



Parents of
Black Children

A CALL TO ACTION:

Systems abuse of Black students within Ontario's education system



Presented to:
Ontario Human Rights Commission

March 2022



Parents of
Black Children

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The need for Parents of Black Children	5
Black educators' experiences of anti-Black racism	6
Black families' experiences of anti-Black racism	7
What is anti-Black racism?	8
What is systems abuse?	9
Anti-Blackness and trauma in the classroom	10
The collection of PoBC anti-Black racism data	11
Fighting for our children: The current issues	14
Supporting students through PoBC systems navigation	16
When does PoBC get involved?	17
How the Roadmap to Education System Navigation works	18
Case Studies	20
Appendix I	29
Appendix II	51
References	56

Introduction

For generations, Black people have faced and overcome anti-Black racism and debilitating prejudices in many forms; from historical slavery and displacement to the ongoing effects of colonialism and systemic oppression. Recent events, namely the murder of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020, have brought a greater public awareness to issues of police brutality and other forms of systemic oppression and state-sanctioned violence against Black people.

The increase in awareness has created more discourse on the topic of anti-Black racism worldwide, and we are finally seeing individuals, institutions, and governments acknowledging the reality that structural barriers do, in fact, exist. While this is a step in the right direction, Black communities in Canada are calling for concrete institutional reform and policy changes to ensure the rights and freedoms of Black people, Black families, and Black children are protected.

Many Canadians often look to the U.S. when discussing issues of anti-Black racism and do not acknowledge that anti-Black racism is prevalent in their own backyard. Most would be shocked to discover just how much the issue is built into our very own school systems. In fact, anti-Black racism has occurred in the Canadian education system for over a century and includes the legacy of segregated schools for Black students.

Within the province of Ontario, years of collected research, data, and testimonials of those with lived experience have made one thing clear: there is an anti-Black racism crisis in Ontario's education system with little to no systemic policies to address it. This contributes to the emotional abuse and harm inflicted on Black children, who are subjected to daily interactions with those who are harming them.

Racism is violence. Racial violence is trauma. This fact has been documented by numerous mental health experts and healthcare authorities throughout Ontario. Yet, despite understanding the violence and trauma that anti-Black racism inflicts on Black students and their families, there are few accountability measures within the Canadian educational system to protect Black children.

This is our job. Since September 2020, Parents of Black Children (PoBC) has provided Systems Navigation services to families and Black children in Ontario. We've extended our services to support families across Canada and in the United States.

The need for PoBC

We know that regardless of where Black children live they are facing anti-Black racism in the education system. Currently, PoBC operates in Ontario and is federally incorporated. An Ontario Trillium Foundation grant for the United Parents Project used the Greater Toronto Area's York Region as a pilot to test the idea of using Systems Navigation in education, parent mentorship, and knowledge-building workshops. PoBC also has U.S. chapters in Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Independent studies have found that Black students face barriers in education. This is not simply our lived experience, but data-driven proof that requires that school boards and the Ontario government make concrete changes to ensure that Black students receive the education and support they deserve.

Teachers and parents in the Black community who participated in the ground-breaking 2017 York University report [Towards Race Equity in Education](#), said that parents of Black children needed to be more engaged and observant to ensure their children had the same learning opportunities as others.

For these reasons, a Black-led, Black-focused organization like Parents of Black Children was created to support Black families province-wide.

The goals of PoBC are to:

- Be the voice of all parents of Black children, so no parent has to fight alone for a just, safe, and equitable education for their child.
- Work to eliminate anti-Black racism and the oppression of Black students at school and interconnected systems.
- Advocate to ensure school boards collect rigorous disaggregated race-based data.
- Open a continued dialogue with school boards, independent, and private schools about anti-oppressive practices, culturally responsive pedagogy, and anti-Black racism within their schools and connected systems.
- Increase the knowledge of parents of Black children, and Black students, to advocate for change within the education and connected systems to help facilitate their success.

