



# VOICES OF ONTARIO BLACK EDUCATORS An Experiential Report

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- The Peel Association of African Canadian Educators (PAACE)
- Windsor Black Educators Association (WBEA).

My gratitude also goes out to the many Black educators in Ontario who completed the survey and agreed to be interviewed. Through this study, we collected, analyzed and summarized a substantial amount of information. We have made every effort to fairly and accurately reflect the perspectives of all participants and hope that participants hear their voices and see their experiences reflected in this report.

I hope that this report puts voice to the experiences of the Black educators who told me that they did not want to participate in this study because of fear of reprisal and those who indicated that they didn't want to provide details about particular incidents because they were fearful of being identified.

All of the research participants with whom we spoke expressed a love of teaching and a desire to see all students succeed. They shared their personal, sometimes painful, experiences. They offered their insights, and made suggestions for change in hopes of not only improving their own workplaces, but most importantly, so that Ontario's public education system equitably serves all of its students.

I hope this report supports the work of individuals and organizations to continue to advocate for a public education system that serves all students equitably.

Tana Turner

## About ONABSE

The Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators promotes and facilitates the education of all students, African Canadian students in particular; to establish a coalition of African Canadian educators and others directly or indirectly involved in the educational process; to create a forum for the exchange of ideas and strategies to improve educational opportunities for African Canadians; to identify and develop African Canadian professionals who will assume leadership positions in education and to influence public policy concerning the education of African Canadian people.

The Alliance:

- a. Works to eliminate and to rectify the effects of racism, harassment and sexism in education.
- b. Raises the academic achievement level of all students and to place particular emphasis on that type of learning which builds positive and realistic self-concepts among African Canadian students.
- c. Establishes and promotes the degree of awareness, professional expertise and commitment among African Canadian educators necessary to enhance and contribute to the efforts of other educators and community persons.
- d. Provides financial and human resources for recruiting African Canadian school personnel, certificated and support personnel.
- e. Provides training for all personnel to impact the education and socialization of African Canadian students.
- f. Meets and shares ideas, proven programs and effective techniques for demonstrating that African Canadian students can learn.
- g. Researches and promulgates positions on key educational issues which affect all children and students of African descent as it relates to public policies.
- h. Addresses the growing economic gap as experienced by the African Canadian Community.

For more information, visit [www.onabse.org](http://www.onabse.org).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In February 2015, the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (ONABSE) contracted with Turner Consulting Group Inc. to conduct research into the experiences of Black educators in Ontario. The goal of this research was to give voice to the experiences and perspectives of Black educators, the challenges they face, and identify how best ONABSE can continue to work to influence public policy concerning the education of African Canadian people.

While there are various studies that explore the experiences of African Canadians in the labour market,<sup>1</sup> none have specifically explored the experiential realities of Black educators. This research, a first in Ontario, is the product of three month's work by the consulting team. We heard from African Canadians<sup>2</sup> about their experiences as educators and their perceptions of systemic and attitudinal anti-Black racism in Ontario's public education system.

This research is grounded in our understanding of the history and contemporary experiences of anti-Black racism in Ontario's labour market and public education system. In this study, we also use the perspectives of Black educators to examine the concept of *experiential racism*. In an exploration of the experiences of African American police officers, Bolton and Feagin note, "Using this approach [of experiential racism], we and other researchers have shown previously how racial discrimination is experienced as a routine, recurring, and everyday reality for black Americans and other Americans of color across and within an array of societal institutions."<sup>3</sup>

In addition, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used to provide a conceptual framework for this research. CRT does not take a "colour-blind" approach to research, but instead recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and systems of Canadian society. This approach rejects the false narrative of meritocracy that says that anyone who works hard can get a job that reflects their skills and abilities and be successful in the workplace. Instead, it acknowledges the systemic and individual racism that impacts all aspects of the lives of racialized people.<sup>4</sup> It uses qualitative analysis to tell counternarratives — these are the stories of "people whose

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<sup>1</sup> See for example: Block, S., Galabuzi, G.E. (2011). *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market*. Toronto: The Wellesley Institute; Fearon, G., Wald, S. (2011). The Earnings Gap between Black and White Workers in Canada: Evidence from the 2006 Census. *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 66,(3) pp 324-348.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report, the terms "Black" and "African Canadian" are used interchangeably to refer to those who are people of African descent, regardless of the where they were born, e.g. Caribbean, The United Kingdom, Canada, Africa.

<sup>3</sup> Bolton, K. and Feagin, J. (2004) *Black in Blue: African-American Police Officers and Racism*. New York: Routledge. p 27.

<sup>4</sup> See Hylton K. (2010). How a turn to critical race theory can contribute to our understanding of 'race', racism and anti-racism in sport. *Sociology of Sport*, 45(3), pp.335-354.

experiences are not often told, including people of color, women, gay, and the poor".<sup>5</sup> These counternarratives are important to give voice to the experiences of African Canadians who are marginalized in the workplace and whose experiences are often in stark contrast to the dominant narratives of equitable and inclusive workplaces.

There are many individuals and organizations that continue to resist any suggestion that racism exists in employment policies and practices in Ontario school boards and classrooms. This continued resistance ignores the evidence of historical and current racial discrimination throughout the Ontario labour market and education system. It also ignores the mounting evidence of racial disparities in educational outcomes between African Canadian and other students. It would be extraordinary indeed if the Ontario public education system were somehow free of the racism that exists in other sectors and organizations, and which adversely affects the treatment of, and outcomes for, African Canadians and other people of colour.

While Ontario's institutions have historically been marked by racism, African Canadians have responded to this negative treatment with a variety of countering and resistance strategies. Since the beginning of their enslavement in Canada, continuing to the present day, African Canadians have resisted oppression, examined and documented their experience, advocated for legislative change, organized, created their own institutions and engaged in subversive activities to both improve their social conditions and the larger society.

This report continues this history of resistance by allowing Black educators to tell their stories—stories that have previously not been told or been told by others. It will also support the efforts of ONABSE and other organizations to continue to advocate for equity within Ontario's public education system.

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<sup>5</sup> Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Story Telling as an Analytical Framework for Education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), p 26.

## 1.1 Anti-Black Racism in the Labour Market

This research is grounded in our understanding of the ways anti-Black racism is expressed within organizations — at the systemic and individual levels — and how these forms of anti-Black racism inter-relate and reinforce each other, as depicted by the model below.<sup>6</sup>



For the most part, racism is no longer expressed in obvious ways in the Canadian workplace. Because racism is no longer "in your face" some Canadians find it hard to believe that it remains an issue in the workplace. Racism also runs counter to the narrative that Canada has created about itself. As Jeff Reitz, Professor of Ethnic, Immigration and Pluralism Studies at the University of Toronto notes, "Canadians have as part of their self-image the belief in being

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<sup>6</sup> This section reflects our analysis of workplace racism summarized in *Facing Race: A Systems Approach to Thinking About Race and Racism Within Organizations in Workplace Diversity 2020: Twelve Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Trends and Issues*, Turner Consulting Group Inc., 2014.

inclusive, open, multicultural, and Canadians are proud of that. It would be inconsistent to then believe that there's pervasive discrimination."<sup>7</sup>

As shown below, the system of racism within organizations operates at four levels: two at the individual level and two at the systemic level.<sup>8</sup> This shows that racism isn't simply the result of "a few bad apples" within organizations, but is embedded in its very fabric; in other words, racism is systemic.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RACISM	
<p><b>PERSONAL RACISM</b></p> <p>Racism at the personal level encompasses the attitudes, feelings, and beliefs that are held about people of colour generally, and about specific groups of racialized people, such as African Canadians. This includes biases, prejudices, and stereotypes; both those we hold at a conscious level and those that we hold unconsciously.</p>	<p><b>INTERPERSONAL RACISM</b></p> <p>At the interpersonal level, personal attitudes, feelings, and beliefs can be reflected in actions, behaviours, and language. Interpersonal racism includes deliberate actions as well as micro-aggressions that we may not be conscious of.</p>
SYSTEMIC-LEVEL RACISM	
<p><b>INSTITUTIONAL RACISM</b></p> <p>Institutional racism includes the written policies, procedures, and practices which create barriers to the hiring, advancement, and full inclusion of racialized employees in the workplace.</p>	<p><b>CULTURAL RACISM</b></p> <p>Racism can also exist within the organizational culture in the unwritten rules and cultural norms that determine how things get done in the organization, who is valued in the organization and who is not.</p>

At the personal level racism is reflected in the attitudes, feelings, and beliefs that are held about people of colour at both the conscious and unconscious levels. At the interpersonal level, individual attitudes are reflected in behaviours, language and interactions with people of colour. Interpersonal racism includes deliberate actions of discrimination as well as micro-

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<sup>7</sup> Hildebrandt, A. (2010, March 15). Aboriginal Peoples, Muslims face discrimination most: poll. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/aboriginal-peoples-muslims-face-discrimination-most-poll-1.874710>

<sup>8</sup> Apollon, D., Keheler, T., Medeiros, J., Ortega, N.L., Sebastian, J., Sen, R. (n.d.). *Moving the Race Conversation Forward*. The Center for Racial Justice Innovation. Retrieved from [http://act.colorlines.com/acton/attachment/1069/f-0114/1/-/-/-/-/acial\\_Discourse\\_Part\\_1.PDF](http://act.colorlines.com/acton/attachment/1069/f-0114/1/-/-/-/-/acial_Discourse_Part_1.PDF)



aggressions<sup>9</sup> that individuals may not be conscious of, such as ignoring the contributions of a racialized person in a meeting or assuming that a racialized person is an immigrant.

Systemic racism includes institutional racism and racism that is embedded in the organizational culture. Systemic racism can be embedded in written policies, procedures, and practices that create barriers to the hiring, advancement, and full inclusion of racialized employees.

Organizational culture includes the unwritten rules and cultural norms that determine how things get done in the organization and what and who is important. The organization's culture sends powerful messages that can maintain racial disparities and racial hierarchies within the workplace.

Personal attitudes and interpersonal interactions in the workplace are influenced by the structures, practices and culture of the organization. As such, racism at the personal and interpersonal levels can also reflect and be reinforced by systemic racism.

The model — System of Racism in Organizations — also shows the personal and professional impact that workplace racism can have. The personal impact of individual and systemic racism can lower motivation and increase dissatisfaction with one's job. At its worst, persistent racism can negatively affect a person's emotional and psychological well-being and can even cause psychological trauma. Some have compared the personal impact of racism—depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, irritability, and jumpiness—to those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>10</sup>

Racism can also have a negative professional impact on racialized employees. Various studies show the disparities that result from racial discrimination in the labour market. For example, the unemployment rate for African Canadians is 74% higher than that of White Canadians.<sup>11</sup> The average employment income of full-year, full-time income for Black workers was \$40,179 in 2005 compared with \$51,221 for all Canadian workers.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the latest study from

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<sup>9</sup> Williams, M. (2013, May 20). Can Racism Cause PTSD? Implications for DSM-5. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/culturally-speaking/201305/can-racism-cause-ptsd-implications-dsm-5>. See also the work of Dr. Kwame McKenzie on racism and mental health.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Block, S., Galabuzi, G.E. (2011). *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market*. Toronto: The Wellesley Institute.

<sup>12</sup> Fearon, G., Wald, S. "The Earnings Gap between Black and White Workers in Canada: Evidence from the 2006 Census." *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 66,(3) pp 324-348.

the Greater Toronto Civic Action Alliance shows that the unemployment rate for Black youth (age 15 to 24) in the Greater Toronto Area was close to 30% compared to 20% for all youth.<sup>13</sup>

If the root causes<sup>14</sup> of these disparities are not acknowledged, some may use the negative personal and professional impact of racism as evidence to support their beliefs that racialized employees do not have the skills, abilities, or desire to work in the organization or advance into leadership positions. Failing to recognize the root causes of racial disparities may also reinforce the belief that African Canadians are not the right "fit" for the organization.

## 1.2 Anti-Black Racism in Ontario's Public Education System

Ontario enjoys a reputation of being a safe haven for African Americans fleeing slavery and oppression in the United States. Black Loyalists settled in Ontario following the American Revolutionary War. They established communities, contributed to the development of the province, and helped defend the country from the Americans during the War of 1812. Ontario was also the destination for many African Americans fleeing slavery via the Underground Railroad.

While Ontario was a safe haven for African Americans it also has a legacy of anti-Black racism which includes slavery, exclusionary immigration laws, forced housing segregation, exclusion from post-secondary education, restrictive covenants that prevented Black people from buying property, employment discrimination, and legal discrimination by businesses. The racism refugee African Americans encountered in Canada caused many to return to the United States following the conclusion of the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

Ontario also has a legacy of segregation and anti-Black racism in public education. With the influx of African Americans, communities throughout Ontario began to exclude Black children from attending public schools. White parents also began to lobby the provincial government for legislation to legally enforce their existing practice of excluding Black children from public schools. The superintendent of schools for Canada West, Egerton Ryerson, complied with this request and added a provision to the *Common School Act* of 1850 that allowed for separate schools based on race. Section XIX of the *Act* allowed for separate schools based on race. It read:

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<sup>13</sup> Greater Toronto Civic Action Alliance. (2014). *Escalator: Jobs for Youth facing barriers*. p. 9. Retrieved from [http://civicaction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/civicaction\\_escalator\\_report.apr\\_.16.c.single.page-from-Key-Gordon.pdf](http://civicaction.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/civicaction_escalator_report.apr_.16.c.single.page-from-Key-Gordon.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Some examples include institutional racism, stereotyping, racial profiling, streaming in school systems, as well as anti-Black racism and the legacy of slavery to name a few.

<sup>15</sup> Bakan, A. (2008). "Reconsidering the Underground Railway: Slavery and Racialization in the Making of the Canadian State." *Socialist Studies* 4(1), pp.3-29.

It shall be the duty of the Municipal Council of any Township, and of the Board of School Trustees of any City, Town or incorporated Village, on the application, in writing, of twelve, or more, resident heads of families, to authorize the establishment of one, or more, separate schools for Protestants, Roman Catholics, or Coloured people.

Racial segregation in education was now legal in Ontario. Some communities established separate schools for Black students, which were often underfunded and staffed with poorly trained teachers. Some communities continued to bar Black children from attending local public schools and refused to establish schools for them. While Black residents were responsible to continue to pay their property taxes which funded the growing public education system, in many Ontario communities, they did not reap the benefits of the public education system.

This deliberate attempt to reduce access to education for people of African descent is rooted in this country's history of anti-Black racism:

Whether we wish to remember or not, the educational segregation of children of African descent in Canada and elsewhere is a direct by-product of the system of chattel slavery, an institution whose goal was to strip African people of their dignity and humanity in order to use them as vehicles of cheap labour for a profit-making system.<sup>16</sup>

As historian James W. St. G. Walker points out:

By circumstance and public attitude, a colour line was drawn in Canada which affected the economic and social life of the blacks. The various attempts to give legal sanction to the line failed universally except in one important area: blacks were denied equal use of public schools in Nova Scotia and Ontario, and this division was recognized by the law. The most important manifestation of colour prejudice in Canadian history is in education.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of education to Black parents is evident by their persistent efforts to gain access to education for their children. Black parents delivered petitions to local and provincial governments, challenged policies and the legislation through the courts, withheld education

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<sup>16</sup> Hamilton, S.D. (2011). Stories from The Little Black School House. In S. Rogers (Ed.) *Speaking my truth*. Retrieved from [http://speakingmytruth.ca/?page\\_id=612](http://speakingmytruth.ca/?page_id=612)

<sup>17</sup> Walker, J.W. S. G. (1980). *A History of Blacks in Canada: A Study Guide for Teachers and Students*. Hull, QC: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, p. 107. For a contemporary, comprehensive discussion of the history of African Canadians see: Walker, J.W. S. G. (1999). African Canadians. In Paul Magocsi (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

taxes, and when those efforts failed, demanded funds to build their own schools or built their own schools without the support of the local government.

In one such case, Dennis Hill sued the school board in 1852 when his son was not able to attend the local public school, even though the nearest Black separate school was four miles away. His suit was unsuccessful, with the judge ruling that once a separate school has been established, Black children must attend it. The judge also ruled that the existence of a separate school was justified because of White parents' prejudices.<sup>18</sup>

Two years later, George Washington also sued the Charlotteville school board officials after they changed the school district boundaries to exclude Black children from the local public school, while refusing to open a separate school for them. In this case, the court ruled that if no separate school exists, Black children cannot be denied access to public schools.

In some communities where Black children were excluded from public schools, Black communities started their own schools. In Sandwich and Windsor, Mary Bibb and Mary Ann Shadd opened schools for children of all races. By 1851, the Buxton Mission School had gained a reputation for providing high quality education. It was of such high quality that almost all the White students from the public school in neighbouring Chatham began attending the school established by the Black community.<sup>19</sup>

In 1891, Black residents formed the Kent County Civil Rights League to lobby the school board to change its policy that required all Black children to attend one school in Chatham, regardless of where they lived in the city. Their efforts helped to desegregate Chatham's schools.<sup>20</sup>

In Ontario, racial segregation was legal in public education for 114 years. In 1963, Leonard Braithwaite was elected as Ontario's first African Canadian MPP. During his first speech in the Legislature, Braithwaite called for the government to "get rid of the old race law."<sup>21</sup> Because of his efforts, the law was changed in 1964. The last segregated school in Ontario was closed in 1965 following lobbying by African Canadians.

