-Black respondents agreed that the Board makes a concerted effort to recruit, hire, and retain qualified Black teachers and that Black staff get the supports that they need to succeed. However, a much smaller proportion of Black staff agreed (17% and 14%, respectively). Only 39% of non-Black and 31% of Black respondents agreed that Black staff experience a positive and supportive working environment.

In addition, while 27% of non-Black respondents agreed that when issues of workplace anti-Black racism arise they are effectively addressed, compared with only 17% of Black respondents. Thirty-two percent of non-Black respondents agreed that managers and school administrators understand workplace anti-Black racism and how to address it, compared to 14% of Black respondents.

The online survey asked respondents to identify the issues faced by Black staff. While many did not elaborate, they provided a long list of the issues and challenges faced by Black staff, including: hostile work environment; exclusion; lack of support and opportunities to advance; public humiliation; bullying, harassment, threats, and intimidation; white fragility; low representation; stereotypes; and lack of support when they experience racism from students and parents.

Black staff are important to the success of Black students, yet there are few Black teachers at GECDSB

A good deal is known about the impact of Black teachers on Black student success. A number of research studies have assessed the impact of Black teachers on both Black students and other students. These studies have found that Black teachers have a significant positive impact on the achievement and well-being of not only Black students, but all students. Black students who have had at least one Black teacher are more likely to graduate from high school, more likely to attend university, and less likely to drop out of school.[48] Other studies have also found that Black students perform academically better when they have a Black teacher.[49]

Researchers also found that having a Black teacher in elementary school has a lasting impact on Black students. One 2017 study found that low-income Black male elementary school students

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[48] Camera, L. (2018, November 23). Black teachers improve outcomes for Black students. U.S. News. https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2018-11-23/black-teachers-improve-outcomes-for-black-students; Rosen, J. (2018, November 12). Black students who have one black teacher are more likely to go to college. Johns Hopkins University. https://hub.jhu.edu/2018/11/12/black-students-black-teachers-college-gap/; Dee, T. S. (2004). Teachers, race, and student achievement in a randomized experiment. The Review of Economics and Statistics, 86(1), 195–210. https://doi.org/10.1162/003465304323023750

[49] Ibid.

who were paired with a Black teacher in Grade 3, 4, or 5 were 39% less likely to drop out of high school.[50] The researchers also found that matching low-income Black students with at least one Black teacher between the third and fifth grades increased their aspirations to attend university by 19%.

In addition, because Black teachers see and interact with Black students through a different lens, Black students are less likely to be disciplined by Black teachers.[51] One study conducted in 2015 found that Black students' behaviours improve when they have Black teachers, and that having more Black teachers decreased their probability of suspension.[52]

The benefit goes beyond simply representation, but is reflected in how Black students are treated by Black teachers and the expectations they hold for Black students because of the racial lens through which they see Black students. One 2016 study found that when White teachers and Black teachers assessed the same African American students, White teachers were 40% less likely to predict that their Black students would complete high school and 30% less likely to believe they would graduate from university.[53] The researchers concluded that the low expectations that many White teachers have of their Black students could negatively affect these students' school performances and goals for the future.

Other research has found that Black students aren't the only ones who benefit from having Black teachers. A 2000 study exploring the impact of racialized teachers in the classroom found that the lived experience that comes with being a racialized person results in these teachers being more likely to disrupt the systemic racism that impacts their students.[54] Having a Black teacher also helps disrupt anti-Black racism when White students and their parents see Black people in a position of authority.[55]

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[50] Perry, A. (2020, May 26). The educational value of a Black teacher. The Hechinger Report. https://hechingerreport.org/the-educational-value-of-a-black-teacher/

[51] Miller, R. R., Sr. (2017). Exclusionary discipline in New Jersey: The relationship between Black teachers and Black students. Journal of Educational Controversy, 12(1), article 7. https://cedar.wwu.edu/jec/vol12/iss1/7/

[52] Strauss, V. (2020, August 29). Why Black teachers matter to Black and White kids. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/08/29/why-black-teachers-matter-black-white-kids- book-excerpt/

[53] Perry, A. (2020, May 26). The educational value of a Black teacher. The Hechinger Report. https://hechingerreport.org/the-educational-value-of-a-black-teacher/

[54] Quiocho, A., & Rios, F. (2000). The power of their presence: Minority group teachers and schooling. Review of Educational Research, 70(4), 485–528. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543070004485

[55] Strauss, V. (2020, August 29). Why Black teachers matter to Black and White kids. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/08/29/why-black-teachers-matter-black-white-kids- book-excerpt/

Yet, while a good number of studies point to the need to hire, retain, and support Black teachers, Black teachers at GECDSB reported that not only are they underrepresented, but they are also not supported to succeed.

