

Attn: Minister Stephen Lecce

Andrea Horwath (NDP Leader and MPP Hamilton Centre) and the NDP Black Caucus - Dr. Laura Mae Lindo (MPP Kitchener Centre), Faisal Hassan (MPP York South-Weston), Dr. Jill Andrew (MPP Toronto – St. Paul’s), Kevin Yarde (MPP Brampton North), Dr. Rima Berns-McGown (MPP Beaches—East York), Mitzie Hunter (Liberal MPP Scarborough -Guildwood) and Michael Coteau (Liberal MPP Don Valley East), Michael Schreiner (Provincial Green Party Leader and MPP Guelph) Ontario Premier Doug Ford Canadian PM Justin Trudeau, Ontario NDP Education Critic Marit Stiles, CBC Toronto Host Dwight Drummond, Sandy Hudson, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, Desmond Cole

Dear Minister Lecce,

The Ontario Black History Society is writing to demand the Ministry of Education of Ontario take immediate action to improve and update the current Ontario Social Studies, History, and Geography curricula by formally including explicit mandated learning expectations on Black history and experiences from K - 12.

For 42 years, it has been a crucial part of the mandate of the OBHS to support the inclusion of Black history in classroom instruction. In fact, our organization was established by Dr. Daniel Hill, the first Director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission and father of author Lawrence Hill, and other Black educators and community members precisely because they were concerned about the systemic absence and misrepresentation of Black history in schools. The past seven months have highlighted what Black people in Canada and worldwide have known for generations, that Ontario and the nation of Canada have perpetuated and failed to address anti-Black racism in any systemic way.

The social uprising against police brutality and systemic racism along with the calls to remove monuments, street names, and other historical markers that celebrate colonization, enslavement, violence, and displacement have elucidated why it is essential to teach young people in Ontario about the contributions and achievements of Black Canadians. They also provide a rationale on the importance of educating them about the ways that Black Canadians have faced systemic racism by various levels of government and racial discrimination in white-majority society throughout our history.

Further, the Ministry of Education’s review of anti-Black racism in the Peel District School Board and the ongoing concerns in the York Region and Toronto boards have been repeatedly cited as having serious/negative effects on the educational experiences and outcomes of Black students in the province. A common concern articulated by Black children, Black parents, and Black communities is the exclusion or marginalized representation in the curriculum presented in classrooms and schools. The over 400-year presence of people of African descent in Canada has been “blacked out” to the detriment of the human rights of Black Canadians.

To date, the curriculum only has optional suggested topics related to Black history. Educators do not have to teach these. The lack of explicit curriculum expectation despite decades of advocacy by Black parents and community members is an act of anti-Black racism by the Ontario government that must be addressed once and for all. Contrary to what you noted in an interview on July 9, 2020, the Ministry and the public education system has not done enough to represent Black history and experiences in the curriculum. Optional teaching in grades 3, 6, and 9 as you state is woefully inadequate and relegates the Black presence in Canada to the margins.

That's why today, the Ontario Black History Society is launching a campaign to highlight the lack of Black History taught in Canadian classrooms. Included in this package is a copy of the History textbook used to educate Grade 8 students in this province, with one major change - we've blacked out all of the Non-Black history. As you'll quickly realize, once all of that history is removed, only a few pages remain. Copies of this book are also being distributed to other notable figures throughout the province, and an ad addressing this issue is launching online with the hashtag #BlackedOutHistory, to create a groundswell of support for change.

The inclusion of explicit mandatory learning expectations must be part of the Ministry of Education's provincial strategy to address and disrupt anti-Black racism in public education. This would be a positive step for the government to recognize and correct the impact of the erasure and marginalization of an over 400-year Black presence. It would be a systemic step in reform and reconciliation.

Further, including explicit mandated learning expectations not only fosters a sense of belonging and racial pride in Black children, it would also help to reduce the development of racial prejudice in non-Black students, reduce the manifestation of racism in our society, and increase awareness of issues of race and racism that are realities in our diverse province. This will result in fostering future generations of change makers, future citizens who actively work to dismantle the inequities resulting from systemic racism and to create an Ontario that will live up to its ideal of a place for all.

The OBHS asks that you and the Ontario Ministry of Education immediately:

- Commence a review of the SSHG and CWS curricula
- Work with knowledgeable Black educators and scholars to conduct the review and to identify topics, themes, and content to be integrated into the curriculum
- Include Black history and Black experiences past and present as a mandatory part of the SSHG and CWS curricula from K to 12 and subsequently in all subjects from K to 12
- Provide consistent supports and resources to enable educators to effectively teach Black histories

This matter requires your urgent attention including an immediate concrete commitment to make these changes and a clear outline of the actionable steps the ministry of education will take. Fulfilling the goal of mandating Black History in the curriculum will make a better tomorrow and a better Ontario for everyone.

Sincerely,



Natasha Henry
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On behalf of the board of the Ontario Black History Society

Founded in 1978, the Ontario Black History Society (OBHS) is a registered Canadian charity, dedicated to the study, preservation and promotion of Black History and heritage. The Society aims to encourage public interest in Black History through the: Recognition and documentation of the contributions of peoples of African descent and their collective histories, past and present, through education, research and collaboration, the development and support of educational initiatives and exhibits and the inclusion of Black History material in school curricula.