Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education Symposium

PANEL A SUMMARY: Equity for Black Students

PANELISTS

Karen Murray
System superintendent, Equity, Anti-Oppression and Early Years, Toronto District School Board

Raquel Walker
Coordinating Principal of African, Black, and Afro-Caribbean Student Success, Peel District School Board

Kearie Daniel and **Charline Grant**
Representatives of Parents of Black Children

Anti-Black racism and oppression remain huge obstacles that stand in the way of success for Black students and families navigating the education system. Speakers in this panel came together to name key challenges and spark discussions on how to advance equity for Black students.

Panelists underscored the importance of a non-deficit approach (i.e., focusing on strengths) if Black students and their families are to be supported in such a way that they will thrive, not just survive. Support can take on many forms, including but not limited to the following: centering Black student voices, Black people being present in the curriculum as well as the school environment, and prioritizing anti-racism in schools by reworking teacher education and professional development practices. This training is necessary for school staff and leaders to be able to notice, name, and address anti-Black racism and oppression.

These approaches are not possible without acknowledging and breaking down the structural barriers that continue to uphold anti-Black racism. Panelists agreed that education stakeholders need to engage in self-reflection, take accountability for their actions, and hold others accountable for theirs. To sustain this work, dedicated funding and staff are essential to successfully create conditions in schools that affirm the identities and well-being of Black students.

Moreover, we need to make space for Black joy: the celebration of Black culture and excellence. In order for these partnerships and engagement to be genuine, they must be a two-way street. Transparent and frequent communication is integral to having productive conversations about how things are being done and what needs to change to progress towards equity for Black students in the public education system.
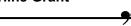
> *"What you don't know, you need to go find out. You can't rely on the people in this body to fix a system that we did not create."*
> **- Karen Murray**

> *"This process doesn't just benefit Black students. It addresses an unjust system that impacts us all."*
> **- Raquel Walker**

> *"There's a difference between being involved and being engaged."*
> **- Kearie Daniel**

> *"One of the worst things you could do when parents show up [to advocate]... is police that work."*
> **- Charline Grant**

RESOURCES SUGGESTED BY PANELISTS

- The Empowering Modern Learners Guide *(guides educators in the implementation of equity)*
- School Improvement Equity Planning (SIEP) and School Equity Audit Tool (SEAT) *(for school leaders creating a plan to improve student achievement)*
- Parent Knowledge Building Virtual Workshops
- The Parents of Black Children Mental Health Fund *(access to mental health professionals)*
- OMO Virtual Campus *(free drop-in homework help)*
- The EDGE Tutoring Program *(free K-12 tutoring)*
- The Educators' Toolkit *(educator resource to support inclusive and anti-racist teaching)*

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