Black teachers and their non-Black colleagues shared their perception that Black teachers are significantly underrepresented among the teaching workforce at GECDSB.

> *24 years with the board and I have not seen many Black Staff within this board. I am not sure if I have seen 12 as yet.*

> *Some of the key issues are that there needs to be more Black representation in the classrooms and other areas in the board.*

> *One of the key issues is that there is not enough Black staff; so representation is an issue. Currently, I am one of the few Black staff in the whole school board.*

> *The Board does not employ a representative number of Black staff. In the 30 years that I have been employed at the Board, I have known 3 or 4 Black principals. We do not have any management staff who are Black and few unionized staff who are Black.*

> *There are 3 Black people [staff] in our school of 700-800 students, and 15-20% or more are Black.*

Some shared their concern that there were few Black educators in Windsor, and felt that their low representation within the GECDSB workforce reflects their low representation overall.

> *Black people are not as well-represented as White staff. Black staff need to pursue teaching positions as equally as other positions.*

> *Not enough representation but that is not a deliberate intent by the Board. Lack of [B]lack applicants is the key factor and those with the required qualifications.*

However, there were also those who felt that the low representation of Black educators was instead due to barriers in the hiring process. Some shared their perception that well-qualified Black educators and staff are overlooked for permanent positions and advancement opportunities in favour of less-qualified White educators. The result is that these teachers move to the Greater Toronto Area in search of employment. Both Black and non-Black staff shared their perspectives

on and experiences with what they feel is a biased hiring process that favours the hiring of White teachers. As one person commented:

> *Black teachers face inequity; there is a lot of favouritism, unfair work practices, less promotions.*

Black educators understood that they are more than representation to Black students—they are important advocates for Black students; they have high expectations of Black students; and they offer safe and affirming learning environments for Black students. Many non-Black staff spoke about the value of Black teachers only as it relates to representation:

> *It's systemic and if you look closely enough, it's right in front of our eyes. How many leaders are Black: senior reps, principals, vice-principals, people working in support roles? How many teachers are Black? How are the staff representative of the Windsor/Essex community? If students do not see themselves represented by the staff that surrounds them, the role models don't exist. They also see fewer opportunities for them and they don't have contact with those that understand and live in the same "world".*

> *I think it's an issue that Black students not being able to see educators that look like them.*

Black students themselves spoke of the significant impact that having a Black teacher or school administrator has on them:

> *There is a lack of Black teachers and nothing you can do about it. I never met a Black teacher until grade 9, so that makes all the other Black kids subconsciously lean away from being teachers. I think it's just rooted in you for certain jobs, like, "Black folks don't do that." So it's just rooted in us subconsciously because of the lack of representation.*

> *For the first time, a principal at our school is a Black woman. I've never seen that before and when you see that, it's powerful. It encourages us to believe in ourselves. When you see that is possible, it feels like anything is possible. I feel like it should have been in the newspaper, and they are not saying enough about it.*

Experiences of racism and a hostile and unwelcoming work environment

Black staff recounted numerous examples of overt racism and more subtle microaggressions that they experience on a daily basis. When complaints are made to administrators about these incidents, administrators opt to minimize the incidents or, in some cases, retaliate against the Black staff who are making the complaint. We also learned that some administrators have simply remained silent on the matters and take no action at all. This deliberate inaction by administrators reinforces a culture of harm towards Black staff as well as students in the school community. Over time, this can affect the mental health of Black staff and their ability to perform their duties and be fully present for the students they are expected to teach. Examples include:

- Being yelled at or cursed at openly in front of students
- Being ignored in lunchrooms
- Experiences of microaggressions

    I experienced being looked at weird, the silence, the side eyes, or they look you up and down. You say, 'hello', and nobody replies. I'm comfortable in this school. I worked here for a long time, but it's toxic. It's just toxic and it's unhealthy.

    There are many issues I have faced working for this board. I feel that I'm not respected. Often, I have been asked on many occasions, "What are you?" I had a principal put her fingers through my hair and ask me if my hair is real. Other staff make inappropriate jokes. I really feel that I'm not seen as a human. I really have no trust of the board as I'm invisible and not important.

Black educators shared that they are often the only Black person at the school, leaving them feeling isolated in an unwelcoming environment. While a number shared that there are pockets that feel welcoming, overall they don't experience a welcoming and inclusive work environment.

> *It really depends at which school you are working. Admin is different and personal bias happen to get in the way. I'm not sure it has ever been a welcoming environment if you're from another culture or race.*

> *My personal experience from day one, it's been discrimination. I do have a lot of good people that I met throughout and there are some who are you know, not maybe racist in front of you, but racist behind your back and then you've got the ones who are just all racist.*

Occasional teachers who are Black or other races are not welcomed. I have watched other teachers not say hello and shun them. It seems to only happen to people of certain backgrounds. If someone new comes into the staffroom, a White teacher is invited to lunch or they say hello… It's very subtle and if you're not paying attention, you might not notice. It's definitely there. It's been there no matter what school I have been in.

In addition, consultation participants also spoke about the experiences of Black staff who have attempted to assist Black families that were being disciplined, silenced, or publicly admonished for attempts at advocacy, sometimes in front of Black families. Black staff also shared their perception that their careers are often sidelined for advocating for Black children and equity. One person noted that it is "career suicide" to champion anti-racism or equity, stating that "When you call out racism, you become the problem."

Black teachers connected their experiences to those of Black students:

If we are this unsafe in schools, imagine how unsafe Black students are.

It is important to note that a number of non-Black staff shared that they don't know what issues their Black colleagues face because there are so few of them or that they've never engaged in conversation with their Black colleagues about these issues. Others shared that they don't feel that Black staff experience any issues in particular or are treated better than non-Black staff:

I honestly don't see any. I have worked with various Black staff over the years and have not heard or seen anything. Anyone that I have worked with seemed very happy and content.

I have never known a Black staff member to have any issues related to their skin colour.

None. They are treated as well if not better than non-Blacks. This is CRT bullshit and if anything they get preferential treatment.

Some Black teachers shared that the environment in their schools were so unwelcoming that for decades they have chosen to eat their lunch in their classroom, alone, rather than eat with their colleagues in the staff room.

Experiences of the Board's failure to provide religious accommodation were also shared, with staff sharing that their requests have been outright dismissed by both their school administrator and human resource staff.

Black staff not recognized nor celebrated for excellence

Throughout the consultations, we heard from Black staff that they are constantly called on to take on additional projects or tasks, yet are not recognized for their excellence in performing and exceeding expectations in and outside of their assigned roles. In some cases, a few of the Black educators have been acknowledged and rewarded for distinction outside the Board, but not by the Board. These employees shared that it sends a very clear message that GECDSB does not value its Black educators.

Unequal expectations

Staff also shared that while they are often devalued by the Board, there are unequal expectations placed on them. They are often given the added responsibility of organizing Black History Month activities, being the equity expert, or engaging with Black children and their parents when issues arise.

> *I definitely have seen it for Black History Month. A few times where I've been in a school where there's been a Black educator, that teacher's always kind of told, "okay you'll do Black History Month for the entire school." It's not their job to teach all the rest of us, and that's every school that I've been in. That's what I've seen, and that's just got to be exhausting to have it being constantly thrown upon them and they just do it.*

> *She is called in to deal with a Black student or a support staff of colour and is called in to administration with other staff to mediate conversations or explain why what the White person said was not ok, or why a student calling a support staff a "Darky." Having a conversation with administration to say why you can't say those things and why it is inappropriate.*

> *The weight on the Black and the other racialized employees are always expected to deal with issues concerning race.*

> *They should not have to always be the voice or feel pressure to explain everything to their Caucasian colleagues.*

Black educators also shared that although they are often expected to bridge relationships between White teachers and Black parents, it can backfire on them. When Black educators do this

relationship building too well, such that Black students and parents seek them out, White school administrators become upset about the relationships built. These Black educators feel that they are then at risk of reprisal.

