



Statement on Systemic Anti-Black Racism within Durham Region Schools

Statement By:

THE BLACK LEGAL ACTION CENTRE (BLAC) and DURHAM COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINIC

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The Black Legal Action Centre (BLAC) and the Durham Community Legal Clinic (DCLC) stand in support of all students who have had to endure anti-Black racism during their pursuit of academic advancement, both within and outside of the confines of their academic institutions. Anti-Black Racism (ABR) is not a new or uncommon phenomenon among schools within Durham Region. Recent incidents involving an [explicitly racist yearbook message directed at a graduating high school student](#), serve only as evidence of the continued mistreatment, and ongoing subjugation to racism, faced by Black students. The BLAC and DCLC condemn this overtly racist act and again, stands in support of anyone who has been impacted.

What has become apparent, primarily through the widespread coverage of this particular incident, is that instances of anti-Black racism faced by students across Ontario are not always given equal attention. They are also not addressed with equal amounts of vigour. Parity cannot be achieved if there are differences in the public outcry and acknowledgement of any occurrence that is rooted in anti-Black racism. It is important to note that private and public acknowledgement in and of itself is not an effective means of bringing about change. Beyond publicly acknowledging the continued racially provoked experiences of Black students, information should be provided to the public as to the tangible steps being taken to address the problems and the results of those measures. This is often not the case. Inquiries regarding the decision-making process, the parties to these processes and the implementation are often stonewalled. Without a fully transparent process, there exists the potential for the community as a whole to feel disenchanting and to lose additional faith in a system that has already shown itself to have discriminatory and inhibitory elements.

Historically, many of the purported efforts to address ABR have been limited to reviews, reports, consultations and commitments to bringing about change that has not resulted in actionable follow up initiatives. The Ministry of Education must take decisive steps to highlight the harmful effects of ABR when committed by both students and teachers across Ontario.

Steps should also be taken to address the lack of oversight that could potentially limit the frequency with which acts of ABR occur. At the very least, the imposition of certain measures may serve as additional deterrents to such actions. To this end, the collection of data would serve as an effective aid in establishing things such as how ABR related actions are being addressed, the frequency with which it occurs, and if it is occurring at a particular grade, etc. Data collection can also provide general insight on discipline within the school system. While the Ministry of Education has started to collect race-based data across school boards throughout Ontario, it does not go far enough to identify, address and prevent further harm to Black students. Without the data, we cannot assess whether specific schools exhibit a particular trend and we will not be able to accurately make adjustments with respect to how students at these schools are being engaged. This needs to be addressed.

Even with the steps taken by the Ministry of Education, these efforts do not represent the efforts taken by all school boards with in Ontario. To effectively combat anti-Black racism across school boards in Ontario, it is necessary for boards to take actionable steps. These include, but are not limited to, actions such as:

- displaying an ongoing commitment to the hiring of Black educators and educational administrative staff to more accurately reflect the diverse student population;
- ensuring that the contributions of Black people are not limited to the consultation stage but, ensuring that qualified Black professionals and Black people with lived experience are a part of the decision making and policy development stages within academic institutions;
- the implementation of ongoing anti-Black awareness training for teachers in all schools that fall within the mandate of the school board;
- equity and fairness training for all teachers; ensuring that, or advocating for, Black history and Black Canadian history to form a part of mandatory teaching for all students;
- an increased commitment to the collection of race-based data, particularly with regards to discipline within schools; and
- committing itself to improving the quality and strength of educators' teaching and classroom management skills.

While we have identified another issue faced by Black students in an Ontario school board, we must not forget that this remains a systemic issue that must be addressed from the top. We urge the Ministry of Education to continue concerted and honest efforts toward an equitable education system in Ontario.