Consultation and Research Report for Empowerment Squared's School Readiness Academy

Prepared by:

Lubabah Al-Ani

Brittany Georgeson

Sara Mayo

Jona Ombao-Appadu

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton

May 2022

Table of Contents

Section 1.0
Introduction

Empowerment Squared Hamilton's School Readiness Academy is a five year project, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and focuses on Hamilton's racialized and newcomer youth, aged 12 and older. The project goal is to help these students navigate through and succeed in Hamilton's educational system, whilst coping with issues of racial discrimination, culture differences, language barriers, pre-and post-migration trauma, inter-generational trauma, mental health difficulties and other hurdles that make graduating high school and proceeding forward in their education more challenging. With the proper support, youth can integrate into their communities and use their education as a stepping stone to benefit themselves and their families as a whole.

A literature review and community consultations were done to gather best practices and feedback about what programming and supports the School Readiness Academy could offer to newcomer and racialized students and families in Hamilton, to help achieve the project's goals.

Research questions that the report focusses on are:

- What has worked well in supporting successful outcomes for newcomer and racialized students?
- What are the ways in which pre-migration, migration and post-migration trauma and shocks can be eased to improve student outcomes?
- What educational/community supports marginalised youth are most in need of?
- What are existing models in other communities that have addressed these issues?
- How can we create cultural competence in order to bridge cultural gaps?
- What are ways in which trust can be built between staff and communities?

As well, some educational policies such as streaming, age-based grade placement and aging-out policies and practices, discipline policies and disproportionate punishment were discussed in focus groups and interviews to gather feedback on improvements needed to reduce disparities in school achievements and improve outcomes.

Section 2.0
Methods

This report is based on a variety of sources and methods to collect information and analyze data. Nine focus group consultations were conducted with Hamilton residents who identify as racialized or newcomers and were current high school students, young adults, parents of current students (ranges of ages). In addition, a focus group of retired educators was conducted. Focus groups were conducted both in-person and virtually. Two of the focus groups for newcomer parents were conducted with interpretation (Somali and Spanish), and one was conducted entirely in Arabic, with notes of participants' discussion translated to English.

Focus groups were facilitated by Empowerment Squared staff or SPRC staff, with notes taken by SPRC staff, except in the case of the Arabic focus group, which notes were taken by a professional interpreter.

In total, 59 participants were included in focus group discussions: 15 high school students, 12 young adults, 21 newcomer parents, and 10 educators, and five settlement workers. Incentives for recognition of time and insights provided by participants were $50 gift cards for students, young adults, and parents. In- person participants were also offered a take-away meal afterwards.

In addition to the focus groups, nine one-hour interviews were conducted virtually with service providers, community leaders, and retired and current educators. Interviews were conducted by SPRC staff.

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's Research Ethics application was approved for interviews of current teachers. Students and parents were recruited through Empowerment Squared's current networks, not through schools, therefore, ethics approval was not required. Teachers and staff invited to participate were also largely drawn from Empowerment Squared's network of partners across Hamilton.

Dedoose software was used for the coding on focus group notes and interview transcripts.

Focus group and interview questions covered topics such as:

- What participants liked about the high school system

- What they would like to see changed,

- What the transition was like for newcomer students and families,

- What schools could do to better involve parents in their children's education, and

- What school policies and practices were helpful or not in their experience of the high school system.

Questions were kept fairly general and open-ended to allow for a broad discussion and to help ensure that participants would not feel compelled to share personal experiences of marginalization that might make them uncomfortable. Many participants did, however, volunteer such experiences in the discussion, as they felt comfortable that it was a safe environment to disclose these incidents.

Section 3.0
History of Anti-Black Racism in Ontario's School System

An overview of Anti-black racism in Ontario schools starting in the 1840s, is helpful to understand the legacy that these policies and practices have created and the impact they have had on generations of Black children in Ontario. Though many Black families had longstanding roots in Canada previous to this period, they were nonetheless seen as "newcomers" by the dominant white society. Thus anti-black racism in this period can also be considered at the time to be a type of xenophobia towards newcomers, and gives insights into newcomer experiences since the earliest days of the school system. The intersectionality of race and (perceived) newcomer status is an important one – while newcomer students from many different countries were subject to discrimination and oppression in Ontario's history, treatment of Black students was codified, and legislated in targeted ways towards Black students in particular.

Natasha Henry, of the Turner Consulting Group, authored an in-depth review on this topic in 2019[1]: Henry explains that from the earliest days of Ontario's public education system, established in the early 1840s, Black students were marginalized and excluded. "Black children were turned away from schools almost immediately in London and Hamilton, because many White settlers were opposed to Black children attending school with their own children (Backhouse, 2007). This was counter to the policy in the Common School Act of 1843, which maintained that it was illegal for school board officials to refuse access to education to 'any class or description of persons resident within the school district to which such common school may belong.' "Gerrymandering of school districts by local board trustees to intentionally exclude Black families from school districts was used a tactic to create segregation despite this law.

---

[1] Henry, N. (2019). *Anti-Black Racism in Ontario Schools: A Historical Perspective*. Turner Consulting Group Reseach and Policty Brief. https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/policy_brief_-_no_1_may_2019.pdf

When students could attend white schools, segregation within the building and classroom remained. Students were kept apart from whites by sitting on separate benches and separating their bags/coats/lunches. School pictures had black students standing apart from whites.

By 1850, superintendent of schools for Canada West codified racially segregated schools due to demand from white parents, and segregation based on race and religion became the norm. Black and Catholic students could request for a separate school and white school trustees could implement separate schools, as they wished.

School taxes were collected from black property owners for public schools they could not attend. A "rate bill" was charged for black students to attend separate schools. Taxes imposed could be one or the other or both. Black people could only refuse to pay the rate bill which supported black schools. Black schools did not receive equal funding as white schools.

Teaching was done primarily by white teachers as black teachers were rarely employed. Black teachers taught in segregated schools and faced poor working conditions and lower pay due to the unequal funding base. While Toronto's schools were integrated in this period, no black teachers were employed until 1952.

Mission schools established by Christian churches or Sunday Schools were sometimes the only option for families in Southwestern Ontario. Black schools were too far away and students were not allowed into their local schools.

Academic abilities and intelligence of black students were questioned, where poor scores "were attributed to their genetics and race, not to the unequal learning conditions or to the racism Black families endured in society." Henry explains.

Black-operated private schools were an option for those who could afford it. Racially integrated private school in Windsor was opened in 1851 by Mary Ann Shadd Cary, funded by parent fees and the American Missionary Association to support formerly enslaved families. The school became well known for its high academic level. White families began sending their children there.

Between 1850 and 1855 at least six lawsuits were launched by Black parents against the injustices of segregated schools and unequal funding. One Black family won their case.

The law changed in 1964 when the first black MPP Leonard Braithwaite put forth a motion for the government to repeal the section of the Act allowing racially segregated schools. The last segregated school closed in 1965 in Colchester, near Windsor.

The ending of legalized segregation did not end anti-Black racism in Ontario schools. In the more recent era, a number of studies and reports have been written about the impact of current racism in schools on Ontario's Black students and families.

The pivotal _Roots of Youth Violence_ report from the Ontario government in 2008, described the impacts of everyday racism in the education system at the time:

- the Safe Schools Act which disproportionately harmed Black students, as well as students with disabilities, or whose parents who had communication challenges with school officials.

- A Euro-centric curriculum which made Black and other racialized groups, the majority of students in many schools, feel like outsiders in their own province.

- Guidance counsellors and teachers cueing low expectations they have for Black students, and the lack of Black teaching staff contributing to lack of role models and mentors for Black students.

- Police presence in schools, racial profiling and criminalization of minor incidents leading to disengagement of marginalized students, and suspensions and expulsions putting them at higher risk of finding connections with street and gang culture.

The Safe Schools Act was repealed in the era of the *Roots of Youth Violence* report, but changes to many other contributors to racism in Ontario's schools are taking much longer. The Toronto District School Board was the first school board to remove police officers from schools in 2017, with Hamilton Wentworth District School Board joining in 2020. Many other school boards across Ontario and in Hamilton continue to have active police programs in place.

Curriculum improvements have been implemented to a certain extent; however, students often have to seek out specialized programs to get a full understanding of Black history in Ontario. The teaching profession remains largely White-dominated which is a stark contrast to the fast-growing diversity among Ontario's student cohorts.

More recently, in 2021 the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI) conducted intensive consultations with Black students in Hamilton high schools, as well as Black parents and Black young adults who recently attended school in Hamilton. The focus of the consultations was the racism experienced in schools and what needs to change. The findings from the consultations were hard-hitting and wide-ranging. Everyday racism continues to be a reality faced by Black youth in schools, and the impacts are equally severe.

Some of the HCCI's *[Community Safety and Well-Being for Black Youth in Hamilton Schools](#)* report pointed to impacts related to school suspensions and expulsions for Black youth:

> Existing mistrust between staff and Black students is exacerbated by the excessive rate at which Black students are 'disciplined' in their schools. Though no race-based data on disciplinary measures exists for students in any Hamilton school board, it is possible to extrapolate from nearby districts. Data-collection in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) found that Black students, who accounted for 11% of the TDSB student population in the 2016-17 school year, were disproportionately suspended and expelled (36.2% of all cases in 2016-17 and 34.3% in 2017-18).

> One student was well aware of this disparity: "students of colour are always in trouble and getting suspended, so there's no point in going to teachers."
>
> Black students are not uniquely, inherently troublemakers, yet are punished in schools more frequently than is proportional to their student population. Over-policing and under-supporting is not conducive to Black student safety and well-being, and prevents Black students from reporting anti-Black racism to school administrators or staff.
>
> One community organization representative estimated that during the few years he has spent mentoring Black youth, he has seen "more than 15 kids [get] kicked out of [school name], and a lot of them ended up on the streets." He additionally stated, "These trajectories need to change."

The report also documented the normalized reality of racism in schools:

> When asked about experiences with anti-Black racism in schools, 19 of 44 (43.2%) consultation participants volunteered adverse experiences with the N-word. Two additional students mentioned three other stories involving racially motivated insults — "coloured people", "Black monkeys", and "African booty scratchers"— bringing participants' total experiences in this category to 47.7% (21 of 44).
>
> These incidents involved both staff and students as perpetrators, with many students sharing multiple instances and indicated the incidents came from known perpetrators left unchecked. The use of racial slurs in schools can be separated into three categories— targeted use, use in a so-called 'educational' context, and the 'N-word pass' phenomenon.
>
> "There was no point in telling my mom because I would have to talk to her every single day; I just felt tired and defeated."
>
> [While listing seven instances of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia she and her family have recently experienced] "If I started talking about these microaggressions, I won't ever stop."
>
> "Many things are happening that aren't being reported or counted. Not everybody has the courage to express what's going on with them. I'm so used to it that I'm not shook when it happens again."

Students also relayed to HCCI how Black youth felt racism in schools limited their access to leadership positions, prevented them from creating mutual support groups, and instances where they were censored from expressing their opinions on the causes and impacts of racism:

"I would change the selection of the student council. It mainly consists of white people. White people do not represent Black people. When I look up at the student council I don't see anyone that represents me. There is no one like me there. How am I going to be motivated to be like them or look up to them when there is no one like me? My friend told me, 'how about we participate in the elections for student council,' and I felt confused, because I have not seen any Black person go into the elections or be the Student President. So, I feel like there's no chance for Black people to be the Student President, because obviously they chose only white students to be the president. I feel like it would be refreshing to see people like me in the student council." [3 participants present agreed].

