

YRDSB report calls for more Asian representation in school curriculum

There is a need for Asian representation in school curricula to empower students and educators to dismantle anti-Asian racism in classrooms, schools and in the community, a recent report commissioned by the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) has found.

This is among the primary recommendations stemming from a consultant study commissioned by the YRDSB as part of the development of its Dismantling Hate and Oppression Framework (DHOF).

Drafted in partnership with DeiDefine Consultancy, the report is part of the Board's multi-year strategic plan and the Director's Action Plan to champion equality and inclusivity for all.

This partnership aims to create a Dismantling Hate and Oppression Framework to address racism, hate and discrimination with specific focus on Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, etc., says the YRDSB. YRDSB is committed to addressing hate, racism, and all forms of oppression in schools and worksites. This with the goal of creating inclusive, equitable, and identity-affirming learning and working spaces in the York Region District School Board.

The consulting team, led by Latoya Reid, a researcher, social worker, and social justice advocate, engaged with school communities through focus groups and surveys where participants bravely shared their pain, suffering and traumatic experiences with anti-Asian racism, reads the report.

We were honoured to listen to such narratives, try to capture them authentically, and share it with the others through this report, which is a call to action, say the consultants.

The study found that although students and educators generally felt welcomed at school, there is a low sense of belonging by Asian members in the YRDSB. Further, diverse Asian representations are lacking among staff at all levels, and most notably in senior leadership positions.

The report went on to note that, colonial practices and procedures continue to prevail at the YRDSB leading to harm and barriers against Asian members, as well as all other marginalized groups.

Among the first recommendations coming from the study was an increase in Asian representation in the education curriculum and throughout the Board.

YRDSB should further invest in mentorship opportunities and district-wide mentorship programs specifically designed to empower Asian students and staff, as well as all the racialized and marginalized students and staff across the district, they found. It is important to create and nurture opportunities for staff, specifically between Asian and non-Asian educators, administrators and students to support one another with implementing more empowering Asian representation within the curriculum.

Targeted professional training and learning, they found, was needed for all staff at all levels, to become aware of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) topics that intentionally deepen understanding of anti-Asian racism. Also recommended is an Advisory Circle on Anti-Asian racism, made up of students, parents, educators, administrators, trustees, and community groups, to identify issues and collaborate on supporting school needs.

Compensation should be given to educators who continuously lead EDI efforts, including initiatives that address anti-Asian racism, reads the report. An annual budget for EDI should be allocated specifically for work that supports the dismantling of anti-Asian racism, as well as more awards and recognitions to celebrate the work of students, educators, and administrators that address systemic barriers for equity-deserving students.

?Training does not always have to be formalized. A monthly drop-in support group is recommended to allow people to share their ongoing experiences and bounce ideas off one another. This will lead to dialogue and important conversations from multiple perspectives which will promote relationship-building amongst educators, staff and administrators. If all initiatives are constantly formalized it can take away from engagement and open dialogue. Furthermore, to facilitate doing this work with the community and offer guidance to teachers and administrators who may not know where to start more partnerships need to be created with community agencies to lead programming that affirms Asian identities in schools. This will also create continuity of representation within schools as well as build relationships with other stakeholders who contribute to the school-community interface.?

In the coming weeks, The Auroran will take a closer look on further themes identified in the report: Low Sense of Belonging, Lack of Asian Staff Representation, and Colonial Practices and Procedures Give Rise to Harm and Barriers.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter