

Anti-Racism Initiatives in K-12 Schools in Canada

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**Pathways to Prosperity Standing Committee on
Immigration to Northern, Rural, and Remote Communities**



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Pathways to Prosperity Partnership

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About the Author

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About Pathways to Prosperity Canada

The Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) Partnership is a national alliance dedicated to providing an actionable evidence base for immigrant settlement and integration policies and programs in Canada. The Partnership includes key federal and provincial/territorial migration ministries; municipalities; national, regional and local organizations involved in newcomer settlement; and researchers from across the country.

Pathways to Prosperity builds capacity for service provision and for promoting welcoming communities for immigrants through practical research and the development of new tools, training, and other knowledge mobilization activities. Two areas of special interest are a) rural, remote communities and small and medium centres, and b) French-speaking immigrants in Francophone minority communities. By integrating academic scholarship with sector expertise and detailed government program knowledge, P2P mobilizes essential knowledge, resources and supports. Engagement is based on full collaboration of the sector in all aspects of the Partnership.

About the Pathways to Prosperity Standing Committee on Immigration to Northern, Rural and Remote Communities

The P2P Standing Committee on Immigration to Northern, Rural, and Remote Communities focuses on attraction, retention, and integration of immigrants in northern, rural, and remote communities and is primarily involved in providing advice and participating in activities relevant to these communities, and in supporting the work of Pathways to Prosperity.

Executive Summary

This report explores anti-racism initiatives in Canadian K-12 education, with an intentional focus on rural and Northern regions, with the objectives of understanding the experiences of racialized and newcomer students and identifying promising anti-racism strategies and practices. The Pathways to Prosperity Standing Committee on Immigration to Northern, Rural and Remote communities draws its membership from across Canada and across sectors engaged in supporting newcomer settlement and integration in Canada's smaller communities. In commissioning this report, the standing committee was motivated by policies and efforts promoting the regionalization of immigration, anecdotal evidence suggesting differences in experiences and resources for racialized students in smaller and rural communities, and an apparent geographic imbalance in the research focus on anti-racism initiatives in Canada. Drawing from 236 academic, public, and policy sources published predominantly between 2020 and 2025, the report analyses how racism manifests and how anti-racism efforts are unfolding across four interrelated areas: provincial policies and curriculum, schools and school boards, teachers and the classroom, and communities.

Key findings reveal that while some progress has been made at the provincial level, particularly in British Columbia, curricula across Canada often remain Eurocentric and fail to include Indigenous knowledge systems or address systemic racism meaningfully. School boards often adopt symbolic or surface-level initiatives without structural follow-through. Rural schools face additional challenges, including staff turnover, lack of diversity, and limited resources. Teachers are often left to address racism independently, despite insufficient training in anti-racism pedagogy in teacher education programs. The most effective anti-racism efforts start at the grassroots level, driven by individual teachers, engagement with local communities, and activist parents. Community engagement – especially in rural areas – can be both a challenge and a key site of potential changes, particularly when education is embedded in local knowledge and lived experiences.

The report concludes with targeted recommendations for each level of educational structure, advocating for mandatory anti-racism curriculum, equitable hiring, systemic and ongoing training, and deeper integration and engagement with diverse community voices. These recommendations include:

- **Provinces and Territories:** Integration of explicit anti-racism education that addresses systemic racism across the curriculum with clear benchmarks and periodic reviews; greater variety in assessment practices to account for multilingual and culturally diverse student backgrounds; and increased and targeted funding for schools and support for teachers in rural and Northern areas.
- **Schools and School Boards:** Regular equity audits and census surveys of students, teachers, and administrators; ongoing and systemic anti-racism and cultural competency training; replacement of punitive disciplinary practices with restorative justice practices; equitable hiring and promotion policies and practices to promote diversity among educators and administrators; targeted community outreach; greater inclusion of racialized students

and families in decision-making processes; and clear policies and consistent and adequate responses to incidents of racism in schools.

- **Teacher Education:** Mandatory anti-racism education that emphasizes systemic racism, unconscious bias, and equitable classroom practices; mandatory coursework on Indigenous education and experiential, community-based, and culturally responsive pedagogies; addressing systemic biases in admission processes; mentorship opportunities for teacher candidates from Indigenous, rural, racialized, and immigrant communities; and training on responding to incidents of racism in the classroom.
- **Teachers:** Integration of racial justice, a diverse canon, and real-world examples into lessons regardless of subject area; actively challenging racism when it occurs in the classroom, applying consistent and adequate responses; decentering classroom power dynamics (e.g., through collaborative learning, student-led discussions); and supporting advocacy by teachers' unions for changes to education policy and accountability for equity initiatives.