"I tried starting a club for Black students, but teachers told me that there were already other clubs in place, although there actually weren't any for Black students specifically."

"They should make more clubs and make clubs easier to form. If I was a principal in September, I would make more incentives for clubs run by people of colour, and offer more class accommodations. I think more people would join clubs if they did more research about things that people of colour, especially when they are from poor neighborhoods, experience. Or if they made school clubs give students volunteer hours."

"My friend and I wrote and submitted a BLM-themed piece for our yearbook, but the published version had a completely changed message. We talked about how there was a lack of diversity in staff, how the curriculum needs more Black History education, and they completely cut out the section. They took out words like 'police brutality' and 'racially motivated murder' about George Floyd. We were talking specifically about racism in schools and that stuff specifically was removed. They asked for Black voices to speak on behalf of the school, then they turned their backs and rewrote it."

Highlighted sections are quoted from the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion's *Community Safety and Well-Being for Black Youth in Hamilton* report: https://hcci.ca/safety-plan-for-black-students/

Section 4.0
Themes From Literature Review and Consultations

4.1 Newcomer experiences in the education system

Students who arrive from another country may have experienced distress and/or trauma at one or more stages of their migration journey. For example, children may be affected by the following factors in the pre-migration, migration and post-migration experiences, and each will affect their integration into the Canadian education system in different ways (Table 1).

Table 1. Factors related to migration that affect children's mental health[2]

Pre-migration	Migration	Post-Migration
Age and developmental stage at migration	Separation from caregiver	Stresses related to family's adaptation
Disruption of education	Exposure to violence	Difficulties with education in new language
Separation from extended family and peer networks	Exposure to harsh living conditions (e.g., refugee camps)	Acculturation (e.g., ethnic and religious identity; sex role conflicts; intergenerational conflict within family)
	Poor nutrition	Discrimination and social exclusion (at school or with peers)
	Uncertainty about future	

These experiences are more commonly experienced by children of parents without status, refugee claimants, or government assisted or privately sponsored refugees, than newcomers who come with family members via the Economic Class immigration stream. Children who arrive through the Family Class stream, or with their parents on work or foreign student visas have a diversity of backgrounds and migration journeys and may also experience these mental health challenges.

Hamilton has been designated a reception centre for refugees by the federal government, and therefore, welcomes a higher proportion of refugees among its immigrant population, compared to the Ontario average (Figure 1). Around 32% of recent immigrants arrive via the refugee

---

[2] Table from: Kirmayer, L. J., Narasiah, L. J., Munoz, M., Rashid, M., Ryder, A. G., Guzder, J., Hassan, G., Rousseau, C., & Pottie, K. (2011). Common mental health problems in immigrants and refugees: General approach in primary care. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 183(12). http://www.cmaj.ca/content/183/12/E959.full

stream, more than double the Ontario average. For this reason, Hamilton school boards need to be particularly attuned to the needs of this large population within its schools.

Figure 1. Immigrants by major admission category, by selected immigration periods, Ontario and Hamilton (Statistics Canada 2016 Census)
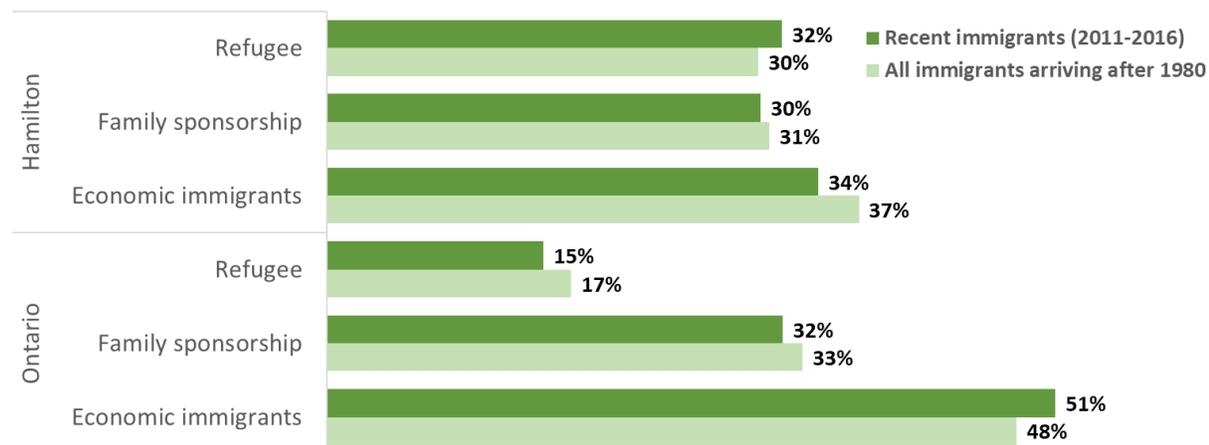
4.4.1   Impacts of language barriers

Among newcomer students and parents consulted for this report, language was the most pressing concern in the education system. For those whose English proficiency was low, the inability to communicate with the school, understand what their children were learning, and get their needs understood by the school was a big concern.

> "It's very difficult to make the teachers to understand the problems we have and how hard it is to make here. To understand what we have for the kids. While the teacher looking for translation from Somali to English takes time. We understand our kids when they have frustration and don't get what they need, and the teacher takes time to understand what we need. The teacher, if they don't understand, they don't have time to give it to you they will go on with their education. There is no understanding there. The teacher cannot take many times to say what we need and they don't understand. They are not happy to hear what we are saying all the time. That's why we have problem for the teachers. Lack of communication, presence of interpreters. It takes time to communicate and the teachers are not understanding his frustration." – Parent

> "I would like the school to focus on newcomers' language skill because they don't have any English, so they don't feel that they are less and isolated. I would recommend doing intensive language classes for the newcomers' students to escalate their progress of adaption with other kids." – Parent

"The family even if they know some English it is very hard to communicate with teachers especially in high school. For example, I don't attend parents meeting because there is no interpreter, even if I understand some information, I will not be able to comment back. In the meanwhile, I attend some zoom meetings, but I can't understand most of them, I only understand some simple information. It is essential to have an interpreter especially during parents meeting, either it could be zoom meeting or in person. Otherwise, I will not attend." – Parent

"I don't understand how high school system works here, neither how they select courses! My kids are teens and it so hard to decide what they really want and even for me I can't help them because I don't understand how it works! In case, they change their interest path, how we can help them? In high school they communicate with us through emails and again language barrier hits me. There is no interpreter to help me to communicate with teachers, neither no way to connect with any person who would help my kid to pick up their courses. That led to poor communication between us because I don't understand what the best choices for him is and how we can do this process together!" – Parent

"We not only parents who have difficulty. A lot of kids in our community have this problem. The board of education and the teachers, if you can share with them what we are here today and see if you can get more help for the children, we will be happy. The teacher knows this child how he is behind for his age, or how he's learning, and the teacher can help more to get more education. Some of the parents they can't speak English and they do not have background education where they come from, is there any help for the parent too? When they come to house with homework and parent don't understand what they have, and nobody is telling them in their own language to explain the difficulties the child has, like not doing homework on time. They don't understand the books and what they have. The parent cannot do nothing about what the child can do. They need help to understand when the children are behind." – Parent

Service providers indicated that they have challenges finding interpreters for some languages: "I think that is the challenge and that is what I think we're missing in the community at this time is just the languages. We don't have many of the languages that we need to advocate for the students."

Newcomer service providers interviewed further recognized the difficulties that arise when parents need to rely on their children to interpret for them in their communication with the school. This creates a power imbalance in the parental-child relationship which can be challenging to manage.

"The parents' language barriers are very important because the children that they are becoming the interpreter of their parents, which is taken for granted. We have very lots of experience that the power will change in that point that the child has the power over the patterns. And I wish that the teachers can understand the students' situation. The pressure of fitting in with their Canadian peers. That's at one hand experiencing discrimination among the other students. They say they have it, but nobody knows about it. And getting in trouble by their parents at home. So, they are like a sandwich squeezed in between the school outside and the parents at home. So how they are adjusting a new educational system to overcome these challenges?" – Service Provider

"Translate messages and put them on the call so that parents can know the messages. Communicate with parents in their own language. Actually, make sure that parents are getting the news and everything. My mom does not speak English or know how to use technology. Any calls or e-mails from the school I am answering for her. They should make sure that parents can understand and receive this information. Using an interpreter or a translator." – High school student

4.4.2   Impacts of English language immersion model

Dedicated language instruction time for English language learners is limited in Ontario schools. The Ministry of Education favours the immersion model, where kids are placed in grades according to their age, regardless of their knowledge of English, and through time spent hearing English in the classroom, eventually learn to understand instructions, speak, and carry on conversations. Starting in grade 1, ELL classes are around 2 hours per week, with the rest of the time being spent in their regular classrooms, even if their comprehension is limited. Some parents described how this made newcomer children's experiences of school more challenging.

"I noticed that our kids avoid playing with other kids because they don't have the language, and this affects them badly, so I wish if teacher could do something about that. Focus on language essentially" – Parent

"I have three kids at high school and our suffering is in language and it requires more from ELL program because it is not enough" – Parent

One student explained that the time to learn English in the immersion model was shorter if their language group was unique in the school.

"When I started school, me and my sibling could only speak Persian. They had no one available to help us speak it, but it helped me learn English faster. I had a lot of Arabic friends and they were speaking Arabic to each other, and they were developing slower." – Student

Teachers are told how many ELL students will be in their classrooms, but additional support they receive is limited, one teacher explained, and is not proportional enough to the number of students who don't understand English they are teaching, In Kindergarten, there is no ELL program at all, and teachers are sometimes leading classes that have a majority of students who don't understand English instruction. Teachers agreed that more ELL supports are needed for Hamilton's growing population of immigrant children.

> "I think sometimes we just throw new newcomers with very little English into classrooms where the teachers can't give them what they need in like a regular classroom without more support, like the ELL support students need."
> – Educator

4.4.3   English language learners' experiences of accent shaming and stereotyping

Many parents and students explained how language also becomes a source of marginalization and stigmatization from native English-speakers.

> "What I wish that teacher could explain the question and let the new student try to participate and don't let anyone laugh at them. The child's feelings will badly get affected when others make fun of them." . - Parent

> "In Canada people are not patient if you have a language barrier, or accents. That kills the self-esteem of kids who are in high school." – Parent

Educators also reported that if they had an accent that limited their job opportunities in the education sector, and conversely, that when they were placed in schools with many English learners, they felt students were happy to hear a teacher who had an accent, and made students feel more comfortable with their own accents.

Educators reported that lower expectations for many newcomer students can be common, because of ingrained biases, and difficulty understanding English language learners' when they speak, so not having an opportunity to understand their intelligence. Recognition of these biases is essential, so that the students can be treated with more appreciation of their gifts and skills, one teacher said. Parents and students explained how they recognize and get negatively impacted by those lower expectations that can be assumed of them.

> "When a student is a language learner, does that mean that somehow their intelligence isn't as high? Does that mean that we're not expecting as much from that student? I think that that it's a natural thing when someone cannot articulate their intelligence. That this is a natural tendency and we need to work against that tendency." – Educator

> "Yes, we are immigrants, but we are intelligent. We are not dumb. More acceptance more inclusion is needed." – Parent

"Our registration forms don't explain what the English learner program is, and then some of our families don't want their children with that box checked because it looks as if they know about the lower expectations and so they don't want those."
– Educator

4.4.4 Immigrants' mental health, including migration trauma

Mental health impacts like in the quotes above related to language, migration, and changes to cultural environment were frequently mentioned by parents and students. Hamilton's large number of students arriving as refugees have journeyed for years as migrants and experienced traumas in their journey.