As PoBC works toward the common goals of creating sustainable, systemic, and transformational change in Ontario's education systems, we are grounded in principles based on anti-Black racism analysis, including:

- **Analyzing power.** Our job is to identify and unpack systems of oppression that have shaped school boards and education policies and practices including white supremacy, colonialism, and anti-Blackness.
- **Transparency and accountability.** Our job is to operate in a fully transparent manner and be accountable to Black parents, by providing community members with detailed information about PoBC, our processes, leadership, and outcomes.
- **Listening.** Our job is to prioritize the voices of Black parents and children, elders, LGBTQ2SQ+, and members of religious minority groups, through their own words. We support non-Black parents of Black children, but first they must recognize their own privilege.
- **Appreciation & gratitude.** Our job is to appreciate and respect all intersections of Blackness. Through appreciating all facets of the Black experience, we will reach our goal of dismantling white supremacy and creating equitable environments for all Black children.

Experiences of anti-Black racism

Black educators' experiences of anti-Black racism

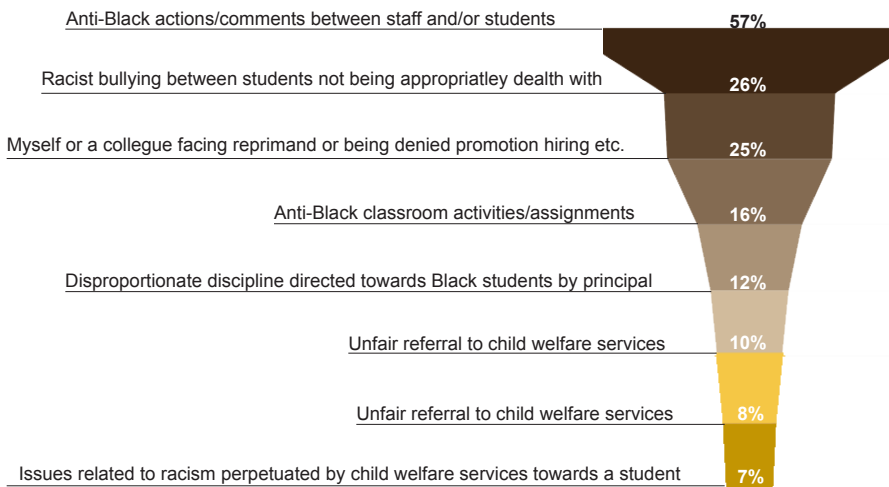
In March 2021, Parents of Black Children launched the first anti-Black racism reporting tool for education workers. The School Racism Reporting Tool is an anonymous tool accessible through the PoBC website. To date over 150 respondents have completed the racism reporting tool.

The experiences of Black educators in the workplace differ significantly from non-Black educators. Black education workers are consistently faced with targeted racial violence at work by students, parents, and colleagues. They are facing incidents of anti-Black racism while also bearing witness to the anti-Black racism suffered by students in their care.

Black educators and administrators who are doing the work of eradicating and dismantling anti-Black racism often become targets for abuse and harassment. The voice of the Black teacher working to create an anti-racist environment for Black children is seen as the problem, instead of the problem being anti-Blackness and racism.

There are no systems of accountability and reporting for educators, nor are there mechanisms in place to support those who are victimized. Although teacher federations, unions, and representative organizations are some of the most wealthy and well-resourced organizations in the country, they lack the will, expertise, or capacity to proactively protect educators from racial abuse and structural violence. The School Racism Reporting tool allows any educator, custodian, administrator, or anyone working within the education system – regardless of their race – to report instances of anti-Black racism that they have experienced or witnessed.

Nature of Incidents



Top reporting school boards

1. Toronto District School Board - 13%
2. York Region District School Board - 11%
3. Simcoe County District School Board - 7%



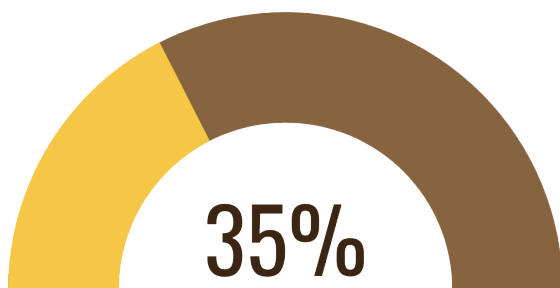
Only 18% of education system staff respondents raised their concerns with both the union and the school board.

