

Ministry Directives

for the Peel District School Board

May 4, 2020

Dear Peel District School Board Families:

Over the past few weeks, Peel District School Board staff have dedicated a lot of time and support to re-envisioning learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We continue to see staff step up, in above-and-beyond ways, to reach, engage and support every learner. In the same way, staff must commit to action in addressing the [Ministry of Education's Review](#) of the Peel board.

We must do better to provide all members of the community, in particular Black students, staff and families, with safe and inclusive places to learn and work. We are faced with the same urgency we encountered when the pandemic school closures were announced. The same commitment to care, engagement and support is required as we work to eliminate the legacy of anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination that exists in our system.

I have made it clear to every staff member, in every role, that each one of us has responsibilities to respond to the [Minister of Education's directives](#) and to change practices that have led us here. We own this work, and the only way we disrupt this legacy is by committing to this work together, as a staff, alongside students and community.

As a senior leadership team, we have been digging deeply into the content of the report while also taking action on [directives](#), according to the stated timelines. Since the release of the report, I've shared updates with you on our action and progress. While we take these measured steps, there are immediate actions we must implement now that have a direct impact on students and their success. Today, I will share these actions, which have strong connections to the work we do in schools, with you.

The work we undertake will be done through an anti-oppression lens, in particular an anti-Black racism lens. We will honour peoples' histories and identities, and work to better understand every student, colleague and family as we navigate this work. We will put our commitment into meaningful and authentic practice and do what is right and just by those we serve, in particular Black students and staff, and others who are marginalized.

Progress on Ministry Directives

On a regular basis, staff, families and community will receive updates on the actions we've taken on the [Minister of Education's directives](#) and their connection to everything we do in our system, every day, to eliminate anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination. Our goal is to take action on

the directives, but to go deeper to ensure the impact of our work is positive, effective and pervasive.

Securing accountability (directive 9)

Working with our Research and Accountability department, our new Superintendent of Equity, and other internal and external stakeholders, we will build in measures to evaluate our impact. We will also undertake the following to drive meaningful and transformative improvements throughout the system, and hold ourselves accountable:

- use demographic (Student Census) data to direct all strategic decisions
- use feedback to monitor implementation with key stakeholder groups, both internal and external
- scan effective practices already in place, inside and outside the Peel board, and work to ensure that they are pervasive throughout our system
- actively engage partners, community and system stakeholders to consistently assess implementation and effectiveness
- align all school plans throughout the district to ensure shifts in practice (e.g. suspensions and expulsions, pathways/guidance, Regional Learning Choices Programs)

Through our new Annual Equity Accountability Report Card, we will establish accountability measures and responsibilities for school and senior board leadership, and we will reach out to the community regularly to assess our progress and make any necessary adjustments. Our first progress report will be issued by June 1, 2020, and our first Annual Equity Accountability Report Card will be shared through my Annual Report by Jan. 31, 2021.

Superintendent of Equity (Directive 10)

The posting for our new Superintendent of Equity position will go out early this week, and will be available on our [website](#). Once the Superintendent of Equity begins in their role, they will establish a new, robust Equity Office, and engage in a process to enhance the board's Equity team by hiring outreach workers and additional equity leads. We hope to have an individual in the role by early to mid-June 2020.

Regional Learning Choices Programs (Directive 14)

We will begin work immediately to address the statistically significant disproportionality in enrollment of Black students and other marginalized students in the Peel board's [Regional Learning Choices Programs](#). We will implement measures to ensure Black and other marginalized students have equitable representation in these programs. We will also explore how access to programs can be improved through program planning and geographic placement, subsidies and marketing strategies. These changes will support Regional Learning Choices Programs that start in September 2021, and be implemented in the selection process that begins in late Fall 2020.

Anti-Racism Policy (Directive 16)

Consultation and development on the board's Anti-Racism Policy is beginning now. A Steering Committee will be set up with internal and external experts to guide the policy's development and implementation.

Graduation Coaches (Directive 17)

We are committing to hire four graduation coaches to support secondary schools in a strategic response that is based on our Student Census data. Two of these positions will be funded by the Ministry of Education, and the Peel board is committing to funding two additional positions.

These advocates will work towards ensuring that Black youth between the ages of 13 and 18 are engaged to realize their dreams and achieve their full potential. Specifically, they will develop creative approaches to attract and retain youth in the program, act as student mentors and advisors, and advocate for individual learners with teachers, other school staff and families. They will also identify and address systemic barriers where privilege and a lack of cultural competence may be at play, and create spaces for students to voice their experiences to enable the Board and its secondary schools to establish trusting relationships and responsive services.