Severe war trauma that many refugees experienced has been shown to be associated with psychiatric disorders like PTSD and depression and has been found to predict psychiatric disorders in later life[3]. Post-migration factors said to put PTSD sufferers at risk of continued and increased psychological distress included delays in processing refugee applications, obstacles to employment, language problems, racial discrimination and loneliness. PTSD and depression have different patterns of development and prognosis, with PTSD being related to earlier trauma, while depression is linked to recent stressful events. Financial problems constitute a second post-migration parental worry associated with children's significantly higher depression scores[4].

Even for newcomers who did not have a traumatic migration journey, being in a new country is an intimidating experience, and can impact their confidence to develop and trust new social relationships.

"Introvert immigrant vs. Extrovert immigrant. For an introvert it may be hard for them to make connections and get assistance. Some people may have fear facing new things, and teachers need to be more understanding of that." – High school student

"Our kids sometimes feel shy, would be good to take care of them afterschool, more one on one, smaller groups, once a week or twice a week, to support our kids."
– Parent

"Promoting equity is the main solution because it's not fair to look at the students they were born in Canada, in a safe place. Everything is provided. No issues such as coming from a war zone. Most of the newcomer students who have experienced that, I can say 90% are traumatized. Even the Settlement Workers in Schools, they

---

[3] Refugee Technical Assistance Centre. *Traumatic Experiences of Refugees.*
https://refugeehealthta.org/physical-mental-health/mental-health/adult-mental-health/traumatic-experiences-of-refugees/
[4] Big Ideas for Growing Minds (BOLD). Parental migration and the children left behind.
https://bold.expert/parental-migration-and-the-children-left-behind/

are not only all fully equipped or trained how to support those students. So, I really, really wish to see equity and diversity and inclusion in the classrooms. Teaching them how to be comfortable engaging in conversations with other people. Sometimes things come down to having connections with people. For a new immigrant it can be intimidating talking to someone you don't know."
– Service provider

4.4.5   Training for teachers and students

These findings underscore differences in supports that would be needed within the newcomer student population. Newcomer students who arrived to Canada with their families via the economic class immigration stream would be less likely to experience these pre-migration traumas, compared to newcomer students arriving as refugees or without status. Getting to know each student as an individual is key to understanding what risk factors they may be subjected to, and to ensure supports match their specific needs. Students, parents and educators often expressed wanting there to be more training to support newcomers.

> "Research on the internet to better understand what a newcomer student would go through in a new country. You cannot understand what someone is going through by sitting in your office. It involves research and conversations." – Young adult

> "We place a student in the same class as another student with the same language, but I was not aware of the tension between religious groups of students. Religion is a big factor and different social groups. We need people to explain to us. Our cultural expectations, there' so much we don't understand." – Retired educator

4.4.6   Cultural adaptation for newcomers

The time for adjustment for newcomers to understand Canadian cultural norms and expectations is an important consideration for schools to understand, newcomer parents and students explained.

> "Take it slow. If you know I have never been to a school in Canada, it is a lot of pressure to learn everything at once. All of my teachers were like 'okay, let's go.' They gave the impression that I was supposed to know everything already. They didn't really show me any support at all. If someone is an immigrant, know that they are not going to know everything. Be more supportive." – Young adult

> "Students who have grown up in Canada have completely different backgrounds than newcomers. Immigrants are expected to know everything that other students know, but we may not have the same knowledge. "– Young adult

"Educate families and students about the school policy and rules. Try to be tolerant and understandable if any problem happens with our kids because of the lack knowledge of the rules." – Parent

"Then there is the Canadian school culture and the newcomer. Parent is not able to fully navigate the academic, extracurricular, and social components of their children school life." – Service provider

"Back home, the kids can fight, they can hit each other. But there in Canada it's not allowed. Especially in nutrition breaks, my son and friend, they push each other." – Parent

"Many newcomer families have a background that places the highest value on academic achievement, but very little or no value on children's extracurricular activities. So, they may not respond well to the challenges that stem out of these activities and many choose not to participate in games and field trips. As the other Canadian parents do. And that absence could be interpreted as neglect or lack of interest." – Service provider

4.4.7   Exclusion and social isolation from Canadian society

Some newcomers and service providers spoke of the exclusion from Canadian society that is felt by many. Providing more education of immigrant journeys and challenges among non-immigrant families, and promoting cross-cultural and peer support to reduce social isolation, was suggested.

"Newcomers are left on their own. Volunteers needed to help them. Continued support, not just dropping off. You can't integrate in six months. Not even six years. They need to develop social networks." – Parent

"I think people just assume that newcomer youth should, or newcomer families should, move to Canada and be grateful for what they have. And now assimilate and move on, and it's just such a crazy idea. I mean, can you imagine? Who watched two of their family members murdered and one kidnapped, and then they had to move from the home that they were living in? And now they're living in an encampment with 1,500 other families, where the water and the food is scarce, with limited access to schooling and medical care, and sometimes some of those encampments can be dangerous. And so, they live in fear for another six months. And then their visas come in and they get their passports, and they're off to Canada. Well, you don't forget all of that stuff that went before and you've never had the opportunity to work through. Now you're in another country where nobody speaks your language. And you don't speak theirs and you do end up getting, you know, connected with people in your community, who do speak your language. But they

also suffered trauma, and they're struggling to support one another. It's nice to offer people asylum and a place to live and sanctuary, but we do a really bad job once they get here of understanding that. They need more than just a place to live and food to eat." – Service provider

"We still have difficulties in our community where they're not helping that much. Needing translator for social worker, it takes a while to get a translation. So many people from our community are still having that difficulty. There's a problem with welcome system – they don't tell what's going on, what's going to happen in this country. They bring us to this country, and they let you go." – Parent

"I felt that all of the teachers did not really understand where students were coming from, especially those new to the country. Those who speak a second language. There wasn't enough support within the school. Lots of talking but never following through with much. Not to blame the teachers, but the whole curriculum itself. It should have a mentorship program. Schools should build more connections with non-profits such as Empowerment Squared who help marginalized students, rather than waiting for people to come to them. There's not much engagement going on within the school. Also, trying to understand people's experiences. There is a lot of misunderstanding. For example, Friday prayers in my school. A couple teachers were really not happy with it. I feel like there is so much pressure on students, especially those coming from a marginalized community. The increased police presence at my school was also intimidating and made people uncomfortable. Something needs to be done in this regard." – Young adult

4.4.8   Barriers to advocacy by newcomer parents and caregivers

The cultural background of some newcomer groups makes it less natural for them to advocate for their children's needs directly to teachers and school officials. Add that to language barriers, and it becomes, as one parent described it, a "double whammy" for families and hinders children getting the proper support they may need.

"Many parents have come from a system where they accept the authority of the school, and that that's been part of the cultural background where they've come from. So, you don't get the school has a huge authority but here that the system is actually the other way around it. It is based on how much squeaking is done."
– Retired educator

"And as a parent, you were able to go to school to advocate for your child, and sometimes I often think of parents who A) do not know the school system B) do not have the language and obviously a lot of these I guess non-Western culture. You know, we come from countries where the school is almost the authority. What the

school says it's the final say, right. So having that attitude as well, in a way, prevents parents from advocating for the needs of their children within the school system, and these are really, really important factors." – Service provider

"We were raised in a culture, where you are, you are in a hierarchy. And in that hierarchical culture teachers are kind of up there and other people are kind of down there. Then you look at schools with a kind of respect that says school knows what's best for my child. And so, when the school says to you, 'this is a class that your child should go into. This is the course that we think your child should take.' You might accept that. Not knowing that you can challenge it." – Parent

"Parents who come in as newcomers coming with that frame of reference in their mind may not want to challenge any decision taken by the school. They may not want to challenge placements of their children. And so, part of the preparation of parents to address schooling is to let them know it's OK to challenge, don't be intimidated. If the family does not speak English as their first language, then you have another level of intimidation." – Retired educator

Some suggested it would be useful to create a forum to hear from newcomers directly can help them feel more comfortable to bring up issues that can help open lines of communication and pro-actively solve problems.

"Is there a board of education to give us a meeting every few months to talk about our children, what they do, what they need to do, what they have to do, what we can help. Then we know what's going on. We have some student who finish high school and cannot read or write and they don't understand what they're doing even."
– Parent

"I think if they could if there's some could be some sort of unified Council so there could be strong advocacy, because there's no one else advocating for these kids right now. That's one of the problems the parents don't know." – Service provider

"And with the schools so they want to be involved in school parent teacher meetings for example because they feel disadvantaged due to literacy related issues or language related issues. When you are uncomfortable in a space you are not going to be able to participate fully and with parents not being involved in their kids learning that already disadvantages the children." – Service provider

Some service providers felt that the inaccessibility of school facilities for programming was a barrier for better services they could develop for newcomer families.

"Part of the problem with schools is that they charge for their space now and they don't charge a little bit. They charge quite a bit, so if we wanted to run a program, let's say we wanted to run our connections program, which is our newcomer, youth program. Because we did talk about expanding it and including the parents to see if,

you know, to create kind of a fun opportunity for parents and kids to play together and to come. You know, we'd have like a homework component and so like we envisioned it. To run it successfully, though, it would have to be run in the school. It's really hard to find another community, but they already can make it to the school we know about. So, the school is kind of the best place for it. But it seems like there's always barriers; if it's not cost, then it's the hours where the school is not open or it's not available." – Service provider

4.4.9   Transportation, food needs, and readiness for kindergarten

Logistics like transportation, including getting kids to school, was another common challenge raised by newcomer parents, when arriving in Canada. Just getting around is a big challenge, due to weather, unfamiliarity with streets and the bus system, or not having a car or driver's license. Some parents also noted they needed help providing meals for students.

"They have extreme winter here and they are expected to come to school. Kids will walk to school. They need a better bussing system. They need a better food system. They need to put money into that." – Parent

"When I came to Canada, at that time I was going to a public school. We contacted the school for the bus and the school said no we cannot. They never gave me the bus the whole year I went there. There were many students from my area that were going to the bus." – Parent

"When we started school, they could have done helping with the transition. When you first come to Canada it's hard to get a car and transportation. The bus would only pick up three of my kids. How difficult it is to pick up all of my kids? They told me to go to the principal. They could have taken all of them as the bus was empty. It doesn't make sense. They could help new immigrants with transportation – the school system here needs to learn from America. The bus system here does not make sense." – Parent

"Another thing they should do here is give the kids food. In America, they give them breakfast and lunch. They are putting burden on parents, telling them what kids can bring and cannot bring. They're telling my friend she can't bring juice, cookies, etc. the teacher tampered with her daughter's lunch. Suggesting foods that Africans do not know or eat. If the school has all these excuses on what kids can bring, just give them breakfast and lunch."

"It's always difficult coming to a new country. We didn't have snow, we had hot weather. If we need to go to an address, we need someone to take us there. Everything was difficult like taking the kids to school, but we are past that now. Thank God." – Parent

Parents and educators of kindergarten aged kids reported needing more support for the youngest newcomers in the school system. Parents explained that they felt their kids English language learning needs were not being met, as many of their children didn't have enough English skills to understand classroom instruction. Kindergarten uses the full language immersion model, so no ELL classes are available for that age group. In addition, an educator explained the need for more support and communication with newcomer parents on the importance of kids being fully independently toileting by the time they enter kindergarten (which can be as early as age 3 and 8 months for kids born in the last part of the year).

> "One of the gaps [for newcomer children entering kindergarten] is toileting and changing themselves independently. We have to coach kids before they go in to the washroom. 'OK, you need to make sure you put down your underwear. Use toilet paper, put up your underwear and your pants' so that knowledge is missing. I think it's just the parents might be toilet training them a little too late. And when the child doesn't understand English its doubly hard for the child." – Educator

The COVID pandemic has exacerbated this situation as EarlyON centres were closed starting in March 2020, and they had previously provided school readiness programing for 3 and 4 year olds in locations across the city. Throughout, most of 2021 EarlyON centres in Hamilton only provided virtual programing, and in Spring 2022 were still not offering full indoor programing that was in place before the pandemic. One educator suggested that service providers that have newcomer clients with 3 and 4 year olds inform and encourage parents to ensure kids are independently toileting by the time they start school.

4.2 Bullying prevention and inclusive classrooms

Bullying prevention has been shown in the literature to be an important component of improving outcomes for racialized and newcomer students (REF). In consultations for this report, newcomer and racialized students reported incidents that contributed to bullying in classrooms, and wanted teachers to do more to make classrooms safer and more inclusive.

As also mentioned in the newcomer section of this report, second language learners reported incidents where they felt stigmatized because of their accent.

> "Some kind of training for the teachers. For example, reading in front of people and other students start laughing. Make sure reading doesn't turn into a traumatic experience in the classroom" – Young adult

Stereotypes about cultures and countries were reported by students as something teachers should address.

"Sometimes students see the cons before the pros in other [cultures] because they are not well educated. Part of it is to blame the teachers who do not give [other students] good information. [Teachers] need to educate other kids." – High school student

"Some of my teachers think some of the Jamaican music I listen to is not appropriate. It's what I listen to and what I like, you can't really tell me what to listen to. They think that I'll act out." – High school student

Some students felt their experiences of bullying were minimized and felt the burden was on them to control their reaction.

"Students were making fun of my home country to me and it made me want to cry. When I told my teacher she told me to ignore it. How can I ignore the things that people say about my country? Instead of telling them to stop, she told me to ignore it." – Young adult

Parents spoke about the racism between students that their children reported and how it impacted their learning.

"Stop racism amongst children, kids. Safe and friendly environment conducive for kids to learn." - Parent

Students wanted more inclusion and respect for their religion and culture, and some students also wanted schools to do more to increase cross-cultural connections between groups:

"Also, I found it quite disturbing in high school the lack of understanding of diversity in my school. We really have a problem when it comes to tolerance. We're not really allowed to practice Friday prayers, etc. The school should try to understand the collective people rather than just talking about inclusivity and say they're going to do." – Young adult

"There needs to be more awareness of population being taught. When I was celebrating Eid, the teacher was not accommodating and didn't understand my need to take time off because the school calendar had a different date. It was important to me and that's the day my family celebrated – there are different days." – High school students

"When I was in high school the curriculum around Christmas and Halloween. It made me feel really weird because I didn't celebrate it. We would always be asked what we got for Christmas, it made me feel like I was poor and couldn't afford presents. When I was really young, I thought Santa didn't like me. But my family didn't celebrate Christmas." – Young adult

"Canada is multicultural yet students create cliques with people from the same cultural background as them. I think that school should make a rule to mix people

together, for example through peer tutoring. I want to see everyone mix up and be sincere with others. The school should create intentional opportunities to mix." – Young adult

"I remember there was a large Somali community at my school and had a lot of friends at the beginning. When I switched schools, it was majority Arabs and Whites. It was hard for me to adjust. The school system should have more welcoming for newcomers and understanding it's difficult for them to adjust." – High school student

4.2.1 Food and meal times, dress and hair are targets of bullying incidents

Students reported that nutrition breaks and food were often a focus for bullying and exclusion – students want teachers and schools take steps to address issues proactively.

"I feel like people always react to food they haven't seen before. Some foods that people eat with their hands and get weird looks. Yet people can eat a hamburger and no one sees that as abnormal." – High school student

Parents also reported that teachers were judging children's food from a western lens:

"I have a very skinny child and I am trying to have her add some weight. Where we come from the food is very different. She doesn't eat, she is very picky. The school will write me that it is not healthy food when I send lunch like meat pies. The teacher doesn't know what it is – it is healthy." – Parent

One educator explained that educators are working to improve this, but because of how teacher hours are funded, for grades 1 and above teachers circulate between multiple classrooms during meal times, so challenges remain.

"We do student surveys and they tell us the places where students don't feel safe is during that unstructured time, like nutrition breaks or like moving about the hallways or recess time. So that is something that we are talking about how to solve." – Educator

Dress code was a source of exclusion reported by some students, and also highlighted in the HWDSB's Safe Schools Review Panel final report[5] as a policy that unfairly targeted Black students' hair and dress style. More recently, HWDSB has created a new school board wide dress code policy that aims to reduce these types of conflicts and biases.

"One of my experiences in middle school – they had a dress code. One day I wore a durag and as soon as one teacher saw me during an assembly and announced

---

[5] HWDSB's Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel's final report: *Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment* (2021) https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/safe-schools-review-panel/#tabs-112

durags were not allowed. I was just trying to flatten my braids. People use it to get their hair flat and make waves. This teacher was out for me." – High school student

"My teacher made me take off my durag during O Canada. It was part of my hairstyle. When I said no, she tried to take it off, I got sent to the office. I was allowed to continue to wear it once my mom came to the school and explained."
– High school student

4.3 Cultural Competency Building

In consultations for this report, many students expressed that they felt the diversity of the student body was not integrated into education practice:

"Names in assignments were always 'Paul' or 'Lily' never diverse names. That would have made me feel more normal to see names like 'Ayesha'." – Young adult

"I don't know if they're not aware or don't want to be aware. I see things differently, do things differently. I see things a certain way based on my experiences. I don't think a lot of teachers went out of their way to try to understand that I'm coming from a different culture with different experiences. I approach things differently, even the way I respond to questions. They sometimes thought I had an attitude, but in my culture, we just say things very straight forward. I didn't have an attitude." – Young adult

"The whole student body isn't one homogenous thing. There are all types of students – black, racialized, different genders, abilities. In order to make the school a welcoming, safe environment they actually have to take steps towards doing that. Simple things like questions. Creating a safe space for students to come forward about their different experiences. You don't really know where to go, what options are available, so you just deal with it on your own. I think being active and trying to create a safe space would be good." – Young adult

Students wanted to see more cultural respect and cultural competence among teachers. The US-based National Education Association (NAE) describes cultural competence as "having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families." (NAE. "Why Cultural Competence?" August 27, 2020.) An American education leader, George Farmer, further explains that "when educators fail to acknowledge their own biases and assumptions, the hindrance of a student's developmental process is inevitable. Having good intentions is not

sufficient; the actions are what will be seen and felt by students. What one individual may perceive as innocent can have detrimental ramifications."[6]

Students and parents expressed the impact of experiences with teachers or students who lacked cultural understanding and competence. For example, differences in cultural expectations can lead to students being unfairly punished, as explained by one parent:

> "The teacher told him to stand up and come in front of her, but he didn't look at her eyes because we were taught not to look at your teacher or elder person and eyes. So, he put his head down and he said 'I'm not the one who did that'. She said 'no look at me, you were the one who did that' and she suspended him. She sent him to the office and he came home crying: 'mom, you told us not to look in the eyes from the elders and your teacher and respected people. But I was suspended because I didn't do that and I didn't look at the teacher's eyes.' So, I went to the school and explained to them, I raised him not to look in the eye. But he was telling her it wasn't his fault that that happened. And then it solves when I explained it to them. And the principal called all the teachers in the break time and said, 'listen to this parent (me). She will explain to you how she raised their children and what happened today.' " – Parent

Sometimes these challenges can lead to having to change school or dropping out of school entirely.

> "A lot of the same issues as well to a lot of times they see it being personalized in terms of some bias towards their involvement. You know, within an individual classes. School or within the system, and they'll share an unfortunate example of, you know, a situation that happened with a teacher with a principal with whatever it is it you know. Some authority figure within that school. Where they feel that they weren't understood in terms of their own cultural context and understanding and how they fit within a system that, particularly if they're a newcomer, may be quite foreign to them, right? So, despite some of the supports that have been intentionally built into the system that that aren't necessarily either transparent or meeting their needs, or being implemented the way that they were, you know, effectively designed, so that's on a very grassroots level that we hear stories every day, and we have. We experienced students who you know are traumatized by this, students who drop out of school students who are looking to change schools." – Service provider

Trying to fit in leads some students to suppress their own culture, when schools don't create a welcoming environment for newcomers.

---

[6] Farmer, G. (2020). *How Schools and Teachers Can Get Better at Cultural Competence.* Education Next. https://www.educationnext.org/how-schools-teachers-can-get-better-cultural-competence/

"Trying to become like those other ones and try to forget about who they are - I would love to see teachers celebrate and learn. Learn about other children's culture and encourage it because when they come and they see another culture, like Canadian culture, they want to forget about their culture. They want to trash [their own culture] because it's not in, they don't embrace it. So, if the teachers tried to learn about their culture and promote, and celebrate, and encourage, they would feel included." – Service provider

"[Newcomer students] will tell Mom: 'mom. I just want to fit in'. [For example, because their lunch is different than other students' lunch] younger kids go hungry or rely on their teacher to provide a snack. Their mom will pack lunch, but it just won't leave the backpack. So, most of our clients report their inability to adapt to the school culture. This is indicative of a space not being inclusive. So, they have wondered if they can raise their Canadian children to adjust properly and succeed in their new home without necessarily sacrificing their cultural heritage." – Service provider

4.3.1   Hiring

Research shows that minority teachers are likely to be more effective in producing positive academic and behavioural outcomes for same-race students (with the evidence being strongest for Black teachers improving outcomes for Black children)[7]. Ensuring staff come from diverse backgrounds, reflecting the student body is a key component of any cultural competency strategy. Students expressed that the lack of diversity among teachers was something that needed to change.

"I think that they should employ more teachers who come from the same background as students who don't speak English" – High school student

"In my high school we had no non-white teachers, so there was no opportunity for that. I think it may be a big culture shock for newcomers." – Young adult

"Diversity – all of my teachers were white or white appearing. It would be nice to see someone who looks like me or is diverse." – High school student

"My husband was a teacher for 20 years at home, here he cannot get a teaching job. Maybe if we had more black teachers here with this experience it would be helpful." - Parent

---

[7] Redding, C. (2019). A Teacher Like Me: A Review of the Effect of Student–Teacher Racial/Ethnic Matching on Teacher Perceptions of Students and Student Academic and Behavioral Outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, *89*(4), 499–535.https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319853545

Currently, teachers are much whiter than the students they teach. According to the 2016 Census, 36% of Ontario's children identify with a visible minority group, yet only 14% of Ontario's elementary teachers and 13% of secondary teachers self-identify as with a visible minority group. Figure 2 breaks down this data further to compare disparities by specific racialized group and comparing Ontario and the Hamilton Census Metropolitan Area. This chart shows that disparities between the racialized status of teachers compared to children is even greater in Hamilton than Ontario, and is particularly large for the large Black and Arab-identified child population in Hamilton, with four times as many children as elementary teachers in these groups. Comparisons with secondary teachers shows even greater disparities.

