

MEDIA STATEMENT

For Immediate Release: Thursday, March 27, 2025

Towards Real Change: OSSTF/FEESO Response to the OHRC Report on Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario's Public Education System

Toronto, ON – OSSTF/FEESO commends the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) for the work they have undertaken in publishing their paper: "Dreams Delayed: Addressing Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario's Public Education System."

The effort taken to research, consult, understand, and publicly report on anti-Black racism in Ontario's public education system is admirable. The actions proposed in the report inspire confidence that this work will help contribute to the realization of better outcomes in addressing anti-Black racism in education.

OSSTF/FEESO is committed to eradicating anti-Black racism within our Federation and throughout public education. We acknowledge the work that remains and are dedicated to meaningful action to address anti-Black racism in Ontario's public education system.

OSSTF/FEESO has been committed to addressing anti-Black racism within our Federation and in the education sector. As part of our commitment, over the past five years, we have spent over \$1.6 million on professional development and a series of other initiatives related to addressing anti-Black racism.

Our Provincial Office has a dedicated full-time staff person working on equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression within the Federation. In addition, an In-House Equity Team assists with revising and implementing the Federation's Action Plan to Support Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression, with the goal of improving the working conditions of our members and creating a truly inclusive, accessible, and equitable organization.

OSSTF/FEESO is proud of our standing committee devoted to addressing anti-Black racism, in addition to our other equity-focused committees and work groups. The Addressing Anti-Black Racism/Racism Committee works to inform OSSTF/FEESO policies and actions related to the dismantling of anti-Black racism and racism within the Federation, in the education sector, and in broader society.

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At the local level, the organization has mandated that the position of Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression Officer exist through all local districts across the province. Together, these individuals act as key points of contact for members seeking support. They also serve as resources and sources of information for our members. Multiple networking and training opportunities have been funded over the course of the past few years to support these individuals in the important work that they do.

While we are eager to engage and collaborate with other organizations and duty-holders in this work, OSSTF/FEESO has concerns that the section in the OHRC report about the role of trade unions misconstrues the role, obligations, and capabilities of trade unions in the workplace.

It is our experience that members prefer succinct and clear explanations of what power, tools, and authority are available to the Federation, so they can properly manage their expectations. Conversely, misconstruing capabilities often contributes to the exacerbation of frustrations, which runs contrary to both the spirit of the report and what we would strive to achieve in the representation of our membership.

For instance, we are concerned that the report will create unrealistic expectations around the ability of unions to establish policies and procedures that govern the workplace. While we welcome the opportunity to consult on such policies, the management of the workforce is the responsibility of employers, a distinction that is not clearly identified in the report.

During our consultation with the OHRC, we raised these concerns and sought clarification on how the report's expectations of unions could be practically implemented. While the OHRC did not substantively revise the report, they did express a willingness to work with us in the months ahead as the report's action framework takes shape. We value this commitment to ongoing dialogue and look forward to finding common ground which is responsive to the legal framework by which we are governed.

That said, it is crucial that our concerns with the report not be mistaken as a lack of support for it and the significant work that must be done. OSSTF/FEESO absolutely supports the impetus and spirit of the report and acknowledges that we have an important duty to continue to work to address anti-Black racism in public education and within our Federation. We are simply concerned that the section in the report on the role of unions is going to be broadly misunderstood by the public, as written.

OSSTF/FEESO is committed to continuing its work to learn and support members in understanding race-based bias, prejudice, and how anti-Black racism operates in pedagogy, classrooms, and schools, so it can be dismantled.

We look forward to continuing our conversation with the OHRC and other duty-holders to better understand what is being asked of us, so that we can support the findings of the report and its actions, and work collaboratively with other stakeholders to identify, address, and eliminate anti-Black racism in public education.

OSSTF/FEESO, founded in 1919, has over 60,000 members across Ontario. They include public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, early childhood educators, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, university support staff, and many others in education.

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