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<sup>18</sup> Winks, R. W. (1997). *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. p 373.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Hepburn. S. A. (2007) *Crossing the Border: A Free Black Community in Canada*. Urbana [Ill.]: University of Illinois Press. p 159.

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton, S.D. (2011). Stories from The Little Black School House. In S. Rogers (Ed.) *Speaking my truth*. Retrieved from [http://speakingmytruth.ca/?page\\_id=612](http://speakingmytruth.ca/?page_id=612)

<sup>21</sup> "Get rid of old race law—Negro MPP". *The Toronto Daily Star* (Toronto). February 5, 1964. p. 35.

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, as Canada removed the restrictions within its immigration policies that limited immigration from non-European countries, the number of African Canadians steadily increased, coming primarily from the Caribbean and Africa. The increasing size of the Black community highlighted the issues that Black children faced in Ontario's public schools. The Black community continued to identify anti-Black racism in Ontario's public education system and advocate for equitable treatment of Black students. They formed organizations to lobby the school boards for change. They created after-school and weekend programs to tutor Black students. They also initiated and advocated for studies to explore the issues that Black students face in Ontario's public schools that would make recommendations for changes to improve opportunities for and experiences of Black students.

The *Final Report of the Work Group on Multicultural Programs (1976)* and *The Final Report of the Sub-Committee on Race Relations (1979)* explored issues of racism in Toronto schools and made recommendations to address the identified issues. The May 1978 *Draft Report of the Sub-Committee on Race Relations* concluded that racism existed in the school system. The report attributed unequal outcomes for Black students to a mixture of "racial discrimination and ignorance of the cultures and traditions of visible minority people."<sup>22</sup> In this study, racialized employees reported that they also experienced workplace discrimination, including being overlooked for promotion, having limited access to mentoring, and that, as a result, racialized students in the system had few role models.

In 1986, the Toronto Board of Education established a consultative committee on the education of Black students in Toronto schools. The committee was charged with investigating the concerns expressed by the Black community about the education of Black students in Toronto schools, including streaming, racial discrimination, over-representation in special education, high drop-out rates, and curriculum that does not reflect the experiences, histories, and cultures of Black students. In 1988, the consultative committee submitted its final report which made a number of recommendations to address the identified issues.

In 1992, Toronto experienced riots on Yonge Street triggered by police shootings of Black youth. In response, Premier Bob Rae commissioned former UN ambassador, Stephen Lewis, to investigate the underlying causes. Part of his work included exploring issues within Ontario's public education system. Lewis found that racism, particularly anti-Black racism, was pervasive throughout Ontario:

...what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-Black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and

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<sup>22</sup> Toronto Board of Education. (1978). Draft Report of the Subcommittee on Race Relations.

wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping-out, it is housing communities with large concentrations of Black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is Black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of 'multiculturalism' cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target.<sup>23</sup>

Lewis made recommendations to the Ministry of Education to establish strong mechanisms to monitor the implementation of multicultural and anti-racism policies, monitor employment equity programs in Ontario school boards, revise the curriculum to reflect the multicultural nature of Ontario, eliminate streaming, and, ensure school boards report to community groups on their anti-racism and multicultural curricula.

Various studies in the 1990s, including the *Report of the Royal Commission on Learning* (1994), the Toronto Board of Education *Every Student Survey* (1993), and the Report of the Four Level Government and African Canadian Community Working Group (1992), found that Black high school students typically had low academic achievement and high drop-out rates. They found that the policies and practices, curriculum, and learning materials limited the success of Black students in Ontario schools.

More recently, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) identified the lack of representation of Ontario's diversity among school board employees as a possible contributing factor to the disproportionate suspension and expulsion rate of racialized students and students with disabilities. In its 2007 settlement with the OHRC, the Ontario Ministry of Education committed to "proposing that post-secondary institutions that provide teacher training and certification actively promote, advertise and recruit teachers and teaching candidates from racialized communities and disabled persons and other under-represented groups of persons within Ontario".<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lewis, S. (1992). *Report on Race Relations in Ontario*. Retrieved from <http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/13000/134250.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2007). *Human Rights settlement reached with Ministry of Education on Safe Schools — Terms of settlement*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/human-rights-settlement-reached-ministry-education-safe-schools-terms-settlement>

### 1.3 Teacher Diversity Gap

Since the preference for European immigrants was removed from Canada's immigration policies, Ontario, the preferred province for immigrants, has become much more racially, ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse. With an aging population and declining birth rates, Canada has become more heavily reliant on immigration for population and labour market growth. The result is an increasingly diverse population.

Statistics Canada data shows that, in 2011, slightly more than one-quarter (26%) of the provincial population was racialized.<sup>25</sup> The vast majority of Ontario's racialized population lives in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) particularly in four municipalities: the City of Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, and Markham. The racialized population made up 72% of Markham's population, 66% of Brampton, 54% of Mississauga, and 49% of the City of Toronto.

Despite this diversity, those at the front of Ontario's classrooms do not fully reflect those in the classroom. Analysis of 2011 National Household Survey data shows that a Teacher Diversity Gap exists in Ontario and is only slightly better than the gap found in the United States and a number of American states.

To calculate the Teacher Diversity Gap, the percentage of teachers of colour is divided by the percentage of the general population that is racialized. A value of 1.0 indicates that the teaching population reflects the diversity of the population and that there is no gap. The smaller the number is, the larger the gap.

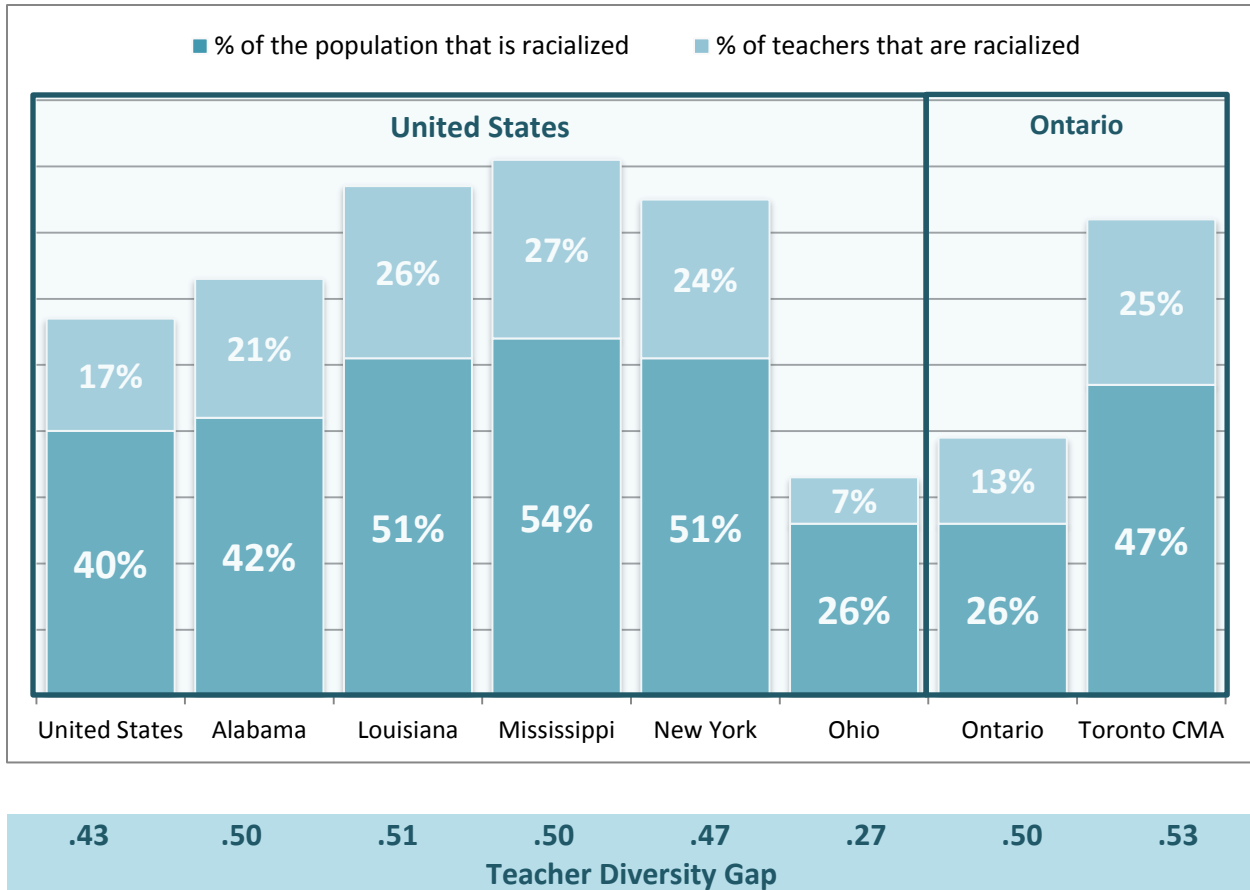
Chart 1 compares the Teacher Diversity Gap for Ontario and Toronto CMA,<sup>26</sup> compared to the gap for the United States and some specific states.

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<sup>25</sup> Statistics Canada. (2011). Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-010-x/99-010-x2011001-eng.cfm>

<sup>26</sup> The Toronto CMA is defined by Statistics Canada and includes all of the Toronto, Region and York Census Divisions but only parts of Durham and Halton.

**Chart 1**  
**Teacher Diversity Gap<sup>27</sup>**



As Chart 1 shows, Ontario has a Teacher Diversity Gap of .50, meaning that there is a large demographic divide between teachers and students of colour in the province. In 2011, while racialized people represent 26% of Ontario's population, they make up only 13% of the province's 76,030 secondary school teachers and 129,105 elementary school and kindergarten teachers. Most interestingly, the gap for the Toronto CMA where the majority of the province's racialized population lives, is slightly better at .53. In the Toronto CMA, racialized people make up 47% of the population, yet make up 25% of secondary school teachers and 24% of elementary school and kindergarten teachers. That is to say, in terms of racial demographics, teachers in Ontario and Toronto CMA are far less diverse than the student population they teach.

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix A for notes on the data and links to the various data sources used for this analysis.



Statistics Canada projects that, by 2031, Canada's racialized population will grow to 32% of the population and 63% of the population of the Toronto CMA.<sup>28</sup> Without significant increases in the number of racialized teachers, the Teacher Diversity Gap will likely widen as the provincial population becomes increasingly racially diverse.

These demographic and societal changes create a compelling business case for the provincial government and Ontario's school boards to focus their efforts on hiring more racialized educators and on creating an inclusive organization in which they can contribute their best to their students.<sup>29</sup>

#### 1.4 Employment Equity in Ontario School Boards

Ontario school boards have a long history of implementing employment equity programs to advance gender equity. In 1975, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) Task Force on Women noted that women represented 37% of high school teachers, yet only represented 5% of vice principals and 2% of principals.<sup>30</sup> In 2011, women represented 83% of all elementary school and kindergarten teachers and 59% of all high school teachers, and represent 60% of all school administrators.<sup>31</sup> The closing of this gender gap was the result of very deliberate efforts by the teachers' federations and the provincial government.

In *From Hope to Harris*, Robert Gidney outlines the history of employment equity in Ontario's school boards:

- Beginning in 1969, the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario (FWTAO), in hopes of addressing the gender inequity in Ontario school boards began to run summer leadership courses for its members as well as undertaking other initiatives to support the advancement of women in education.

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<sup>28</sup> Caron Malenfant, E., Lebel, A., & Martel, L. (2010). *Projections of the Diversity of the Canadian Population 2006 to 2031*. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-551-x/91-551-x2010001-eng.htm>

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that this is but one strategy among others, such as reducing the Eurocentricity of provincial curricula, that should be implemented to make Ontario's public education more inclusive and reflective of the student population.

<sup>30</sup> Gidney, R.D. (1999). *From hope to Harris: the reshaping of Ontario's schools*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

<sup>31</sup> Government of Canada. (2011). *Workforce Population Showing Representation by Employment Equity Occupational Groups and Unit Groups (2011 NOC) for Women, Aboriginal Peoples and Visible Minorities*. 2011 Employment Equity Data Report, Ontario – Table 5. Retrieved from [http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards\\_equality/eq/pubs\\_eq/eedr/2011/report/tables/table05/page07.shtml](http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards_equality/eq/pubs_eq/eedr/2011/report/tables/table05/page07.shtml)

- Beginning in 1973, the provincial government introduced policies to improve the representation of women at senior levels of the Ontario Public Service. One result was an increase in the number of women in leadership positions of the Ministry of Education.
- In 1979, the Ministry of Education established an Equal Opportunity / Affirmative Action unit to promote gender equity at all levels of the education system.
- In 1980, FWTAO adopted affirmative action for women as its major goal for the following five years.
- In 1984, the provincial government established the Affirmative Action Incentive Fund which paid 75% of the start-up costs of school boards hiring an Affirmative Action Co-ordinator. Boards were required to adopt a formal affirmative action policy for women, appoint a senior staff member to develop and co-ordinate an Affirmative Action Plan that would include goals and timetables for hiring, promotion and training women employees at all levels. They were also required to collect data and report to the ministry on the hiring, promotion, and training of women. While this was a voluntary program, in two years 79 boards accessed the funds and implemented affirmative action programs for women.
- In 1992, the provincial government introduced the *Employment Equity Act*, which required the Ontario Public Service, broader public sector employers, and public sector employers to implement employment equity programs to close any gaps in employment for women, racialized people, Aboriginal people, and persons with disabilities.
- In 1995, the Mike Harris government came to power and repealed the *Employment Equity Act*. The Act to repeal this legislation required organizations that had collected data to analyze gaps in employment to destroy this data.
- In 2009, the provincial government recognized the need for greater diversity within school boards through its Equity and Inclusive Education Policy. The policy requires that school boards "implement positive employment practices that support equitable hiring, mentoring, retention, promotion, and succession planning." However, while the policy notes that board staff "should reflect the diversity within the community," there is no requirement that boards collect data on the composition of its workforce or student population, analyze the diversity gap, or implement efforts to close the gap.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study uses survey and interview data collected from a non-random sample of African Canadian educators in Ontario. The link to the online survey was distributed to Black educators who are members of ONABSE. In addition, networks of Black educators at various school boards across Ontario were asked to distribute the link to the online survey to their members. Given that not all Black educators are members of these associations, survey respondents were asked to share the survey with other Black educators in Ontario. This snowball sampling technique allowed existing participants to recruit additional survey respondents from among their networks. The link to the online survey was also shared through social media. In total, 148 Black educators completed this survey.

Survey respondents are from diverse backgrounds. They are current (92%) and retired (8%) educators from 12 Ontario school boards. 69% are women; 31% are men. They hold a range of positions within the school board, including permanent classroom teachers (45%), occasional teachers (14%), other educators, such as Resource Teacher, Department Head, Teacher Librarian (19%), and administrators (22%), including vice principals, principals and superintendents. The majority of survey respondents have over 10 years of experience as an educator (63%), while 25% have 6 to 10 years, and 12% have less than 5 years. They also identified as coming from a range of cultural backgrounds including Caribbean (62%), African (13%), Canadian (17%), and mixed ancestry (8%).

To deepen our understanding of the survey data, the perspectives and experiences of Black educators were further explored through one-on-one interviews. Ten Black educators from four school boards were interviewed. Six are women, four are men, and all are Canadian-trained educators.

The interview instrument included 18 guiding, open-ended questions that allowed participants to cover topics of interest to this study. The information collected through these interviews was analyzed, attending to patterns as well as shared understandings and experiences that will provide further insights into the responses received through the online survey.

While there is 2006 Census data, which provides the number of racialized educators in Ontario, that data is not readily available by racial sub-group. As such, there is no way for us to know the total number of Black educators in Ontario and what proportion of all Black educators participated in this study. However, the collective experiences of those who completed the online survey and who were interviewed are sufficient to provide insights into their personal experiences of racism, the barriers to hiring, promotion and full inclusion, as well as their perception of the impact of Black educators on students. While we heard variations in

experiences, the recurring themes allow certain conclusions to be drawn. This input can be useful to create a diverse teacher workforce and work environments that contribute to equitable and inclusive education for all students.

Through the survey and interviews, a significant amount of information emerged, allowing us to explore the lived experiences of anti-Black racism within Ontario's education system, as described by the participants. As Essed notes:

Experiences are a suitable source of information for the study of everyday racism because they include personal experiences as well as vicarious experiences of racism. In addition, the notion of experience includes general knowledge of racism, which is an important source of information to qualify whether specific events can be generalized. These experiences of racism are made available for academic inquiry through accounts – that is, verbal reconstructions of experiences .... [R]econstructions of experiences in such accounts provide the best basis for the analysis of the simultaneous impact of racism in different sites and in different social relations. Accounts of racism locate the narrators as well as their experiences in the social contexts of their everyday lives, give specificity and detail to events, and invite the narrator to carefully qualify subtle experiences of racism.<sup>32</sup>

The survey and interviews provided African Canadian educators an opportunity to share their experiences and insights in their own words. To amplify the voices of research participants, throughout this report we have included verbatim extracts from interviews and the online survey. To protect the anonymity of participants, details of specific incidents, as well as names of school boards, schools, and individuals have been changed or omitted.