Figure 2. Children aged 0-14 years, elementary teachers, and secondary teachers by proportion identifying with a visible minority group, Ontario and Hamilton CMA (Statistics Canada, 2016 Census)[8]
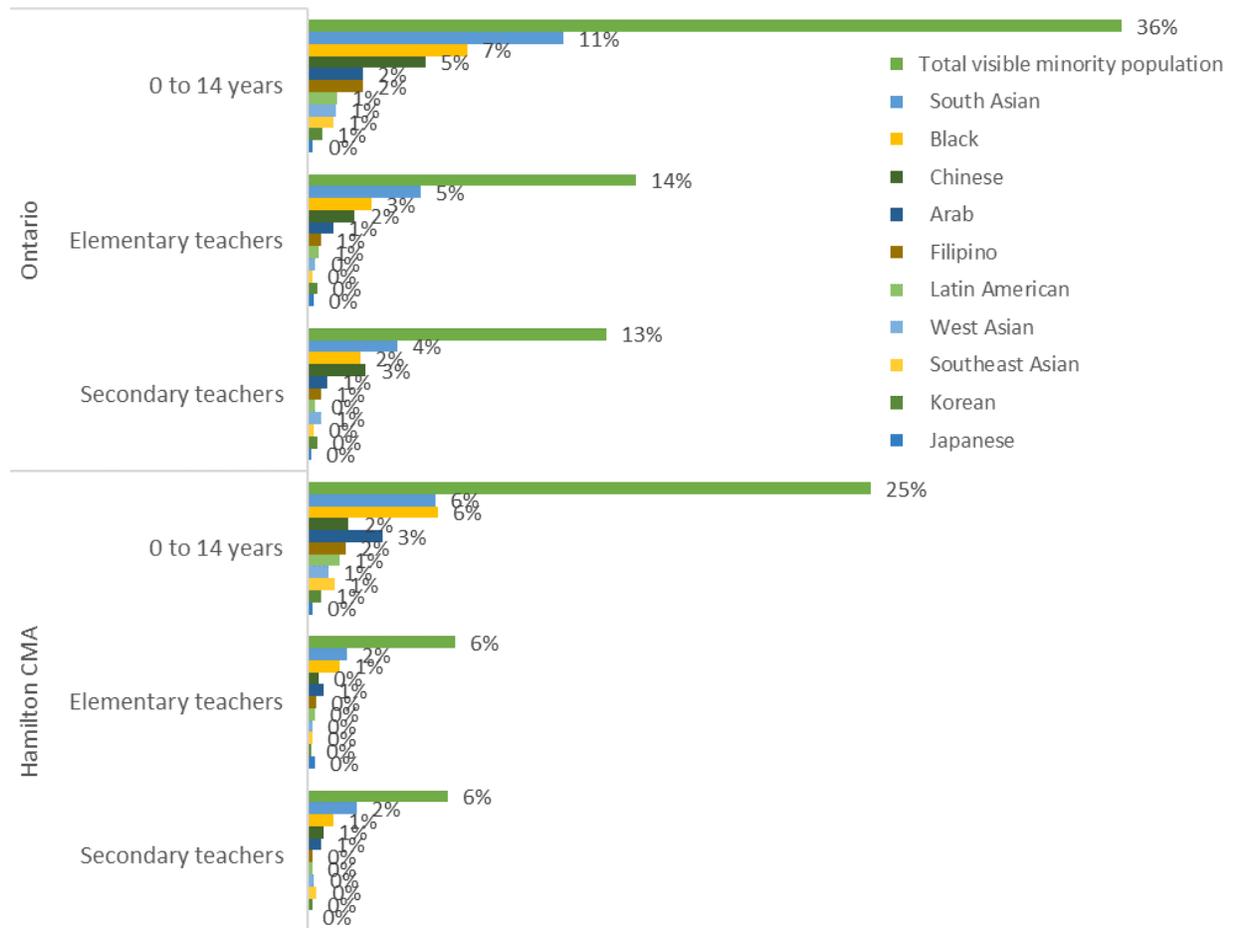
Hiring practices within schools and boards was pointed to by some educators as what was needed to be reformed to address these disparities. Currently it common for cultural norms, and unconscious bias to become barriers for hiring of racialized and/or newcomer staff, educators explained. Section 6.0 of this report provides information about the *Equity Hiring Toolkit*, developed for educators in Ontario, which helps to remove these barriers.

> "Principals have a lot of power to hire whoever they want. There's not enough structure and accountability. There should be two people from the HR department conducting interviews, not just the principals." - Educator

Participants also noted that the disparities in cultural diversity of the student body is an issue that needs to be addressed further upstream to remove barriers and increase interest of racialized students to go to teachers' college.

---

[8] Due to rounding, some bars appear different from each other, even with the same percentage label.

"They have now extended teacher education to cover two years. And they said the pool [of racialized teachers] is even smaller, [in part because] when students at school who are racialized don't see examples of teachers who are also racialized, then there is a tendency for them to seek other professions other than education because it so it becomes a vicious circle." – Retired educator

"Where you find [among education staff] a more racialized population is [among] educational assistants. They are coming from college, you see more [racialized educational assistants] because of the licensing [requirement needed] to be a teacher and that teachers' college, is another two years. And many people can't afford to do that." – Service provider

4.3.2   Cultural competency training

The currently largely white, middle-class teacher body in Hamilton can increase cultural competency with training in proven methods highlighted in the literature such as building relationship, setting expectations, and working to keep students engaged.

"A big emphasis [is needed] on understanding the population that you're serving. Understanding challenges faced by students and adapting to better serve them. Teachers get into the routine and habit. Need to be constantly evolving and adapting. Putting in more effort. "– Young adult

The NAE defines culturally competent staff as trained to[9]:

- Know the communities they serve

- Identify areas for growth

- Listen and Observe

- Develop Cross-Cultural Skills

- Set goals using measurement tools like the *Cultural Competency Continuum*

George Farmer in, *"How Schools and Teachers Can Get Better at Cultural Competence",* emphasizes that training must be more than a single day. "Checking off back-to-school professional-development boxes is insufficient to identify, address, and begin to resolve bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. […] To begin, schools must shift away from the notion of culture as a celebration or event. Instead, schools should move to a view of culture as experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and values that affect the lives of everyone in the school building. […]

---

[9] Farmer, G. (2020). *How Schools and Teachers Can Get Better at Cultural Competence:* Education Next https://www.educationnext.org/how-schools-teachers-can-get-better-cultural-competence/

Gaining cultural competency will require a plan. School districts should provide training throughout the entire year."

One participant in this School Readiness Academy research project suggested that cultural competency needs to be pushed further, and emphasis should be on cultural proficiency:

> **"**There's a spectrum starting with Culture acceptance and then cultural competency and people were satisfied by being culturally competent. Cultural proficiency takes it a step further? Proficiency is not just being competent, but by being appropriate in what you do. I could be competent and understand your culture and understand your perspective completely, but I may not be cultural proficiency because to be culture proficient it means and must not only understand, you would understand everybody else in the system who may be like. You are different from you address each person according to their need. Because everybody doesn't need the same thing." – Retired educator

Educators said that when there is one large group of immigrants coming from one region/country, specific training to gain knowledge about that specific population is offered, as was done when over Syrian refugee children and their families arrived in Hamilton. But training to understand smaller immigrants groups, or more specific training relative to newcomer experiences is not something that they had seen their boards offer.

> "If we have students from a war zone, we not trained to support that. We had a student once whose hearing was damaged by that experience, and we didn't really realize that. As well students were sometimes freaked out by the school bells, and things like that like that we learn along the way. But we haven't had any specific training in helping students with trauma, that's something that we could benefit from. And again, you do learn over the years and you get better at it. But like training would be awesome." – Educator

4.3.3   Cultural competence among the student body

Racialized and newcomer students also expressed that they wanted teachers to do more to make other students more culturally aware.

> "They should change the students' mindsets about how to see other countries. For example, teachers should teach about the pros of countries, not just the cons."
> – High school student

> "Teach compassion. I might not know about other cultures besides my own. Whether it's history, math, etc. I need to understand that there's a diverse group in the room and I need to consider their experiences. If you're compassionate and empathetic, you're more aware." – Young adult

---

> "Finding different ways to reflect different perspectives in different parts of the curriculum. History and social studies – teaching black history or African history. But also trying to find opportunities to integrate it into other classes. Music – teach diverse music. Math/science – different contributions from different parts of the world. At that point different experiences are brought in for students. That's what inclusion is meant to look like." – Young adult

Participants wanted more attention paid to food, holidays, dress, and other culturally important facets of everyday life, and educating entire class about cultural differences and inclusion.

> "Otherwise, there's a lot of battle. With culture, cultural shock and stuff like that. Parents also experience it because. For example, like food, if they come and they see everybody eating sandwich and the other culture. And other children start laughing. What is that? I would love to see teachers address this. Teachers celebrate like oh, tell us more about that and encourage it." – Service provider

Some service providers wanted there to be greater emphasis on Indigenous history in Canada as part of newcomer settlement and learning about the country.

> "Many newcomers don't learn about the history of First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in Canada, and some may have inaccurate information that they learned before coming here. Newcomers want to know about the country they are coming to, and more opportunities for them to learn about Indigenous history will help them in their settlement journey, and strengthen relationships between newcomer and Indigenous communities."– Service provider

4.4 Building Trust

Hand in hand with cultural competency is building trust with students and families. Trust allows teaching methods to be most effective, and helps community building to support development and learning outside the classroom as well. "Trust is defined as an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open." (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran 2003 p. 189). Trust is also the foundation that is needed to work through challenges and conflicts that arise in school communities.

Young people learn to trust and distrust institutions based on personal experiences (schools, police, health care, etc.), and US research shows that minority middle-school students who retain trust in their teachers and school get better grades, and are likely to go on to college. Psychologist at University of Texas reports that middle school is an important time to strengthen institutional trust, by then students are more sensitive and aware of unfairness, injustice, and

disrespect. "Minority youth learn at a young age that their group face inequality starting a pattern of lost trust, defiance, more punishment, and more distrust."[10]

One student gave an example of when they lost trust with a teacher, due to feeling a sense of injustice:

> "Teachers – please treat every student like a human, an individual before a learner. I think a lot of teachers take an attitude where they're the teacher and we the students are here to learn. That leaves a lot of room for them to not treat you with respect for no reason. That was the experience for me. The first couple weeks or so I was treated badly for no reason and I thought it was because of the way I looked. After they read my essays, I was the teacher's pet. Students should be treated with respect and dignity before anything else. Maybe that's because of the focus on academics and grades and stuff that we have. – Young adult

This kind of experience is not unique, and is emblematic of one of the ways trust can be quickly eroded. "If families are to trust teachers and other school staff members, in other words, they must believe that school personnel are qualified, fair, and dependable, and have their child's best interests at heart" (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Young, 1998). In most cases, such trust is built over time, based on sustained interactions between the parties in question. "In the absence of prior contact," Bryk and Schneider (2002) assert, families and educators "may rely on the general reputation of the other and also on commonalities of race, gender, age, religion, or upbringing" to assess a new person's trustworthiness. The more parties interact over time, however, the more their willingness to trust one another is based upon the other party's actions and their perceptions of one another's intentions, competence, and integrity."