They also shared that Black educators are under far more scrutiny and are held to a higher standard than their White counterparts.

> *I've heard administrators making disparaging comments about the way that a Black educator runs her classroom and quite vocally putting the blame that the teacher just doesn't know how to control the class. There'll be other classes in the school where it may seem a little bit more chaotic to the outside, but those classrooms I've witnessed have always been described as the onus is on those students [being] out of control. Students don't have control over their behaviour, but when it's a Black educator, it's their fault.*

Issues of racism not addressed

Similar to what was shared about the experiences of Black students, Black staff shared that their experiences of racism are often ignored by both the union and the Board. Some shared that they have made complaints over the years that were never investigated or their fear of reprisal should they make a complaint. Others shared that they are hesitant to raise concerns out of a lack of confidence that the issues will be dealt with appropriately. As a result, they continue working in hostile work environments.

> *A colleague experienced racism from a student. The teacher had an accent. This teacher is constantly being second guessed and challenged by students. I was still in the room and one of the male students told the Black teacher "You are not qualified to teach." I reprimanded the student and sent him to the office. The principal didn't do anything and sent him back to class with two slices of pizza.*

> *The people in charge of mediating incidents of anti-Black racism are White. They allow other White people the excuse of ignorance in perpetuity.*

> *When issues of anti Black racism happen in schools, it is not addressed in the appropriate manner since 99.9% of administrators are White and the issues are not considered important because of their context and their perspective of never experiencing anti-Black racism themselves.*

> *When issues arise around anti-Black racism, Black students and staff often are not heard or not listened to properly. It becomes increasingly difficult for students, staff, and families to share their stories when they continually have to dismantle the systemic racism in our system in order to be heard and valued.*

We learned that when Black staff do decide to initiate a formal complaint, they have often been unsuccessful because the same aggressors were also friends with the union representatives. This usually resulted in their complaints being dismissed or minimized by the union. In many examples, we heard that union representatives lacked the skill and knowledge to effectively advocate for Black members when the complaint was based on anti-Black racism or any form of discrimination or harassment. We heard that in some cases, the union's attempts to address these issues fall short and result in more harm towards Black educators. For this reason, many Black staff spoke about avoiding the initiation of a formal complaint because it would likely result in further maltreatment by administration or their peers.
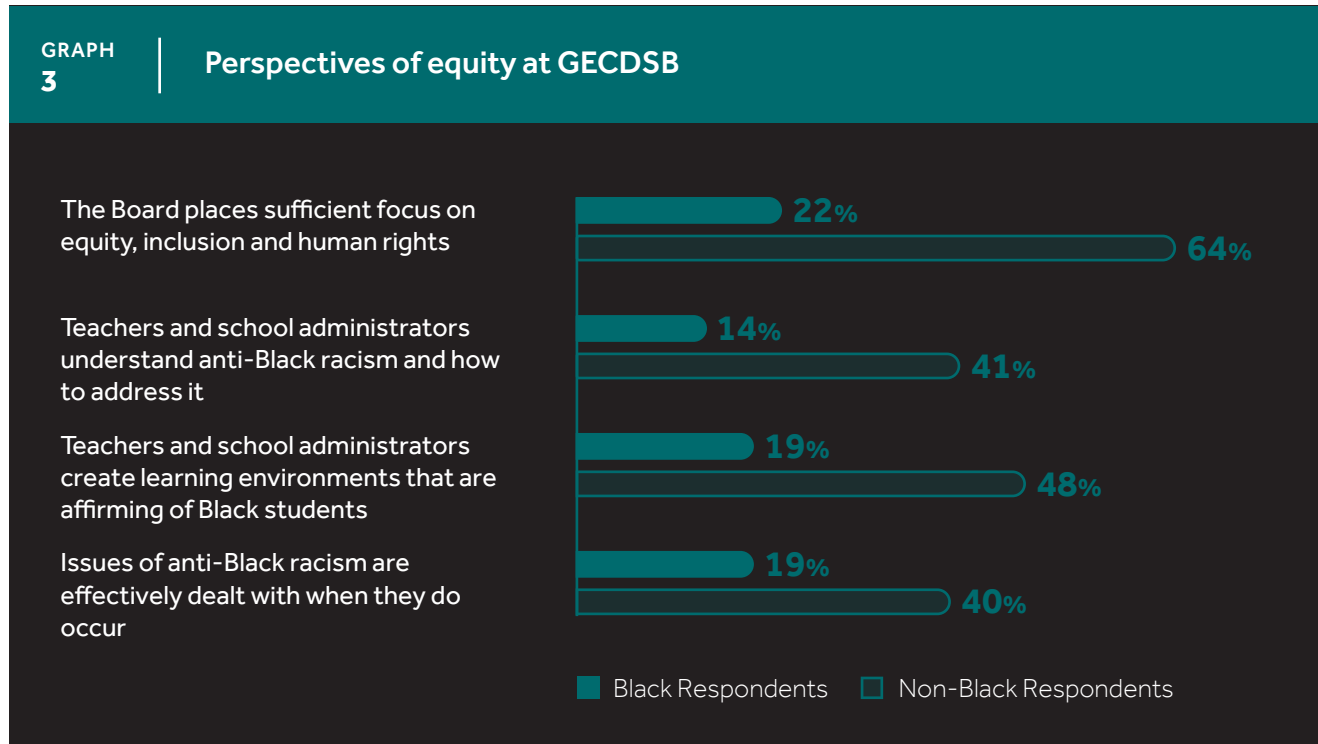
Personal impact

