

Black Student Success Committee Ward 7 Chapters*

Statement Regarding Anti-Black Racism in Parkdale and Swansea Schools and our Demands for Safety and Accountability from TDSB

November 2021

That hateful and dehumanizing acts of anti-Black racism persist in Parkdale schools and throughout the Toronto District School Board, is reproachable, but not surprising.

Based on multiple accounts and reports, it is clear that constant inaction and lack of accountability on the part of the Board has allowed for toxic cultures of discrimination to continue in the system and school communities, fostering emboldened and criminal acts of hate toward Black students, staff and families.

Recent incidents of [hate mail at Queen Victoria Public School](#), [blackface at Parkdale Collegiate Institute](#) and numerous Anti-Black racism [incidents on Swansea Public School Parent Council](#) are only few examples of the harm that threatens Black children, parents, teachers, principals and support staff in what is expected to be, and which the Board has a legal obligation to ensure is, a safe learning environment and workplace.

Black children, their families and staff will not be safe in Parkdale, Swansea or Toronto schools until the TDSB takes tangible, decisive actions to mitigate harm and demonstrate accountability and non-tolerance including, but not limited to, these immediate measures.

Our Demands

The Black Student Success Committee Parkdale-High Park chapters demand that TDSB address the anti-Black racism rampant in Ward 7 schools, with the following immediate measures:

- 1. Immediate termination of secondary school teacher, Gorian Surlan from Parkdale Collegiate Institute and all TDSB schools.**

Gorian Surlan's hateful behaviour is a clear and serious breach of the TDSB code of conduct ([PR585](#)) and provincial code of conduct. We expect zero tolerance of this proven engagement in hateful behavior that has jeopardized the well-being of staff and students and poisoned the learning environment.

- 2. Establishing a safe space for Black students, staff and families by way of an alternative Africentric school in downtown Toronto.**

TDSB has failed to provide a learning and workplace environment that is safe for Black students, staff and families. Despite numerous investigations, policy updates and disciplinary actions, the hateful and criminal acts of racially-motivated harassment toward Black children and caring adults continue on a daily basis at Queen Victoria P.S. Parkdale P.S., Parkdale Collegiate Institute, Swansea P.S. and other Ward 7 schools.

TDSB is obligated under the Caring and Safe Schools Policy ([P051](#)) to provide an anti-oppressive, caring, safe, accepting, respectful and inclusive environment for all. Until TDSB can achieve that within all schools, Black children and adults alike, require a learning and workplace space that prioritizes their safety and well-being.

- 3. Establish a mandatory anti-Black racism training program for all Ward 7 staff that is delivered by an expert consultant of BSSC choosing, implemented by November 30, 2021, and includes disciplinary measures for non-compliance by stated dates.**

The current “equity training” made optional for, and delivered by internal staff, is clearly insufficient in addressing the crisis of anti-Black racism among teachers, administration and other school staff.

In their [investigation report](#), and in reference to staff training on equity and anti-Black racism, Turnkey identified “...misalignment in terms of the Board’s assumptions and perceptions and the realities that play out at the school level; specifically, at QVPS”.

Further, they recommended that TDSB “Roll out ongoing, adult learning style training on anti-racism training, with a focus on Anti-Black Racism” and that, “Such training should be delivered to teachers, non-teaching school support staff, administrators, and Board administrators”

And specifically that “The Board should ensure that employee training on Anti-Black Racism includes training including with a focus on misogynoir...Black women experience Anti-Black Racism in unique ways, and this nuance needs to be better understood by Board employees.

- 4. Remove privacy protocols that protect the identity of aggressors in incidents of anti-Black racism.**

Further harm is inflicted when students, parents and caregivers are not made aware of educators and school community members who perpetrate hateful acts. The privacy policies and confidentiality protocols currently in place protect the identity of aggressors allowing continued access, opportunity and incident of harm toward Black students, staff and families within the school community. Further, it inflicts continued emotional violence

and trauma toward victims who are forced into silence through long, bureaucratic investigation processes.

Based on our experience of consistent lack of action in the past, we have no confidence the safety of the Black community will be prioritized without explicit demand from the community.