Having more check- ins between students and teachers was a common suggestion with both parents and students:

> "Have students meet in office once a month or once a week to check-in. Some students are shy and may not feel comfortable speaking up. Help them figure out their challenges." – Young adult

> "Part of a teacher's job is to welcome their kids and make them comfortable in their classroom." – Young adult

---

[10] Yeager, DS, et al. (2017). Loss of Institutional Trust Among Racial and Ethnic Minority Adolescents: A Consequence of Procedural Injustice and a Cause of Life-Span Outcomes. Child Development journal. http://www.columbia.edu/cu/psychology/vpvaughns/assets/pdfs/Loss%20of%20Institutional%20Trust.pdf

"Creating safe space where students can come if they don't understand certain things. Even though there's opportunities it can be embarrassing or intimidating, especially for racialized students." – High school student

"My daughter started elementary two years ago and recently started high school. It was a big change and adjustment and I notice a big change in how teachers deal with her. It seems that teachers focus on the kids who are doing well and their development rather than the ones who are struggling. With virtual learning, teachers have certain expectations for them to complete work by a certain time but there is little support for them. I'm not seeing the balance." – Parent

"Teaching them how to be comfortable engaging in conversations with other people. Sometimes things come down to having connections with people. For a new immigrant it can be intimidating talking to someone you don't know." – Service provider

Having check -ins and conversations specifically about mental health was also brought up by many students as vital to building trust:

"Having discussions on mental health from an early age is very important. I feel like teachers play a big role. I have seen good teachers give accommodations when students are struggling. If I ever was a teacher, I hope I would be like them."
– Young adult

"Instead of confronting people and asking them to do your work, ask students if something is wrong. Teach empathy, maybe there is something wrong." – High school student

"More teachers could be patient with students. For me I was really anxious in high school and a lot of the times I think that got read as lazy. I was skipping classes because it was difficult for me to be in a classroom. Offering support and encouragement would be more helpful. Anxiety looks different for every person."
– Young adult

"Check-in with newcomer students. Are you settling in class, is there anything that's bothering you, etc. With me, I was getting bullied and I thought that if I told someone I wouldn't look cool. I felt terrible." – Young adult

The opportunities for interactions with newcomer families are made much more difficult because of language barriers, and participants wanted schools to do more to pro-actively build more opportunities to build relationships and trust with these families,

"Some kind of buddy system where students who have experienced immigrating to Canada can serve as mentors. Or a club that includes students who are new to

Canada to provide them with a sense of community and allow them to share and celebrate through experiences instead of assimilating." – Young adult

"Trying to help people and find a solution rather than assimilate. In my high school you could see micro-aggressions. I was told I could not make it to university by my guidance counsellor because I didn't speak proper English. School systems should have more outsider people who can understand newcomers. More mentorship programs and trying to engage." – Young adult

"Throughout high school there's such a cycle you go through. So many aspects parents could help with, especially the challenges and struggles they're facing. Maybe a monthly session for education and voicing concerns for parents. Maybe it is too overwhelming for children to take this on their own." – Young adult

"Engagement with what's going on, on the ground. What is going on in the community. In my area so much is going on with street violence. We should pay attention to that and try to help that. It's very sad and disturbing how many kids I went to school with have gotten into street violence." – Young adult

"ELL teachers were nice and we were automatically assigned a buddy to help." – High school student

4.5 Parental involvement

4.5.1   Student perspectives on parental involvement

While each newcomers' journey to Canada is different, one common aspiration shared by perhaps most new immigrants to Canada is for their children to do well at school. "We came here in part for the education of our children," explained one parent.

The literature review for the HWDSB's Safe Schools Review Panel's final report indicated that "high parental support has been shown to buffer children against the negative impact of bullying victimization."[11] On the other hand, parental involvement more generally in their children's education, for racialized and newcomer students, has been shown to have mixed impacts in the academic literature[12].

---

[11] Vaillancourt, T., Pepler D., Farrell, A., (2020). *Bullying in Childhood and Adolescence A Literature Review for the HWDSB Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel.* Hamilton Wentworth District School Board. https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/safe-schools-review-panel/#tabs-112
[12] Robson, K., Anisef, P., Brown, R. S., & George, R. (2018). Underrepresented Students and the Transition to Postsecondary Education: Comparing Two Toronto Cohorts. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 48(1), 39-59.

This was echoed by racialized and newcomer high school students and young adults consulted for this report - they felt parental involvement was positive or negative depending on the preferences of the student. Involvement of parents was also variable depending on circumstances of the parents.

> "For me there was too much engagement. I feel like in high school you're starting to become your own person and want to have your own agency, you don't want to be pushed by your parents to do something you don't want to." – Young adult

> "Reduce the amount of time they're talking to parents/guardians. It can create stress on the student as the parent is raised differently and has high expectations on the child. Sometimes they over-communicate." – High school student

> "Some kids may not have a good relationship with their parents, over-communication may cause challenges and difficulties for the children. If teachers are communicating with the parents first, going over my head as the student and telling my parent, that makes it feel like you are out for me." – High school student

> "The parents have to be involved but if it's too much, it can be distracting." – High school student

> "I feel like they're involved in everything they should be. For example, signing report cards, parent conferences. They're involved enough." – High school student

> "My parents are very involved in my academic life. My mom checks what I do in school every single day and asks me in the car ride what I learned today. She will e-mail my teachers if I don't explain well or has concerns." – High school student

> "I think that depends on the student. There are some students who don't care about their school work but some are responsible enough to know they have to do their school work. Some people need their parents involved to succeed." – Young adult

> "Mine are not involved. I'm not fine. I feel that they should understand. If my parents knew more about the school, they would understand how much work I have to do. I need to have a balance between that and cooking and cleaning. They should talk to the school." – High school student

> "I wasn't able to do that well in high school because my parents – we immigrated when I was really young and they were really struggling. They couldn't really teach me to study because of how much was on their plate." – Young adult

4.5.2   Parent perspectives

Most parents who participated in the consultations wanted to be very involved in their children's education, and felt there wasn't enough opportunities for that. This wasn't surprising, as being interested in a focus group about education will mean parents already interested are more likely

to participate. The study did not do specific outreach to parents who were not interested in being engaged in their kids' education.

> "I don't think there's a lot of ways for parents to be involved. They invite parents to be a part of the council and I think that's it. I know there are also the parent interviews to get an update on how the kids are doing, I find that's the main way for us to get feedback, updates, how the kids are doing, and any challenges or concerns. The report cards also have communication. I'm not sure if there are other ways for parents to be involved. Last year I stayed online with the kids for the whole year. I was able to listen to absolutely everything they were learning so I felt involved. When they were talking about an orange shirt, for example, they didn't say much about what it meant. I was able to build on that and explain more at home. I was able to know everything that was happening, and I was able to follow-up on weekends." – Parent

Most parents discussed homework issues when asked how they want to be involved in their children's education.

> "I think the government should put emphasis on homework. Back where we come from in Africa, it is tough. It's not easy because they do a lot of pushing, a child has to do 16 subjects, and we all came out well. I think they should put more efforts in their homework. When my kids come back from school, they tell me they don't have homework. They invest more in activities, play, crafts, paint. What time do you have for your studies?" – Parent

> "What we need is something like balance. Not too much homework, and not that there is nothing. I want them to give my children a book and tell them to read. Push them a little bit. All through elementary they are not getting work, when high school comes around, they are expected to do projects and reports." – Parent

> "I don't find that the teachers push children enough to read. I feel that the schools share in the responsibility. If the teachers push my children to read, they will do it. Where I came from, they push kids to read and do a lot of homework, and I could find the results very good. Here, especially from grades 1-7 there is not enough homework and reading. Schools need to push more for kids." - Parent

Many parents expressed how homework was the most important way they could follow their children's progress and were disappointed that the school was not providing that opportunity. Some parents also wanted more homework to give more structure to their children's time at home, to help avoid excessive screen time.

> "Send more homework for the kids that will keep them busy, take their eyes of distracting activities like television."

A minority of parents were happy with the low amount of homework their children received from school.

> "Then, when I moved to Hamilton, I was surprised that there was no homework anymore. The good thing about it here is that they care a lot about kids and one more thing it is not intensive. What I mean, the school is not focusing only on academic level but also, they focus on having fun. I like this so much because they make the students feel comfortable and take care of their psychological health at the same time. We do not have same system in our home country, over there they care only about academic level." – Parent

> "But here as I mentioned before they care about kids and make kids love school. That means the kids are enjoying their time and learning at the same time. So, the education system here distinguished than other system that they mix between learning and playing at the same time. One more thing I would like to mention is that in our country kids used to carry a very heavy back bag that almost hurt their back, but here there are lockers that can be used to put daily books in it, which is great!" – Parent

Some parents spoke about the inequalities in access to education supports outside of school:

> "Now, Kumon is taking over the country. They give them lots of work. At the end of the day the school is at the side and Kumon is taking over. I had a conversation with my friend who was born here, she told me to register my kids for Kumon as she has had hers enrolled throughout their time in school. I'm asking – what is the school doing? They should look at that. Kumon takes kids from the grassroots, go to their website. Imagine having four kids and having to pay for Kumon – it's not cheap." – Parent

School Council meetings were cited as groups where newcomer and racialized parents felt out of place:

> "Parent Teachers Association. Happens about once a year, get to know each other 1-on-1 to discuss. They try to bring parents together and have someone representing the parents. They should try to involve Black parents. They involve the white parents. Black parents need to be able to share their views. When I went to a PTA meeting all of the school people were white. " – Parent

4.6 Pathways to graduation and post-secondary education

In our consultation with newcomers and racialized parents and students, educators and community leaders, they reported that determining different academic and career pathways are

crucial in supporting newcomers and racialized students to make informed decisions with regards to their academic journey towards Post-Secondary Education (PSE).

Newcomer and racialized students reported that they want a student-centric approach where they are listened to and not told what they should do. There were many students who reported that they felt that teachers and guidance teachers had low expectations of racialized and newcomer students' futures.

> "Listen to students instead of telling or forcing opinions on students. I had teachers telling their opinions to my friends on courses. For example, telling someone to take science when they want to take something else." – High school student

> "First day of school in grade 9 my teacher made us take a test. I asked her 'I want to go to guidance counsellor to change my courses because my elementary teacher chose them, without my input.' The teacher told me I was fine and that the courses were fine. The teacher kept repeating the same information when I didn't like. I made an appointment with the guidance counsellor the appointment was forgotten by the teacher and counsellor. My teacher dismissed me when I asked about it." – High school student

> "There's stuff that most people want to do, like video editing for example. Let's say a kid wants to be a video editor/content creator. Then the teacher just laughs and says that it won't take them anywhere. I feel like most schools need more classes on teaching people that are interested in that type of stuff to learn more about it. There should be teachers to help them with it." – High school student

> "I think certain kids in my class want to be different things. My teacher told one of my friends that what he wanted to do wasn't a real job. My friend corrected him and told him that there are successful who play video games, and the teacher said they are just lucky." – High school student

Newcomer parents having a lack of information about how post-secondary pathways work was highlighted repeatedly as a gap that needs to be filled.

> "Find ways to better engage with families and newcomer youth. Students need to understand what to do in the transition from high school to university. My parents didn't know how the education system worked and it was up to me to explain it to them. If there's more support from the school it could help families support their children in achieving goals." – Young adult

> "The student shouldn't be the sole channel to inform parents of what's happening in high school. Apart from parent-teacher meetings there needs to be some sort of monthly presentations/education/group with parents. 13-year-old me didn't know what was important to tell my parents and keep in mind as I planned my career." – Young adult

Newcomer and racialized students reported the importance of ongoing communication of academic pathways to support them map out their academic journey.

