

September 28, 2021

Ontario's teacher unions respond to government's refusal to fund proposal to combat systemic racism

TORONTO, ON—Ontario's teacher unions recently learned that the Ministry of Education will not be funding numerous initiatives the unions proposed in March 2021 that would address and confront systemic racism in Ontario's publicly funded education system. The following is a joint statement from the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO), Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO):

"While the Ontario government is on record as committing to legislative and system changes to 'advance equal opportunity of Black, Indigenous, and racialized students,' we question how sincere this commitment is, given that it has turned its back on funding programs that have proven impact and that show evidence of lasting change. Their refusal to support our proposal and their lack of commitment to supporting effective professional development perpetuates and normalizes the status quo.

Historically, Black, Indigenous, and racialized students have been discriminated against, both by the institution that is supposed to ensure that all students are treated equally and have the same opportunities for success and by those in government who continue to ignore calls for systemic change.

Increasingly, Ontarians demand that elected officials and leaders take real and bold action to eliminate systemic racism deeply entrenched in all societal institutions. To effectively deal with the pervasive racism that exists in education, including anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, the government must make real investments.

To date, we have not seen a meaningful commitment from the Ford government to fully address racism and other forms of discrimination in Ontario's schools. What we have witnessed is purely performative and void of genuine solidarity in support of those who are underrepresented, underserved, and marginalized.

Changes to legislation without putting in place comprehensive supports for professional learning for educators will not bring about the progress that is needed in our system. To work towards eliminating systemic racism in education, significant steps must be taken to support educators and teacher candidates and to recruit educators who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, and racialized into the profession.

The proposal included objectives that would support teachers' and education workers' understanding of systemic racism and how to disrupt it. Specifically, the professional components included in the proposal would have:

- supported teachers and education workers so that they could commit to creating anti-racist teaching and learning spaces,
- supported teachers and education workers with programs aimed to guide how to move from intention to action, and
- supported teachers and education workers professional learning by embedding equity and inclusive practices into their everyday teaching practices.

In the important area of anti-oppression education, our organizations have acknowledged the critical need to support educators in their work to recognize racism in all its forms and combat discrimination at all levels. The Ford government's refusal to invest in our proposal is yet another disappointment in a long list of failures. Now is the time to take affirmative and drastic action to address the historical oppression the education system has had on Black, Indigenous, and racialized peoples."

Karen Brown, President, ETFO
Barb Dobrowolski, President, OECTA

Karen Littlewood, President, OSSTF/FEESO
Anne Vinet-Roy, présidente/President, AEFO

-30-

For more information, please contact any of the following media relations representatives:
AEFO—Marilyne Guevremont at 613-850-6410 or mguevremont@aefo.on.ca
ETFO—Carla Pereira at 416-576-9074 or cpereira@etfo.org
OECTA—Michelle Despault at 416-925-2493, ext. 509 or m.despault@catholicteachers.ca
OSSTF/FEESO—Jennifer Seif at 416-751-8300, ext. 221 or jennifer.seif@osstf.ca