While Black educators expressed their deep commitment to all students, they also shared the impact that their work experiences over many years have had on their mental health. They shared the need for Black-only spaces to share experiences and heal.

> *Racism makes you sick because as Black educators, you are experiencing your own anti-Black racism. Then you have second-hand trauma because you watch your students go through the same things and you can't do anything about it sometimes.*

Some shared that they have experienced serious medical issues because of the stress of working at GECDSB. Some who also have children attending school at GECDSB shared the double exposure to racism by the Board as both an employee and a parent of a Black student.

3.3 | EQUITY AT GECDSB

Survey respondents were also asked about their perspectives of equity at GECDSB.

GRAPH 3 | **Perspectives of equity at GECDSB**

The Board places sufficient focus on equity, inclusion and human rights — 22% / 64%

Teachers and school administrators understand anti-Black racism and how to address it — 14% / 41%

Teachers and school administrators create learning environments that are affirming of Black students — 19% / 48%

Issues of anti-Black racism are effectively dealt with when they do occur — 19% / 40%

■ Black Respondents   □ Non-Black Respondents

As Graph 3 shows, Black respondents are again far less positive about equity at the Board. While 64% of non-Black respondents agreed that the Board places sufficient focus on equity, inclusion, and human rights, only 22% of Black survey respondents agreed.

Only 41% of non-Black respondents agreed that teachers and school administrators understand anti-Black racism and how to address it, and 48% agreed that teachers and school administrators create learning environments that are affirming of Black students. However, only 14% and 19%, respectively, of Black respondents agreed with these statements.

Lastly, while only 40% of non-Black staff agreed that issues of anti-Black racism are effectively dealt with when they do occur, only 19% of Black respondents agreed.

These issues were further explored in the focus groups. Respondents shared a range of perspectives primarily relating to the Board's lack of focus on equity in general and anti-Black racism more specifically.

Long-standing issues of anti-Black racism

Black focus group participants represented three generations. While some were Black parents and grandparents, a number shared that what their children and grandchildren are experiencing at the Board is similar to their own experiences. Community members indicated that there is a lengthy and unresolved history of these behaviours towards Black parents and Black students, with little to no change in the Board to address these long-standing issues.

As such, they felt that the issues of anti-Black racism are long-standing and deeply embedded in the culture of the organization and will take a great deal of commitment and focus to address. They felt that while there have been some initiatives implemented over the years to address issues of anti-Black racism—including the hiring of Graduation Coaches and the development of Black-focused courses—as well as resources created to embed Black history into the curriculum, the Board has not done enough to acknowledge and address anti-Black racism, despite the long-standing history of Black people in Windsor and Essex County.

