

LACK OF ACTION TAKEN BY BOARD, SAYS JAMES

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"All the evidence-based data shows that anti-Black racism is very real," said James in an interview following the delegation. "We know the impacts it has on students and their lives. So, when you're talking about things like streaming and punishment and just in general, like microaggressions and all those things, it's traumatizing. You carry it with you."

In a memo sent to the board earlier this year, the Black Teachers Association of HCDSB — which represents educators in Halton Hills, and across the region — outlined a set of changes it believes need to be made.

James reiterated the points from that memo, including calls for the formation of advisory committees, changes to hiring practices and retention,

new curriculum support, a policing-free board, and intentional, measurable and time specific professional development.

The HCDSB confirmed it did receive the memo and its response was to meet with representatives from the Black Teachers Association of HCDSB to discuss the outlined requests.

James said in her delegation the lack of action on these measures reflects the depth of the problem.

"The delays and lack of action are a gross display of how anti-Black racism is not prioritized in this board. It is a gross display of how blatantly overlooked and undervalued our Black students and Black teachers are in this board. How much longer are we expected to wait for change, to wait until our value is valuable enough for the board to see us and the needs of our students?"

said James during her delegation.

In response to James, the HCDSB said in a statement it acknowledges the problem of anti-Black racism and has taken a multi-pronged approach that includes professional development, policy review, data collection, inclusive curriculum and establishing mechanisms to respond to incidents of racism and discrimination when they occur.

Responding to why the changes have appeared to take so long, the board indicated it's a complex problem to address and said progress will occur in incremental steps.

"Anti-Black racism is a systemic issue that exists in every institution, including our school district. The work of equity and inclusion is a system priority, and we are committed to dismantling anti-Black

racism in our schools and across the board," reads the statement.

The immediate response to James' delegation was a motion by the board of trustees calling for the hiring of a consultant to assist staff with establishing a committee, with the ultimate goal of achieving system equity for Black students.

Milton trustee Patrick Murphy acknowledged the motion was a small step and an attempt to take on a significant issue.

"All journeys have to start with the first step," said Murphy. "If the report comes back and more time is needed, more resources are needed. Whatever the case may be, then that's the opportunity for the board of trustees to have that debate and make that decision. The time for sitting on our hands is over."

The motion passed with

a 4-3 vote. Trustees Janet O'Hearn-Czarnota, Brenda Agnew, Patrick Murphy and Marvin Duarte voted in support. Tim O'Brien, Peter DeRosa, and Helena Karabela voted against the motion.

Incidents of anti-Black racism are not currently tracked at the HCDSB. However, according to the board, a procedure has been developed that will enable them to track and publish that information starting in the 2022-23 school year.

While the hard data on the incidents is not available, James said they have heard from students for years that these incidents are occurring. She also said the students consistently say the board response to these incidents is inadequate.

"How are these people healing? How are the students healing from the

trauma they're experiencing day in and day out when they don't see anyone in the building that looks like them, when they aren't celebrated the way they should be celebrated, when Black excellence isn't at the forefront?" said James.

The HCDSB has recently completed a student and workforce census that will provide a record of identity-based data of the population. That information is presently being collated and is anticipated to be finalized in December of this year.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: In light of a recent allegation of anti-Black racism at the Halton Catholic District School Board, we delved deeper into this important story, examining the details behind the claim and the board's response to it.

PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD APPOINTS NEW SUPERINTENDENT

Jennifer Fowler, a former administrator with the Peel District School Board, will replace retiring superintendent of education Rob Eatough effective Aug. 1.

Fowler joins recently announced superintendents Nick Frankovich, Jennie

Petko and Jonathan Shoss who will also start their new roles on Aug. 1.

"The announcement of Rob Eatough's retirement after 30 years in education is an opportunity to thank him for his leadership and contributions to the board

and the senior administrative team," said Curtis Ennis, HDSB director of education. "I want to specifically recognize Rob for the impact he has had on advancing our commitment to Indigenous rights and education, human rights, equity

and inclusive education as he has led that work during the last few years."

Fowler comes to Halton with teaching experience gained at Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board and administrative experience in the

PDSB.

In her most recent role, she was the coordinating principal of caring and safe schools where she supported schools in the creation of welcoming, caring, safe and inclusive learning environments.



HDSB photo
Jennifer Fowler replaces superintendent Rob Eatough, who is retiring as of Aug. 1.

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