

PLEASE ADD ATTACHED TO YOUR COPY OF THE MINUTES

MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24th WITH JOINT AD-HOC COMMITTEE.

APPENDIX C - PRESENTATION OF ORGANIZATION OF PARENTS OF BLACK CHILDREN.

any progressive measures taken by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education for all children, including our own - but this time, of immediate interest to us are the following concerns which call for action:

- the area of curriculum - how black students relate to the school curriculum and how the curriculum affects them.
- the assessment and placement of black students is also on our minds.
- the employment and promotion of black teachers, administrators and other staff in education is frequently discussed topic among us.
- the Black Heritage Programme, its funding, development and integration within the schools, is also of

We welcome this opportunity to join with other parents to address the Third Languages Workgroup of the Toronto Board of Education.

The Organization of Parents of Black Children is committed to working towards fair and equal treatment of black students within the school system. We are concerned about quality education for all students, but are particularly concerned about the progress of black students, realizing that one day they will be taking our places, and we want them to be adequately prepared for that responsibility. We know that many of our children are performing well in school, but we also admit that many are not - that many are locked into dead-end programmes with little hope for future advancement. We applaud and support any progressive measures taken by the Toronto Board of Education and the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education for all children, including our own - but at this time, of immediate interest to us are the following concerns which call for action:

- the area of curriculum - how black students relate to the school curriculum and how the curriculum affects them.
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In a release on June 10, 1981, Mr. Jim Fleming, Minister of Multiculturalism, stated that "Racism is an insult to the spirit of Canada", and he pledged his ministry to "a comprehensive programme of public education to combat racism." We have to state once again that black students, as their parents, are often subject to racism and discrimination in the school system, even though we acknowledge the effort of the Toronto Board, through its Race Relations Department, to deal with the cancer of racism. Whether our children were born in the West Indies or Africa, England or Canada, many of them feel alienated within the school system, and several experience identity problems due to negative experiences. Education should be nourishing the self esteem of our children, as of all children, in a system which claims to support equal opportunity.

CURRICULUM

Black students in both elementary and secondary schools are exposed to curriculum content which generally excludes their backgrounds and experiences; this diminishes their pride, self worth and perspective on their heritage. A good education should include some reference to one's SELF and should encourage one's aspirations — and when a child's background is omitted or presented negatively, then that child is experiencing education which is alienating. When a black child draws his black mother looking white, as we know many do, then we have a serious problem.

The curriculum in Toronto schools is still basically white and middle class, even though the Ontario Ministry of Education policy on paper seems to support education for a multicultural society. The Toronto Board's review of textbooks has revealed racial, ethnic, class and sex role bias in some unexpected texts like Music, Mathematics and Business Education — how much more can be expected in Social Studies and in the History books.

Many black children have not learnt (except they attend Black Heritage classes or their parents take the time to teach them) that blacks have been in Canada since the seventeenth century and have not recently arrived here from Jamaica, as the school system seems to assume. Many children have not been taught about the Underground Railroad and how Harriet Tubman led hundreds of black slaves from the Southern United States to freedom in Canada. The history books used in schools would not inform our children that slavery was practiced here in Canada in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even by prominent politicians, as documented by Daniell Hill in The Freedom Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada. Nor has the curriculum taught them adequately about the Native peoples of Canada and the other non-Anglo Saxon groups which form the Canadian mosaic, which we so proudly boast.

Our recommendation, therefore, is that the curriculum integrate a fairer selection of materials in all courses; we

believe that this would be of educational benefit to all students. For example, a secondary school course in literature might include Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Gabrielle Roy, T.S. Eliot, Shakespeare and so on, but how about including a play by Sophocles or a novel by Austin Clarke, who is a capable writer living here in Toronto, or V.S. Naipaul, a West Indian writer of South Asian origin, who was nominated last year for a Nobel Prize. And in science courses, the work of non-white people should be included. Black and other minority students have been exposed to a white curriculum for too long; for our survival with dignity in this country, our children need to see the positive side of our heritage, rather than the humiliating, negative stereotypes of books like "Little Black Sambo."

Over the years, we have heard from Black Canadians about some of their experiences in the nineteen forties and fifties in Toronto and other schools - one student was put out of the class whenever Africa "the Dark Continent" was discussed; some were Jim Crowed to the back of the classroom as blacks were Jim Crowed to the back of the buses in the Southern United States. So we are led to believe today that we have come a long way, for really our children do not experience such overt racism (although some still do.) We are reminded, however, that segregated schools were legal in Canada up to the first part of this century,

and as Danny Hill reports, this legislation was removed from the books only in 1965.

In recent times, we have heard boards of education supporting a policy of equality in education, and we, as black parents, are urging the Toronto Board of Education and the Ministry of Education to put these policies into practice and to further expand them so that we can be assured a secure future for our children - so that our children will grow up believing that the definition of a black Canadian is equal to that of a white Canadian. We anticipate the time when we will have equal citizenship in Canada and an educational system truly supportive of equality.

Thank you.

Keren Brathwaite
Organization of Parents of
Black Children
June 24, 1981