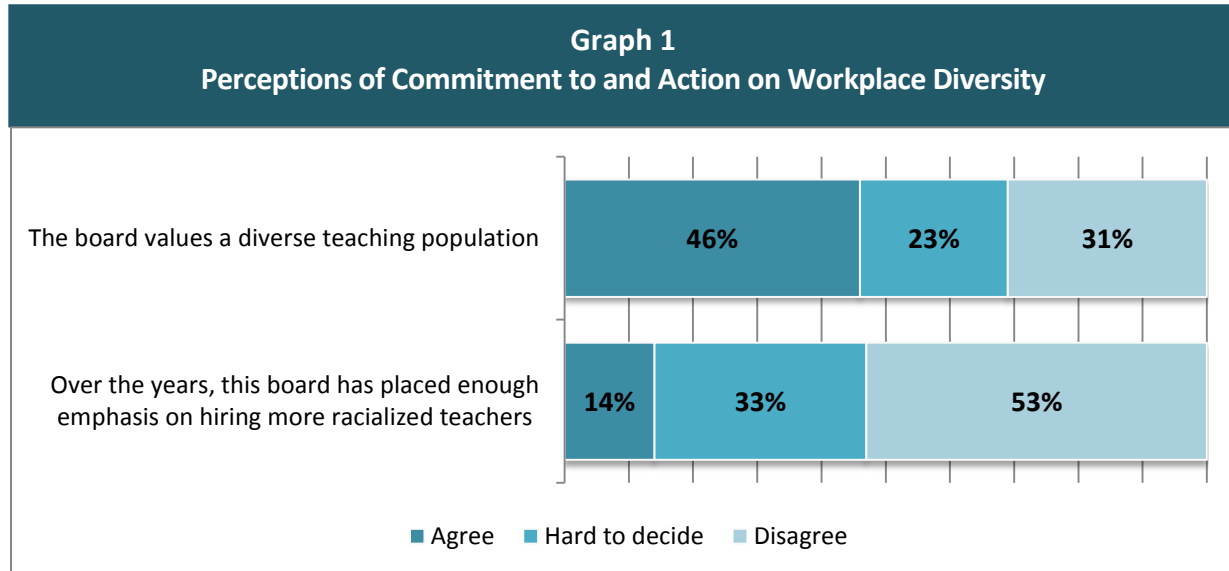
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<sup>32</sup> Essed, P. (1991). *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications. pp. 3-4.

### 3. HIRING AND PROMOTION

#### 3.1 Perceptions of Board Commitment to and Action on Workplace Diversity

Survey respondents were asked about their perception of their board's commitment to workplace diversity as well as whether the organization has placed enough emphasis on hiring and promoting staff from diverse backgrounds.



As Graph 1 shows, less than half (46%) of respondents think that their board values a diverse teaching population. In addition, many perceive there to be a gap between the board's commitment to hiring a diverse teacher workforce and its concrete actions taken to achieve this goal, with only 14% agreeing that the board has placed enough emphasis on hiring racialized teachers.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (99%) indicate that they believe that a diverse teacher workforce adds to the school's ability to effectively educate students from diverse communities, backgrounds, and identities. The vast majority (98%) also felt that a workplace that welcomes and values diversity is important to them.

Many respondents further commented on their perceptions of their school board's commitment to diversity, with many suggesting that the board's stated commitment has not been operationalized:

*The board preaches equity but does not follow through. ~*

*The staff optics speak for itself. In this board, people of colour are hard to find. ~*

*We have all these great policies in place. Someone who looks at the board from the outside would think it looks great. But that's not what it looks like on the ground. Nothing has changed. ~*

*Presently the [board] seems to be focusing on hiring individuals from the GLBT community. I think it is also imperative to focus on hiring individuals from racialized communities since individuals continue to face discrimination based on the colour of their skin. ~*

*The staff does not adequately represent the diversity of the students they are supposed to serve. ~*

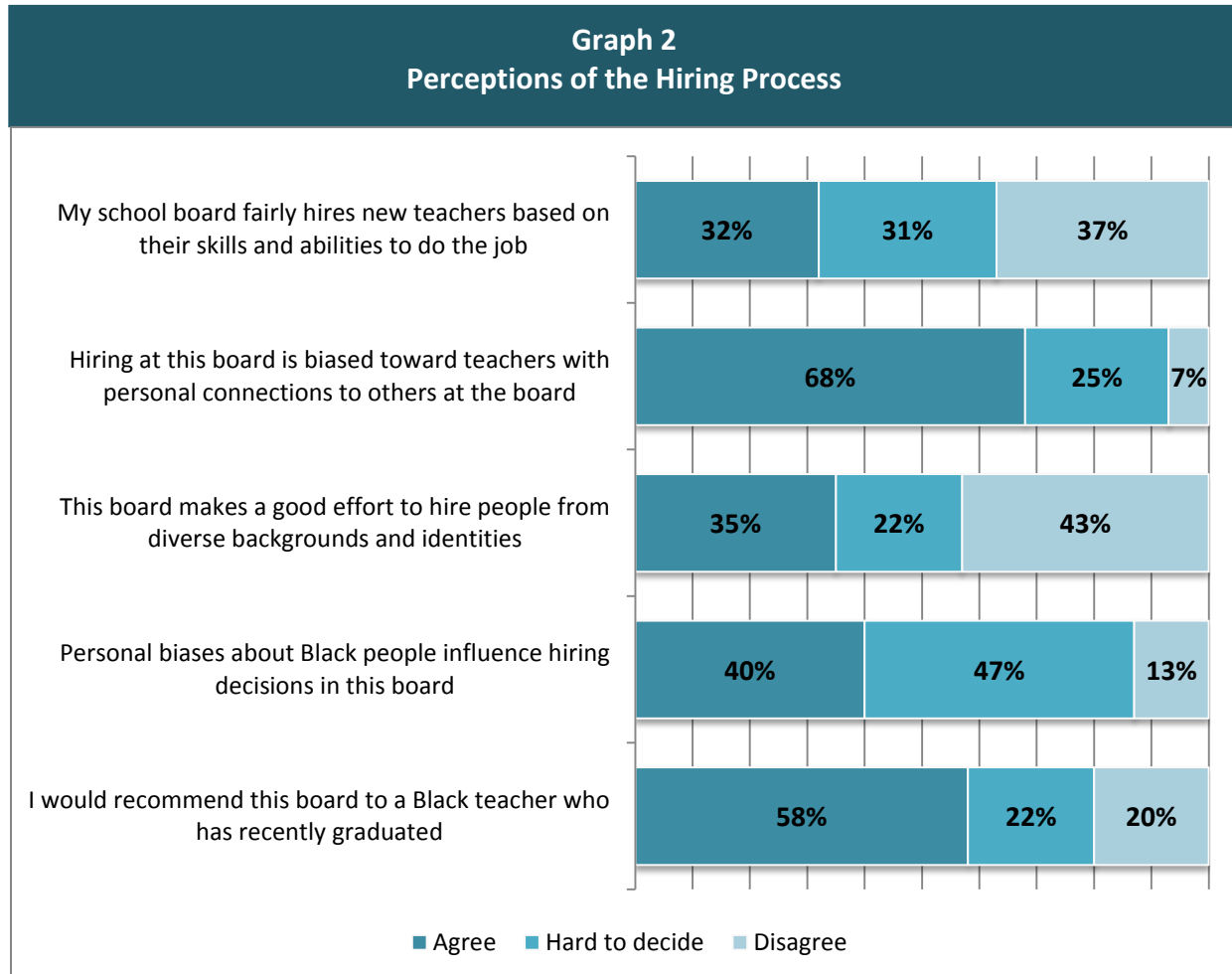
Survey respondents thought that a commitment to diversity was not evident among board employees. Only 33% of respondents agreed that board employees value what diversity brings to the organization. Some also shared experiences of the negative reactions that their colleagues have expressed and their resistance to equity and diversity initiatives within their school and school board:

*There is still resistance, eye-rolling, and a begrudging attitude toward the acceptance of diversity as a strength for this organization. I don't know what's to be done about that. You can't change the way people think but perhaps it needs to be made even clearer to them that failure to respect and fully carry out the organization's diversity policies will result in real administrative consequences beyond just a transfer to another school. ~*

*We invited one of the equity [staff] to do an equity presentation within our school. The administrator at the time wasn't in the school, he didn't stay for it. Five Caucasian teachers ended up walking out [during the presentation because the presenter suggested that the school] put images up that would reflect the community, and I told you that our school is predominately South Asian. This offended my colleagues. Now if I was sitting in a meeting that was organized by the school as a professional I may disagree, but to make a statement by walking out, would not be accepted. It's not acceptable and the issue was never addressed. ~*

### 3.2 Perceptions of the Hiring Process

In both the interviews and online survey African Canadian educators were asked about their perceptions of the hiring process within their respective school boards. A large proportion of Black educators expressed concerns about the hiring process and the board's ability to hire based on qualifications rather than favouritism and personal connections.



As Graph 2 shows, only one-third (32%) of the Black educators who completed the survey agree that their school board fairly hires new teachers based on skills and abilities. Some in fact raised concerns that personal knowledge of the board's process is important in order to be hired. As such, those with personal connections to the board stand a better chance of being hired:

*I remember feeling quite frustrated during the application process to [the board].  
The website states that you can apply at any time, yet inside information*

*revealed that January was the optimal month to apply. This information was kept secret from applicants and was only revealed to me because it was acquainted with someone who had an "inside connection". It really opened my eyes to what I was up against with the hiring process. ~*

Despite the introduction of Regulation 274 by the provincial government, which was meant to remove nepotism in school board hiring, many survey respondents felt that personal connections continue to be very important to the hiring of educators within the organization. They felt that the lack of accountability mechanisms means that administrators can continue to hire who they know, which will result in little change in the composition of Ontario's teacher workforce. While this study was not designed to determine how widespread these practices are within Ontario's school boards, 68% of survey respondents thought that hiring within their respective boards is biased toward teachers with personal connections to others at the board. As some survey respondents commented:

*Favouritism and nepotism are significant factors in who is hired and promoted at the school level. However, well-connected people, even if they are people of colour stand a better chance at advancing their position in the Board. It is definitely more difficult for people of colour to make the connections though—that is for sure. ~*

*Nepotism is still an issue. Administrators support the advancement of their relatives or people in their cliques. It's all about who you know. In such a large board, personal connections are disguised. You don't know who is connected to who. ~*

*Regulation 274 was supposed to break up that old boys' club but nothing has changed. They've learned to work around the system. They go through the motions but make sure that the person they want to hire is hired. When you look at it from the outside, it looks like they are complying with the regulation. But next time around will I apply for all those jobs and do those interviews, maybe not, but then they'll be able to say that people don't apply. ~*

*The province needs to put in place a regulation where principals are required to account for the people they have hired / interview. Even though Regulation 274 has been introduced, principals and vice principals are finding loopholes to advance who they know and want to work with through the system. The system has changed minimally. ~*

*Having a 'transparent process' means nothing if the final hiring decision to hire is still based on the subjective opinion of the (white) person doing the hiring. ~*



*The idea of an equity policy and hiring policy was that you didn't have a boys' club anymore and anyone can have a fair chance of getting the position. But it doesn't work like that in the real world. ~*

Some suggest that given the current over-supply of teachers and limited job openings, there is much more opportunity hoarding going on within school boards as administrators try to keep the available positions for those in their own personal networks or those who look like them:

*It's a rough ride to get in. There are many people going into education, and if the door is half open, the person who will get it will be white. ~*

Hiring based on personal connections means that all qualified educators are not able to compete for job openings equally and, as a result, the best and brightest teachers are not being hired. In addition, some research participants noted that in an organization that is predominately White, hiring based on personal connections limits the racial diversity of the teacher workforce and, therefore, reproduces the status quo. In fact, only 35% of survey respondents agree that their board makes a good effort to hire people from diverse backgrounds and identities.

In addition, 40% of survey respondents felt that personal biases about Black people influence hiring decisions at their school board. Some research participants further elaborated on what they felt were conscious discriminatory attitudes on the part of those involved in hiring:

*There was an awareness of other Black educators at some schools that those administrators don't hire Black people. So I knew I wouldn't be hired there. Those teachers told me that the only reason they were there is because they were already on staff before that administrator was hired and that this administrator doesn't hire Black teachers. ~*

Others thought that the low representation of Black educators was more a reflection of unconscious rather than conscious biases:

*I would not cite personal biases against Blacks as hindering hiring and promotion, but I would cite embedded assumptions that are not necessarily conscious and are definitely unexamined. There is also no will to admit the necessity of examining and being self-reflective around issues of privilege and embedded assumptions. ~*

Many of those with whom we spoke expressed concern that educators in their board do not reflect the diversity of the student population:

*In my board, I know that Black teachers are out there, I don't think they fare very well to be honest with you. Proportionately, if we look at the numbers ... I don't*

*want to say a number because I don't want to be wrong ... but I've had a number of roles at the board so I've had the opportunity to travel the board, I was a consultant at one time so I know Superintendents, I know Principals, I know school sites and when we go to board wide meetings or the board conference where all schools are represented, I can count on one hand the black teachers. With a board as large as ours, that's problematic. ~*

Survey respondents indicate that school boards have only recently begun to focus on hiring educators to reflect the diversity of the student population. As such, the boards' long legacy of relationship-based hiring, which tended to disadvantage Black and other racialized educators, means that it will take a long time before Ontario's teacher workforce reflects the diversity of the student population:

*I think this board is attempting to be fair in its hiring practices now; however, its hiring history means that it will take some time for hiring practices to truly reflect our current population. ~*

*I believe that the board is making strides towards improving in this area. In the 80's and 90's I never had or saw a teacher of another race. The first black teacher I saw was when I started college. Today I am seeing more diversity so there is improvement. ~*

*The percent of teachers especially black teachers does not adequately reflect the student population. The students do not have anyone to relate to or who can relate to them in many situations in this board. The number of black teachers is dismal while there is a great number of available black substitute teachers. ~*

Of particular concern for some research participants was the lack of Black male educators within Ontario's public education system:

*The few people of colour that [this] board hires are treated poorly and most of the hires are women. There are very few male role models in this board. ~*

*Where are the Black male educators? ~*

When asked if they would recommend their school board to a Black teacher who has recently graduated, only 58% indicated that they would, while 20% indicated that they would not.

Research participants also shared their perception of being set up to fail in teaching assignments, some even as early as when they were in teachers college:

*I was in my last year of teachers college. I was an English major. I was supposed to be placed in a classroom where I could teach English for my practicum placement. My prof put me into a grade 7/8 split class of math and science. Where my peers had to prepare lessons for one grade level, I had to do two.*

*When I went to her and said that I was in the wrong placement, teaching the wrong subjects, instead of moving me, she added on a language class with a very particular and extremely uncooperative teacher. I was drowning. I had twice as many lessons to prepare as any of my peers and was having difficulty managing the work. Whereas the math and science teacher was lovely, very helpful, if I had questions about anything in the language class, the language teacher would offer no help. I could not call her to clarify anything and she insisted I "Look it up" if I was unsure what to do. Add to all this a part time job (I was not living at home and had to pay rent while I put myself through university). Anyway, when I went to my prof about the situation, she insisted that I was having problems because I "was not dedicated" to the teaching program. She told me that if I wanted to pass, I needed to be serious and quit my part-time job. ~*

*So then after the school year started, I heard stories that the teacher they had previously quit half-way through the year because the kids were apparently rambunctious. And the kids came in feeling powerful because they knew the teacher had left because of what they had done. Of course, I didn't have any of that knowledge in the beginning; that came over time. When the kids started trusting me, they started to tell me the stories that the staff didn't tell me. Nobody told me anything. It wasn't until the staff got to know me and saw that I have everything under control with these kids, then the stories started coming out about the previous teacher, about certain kids in the class, about certain families and what they'd done to make sure that the teacher was fired. So then I realized that they had stacked my class! ... Could that have been disastrous for me? Absolutely! Was it? No! ~*

In and of itself, the low representation of Black educators is of concern as it could reflect discrimination in the hiring process. It is also of concern because this low representation can serve to perpetuate discriminatory attitudes that African Canadians do not make good educators or that they are not qualified for, or interested in, teaching. When these attitudes and beliefs are held by administrators with responsibility for hiring, they could further perpetuate the under-representation of African Canadian educators. When held by colleagues, these attitudes affect how Black educators are treated on a daily basis. Many research participants shared their perception of being negatively affected by the stereotypes that administrators and colleagues have about Blacks—stereotypes which also impact the experiences of Black students in Ontario's public education system:

*Historically black people have been viewed more negatively than other races. I feel that pressure as a black educator. I am more likely to be considered to be aggressive than assertive. ~*

*I know that some people sometimes demonize me because of my race and many demonize the students because of their race. They often lower expectations for*

*students from racial minority groups and ensure that those students will not find pathways to success. ~*

*The stereotypes about Black males being unintelligent, dishonest, lazy, intent on doing harm, and simply not belonging in this profession make me feel compelled to present myself in such a way that nobody can easily use these stereotypes against me. I'm always overdressed, overly formal in the way I speak and write to colleagues and parents, never too loud or boisterous when other staff are having a laugh at lunchtime, and I never feel like I can relax. ~*

*The media's mostly negative portrayal of Black people is far more ingrained into our society than of other racial minorities thus affecting the deeply embedded stereotype ideologies that I have to dispel. ~*

*Black people are seen as more threatening. Our Asian brothers and sisters are viewed as the model minorities—in many instances they are less likely to speak out about systemic inequity/racism. As a result, those of us who are black that do challenge the system are seen as the problem and actually are dismissed even though the issue raised would support all racialized staff / not just black staff. ~*