> "The Specialist High School Major program that encouraged us to do co-op and explore some of the different careers out there. This really pushed me on my journey and was valuable. I found that very helpful, it was a good step into the real world on my path to post-secondary." – High school student

> "My high school was self-directed and non-traditional in that sense. We had unit guides and you would have to complete the units. You had the option of choosing what department you did your work in and what you worked on. It gave me independence, learn at my own pace, time management. I could go to my teacher and ask questions on a 1-to-1 basis. During certain periods you could sign up for 1-to-1 help. This suited my learning style. We had the SHISM program which allowed me to explore my interests and decide what I wanted to pursue in post-secondary." – Young adult

> "At school I could make an appointment with an advisor to help me decide courses to take, graduation requirements. I liked the summer school program too." – High school student

> "When I was new to Canada, I took ESL courses. They were advising me every semester about next steps to prepare for post-secondary." – Young adult

> "More work done in terms of explaining to students what is required for them to have a smooth transition from high school to post-secondary. Making aware of career paths, opportunities, courses." – Young adult

> "Make students more aware of their options for postsecondary early on. A lot of people, myself included, didn't know about the application process and different college/university programs until grade 12. At that time, you've already selected your courses and everything" – Young adult

Research participants highlighted the importance of awareness of different career paths and flexibility on the process.

> "It's a very linear process in terms of having students decide at 13 whether they want to go the college or high school route. Offering flexibility to help students keep their options open. This would be beneficial to so many students and newcomers to help them navigate education." *Retired educator/community leader*

> "I would like to see the linear process change. There is also very little discussion about the career paths available outside the high school. They really only discussed this starting when I was in grade 12. At that point you're already in the process of making a decision." – Young adult

"I resonate with that because I work in health care. I had to have a family friend guide me into where I'm going. Now that I'm in the health field I have become aware of new career paths." – *Parent

Young adults saw the need for much more information at an earlier stage in their studies to be communicated details about financial supports and scholarships. They also wanted more and explicit information on PSE expectations.

"Unveil financial support. More financial literacy. Scholarships/bursaries. The importance of deadlines as well. Students have tools to be more proactive in looking for different scholarship opportunities. Other opportunities to supplement education. There should be more stress on demystifying opportunities when going to college or university so you can be more proactive in starting your career path. For example, telling students that they need to apply for scholarships early due to competitive nature." – Young adult

"In University I changed programs three times. It was crazy and it made me realize I didn't know what it was going to look like when I went to university. No one told me the expectations, so I had completely different ones. No one told me about finances, in my own family I found it hard to take my studies seriously while also supporting my family. The school should really be honest with their students rather than going around the bush. Telling students what they need to do, how to do it, resources. We need to put more emphasis on that. Just be real and tell the way it is." – Young adult

"More vocational experiences. Students should know what other opportunities there are. They did a poor job of explaining that in high school. Also, the fact of not knowing what to do – I also relied on an upper year friend to guide me. My family immigrated to Canada so I had no idea how the system worked. More check-ins from guidance counsellors to see how students are doing. The appointments were not regular. More knowledge, information would be helpful. Financial literacy could have been taught better in high school. Also, the idea in university it is very different from high school. More flexibility in students and providing opportunities where they are accountable. Personal interest courses. I was hesitant to take courses I was interested in as I thought I would get a bad grade. Maybe a pass/fail basis to help students do what they need to do." – Young adult

4.7 Extra-curricular activities

The School Readiness Academy literature reviews has highlighted school models focused on supporting newcomer, Indigenous and racialized students. The programs that are indicated on that lit review provides holistic programming that covers many aspects of students' lives beyond the classroom. These programs provide supports with leadership development, life skills development, financial literacy, how to communicate to parents, dealing with sexism, racisms

and mental health supports.   One theme that emerged upon our consultation with research participants is the importance of extracurricular activities and the role it plays on academic success.

"We need something like sports or swimming, something after education to make them the kids because they're growing up and need more help, to get outside even. They need exercise for the kids when they come out from school to do some programs." – Retired educator or Community leader

"I also liked the extracurricular opportunities. Be it drama, sports clubs. Meet like-minded people" – High school student

"My high school was quite a lot behind until grade 11 or 12 when different teachers and more programs came in. I was part of the poetry club in grade 11 or 12. Taking different classes, doing different activities. It helped prepare me for the first year of university. My creative writing class helped prepare me and put me in a position where I was ready to do what I want to do and doing my own work. As well, we had the Muslim Student Association where I was heavily involved in the community and supporting newcomer students. I felt like I was doing something beneficial for my community. That is something I can never forget from my experience." – Young adult

"My school is really good, but the thing is I want them to make more sports like soccer and basketball teams. We have teams but every year they change to lower grades." – High school student

"They need to add more sports in too, in our school it's just football, basketball, and volleyball. The only sports girls can try out for is volleyball. Because only boys have a football and basketball team. I would say there should be a girl's football team. And soccer." – High school student

"Lots of opportunities at my school outside of academics. Sports. Business competition. Lots of things, it was fun." – High school student

"Playing sports. It was really nice to join whatever you wanted to try." – High school student

Section 5.0
Overview of Other Models Focussed on Supporting Newcomer, Indigenous and Racialized students

Twenty-two programs focused on racialized, newcomer, and Indigenous students are summarized in Appendix A. Many of these programs share approaches and have similar programming content tailored to reach and engage each of their target group of students.

First and foremost, many of these problems help students develop students' sense of identity by increasing their knowledge and pride in their own culture and/or native language. This helps students strengthen self-confidence and motivation to engage in academics. The use of real world experiences is a common way to do this, including such as field trips, discussion of current events and guest speakers. Making connections between historical events and life today helps students engage with big picture concepts. The complexities of unravelling these connections helps makes students interested in materials that otherwise can seem dry and distant.

Many programs bridge gaps in knowledge by extending programming beyond traditional school hours. Targeted staffing with supportive professional development, and teachers who specialize in engaging with the specific student group has been a way to ensure high quality teaching to fill knowledge gaps among students more quickly than what occurs in regular school programs.

Programs reviewed also provide holistic programming that covers many aspects of students' lives beyond the classroom. A variety of leadership development opportunities allows students to hone their strengths in public speaking, peer support and time management, among other skills, and increase self-confidence. Many of the programs reviewed included life skills development: financial literacy, how to communicate with parents, and how to deal with sexism and racism. Mental health support is also a component of many programs, sometimes using terms like stress management to be a less intimidating, more approachable way to talk about mental health challenges they are facing. Many programs help students acknowledge the mental health impacts of racism and xenophobia as a first step in healing from these challenges.

Section 6.0
Recommendations of Previous Reports on Improving Outcomes for Racialized and Newcomer Students

Many of the findings of this report, echo the calls made in previous reports, recommending improvements in education system to improve outcomes for newcomer and racialized youth. Highlights of these recommendations are provided here, and show that disparities in the education system have been analysed for many years, and it is long past the time, to implement these types of changes to meet goals of equity and inclusion that the leaders in education system says they want to achieve.

Hamilton Centre for Civil Inclusion: *Community Safety and Well-being for Black Youth in Hamilton* (2021)

This report[13], the most comprehensive investigation into the impacts of anti-Black racism in Hamilton schools, has 11 recommendations for provincial officials, schools and school boards, and community leaders to implement. More details about this report's findings are included in section 3.0 of this report. These recommendations from the HCCI are especially relevant for this report:

> Recommendation #2: **Ensure and enable Black-specific supports at all schools**
>
> Recommendation #6: **Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression (ARAO) training for all staff, including administration, nurses, social workers, teachers, educational assistants, system leaders, trustees and principals**
>
> Recommendation #7: **Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression (ARAO) testing/competency for new hires**
>
> Recommendation #9: **Hire an adequate number of Black teachers and provide them with Black-specific supports**
>
> Recommendation #11: **Allow Black cultural dress, including durags, to be worn in schools.**

This last recommendation has now been implemented by the HWDSB as of November 2021. No changes to dress code have occurred in the other three Hamilton boards

---

[13] Available at: https://hcci.ca/safety-plan-for-black-students/

The Turner Consulting Group's *Voices of Ontario Black Educators: An Experiential Report* for the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (2015)

This report[14] provides valuable insights into Black teachers' experiences in their workplaces. Their recommendations support many of the findings of the report, and warrant urgent action. Among their recommendations are for Ontario's school boards and the Ministry of Education to prioritize:

Employment equity policies to make gains in reducing the disparity of Black teachers in Ontario's education system.[15]

"This approach was successful to close the gender gap within public education and can be successful to close the racial gap."

Create and improve workplace discrimination policies and practices and support the formation of Black educator led networks for improved professional development, mentoring and collaboration

"Such programs would play a role in reducing the experiences of discrimination and harassment and also to ensure that any issues that do arise are appropriately investigated and addressed."

"Black employee networks […] would be useful to provide support and help individuals to succeed and advance within the organization."

Increased training for educators

"Training for all teachers and education staff can alert staff to cultural differences, nuances, and complexities in order to increase their ability to teach and interact effectively with Black students."

Afrocentric curriculum

"A curriculum that includes African Canadians, as one important element of supporting the success of Black students, has been consistently advocated for over several decades."

---

[14] Available at: https://onabse.org/ONABSE_VOICES_OF_BLACK_EDUCATORS_Final_Report.pdf

[15] This recommendation's goals can be transformed into action by using the ***Equity Hiring Toolkit***, developed as part of Zuhra Elizabeth Abawi's PhD thesis dissertation at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto, titled *Troubling the Teacher Diversity Gap: The Perpetuation of Whiteness Through Practices of Bias Free Hiring in Ontario School Boards.* (2018)
The Toolkit is accessible starting on page 166 of the dissertation:
https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/82960/3/Abawi_Zuhra_E_201803_EdD_thesis.pdf

Support Black Parents and students to make gains in achievement.

> "This study suggests that school boards can do more to help Black parents understand the Ontario public education system and support their children's education. Information and supports to navigate the school system could help Black parents understand the resources available to them to advocate effectively for their children when issues arise."

Bridging Two Worlds: Supporting Newcomer And Refugee Youth by Jan Stewart and Lorna Martin, University of Winnipeg (2017)

Bridging Two Worlds: Supporting Newcomer And Refugee Youth, A Guide To Curriculum Implementation And Integration[16]*,* a CERIC-funded University of Winnipeg project into how career development can make school more meaningful for newcomer and refugee youth. The research included over 400 participants in interviews or focus groups, including guidance counsellors, teachers, refugee/newcomer students, and other stakeholders.

The report recommendations to schools and school boards include:

> **Schools shall consider diversity in their hiring practices with particular attention to newcomers.**
>
> **Schools shall have policies that require appropriately qualified staff members to conduct language testing and assess school readiness for newcomer and refugee students.**
>
> **Schools shall require regular staff training in culturally safe and trauma-informed teaching practices.**
>
> **Schools shall provide E/FAL professional learning opportunities for teachers and para-professionals who do not have qualifications in the area of additional languages.**
>
> **School divisions shall provide additional funding for after-school programs, language classes, and culturally safe community programs to those schools within their catchment area with populations of E/FAL students in the range of 30% to 50%.**

The report also suggests best practices for teachers:

---

[16] Available at: https://ceric.ca/wpdm-package/bridging-two-worlds-supporting-newcomer-refugee-youth/?wpdmdl=21660&refresh=61e1b24bb3e761642181195

Know Your Students

Learn about your students' assets and skills that have helped them survive hardship. Celebrate each student's unique experiences and background.

Know and Build Your Community

Collaborate to foster multiple perspectives and engage in community-building activities.

Know the Signs

Build a safe relationship and environment to lay the foundation for healing. Listen to what students and families tell you and be aware of non-verbal signs of progress or stress.

