

Administrators' Black Caucus Position Paper - PPM 144 Bullying Prevention and Intervention

Introduction:

The Administrators' Black Caucus seeks systemic and structural changes that create policy language, new accountability measures and indeed new mindsets that will finally affirm the humanity and immense value of all Black staff, stakeholders and most importantly, Black students. Using Critical Race Theory as a tool for analysis we understand that an update and modernization of language and legislation in the Education Act is necessary in order to dismantle individual and systemic anti-Black racism in PPM 144, PPM 145, the Standards of Practice and the Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession. The revisions need to ensure greater alignment with PPM 119 and Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan. The continued success of this work is reliant upon courageous leadership with clear end goals that are time sensitive.

The Issue:

PPM 144 *Bullying Prevention and Intervention* mandates school boards to create policies that outline proactive and reactive measures in order to prevent and respond to incidents of bullying. Though this current PPM adequately outlines the need for whole-school approaches as well as individual supports for students, upon closer analysis there are gaps that would allow for certain groups of students, particularly Black students, to experience bullying on the basis of race that is not adequately addressed through the current mandate of PPM 144. PPM 119 *Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies* in Ontario Schools (2013) was developed based on the *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* and requires school boards to create policies that "...foster a positive school climate that is free of discriminatory or harassing behaviour (2013)." Additionally, while there is currently a recognition that racism, and specifically anti-Black racism occurs in schools, there is an increase of racially motivated bullying that students, staff and administrators experience in school settings. At this time, there should be greater provision for staff and administrators to report bullying based on anti-Black racism.

Systemic Barriers:

Anti-Black racism is present in all aspects of society. Yet it is stated in PPM 144, that "Ontarians share a belief in the need to develop students' character and to prepare students for their role in society as engaged, productive, and responsible citizens (2018)." There has been much debate recently about the ways in which Character Education further marginalizes and traumatizes Black students because it does not recognize how anti-Black racism impacts Black students' mental health and wellness and achievement. Furthermore, Character Education can sometimes assume that Black students lack the character traits necessary to be successful in school and beyond and therefore seeks to change/assimilate those who do not subscribe to status quo expressions of behaviour (Love, 2019). In practical terms, current school-based strategies rooted in *respect* and *character development* do not go far enough to

address incidents of anti-Black racism. Therefore, a critical analysis of race when interpreting and responding to student behaviour, intervention strategies and supports as well as developing surveys and interpreting their results needs to be applied to the current PPM 144 in order to remove systemic barriers and discrimination that Black students experience as a result of racial bullying. As outlined in PPM 119, “[r]ecent research shows that students who feel connected to teachers, to other students, and to the school itself do better academically (2013).” Therefore, it is an added challenge for students who experience bullying of any kind, especially on the basis of race to feel connected and valued within the school community and therefore would be at risk academically as well as socially. In order to strengthen the intentions set out in PPM 119 and the Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation the language of PPM 144 needs to be modified.

Recommendations:

1. Excluded from the statistics on bullying outlined on page 3 are incidents that are racially motivated. Therefore, statistics on racially motivated bullying need to be included as a category for analysis.
2. Page 4 speaks to the need for intervention strategies. Current strategies and programs aim to change the behaviour of students. Among these present in schools today are programs such as WITS, Collaborative problem solving, Self-Reg programs such as Zones of Regulation, 7 Habits, etc. But none of these address systemic barriers such as anti-Black racism. Therefore, school boards need to employ anti-racism and anti-oppression approaches when developing strategies to address bullying on the basis of race resulting in anti-Black racism.
3. School Climate surveys should include a section on anti-Black racism and how it impacts students, staff, and administrators.
4. In the definition of bullying on page 5, where “the pupil ought to know...” is problematic if schools are absent of anti-racist pedagogies or programs. This paradigm assumes that the default culture is the dominant culture and behaviours that are outside of those norms are labelled inappropriate. The use of inappropriate slurs like the “n word” goes unchallenged and/or consequenced because it is often dismissed as being the popular language or synonymous with a swear word, without considering the historical context of the use of the word. Therefore, anti-bully programs need to be framed in anti-racist pedagogies in order to address issues of racial bullying proactively and reactively.
5. Racism is insidious and sometimes is dismissed, overlooked, ignored or classified as ‘rude’ or ‘disrespectful’ behaviour. Page 5 outlines “subtle forms of social or relational aggression”. The term ‘racial micro-aggressions’ should be included in order to make the expressed point of addressing anti-Black racism as a form of social or relational bullying.
6. Page 7 includes the stipulation that School Board Bullying Prevention and Intervention plans include input from communities. Traditionally, marginalized communities are seldom a part of these collaborative school improvement processes. Therefore, this section on page 7 must explicitly note the inclusion of ‘Black, African, and Caribbean communities’ as well as those traditionally underserved.

7. Prevention and Awareness Raising on page 8 points to the focus on skills for developing relationships among students as a way to address bullying and create safe and inclusive school climates. If students do not understand the historical context of racism stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination are more likely to inhibit healthy relationships with Black students. Therefore, Bully Prevention and Intervention programs must include teaching students about anti-racism and other forms of oppression.
 8. PPM 144 should acknowledge the need for a more critical and culturally relevant approach to behaviour analysis that considers the historical context and lived realities of Black students. This would address unconscious bias where behaviour is interpreted through the white gaze aptly described in the PDSB Ministry Review, “While being called out for their behaviour, [Black students] watched while non-Black students did the same thing without any consequences (2020).”
-

Works Cited:

Love, B., *We Want to More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom*. Boston, 2019.

PPM 119 *Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies* in Ontario Schools, Ontario Ministry of Education (April 2013).

PPM 144 *Bullying Prevention and Intervention*, Ontario Ministry of Education (Oct. 2018)