In addition, provincial and territorial governments, schools and school boards can **build community** by collaborating with local community organizations, Indigenous Elders, and advocacy groups developing outreach programs that engage immigrant, Indigenous, and racialized parents in school decision-making processes, ensuring language support and culturally appropriate communication; providing resources for parents navigating systemic barriers in the education system; creating community liaison roles in rural schools; and offering or expanding service learning opportunities for students, allowing them to engage in racial justice and community activism.

Finally, the report ends with a call to action for more focused research on rural contexts, where structural racism is compounded by fewer resources, underfunding, staff turnover, and limited cultural exposure.

Anti-Racism Initiatives in K-12 Schools in Canada

Introduction

Racism and discrimination manifest themselves in a myriad of ways throughout the education system. There are systemic issues at various levels of education in many countries and varying demographic contexts. This report explores anti-racism initiatives in Canadian K-12 education, with an intentional focus on rural and Northern regions. However, I include references to research conducted in other regions, countries, post-secondary educational institutions, and urban centres. Throughout Canada, there have been numerous initiatives at varying levels of educational power to address racism and discrimination; however, some initiatives are more successful than others. After I provide a breakdown of my research methods, outlining search terms, exclusions, and limitations, I divide the remainder of this report into four sections, identifying different levels of power and influence in educational structures and the initiatives undertaken at that level. The levels are:

- (1) Curriculum and provincial efforts, exploring what has been done where, in what subjects, and tracking successes across provincial lines;
- (2) Schools and school boards, analyzing employment conditions, school-wide efforts, and approaches to discipline;
- (3) Teachers, starting with teacher education and training, and exploring teacher-led anti-racism efforts, and the advocacy work of teachers' unions; and
- (4) Community level, with a focus on student-to-student relationships and initiatives, parent involvement and activism, the integration of community into the classroom, and broader community involvement to increase diversity, acceptance, and belonging.

I selected these four areas – curriculum, schools and school boards, teachers and the classroom, and community – because they reflect distinct but interrelated levels of influence within the K-12 education system. Each area represents a site where structural racism manifests and where anti-racism efforts are initiated, implemented, or experienced. Curriculum represents the overarching framework of what is taught and valued; schools and school boards embody institutional structures and policies; teachers (and the training they receive) and classrooms reflect the everyday practices and relationships that shape student experiences; and community acknowledges the broader social and cultural context in which schools are embedded. When reviewing the literature, sources tended to focus on one of these themes or another, which allowed thematic sorting. Apart from aligning with the literature's categories, analyzing each of these levels captures the complexity of systemic

racism in education and highlights the key leverage points where change is occurring, is possible, or where barriers to change continue to exist.

I recognize that education systems are inseparable from broader social structures and lived experiences. Experiences of racism, and specifically immigrant integration into communities, are affected by the wider community context. There is emphasis in the literature on the prevalence of racism in schools (and wider communities) specifically *in rural areas* (Dort, 2021; Lam, 2023; Lynch, 2023; Guo-Brennan et al., 2019). Generally, demographic trends suggest immigrants and racialized peoples are less prevalent in the rural or Northern areas of Canada, while such regions are also likely to have larger Indigenous populations (Bollman, 2023). The lack of exposure to diversity contributes to the lack of community acceptance and integration of diverse persons – including between newcomers and Indigenous populations (Banack, 2023; Lai & Huffey, 2007; Pohler et al., 2023; Prete, 2021). Rural areas can also be very close-knit and insular, making newcomers immediate outsiders (Stelmach, 2020). There also tend to be fewer resources for rural schools, leading to fewer teachers, transient educational leadership, school closures, and limited avenues for supporting racialized students and students who need additional support (Karanja, 2007; Looker & Bollman, 2020; Rishworth et al., 2022; Appiah-Odame, 2024; Hirsch & Borri-Anadon, 2023; Cristall et al., 2020; Cristall & Hibbert, 2020). Studies also suggest that it is harder for (any) students from rural areas to attend post-secondary schools and teacher education programs, where there is similarly less rural representation – creating a cycle of rural disadvantages (Gereluk et al., 2020; Anthony-Stevens & Langford, 2020; Danyluk et al., 2020; Hill et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2020; Smith & Peller, 2020).