*Blacks are viewed as less qualified, or as pushy and angry if they raise certain issues. ~*

*I have had blatant experiences with individual expressions by employees at various levels of the board and other experiences that have affected my career in education. Race has affected my career in education in such a way that I was scapegoated, sidelined, threatened and silenced with no recourse except perhaps legal. ~*

*I was asked by a principal if I would ever consider straightening my hair. I was put in charge of Black History and told I was an obvious fit. If I didn't do it, no one would. Told I should steer away from too much Black history in classroom as Black history is not important when no black students present. And so on... ~*

The perception that African Canadians are not qualified for jobs in education could also reinforce the perception that when Black and other educators of colour are hired standards have been lowered or they were hired to meet quotas. As some research participants noted, because Black educators are such a rarity in many schools that their qualifications and their right to be in these schools are constantly questioned:

*I'm constantly questioned... My skills/competencies are questioned - they think I only got to where I am because I'm black. I'm passed over for promotion opportunities - [I get labelled] the angry black woman. ~*

*I also have to deal with the possibility that people think that I have my job because of a push for diversity and not because of my actual teaching abilities and experience. ~*

*In terms of my ability, I am judged not on the years of experience, practice or education but on my skin colour and how that contributed to my success. ~*

*I have to prove over and over again, to students, teachers, and colleagues, that I can do the job. A white person is just assumed to be competent, unless they prove otherwise. ~*

In some cases, research participants indicate that the Black teacher's skills and abilities are undervalued:

*When the other teachers saw that I had it under control, they started asking me, 'what's the trick?' Like it's not about my abilities — there's something special that happened that now these kids who caused someone to be fired the year before, all those kids are under control and are lovely. So it wasn't about my ability, it was magic. ~*

One survey respondent noted that Black educators are so much of a rarity that students themselves are surprised to see them at the front of the classroom:

*Students will often treat me differently (initially). It takes a few weeks for their disbelief to dissipate; they are surprised that I am a real teacher. In some instances the students' media perception of Blacks is transferred to me. ~*

In fact, some who advance into leadership positions shared the backlash that they experienced:

*I always received strong evaluations as a teacher. When I started to rise above my white colleagues that is where the problems started. When I became a VP there was a stalling of my career for a number of years. I had a hard time moving to principal. I had to go through twice. One superintendent openly stated that she did not believe the experience that I had stated. I asked for an explanation and was not given one. I found that I had to stay quiet or risk not being promoted. ~*

Black educators also described micro-aggressions, the "brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages"<sup>33</sup> that tell them that they are out of place and do not belong as educators in Ontario's public schools:

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<sup>33</sup> Sue, D.W. (2010, Oct 05) Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Is subtle bias harmless? *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201010/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life>

*[My experience is] rooted in racism and not believing that an educator can be black. I had a supply teacher tell me I am not allowed to park my car in staff parking. Standing in front of the Principal's office—dressed as a professional—police officers asked if they were there for me. Attending a new job assignment and colleagues asking if I am a new caretaker. ~*

*You are very aware of the fact that you are a "minority," and that you don't necessarily belong. White Privilege is very real and in play in education. ~*

*I don't think that necessarily as a black person you're seen as equal... to a Caucasian teacher and [it's believed] that you shouldn't be there. ~*

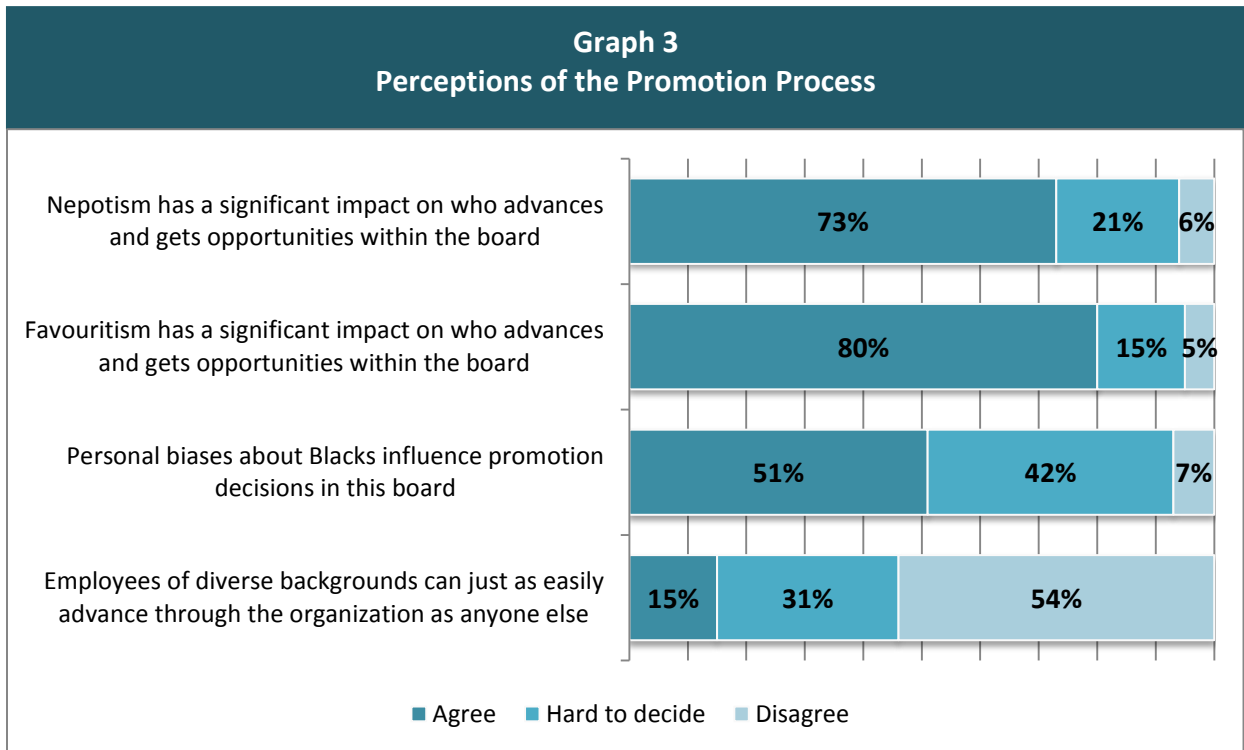
Some educators who were interviewed also expressed concern that the lack of Black educators dissuades Black students from pursuing a teaching career, which in turn further perpetuates racial disparity in teaching:

*[Black students] don't see themselves in the profession because of the systemic barriers that keep teachers of colour out of the system. It is a predominantly Caucasian profession and that's not by accident. It's not that Black people don't have the aptitude to teach. ~*

### 3.3 Perceptions of the Promotion Process

Each Ontario school board has its own promotion process that prepares and assesses teachers for advancement into administrative positions. These are formal, competitive processes meant to assess the skills and abilities of educators against the *Ontario Leadership Framework* developed by the Ministry of Education. The framework defines and identifies for educators the attributes and competencies that are considered to be important in a leader and allows emerging leaders to understand what they must do to be a successful leader in Ontario's public education system.

The online survey asked respondents about their perceptions of their board's promotion process. The majority of survey respondents felt that, despite the framework provided by the Ministry of Education, the promotion process within Ontario's school boards is based more on nepotism and favouritism than on skills and abilities to be an effective administrator.



As Graph 3 shows, the vast majority of survey respondents felt that nepotism (73%) and favouritism (80%) have a significant impact on who advances and gets opportunities within the board. Many commented that personal networks and informal mentoring was critical to the advancement within Ontario's school boards. This includes being provided with insider information about the promotion process and being provided with opportunities to meet and work with those who are involved in the promotion process. Access to these networks often gives an unfair advantage to certain groups of employees and allows "who you know" to outweigh "what you know" in the selection process. As survey respondents noted:

*I worked hard and had to take lots of extra courses, but I was bypassed on more than one instance when I was more than qualified for an opportunity that presented itself. However, I was told because someone knew the superintendent I would not get the job and that's the way it was. ~*

*The struggle to get ahead is harder [for Black educators]. I am less likely to have "inside information" or "speak the language." ~*

*I applied twice for lead-teacher position in my school, despite the fact that I am the most senior teacher who applied for the position and I am black, I was denied. With no apparent reason except for some flimsy reasons that were not tenable. ~*

*I was working as a Long-term Occasional teacher at the same school for many years. I had the support of the staff, students and parents at this school. Did not have the support of the Admin however. When a permanent part-time position came up, one I was qualified to teach, the principal decided to hire me for another 1 year contract position. He also knew I was qualified to teach the permanent and I had expressed my desire to get the permanent part-time position. He in turn hired the tall...girlfriend of his buddy the gym teacher. She had no experience in the board nor was she qualified to teach [the subject]. ~*

In addition, survey respondents expressed concern that the promotion process is not structured in a way to fairly assess candidates for positions of leadership:

*The promotion process, in my opinion, leaves much to be desired. I believe its design encourages biases... The mentor prepares the candidate for the promotion process. In my opinion, this is not natural, so the 'real' / 'true' professional is not encouraged to emerge during the interview. ~*

*The promotion process needs REAL HELP...In my opinion, if the candidate has a broad base of experiences to which the Interview Team is unfamiliar, the Team does not know how to manage the candidate's responses so the candidate is rejected because he/she does not 'fit their expectations'. Also, the process expects candidates to memorize their prepared responses to questions from the package. I believe the process is so very contrived that it leads to one questioning the validity of the whole process. THIS DOES NOT happen in other disciplines (e.g., Law, Nursing, etc.) ... so why in Education???* ~

Survey respondents were also concerned that personal biases held by those involved in the promotion process influence promotion decisions. Just over half (51%) agreed that personal biases about Blacks influence promotion decisions in the board. In addition, only 15% agreed that employees of diverse backgrounds can just as easily advance through the organization as anyone else. For some research participants, principals fail to see the leadership potential in Black and racialized educators and tend to groom and support White educators for advancement. As some see it, remaining in the board puts one at a disadvantage and the remedy is to gain experience in one board and seek advancement within another board:

*The board has failed to address this problem head on, however, it continues to hire teachers from other boards into positions of responsibility while many qualified teachers within the board are left behind because their principals do not appreciate the contributions of those teachers and therefore abstain from giving them the expected backing. ~*

*I know some Black educators who would make excellent principals, however they have not had any success. I encourage them to try in other boards, but they should not have to. ~*



Many indicate then that the path to advancement for White educators is very different from that of Black educators:

*There are certain barriers or hurdles for Black educators that are dismissed, ignored or removed for White educators. ~*

*I was not supported in order to complete my practicum that would allow me to complete the requirements for my Principal Qualification Program 2 training. My white colleague was supported in doing her practicum, (around the same time) and she became my VP in a matter of months. ~*

*White educators are given many more leadership opportunities. If you walk into any school success workshop, you see almost entirely white people, especially white women. There are schools that bring large teams where the entire group is white, blonde and female. Staff complain that workshops... strangely fill up quickly, even though the workshop is posted at 1 a.m. in the morning. Staff will try to sign up at 5 a.m. and find out that it is full. The question is 'How did those successful staff members know to sign up at 1 a.m. in the morning?' ~*

Some reported that their leadership journey is not supported to the same extent as that of their White colleagues and in some cases feel that their advancement was deliberately sabotaged by administrators:

*I feel that sometimes the ideas of a White teacher are given more preference and support. ~*

*I have never, nor (I suspect), will I ever have the liberty and autonomy to thrive, grow, create, challenge, advance, and succeed as my White colleagues do. I have never received as much support, encouragement, and comradery as my White colleagues do. ~*

*When you have an idea or initiative that could help you in your leadership journey, you either get pushed back or the idea is stolen and given to a white educator. When you are allowed to or when you finally find a way to showcase your leadership skill, such achievement is relegated to the background. As a black educator, I have written many proposals that were stolen and given to another white educator. When I won an honour roll award by the Toronto Star, my principal refused to acknowledge it until I challenged her. As the only male and one of most qualified teachers with a specialist in [a certain area], I was replaced, even when there were two openings. ~*

*I once started a program at my school, when the program became huge, one of the VPs, who is very close to the principal decided to highjack the program and made it her own... I feel depressed sometimes when I looked at many white*

*educators who have done less than I what I have done, but were quickly promoted to the role of VP. ~*

*I was once a highly successful VP and deprived of the opportunity to assume the role of Acting Principal when the position became open. INSTEAD, a white colleague was taken from a different school to be Acting Principal. I was then asked to seek a transfer to another school ...in the role of VP. ~*

Black educators repeatedly reported that they feel they have to be twice as good to be seen as leadership potential:

*[M]y results have to be twice as good as a white educator for me to be recognized. ~*

*My mother prepared me for this. She told me I have to work twice as hard to get half as far. ~*

It is important to note that not all research participants expressed difficulty advancing in the organization. The fact that there are African Canadians in senior positions within Ontario's school boards indicates that many can and do advance. Some research participants shared with us that they were identified by an administrator as having leadership potential and were supported to advance:

*The board and my school administration have supported me greatly and mentored me towards leadership. ~*

*I actually have been blessed and I enjoy working for this board. Yes there are strongholds and advancement must be made. Despite this, I have been blessed with mentors who truly believed in me. ~*

There were also some educators who indicated that from their perspective they could make more of an impact in the classroom and therefore they chose to remain there, rather than advance within the board:

*Being Black when I started to teach in the late 1970's was an asset to my career. As a Black woman, one can be seen as upwardly mobile and able to show the board's commitment to gender and racial equity. After being approached several times to go for promotions and seek administrative roles, I chose to work in my capacity as a Guidance Counsellor to assist students and parents to navigate the school system more effectively until retirement. ~*

Others indicated that they have seen the poor treatment of African Canadians who advanced into administrative positions and the amount of additional personal energy that it requires to be successful at that level and as a result have chosen not to seek advancement:

*No, I'm really not interested in entering that political realm ... I'm not interested in entering that level and for a number of reasons. I think you're moving far, far away from the classroom and from students... We used to have a black VP and she was pushed out. Just knowing that it could happen, and myself experiencing some of the bully tactics of the board or administrators, [makes me uninterested in that kind of advancement]. They give you the impression that you're lucky that you have a teaching job that pays well and don't necessarily try to go any higher. Unless you're able to be very good at code shifting<sup>34</sup> -- you'd have to be really, really well versed in code shifting. I don't think that your hard work and merit is enough. ~*

### 3.4 Networks and Networking

Throughout this study, many participants expressed concern that the small number of Black administrators and the exclusion of Black educators from the old boys' (and girls') club, means that they have limited access to decision-makers and limited opportunities to be mentored for advancement. They raised concerns that informal networks are used to pass on critical information about the organization, raise the profile of certain individuals, and provide information about the promotion process—all factors which are critical to individual success within the organization.

Participants shared that there are established and entrenched networks within each board that are based on personal and familial connections. These networks tend to exclude Black and other educators of colour. Compounding the effect of being excluded from these networks is the limited ability of Black and other racialized educators to create their own networks with the same reach and impact. This challenge stems from the relatively small number of educators of colour within Ontario's school boards, the small numbers in leadership positions, and their isolation within individual schools. As such, educators of colour have not developed the social networks essential to support their success within Ontario's school boards. The existing personal networks critical to securing employment and advancement opportunities serve to reinforce the racial disparity and racial hierarchy within Ontario's public school boards.

*This Board is very cliquey, so if you are not part of the social scene outside of the school, you are not going to be chosen, recommended, included in the "outside of school" discussions when transfers, new staff lists, new school hirings are being discussed. ~*

*Up until the time we got a new principal, I was never invited for these in-school opportunities such as Teacher-in-Charge when the administrator is gone. I didn't*

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<sup>34</sup> Code-shifting is the instant and frequent switching between two languages, communication or cultural styles.

*know how to get into that loop of people who were involved in it. I was never invited to whatever party they had where they talked about it. ~*

*The move from Vice Principal to Principal at the secondary level in my board, when I wanted to apply, was blocked because I was not part of the "in-group." ~*

Research participants noted that these networks are also used to broadcast negative perceptions about individual Black educators. Many voiced their fear of being "blacklisted" within their board if they are seen to be "troublemakers," which can include advocating for equity or making a human rights complaint. These "blacklists" are shared informally through these personal networks within the board. So, as some educators noted, if you have a bad experience with one administrator, that information is shared among administrators throughout the organization:

*Because of that one experience, I will never get promoted at this board. I'm thinking of moving to another province to advance. ~*

*Principals have power and they talk amongst one another. They support one another as well and "black list" you as an individual. ~*

*There is a culture where voices of those who are black or aware of issues of equity are... silenced and "black listed." ~*

So, while the formal organization policies may integrate principles of equity and even champion a diverse workforce, informal social networks may still be working to exclude or limit the advancement of African Canadians.

