

Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium

PANEL B SUMMARY:

Equity for Students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour

PANELISTS

Micheline Limoges

Superintendent of Education-
Equity and Inclusive
Education, Human Rights,
and **Melissa Jean-Baptiste Vajda** Human
Rights and Equity Advisor,
Conseil Scolaire
Catholique Providence

Jacqueline Lawrence

Superintendent, Equity,
Anti-Oppression & Early
Years, Ottawa-Carleton
District School Board

Neethan Shan

Executive Director, Urban
Alliance on Race
Relations

While anti-racism and anti-oppression frameworks, statements, and strategies are becoming more common in public institutions such as our schools, three panelists came together to talk about equity as a transformative process and not just a service or charitable act. Because discomfort and uncertainty are part of the process, it is often difficult for everyone to see themselves as learners and commit to growth. Herein lies the critical roles of continued professional development, capacity building, and accountability in the education system.

Collecting information using tools such as student and staff censuses can provide valuable insights about gaps in the education system. However, for the data to be meaningful, participation in these census surveys needs to be increased through better communication about why the data is important and how it is being used. This work is impossible without the engagement of students, families, communities, and the full diversity of educators and school staff.

Additional strategies include the development of an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion team and an Indigenous Education Lead to support teachers and school leaders with the necessary training, classroom visits, and resources to develop awareness and engage in self-reflection. Often the demand for services exceeds the available resources, so it is imperative for the government and school boards to commit sustainable funding to support this work.

Inclusion and diversity are paramount to shift the cultures that we work and live in. What is considered 'normal' is not working for everyone and if we do not address the cultures of these spaces, little change will occur. We all have biases, but we must be aware of where those biases are. When facing complex and difficult situations involving equity for students who are Black, Indigenous, or racialized, Jacqueline Lawrence encourages us to remember the acronym P.I.E.: "*Perception, Interpretation, and Evaluation*": understanding our own perceptions, interpretation, and the ways we assess staff, students, and families.

“We are getting a higher and higher demand for assistance, which is great. More people want the tools, want the language, want to know how to handle things.”
- **Melissa Jean-Baptiste Vajda**

“The word progress is sometimes the biggest barrier for progress... we always have to measure progress with the magnitude of the problem. If we don't have [this] context, progress may look like a great thing. But in fact, it is just managing inequities.”
- **Neethan Shan**

“Especially for Black History Month and for Indigenous Heritage Month, we're not talking about enslavement, we're really talking about success stories and...great things happening currently in the communities.”
- **Micheline Limoges**

“What was normal was not working for everyone.”
- **Jacqueline Lawrence**

RESOURCES SUGGESTED BY PANELISTS

- [Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap](#) (discusses the importance of securing accountability, identity, building staff awareness and capacity, increasing representation, improving programming and student supports, and engagement and connectedness)
- Anti-hate protocols like the ones from [UNESCO](#), [Canadian Anti-Hate Education](#), or [Learning for Justice](#) (toolkits and resources to combat anti-hate speech for policymakers and administrators)
- TDSB [Learning Opportunities Index](#) (school rankings based on measures of external challenges that impact student success)

To cite this document: Patel, S., Hopson, R.L., & Saeidpour, S. (2024). *Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium: Equity for Students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour - Knowledge Mobilization Summary Report*. Toronto, ON. School of Early Childhood Studies, Toronto Metropolitan University.

For more information, visit: torontomu.ca/educational-equity-symposium/