Search Methods

I predominantly utilised the OMNI Libraries search engine when finding literature. OMNI is a shared library system between a consortium of Ontario's public university libraries (excluding the University of Toronto, Université de l'Ontario français, Université de Hearst, Royal Military College, and Northern Ontario School of Medicine). It includes access to 856 databases, including popular multidisciplinary databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, SAGE, ProQuest, and Scopus. A complete list of all the databases searched through by OMNI can be found at <https://guides.lib.uwo.ca/az/databases>. I strayed from OMNI only when I saw that the majority of search results were coming from the same journal, such as *the Canadian Journal of Education* (which I then scanned through in its 2020-2025 entirety), or when I found a newsletter from Nova Scotia's teachers' union, after which I reviewed other newsletters to find additional references to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization (EDID) initiatives (2020-2025). Every search excluded the terms: nursing, health. There is a large body of literature on anti-racism initiatives in nursing and health education to break down systemic racism in the medical setting. Excluding these terms allowed me to find articles on K-12 and preservice teachers' education more efficiently. Every search also had parameters for publication between 2020 and 2025. There were no limitations on subjects, source type, or language.

Key words: (multiculturalism) + (education) + (Canada)

(multiculturalism) + (elementary*) + (Canada)

(anti-racism) + (education) + (Canada)

(anti-racism) + (elementary) + (Canada)

(anti-racism) + (Northwest Territories) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (Nunavut) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (Newfoundland) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (Nova Scotia) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (PEI) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (New Brunswick) + (education) + (Canada)

(anti-racism) + (Quebec) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (Ontario) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (Manitoba) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (Saskatchewan) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (Alberta) + (education)

(anti-racism) + (BC) + (education) + (Canada)

(immigration) + (education) + (Canada)

(immigration) + (rural) + (Canada)

(rural) + (Education) + (Canada)

*I used elementary as a search term to limit the prevalence of articles focused on post-secondary and graduate education in search results.

After the search and before preparing this report and deciding what sources would be included, I browsed through the sources, produced a short summary and a general abstract analysis, ensuring articles that slipped by in the search were relevant to the parameters of Canada, education in K-12 schools, and were published within approximately the last 5 years. Some studies began before 2020 but were not published until after 2020. Due to a lack of literature on education in rural centres, the report includes articles focusing on urban or unspecified areas as well. As this project started with some pre-established collected resources (16 journal articles, 6 books, 2 book chapters, 1 newspaper article, 1 dissertation, and 14 reports) gathered by the Standing Committee, some sources were from countries such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the United

Kingdom; some sources date before 2020; and some looked at the university level. Through the above search terms, 196 sources were added (117 journal articles, 5 books, 3 book chapters, 54 newspaper articles, 16 theses/dissertations, and 1 report), making the total of 236 sources reviewed. Due to the number of sources found through the above search terms via the OMNI database, I did not engage further through citation trails to find more resources. Overall, from the resources reviewed, much of the literature focuses on the experiences of racism, hypothetical solutions, and calls to action. There is limited research that provides evidence of effectiveness, especially in rural areas. Where possible, I provide examples that showcase evidence of effectiveness and examples from rural areas. Even when the results of initiatives are discussed in the literature, there is a recurring pattern that suggests that even when initiatives have benefits, many do not do enough to challenge or change systemic racism.

Curriculum and Provincial Efforts

At the curriculum level, researchers argue that education tends to be Eurocentric and shaped by Whiteness (Da Costa, 2024; Obeyesekere, 2017; Abdulle, 2017; Appadurai, 2017; Visentin, 2022). Curricula tend to privilege colonial and Western views of the world and perspectives on what is essential to teach about and learn in schools (Joyce, 2017; McLeod, 2017; Benhadjoudja, 2022; Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2022; Louie, 2024). Generally, Canadian education also tends to favour the English language. In instances where a Francophone community or French immersion programs exist, there is also emphasis on bilingualism (English and French), which hinders plurilingualism (specifically regarding Indigenous languages and the languages spoken at home by immigrant students) (see Rhedding Jones, 2010; Daly, 2017; Kubota, 2010; Hutchinson, 2017; Kubota & Bale, 2020; Patouma, 2024). Eurocentrism also manifests in assessments, academic standards, and academic streaming that often overvalues the written word, inadvertently tests on the proficient understanding of the English language as opposed to content material, and necessitates fluency of the ‘hidden’ curriculum – the unstated cultural norms, values, and behaviours (e.g. assuming familiarity with Western historical references or academic etiquette) that are not taught yet are expected to be known (Horne, 2023; Kunnas, 2023; Herbert, 2017; Shin et al., 2021; Xasan, 2017; Cheechoo, 2023; Austin, 2017). Standardized mainstream approaches to education ignore larger social, political, and economic youth disadvantages (such as systemic poverty, leading to food insecurity, lack of access to extracurricular opportunities or school supplies, unstable housing, limited healthcare) and directly correlate with and impede the success of non-White students (see May & Sleeter, 2010; Miller et al., 2024).