As such, many focus group participants saw that the issues facing Black staff and students are systemic.

> *The school environment is systemically averse to Black students. The "educators" are not held to a standard that would have them check and desist any racist (microaggressions and markedly racist) behaviours. The Black student cannot assume safety, recognition for talent and good work, or support in achieving learning in a desired field of interest. It is a shameful situation in this day and age. The fact that the board has not brought their officials/staff to a more equitable approach is indicative of how deep the problem is.*

Focus group participants also shared their perspective that many teachers are ill prepared to teach in a diverse school community, and that many school administrators are likewise unprepared to lead schools with a diverse community, which they feel reflects the lack of focus by the Board on issues of equity.

In addition, many expressed scepticism that this work will lead to change.

> *I'm having a really strong physiological reaction to this. Viscerally, I feel like I've been suppressing a lot of things and just listening to my sisters sharing what they've experienced, it brings me back to every single day that I've been with this board. I say that as firmly as I know*

my name, there is not a single day that I'm in these schools that I feel safe. I do not feel safe. I don't feel valued. I don't feel respected. I don't feel like they fully understand the damage and the violence that they're doing to us. If they do know, and some of them do know, they are actively trying to suppress that and sweep it under the rug. I realize that now about the board, what they externally show the public is more important than what's happening inside the schools to the students and to the educators.

Need for deeper learning about equity and anti-Black racism

Another common theme raised throughout the online survey and focus groups is that staff need deeper learning on issues of equity and anti-Black racism. They shared that because it is only in the past few years that professional learning on equity has been offered, educators and staff have a steep learning curve. They shared that there is a great deal of discomfort with discussing issues of equity:

There is limited acknowledgement that systemic racism exists. Black staff are silenced, their concerns are disregarded (i.e., comments are heard such as "Why is everything about race?").

I think that many people are interested in being allies, they just don't know exactly how to do that. I think that people are afraid to say the wrong things. I think it's a very sensitive issue right now. I think people who aren't Black, and I don't mean to speak for others, but I do think there's a group that are nervous about getting into these conversations with others on the topic.

They are worried that they will put their foot in their mouths, they have antiquated views, and are afraid of being accused of being racist.

Those who are uncomfortable retreat. They get together and talk about the problems and issues with that mindset and actively resist this work. They find likeminded people who they can share their views with.

Teachers are not comfortable, and they don't want to step in it. They are losing their minds over changing the mascot and they aren't seeing that as being racist. They don't understand their White privilege and they are choosing not to because it is uncomfortable, and they don't have to talk about racism because it is not happening to them.

Many shared that GECDSB staff have a lack of professional knowledge about anti-Black racism, which is reflected in how staff interact with Black students, parents, and staff. Many also shared that this lack of knowledge, coupled with lack of accountability with respect to equity, has allowed anti-Black racism and racial disproportionalities to continue throughout the Board.

> *Staff and admin are white and don't understand the issues. They think there aren't issues.*

> *There are limited adults in the system who understand the lived experiences of Blacks students. People are making decisions about what Black students' need without proper consultation (they make decisions from their privileged lens). Lack of diversity on special education teams (special education coordinators), mental health teams (social work and psych) and program department. Black students are pushed out and into community supports that also have very limited staff with lived experience. Anti-Black racism is therefore not discussed or addressed.*

Resistance to learning about anti-Black racism

Despite the lack of knowledge about issues of equity and anti-Black racism, Black and other staff shared that not all GECDSB staff have been open to the learning. Instead, they shared that school administrators have limited discussions on equity issues, and staff have shut off their cameras and spent the time doing other work.

