

Advocacy Groups Call for Review of Systemic Discrimination by BC School Boards and Districts

(Victoria, 5 May 2021) - Moms Against Racism Canada (MAR Canada) and BCEdAccess Society are calling on the Ministry of Education to commission an Independent Review of School Boards across British Columbia to investigate and report on systemic discrimination.

In just the last few months, some members of the Greater Victoria School Board have racially profiled Moms Against Racism as a “mob”, grossly disrespected local First Nations Elders and Chief at a Board committee meeting, and the District has asked the community in multiple surveys to rank human rights in order of importance.

“This is how systemic oppression is upheld in our society. It is not crosses burning on lawns; it is well-meaning people in positions of power, with no marginalized lived experience, making life-altering decisions on behalf of marginalized children thinking they know what is best for them,” says Kerry Cavers, President and Founder of MAR Canada. “When a School Board is posing a budget survey question that pits ‘all learners’ against ‘Indigenous learners’ for resources, we have a huge problem.”

A School Board Trustee In Chilliwack regularly speaks against the human rights of LGBTQ2S+ students, and has added ableist remarks recently as well. In Northern BC, ableist curriculum resources were discovered when a student with disabilities received handouts that use the ‘R’ word and ask questions that demean and devalue people with developmental disabilities and mental health conditions. In Abbotsford, a class was asked to list five positives about Residential Schools. All across BC Educators continue to use books with the ‘N’ word, and materials misrepresenting colonization and relationships between Canada and Indigenous Peoples. And while it is not the School Board’s responsibility to evaluate individual teachers or administrators, it is responsible for “ensuring the superintendent has put in place the necessary procedures and actions to ensure teachers and administrators within the district are evaluated on a regular basis according to established board policy”, such as antiracism, multicultural, and human rights policies.

“We have been writing to School Boards around BC regularly about these issues,” says Tracy Humphreys, BCEdAccess Chair. “School District 61 pulled one survey with discriminatory ranking questions and then posted another with the same issue a week later. Province-wide, the inclusion of supports and services necessary to access students’ human right to equitable access to education in ranking questions on School District budget surveys has been going on for years..”

School Boards are systems and they continue to perpetuate oppression, inequity, and harm all across BC. In Education Minister Jennifer Whiteside’s November 26, 2020 Mandate Letter, the Premier acknowledges that the province ‘has the moral and ethical responsibility to tackle systemic of discrimination in all its forms’ which includes systems such as School Boards and Districts.

MAR Canada and BCEdAccess are calling for an Independent Review to include:

1. School Board Composition - Do school boards reflect BC’s diverse population? Is action being taken on this issue?
2. Informed Policy Making - Are Trustees and staff applying GBA+ analysis to their recommendations and decisions?
3. Conduct and Complaints - What is the prevalence of discriminatory actions or decisions made by School Boards and their staff? Are Boards listening to and taking action on feedback from parents and local advocacy groups on human rights matters?
4. Commitment to Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion - What training have Trustees and staff taken? What projects or initiatives have Boards undertaken for the betterment of their Districts in these areas?
5. Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation - What is the state of the School District’s relationship with their local First Nations? How are they working with them to support the 96 calls to action, specifically Call to Action 62:

We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

“There are systemic gaps in understanding of and commitment to equity that need to be addressed in Education. We can’t address what we don’t know and that is why we believe an assessment of where School Boards are at in terms of their anti-racism, diversity and inclusion efforts is needed. With measurement there can be accountability and with accountability, hopefully, much needed change” says Cavers.

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Moms Against Racism Canada is a federally registered non-profit organization with the mission to educate moms, and those in mothering roles, in anti-racism, cultural competence, and decolonization so they have the tools and support to dismantle racism within themselves, their families, and their communities. Through gentle leadership and mutual learning we believe we can end racism where it starts - in the home. Learn more at www.momsagainstracism.ca

The BCEdAccess Society is an organization of families of children and youth with disabilities and complex learners all over the province of British Columbia. We champion and support children and youth who have disabilities and who are complex learners to reach their full potential in BC education and in all aspects of their lives. Learn more at www.bcedaccess.com

Backgrounder

What is systemic discrimination?

Systemic discrimination can be described as patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the structures of an organization, and which create or perpetuate disadvantage for marginalized persons. Marginalized people are “edged out” of society because of certain personal characteristics. The BC [Human Rights Code](#) forbids [discrimination](#) based only on these certain [personal characteristics](#).

List of Protected Personal Characteristics:

<http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/human-rights-duties/characteristics.htm>

<https://www.vicnews.com/opinion/mla-report-what-is-systemic-discrimination-bias-and-racism/>

What is GBA+?

<https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-analysis-plus/what-gender-based-analysis-plus.html>

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls To Action

http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Link to ‘mob’ video <https://youtu.be/n9tD5DtHHuA?t=6227>

Link to ed policy meeting <https://youtu.be/2buyaGbsu2A?t=668>

SD61 Survey question

5. The [strategic plan](#) focuses on three goals, including 10 strategies. What goal of the strategic plan do you think needs the most investment?

- Create an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment that will support and improve all learners’ personal and academic success.
- Create a culturally responsive learning environment that will support Indigenous learners’ personal and academic success.
- Create an inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment that will support all learners’ physical and mental well-being.