Research shows embedded discrimination in education in a general sense, but also specifically explores discrimination in the curriculum of different subjects. This includes history, mathematics, physical education, music, geography, science, and English. Thematically, research on each subject reveals a lack of representation and diversity across the board. Students are taught European history (Greeks and Romans versus Asia and Africa, for example) (Joyce et al., 2023); mathematical pedagogy does not account for Indigenous ways of thinking and prioritizes

generalization (Stavrou & Murphy, 2020); students are taught a perception of health that focuses on White bodies (Tajrobehkar, 2020; Fitzpatrick, 2010); streaming predominantly impacts STEM subjects (Bing et al., 2023); the achievements of racialized people are left out of scientific discussions (Copeland & Kamalodeen, 2022; Riley & Mensah, 2024); music classes learn a predominantly classical European canon (Clark, 2021; Hamilton, 2021; Hess, 2021; Morton, 2010; Bradley, 2006); Indigenous traditional knowledge is left out of geographic conversations (Alderman et al., 2021); literacy assessments and reading assignments ignore strengths of different languages and cultures (Honeyford & Watt, 2024; Locke, 2010; Capper, 2021). Overall, Indigenous, Black, and other forms of cultural knowledge and holistic ways of knowing are excluded from education (Kissi, 2024; Stewart, 2010).

Structural issues are reflected provincially by educational policies and economic priorities – which may impede anti-racism initiatives and challenges to structural racism that may require financial resources (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022; Jabbar & Mirza, 2017; Diem & Welton, 2020). Provinces also outline curriculum expectations. Canada prides itself on multiculturalism, and anti-racism has emerged as a primary focus area in recent years. However, adopting anti-racist educational policy initiatives has varied across the country. The most advanced work appears to be coming out of British Columbia, including the “Racial Equity Together: K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan” (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2023b), the “Anti-Racism Action Plan” with actionable suggestions for teachers (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2023a), the “Indigenous Peoples: Languages Guidelines” (University of British Columbia, 2021), and the BC Tripartite Education Agreement, which involved adding an Indigenous studies course to high school graduation requirements (Siemens & Neufeld, 2022; Chrona, 2022). Manitoba released a report entitled “Creating Racism-Free Schools through Critical/Courageous Conversations on Race” (Government of Manitoba, 2017). Nova Scotia’s Departments of Justice and Education released a “Restorative Approaches in Schools Fact Sheet” (highlighting more inclusionary approaches to disciplinary actions) (Government of Nova Scotia, 2021). Ontario has an “Equity and Inclusivity Education in Ontario Schools” (2014) curricular outline, introduced an Anti-Racism Secretariat (later folded into the Anti-Racism Directorate), and ended Grade 9 streaming into applied vs. academic courses (George et al., 2020).

Although British Columbia has arguably made the most efforts towards provincial-level anti-racism, the province’s policies have been accused of engaging in symbolic anti-racism (George et al., 2020). British Columbia focuses on multiculturalism and language diversity but fails to address racial inequities explicitly (George et al., 2020). Similar critiques have been made about the Manitoba curriculum (Heringer, 2024) and the removal of anti-racist language from Ontario’s new mathematics curriculum (despite eliminating streaming) (Jones, 2021). Despite criticisms of British Columbia’s curriculum, the Northwest Territories is switching to it from Alberta’s, as it allows for better integration of Indigenous knowledge and is more malleable to land-based traditions (French, 2021). Nunavut is investigating whether to follow suit (Sallaffie et al., 2022).

Schools and School Boards

Structural racism is also prevalent at the school board and school district levels. One area of concern regards school environments and employment conditions for teachers, administrators, and other educational assistants. Immigrants and racialized people are less likely to be hired, retained, or promoted (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2023; Warick, 2020; Reid et al., 2024; Tessaro et al., 2021). Racial discrepancies exist between levels of power and authority, with racialized employees tending to be on the lower ends of hierarchies – especially considering educational assistants and settlement workers in schools (Abawi, 2021; Davis, 2023; Lopez, 2020). Lack of diversity can lead to microaggressions and discrimination amongst staff (Graça et al., 2024; Dandala, 2020; Lopez, 2020). Lack of representation also negatively impacts students of racial and language minorities (Dandala, 2020; Lopez, 2020; Oba et al., 2024). In rural areas, there is less retention of teachers, creating constant turnover, which may impede initiatives and cause distress to students (Gereluk et al., 2020).

