

## **Joint Statement regarding the release of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's report *"Dreams Delayed: Addressing Systemic Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario's Public Education System"***

The Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and its Affiliates are encouraged by the research and community work conducted by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) to understand and address anti-Black racism in education. Anti-Black racism has been experienced by students, communities, and education workers for generations. Anti-Black racism is fueled by race-based bias and prejudice that has insidiously infiltrated policies and processes to perpetuate a culture of schooling that prevents Black students from experiencing the full promise and benefits of publicly funded education in Ontario.

OTF and its Affiliates recognize that the ubiquitous nature of anti-Black racism must be collectively identified and rooted out by all actors throughout education. The work of OTF and its Affiliates with regard to anti-racism and anti-Black racism calls to action, programs, and/or professional learning was initiated to help members understand their important role in identifying and addressing anti-Black racism.

The OHRC's report, "Dreams Delayed: Addressing Systemic Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario's Public Education System" acknowledges that publicly funded education is shaped and supported by various legal bodies of governance and workplace legislation. As a result, not all organizations have equal power in holding individual actors to account.

It is important that there is clarity on the role OTF and its Affiliates can take in eliminating anti-Black racism. This clarity helps set realistic expectations of the legal power to bring about system-level change. Without this clarity, there is a risk of the report's calls for action becoming another failed attempt to improve the experience of Black educators, Black students, and their families within the educational system.

As such, ensuring there is a collective understanding that any anti-Black racism work undertaken by OTF and its Affiliates must comply with the unions' statutory responsibilities is critical. Without limitation, these include:

- Representation and advocacy for members throughout employer processes, including ensuring due process and support during investigations and hearings.



- Adherence to employment standards, ensuring that any disciplinary actions are consistent with applicable labour laws.
- The legal duty to represent all members fairly and impartially, without discrimination or bias, in accordance with the principles of natural justice.

**These responsibilities do not and cannot include management of the workforce or exclusive employer rights, as may be mistakenly interpreted by the OHRC's report.**

OTF and its Affiliates will:

- Continue to initiate work with the Ministry of Education and school boards to develop policies and practices that create safer spaces for educators to come forward and address instances of racial harassment.
- Work to ensure that collective agreement processes (e.g., grievance, arbitration) apply a human rights and anti-racist lens.
- Continue to represent Black members experiencing harassment and discrimination in the workplace. This includes strengthening how complaint processes will continue to ensure fair and balanced representation.
- Continue developing initiatives and/or offering voluntary professional development regarding human rights in education. Any professional development offerings would complement mandatory school board training on human rights violations in the workplace.

OTF and its Affiliates look forward to continuing conversations with the OHRC. They welcome the invitation extended by the OHRC to gain a fuller understanding of how all identified union actions can be operationalized in compliance with the laws which govern unions and federations. This will include developing precise actions unique to the experiences of Francophone communities.

OTF and its Affiliates stand ready, as always, to work with the Ministry of Education and other key stakeholder organizations in collectively and collaboratively addressing anti-Black racism.

OTF and its Affiliates are committed to continuing their work in supporting their members to better understand anti-Black racism and what they can do to identify, address, and eliminate anti-Black racism in their pedagogy, classrooms and schools.

