

Minister Lecce releases final report on provincial intervention at PDSB

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

A recent provincial review of alleged racism in Peel District schools has found that "immediate and robust action is needed" to correct systemic issues that have marginalized groups of students over several years.

This past October, a request was sent in for ministry intervention against discrimination allegations against Peel District School Board (PDSB). The request was submitted by Past Chair and Vice-Chair of Board of Trustees alongside students, families and the broader community.

"Schools must feel safe, inclusive and welcoming places for students, staff and the entire community. Allegations related to equity in the Peel District School Board have raised concerns specifically related to anti-Black racism and lack of adherence to governance, leadership and human resource practices," stated Lecce.

Lecce responded to the comments made in the request and review and issued directions for the Peel Board to address the allegations against them including, systemic discrimination "specifically anti-Black racism" human resources practices, board leadership and governance issues.

"The accounts of systemic racism and discrimination documented in the report are deeply troubling and will not be tolerated. After decades of inaction, I want to see swift implementation of my directions to drive the necessary and positive change that students deserve," said Lecce in a recent press release. "Students and the community have demanded change and I want to assure them that we will monitor Board implementation of the directions and hold them to account to deliver transformational change that will put every student on a path to success."

The review got more than 450 requests for interviews and over 160 written and telephone submissions regarding the issue. 115 interviews were held along with four community and student discussions sessions to gain the public's perspective.

The Minister of Education appointed Shawn Richards, Sue Herbert and Ena Chadha to put together the review and recommendations.

"It is clear the immediate and robust action is needed," said Ontario's Advocate for Community Opportunities, Jamil Jivani. "The March 13 announcement by the Minister is an important step toward building a public-school system that gives each child "regardless of race, background or postal code "a fair start in life."

The Peel District School Board is responsible for a total of 257 schools within Caledon, Brampton and Mississauga with over 155,000 students with different race, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds.

The Peel District School Board have been given 27 ministerial directions by Lecce with a strict timeline and deliverables, which is accessible online for students, families and the community can track the progress being made.

Chair of the Board Brad MacDonald and Director of Education Peter Joshua released a statement in response to the release of the final report on March 13.

The statement highlights committing the urgency on the directions given by the Minister of Education and the expectations staff and colleagues within the school board, along with apologies to those who have been affected.

"It is clear that many individuals have been negatively affected over the years, and we apologize for the trauma and hurt they have experienced. But apologies mean nothing if we don't take action to address and correct systemic issues that result in marginalization

and oppression. To do this, we cannot centre issues of equity on the discomfort of people in positions of power. We must centre those who are being marginalized, lean into our discomfort and choose to do what is right and just by those we serve. We must put our commitment to equity and inclusion into meaningful and authentic practice,? the statement reads.