At the school board and district levels, there is a general lack of school-wide anti-racism movements, engagements, or initiatives (Scott & Louie, 2020; Shah et al., 2023; Wallin & Tunison, 2022). Diversity is often superficially acknowledged (seen in land acknowledgements, Black History month events, etc.), leaving the colonial structure largely intact (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023; Nsouli, 2020; Oba et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2022). Without school-wide initiatives, pressure is being placed on individual teachers to make change. For example, even though there is a teaching resource for educators to teach about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and 2-Spirited Peoples in Canada (MMIGW2S), teachers themselves must find it and implement it in their classrooms (see Vanner et al., 2024). However, one anti-racist classroom does not protect students when outside of those walls (Amboulé-Abath, 2019). Furthermore, at the school level, there are discrepancies with how streaming is approached and how decisions are made about who should be included in gifted, International Baccalaureate (IB), or French Immersion programs (George, 2023; Wong, 2021; Theoharis et al., 2023). Racialized immigrants and students are often underestimated and excluded from academic and extracurricular opportunities (George, 2023; Antony-Newman & Niyozov, 2023; Rigelhof, 2017).

Lastly, of note, there are also imbalances concerning how racialized students face and experience discipline, especially in comparison to their White peers. Black, Indigenous, and immigrant students, and those from low-income families, face more detentions, suspensions, and expulsions (Robson et al., 2022; Theoharis et al., 2023; Bueckert, 2022; Radebe, 2024). Racialized students also experience racial or linguistic discrimination by White peers – White peers who often go unpunished for such acts (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023; Oba et al., 2024; Serebrin, 2023; Guo et al., 2019; Qin et al., 2024). Discipline discrepancies are also prevalent amongst staff, with racialized educators being under more surveillance than White counterparts, and White educators being underdisciplined for their discrimination against racialized co-workers *and* students (Callender, 2020; CBC, 2021; Davis, 2023; Macintosh, 2021a; Benchetrit, 2023; Shah & Grimaldos, 2024).

The first step towards successful anti-racism initiatives is to evaluate the specific problems that impact a school or district – this allows for more focused attention (Diem & Welton, 2020; University of British Columbia, 2022; Pauchulo, 2013). Whole-district approaches are essential to achieving sustained change, as they ensure anti-racism is embedded in the fabric of the school system rather than treated as an add-on (Pauchulo, 2013; Amboulé-Abath, 2019). Various school boards across Canada have created district policies that state a commitment to address discrimination, but not all address racism specifically, or provide action pieces (People for Education, 2023; Macintosh, 2021b; Macintosh, 2021c). There are challenges regarding capacity which impede the ability to address anti-racism in a holistic sense, with many schools just facing the problem on superficial individual levels – especially in rural areas (People for Education, 2023). Common efforts that *do* get put into action are hiring equity officers, such as the Winnipeg School Division’s hiring of a “divisional Kokum” (Cree for grandmother) (Macintosh, 2023b); creating student leadership and training programs, such as the Regina Public Schools ACT! Program (Pauchulo, 2013), or a Dartmouth school’s introduction of an Africentric high school program (Wong, 2021); implementing ongoing teacher training (Wallin & Peden, 2020); and using equitable hiring practices, such as meeting a specified percentage of non-White teachers and staff (Dandala, 2020). While provincial policies are slow to adopt critical race theory, local school districts and educators are leading in implementing race-conscious teaching (Tyndall & Raza, 2024). Some school boards have specifically worked to supplement provincial curriculums and fill the gaps with anti-racism “resource kits” (Raghem, 2021). Overall, efforts that focus on multicultural education or anti-bullying initiatives fall short, while initiatives that are explicitly anti-racist, and teach about what racism is and how it systematically impacts people, are more effective (Pauchulo, 2013).

Apart from teaching and lessons, there are additional steps school boards can take to increase equity. Initiatives that involve parents, especially immigrant parents or non-native English-speaking parents, help increase student (and parent) integration and belonging in their school (and broader) communities (MacPhee, 2021; Zaidi et al., 2021). Initiatives that involve integrating settlement workers in schools, and having trauma-informed school counsellors, educational assistants, and English-as-a-second-language teachers (especially for refugee students) are also effective (Gebhard et al., 2021; Antony-Newman & Niyozov, 2023; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022). The impact of school-wide financial support programs, such as meal programs, transportation support, and opportunities for technology access, should not be understated (Macintosh, 2023a), as racialized and immigrant families are statistically more likely to be impacted by wider socio-economic factors. Lastly, the Government of Nova Scotia released a “Restorative Approaches in Schools Project Fact Sheet”, which outlines approaches to discipline, opting for embedding conflict resolution skills and teachings instead of strictly punishments. No other explicit efforts concerning discipline were found (Government of Nova Scotia, 2021).

