

# Racism and Ontario Schools

## What is Racism?

Racism refers to **prejudice or discrimination against individuals or groups based on beliefs about one's own racial superiority or the belief that race reflects inherent differences in attributes and capabilities**. Racism is the basis for social stratification and differential treatment that advantage the dominant group. It can take many forms, including explicit racial prejudice and discrimination by individuals and institutions as well as structural or environmental racism in policies or practices that foster discrimination and mutually reinforcing social inequalities (e.g., attendance policies that favor a majority group). Racism can also take the form of unconscious beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes toward racial groups in the form of implicit bias (e.g., assuming limited ability when students speak non-standard English; fearful responses to verbal or physical behavior of non-White students; Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Jackson, 2016). Other forms of racism are modern symbolic racism in which individuals deny the continued existence of racial inequality while contributing to discrimination and aversive racism through in-group favoritism for the dominant racial group (Bailey et al., 2017; Friske et al., 2010).<sup>1</sup>

Racism is the use of institutional power to deny or grant people and groups of people rights, respect, representation and resources based on their skin color. Racism in action makes Whiteness a preferred way of being human. By whiteness I am referring to the civilization, language, culture and the skin color associated most often with European-ness. Racism is reflected in a hierarchy in which beauty, intelligence, worth and things associated with Whiteness are at the top. [Enid Lee, "Anti-Racism Education: Pulling Together to Close the Gaps", in *Beyond Heroes and Holidays*, 1998, p. 27]<sup>2</sup>

Racism is a belief that humans can be divided into a hierarchy of power on the basis of their differences in race and ethnicity. With some groups seen as superior to others on the sole basis of their racial or ethnic characteristics. Racism is frequently expressed through **prejudice and discrimination**. The belief can manifest itself through individuals, but also through societies and institutions.<sup>3</sup>

## What is the Difference Between Prejudice and Racism?

- Prejudice refers to a preconceived idea about a particular group, while racism involves an unequal distribution of power on the basis of race.
- Sociologists have found that racism has led to a wide range of detrimental outcomes for people of color, including unequal access to jobs and housing, as well as an increased risk of being a victim of police brutality.

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<sup>1</sup> [what is racism/prejudice - Search \(bing.com\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [FACTJune2000.p65 \(crrf-fcrr.ca\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Racism | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

- According to the sociological perspective, members of privileged groups can experience prejudice, but their experience will be different than the experience of someone who experiences systemic racism.<sup>4</sup>

## What is Systemic Racism?

Systemic racism, also known as institutional racism, refers to the ways that whiteness and white superiority become embedded in the policies and processes of an institution, resulting in a system that advantages white people and disadvantages others, notably in employment, education, justice, and social participation.<sup>5</sup>

## How to Fight Systemic Racism? (Reprinted from UBC, VPFO)

Systemic racism is a ripple effect from years of racist and discriminatory practices, and as individuals it is normal to feel discouraged and powerless. But know that from being more mindful of the ways systems work to promoting social accountability, you too can take a lead in initiating change.

### 1. Reflect

Accepting that racism lives within our society is an important first step. Reflect on the ways systemic racism and your position has impacted you and your perspectives. The experiences of marginalized groups can also vary, so don't forget to apply an intersectional lens when you consider the ways different groups face oppression. You may feel uncomfortable, but this sets a solid foundation for you to explore the complexities of racial discrimination, challenge your notions of race and culture, and see anti-racism in new ways.

### 2. Educate

In order to move forward, it is essential to confront our past with racism and oppression as a country. Having knowledge and understanding in Canada's history with racism provide us with the necessary foundation to the fight against injustice.

As you learn more about Canada's history with racism, ask yourself the following questions: How have the laws changed? Is the targeted group still experiencing the effects of this event today? Were you familiar with this historical event? If not, what is the significance of you not knowing about this event?

### 3. Speak up

Challenge yourself and your communities by bringing conversations into your spaces. Regardless of our intersectional identities, talking about racism is no easy task, but your ability to have more meaningful and productive conversations will grow as you practice more.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [Racism vs. Prejudice: What's the Difference? \(thoughtco.com\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from [Systemic racism: What it looks like in Canada and how to fight it? | VPFO | UBC](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Systemic racism: What it looks like in Canada and how to fight it? | VPFO | UBC](#)

## **4 Steps to Navigating Difficult Conversations** (Reprinted from UBC, VPFO)

There are many ways to have difficult conversations. A simplified approach developed by Dr. Tanya Sharpe and Dr. Geoff Greif, from The University of Maryland School of Social Work uses only four steps and can help you have something to lean on if you become uncomfortable:

**1. Inquiry** - Try to have an attitude of discovery and curiosity. Narrow your focus to the person you're speaking with. Start by asking open questions (those are questions that can't easily be answered with just yes or no), for example: Who are they? What are they trying to discuss? How did their experiences and the belief systems they grew up with shape their point-of-view?

