

Administrators' Black Caucus Position Paper - PPM 145 progressive Discipline

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:

Black students face harsher consequences than other students in the areas of suspension and expulsion. Although PPM145 focuses heavily on school boards implementing a progressive discipline approach and promoting positive student behaviour that will result in a positive school-climate, the intent does not achieve the desired outcome for Black students. For instance, data from the Toronto District School Board School (TDSB) indicated that forty-two per cent of black students had been suspended at least once during high school compared with 18 percent of white students and 15 percent of other racial groups. It also cited more recent stats showing almost half of the 213 students expelled in the five-year period ending in 2015-16 were black. The Roots of Youth Violence also notes that suspensions and expulsions contributed to what is now referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. And it references community workers who noted that suspended and expelled students were more likely to drop out of school entirely and often got involved with criminal activity and, because they were not in school during the day, came under increased scrutiny of the police (George, James, Teclé, & Turner, 2017). The data on suspension and expulsion regarding Black students calls for a re-examination and revisioning of a whole school approach to progressive discipline, and the lack of accountability regarding the inconsistency of Principal's discretion when dispensing of discipline.

Culturally Responsive Whole School Approach

PPM145 calls for a Whole School approach when determining progressive discipline that is expected to lead to a positive school-climate. However, while the intent may be to involve all stakeholders (parents, community, students, teachers), historically the voices of Black communities are frequently absent and excluded from the decision-making table. The Ministry of Education (MOE) *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009) states that, "School Boards will implement strategies to identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit engagement by students, parents and the community, so that diverse groups and the broader community have better board-level representation and greater access to Board initiatives." (p.23) Specifically speaking a whole school approach should include community partners who are members of the Black community and have experience working with the Black community.

Their experience should include working with matters regarding Anti-Black Racism, trauma and mental health and other related issues that may impact the Black community. The expectation is that discipline of Black students be determined using both an Anti-Oppressive as well an Anti-Black framework.

Principals' Discretion in Dispensing of Discipline

Principals use of discretion in dispensing of discipline causes undue hardship to Black students. The disproportionate amount of suspensions and expulsion for Black students when compared to their counterparts can be attributed to a lack of accountability and oversight. This lack of accountability may form one of the various factors resulting in the higher suspension rates for Black students. Research reminds us that, "Black students are disproportionately affected by school suspensions and expulsions, which undermines their ability to fully engage in their education and to successfully graduate from high school. Suspensions and expulsions, particularly for elementary school children, can undermine the foundation for their academic success in later years (George, James, Teclé, & Turner, 2017)." For this reason it is imperative that reference to the Ministry of Education (MOE) Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy should be adhered to when changes for PPM 145 are being considered, in order to ensure equitable outcomes of opportunities for Black students.

Systemic Barriers:

- Location and limited accessibility of staff in the Province to services that include training on Anti-Black Racism, access to culturally relevant responsive resources and Black support staff that include CYWs, Social Workers, School Psychologists.
- Streaming of students into specific types of academic programming and then vilifying students based on programming and pathways.
- Unconscious bias of educators and no accountability measures in place to ensure the learning is happening at the school level.
- Gaining the trust of Black students and their families who are mistrustful of educational systems due to past experiences with systemic racism.
- Status quo with respect to teaching practices and reliance on Eurocentric curriculum
- Union protection for members who are demonstrating anti-Black racism in their approaches to progressive discipline.
- Ontario College of Teachers failure to appropriately hold teachers accountable for anti-Black racism practices.

Recommendations:

The following suggestions were taken from *TOWARDS RACE EQUITY IN EDUCATION The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area*, document

1. School Boards to use the direction set out from the Ontario of Education Ministry's *Towards Race Equity in Education*. Including the following points:
 - a. Require school boards to eliminate the racial disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions by adopting age-appropriate alternative discipline approaches embedded in an anti-Black racism and anti-oppressive framework which will address underlying issues, help

students change behaviour, and create a safer and more positive school climate.

- b. Eliminate the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for children in Grade 6 and under, and require that they be replaced with more compassionate, humane, and rehabilitative approaches to school discipline. Monitor and publicly report on in-school suspensions by race for students in Grade 6 and under.
- c. Make available funding for social supports to address the root causes of inappropriate school behaviours, rather than the symptoms. This includes social workers, child and youth workers, and other social supports that have specific training on how to deal with Black children for schools with a high proportion of Black students.

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1. All school boards will create an Anti-Black Racism Advisory Council/Representative that will be part of the whole school approach to discipline.
 2. To promote a proactive mechanism to ensure accountability and monitoring in order to appeal suspensions and expulsion that are anti-Black racist in nature.
 3. Require administrative teams to perform an assessment of school and staff practices that exhibit anti-Black racism that lead to the suspensions and expulsions of Black students.
 4. Publication of examples and sharing of Early Intervention Strategies that have been successful in setting a positive school climate is needed.
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Works Cited:

George, R., James, C., Teclé, S., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area*. Toronto: York University.

Gordon, A. (2017). Black students hindered by academic streaming, suspensions, says report from York University. *The Star*.

Ministry of Education (MOE). (2009). *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*.