This is a first step as we address directive 17 to "develop and implement a plan, with reasonable goals and timelines, to reform our guidance system to address the needs and expectations of all students and their families, and to remedy the inadequacies and gaps in supports and guidance for historically and currently underserved demographic groups, with particular focus on Black students."

Course Selection Processes (Directive 17)

We will begin work immediately to address concerns and implement professional development for our guidance staff in middle and secondary schools in order to broaden awareness about how we best support students in a way that brings about changes to current practice. We will do this through an anti-oppression lens, in particular an anti-Black racism lens, so that we are better able to attend to the students who are in front of us to help them meet their full potential. We need to ensure that we serve their interests, passions and needs.

This professional learning will include additional learning around the use of MyBlueprint as a resource and course selection and pathway planning tool, including resources to support the input of, and communication with families. We will ensure these resources provide explicit support for exploring university-bound pathways.

These changes will be in place in time to support the next course selection process during the 2020-21 school year and will ensure we mitigate disproportionate outcomes for Black students.

De-streaming (Directive 19)

Proposed timelines for a secondary school de-streaming pilot project for Grades 9 and 10 have been submitted to the Minister of Education for review and approval. Once we hear back from the

Ministry, we will form a Steering Committee with internal and external stakeholders and develop a consultation plan.

We will design and implement a substantive secondary school de-streaming pilot project for Grades 9 and 10 for the 2021-22 school year that aims to mitigate and reverse the impact of systemic racism for Black students in the Peel board. At least two secondary schools will be involved in the pilot, and other school boards who have de-streaming initiatives will be consulted. Schools will be determined using a strategic response based on our Student Census data.

Suspensions (Directive 21)

The Ministry reviewers found that Peel board data clearly shows that Black youth, especially males, are disproportionately represented in suspension, expulsions, exclusions and streaming. After considering what we could do in the short-term to address this serious concern while exploring longer-term remedies, we have provided the following direction to school administrators.

Effective immediately:

- **We will cease the practice of “informal/in-school suspensions.”**
- For students who experience challenges, we will continue the practice of providing safe, alternative learning spaces with support. We must consider the school to prison pipeline and how “informal/in-school suspensions” are viewed as a punishment that does not offer learning supports that are consistent with students’ strengths, needs and learning goals.
- If it is in the student’s best interest to be in an alternative learning environment, administrators must use a restorative mindset and approach, and work with support staff in the school, and/or Early Years and Special Education departments, to ensure students are appropriately supported. The goal is for students to remain included in the classroom community. Reintegration, repair and restoration must always be prioritized.
- **All suspensions and expulsions of students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 will cease.**
- **For all other grades, all suspensions must fall under Ministry definitions/incident codes.**
- Superintendents of Education will ensure consistent application and adherence of [Safe and Accepting Schools - Policy 48](#).
- Before deciding whether to impose a suspension, a Principal or Vice-Principal must make every effort to consult with the student, where appropriate, and the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s) to identify whether any mitigating and/or other factors might apply in the circumstances, including, but not limited to, race and/or disability, and/or whether the consequence will exacerbate the student’s disadvantaged position in society. Using an anti-oppression lens, school administrators must also consider that students who come from backgrounds of historic and systemic disadvantage may face additional and, at times, intersecting barriers to equity.
- Where a Principal has determined that it is appropriate in the circumstances to impose a suspension, the Principal or Vice-Principal must, within 24 hours of the decision, make all reasonable efforts to orally inform the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s) or adult student of the suspension. This will be followed by a letter (hard copy or electronic) notifying them of the suspension, and includes information on how the suspension can be appealed.

Staff, in consultation with internal and external stakeholders, are reviewing the board’s student progressive discipline operating procedures, [Safe and Accepting Schools - Policy 48](#), and Code of

Conduct to reflect and prioritize restorative approaches as alternatives to suspensions, expulsions and exclusions.

Moving Forward

As you can see from this update, our work on the directives has started and is ongoing. There are directives that we acted on immediately and on our own, and there are others that must and will include consultation with staff, students, families, committees and community. We remain committed to consulting and to working with the Black community, and other communities, in the days, weeks and months ahead. Additional details of this ongoing, collaborative consultation process with the Black community will be made available very soon and shared out broadly by the Board.

I want to assure everyone that the Peel board's commitment to anti-Black racism and anti-oppression is not on pause. We are being intentional about this work. As we make progress on the directives that provide voice, support and a way forward, we will share updates with you and the community on our [board website](#).

Peter Joshua
Director of Education