**2. Acknowledge** - It's important to know that acknowledging their personal experience is not the same as agreeing. We can make others feel heard by acknowledging their experience without agreeing with everything they say. Allow space for them to share without interrupting to add your own experience. The goal is to have a constructive conversation and help each other learn.

**3. Widen the discussion** - The next step is to widen the discussion by incorporating wider perspectives into the conversation. A good conversation can happen when it is open-ended and people express and learn from one another's experiences and perspectives. What can you see from your perspective that they may have missed? Is there something you can learn?

**4. Problem solving approach** - Now you're ready to begin building solutions together. How can we move forward from here? It is important to remember that the goal of these conversations isn't to solve racism, but to better equip ourselves and those around us in the ongoing fight against injustice.<sup>7</sup>

**For more information, refer to the Canadian Race Relations Foundation Fact Sheet titled, *Racism in Our Schools, What to Know and What to do About it*, published June 2000.**

[FACTJune2000.p65 \(crrf-fcrr.ca\)](#)

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<sup>7</sup> [How do we overcome our fear of talking about racism? | VPFO | UBC](#)

# NEWS RELEASE

## Ontario Taking Bold Action to Address Racism and Inequity in Schools

New Changes to Advance Equal Opportunity for Black, Indigenous and Racialized Students

July 09, 2020, [Office of the Premier](#)

TORONTO — The Ontario government announced bold new changes to the education system that will help break down barriers for Black, Indigenous and racialized students and provide all students with an equal opportunity to succeed. As part of this action, the province will move forward with ending Grade 9 streaming into applied and academic courses, proposing to eliminate discretionary suspensions for students, strengthening sanctions for teachers who engage in behaviour of a racist nature, and providing teachers with additional anti-racism and anti-discrimination training.

"To help our young people reach their full potential, we have to start earlier to create equal opportunity for them, whether that's reforming suspensions for primary grades or ending the practice of streaming for Grade 9 students," said Premier Ford. "Above all, our government will not tolerate racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, Islamophobia or hate in any form in our schools. Through these initiatives to promote equality in education, we will ensure students from all walks of life are set up for lifelong success."

Through Bill 197, *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020*, the government is proposing to eliminate discretionary suspensions for students from kindergarten up to Grade 3, beginning September 2020. Serious offences will still be subject to mandatory suspensions. The latest suspension data from 2018-19 shows that over 65,000 elementary and secondary students in Ontario were suspended during that school year.

Starting in September 2021, the government will begin the process of ending Grade 9 streaming into applied and academic courses. Currently, students enrolled in applied-level courses have multiple negative outcomes and limited opportunities for post-secondary advancement.

"Every student — irrespective of the colour of their skin, faith, heritage, and orientation — deserves every opportunity to succeed in the classroom," said Minister Lecce. "The transformational change we are driving forward will embolden a generation of students and unleash their full potential, absent the systemic barriers that hold them back. To racialized students in Ontario: we see you, and we value you. We will stand with all students on this journey to advance respect, dignity, and opportunity."

As part of its plan to end early streaming, the government will introduce a new foundational Grade 9 math course for September 2021 and will work with school boards as they transition students into a de-streamed Grade 9 math program. The de-streaming of the Grade 9 math curriculum is the first step towards further de-streaming in other curriculum areas, which will better support all students in having every opportunity to pursue the pathway of their choice after their K-12 education.

"We must recognize that today's changes are the result of our government and community members working together," said Jamil Jivani, Ontario's Advocate for Community Opportunities.

"In particular, parents in Ontario's Black communities have been a powerful voice for change, providing their unique insights in how suspensions and streaming have disadvantaged black students. Thank you to every parent and community leader who engaged with us in this process."

To ensure students feel accepted in a discrimination-free classroom, the government will be strengthening sanctions for teachers who engage in behaviour of a racist nature. Over the last 23 years, the Ontario College of Teachers reports that there have been 32 instances of teacher discipline for racist or homophobic behavior or remarks.

The Ministry of Education has also proposed additional anti-racism and anti-discrimination training before the end of the calendar year. The government is currently consulting with teachers' federations, education workers' unions, and trustees' associations on the implementation of this critical initiative.

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## Quick Facts

- Through the Grants for Student Needs program (GSN), the Ministry of Education is providing a projected \$40.9 million to help school boards implement suspension policies, including the hiring of professional staff and implementing prevention and intervention activities and programs. School boards will use this record-high allocation to support the implementation of the new suspension policies.
- School boards can use portions of their \$10 million in new mental health funding to provide students, educators, and staff with the resources and training needed to implement the new suspension policies.
- The government has committed to providing \$3.5 million to support the Black and Indigenous grad coach programs, which provide wrap-around supports for students who are at risk of not graduating.
- On June 4, 2020, the government launched the Premier's Council on Equality of Opportunity, a new advisory group that will provide advice on how young people can overcome social and economic barriers and achieve success.
- **In accordance with the Anti-Racism Act and Anti-Racism Data Standards, all school boards in Ontario will be required to collect race-based data by January 1, 2023.**<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>[Ontario Taking Bold Action to Address Racism and Inequity in Schools | Ontario Newsroom](#)