

Joint Letter From Minister of Education Mitzie Hunter and Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism Michael Coteau

March 23, 2017

Ontario is a diverse province, strengthened by our desire to share and learn from one another. We cannot stress enough our commitment to fostering an education system where all students, parents, staff and members of the school community feel safe, welcomed and respected in our schools.

To be clear, all school boards are required to have a religious accommodation guideline in place to help boards establish open, fair and transparent processes for considering individual requests. We encourage parents and students to have an ongoing dialogue with their schools if an accommodation is required or whether there are concerns. While it is our expectation that all public school boards comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code, we know that hate continues to spread, even in the most diverse regions of our province.

That's why our government released A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan. This is a whole-of-government approach to combat systemic racism, with specific targets to address Islamophobia. We need to all work together to strengthen relationships with racialized communities through community collaboration. This is an important step towards addressing systemic racism in our public institutions, as well as other forms of discrimination.

We know that the Peel District School Board has been working closely with their students and the community for more than a decade on religious accommodation in their schools and we are pleased to see their commitment to inclusion. Our Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy is also available to support the education community identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers in order to support student achievement and well-being, honour diversity, and affirm respect for all in our schools.

Realizing the promise of Ontario's diversity is a continuous process grounded in actively respecting and valuing the full range of our differences.