Research participants also stressed the importance of these personal networks to accessing leadership opportunities such as Department Head and opportunities at the board office, which are critical stepping stones to advancement. However, the number of these positions within each board is limited and, as many Black educators noted, access to these positions are closely guarded and reserved for those being groomed for advancement. They note that the path to promotion begins long before the promotion process and access to that pathway is based on personal connections and personal relationships:

*All the positions of responsibility in my school and all the schools I can think of are filled by White people. Some younger than me and some older, so I can't help but feel that race is a factor. If you go on the Ontario College of Teachers website and compare qualifications, I am more qualified than many of them. I should be able to become a principal tomorrow, but I can't even get a department head position at any school in this board. ~*

*The people already in the system influence who gets the promotion. It is really based on who you know. ~*

*Although it cannot be proven, there is rampant talk of people getting informal assistance from people who have access to information in the promotion process. ~*

*I had my principal qualification almost ten years ago. In the past, the board had a policy that you cannot apply for VP positions unless you are a head of department. Over and over again, I have applied for headship but could not get one. Even though the board has changed its policy on paper ... in reality the onus is still on your principal to determine if you are ready to apply to become a VP or not. ~*

One educator indicated that advancement within his board benefits those who have been coached and groomed to reflect, not challenge, the status quo because the board is not open to new ways of doing things, regardless of the benefit to the student:

*The ideal is that they are hiring people from diverse backgrounds, but they only hire people who have been mentored to fit into the current system, which means they hire the exact same kind of person, just with a different skin colour. ~*

The survey also asked educators who had applied for promotion but were unsuccessful, why they thought they were not promoted. Again, their responses point to the perception that personal connections and how well you are liked play a bigger role than ones skills and abilities in the promotion process:

*Don't know the people with the power very well. ~*

*Not given enough mentorship to prepare for the interview process. ~*

*I was not successful the first time that I went for promotion to principal. The feedback was not specific and I have never been told in what area I lacked. I was moved after my unsuccessful attempt. The new principal and superintendent were not supportive although I worked very hard. I was only told that "you do not have a presence." This was never explained to me. ~*

## 4. EVERYDAY RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

### 4.1 Marginalization and Isolation

While some Black educators with whom we spoke talked of the warm relationships they had with their colleagues, one common theme we heard was marginalization and isolation in the workplace. The lack of a welcoming and inclusive environment for Black educators can result from consciously or unconsciously held biased attitudes and the resulting personal discomfort White educators experience around African Canadians. It is worth noting that experiences described by participants in this research are strikingly similar to those of participants in research about Black nurses in Ontario.<sup>35</sup>

The Black educators we spoke with shared the various ways in which they are marginalized such as not being included in personal networks, not being invited to collaborate with colleagues, and colleagues' belittling of Black people in casual conversation. Even while they work with their White colleagues on a daily basis and may have cordial professional relationships, many indicated that they do not have close personal relationships with these colleagues, mainly because of the racial and cultural divide that exists.

They also shared the various micro-aggressions that they experience on a daily basis. Because these micro-aggressions are often dismissed as "jokes" or minor incidents, Black educators find it difficult to challenge the behaviour. The compounding effect on Black educators can be both personally and professionally significant.

Micro-aggressions such as the use of racist jokes, racial name calling, and racialized disrespect can also make the workplace uncomfortable and hostile for Black educators. Some educators spoke of hearing negative comments made either directly to them or in their presence, including colleagues joking about lynching, referring to Black students as "animals," and using the word "n\*\*\*\*\*" in conversation.

*The "N" word was used in casual conversation in our staffroom. I was introduced as "home girl" to a student teacher. When showing a picture of my grandchildren they were called, "cute little monkeys". ~*

*A colleague was shocked that I was raised by both parents and expressed it in the staff room. ~*

In some cases, Black administrators shared that they experience open hostility from senior leaders in the board. One administrator told us of the negative treatment she received from her

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<sup>35</sup> Das Gupta, T. (1996). Anti-Black Racism in Nursing in Ontario. *Studies in Political Economy*, (51) pp. 97-116.

superintendent, including feeling that a successful program she initiated and led was undermined by the superintendent. She also reported that whenever she tries to engage her superintendent in conversation, the superintendent simply walks away.

Other educators shared that in order to fit-in to a predominately White workplace they can't be themselves at work, and feel that they must consciously monitor their behaviour so that they don't reinforce the prevailing stereotypes about Blacks:

*It is a white system and as a black educator you have to fit into it. You are not allowed to be yourself, as it is normally interpreted in a different way and can be viewed as negative, and bias sets in, you are then labelled. ~*

*[You] have to prove yourself more than white educators and have to endure the same stereotypes from colleagues that they place and share with black students (i.e. background, upbringing, experiences, abilities, etc.)... If you have similar life experiences as white teachers, they are amazed and want to know how and why. They also may use a black teacher to confirm their thoughts about students families (i.e. "You made it so why don't they?") ~*

Research participants shared the ways race and gender intersects within Ontario workplaces, impacting the way Black men and women experience racism. The survey responses of Black women shed light on their experiences:

*As a woman I am judged and people comment on how I dress more. ~*

*I feel that when I speak I am seen as the angry black woman and my opinions are shut down and not valued. ~*

*I believe that as a Black female administrator—especially in the secondary school I—caretakers, vice principals, teachers and other staff do not seem to want me to be the one giving directives. In the beginning of my tenure I experienced resistance, sabotage, passive aggressive behaviour, gossip, lack of co-operation, distrust, second guessing, insubordination and things generally being made more difficult than they should be. As time went on, two to three years, some of the behaviour changed for the better. ~*

Black men also shared the ways negative perceptions of them and their capabilities affect their experiences:

*As a black male my experience has been different and unique from teacher's college, to being hired, to working in various boards. The difference has been the culture of the school I have had to adapt to, the students who have been unfamiliar with a person of my "race", heritage, and background; having to*

*battle both adult (colleagues, parents) and student perceptions and beliefs every day, all day. ~*

*Black men are marginalized and treated more harshly. They are viewed as aggressive and offenders. ~*

*Other teachers are fearful and feel threatened by you. ~*

*People seem to feel that Black men are to be afraid of. We are constantly seen as a threat regardless of how well we demonstrate our competence. ~*

*As a black man, it is always assumed that I am aggressive and intimidating. ~*

*As a black man, most of my past principals are white female. For some reason, when I approach them for any reason, it is either they respond in a very condescending manner or ignore or refuse to even have any tangible conversation with me. ~*

One Black man who was interviewed shared how he has had to moderate his persona at work to counter the negative stereotypes about Black men:

*How I'm treated has a lot to do with my public persona. I'm not necessarily as straightforward and outgoing as I normally would be. I've had to temper that because as studies show, Black men are judged more harshly, are seen to be more aggressive when they are not, more threatening even when they are not, so I've had to soften a lot of what I say and be less direct. There is a set of assumptions that mainstream society has that hinders the individuality of Black men and Black women, it's just different sets of assumptions. While my experience may be different from that of a Black woman, the common thread that runs through is that people in the mainstream see us as the sum of their assumptions and not necessarily as who we actually are. ~*

Having a network of understanding colleagues supports an educator's career. For Black and other educators of colour, creating their own networks can be a valuable source of emotional and professional support as these networks can help them learn to navigate the organization as well as understand and deal with the systemic and individual racism that they may experience in the organization. However, opportunities for networking are limited because of the relative isolation of Black educators within individual schools. Many of those with whom we spoke indicated that they are either the only Black teacher in their school or one of two or three. This reality was so common that many referred to themselves as "the only," where the adjective has become a noun.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Bolton, K. and Feagin, J. (2004) *Black in Blue: African-American Police Officers and Racism*. New York: Routledge. p. 152.



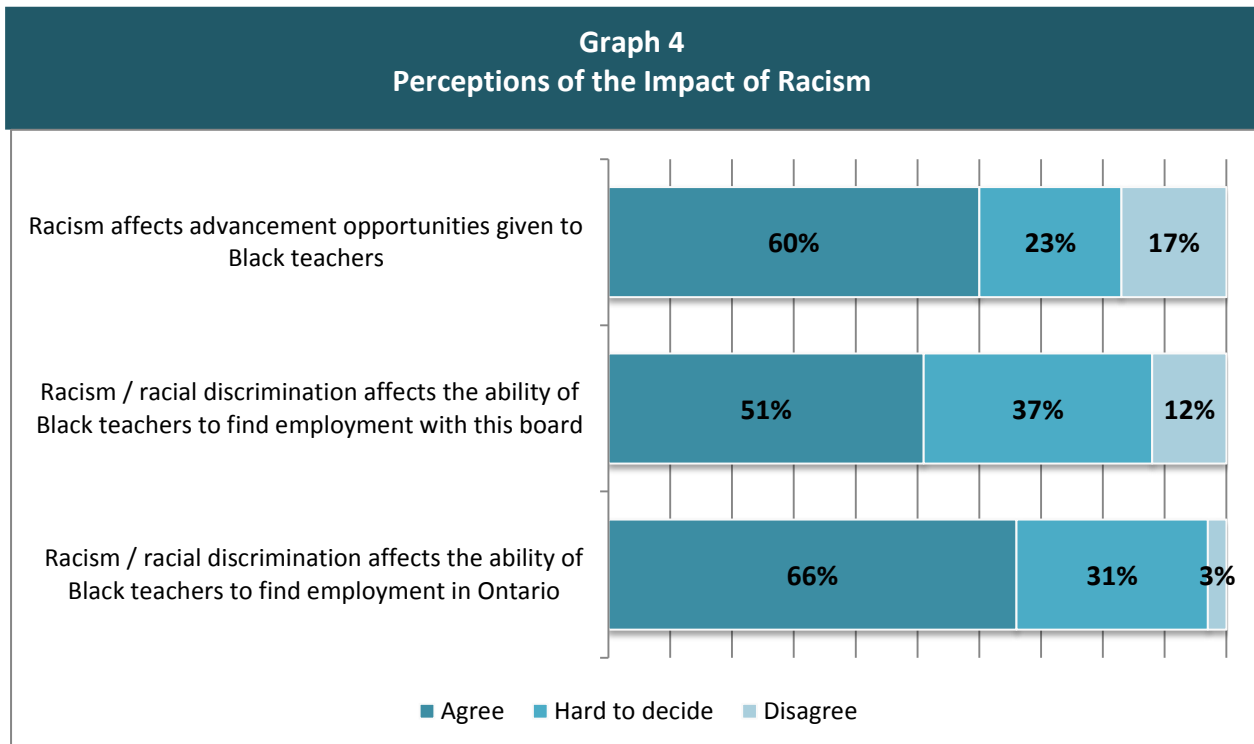
Some research participants also expressed a hesitancy to network with other Black educators because their White colleagues view two or more Blacks in discussion with suspicion. In one school where there are about ten Black teachers, we were told these teachers don't get together as a group so as not to draw attention to themselves. When we asked this educator why the Black educators at his school don't get together as a group, he responded:

*We actually joke about that. Two of you talking is ok, but when there's three of you talking there could be a coup! When there's more than two, people stop and make comments, which is strange. And so it just doesn't happen. The environment really is not supportive of it. You don't want to be seen as a non-team player. Even when we are just talking and joking around... Caucasian teachers when they come upon you talking in the hall they do comment. ~*

Some also voiced their hesitancy to be involved with the Black educator networks in various school boards as they perceive that members of these organizations, particularly the leaders, are "blacklisted" from advancement.

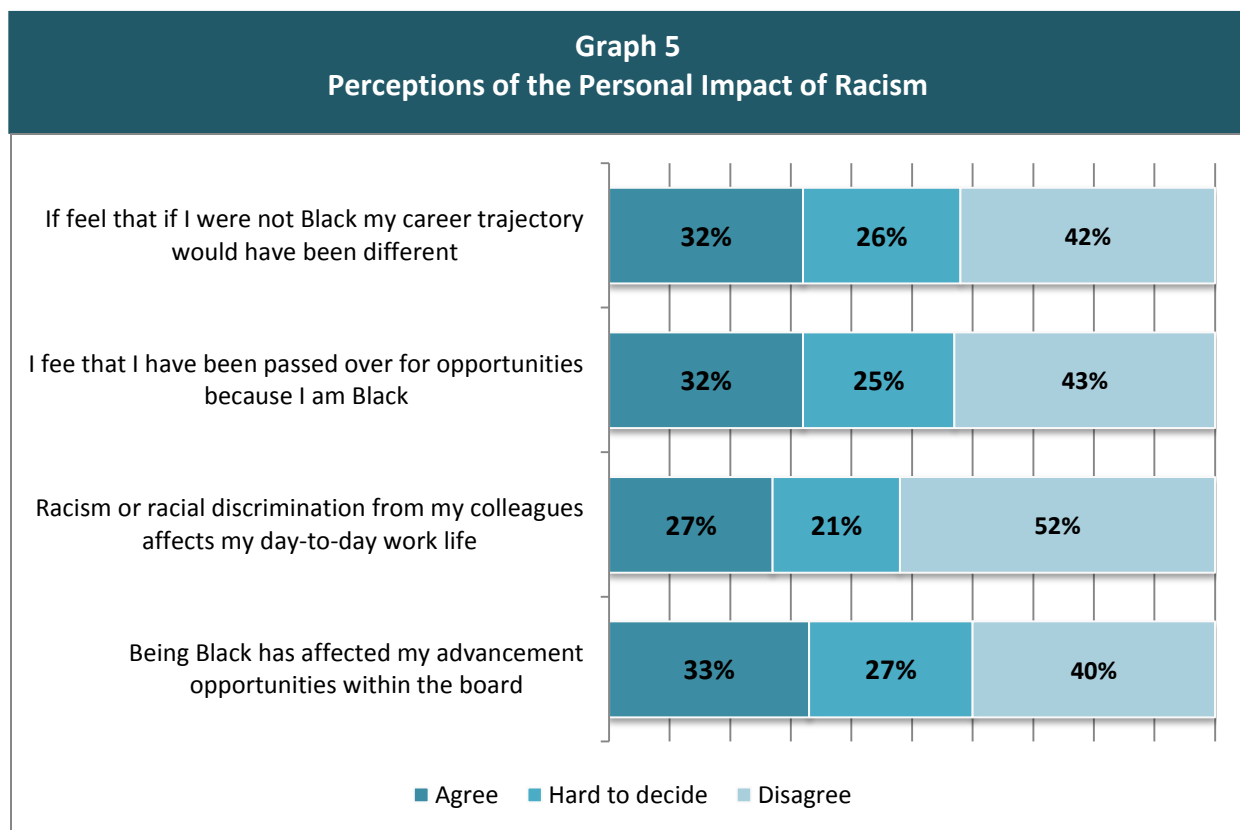
## 4.2 Racism, Harassment and Retaliation

Survey respondents were asked about their perceptions of the impact racism has on Blacks generally and on them specifically.



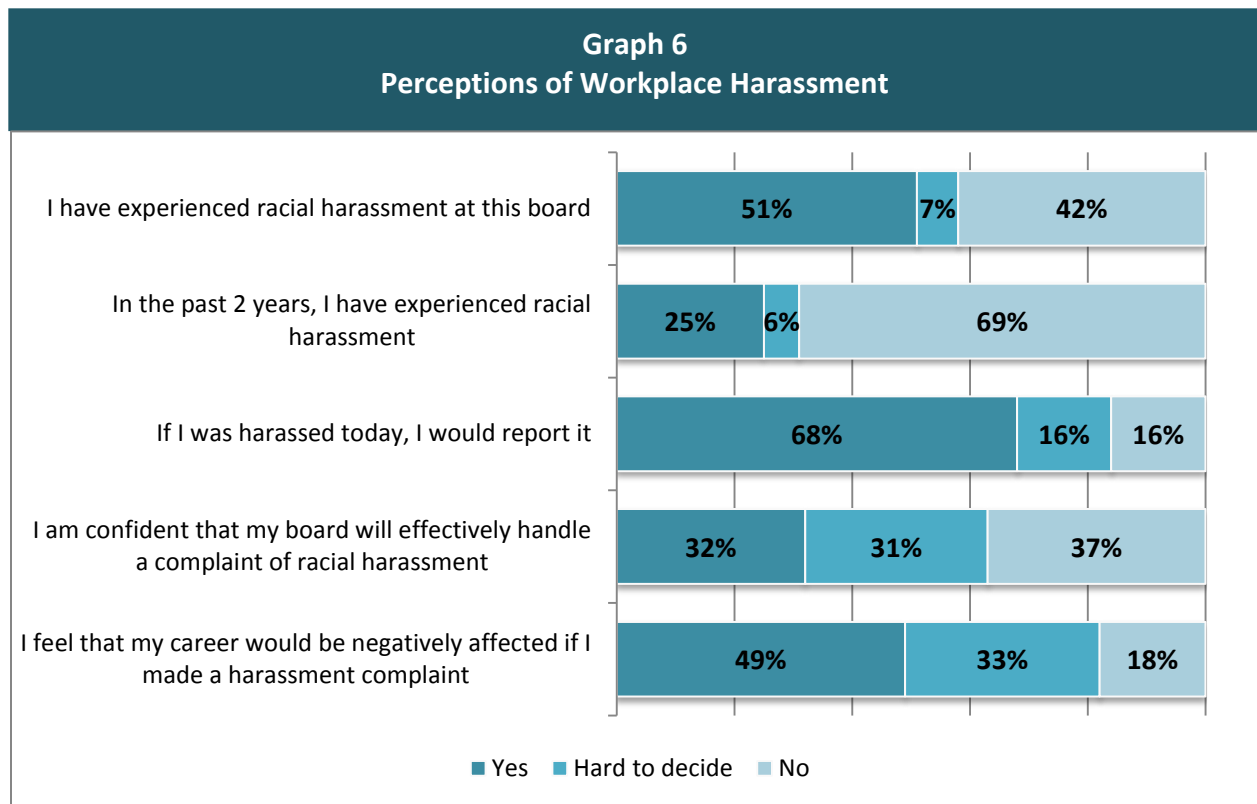
Graph 4 shows, survey responses to questions about the impact of racism on Black educators generally. 60% of survey respondents agreed that racism affects advancement opportunities given to Black teachers. 51% agreed that racism and racial discrimination affects the ability of Black teachers to find employment within their school board. 66% agreed that racism and racial discrimination affects the ability of Black teachers to find employment in Ontario.