Black families' experiences of anti-Black racism

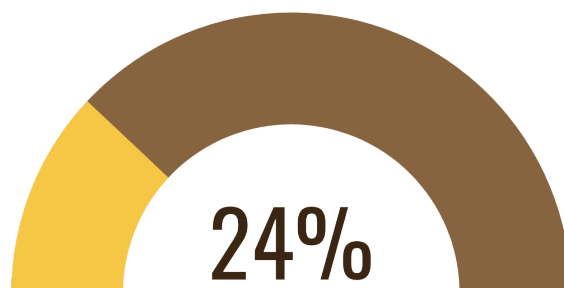
The experiences of Black families within the education system is complex and prevalent. Children are forced to deal with painful and egregious harm at schools which do not have the appropriate mechanisms in place to protect them. These students are racially targeted by peers and teachers at school. In addition to the interpersonal violence, they also have to contend with racially biased curriculum, evaluation practices, and policies at school that put them at risk daily. Black educators experience and/or witness anti-Black racism firsthand, but Black families' experiences with anti-Black racism in the education system is through their children's interactions with the system.

Some of the most alarming and egregious cases of anti-Black racism towards students have occurred in Catholic school boards in Ontario.

Black families within the education system often contact PoBC for support as their last resource to gain meaningful results. This usually occurs after most families have approached the education system for a resolution themselves, only to be left feeling more vulnerable and alienated.



Only 35% of education system staff respondents felt comfortable to raise their concerns with their school board



Only 24% of education system staff respondents felt comfortable to raise their concerns with their union



What is anti-Black racism?

Within schools and adjacent systems, Black students face overt racism, such as being called the n-word to being beaten and bullied simply because they are Black. The physical and emotional scars of these occurrences are evident and lifelong. However there are elements of racism that are far more insidious and covert which go unnoticed by everyone except the victim. Racism comes in the form of neglect and omission, such as ignoring a child's raised hand in the classroom, not acknowledging their abilities and not recognizing the contributions of Black people and their realities, all of which can make Black children feel invisible and devalued in their educational environments.

Types of neglect include, but are not limited to:

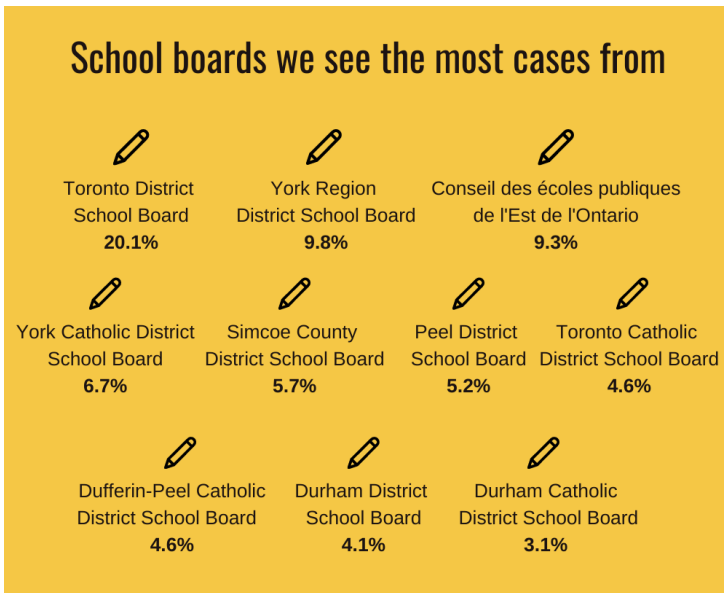
- Isolating a student due to normal child-like behaviours
- Refusing to teach a student or providing a below standard education
- Refusing to follow or revisit students' Independent Education Plans (IEP)
- Not expressing to parents the educational needs of the child until the last minute
- Ignoring a child's concerns in or outside of the classroom
- Disregarding instances of bullying or emotional harm to Black students

