

The Human Rights complaint alleges the following:

Over the course of the 2015/2016 school year, several families have faced racial and religious discrimination as a direct result of how their child or children were treated while in the care of schools operated by the York Region District School Board, and the teachers who work for the Board. The Superintendents, Trustees, and Senior staff including the Director of Education also are culpable in this complaint.

Anti-Black Racism

Family#1: A black child, age eight was physically assaulted at school and the school did not follow policy or procedure in the collection of information and evidence in the case and accused the child of lying and the parents for pressuring the child to tell a different story from the one that was told to the school by the staff involved in the assault.

Family #2: A black child was called "Nigger" at school and when the parent spoke to the administrator about it, she was told that the child who called the black child that racist word was a behavioural student. The parent felt this was mishandled. The parent felt the Principal dismissed her concern and her child felt unsafe attending school.

Family #3: A black child was beaten severely by a group of white students while being called "Nigger" and punched and kicked in the head, while other students looked on and videotaped it, and shared it on social media. The school did not suspend the suspects, or follow board protocol. The parents were not told of the incident until 6pm that evening, 8 hours after the child had suffered a concussion. Follow-up meetings regarding this issue and the Board were met with no accountability nor apology, or clear plan to combat racism in the school. The child felt threatened, and unsafe attending school.

Family #4:

This family has a boy and girl in York Region schools.

Last year a teenage boy attending high school was made to feel marginalized by his teacher who constantly made racist remarks about his afro and him combing his hair with an afro pick. When the student asked why the teacher didn't ask other students who were combing their hair in the hallway or in class to put their brush away, the teacher asked him to leave the class. When the student left the class and tried to get back in, the teacher locked the door on him. The same teacher shouted at the student to leave the class, when the student asked a question about the homework and had the student stand outside for the rest of the class. The act was so aggressive students in the class sought out the mother at a school basketball game to let her know what happened to her son. The same teacher lied to the students' basketball coach and teacher about the student leaving class early to attend a basketball game, when in fact the student did not leave early. Due to the accusation by this same teacher, the student was taken out of the game and was not allowed to play in the tournament, he as yelled at by his coach and disciplined and made to feel like he was a disappointment to his team. When the parent went in to meet with the teacher about the lie, the teacher acknowledged he was mistaken but did nothing to rectify the situation or clear the students' name, and for the rest of the year, the student hated going to class and failed the course.

Over the course of seven years a young black girl from the same family began telling her mother and father about instances at school where she was made to feel like a second class citizen

because of her race and she felt that teachers and staff did not like her and treated her differently. She was speaking to her friend at recess in her parents' mother tongue "patois" just like Asian students speak Mandarin, Italian students speak Italian, or Arabic students speak Arabic, but when she spoke in her accent, the teacher called her out and asked her to speak English and not that Jamaican language. When she asked why other students were allowed to speak their language, she was dismissed. On another occasion, the same girl accidentally tripped and fell over a plastic cone in gym class and it broke. The teacher demanded that she pay \$50 for the broken plastic cone and then told her to get a broom and dust pan from the caretaker's closet and sweep up the mess she made along with sweeping the entire gym. This made the girl feel threatened, unsafe and ridiculed in front of her peers.

At this same school, nine black families left the school with their children and went to an English school because the tone of the school was anti-black. On another occasion 5 families went to meet with the Principal (has since left the school) to discuss the lack of diversity, equity training and inclusion practices at the school. The Principal left that year.

There are dozens of other families that have shared their stories with our organization, who are afraid to add their stories to this claim for fear of reprisal and the embarrassment it may cause their families and their place of employment.

Incidents of anti-Muslim Discrimination

When: 09/2015-11/2016

Over the course of two years, principal Ghada Sadaka of Sir Wilfrid Laurier Public School consistently posted and made affirmative comments on several articles that promoted hatred against Islam, Muslims and refugees on her Facebook page. Several students, and three families in particular have expressed anxiety about their safety and interactions with the principal as a result of the posts. After making complaints to the YRDSB, the families have repeatedly requested to seek information from the board on how their complaints had been handled. To date, they have not received any substantial explanation on the investigative process, nor has there been any disciplinary action against the principal. In fact, the principal attended a public board meeting where she was seen to be supported by several senior members of the School Board. The YRDSB failed to follow its own policy and procedure #240 in properly investigating and responding to complaints of discrimination within the school board. The board failed to follow its own policy #240 in carrying out a transparent and fair investigation into principal Sadaka's conduct and other issues of systemic discrimination. The NCCM wrote two letters to the board to raise concerns about the investigation process, however, no tangible response was provided as to how the board plans on assuring concerned families that staff who foster anti-Muslim discrimination and racism will be investigated thoroughly and fairly, and appropriate steps will be taken to reprimand individuals who hold these sentiments.

Effects:

Each child no longer felt safe at their school. Their grades were effected and their social skills were affected. They no longer wanted to go to school, take part in activities and had anxiety when approached by the teachers in question.

The parents had to take numerous days of work to attend countless meetings with staff, teachers and the Board, including the Director of Education and Trustees. Parents lost faith and trust in the Board and were anxious about leaving their child in the care of the school for 8 hours each day not knowing what their child was experiencing at the school.

The mental health of their children was affected and some parents had to pull their child from the school to relieve them of the anxiety. One parent had to take their child from a French immersion school to an English school because the abuse was so great. Another parent paid for private school out of country for her son because he was so traumatized by what he faced at the school and his grades were affected while at the school.

The social and emotional affects have left the students scarred with anxiety and fear of reprisal. It has left the parents feeling destitute and disenfranchised about the systemic racism within the school board.

One family is from South Africa and experienced Apartheid in South Africa, and felt that coming to Canada would offer their children a safe and caring learning environment contrary to what they experienced. These incidents have deeply affected this family and they are distraught. There has been financial burden on these families from loss of wages, to taking their children to new schools out of their school zone and out of the country, to therapy and anxiety support, tutoring and family issues ensuing from these incidents.

Aside from the affects listed, these students have lost a part of their childhood and innocence. These black students attended school every day thinking that they were just like all their other friends, until a teacher made them feel they were different, and told them that their cultural norms and ethnic diversity was not welcome in Ontario schools. The marginalization and racialization that these students were introduced is irreparable. It has forever scarred them, and greatly affected their scholastic achievement and their desire to do well in school and succeed.

Several Muslim students have also been directly impacted by anti-Muslim sentiments fostered by principal Sadaka. Along with heightened anxiety in interacting with the principal, the students no longer feel that the school is a safe space where they can express themselves and fully participate without feeling stigmatized and unwelcome. A young Muslim student expressed that she was afraid to request a day off for Eid, an Islamic religious holiday, because she did not want to go to the office. Other students have expressed similar concerns in regards to interacting with school staff.