Survey respondents were also asked about the impact of racism on themselves. The results show that while the majority of survey respondents perceived that racism affects the employment and advancement opportunities of Black educators, they were less likely to think that racism has personally affected their career and their day-to-day work lives.



As Graph 5 shows, 32% of survey respondents agreed that if they were not Black, their career trajectory would have been different. 32% felt that they have been passed over for opportunities because of their race. 27% agreed that racism or racial discrimination from their colleagues affects their day-to-day work life and 33% agreed that being Black has affected their advancement opportunities within the board.

Survey respondents were also asked about their experiences of workplace harassment.



As Graph 6 shows, 51% reported that they have experienced racial harassment at their current school board, while 25% reported that they have experienced racial harassment in the past two years.

While 68% reported that if they were harassed today they would report it, only 32% report that they are confident that a complaint of racial harassment would be handled effectively by their board.

Importantly, close to half of all respondents (49%) feel that their career would be negatively affected if they made a complaint of harassment. As noted earlier in this report, in an organization in which personal networks and the recommendation of your administrator is critical if one is to be considered for advancement and other opportunities, the fear of being "blacklisted" is a consideration for many when deciding how to deal with an issue of harassment. Both Black men and women shared concerns about addressing racial harassment because they did not want to make their situation worse by reinforcing stereotypical ideas about Black people being angry, threatening, confrontational, or as having a chip on their shoulder. As noted earlier in this report, some survey respondents expressed concern about

raising issues they face in the workplace as it may reinforce existing stereotypes about Black people:

*If you voice your opinion, you are considered to be "aggressive" while a white person who made the same comment would be considered to be "assertive." ~*

Black educators were also worried about retaliation if they raised concerns about, or made efforts to address, the racism they experience. Survey respondents were asked if they experienced harassment or discrimination, whether they reported it, and, if not, why not. Some shared that they reported the harassment or discrimination while others dealt with the issue on their own. For those who did not report an experience of discrimination or harassment, fear of reprisal was the main reason given:

*What purpose would that serve? Not sure it would yield a positive outcome. It wasn't that big a deal. Happens all the time. ~*

*I experienced harassment by a colleague and did not report it—due to fear of reprisal. ~*

*It would be used negatively against me. ~*

*Because I did not want to be blackballed... need the reference. ~*

*Because if you are labeled a trouble maker, you will not advance in your career. ~*

*I became aware of the board culture especially among the principals and vice-principals, which is to label you as anti-board policy. Once you are labeled, it becomes more difficult for you to advance. It is better to be quiet, suck it up and pretend it did not happen. ~*

*Fear of retribution. Being the only visible minority on staff leaves me in an isolated, vulnerable position and I don't feel comfortable speaking out against the things I see, hear, or experience. ~*

Some educators shared their treatment when they did raise concerns in the past:

*There is no support for an individual in such a position. Many persons feel entitled to harass. When I approached a principal for help, I was informed that there was nothing he could do about it. ~*

*I reported it once and it affected my career negatively. On the second occasion I dealt with it myself. ~*

*It was a waste of time and resources. It used up \$ to investigate to find the individuals at fault only to see them get promoted shortly after. ~*

*Blame the victim approach. I was branded as a trouble maker that everyone should be scared of. I was denied promotion for a long time. ~*

*I approached another principal and was informed that there must be another reason for the mistreatment and that I only perceived the problem as a race issue, but it was likely just jealousy. ~*

*When I went to the relevant authorities, they were more concerned with going through the motions of addressing the issue, rather than actually dealing with it. THEN I got labeled a trouble maker. ~*

*Not only are opportunities for employment and promotion more limited for Blacks and other racialized educators, people who speak up against these injustices are informally targeted. This is done in subtle ways such as removal of support when the employee is experiencing difficulty, ignoring the employee when he/she reports issues on concern (e.g., the employee will raise examples of others saying offensive remarks—the investigator will conclude that the results are inconclusive and will bring the matter to a close. The focus stays on making the parties reach an agreement where both can get along), 'make mountains out of mole hills' attitude whenever a complaint is brought against the targeted employee (e.g., a different employee accuses the Black employee of saying something considered offensive and it is investigated fully. The focus now is finding out what the Black person did wrong). The end-result is that the person feels that they are in a fish bowl judged against criteria that has nothing to do with his or her job. It is clear that the person who speaks up is unpopular and that he/she should expect blow back. ~*

A few spoke about being unaware of their right to a harassment-free workplace and how to make a complaint if they chose to:

*As a recent immigrant at the time I was not aware of my rights. It is difficult to prove that some actions are racially motivated. ~*

*I don't even know how I would report it. This board doesn't tell employees these things. ~*

And others were sceptical that their complaint would be investigated fairly and objectively:

*The system is not set up to effectively investigate such a claim. The system is also set up to support itself—like the police, they investigate themselves and as a result things haven't changed and those who are victimized do not get justice. ~*

There was also some concern that personal and family connections within the school board make it difficult to raise issues of harassment or discrimination:

*The harasser's family connections to the inner circle of power was intimidating. ~*

*I know my career would be negatively impacted because of the circle of friends and affiliation that exists. ~*

These fears mean that Black educators who feel that they have experienced harassment or discrimination often have to choose between exercising their rights under the Ontario *Human Rights Code* and potentially severe career consequences in an even more hostile workplace.

## 5. THE VALUE OF BLACK EDUCATORS

While this study focuses on the experiences of Black teachers in Ontario's public education system, we would be remiss to have this conversation without considering the impact of Black educators on Black students. Because research shows a connection between Black teachers and Black student success, the under-representation of Black educators is not only an issue of equitable hiring and promotion but also a contributor to student success and the preparation of all students for an increasingly diverse workforce.

### 5.1 Student Achievement

*When Black children fail in school, so often there are not raised eyebrows, there is little outrage and there is no handwringing. It is expected and it is normal. Yet when especially poor Black children do well in school, it is met with surprise. It is seen as almost miraculous... And many of these "successful" students come to see themselves as abnormal, freaks, even outcasts, castigated by their peers.<sup>37</sup>*

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Many studies, which examine the underachievement of Black students in Ontario schools, point to a lack of Black teachers as a contributing factor to this phenomenon. In *Examining the Case for "African-Centred" Schools* (based on interviews with Black students about their school experiences) George Dei writes:

Three primary concerns pervade student narratives about school experiences: differential treatment by race, the absence of Black/African-Canadian teachers, and the absence of Black/African-Canadian history in the classroom... Many students describe encounters with authority and power structures that are perceived not to work in their interest. Students describe struggles to construct self- and group-cultural-identities in a school environment that does not adequately highlight their cultural presence, heritage, and history in both the official and hidden school curriculum. They also describe attempts to excel in the face of unflattering teacher expectations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> National Black Child Development Institute. (2015). Being black is not a risk factor: a strengths-based look at the state of the Black child. p 17. Retrieved from <http://www.nbcdi.org/resource>

<sup>38</sup> Dei, G.J.S. Examining the Case for "African-Centred" Schools in Ontario. *McGill Journal Of Education / Revue Des Sciences De L'éducation De McGill*, 30(2) pp.179-198. Retrieved from <http://mje.mcgill.ca/article/viewFile/8239/6167>

In the 2008 *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* report, commissioned by the government of Ontario, McMurtry and Curling concluded that creating teacher workforce that reflects the student body is an "urgent priority":

In the education system, we feel that the most urgent priority is to bring more teachers who reflect and represent the diversity of the students into schools in priority neighbourhoods. This cannot be left to chance or to the vagaries of the hiring practices of individual schools. Through whatever mechanisms the Ministry of Education has or can develop quickly, we believe that action on this issue must be advanced immediately.<sup>39</sup>

While teachers from any ethno-racial group can be effective teachers of Black students, Black educators offer a great deal that contributes not only to the success of Black students, but to the success of all students. Hiring more Black educators is certainly not the cure-all that will entirely close the racial gap in student achievement. Instead, it is one element needed to remove the systemic barriers to Black student success. As one research participant indicated, there is a need for school boards to act on an issue that has been extensively studied:

*There is a real sense of urgency to address these issues. Year after year after year we're failing Black students. It's been documented since the 1980s. Boards need to ask, "If we saw every Black boy entering kindergarten as a future doctor, what would we do differently?" ~*

Participants in this study are painfully aware of the achievement gap between Black and White students. They are also aware of the urgency to close the achievement gap for Black students because without the right education they will be ill-equipped to participate successfully in the 21st century knowledge-based economy. Many participants expressed an understanding of the ways in which public education in Ontario systematically fails Black students. Most Black educators with whom we spoke recognize that the systemic racism Black students face in Ontario schools leads to the disengagement of Black students, high drop-out rates, and their over-representation in non-Academic programs of study. They recognized that their presence and commitment to their students have a positive effect on Black student success:

*Black students having critically-aware Black teachers can have a positive impact. These teachers would advocate for culturally responsive approaches, have high expectations for students, and attempt to keep disengaged students in school. ~*

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<sup>39</sup> McMurtry, R. Curling, A. (2008). *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*. Volume 1, Chapter 9. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume1/chapter09\\_structural\\_reform.aspx](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume1/chapter09_structural_reform.aspx)



*Black educators have a very positive influence on black students as they can associate the black educator to people in their family who they love and trust. I'm curious to see if black students who have more black teachers if they would choose a career in education. ~*

*Students are motivated by seeing educators who look like them and understand them. ~*

*In many cases both share common experiences. Students are provided with role models. Many Black teachers fill extra-curricular roles for students. Black teachers can help administrator's with Black student issues (facilitate relationships between students and white administration). ~*

*Black educators bring an experience that no other group can bring to the classroom. Here are a few of those experience: 1) The black parents and students see the black educator as a role model. 2) This presence encourages the black student to aspire to achieve. There have been research studies that have shown this to be true. ~*

Black educators are more aware of racism and often have a better understanding of the systemic nature of anti-Black racism in the school system and the impact it has on the success of Black students. As such, unlike many of their colleagues and society in general, they don't see the underachievement of Black students as "normal":

*[When White teachers see a Black student drop out of school] they see a drop out. They don't see someone who has been pushed out due to the experiences that that child has had with the system all the way through. I don't think they see it as a problem. They don't have to. ~*

While it certainly is not a cure-all, hiring more Black educators may be a powerful tool in increasing student achievement. Student engagement is multidimensional, involving a motivational component, a behavioural component, and a cognitive component.<sup>40</sup> Black educators can uniquely contribute to the motivational component by serving as role models for Black and other racialized students. They can contribute to the behavioural component by forming culturally informed relationships and implementing culturally responsive classroom management techniques. Black educators can also contribute to the cognitive component by helping to ensure that Black students are engaged with a curriculum that reflects and is relevant to them. As such, Black educators contribute to effective instruction of Black students,

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<sup>40</sup> National Black Child Development Institute. (2015). Being black is not a risk factor: a strengths-based look at the state of the Black child. p 18. Retrieved from <http://www.nbcdi.org/resource>

and as other research demonstrates, effective instruction has more influence on student performance than do other resources within the school.<sup>41</sup>

## 5.2 Role Models

*Few would say that a black child needs to be taught by a black teacher or that a Latino or Asian child cannot thrive in a class with a white teacher. “Ultimately, parents are going to respect anybody who they think cares for their kids,” said Andres Antonio Alonso, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. “But if there are no people who somehow mirror the parents and the kids, then I think there could be a problem.”<sup>42</sup>*

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Black educators also have an important symbolic impact on a racially diverse student population. In the face of persistent negative stereotypical images from news and entertainment media about Blacks, the presence of Black educators as competent, caring professionals helps to counter these messages and sends a strong message to both Black and non-Black students that African Canadians are much more than what is portrayed in the media and that they have a place in Canadian society. Being seen by other educators in leadership roles throughout the school and school board also helps other educators see the potential of Black students.

The educators with whom we spoke understood the important role that they play in the school. They know that many students will go through Ontario's public education system never having a Black or racialized teacher. They understand that for many Black and non-Black students, they are likely the only Black educator that these children will ever have and they know how important that experience is in shaping student perceptions of African Canadians:

*Kids no matter where they are, need to see that Black educators exist and that not just Black educators, but Black people in general, are caring, kind, competent, principled, intelligent, all those things that good teachers are. I like to think that I'm changing their cognitive map—their awareness and idea of what a Black man is, is different because they've had a year with me. And even if they haven't been in my class just seeing me in the hallway, talking to their friends about how*

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<sup>41</sup> Bireda, S., Chait, R. (2011). *Increasing Teacher Diversity: Strategies to Improve the Teacher Workforce*. Center for American Progress. p 2. Retrieved from [https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/11/pdf/chait\\_diversity.pdf](https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/11/pdf/chait_diversity.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Rich, M. (April 11, 2015). Where Are the Teachers of Color? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/sunday-review/where-are-the-teachers-of-color.html?ref=opinion&\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/sunday-review/where-are-the-teachers-of-color.html?ref=opinion&_r=2)

*much fun we have in class, about how I'm really strict, the high expectations that I have, all the cool stuff they learned, and how they can come to me and talk to me if they're hurt. Those are the things that change a child's impression of what a good person looks like. People go through the public education system never having had a teacher of colour. So if everything they know about Black people is from a biased perspective, what are you going to think about Black people when you get to be the age of majority and you're voting, or you're policing, or you're litigating or judging. What are you going to think about Black people then and how is that going to impact marginalized people? ~*

*It is vital for black and white children to observe that black educators are a contributing force to their academic development. It reinforces positive associations of black people to all students. It reduces stereotypes and misconceptions. ~*

*Black teachers are seen as role models. Students can learn from the educators and be proud of their heritage. Students will aspire to be like them and contribute positively to society. ~*

*We Black educators are proof positive of university educated success in our communities, however we also bring more diversity to classroom experiences for all students by addressing issues of racism and diverse cultural experience in society instead of the largely prevalent Eurocentric focus of the average classroom. ~*

*I believe when Black students see Black educators, in all aspects of education, they see Blacks as professionals and leaders as opposed to just rappers, athletes or thugs. ~*

*Black educators are extremely important to Black students. We act as role models, mentors and are able to communicate with students and their families at a different level. ~*

*Black educators are able to provide Black students with a concrete example of the potential that they have as a racialized group. Too often the media provides negative stereotypes of our people and seeing educators who expect great things from them and break those stereotypes could have a great impact on Black students and their aspirations. ~*

Some educators spoke of how the education system works with society as a whole to stereotype and problematize Blacks in general and Black youth in particular. This makes some children and youth feel ashamed to be Black. They spoke of how the education system can shame Black children through a Eurocentric curriculum that redacts Blacks and their contributions to Canadian society, by the low expectations teachers have of them, and by streaming Black children into non-academic programs of study. As one educator noted, the lack

of positive role models in the school further contributes to this shaming and to the injury to the psyche of Black students when they do not see themselves reflected in the education system:

*Black students tell their teachers that they are ashamed to be Black. I doubt many White educators have had students express shame about their Whiteness although I admit that I could be wrong. This is my impression, based on lived experience and conversation with other racialized colleagues. ~*

Black educators who themselves are products of Ontario's public school system were keenly aware of the issues for Black students. Indeed, some discussed their experiences of attending nearly all-White schools and the negative treatment they received by students and teachers and how these interactions shaped their understanding of racism. Some also shared that being a role model was part of their reason for going into education—they wanted to make the education experience of Black children better than their own:

*I know what it's like to be one of the only children of colour in the class. Moving through the public education system, it was tough—it influences who you become. There were certain parts of myself that I doubt. I'm always conscious of the stereotypes. I was always conscious that I was the spokesperson for my race and would do what I could do dissuade people from thinking that way. It's tiring and it's stressful and I would rather not see other black kids go through what I had to go through. ~*

Some of those we interviewed also thought that seeing Black educators was also important if Black students are to see teaching as a profession open to them:

*I did not see any administrators of colour until my last year of high school. So this concept of being Black and an educator who imparts knowledge in Ontario was an alien concept to me. I didn't know it was possible. I think a lot of Black kids don't think that it is possible either because of their experience growing up in this system. ~*

*It is aspirational for the students. You can only go towards what you know. So if all they've ever seen is White teachers, they think teaching is a White job. When I taught in northern Ontario, none of the Aboriginal students I taught considered going into teaching. All the teachers they've ever seen were White. So that's the first and most important role that Black teachers serve—they give students in the class the opportunity to see Blacks successful, and a Black man in my case, who are not a rapper or a basketball player. ~*

Black educators were happy to make a positive contribution to students and the school community but are also conscious of the toll being the only or one of only a few Black teachers can take. Some also shared the perception that Black educators were hired to handle problems

with Black students at the school. As a result, they often take on disproportionate amounts of mentoring of Black students and also support other teachers to deal with Black students and parents. These educators were also concerned that they are also expected to be experts on all matters related to Blacks or equity in the school. As research participants noted:

*There is the assumption that because there is a black teacher on staff that they have covered themselves when it comes to diversity and refer to the teacher when there are issues with the black community. You become the expert in all things "black" whether you want to or not. ~*

*In this board Black educators are fewer in number and are expected to be the touch point person for all equity issues. ~*

*Being the only Black educator in most of the schools I taught at, and the only voice of the Black students and community made me stronger. White teachers were good and meant well but some did not understand their privilege. When issues of racism happened in the larger community, I was always asked to explain. ~*

*As an administrator I spend time with White educators in teaching them the lens that they have when teaching Black students. There is a lack of understanding of Black students' experiences. ~*

### 5.3 Culturally Informed Relationships

*We need to speak up and say that cultural competence is professional competence, because you can't teach students if you don't actually value the students as students.<sup>43</sup>*

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All educators that we interviewed agreed that Black students experience racism in Ontario's public schools as it is embedded in the attitudes of educators, formed by unconscious racism and a lack of cultural understanding. These attitudes can sour relationships with Black students and can impact decisions that can negatively impact Black students.