Acts of anti-Black racism include, but are not limited, to:

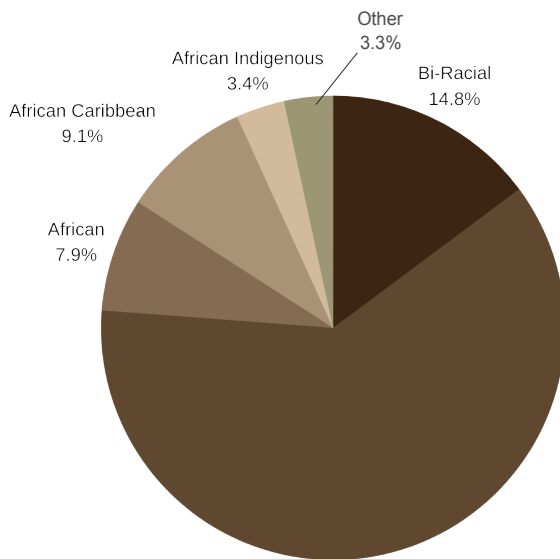
- Using texts and teaching materials that degrade Black people
- Refusing to reprimand white and non-Black students for using the n-word against Black students
- Applying harsher discipline for Black children
- Low academic expectations
- Adultification of Black children
- Surveilling Black children at school
- Disrespecting parents and family members of Black students
- Targeting students or families due to race
- Gaslighting parents, family members and students who come forward with complaints and concerns



The collection of PoBC anti-Black racism data



59.8% of families have tried to raise concerns with their child's school/board.



How does your child identify?



50% of families report experiencing anti-Black racism



23% of families report experiencing issues in specialized programs



14% of families report their children are experiencing racist bullying



3% of families report that Individual Education Plans are not being followed/considered

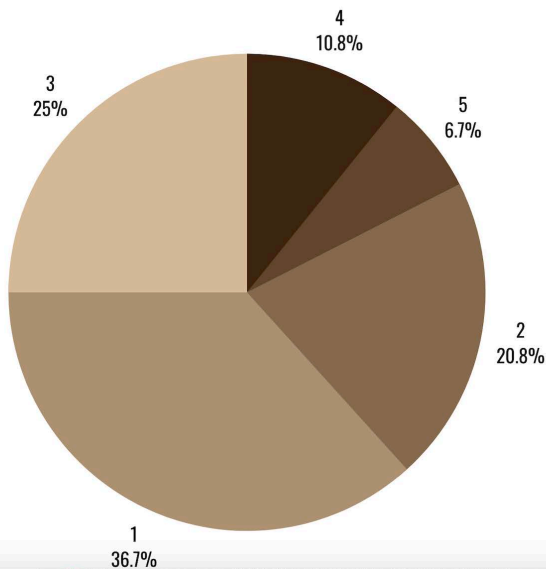


The collection of PoBC anti-Black racism data

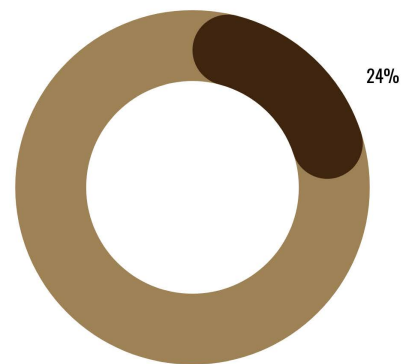
How confident do you feel navigating the education system?

1 = not confident at all

5= very confident



% of cases from Catholic school boards



We are seeing many of the more egregious instances of harm to Black students coming from Catholic Schools in Ontario.

Region to watch....



Halton Region

Combined PoBC cases from both Halton school boards total 3%.

Although the number of reported cases in Halton is low, PoBC has been called to support multiple families who have requested support from other agencies. PoBC has also been contacted by parents with children at both boards as well as a staff concerned about anti-Black racism.

Black parents within Halton Catholic District School Board have formed an affinity group to try and support each other due to the number of racist incidents they are facing.

When does PoBC get involved?