Teachers and the Classroom

When looking at examples of racism and anti-racism initiatives at the classroom level, one must look at the teacher, as well as their education and training. As the literature suggests, many education programs currently do not provide sufficient diversity training, engagement with anti-racist or Indigenous pedagogies, nor are teachers educated on *systemic* racism and their role in said system (Davis et al., 2024; Hodges, 2024; Kempf, 2024; Ruzylo, 2024; Vavrus, 2010; Pete, 2017; Martin et al., 2017; St-Pierre & Hirsch, 2024; Young, 2017). This leads to teachers, perhaps inadvertently, participating in discriminatory actions against their students, including microaggressions, mispronunciations of names, and generally expecting less from racialized students when compared to their White counterparts (Gandolfi et al., 2024; Oladi, 2023; Baptiste-Brady, 2022; Shah & Grimaldos, 2024; Apostolovski, 2023). The discrimination follows into parent-teacher meetings and other instances of parent involvement, where parents feel unwelcome and unheard by their child's teacher, and thus the school (Butler, 2021; Cranston et al., 2021; Hamilton-Hinch et al. 2021; MacPhee, 2021; Shah & Grimaldos, 2024; Zaidi et al., 2021). Lack of education also leads to teachers being uncomfortable talking about race and racism and scared of "getting it wrong" (Ruzylo, 2024; Corbett et al., 2023). Continued learning opportunities are also not always offered or taken advantage of (Cranston, 2021; Kempf, 2024; Ruzylo, 2024; O'Connor, 2020; Zesseu, 2024). Furthermore, pre-service teachers experience discrimination in teacher education, from biased admission processes, lack of diverse instructors, to being taught pedagogy that does not align with their cultural background (Guo & Guo, 2022; Halparin, 2022; Jacquet, 2024; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 1996).

For admission biases, steps that have worked include changing applications from overvaluing grade-point average (GPA) and experience to implementing a more interview-based application cycle and diversifying the interviewers and admissions boards (MacMath et al., 2023). In a teacher education program, teaching pre-service teachers about structural racism and the history of racism is effective (Wright-Maley, 2022). Pre-service teachers are products of the education system itself; it cannot change if it keeps being reproduced (Wright-Maley, 2022). Teachers with more anti-racism competence are more likely to implement anti-racism initiatives; the same is true for plurilingual competence (Peng, 2023; Gebhard, 2020; Keith & LaRue Keeley, 2023). Other initiatives that are effective include creating diverse professional learning communities (Davis et al., 2024) and mentorship programs (Hill et al., 2020) for pre-service teachers to learn from each other. It is also crucial for anti-racism learning to be long-term and systemic (Kempf, 2024).

Looking at other examples of mentorship and support, it is common in the United States and Australia to establish teacher positions for Indigenous pre-service teachers *before* graduation (Tessaro et al., 2021). Collaborative mentorship programs match teachers to schools in need – this has been successful in providing Indigenous teachers for Nunavut and Mi'kmaq communities (Tessaro et al., 2021). Ongoing mentorship and professional development throughout Indigenous teachers' careers after teacher education is also beneficial (Tessaro et al., 2021). These practices are common in the United States but limited in Canada. These practices assist with Indigenous

teacher retention and finding Indigenous teachers for rural and Northern communities, thus demonstrating how progress begins with teacher education programs.

In teacher education programs, and as we will see in K-12 classrooms, it is also effective for pre-service teachers to engage and collaborate with their local communities and diverse populations (Tupper & Omoregie, 2024). A pre-service teacher can learn about Indigenous pedagogy in the classroom or from Indigenous Elders out on the land – the latter being more effective (Scully, 2020). For one example, *Onikaniwak: For those Who Lead* is an experiential immersion program where pre-service teachers and educators engage with Cree knowledge holders for 12 weeks (Wallin & Peden, 2020). Another effective example is a practicum option where pre-service teachers work with refugee mothers inside their homes to co-create curricula (Tinker Sachs et al., 2017). Overall, it is effective for pre-service teachers to be taught to see themselves as not just part of their communities, but as community leaders (Hill et al., 2020).

As mentioned before, responsibility for anti-racist education often falls solely on individual teachers rather than a whole school-wide effort. Geography teachers have integrated regional storytelling into lessons, highlighting stereotypes of different regions and engaging with collective land-based knowledge making (Alderman et al., 2021). In Toronto, a teacher developed a course dedicated to deconstructing anti-Black racism (Wong, 2021). A teacher has abandoned PowerPoints and structured assessments for circle discussions (Bouvier, 2023). Another teacher has made it a habit of removing her desk (authority symbol) and introducing herself to her class through her lineage (Roberts, 2023). Teachers often diversify their teaching canons (Copeland & Kamalodeen, 2022). These efforts have variable effectiveness. What appears to be *the most* effective is not just diversity-signalling but providing leadership opportunities and opportunities for students to learn about the realities of the world beyond the classroom whenever possible (Peters, 2022; Mitton & Murry-Orr, 2021). This involves using mathematics, science, and history lessons to teach about structural racism and allowing students to “solve” or understand real world problems through lesson plans that align with curricula already being taught (i.e. using real census data to analyze racial disparities in income to teach about means, medians, and standard deviations, assigning projects that investigate disease prevalence in different communities to get at social determinants of health in biology class units on genetics and health; Gutstein, 2010).

