

Purpose of this Guide

To provide guidelines to follow when addressing reports of racism and discrimination in schools. Staff and Administration should be alerted whenever allegations of racism and discrimination are made. Racism and discrimination have a traumatic impact on student well-being and negatively impacts the school climate. These incidents require direct school intervention, including a full and unbiased investigation by Administration. DCDSB is continuing to take steps to:

- Raise awareness and understanding about human rights and discrimination
- Address discrimination
- Hold people who discriminate accountable
- Make every intentional effort to prevent discrimination

Key Actions of School Staff Working Together

Stop > Name

Support > Report

Investigate > Ensure Accountability

Restore > Follow Up

Questions to Consider for the Investigation Process (pg. 3)

1. Consider the power dynamics in terms of position and society. Recognize how your identity might be impacting how the parties speak to you and what you hear. You are now part of the dynamic. You (and the institution) are not neutral.
2. Are the parties given the option of bringing in a facilitator/advocate who might understand their situation more in terms of identity/context and power relations?
3. Interview each party separately and listen to the impact, validating as much as possible. How do you show care and that you take this complaint very seriously?
4. Recognize identity differences of the parties, and how interpretations and ways of communicating, could be influenced by such differences
5. Are assumptions being made about a person's behavior, body language, or other forms of communication in relation to identity?
6. Is discrimination at play?

* *One Vision, One Voice. Human Rights – Complaints Analysis: OVOV Lens.* (This lens was developed in collaboration with the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton).

Framework and Resource Document — Responding to Student Incidents Involving Racism and Discrimination

Revised July 8, 2021

Our Commitment to Equity

The Durham Catholic District School Board (DCDSB) is rooted in Faith and aligns our strategic actions to the core commitments of Excellence, Equity, and Engagement. We are committed to cultivating a positive sense of self and belonging for each individual by respecting and responding to diverse identities and strengths. We envision a welcoming community of faith where each and every individual feels a deep and authentic sense of belonging. The well-being and academic success of our students and the success of our whole system depends on this.

School administrators and staff have a professional, moral and legal obligation to create equitable, safe, respectful, and inclusive spaces for all students, parents/guardians, and staff. This guide will help ensure that the rights and responsibilities of all parties are upheld when dealing with incidents of racism and discrimination in our schools.

Courageous Conversations as a Strategy for Change

Having courageous conversations about race is an essential strategy for organizations to address racial disparities through safe, authentic and effective cross-racial dialogue. It is important to acknowledge from the outset that conversations about race cause discomfort to varying degrees. We must make a commitment to create a space to speak openly without judgment if we are to authentically address and dismantle racism and discrimination in our school system.

What is Discrimination?

Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of grounds set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC), or on the basis of other, similar factors. It can include comments, actions or decisions that make people feel unwelcome or uncomfortable, based on their identity or ability. Discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional, has the effect of limiting access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages that are available to other members of society. Discrimination may be evident in organizational and institutional structures, policies, procedures and programs, as well as in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals.

Prohibited Grounds of Discrimination (Ontario Human Rights Commission)

- Race
- Colour
- Ancestry
- Creed (religion)
- Place of Origin
- Ethnic Origin
- Citizenship
- Sex (including pregnancy, gender identity)
- Sexual Orientation
- Age
- Marital status
- Family status
- Disability
- Receipt of public assistance

Key Actions of School Staff Working Together

Stop

- Whenever possible, intervene immediately to stop the discriminatory act, and acknowledge what was said or done was inappropriate — we are teaching students that certain language and actions are unacceptable in our schools.
- Respond empathetically and validate the student’s experience and feelings (e.g., anger, hurt) – this will go a long way in de-escalating a potentially explosive situation.
- If possible, name the behaviour or discriminatory act (e.g., “You just put someone down based on perceived (sex, race/ethnicity, age, etc.).”).
- Choose your words carefully and focus on the act not the person (e.g., the comment is racist, as opposed to you are racist).
- Explain why the behaviour is hurtful and prohibited (e.g., “At this school, we respect everyone and are responsible for the impact of our words/behaviours.”).
- Ensure that the dignity of all involved is made a priority (e.g., students directly involved, witnesses).
- All incidents of racism and discrimination must be reported to the office.

Name

Support

- Engage in courageous conversations to validate and understand what is happening, the impact on those involved and the opportunities for learning.
- All staff are responsible for supporting any individual that has been affected by or witnessed an incident of discrimination.
- Students may prefer to speak to a trusted adult in the school for guidance and support — parents/guardians may also be called as part of the process.
- Support the individual(s) by finding a safe place and talking with them about how you can support their well-being (e.g., allow the student to express their true feelings without worrying about reprisals).
- Separate the individuals involved, if necessary and as appropriate.
- Quietly check in with and reassure the individual who was harassed (e.g., Are you okay? Everyone should feel safe and be safe here. What happened was totally unacceptable, and you are very important to all of us.”)
- Alert school administration of the incident and relevant details as soon as possible to allow for appropriate follow up and possible next steps.
- Document what occurred and the steps you took for your own records.

Report

Investigate

- It is important to investigate the situation in order to fully understand what is happening (reflect on the assumptions/judgements you may be making).
- Ensure that the dignity of all involved is a priority and maintained at all times
- Consider bias and barriers to equity, including personal perceptions and assumptions being made (e.g., assuming guilt before investigating due to past incidents).
- In a timely manner, the principal/vice-principal will conduct preliminary fact-finding, in accordance with relevant procedures — at minimum this will require a conversation with the involved parties.
- Principal/vice-principal may be required to conduct a more formal investigation depending on the nature of the incident and the results of the preliminary fact-finding.
- Document throughout the investigation process — date and time stamp all notes and interviews.
- Outcomes are determined using a balance of probabilities — you don’t always need hard evidence.
- Principal/vice-principal will contact the parent/guardian to share what has happened and steps that are being taken (not required if student is over 18 years old).
- Using a progressive discipline approach (e.g., early and ongoing interventions, range of options, consider individual circumstances and mitigating factors), decide on the appropriate course of action and consequences, in consultation with the Family of Schools Superintendent as needed.

Ensure Accountability

Restore

- Restore relationships and commit to ongoing monitoring and check-ins to proactively support a safe environment free from racism and discrimination.
- After the investigation has been completed, restore with the individuals as needed and appropriate, using principles of Restorative Practice.
- Ensure that there is no retribution for reporting an incident of racism and/or discrimination
- Follow up with the individuals involved on a regular basis for a period of time following the incident (e.g., check in on the students more frequently immediately following the incident).
- If appropriate, follow up with specific group/classroom.
- Have ongoing conversations and learning about racism and discrimination.

Follow Up