Think SAFE

- **S**upport and consultation is needed when parents are experiencing challenges within the education system.
- **A**dvocacy and Africentric wraparound supports for parents of Black children experiencing concerns in the education system (this includes children who have one Black parent).
- **F**ree – Education is a human right, and equitable education is guaranteed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28.
- **E**nable finding the right support, unpacking of anti-Black racism and help to deal with school administration, teachers, and board staff.

Identifying the need for System Navigation

Parents need the support of System Navigators because it is difficult to navigate the education system for many reasons, including anti-Black racism. As their parents may face anti-Blackness and microaggressions in the workplace, Black children face anti-Black racism in their classrooms. Anti-Black racism in the class may be seen in a number of ways, from blatant mistreatment of children to microaggressions that are hard to prove. Some examples include:

- Isolating a student due to common childlike behaviours
- Providing substandard education or no education at all
- Ignoring or not revisiting/reviewing IEPs
- Delaying the discussion of a child's educational needs until the last minute
- Ignoring a child's concerns in or outside of the classroom
- Refusing to address bullying or emotional harm to a student
- Using or allowing others to use the n-word or other slurs without punishment
- Ignoring when students say they are treated differently because of their race
- Singling students out for perceived cultural negatives. For example, asking 'why are Black people so violent?'
- Targeting students or families due to race
- Using gaslighting techniques, such as talking about parents' demeanour, to move attention away from the issues

How the PoBC Roadmap to Education System Navigation works

Our System Navigation prioritizes identifying areas and experiences of racism, neglect, gaslighting, and systems abuse of Black students and families during interaction with the education system.

Step 1	After identifying the areas of anti-Black racism, we contact the caregivers and service providers responsible such as schools, school boards, Children's Aid Societies (CAS), Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), Early Childhood Education (ECE), Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, Educational Ombudsman of Ontario, Office of the Independent Police Review Directors, and any other required organization.
Step 2	<p>We draft a letter on behalf of the student, parent or family and send it to the school/ school board requesting a meeting as soon as possible. Due to the levels of vulnerability, harm and trauma involved within the education system, we treat each case as an emergency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important that all service providers and education stakeholders treat all cases of anti-Black racism as an emergency.
Step 3	<p>We identify follow-up plans and establish what is necessary to provide sustainable resolutions for Black students and families. Whenever we make a demand, we focus on ensuring a client-focused approach while emphasizing the need to have procedures and tools to combat anti-Black racism. This includes inquiring about the existence of racism reporting tools for schools, school boards, and adjacent systems.</p> <p>We ask if any team leads or staff has reported this or any other specific incidences of racism and if the tool is only for internal reporting or if it can be used by members of the community outside of the school.</p>

Worrying about making people within the system uncomfortable as we pursue racial equity isn't our priority. The priority is to obtain successful outcomes for our clients and communities, as well as seeing systemic improvements for Black students and their families.

Case Study #1

Background

- School Board: Halton District School Board and Halton Catholic School Board
- Systems Implicated: Education, Child Welfare, Police
- Child(ren)'s Age(s): Primary age Black boy and Black girl
- Family Ethnicity: West African

A young Black boy with immigrant parents was subjected to anti-Black racist policies and procedures and was treated in a racially biased manner.

From his arrival, the family experienced what they now know as sustained targeting of their Black children in the education system.

When still in Kindergarten, the boy was diagnosed with a speech delay. His speech therapy sessions were approved at the first school he attended but, when the student changed schools, there were no follow-ups. The second school did not move forward with the approval and the child's family was forced to pay out of pocket to ensure that their child received the necessary interventions.

At the start of school, the family was also inundated with calls and messages of concern from teachers about their son. The school called the child's mother at work several times to tell her she needed to pick up her son from school immediately, with a specific time given. For example, the child's mother was informed that she would have to drop her son off at 8 am and pick him up by 11 am. The parents were also told, multiple times, to not bring their child to school. These demands resulted in unprecedented pressure, stress, and trauma for the parents.