Lastly, there are also instances where teachers have used their collective bargaining units and unions to advocate for and demand structural change. Reconciliation education has been a bargaining point for Saskatchewan teachers (Smith, 2024). An Ontario bargaining unit advocated for appointing anti-racism roles (Callan, 2020). The Nova Scotia teachers’ union releases a tri-annual newsletter, *The Teacher*, which shares recent news and resources for anti-racism teaching.

Building Community

Due to the systemic nature of racism in education, the system also impacts the parents and families of racialized students in a myriad of ways. A strong communication and collaboration system

between families and schools supports student achievement and increases children's self-confidence and sense of identity (Hudson et al., 2024). However, racial biases, language barriers (including non-French speaking parents in Francophone communities; MacPhee, 2021), cultural differences and unfamiliarity with the Canadian education system can impede parental involvement and integration into the school community. This is especially true in rural areas (Stelmach, 2020). One study argues that traditional Western models of parental involvement are inadequate for refugee families (Cranston et al., 2021). Another study looks at the limited communication between schools and Black families, highlighting specifically that students were placed in individual programming/educational plans (IPP/IEPs) without parental consent (Hamilton-Hinch et al., 2021). While there have been some efforts to get parents more involved in schools (as outlined in the previous section on parent-teacher collaboration), most initiatives lie outside of the school. For example, there have been studies of parents who come together in order to advocate for their children, or who collaborate with local advocacy groups (Baptiste-Brady, 2022; Butler, 2021; Parents of Black Children, 2022).

As a part of the learning experience, there have also been pedagogical initiatives that involve bringing the community into the classroom and bringing the classroom to the community. For one example, as opposed to limiting initiatives to Indigenous land acknowledgments, some schools in British Columbia, such as Maple Ridge School, integrate Indigenous knowledge into lessons through land-based learning (Blenkinsop & Fettes, 2020). In a Manitoba school division, they have implemented programs such as SPROUT to increase Indigenous knowledge systems in teaching and learning – which brings community involvement, Elder participation, and parental support into lesson plans and the learning environment. Literature on this initiative suggests these efforts are successful at mitigating the impact of colonial harms on Indigenous students and bring students of different racial backgrounds together (Deer & Heringer, 2023). Another effective initiative is the integration of Service-Learning Projects, which offer opportunities to engage with the community and put classroom learning into practice. By participating in meaningful, real-world experiences, students not only strengthen academic learning but also develop emotional well-being, social responsibility, and a sense of shared belonging, making their education more impactful (Watt et al., 2024). Overall, initiatives that provide real-world experiences and exposure to various kinds of people and the struggles they face tend to shake, or at least reveal, the *structure* that upholds racism. Initiatives that focus on community and situate education within a broader social context go beyond superficial efforts that the literature tends to criticize.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Anti-racism initiatives take place at various levels in the Canadian educational system. From a review of the extant literature, it appears that successful efforts and change predominantly exist at low levels of authority within the system or outside of the system entirely. This is seen in how teachers take on the challenge of making their individual classrooms anti-racist, and in how we see parents externally advocating for their children. The literature also reveals that the kind of

initiatives that are generally more successful at implementing *structural* change involve direct engagement with, exposure to, and education about *structural* racism. Engagement with, exposure to, and education about non-colonial ways of knowing and approaching learning are also impactful (such as land-based education or involving community leaders as teachers). The areas that require the most change are at the higher bureaucratic levels. Curriculum changes have not done enough to challenge racism; provincial efforts prefer to blanket the structure with multicultural representation. Although representation is important, it is not enough to create truly equitable learning environments. At the provincial level, British Columbia has made the most progress, as they have introduced the most efforts and initiatives. However, they are not necessarily as successful as they could be. When making decisions around how to approach anti-racism, the best place to look for potential models is not at the provincial level at all. Rather, one should look from the ground up. The most success is happening at the small scale (waiting to become large scale) and involves stepping outside of the box (i.e. the current educational system that privileges Eurocentrism and Whiteness).

Based on the findings presented in this report, the following recommendations are proposed to improve anti-racism initiatives in K-12 schools across Canada, particularly in rural and Northern areas. These recommendations are structured across the four categories: curriculum, schools and school boards, teachers and the classroom, and community.