> *There is an unwillingness by white counterparts to acknowledge the experiences of Black staff members and an unwillingness to acknowledge that racism is real and that they have the power and opportunity to be part of the solution.*

> *There seems to be a resistance to acknowledge that there is racism, sexism, and several other isms in greater Essex. I've heard that so many times year after year. Usually it's accompanied by "sit down and shut up there is no racism or sexism in Windsor," but I think that there's just unwillingness to look at that. The systems are built on these colonialism ideas and the supremacy of the ideas of old White men.*

They also shared that professional learning on equity is not mandatory but optional. As a result, most of those who do participate are those who are already doing their own equity learning, thereby creating a large gap between staff and the competencies they need to effectively work in increasing diverse school communities.

There were also employees who expressed a desire for more learning. They shared their commitment to support Black and other racialized students, but felt that they lacked knowledge and understanding. They shared a desire to deepen their understanding and ability to support Black students.

> *Follow-up after courses – feel like it ends there and I do things on my own and implement what I have interpreted that I have learned and as a privileged person I don't know that I am doing it correctly – would like to know that I'm using the right language and would like to know how to support those students – I'm missing something, I would need a follow-up workshop.*

> *I would hope that we would get to being included in the Anti-Black Racism Strategy, we are searching for resources that would be appropriate to the different groups we want to include – to help us unlearn some things of the largely privileged White community*

Other issues at GECDSB

Connected to the issues of equity and anti-Black racism are other issues at the Board, including what a number of staff identified as a disconnect between senior leaders and what is occurring within schools.

> *I would suggest that the biggest issue is surrounding the senior administration team. There is a large separation between their actions and the on-the-ground responsiveness and understanding, meaning the priorities of the admin are often not the priorities of the students/staff in schools.*

Some also shared that greater attention needs to be paid to inner-city schools, which tend to have larger proportions of Black students and which they feel are under-resourced.

> *Schools with a large Black student population don't have enough resources (no books that include Black and Brown representation, lack of technology, etc.). They are unable to raise money through parent groups, and classroom libraries are funded by teachers.*

Resistance to equity at GECDSB

While a number of members of the school community shared their support for this work and a desire to support the Board along its equity journey, there were also those who shared their opposition to the development of this strategy because, from their perspective, the issues that Black students face are no different from those experienced by any other student or are rooted in issues in the Black community.

> *The key issue facing Black students is the racism we are about to breed through [this strategy to address anti-Black racism]. Kids are not inherently racist and by opening this can of worms you are actually INTRODUCING the concept of racism into their susceptible minds. Disgraceful!*

> *Putting emphasis on all of these measure will only ostracize [B]lack students and put more targets on them also creating resentment from the non focused students will be left behind.*

> *The only issue Black students face are these initiatives. Treat everyone as a person and stop making it about race.*

> *[Black people] are victims of their own discrimination. The Black community is the one that has decided the limits of what the students can achieve. Racism does exist. But not only for Black students.*
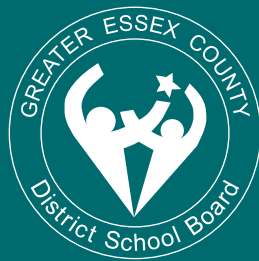
SECTION 4:
Conclusion

Throughout the consultations, participants shared that the issues they have brought forward are the same issues that Black students, parents/caregivers, community, and staff have been identifying for decades. This identifies the need for GECDSB to make a real and sustained commitment to addressing these issues and to continuing to engage with, learn from, and listen to the Black communities in Windsor and Essex County.

The issues identified through the consultations point to the priorities and actions that ought to be the focus of the Board's strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism, including:

- The need for senior leaders to develop their racial literacy and boldly lead the implementation of the strategy
- Foster Black-affirming and anti-racist learning environments
- Improve the ways in which Black parents and communities are engaged
- Inspire and support Black student success, and
- Hire and support more Black staff.

Those who participated in the consultations were encouraged by the recent equity efforts of the Board, including this work to develop a strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism. There were also a number who shared their commitment to and excitement for this work. They have been engaged in anti-racism work for years and applaud the board for developing a strategy that will lead to systemic change. They shared their hope that the Board will take their input seriously and will fully implement the strategy.

We hope that the development of this strategy is a catalyst for change—that it begins to change the culture of the organization and the attitudes of individuals toward Black students, parents, and staff. We also hope that this strategy can be used as a tool to support the beginning of an authentic process to build a positive and collaborative relationship with the Black community to ensure equitable access to education by Black students.