We demand these four measures be implemented no later than November 30, 2021. Failure to take these measures to mitigate harm to Black communities will result in increasing unrest and organized civil action in Parkdale-High Park and among the many groups expressing solidarity with the affected children, staff and community.

Earlier this week, we contacted Ward 7 Trustee, Robin Pilkey requesting that she table a motion of emergency business to address immediate safety concerns. The motion was tabled and approved by the Board of Trustees creating a platform from which these demands can be instituted.

*Black Student Success Committee Ward 7 chapters include Parkdale P.S., Queen Victoria P.S., and Swansea P.S.

Incidents of Anti-Black Racism in Parkdale-High Park Schools

Despite the well documented evidence, witness accounts and continuous reports of racist behaviours of TDSB staff members and classmates, the board continues to demonstrate through inaction that the concerns of parents and their children will continue to be ignored.

There have been numerous policy changes, meetings, phone discussions and email communication from 2019-to present between the three BSSC chapters in Ward 7 (High-Park, Parkdale) and the TDSB. Each chapter has been inundated on a monthly and sometimes weekly basis of anti-Black racist incidents that Black students and staff continue to experience in their classrooms and on playgrounds.

Some of these disturbing, hateful and harmful incidents include the following :

1. Various reports of the N word being used by white children towards Black children with no intervention or learning opportunity to correct the offensive behavior.
2. Body shaming of Black children with hair texture being called 'clown hair' or brown skin colour being called 'dirty'
3. Harassment by exclusion, where white children tell their Black classmates they cannot play with them because of their skin colour.
4. Groups of white children voting on whether or not a Black child can join them during the lunch hour and the majority voting not to sit with the child on a daily basis.
5. Black parents being ordered to leave the school premises (pre-Covid) and prevented from having a conversation with other parents in the main lobby of the school their children attend.

6. African Heritage Month events being cancelled by principals at the last minute despite other schools across the board holding similar events.
7. Teachers labelling Black girls as a 'bad crowd' and discouraging other students to befriend them despite the lack of any problematic behaviours.
8. Black principals being targeted, harassed and openly disrespected by their white colleagues without any TDSB staff being held accountable for their actions.
9. False allegations made against BIPOC staff when they openly support or advocate for Black students
10. Expletives being hurled at BIPOC parents when they ask TDSB staff not to drive on school grounds where children were playing. When the former VP was informed she defended the volatile staff members who stated they were afraid of the parents.
11. Black parents being followed in an unknown car by a family member of a TDSB principal and almost run down on a residential street.
12. Parent receiving an email referencing the KKK and her children by a white council member.
13. Parents being harassed at her private home by a white school council member. The Black parent was screamed at in the presence of her children who now feel unsafe in their own neighbourhood and were too shaken to play in their front yard. The TDSB refused to officially remove the parent from the school council despite this criminal act due to an outdated by-law. The safety of these students and their mother was not prioritized.
14. Acts of discrimination among parent council members at Swansea have played out in council meetings, on social media and in direct communications among members
15. Policy changes, early retirements, staffing changes and meetings and community consultations have not and will not change the toxic, harmful environment that African-Canadians are being forced to endure.

While the school population may appear integrated, the treatment is openly segregated and the culture of unequal treatment is entrenched within the board.

For these reasons and more there is absolutely no confidence in the board's ability to quickly, efficiently support their most vulnerable students and school communities. The indifference is appalling yet not surprising, regardless of who sits at the helm.

The fact that the BSSCs were the first to recognize Parkdale is in a state of crisis points to the lack of urgency and respect for our humanity. Why haven't board members visited our schools and provided the most basic of support?

The TDSB has demonstrated it is more concerned with optics than oppression and we have no faith in systemic change as long as our communities continue to be dismissed, disregarded and disrespected. There appears to be a pattern of last-minute scrambling to regurgitate their ineffective policies and bureaucratic processes.

We as parents, advocates, allies and community organizations must be the change we want to see. We will continue to demand for actions to be taken to protect and support the Black community while seeking alternatives to create safe spaces for Black children where they can learn and develop their potential in a safe and inclusive environment.

Justice delayed is justice denied.