Provincial and Curriculum Level:

- Integrate mandatory anti-racism education into all subjects, ensuring that topics such as systemic discrimination, colonialism, and privilege are directly addressed in classrooms.
- Change current uses of multiculturalism and opt towards explicit anti-racism education by incorporating critical race theory, Indigenous knowledge systems (land-based programs), and discussions of systemic racism into *all subject areas*.
- Move beyond Eurocentric assessment models that prioritize standardized English proficiency. Implement assessment practices that account for multilingual and culturally diverse student backgrounds. Additionally, address inequities in academic streaming.
- Require all students to complete an Indigenous studies and/or anti-racism course as part of their secondary education, following models like British Columbia's mandatory Indigenous courses.
- Develop province-supported resource kits and online platforms to support teachers in rural areas who may not have as much access to diverse educational materials.

- Each province should set clear benchmarks for anti-racism education, including regular curriculum reviews with input from diverse communities and scholars.
- Increase funding for rural and Northern schools to support anti-racist initiatives, professional development, and culturally responsive resources.

Schools and School Boards:

- Conduct census surveys to gather the current demographics of teachers, administrators, and students.
- Implement equitable hiring policies to increase the representation of non-White educators and administrators, ensuring students see themselves reflected in leadership roles.
- Provide ongoing, systemic training in anti-racism and cultural competence for all school staff, including teachers, administrators, and support workers.
- Conduct regular equity audits in school districts to assess racial disparities in student discipline, academic streaming, and access to advanced programs such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) and French immersion.
- Replace punitive discipline policies with restorative justice models that emphasize dialogue, accountability, and conflict resolution, as seen in Nova Scotia's Restorative Approaches in Schools project.
- Implement school-wide programs to support racialized and low-income students, such as meal programs, transportation assistance, and technology access initiatives.
- In addition to symbolic diversity initiatives (e.g., land acknowledgments, Black History Month events), engage in sustained school-wide anti-racism efforts that challenge systemic barriers.
- Develop regional anti-racism task forces to provide structural support and training to rural school boards and educators.
- Create mentorship programs that connect rural school leaders with equity-focused educators in urban areas.
- Implement targeted community outreach efforts to ensure the inclusion of racialized students and families in decision-making processes.

- Encourage student-led initiatives such as anti-racism clubs, peer education programs, and activism projects.

Teachers and the Classroom:

Teacher Education:

- Address systemic biases in teacher admission processes by reassessing GPA-based admission criteria and incorporating interview-based assessments.
- Ensure that all teacher education programs include mandatory coursework on Indigenous education, experiential, community-based, and culturally responsive pedagogy.
- Reform teacher education programs to include mandatory anti-racism training, emphasizing systemic racism, unconscious bias, and equitable classroom practices.
- Implement mentorship programs for marginalized teacher candidates, particularly those from rural, Indigenous and immigrant communities.
- Provide clear policies and training on how teachers should respond to classroom racism to avoid inconsistent or inadequate responses.

Teachers:

- Teachers' unions should continue pushing for systemic changes in education policies, including advocating for anti-racism positions in schools and ensuring accountability for equity initiatives.
- Encourage teachers to integrate racial justice topics, a diverse canon, and real-world problems as examples into their lessons *across subjects*, not just in social studies or history courses.
- Implement classroom strategies that decenter traditional power dynamics, such as collaborative learning and student-led discussions.
- Create classroom environments that actively challenge racism by addressing microaggressions and discriminatory behaviour as they occur.
- For rural schools, leverage online tools and virtual guest speakers to expose students to diverse perspectives beyond their immediate communities.

Building Community:

- Schools should collaborate with local community organizations, Indigenous Elders, and advocacy groups to bring lived experiences and diverse perspectives into the classroom.
- Develop outreach programs that engage immigrant, Indigenous, and racialized parents in school decision-making processes, ensuring language support and culturally appropriate communication. Provide support for parents navigating systemic barriers in the education system.
- Expand student-led anti-racism programs that empower youth to challenge discrimination and advocate for policy changes within (and beyond) their schools.
- Integrate service-learning projects that provide students with real-world engagement with racial justice and community activism.
- Create community liaison roles in rural schools to strengthen connections between families, schools, and anti-racist resources.

Calls to Action

More research needs to be conducted on the initiatives that are specific to and successful (or unsuccessful) in rural areas. There is a significant literature gap, with most of the writing I encountered (and cited throughout this report) being in urban or unspecified areas. Rural examples of pre-existing initiatives are cited where possible. Although the above recommendations could be applied to urban and rural areas, they are recommended from reading the predominantly urban-based literature – a bias that should not be ignored. From the literature, it is apparent that rural schools have similar issues (if not more) with structural racism; however, they also have their own additional barriers to anti-racism initiatives that should be more thoroughly studied – such as less diversity overall in the school and surrounding community, a lack of access to available resources, and other factors. Such barriers could impede efforts that may otherwise be successful in urban centres.

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