In these instances, the Children's Aid Society (CAS) was wielded as a weapon, with threats to call them if the mother did not pick her child up or if she brought him to school. As a result, his mother was forced to stop working.

For the mildest or slightest altercation, this young Black child would often be sent out of class by his teacher, being left to roam the halls for hours. While still under the age of 10, this child was labelled as a "threat to the school" and was mistreated by school administrators and teachers. The child's father noted that on a school trip, other students bullied his son and the bullying went unaddressed by school staff. Not only was this child experiencing harsh treatment from school staff, but he was also being bullied by his peers. The acceptance of harassment of a Black child highlights the anti-Blackness that exists in schools and within school systems, showing how little is done to address and dismantle racism in schools.

Appendix I: Summary of PoBC Provincial Cases

*The timespan for the cases collected range from September 2020 - January 2022

EÜ^] [| o Áe^Áca^} Á[{ ÁÚ[ÓÓÁÚ^•c{ Á pçã æã } ÁQ ca^Áe) áÁÚ[ÓÓcÁ&Q [| Ácaã { Á^} [| ç * Á ç [|

Algoma District School Board

Number of cases: 2

FE A white boy was seen bullying a Black student throughout the school year. The teacher dismissed the white student's behaviour as typical and to be expected from them and told the Black student to ignore it.

GE AA[æãÁ{] [^^^ reported being denied promotion or career advancement due to their advocacy of anti-Black racism and has been discriminated against based on race/ethnicity.

Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic DSB

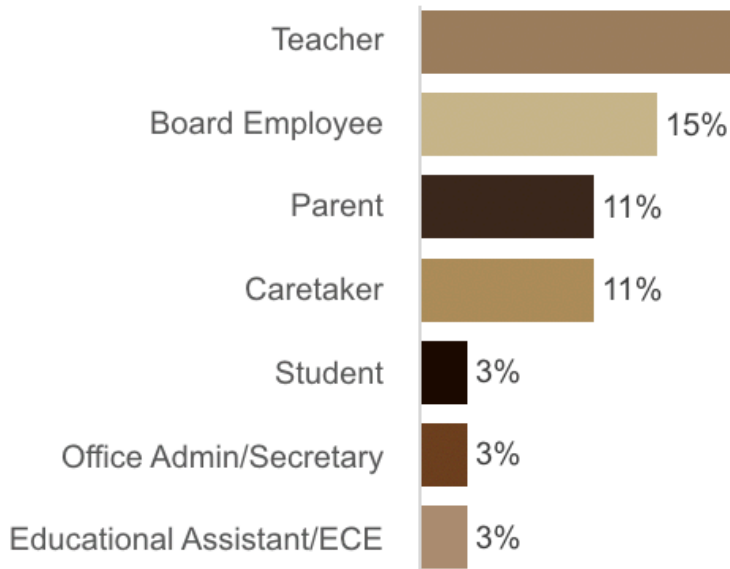
Number of cases: 5

1. The school was not participating in Black History Month due to a lack of lesson plans and resources from the school board. Parents offered materials and resources to supplement the school but they were not acknowledged by the principal.
2. The debate over the use of the book *To Kill a Mockingbird* ensued at a high school. One teacher sent articles celebrating systematic racism deniers, unsolicited surveys, and videos to other staff members that were in line with his views that the text should be used. Teachers have not raised this issue with their union or the school board due to a lack of faith that they will respond appropriately.
3. A white student had reportedly bullied another Black student for years. The white student claims to have been bitten by the Black student, resulting in the suspension of the Black student. The suspension was extended at the request of the white student's mother. The mother of the Black student inevitably made the choice to remove her child from the school.
4. There is ongoing racial tension between the white students of a school and the Black and Asian students. The staff request the creation of anti-white racism and anti-Asian racism tools.
5. Elementary school teachers state that because of a young Black boy's behavioural issues he would not make it far, and might not even get to high school. They then suggest that he may be able to "do something" with his basketball skills. The teachers' comments were reported but the Supervisor made excuses for their behaviour and they received no consequences.