*So I do think that they experience racism. I think the reason that they find school boring is that they don't connect with what teachers are sharing with them. I've been through this with my own children and I know that a lot of it is that they're not doing things or saying things that my kids identify with because it's different than what my family experiences... So the kids get further and further*

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<sup>43</sup> Quinlan, C. (2015, May 22). Students Should Learn More About Their Perceptions of Race, But Don't Leave Out Teachers. *Think Progress*. Retrieved from: <http://thinkprogress.org/education/2015/05/22/3662020/hard-un-teach-racism-teachers-still-discriminate/>

*disengaged. So they think 'why am I listening to you up there telling me that I need to learn this math or this language, who cares what the circumference of a circle is.' So until teachers can figure that piece out a little bit better, there are going to be kids, not just black kids who are going to be disengaged and who are going to be further and further marginalized. That's why dropout rates increase.~*

As with all Canadians, the opinions of educators about African Canadians are formed by the stereotypes and biased information they get from news and entertainment media. In addition, media that educators consume may shape and reinforce perceptions that the average Black family, and Black culture more generally, is dysfunctional and does not value education. This view ignores the many strengths of Black families and Black culture that have allowed people of African descent to survive the brutalities of systemic racism. It also does not reflect an understanding of present-day systemic racism and how it operates in the education system.

Stereotypes which vilify Black people in general, and Black youth in particular, are pervasive in society. These stereotypes can cause White educators to view and define Black people as having and creating social problems. The manifestation of these views can be expressed in discussions or interactions with students and, as some Black educators told us, in the teachers' casual conversations amongst themselves. Negative attitudes toward Black people can then impact how Black students are treated and taught:

*There are some teachers who would do things, but in a patronizing way and kids pick things up. Even 5 year olds will say that the teacher doesn't like me... So they drop out emotionally in grades 7 and 8 and sometimes the parents don't have the knowledge to help them. Sometimes the parents blame the children. But the teacher doesn't believe or reinforce that 'they can and they will succeed'. If you've already affected their self-esteem, they can't cope... They discourage a lot of the black kids. ~*

Black educators come from similar cultural backgrounds and experience the world in similar ways because of their common racial heritage. This shared lived experience is particularly important when students are experiencing challenges that are rooted in racism, inequality or cultural misunderstanding. Black educators who have gone through Ontario's public education system themselves also understand the experiences of Black students in the school environment and can thus act as valuable sources of navigational capital.<sup>44</sup> Black educators use this cultural knowledge to build and sustain meaningful relationships with their students and support them to understand and overcome experiences of racism.

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<sup>44</sup> "Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind". (see Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), pp. 69-91.)

Survey respondents commented on how they are able to form culturally informed relationships with Black students that are significantly different from the relationships these students have with most White educators:

*A strong black teacher who engages students of all ethnicities is essential to creating a positive school environment. However, being a black teacher, I can say and respond to my black students in a way that is culturally responsive and my students understand that I have their best interest at heart. They appreciate that I am real with them and that I understand their struggles. I have the ability to communicate with them in a way my white teachers are unable to. Being a black educator also allows me to see the students in a different light, I don't see "attitude" but I let them know that I understand their struggles and that they can let down their guard. I am not there to judge them but help them in whatever capacity that I can. ~*

*I feel that white teachers may or may not be aware of the stereotypes they are perpetuating/they have when interacting with black children. I feel that they are more aggressive with black children and teach the curriculum in a very Eurocentric way. I feel, as a black teacher, I am aware of the need to practice culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as a stance to empower and engage all students. ~*

*I was a black student in a school with teachers who did not look anything like me. Some of my teachers tried to hinder my progress and I see the same today with many students of colour...The number of black students not graduating and those who are suspended or excluded speak volumes! ~*

*I had to fight my way through racist teachers in elementary, high school and University to succeed in spite of them. Oh boy, could I tell you some stories! Growing up, my parents told me "You have to be twice as good to get half the marks or half the opportunity that the white ones get." And I took that to heart. I had teachers and more importantly, professors, who were supposed to be teaching me how to be a teacher, but instead they seemed hell bent on pressuring me to fail. Maybe they figured, if they made it hard enough, I would just quit. Little do they know that I have been fighting this battle for as long as I can remember. Resilience is something that I have as a Black educator. I can deal with just about anything life or a classroom throws at me. That's not something every teacher is prepared for. ~*

*Some of them see our kids as animals, and they make those kinds of references. They see Black children as older than they actually are, which equates to being less innocent and less deserving of protection and care and it comes through in the way that they speak about Black kids. I sit in the staffroom and, because I sound the way I sound and grew up where I grew up, I don't know if they feel like*

*they're not actually talking to a Black man. But the stuff that comes out of their mouths is unsettling, let's just put it that way. There is definitely a bias—they don't speak about Black children the way they speak about White children. ~*

Black educators also see through the persona that Black youth put on to mask their pain or trauma or protect themselves from the racism they experience in their lives:

*Unlike other races who may find black students intimidating, we are often able to see through the bravado and have real conversations with them. I think students won't genuinely connect with a teacher simply because they are black. Likewise, I think students can genuinely connect with teachers who may not be black. The point is that I believe there are more opportunities for these genuine connections between teachers and students when there is mutual understanding and respect. Even the most difficult student will work their butt off for a teacher they respect and have a good relationship with and whom they genuinely believes cares about them and wants them to succeed. ~*

*When I started at one school White teachers warned me about some Black students. But honestly the problems they had with those students I didn't have with those students. I think it's because they related to me—here's a teacher who looks like me, he's probably gone through some of the things that I've gone through growing up. His style of parenting is probably similar to my parents' style of parenting, and so on and so forth. So here is someone they can relate to. ~*

Black teachers also indicated that they are better able to see past race and the stereotypes that society has created about Black families and Black students. They are able to see the individual and the challenges they might be experiencing:

*I was Teacher-in-Charge for a day and a White teacher asked me to have a conversation with one of the students in his class who was giving him attitude all the time. He was staring—he didn't immediately get to work...But in talking to the student and reading the student's file, I found out the student had a learning difficulty. He needed time to process the information from the teacher. So when he was staring he was still processing what the teacher said...If that was a White student, the teacher would have done some investigating into the problem, instead of just trying to address the behaviour that manifested. ~*

*So, why do other teachers do that? It's because of what they see and hear in the media; what they've grown up knowing and understanding; the structures in society that sets black people up for failure in a lot of ways. So, they live their lives carrying that with them. I don't think they don't want the child to succeed, I think they just come in with those perceptions, "Oh, he's going to be a bit lazy," or "he's going to be focused on athletics, so let's push him in that direction," "he's a black boy and he's really active, so we'll push him in that way and make sure he*



*makes the team," but he may not be successful anywhere else. I see things like that. Then the other piece is the family, "He doesn't get his homework done because that mother or that family doesn't check it, so what do you want me to do," but they're not considering that there are other kids at home and the parents are doing shift work so they're home from 3:30 to 8:00 before an adult comes home. They don't see those pieces, and that that child is responsible for two other siblings and for making dinner and getting it ready so homework is not at the top of the list. They don't see that, they just think lazy parents. ~*

Some research participants also indicated that helping Black students understand how they are treated, and how to interpret events that they perceive to be racism, was an important role that they play. While students may suspect that they are being treated differently, they may not be able to identify the reason for this treatment. As such, Black teachers can help them identify the issue and help students develop coping strategies:

*Yes, I think Black students experience racism because I do as an adult in the school. So, if I'm experiencing it as an adult who is on par with everyone else in that school, economically, educationally, and in every other way, if I'm experiencing it, then clearly the kids must. But kids may not be able to identify it. It may be very covert, very subtle... but I do think kids face racism. They face it from their peers, as well as from staff. ~*

*The impact of Black educators on Black students is enormous; the students have someone to relate to and seek help from. The students have a figure they could go to for assistance and support academically, emotionally, and/or spiritually. ~*

*Yes, students are more likely to approach me with their problems and concerns. If they feel they aren't being heard and respected by other teachers on staff, they know they can come to me and I'll listen to them and hear them out. ~*

*Having personal and historical context has allowed me to recognize micro-aggressive behaviours and racial bias of non-Black educators. Non-Black educators quickly discard these behaviours when Black students or parents express feelings of racial discrimination or differential treatment. ~*

*Black students seek me out to talk to me and when I ask why they say [the White teachers] "wouldn't understand." ~*

*Black students would come to me when they experience incidents they may deem to be racist. I would help them distinguish between what are valid expectations versus what is racial. I'd go over a checklist with them of excellent behaviours and what are expectations of every student regardless of race. We can then look at what is racism and what is not. ~*

*When I came to this school, the Black students were saying that there was an issue of racism and that they weren't being treated fairly... I helped create an Afrocentric club... I looked at it from my own personal history—my father was from the United States and in those days they couldn't even share the washroom with whites. I was determined to make sure black students know who they are and know their history. When they get discouraged, we can remind them that Harriet Tubman didn't get discouraged. We can share our personal experiences and experiences of people we know, which a lot of white teachers can't share.... I tell the kids that you have to prove yourself to the world, don't let them hold you back. If you want it go for it, let no one dissuade you. You might be the only one, but don't give up. They have to develop a mindset that 'I will be successful and no one will stop me'. Even if you fail the first time, try again. If you keep the attitude that you will make it, you will. ~*

## 5.4 Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

*We have shown experimentally, for the first time, that teacher responses can contribute to racial disparities in discipline. In fact, teacher responses may even help to drive racial differences in student behavior -- differential treatment by teachers, to some extent, may inspire repeated misbehavior by black students.<sup>45</sup>*

Research in Canada and the United States shows that Black students are disproportionately expelled and suspended by the education system. These studies also show that teachers tend to punish Black students more harshly even when their behaviour is the same as White students.<sup>46</sup> This reality was evident to most Black educators we spoke with:

*It's damaging to Black students to see yourself and your presence pathologized. The things that White children get away with Black students wouldn't get away with. So everyday you'd see black boys and girls at the office or in detention or in the hallway when they've simply done what any kid in any school has done at one time or another -- it is just handled more seriously. ~*

Discipline not only contributes to school failure but can also set a path toward incarceration. Termed the "school-to-prison pipeline," studies are increasingly connecting harsher school discipline with the over-incarceration of Blacks both in the United States and in Canada.

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<sup>45</sup> Cooper-White M. (2015, April 17). When 'Deshawn' And 'Greg' Act Out In Class, Guess Who Gets Branded a Troublemaker. Retrieved from: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/17/black-students-troublemakers\\_n\\_7078634.html?ir=Education&ncid=tweetlnkushpmg00000023](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/17/black-students-troublemakers_n_7078634.html?ir=Education&ncid=tweetlnkushpmg00000023)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

The educators interviewed for this study were unanimous in their view that being Black better allowed them to apply classroom management strategies that are culturally appropriate for Black students. This comes from their insight into the culture of Black students that makes them better equipped and often more willing to intervene to address inappropriate behaviours. Their experiences reflect what various research studies have found — Black teachers are less likely to refer their Black students to the office because they implement a firm, no nonsense classroom management style that creates learning opportunities and spaces for all students.<sup>47</sup> As research participants noted:

*As a black educator, I sometimes observed students from a minority group refusing to listen and sometimes act disrespectfully to my non-black counterpart. Often time their approach is passive with little expectation for change. It appears most students interpret this approach as non-caring and disingenuous. My approach is to be firm, fair and provide support. Students respect this approach. ~*

*For others, it was thinking 'I would have to live up to their high standards because she has the same kind of standards my mom has for me both socially and economically'. So some of the things that they would do and say to a white teacher if they were in their class they're not going to try it with me because they know that will not be tolerated. And they know that I understand what they're saying, that's the other piece right? They might suck their teeth or say something and I know what that means so I'm going to call them on it whereas a white teacher is not going to call them on it because they don't understand what that means. ~*

In fact, some educators talked about the fear that some teachers have of Black students or a fear of being accused of racism if they were to address inappropriate behaviours. As a result, minor inappropriate behaviours are not addressed. When these behaviours escalate into more serious inappropriate behaviours, it can lead to student suspension and expulsion:

*White people are afraid of Black people and so White teachers don't want to confront Black students who are not behaving appropriately the same way they would approach White students. So there isn't that remediation of that behaviour. We have all those zero tolerance policies that affect Black students differently. White teachers are more empathetic to the experience of White students in a way that they can't be with Black students. And so having a Black teacher there can bring down suspension and expulsion rates. ~*

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<sup>47</sup> See Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research & practice*. New York: Teachers College Press; Weinstein, C.S., Thomlinson-Clarke, S., & Curran, M. (2004). Toward a conception of culturally responsive classroom management. *Journal of Teacher Education*. 55(1), pp. 25-38.

*But if we let them stroll in whenever they want, that works to perpetuate that stereotype. If that was a bunch of White kids standing there, they would have no problems. They would say the bell has rung, now get to class. That's not racism, that's just your job as a teacher. ~*

*I think they're afraid of Black men and boys. That's a big fear there. Why else would a teacher be afraid to tell students to get to class when they should be in class? ~*

*They also don't know the home environment for Black people. They may be afraid of phoning home and may think, "Will I get an angry Black woman on the phone?" That sort of thing. ~*

Black teachers indicated that they are effective at classroom management because they have a range of experience working with marginalized students from all backgrounds, such as from volunteering or working in programs for "at-risk" youth or working in group homes. So while their ethno-cultural background is helpful, those other experiences help them deal with children that their White counterparts can't or don't want to deal with.

*I'm not an average teacher. I've had a lot of experience with children outside of teaching which I've brought to the classroom. I've had the group home experience. I've dealt with kids who've murdered and kids who've stolen and kids who've been in jail. I think there's a bunch of skills that I have that I bring to the classroom that makes managing behaviour a lot more efficient for me than the average teacher. Sometimes I get kids in the classroom and I ask why are they here. Just because he wants to stand up and work. Is it a big deal that he wants to stand up and work? ... They can be sent to my class and it's usually the scenario where it's a bad day and the teacher doesn't know how to manage the behaviour and they need a place to cool out... Some of it is being overwhelmed, sheer numbers in the classroom. Sometimes it's their own training and experience. ~*

While this work is needed and Black educators understand the importance, some reported the toll that it takes on them. One educator reported that she had to move from a school because she was experiencing compassion fatigue:

*I had great relationships with them absolutely and it was hard to leave but it was really tiring -- compassion fatigue to the tenth degree. I stayed there for five years and then at that time I was having my own children too. And then I realized that I can't keep up the pace and I felt that I didn't have anything else to give to them. They needed so much, the whole school, not just the black kids. They needed so much, and at that point I didn't have anything more to give. ~*

## 5.5 Parental Connections

Black educators with whom we spoke also report that they are able to build positive relationships between the home and school to support Black student success. Many interviewees talked about how they have engaged Black parents to work with them for the benefit of their children.