Know Who Can Help

Work with student and family to refer them to next level of care when needed

Know Yourself

Practice self-care and self-compassion

HWDSB's Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel's report: *Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment* (2021)

The Hamilton Wentworth District School Board's recent Safe Schools Review Panel's final report[17] found that a common theme emerging from consultations was that many students are experiencing bullying because of their disability, gender identity and/or sexual orientation, ethnicity, Indigenous identity, newcomer status, race, and/or religion.

In the consultations, students and teachers from racialized and Black communities shared how they experienced bullying, discrimination, and feelings of isolation because of their racial identities. For example, participants felt policies do not adequately protect students who stand up to people who bully. They said policies often rely on outdated and ineffective "zero-tolerance" strategies.

Members of the Black community reported having their cultural expressions, such as hairstyles, dress and mannerisms, policed by teachers who held white cultural expression as the norm.

---

[17] Available at: https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/safe-schools-review-panel/#tabs-112

Black students, in particular, felt that HWDSB dress code policies unfairly target their hair and clothing.

Parents often have been victims of bullying themselves, and be especially knowledgeable about its impacts. Parents felt that when they reported their children's experience of bullying, they were not believed. Newcomer parents spoke about language barriers and how a lack of translators made it difficult to communicate with teachers and parents. They also felt like there was a lack of familiarity with the school system and the appeal process, which meant they did not know how to advocate for their children. There are also cultural barriers. Many newcomer participants reported that in their home culture it was expected to fight back against a bully; they were surprised when their children were punished for that. When talking with members of the Indigenous community; parents spoke about themselves and their children being bullied. It made them feel pushed out of the school system. Some participants felt that their Mohawk identity influenced how teachers treated their children.

The HWDSB Safe Schools Task Force report highlights "the need for an intersectional approach to bullying prevention and intervention." The HWDSB's recommendations that they will implement in the coming years are an opportunity to address some of the root causes that create obstacles for newcomer and racialized students, and the alignment of Empowerment Squared's School Readiness Academy project with those recommendations will increase chances of success. Some of their important recommendations, are summarized below.

For example, recommendation #6 is to **Review policies and procedures from equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression perspectives:**

> In recognition of historical and present-day systemic discrimination against identified groups, the review panel recommends HWDSB examine existing bullying policies and procedures, including guidelines and codes of conduct, through the following lenses: equity, inclusiveness, anti-oppression and anti-racism (including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism and anti-Islamophobia). This examination should be performed in collaboration with others and pay particular attention to HWDSB's policies and procedures for bullying reporting and responding.

The HWDSB report also notes that parents and guardians need to be engaged, and partnerships with parents, school, and communities are crucial to having children and youth feel as they belong. The details in the following recommendation from the HWDSB Bullying Task Force underline the work that needs to be done to build more inclusive, trusting relationships with parents that will help with the school board's goal to eliminate bullying.

Recommendation #2: **Involve parents, guardians and caregivers in bullying prevention and response in meaningful ways**

> In recognition of the critical role played by parents, guardians and caregivers, the review panel recommends HWDSB ensure parents, guardians and caregivers are

meaningfully and continuously engaged in bullying prevention and intervention processes and initiatives at the student, school and system levels. This includes strengthening parent communication protocols specific to bullying reporting, intervention and responding.

Recommended Action Steps for Strengthening Communication with Parents

- Share available educational resources on bullying with all parents, guardians and caregivers, including information on the types of bullying (including cyberbullying); the difference between bullying, aggression and teasing; the impact of bullying; specific examples of how to respond to bullying; and what parents, guardians and caregivers can do if their child bullies

- Share new and emerging educational resources on cyberbullying with parents, guardians and caregivers as they become available over the coming months

- Involve parents, guardians and caregivers in the co-creation, implementation and evaluation of bullying prevention and intervention activities and initiatives

- Establish ongoing, representative and accessible mechanisms for seeking parent input and feedback on bullying prevention and intervention initiatives and activities at both the school and system levels. This should include seeking feedback on bullying reporting and response processes from parents, guardians and caregivers, including those whose children have been involved in bullying in any role

- Expand the ways parents, guardians and caregivers can get involved within HWDSB (such as school councils, the Parent Involvement Committee and Indigenous Education Councils) to participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of school climate initiatives and strengthen school-parent communication

The Turner Consulting Group's *HWDSB Equity Audit* (2020)

This Equity Audit report[18] for the HWDSB included consultations with over 1,000 HDWSB employees, as well as reviews of hiring processes, polices and formal and informal practices. The report draws a clear pathway for the HWDSB to improve its working environment and

---

18 Available at: https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/HWDSB-Employment-Equity-Audit-Final-Report-November-20-2020.pdf

practices, to achieve its goals of more diverse workforce, equitable policies and practices, and an inclusive workplace for all employees.

The report's recommendations are in four priority areas:

Priority 1: Diversify the workforce at all levels

Priority 2: Create a more inclusive and welcoming work environment

Priority 3: Create more equitable policies and practices

Priority 4: Strengthen the organization's equity infrastructure

The report has 70 specific recommendations in these areas, including:|

Recommendation 30: It is recommended that the Board work with other school boards to use their influence to call on faculties of education to increase the racial diversity of their graduates.

Recommendation 31: It is recommended that the Board promote teaching as a profession to elementary and secondary students from Indigenous communities and the equity-seeking groups

Recommendation 40: It is recommended that ongoing training be provided to managers and administrators involved in the hiring process to help them understand and mitigate the impact of unconscious bias on the hiring process, and to help them understand their responsibility to hire based on the skills and abilities to do the job.

Recommendation 41: It is recommended that the Board embed in policies and procedures a commitment to including visible diversity on the interview panel, and that the Board identify this as a best practice for principals and managers.

Recommendation 42: It is recommended that Human Resources Services serve as a model and leader for the rest of the organization by increasing the diversity of employees within the department.

Recommendation 49: It is recommended that the Board conduct a demographic survey of all applicants to the vice-principal and principal promotion process so that it can track the success of applicants throughout the entire process to identify any barriers to advancement and ways in which the Board can improve the process.

Recommendation 50: It is recommended that the Board create a mentoring program to support the advancement of racialized and Indigenous teachers by giving them access to the knowledge and the breadth of experience needed to advance within the organization.

Recommendation 67: It is recommended that the Board develop a strategy to engage employees throughout the organization in equity and inclusion training for all

employees, beginning with relevant competencies for senior managers, team leads, and supervisors. Such training, involving both online and face-to-face learning, should involve role play on how to hold difficult conversations and address issues as they arise, as well as evaluation of knowledge and skill retention. Core topics should include dimensions of systemic racism, implicit bias, as well as intersectionality (i.e., how class, race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation intersect within the workplace). Specific training on the issues facing particular equity-seeking groups should also be provided.

Recommendation 68: It is recommended that issues of equity and inclusion be embedded into all other training provided to leaders, including classroom management, duty to report to the children's aid society, etc.

Section 7.0
Recommendations for the School Readiness Academy Program

Blending the findings from the literature review, the consultations with students, parents, community members, service providers and educators, as well as the review of similar programs leads to many avenues to recommend for the School Readiness Academy.

These recommendations are for educators, schools, school boards, provincial officials, and community stakeholders, and are grouped into two categories:

Listen, Learn, and Take Action

1. **Prioritize qualitative data analysis and linking to track and reduce disparities**

   This report mainly provides qualitative data about Hamilton's newcomer and racialized students and families in the education system. Further research is needed to inform schools, board and the community on quantitative outcomes and disparities for these students. The school boards and the Ministry of Education must prioritize analyzing their own data to understand trends, focus on actions to address important disparities, and monitor progress.

   For example, in 2008 the TDSB analyzed achievements by language, and found that students speaking Somali, Spanish, and Dari had the highest risk of not completing high school[19]. In response the school board implemented strategies to address gaps for these population groups, and within seven years was starting to see reduced disparities[20]. The first step Hamilton school boards could take in this direction, would be to analyse their own data on outcomes for students in the ELL program, since administrative data already includes this data point, without having to do more complex record linkage.

---

[19] Brown, RS, and Sinay E. 2006 Student Census: Linking Demographic Data With Student Achievement. Toronto District School Board Research Report. https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/research/docs/reports/2006StudentCensusLinkingAchievementDemoFinal-Email.pdf

[20] Rushowry, K. (2015) *Grad rates jump for Somali students thanks to programs geared to help.* Toronto Star. https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2015/10/10/grad-rates-jump-for-somali-students-thanks-to-programs-geared-to-help.html

2. **Attend to and take action on reforms previously recommended by advocates on issues raised in this report**

Recommendations related to these issues from other organizations that have been previously published should be reviewed and integrated by relevant organizations and stakeholders (school boards, teachers, community organizations, and the Ministry of Education). The recommendations from HWDSB, HCCI, Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, and CERIC, highlighted in section 6.0 of this report should be prioritized for action. These recommendations include reforming hiring practices to ensure employment equity, improved training for staff, and increased support to newcomer and racialized students and families, and staff.

3. **Create specific opportunities for newcomer and racialized students and families to advocate for their needs within the school system**

Newcomer and racialized student self-advocacy training and supports should be prioritized by schools and community organizations to increase their self-confidence, leadership skills and gain their insights to continue to improve school culture and programming.

Schools and boards should develop new ways for racialized and newcomer parents families to advocate for the needs of their children and youth. For example, specific newcomer and racialized workshops and/or committees that will ensure that families feel they will be comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives.

Support, Educate, and Improve Programming

4. **Improve access to interpretation and translation services for newcomer parents to improve communication between schools and families.**

Increase staff access to interpretation, including services such as telephone based interpretation offered by Wesley Urban Ministries. Increase translation of key board and school written documents for parents and caregivers, such as registration forms, report card templates, and health and safety messages. Increase use of technology for interpretation such as real time auto-captioning and translation in virtual meetings.

5. **Support the development of peer mentoring supports and advocacy opportunities, for newcomer and racialized students and families.**

The Newcomer Orientation Program (NOW) in Toronto, Seeds of Change at North York Community House, and the Immigrant Women's Peer Support Network in Vancouver offer promising peer support models to learn from in this area.

6. **Improve Cultural Competency and Cultural Proficiency among educational staff and students.**

Empowerment Squared, and other well-positioned organizations should consider offering cultural competency and proficiency training for school staff, and in classrooms and school boards should compensate organizations for delivering such training.

Cultural competency for newcomer students can include a focus on Indigenous history in Canada, to give newcomers a better foundation and strengthen relationships between newcomer and Indigenous communities.

7. **School Readiness Academy programing should be based on best practices from other jurisdictions outlined in section 5.0 of this report.**

Programming should have emphasis on confidence-building and identity formation, mental health programing, field trips and guest speakers, and helping students make connections between their experiences and historical and current events, where appropriate.

8. **Parents and guardians of newcomer and racialized children should be offered more programming and supports to understand the Canadian school system, and what they and the schools can do to improve student success.**

Programing could include how the Ontario school system has moved from rote instruction to inquiry-based learning, readiness for school, structure of the school day, and understanding course selection and impacts later on in a student's pathway.

9. **School boards should review post-secondary pathways education and supports to ensure newcomer and racialized students are encouraged to pursue education after high school if they desire.**

Information to students should include more information at an earlier stage on how to access financial aid and scholarships for post-secondary education. School boards should consider involving outside community and cultural organizations to help achieve goals for increased rates of post-secondary education planning among racialized and newcomer students.