Appendix II: School Racism Reporting Tool Data Analysis

Role in School System



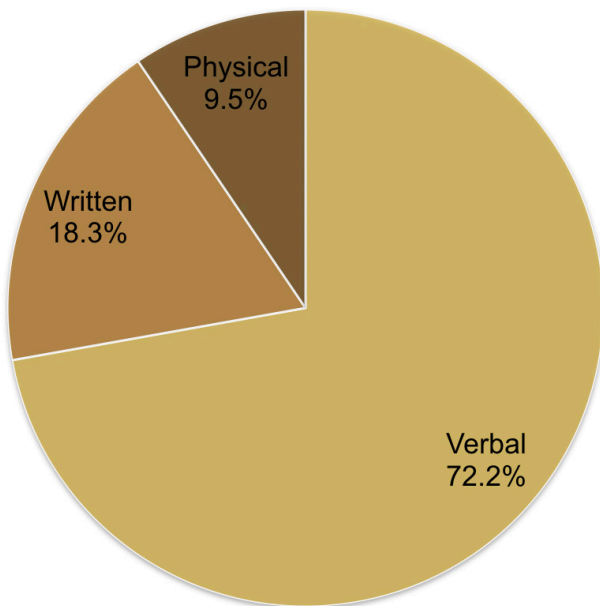
Targeted Abuse...

"... He passive aggressively joked about 'calling the CAS' if a Black student's parent didn't come to pick up their daughter on time."

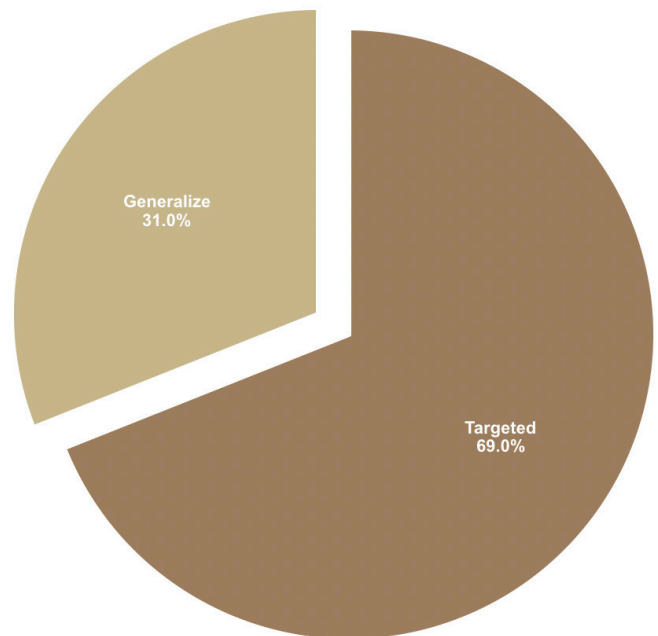
"... Black students are often harassed by sending them to the principal's office,

"A parent... said that 'these people' need to make a better life for themselves, referring to Black Canadians."

Delivery of Discrimination



Targeted vs. General Discrimination



References

- Cenat, J. M., McIntee, S.-E., Mukunzi, J. N., & Noorishad, P.-G. (2020). Overrepresentation of Black children in the child welfare system: A systematic review to understand and better act. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2020.105714>
- Kriz, K., & Skivenes, M. (2015). Challenges for Marginalized Minority Parents in different welfare systems: Child Welfare Workers' Perspectives. *International Social Work*, 58(1), 75-87. 10.1177/0020872812456052
- Raz, M. (2020). Calling Child Protective Services is a Form of Community Policing That Should Be Used Appropriately: Time to engage Mandatory Reporters As To Harmful Effects of Unnecessary Reports. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 110, 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2020.104817>
- Shommu, N., Ahmed, S., Rumana, N., Barron, G., McBrien, K., & Turin, T. (2016). What is the scope of improving immigrant and ethnic minority healthcare using community navigators: A systematic scoping review. *International Journal for Health and Equity and Health*, 1-12. 10.1186/s12939-016-0298-8

This Parents of Black Children report was produced and designed by:

 DAYO Media & Communications
www.dayo.ca

