

Canada's Education System Continues to Fail Racialized Students: A Call for Rights-Based, Community-Led Transformation

A.L. Pauchulo, A. Patel, R. Vaugeois, & P. Parmar (John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights).

Pushed out, held back: How schools and universities fail racialized students. Justice, Health & Communities, 2025.

[You can read the full report here.](#)

Despite Canada's stated commitments to anti-racism, students who are Indigenous, Black or belong to marginalized racialized groups continue to encounter discriminatory policies, biased practices, and hostile environments across all levels of education in Canada. These factors contribute to lower graduation rates and reduced access to post-secondary opportunities, perpetuating cycles of marginalization and socioeconomic disparity.

Systemic racism persists in admission and discipline practices

- Zero-tolerance discipline policies, and the lack of trauma-informed practices result in disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of Black and Indigenous students in K-12 schools.
- A lack of representation in the curriculum, combined with biased disciplinary practices and an underrepresentation of Black and Indigenous educators contribute to an environment where Black and Indigenous youth are often marginalized and labeled "at risk" and their potential undervalued.
- Indigenous and Black students report mistrust and disengagement when witnessing that racism goes unaddressed by educators and administrators.
- Undocumented children have been denied school enrollment in Alberta and Ontario, violating existing policies (Ontario), violating Canada's human rights obligations at the international level, and causing long-term detrimental effects on children and families.
- For Asian and South Asian students, the "Model Minority" stereotype erases disparities within diverse Asian communities and discourages students from seeking support when they encounter discrimination.

Barriers perpetuate inequities

- Tuition increases, precarious financial aid, and high living costs disproportionately impact students from low-income and racialized communities.
- Standardized tests are framed as objective assessment measures although research consistently shows that they reflect opportunity gaps rather than learning potential.
- Food-insecure students face substantial barriers to academic success, which also extends beyond the classroom - this affects K-12 as well as post-secondary students - and food insecurity has been reported to affect over half of students surveyed across 13 (post-secondary) campuses; with 75.8% of Indigenous students experiencing food insecurity.

Curriculum Remains Eurocentric & Colonial: Students call for Reform

- A lack of racialized faculty and culturally relevant supports undermines BIPOC students' sense of belonging.
- Black histories are minimized; slavery and anti-Black racism are frequently misrepresented or not taught.
- Indigenous histories, languages, and worldviews remain marginalized so that denial and "settler ignorance" persist.
- Students have expressed the need for anti-racist, and anti-colonial curriculum reform.
- dominance of a Eurocentric curriculum, which prioritizes Western perspectives while minimizing or misrepresenting Indigenous histories, cultures, and contributions.



It is **essential that solutions be rights-based and informed by international human rights which are clearly defined** in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the Truth and Recommendation Commission Calls to Action.

Recommendations

1. Build and prioritize relationships with Indigenous communities

- Close education gaps by replacing short-term pilot programs with long-term, systemic reforms.
- Ensure equitable and transparent federal funding for Indigenous students on- and off-reserve
- Fully integrate accurate teachings on colonization across all grades.
- Protect Indigenous languages and create funded roles for Indigenous knowledge keepers

2. Engage communities and families in meaningful ways to address racism in K-12

- Build meaningful partnerships among schools, families, and communities for holistic learning.
- Increase IBPOC representation across in senior administrative roles as well as teaching roles
- Remove barriers to parent engagement, especially for low-income and newcomer families.
- Provide mandatory training for decision-makers on Canada's human rights obligations.

3. Implement Anti-Racist Curriculum Changes

- Develop culturally responsive, accurate resources that reflect the realities in Canada past and present.
- Conduct an in-depth review to remove colonial, biased, or denialist content in all subject areas.
- Ensure curriculum changes address both historical and present-day racial injustices and inequities.
- Integrate diverse perspectives but without placing an increased burden on IPBOC educators and students.

4. Build safe and brave environments in primary and secondary schools

- Create strong and rights-based accountability systems for addressing racism.
- Replace punitive discipline practices with restorative approaches, especially for younger students.
- Provide anti-racism and trauma-informed training for all educators which is ongoing.
- Adopt trauma-informed practices across all schools to support students who experience racism and other harm
- Ensure that IBPOC students are not disproportionately directed into (limiting) lower-track academic programs

5. Ensure transparency and accountability through data collection

- Ensure that Ministries of Education and School Boards work collaboratively with communities to develop procedures for collecting data on student achievements and for translating this data into meaningful policy changes.
- Collect disaggregated data (including program choices, graduations, suspensions, streaming decisions, non-completion rates, special education identification)