Some also suggest that the presence of a Black educator may help to counter the cumulative negative contacts that Black parents have had with the education system—a factor, which may contribute to the low level of engagement of some Black parents. In fact, the negative experiences Black parents have with the school system may be what has led to some confrontational behaviours with White educators. As such, some Black educators report being called on to help facilitate discussions between White educators and Black parents:

*When a white teacher feels they cannot talk to a black student or the parents, they come to the black teachers. We are used constantly in this role by white teachers. If a Black teacher is not available, they would ignore the issue especially if it is with a black parent who is confrontational. They may shy away from calling the parents. ~*

Some educators, in commenting on the impact that Black educators have on Black parents, noted that Black parents are more likely to engage in conversations with them rather than with their White colleagues. This may result from the perception that Black educators have a greater understanding of and compassion for Black students:

*The biggest impact with parents and the community has been the trust. They listen to me differently and speak to me differently. They will actually come in to the school because it's me. One parent said, "I didn't know you were a sister—now I can talk to you." It makes a difference. I can connect and understand him and his children. He knows I won't be biased against him and his children. ~*

*There is also a connection with black parents. The majority of black parents feel you can understand their issues; that you're on their side. They confide in you because they feel you are looking out for their child. They feel that you'll give honest feedback and not underestimate their child, not stream their child. So when there is an issue, they believe you are telling them reality rather than racially profiling their child. ~*

Black educators also indicated that they are better able to understand how racism in society contributes to a different reality for Black children. Compared to White educators, Black educators better understand the impact this has on discipline. This understanding allows them to have different conversations with Black parents. As one classroom teacher noted:

*I have a different relationship with Black parents. The conversations we have about discipline is different. A lot of Black parents will say, "you understand why we're so strict with Junior and why we have these expectations." And it's true—my parents had those expectations of me as well. And they understand that there's no such thing as 'boys will be boys' or that we can go easy on Black boys and girls because the things that white kids get away with can get our kids killed. So we're not necessarily just out there teaching, we're saving lives if we can by adhering to strict disciplining. And the parents understand that and I understand. ~*

While their race helps to create meaningful relationships with Black parents, some educators noted that at times it has created some difficulties with White parents. Some respondents explained that their position as a teacher is not always enough to overcome resistance by some White parents. Some educators have the experience of having their authority challenged by their students:

*White students question my authority more than they would a White teacher. As well when I vary resources to reflect all the cultures in the classroom, it is the White students who ask "why are we reading this?" – "this", being a native, Black, or Asian experience. ~*

One educator shared that in order to overcome the resistance of parents, when meeting parents for the first time she opens conversations by establishing her competence:

*When I'm in a community with few Black teachers, the first thing I need to do is prove that I am qualified, capable, and competent. I need to start the conversation with my credentials. I know that and address that before I move on to other things. ~*

Some also noted that Black parents are less likely than their White counterparts to understand the system and use it to advocate for their child. They suggested that White parents are more likely than Black parents to question decisions and placement suggestions by the school and are more likely to contact their trustee to seek assistance. On the other hand, participants indicated that Black parents will accept what the teacher or administration suggests, even when it undervalues the abilities of their child and puts them at a disadvantage academically. One educator shared the experience of the trustee being used to move a student because the parent didn't want their child attending school with Black children:

*I explained the situation and unfortunately the parent and student were accommodated based on their dislike for black students and black educators who were called "N\*\*\*\*\*s". I explained on the phone that I was black and the parent explained that my people do not deserve an education. Again the student was placed at the school after calling and complaining to the trustee. ~*

Some of the Black educators with whom we spoke are also parents of Black students in their respective school boards. They indicate that their status as teachers influences the relationship with their child's teacher and how their child is treated. Some also indicate that, when attending a parent-teacher interview, they take pains to attend with their spouse in order to avoid their child being labelled as coming from a single-parent household:

*Even though I have a well-paying job, I'm still dealing with stuff like any other black parent in Ontario where I make sure my kids look a certain way and when we have parent-teacher meetings that both my husband and I go because I don't want to go by myself and have them think that I'm a single Black parent—I'm conscious of that. All black parents are conscious of that and then of course the kids will be conscious of that. You have to actually learn to navigate the unfairness, the inequity of their schooling because they don't want their teacher to think a certain thing. ~*

One Black teacher indicated that after going in to meet the teacher of her son, the teacher's perception of her son changed and her son noticed a difference in the classroom:

*My son said 'thank you' for coming in because his relationship with the teacher changed and she started to call on him in class. As a parent you have to insist on equal treatment for your children. But you also need to approach teachers with dignity and respect, which doesn't always happen... I used those parent-teacher meetings to advocate not only for my children but for all black children... I know that what happens in the classroom is a reflection of racism in society. So I knew that they looked at my children differently... The majority of teachers are good and are not consciously racist. But schools are a microcosm of society. ~*

## 5.6 High Expectations

Due to their shared racial background, Black educators reported seeing Black students from an asset-based perspective that acknowledges and builds on the strengths that they bring with them to the learning environment. They are committed to the success of Black students and therefore are less likely to accept mediocrity from them. They see the capacity for Black students to be successful, have accordingly high expectations, and push them to do their best work.

The educators with whom we spoke understand the importance of holding high expectations of all students:

*Whether the student is Black or White, what they like about their teacher is that they push them to be the best that they can be. But if I don't ever push them, if I don't think they are capable, or if I don't like them based on their gender, or sexual orientation, or skin colour, then they'll only achieve what they're*

*achieving, they'll never excel. If we look at graduation rates, if we look at post-secondary attendance we can see there is an issue. Yes, some of it has to do with the home environment. But some of it has to do with your teacher and whether they make that effort to push you so you can reach your potential and call you out when you are slacking. But some people are afraid to offend. ~*

Some of the educators we spoke with reflect James Vasquez' notion of "warm demanders". This concept was described by Irvine as teachers of colour "who provide a tough-minded, non-nonsense, structured, and disciplined classroom environment for kids whom society has psychologically and physically abandoned."<sup>48</sup> The quotes of participants in this research often echoed this concept of the "warm demander":

*Black teachers raise the bar for students in a loving and professional way. They increase expectations while maintaining relationships. ~*

*As a black educator I hold the students to high standards and support them and speak to them accordingly (firm but fair). White educators often times "talk the talk" but seem to experience difficulty genuinely walking the talk... maybe due to unconscious stereotypes. ~*

*My experiences were different because I was not afraid of our children and expected them to work towards a meaningful education. I had high expectations of them and exposed them to experiences to broaden their horizons. ~*

*Black students feel a sense of GENUINE empowerment when they are identified and connected with someone from their cultural background. Many students from the black community succeed when their teachers genuinely have high expectations of them by using a firm but fair approach. ~*

*[Being Black] has helped me relate to students better. In my two years working with the Board... my support of Black students in the program gave them quite the morale boost. They felt valued and their parents also saw the difference in their spirits. Having challenges as a Black person trying to make it in the system has allowed me to push the students harder in a way that shows them how much I value and care about them. They know that, despite being tough on them and not tolerating nonsense, I have their best interests at heart. ~*

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<sup>48</sup> Irvine, J.J. (1998, May 13). Warm demanders. *Education Week*, 17(35), p 56.



## 6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The perspectives and opinions shared by Black educators for this study reveal a number of policy implications for Ontario's public education system.

### **Legislated Employment Equity**

Evidence throughout Canada indicates that diversity does not naturally result in equity and inclusion, particularly in the labour market.<sup>49</sup> As such, deliberate efforts are needed to identify and remove discriminatory barriers to hiring, retention, and advancement of Black and other racialized workers. As is evident by this study, employment equity is needed to close the Teacher Diversity Gap in Ontario's public education system. This approach was successful to close the gender gap within public education and can be successful to close the racial gap.

To this end, the government of Ontario should require all Ontario school boards to address racial disparities in employment through employment equity programs that would include a comprehensive review of human resource policies and practices (both formal and informal), the collection and analysis of employment data (disaggregated by racial sub-groups), and the establishment of qualitative and quantitative goals to address any racial disparities and identified issues. An employment equity program would also include appropriate mechanisms to monitor progress and hold administrators accountable for achieving the established goals.

A number of survey respondents identified accountability as key to closing the representation gap for Black and other racialized employees:

*The board needs to set employment equity goals and timetables not just have an employment equity office which merely measures the numbers of employees according to employment categories and other demographic identifiers. In addition, the board needs to increase the number of racialized people on the hiring panels and diversify the gate keepers especially in the secondary panel. ~*

*Now [the board] needs to redress the deficit of diversity in its teaching force by educating principals and hiring staff of the realities of Toronto's demographics, how that is reflected in classrooms and should be reflected in its teaching staff. ~*

*There needs to be more of an effort to hire people of diverse backgrounds in admin positions and in other leadership roles. The execution of the board's agenda on equity and diversity needs to include people of different backgrounds and create an actual office, which would reflect their seriousness on the matter. ~*

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<sup>49</sup> See Block, S., Galabuzi, G.E. (2011). *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market*. Toronto: The Wellesley Institute.

## Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Programs

There also appears to be the need for each school board to create and implement Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Programs. Such programs would play a role in reducing the experiences of discrimination and harassment and also to ensure that any issues that do arise are appropriately investigated and addressed.

As discussed throughout this report, Black educators reported that they experience discrimination and harassment in their workplaces. Their reported experiences would be concerning in any workplace, but are especially concerning when expressed by people entrusted with the futures of Black children:

*The problem is systemic. And I'm wary of the danger of relaying specific experiences of racism because that may embolden detractors to claim, as they often do, that these are just isolated incidents. It is a never-ending, patterned, almost-predictable stream of 'isolated incidents'. ~*

*The board also needs to enable/empower its human rights office to actually sanction people who are depriving others of their human rights. The board has an office which investigates issues with employees. It is staffed by people who are bigoted, prejudge results based on the appearance, race or popularity etc. of the complainant and/or the person against whom the complaint is launched and for whom confidentiality is not honoured. Furthermore, the board needs to honour its agreement with the Ontario Human Rights Commission regarding its treatment of Black students with respect to: suspensions, expulsions, safe school transfers, special education support etc. instead of only addressing the special education aspect of the agreement for mainstream students. ~*

## Race Equity

Various studies conducted in Ontario and other jurisdictions have identified the systemic forces that criminalize Black youth, undermine their emotional well-being, limiting their access to post-secondary education, jobs and ultimately a good future.<sup>50</sup> However, misconceptions remain about why Black youth are not doing well in society. In some cases, the disparities experienced by Black youth are attributed to personal and cultural failings, disregarding the systemic forces that undermine the success and well-being of Black children and youth. Furthermore, research suggests that prejudice and stereotyping are factors that commonly

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<sup>50</sup> See McMurtry, R. Curling, A. (2008). *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*. Volume 1, Chapter 9. Retrieved from: [http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume1/chapter09\\_structural\\_reform.aspx](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume1/chapter09_structural_reform.aspx)

affect how Black youth are treated.<sup>51</sup> Thus, race equity education and training is important for all staff if the experiences of Black students in Ontario's public education system are to change.

While there is a need to identify racial disparities in education, participants pointed out that their boards do not collect race-based data and take a willfully blind approach to racial disparities within the system:

*They want to be colour-blind to absolve themselves of any guilt or culpability in what's going on. That's the Canadian way. We talk about how terrible segregation and apartheid are but then look at the conditions on reserves. Look at the abhorrent conditions Aboriginal people are living in. It's a very Canadian thing that we're experiencing in these school boards. ~*

Participants argue that this race-blind approach is then used to absolve the board of responsibility for the institutional racism that is embedded throughout Ontario's public education system— racism which negatively impacts both Black educators and Black students:

*The school board reminds me of people who say "I don't see race"—which is completely foolish—but the idea of not seeing race excuses you from the hard work of ensuring all students are successful. ~*

*I think in some areas of the school board, they know there's a racial problem. But there's still a power majority who don't want to acknowledge that. That's a very Canadian thing—to refuse to acknowledge that these things are happening. They convince themselves that racism is an American thing. We're not like that, that's the attitude. ~*

Conversely, some educators lauded their board for taking a colour-conscious approach. They acknowledged that it takes a lot of coverage to collect race-based student data to identify and address racial disparities.

Boards across the province could benefit from implementing race equity programs. This would include collecting race-based student data (disaggregated by racial sub-group) to identify barriers to equitable outcomes for Black students as well as anti-racism/anti-oppression training needs for board staff.

Such changes would be consistent with recommendations put forth in the report commissioned by the provincial government, *The Roots of Youth Violence*, which has yet to be implemented:

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<sup>51</sup> See James, C. E. (2004). Urban Education: An Approach to Community Based Education. *Intercultural Education*, 15(1), pp. 15-32 ; James, C. E. (2012). *Life at the Intersection: Community, Class and Schooling*. Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing.

Ontario needs to take one further overarching initiative: to mandate the collection and publication of race-based data in several key areas, including the justice and education systems.... The need for race-based data is overwhelming.<sup>52</sup>

The findings from this study also suggest that school boards should implement appropriate interventions, culturally-responsive supports, and restorative practices to address racial disparities in discipline for Black students.

### **Ongoing Training and Support for All Teachers**

A key finding from this research is that all teachers and education staff should receive training to increase their ability to effectively educate Black students. This includes increasing staff understanding and awareness of racism, racialization, and racial profiling and how they affect the success of Black students. Training for all teachers and education staff can alert staff to cultural differences, nuances, and complexities in order to increase their ability to teach and interact effectively with Black students.

There also appears to be value in creating a position of African Canadian Resource Teacher, similar to the FNMI (First Nations, Metis and Inuit) Resource Teacher position in many school boards. Such a position could facilitate communication among students, staff, parents / guardians, the school and partner agencies, including community organizations, social services, family and children services, and mental health personnel, acting as a key influencer to advocate for the academic, social, emotional, physical and cultural needs of Black students. In addition, this person could be instrumental in helping teachers and principals develop and implement strategies to close the opportunity gap, which currently leads to differences in achievement between Black and other students within Peel schools. Lastly, this person could play a supporting role for schools to appropriately respond to incidents of racism, racial harassment and racial bullying, which target Black students.

### **Support Networks**

Given the importance of mentoring and networks to advancement within school boards, school boards should create opportunities for Black educators to network with White and other staff.

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<sup>52</sup> McMurtry, R. Curling, A. (2008). *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*. Volume 1, Chapter 9. Retrieved from:  
[http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume1/chapter09\\_structural\\_reform.aspx](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthandthelaw/roots/volume1/chapter09_structural_reform.aspx)

In addition, school boards should create and support Black employee networks which would be useful to provide support and help individuals to succeed and advance within the organization.

### **Changed Staffing Models**

The connection of Black educators to the academic success of Black students has long been made. Therefore, it is critical that school boards not only increase the number of Black educators within the system as a whole, but specifically in schools with a significant number of Black students. One educator thought the impact of Black teachers on the success of Black students was so strong that this is the one thing that school boards should and can do if they are serious about improving Black student achievement:

*The most important thing school boards can do to improve the outcomes for Black students is to change the staffing model for schools with a high proportion of Black students. They need to put teachers who look like these students, who want to work with these students, who have the culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy in these schools. If the teacher doesn't understand these students and doesn't want to be there, the teacher will be completely ineffective.~*

### **Africentric Curriculum**

The redaction of African Canadians from the curriculum and classrooms continues to be a concern for both Black educators and students. A curriculum that includes African Canadians, as one important element of supporting the success of Black students, has been consistently advocated for over several decades. As one educator noted:

*Hiring more racialized educators and developing and promoting more Africentric PD [professional development]. All educators need the Africentric resources and PD opportunities. If we could have more diverse education workers to support students in spec Ed programs we would see marked improvement in our racialized students. ~*

### **Support Black Parent Involvement in the Education System**

This study suggests that school boards can do more to help Black parents understand the Ontario public education system and support their children's education. Information and supports to navigate the school system could help Black parents understand the resources available to them to advocate effectively for their children when issues arise.

### **Additional Research**

While this and other research shed light on the issues facing Black educators and students in Ontario, larger and more comprehensive studies are needed to assess the extent of these issues and develop solutions that address the identified issues. Recognizing the immediacy of disparities experienced by Black students and educators, it is important to balance research that focuses on more immediate action, which addresses current community needs, with other research that attends to more strategic, long-term goals.

## APPENDIX A: NOTES ON THE DATA

The challenge in calculating the Teacher Diversity Gap in Ontario is that while data is readily available for the United States, the same data is not the case in Canada. For the United States, teacher and student demographics are available by state and race.<sup>53</sup> This data is used to calculate the Teacher Diversity Gap for a number of states. While there is data on the number of teachers in Ontario and Toronto CMA, the figures includes all teachers, including those working in private schools. In addition, the data on the number of students of colour isn't readily available, so the proportion of racial minorities in the total population is used instead, as shown below:

<b>Ontario (2011)</b>			
	<b>total</b>	<b>Visible Minorities #</b>	<b>Visible Minorities %</b>
<b>4031 Secondary school teachers<sup>1</sup></b>	76,030	9,700	12.8%
<b>4032 Elementary school and kindergarten teachers<sup>1</sup></b>	129,105	16,630	12.9%
<b>Total Population<sup>2</sup></b>	12,651,790	3,279,570	25.9%
<b>Teacher Diversity Gap</b>			<b>.50</b>
<b>Toronto CMA (2011)</b>			
	<b>total</b>	<b>Visible Minorities #</b>	<b>Visible Minorities %</b>
<b>4031 Secondary school teachers<sup>3</sup></b>	30,050	7,485	24.9%
<b>4032 Elementary school and kindergarten teachers<sup>3</sup></b>	53,540	13,040	24.4%
<b>Total Population<sup>2</sup></b>	5,521,235	2,596,420	47.0%
<b>Teacher Diversity Gap</b>			<b>.53</b>

<sup>53</sup> See Boser, U. (2014, May 4). *Teacher Diversity Revisited: A New State-by-State Analysis*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/report/2014/05/04/88962/teacher-diversity-revisited/>

**Data Sources:**

<sup>1</sup> Workforce Population Showing Representation by Employment Equity Occupational Groups and Unit Groups (2011 NOC) for Women, Aboriginal Peoples and Visible Minorities. Retrieved from:

[http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards\\_equity/eq/pubs\\_eq/eedr/2011/report/tables/table05/page07.shtml](http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards_equity/eq/pubs_eq/eedr/2011/report/tables/table05/page07.shtml)

<sup>2</sup> Total Population Showing Representation by Geographic Areas for Women, Aboriginal Peoples, Visible Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities. Retrieved from:

[http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards\\_equity/eq/pubs\\_eq/eedr/2011/report/tables/table01.shtml](http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards_equity/eq/pubs_eq/eedr/2011/report/tables/table01.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Workforce Population Showing Representation by Employment Equity Occupational Groups and Unit Groups (2011 NOC) for Women, Aboriginal Peoples and Visible Minorities. Retrieved from:

[http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards\\_equity/eq/pubs\\_eq/eedr/2011/report/tables/table05/page28.shtml](http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards_equity/eq/pubs_eq/eedr/2011/report/tables/table05/page28.shtml)