



THE EDUCATION CENTRE - AURORA

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Dear Senior Team members,

After reading the November 10, 2016 [message](#) from our Director titled "Our Commitment to Equity", I feel compelled to clarify a number of issues related to Equity and Inclusive Education within the York Region District School Board and my role as the named Superintendent of Equity and Community Services.

First of all, I think the apology by principal, Ms. Sadaka for what can only be described as blatant Islamophobia is a welcome step. Further, Islamophobia is racism and it must be named as such. This is particularly true when despite the incredible racial diversity that makes up Islam, it is those Muslims who are also racialized that are victimized by this racism.

Secondly, I note that in the statement, my position, Coordinating Superintendent of Equity and Community Services is named as being allocated to this file. Unfortunately, my counsel has not been sought, my opinion has not been solicited, and I have had no input into decision regarding what is clearly an equity issue. At two Senior Team meetings, I raised concerns about the manner in which this issue was handled and about the detrimental impact on our Board's corporate image and the feeling of inclusion or the lack thereof of our students, parents and staff who are racialized Muslims. In fact, at the October 24th, 2016 meeting, I stated in no uncertain terms, that as board, we appear complicit with Islamophobia. Following this protestation, I was called into a meeting to help respond to a letter from a concerned parent to the Chair. Here, my position was clearly outlined in a subsequent email where I said, "I think it's important that we name Islamophobia as a reality. Marginalized people will dismiss everything else as platitudes when we don't name and shame Islamophobia, racism, homophobia, sexism, etc."

By way of summary, on the issue of the management of the Islamophobia Facebook posts, as Coordinating Superintendent of Equity and Community Services, I have had nothing to do with the management of this file.

Furthermore, when it comes to Equity and Inclusive Education, I wish to state the following so that the record is pellucidly clear.

- I am the Coordinating Superintendent, Equity and Community Services, but since November of 2015, I have been reassigned to manage student discipline for all students in the YRDSB. This is a massive undertaking with lots of work around expulsion hearings, mediations, readmission meetings, suspensions, intake process for Alternative Classroom and Counselling for Expelled Students (ACCESS), and being support for 12 school superintendent around discipline issues. Clearly, there are equity issues within the student discipline file, but this reassignment has nothing to do with my named role as Coordinating Superintendent of Equity and Community Services.
- Under my leadership and vision, and supported by some Barrie Equity Networked funding, we worked with the Durham District School Board and an outside consultant to train YRDSB staff facilitators and developed an Equity Course entitled, *Toward Equitable and Inclusive Learning and Working Environments*. This three-day course

was to be our seminal work as we moved towards making the YRDSB an equitable and inclusive place to learn and work. The impact of the course on school and board staff who completed the series of three workshops can be summarized by the former president of our local OSSTF who stated, *"This was the best presentation of the topic I have ever attended and believe me, I have been to many such workshops over the span of my career.... Equally important was the fact that your team was able to help the group fine tune their skills and add to their understanding of power and privilege.....There are aspects of oppression and systemic bias that need addressing and you have provided me with new language and tools for going one step further in my work."* This incredible course has been cancelled despite my objections

- When I was appointed the then Superintendent of Equity and Engagement, I rebranded the Cultural Community Services Unit to the Inclusive School and Community Services (ISCS) department. I also brought in an outside consultant to engage in strategic planning around taking Equity and Inclusive Education to scale in the YRDSB. The resulting Equity Strategy Steering and Action Committee was the very large committee of school and department staff who were charged with supporting equity work in our Board. For three years this committee and its work groups did the kind of work that placed our Board on the leading edge of equity work in the entire province. ESSAC can only be described as being in abeyance, and in fact when I attempted to call a meeting, I was dragged into what could only be called a prosecutorial meeting where my motive for calling the meeting was questioned. I sent a follow up email to the Director where I indicated that, *"I will set our last inquisition-type meeting aside". I also indicated that, "Part of the challenge has been that some of ESSACs major work (HR report, Human Rights Policy development, equity course, equity goal in the BIBSA, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy collaborative, Equity Designate training, implementing Religious Accommodations Guidelines including the invitational letter, etc.) have either been changed or have lost momentum. The job action has definitely had an impact, but more importantly, there is a prevailing notion that equity work is seen as a "distraction" and that as long as we're doing gap-closing work, we're engaged in equity or that YRDSB staff who are passionate/committed to the work are viewed as "flag waivers". It's important to know that ESSACs work relies on staff volunteers who now feel marginalized and have been wondering whether it's "safe" from a career perspective to continue to do equity work."* I did not get a response to this email.
- I heard from YRDSB LGBTQ staff that they were effectively feeling marginalized by some of our board's equity work, particularly because so much foundation work had been done on Cultural Proficiency. I then called for a caucus of LGBTQ staff and allies and the resulting Positive Space Steering and Action Committee (PSSAC) was formed. This committee did a lot of great work towards ensuring that LGBTQ students and staff felt safe in the YRDSB. The work of this incredible group has effectively stopped
- It was also my vision, and supported by the then Director that ISCS was to be led by a principal, and that I would have some input into which of our school administrators would best suite this role. It's important to note that the last two ISCS principals have been appointed without my counsel or input
- As I explained in a November, 2013 [article](#) , in 2012, we embarked on a very contentious journey to change our long standing Race Relations Advisory Committee to our Equity and Inclusive Education Advisory Committee (EIAC). This new committee was in keeping with my clear and often expressed vision of a "big tent" approach to equity and inclusive education. In 2015, after this advisory committee advocated very strongly

for the collection of demographic data, the committee was disbanded and later reconstituted with new membership. My position as the now Coordinating Superintendent of Equity and Community Services left off the membership list. In other words, I do not have a seat at the table.

- Working with ESSACs Human Resources Work Group, we embarked on a review of Occasional Teacher hiring. We again engaged an outside consultant who surveyed more than 50% of our Occasional Teachers and over 50% of administrators who conduct the interviews to hire these teachers. The comprehensive report and recommendations aimed at improving hiring practices were not implemented.
- This workgroup also developed an amazing webcast to support conducting interviews that are equitable and inclusive. All administrators who were part of interview teams were to view this 8-minute webcast; this has also not been operationalized and implemented.
- Another of ESSACs Work Group worked for two years with Ontario's Human Rights Commission to develop what became an exemplary Human Rights Policy to take to Trustees. This worked stemmed from concerns coming from our Human Resources Department and our Administrative Services Department that too often when they ended up with a Human Rights complaint, they were being asked by the OHRC for York Region District School Board's Human Rights Policy. Despite my objection and protestation, this policy never made it to Trustees and was embedded in our Respectful Workplace and Learning Environment Policy.
- York Region District School Board has a very large Ahmadiyya Muslim community and the ISCS team wanted to engage in consultation with this community. The aim was to build trusting relationships and to hear from the community about how we can better work together. This consultation was cancelled. It's important to note that I have been copied on several request by the community to meet our Director of Education, and these request have remained unanswered to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- In 2012, under my leadership, we embarked on a long and strategic planning task to revamp our Religious Accommodations Guidelines which had been in place since 1993. The resulting Guidelines are in my view the best in the province. Part of the implementation process was to include a Religious Accommodation Page in our students' agenda, and to send home an invitation letter to parents. This was removed without consulting me as Coordinating Superintendent of Equity and Community Services.
- In the area of anti-black racism, after I received a series of disturbing emails from staff outlining that they were victims of anti-black racism, and after speaking to parents who told me they had grown up in London and were victimized by anti-black racism and had moved to Canada hoping that their son would not suffer the same fate. In fact, their son was being repeatedly called "Nigger" both at school and in the community. In addition, I was being spoken to by other community members and by Superintendent colleagues who were looking for support when they are contacted by principals about black students being called "Nigger". When I raised this at Senior Team and advised everyone that we have to name this as racism and not as "racial bullying" as had been done in the past, the Director responded with anger and loud accusations of me raising unsubstantiated claims of racism.
- The accusation that I was raising unsubstantiated allegations of racism hurt me to the core since that was not a personal issue, it was an issue affecting a core constituency. Black parents and Black students believe that the conduct of the Board in responding to anti-Black racism demonstrate that it does not take compliance with the *Human Rights*

Code seriously and that measures and procedures in place to respond to anti-Black racism are weak, at best.

I contemplated whether or not I should report to the Senior Team in writing, my concerns in respect to the willful omissions, non-compliance, and non-implementation issues outlined in this letter, as I strongly feared reprisal from the Director. I felt this way given the tone he took with me when I raised the anti-Black racism issue and my exclusion [from] key meetings and decisions on issues within my portfolio. However, these issues have been weighing heavily on me for a long time. As a result, I sought independent legal advice from a human rights and education lawyer Selwyn A. Pieters and was advised that I have a legal obligation to speak up on these issues having regard to my role and the requirements of the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*, 1996, S.O. 1996, c. 12, *Human Rights Code* R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19 and *Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2. and appropriate Regulations.

In conclusion and to reiterate, I am an equity-minded educator who is steadfast in my beliefs that students learn and grow best in learning environments where they feel respected, safe, and included without discrimination regardless of their social identity. Measures and procedures has to be undertaken to mitigate or remediate the issue of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia in our learning and working environments. It is clear that Black and racialized Muslim students, parents, and some staff, are concerned about these issues. We must strongly commit to explicit and deliberate work to create safe and respectful places of learning and working.

Yours very Truly,
Cecil Roach
Coordinating Superintendent, Equity and Community Services
York Region District School Board
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