

Present: A. DiGiovanni (Chairman), Trustee J. Doiron, Dr. O. Wright, T. Vaz,  
M. LaFontaine and Executive and Members of the Black Parents' Organization.

The meeting commenced at 6:35 p.m.

1. Opening Remarks

The Chairman called the meeting to order, welcoming the members of the Black Parents' Organization and introducing the trustees and staff in attendance.

Mr. LaFontaine gave a short address explaining the purpose of the task force, covering its history and background. He outlined the terms of reference of its mandate: 1) magnet schools, 2) program as it developed in areas of high density, 3) issue of French.

2. Presentation

Keren Brathwaite, Vice-Chairperson of the Black Parents' Organization expressed the appreciation of the Organization for the opportunity to meet with the Task Force and introduced the members of their group, including representatives from the Scarborough Board of Education, the Black Heritage Committee, a Black Heritage program, Holy Rosary School, Dewson P.S., Frankland P.S., Queen Victoria P.S. and Rose Ave. P.S.

The Chairperson of the B.P.O. explained the history and purpose of their group, outlining their concerns in major areas, including streaming, the level system and self-enhancement of students. She indicated that the aims of the Organization were to educate parents in the workings of the school system, to teach the parents that they are a part of the education system and to show them how to initiate fulfilment of the needs of their community. She listed several committees which had evolved from their Organization and expressed their wish to encourage parents to take an active part in their children's education.

Ms. Brathwaite further outlined the following concerns of the Organization which arose out of discussion at two previous meetings:

- 1) Operations of Black Heritage Committee and the programs in existence. The intent to work with other Boroughs.
- 2) Funding - the program is not directly funded by the Ministry. It is done through Continuing Education. They recommend that they receive regular funding through Ministry.
- 3) Black Heritage curriculum - material needs to be researched.
- 4) Integration of program within the school day.
- 5) General experience of black students:
  - a) Curriculum relating to black students. Race Relations Review heard from black parents about insufficiencies in current curriculum material. There have been no significant changes since then. They appeal to the Task Force to recommend curriculum materials with a direct relationship to all students within the system. The present curriculum is directed basically to the white, middle class student. There is a need for change in the interest of the children.

- b) Assessment and Placement: Parents feel that black students have been disproportionately streamed into lower level schools, limiting their future. Present manner of assessment gives insufficient consideration of the experience of students.
- c) Staffing: There should be black staff on all levels of the education system. Although there have been improvements in this area, there is still a great need for more role models for the black students.
- d) Lack of Implementation of Race Relations and Multicultural Reports. The Board needs to take another look at the recommendations. Although some people are working hard in this area, the Board must be urged to take further action. The Affirmative Action Department seems to stress the female issue only rather than looking at ethnic problems.

3. The floor was opened for general issues and discussions.

Q/ Mr. DiGiovanni: Other communities support the concept of magnet schools and alternate schools. How would this be accepted by the Black community?

Ms. Brathwaite asked for further explanation of magnet schools. Mr. LaFontaine did this and also went on to explain the concept of alternate schools.

A/ We want our children to be included within the regular system. This would be better for their future chances in relation to society.

A/ Two aspects arise from the example of segregated schools in the United States:

Positive - learning own culture from their own teachers.

Negative - ghettoization, less funding, lower standard of teaching.

What we want is to see that our kids get adequate and well-rounded education.

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Q/ Request for clarification: Does the mandate of the Task Force recognize language, not culture?

A/ Yes.

Q/ Language is a part of culture. How can you separate them?

A/ Mr. LaFontaine explained the Ministry policy under which the program is funded through Continuing Education. The Board must operate within the perimeter of this policy. He indicated that the Task Force is in agreement with her statement and that they plan to make presentations to the Board about that very problem.

Joan Doiron stated that she and the other members of the Work Group are in agreement with the B.P.O. in putting culture and language together. They are trying to get the Board closer to where the community is and are willing to take a strong position at the Board in relation to staffing and other issues. She offered an opinion that language prejudices can be similar to racial prejudices. She reaffirmed that there was no valid reason to divide language and culture.

Q/ B.P.O. Respondent: Culture and language have not been brought together. There is more emphasis on the language issue. Questions whether the Board really understands, wonders what the Board policy really is. Feels that Black Heritage Program is receiving token funding only, that the actual funding policy is not clear.

The respondent also made the point that, in her opinion, race discrimination and language discrimination cannot be equated.

A/ Trustee Doiron further clarified the point she was making.

- B.P.O. Respondent: The Black Heritage Program should be taught in regular school to all students, not only the Black students. The Heritage Language Program itself appears to be vague. Funding is not sufficient. Racism is still prevalent. Black language has been stripped from the Black community historically.

Q/ Mr. DiGiovanni informed the group that the Task Force will make an initial draft report then invite reaction from community groups. He invited a submission from the B.P.O. regarding their position on magnet schools, etc.

A/ Generally, the Organization do not care to be separated from the regular school stream.

- Mr. DiGiovanni explained that they would not have to be separate. The program would be open to all ethnics, not exclusive to a particular race. The presence of the program would merely indicate a high density population.
- Ms. Brathwaite stated that the Black community have had a long experience with segregated schools. Children must be kept in regular school classes for their future benefit. They must be well-versed in other cultures.

Q/ Chairperson of B.P.O. inquired if there are guidelines in existence regarding curriculum, etc. of magnet schools.

A/ Mr. LaFontaine answered that this point has to be considered.

- Dr. Wright further clarified the reason for magnet schools. She also provided some insight into the question of busing which had been hinted at. She gave an assurance that, in the case of the Armenian children who are being bused, the request for busing came from the Armenian community, not the Board.
- The point was made that, generally, the Black parents want their children to be part of the regular school system. Their aim is to have Black history taught as a regular subject in school. Supporting a separate school would not achieve this.
- Chairperson, B.P.O.: Our children will have to deal with society as a whole. We want there to be something available to benefit our parents and children.

- Rose Ave. P.S. Parent: Her daughter participates in the Saturday Black Heritage Program and has learned a lot from it. The child likes the program but would much prefer it to be integrated into regular classroom subjects. The parent made reference to the many problems experienced in the United States and suggested that Canada could learn a lot from them. There is a great need for clarification on a level even higher than the Board. The Government has to be supportive, especially in matters such as funding for curriculum materials, field trips, etc. She went on to praise the program at Rose Ave. and attributed its success mainly to the Principal of the school. She feels that the children in that program are learning to live and work together well as children and will move on into society and continue this success.
- Mr. DiGiovanni informed the group that there is a strong incidence of Black children taking part in Heritage Language Programs. In fact, he indicated that one quarter of the children taking Italian are of Black heritage.
- Mr. Vaz reaffirmed the general feeling that Blacks have been segregated for too long and the need now is to come together. This would seem to negate the initiation of magnet or alternate schools.
- Chairperson, B.P.O. asserted that their Organization, as parents, are not interested in attacking other groups in any way. They are simply interested in their children's education.
- One respondent brought up the concern of many parents about the programming of Black children into sports rather than other activities.

### 3. Closing Remarks

Ms. Brathwaite closed on behalf of the Black Parents' Organization, summarizing the major concerns mentioned in her opening remarks. She emphasized their appeal to the Board to implement the recommendations of both the Race Relations and Multicultural Reports.

Mr. DiGiovanni thanked the Black Parents' Organization for their attendance and interest and expressed the hope that the two groups would come together again in the second stage of the Task Force's work.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.