



Name: Dina Shalabi

Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

Request to assign a budget item to hire an Arabic-speaking coach who will support and advocate for students and families who are facing anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism. The coach will also be able to raise awareness and advance the conversation about combating this type of racism while ensuring necessary training and professional development are offered to both administrators and educators. Reference to the first annual public report (2020-2023), produced by Human Rights and Equity Advisor Office, is made in the submitted delegation text.

Greetings,

My name is Dina Shalabi, and I am a parent to an OCDSB student in Gloucester. I am a pedagogical counselor at a local college, and I am part of a working group that collaborates with OCDSB on issues related to one of the ethnic communities in Ottawa. I have served as a community representative for a large international language school as part of OCDSB's IILP Program. I appreciate the opportunity to address you today regarding an essential aspect of promoting equity and inclusion within our educational system at OCDSB. In reference to the first annual public report (2020-2023), produced by the Human Rights and Equity Advisor Office, system issue 13 indicates a lack of central level, identity-based support for Arab students (p. 24).

In addition, one of the emerging human rights issues on page 26, the report addresses the emerging tension between the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism and the application of its working examples and the expression of Palestinian identity, anti-Palestinian racism, and discussion of human rights abuses committed in Israel and Palestine.



Delegation 5.2a

Furthermore, as highlighted in the document, suspension reports and observations indicate systemic racism, discrimination, and bias within disciplinary Processes. These are critical issues to the Middle Eastern community in Ottawa. According to the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Roadmap: Eliminating barriers to success (2020-2023)(p.5), OCDSB students from a Middle Eastern ethnic background comprise 15.3%, the largest group after students with white (European descent).

One of the steps to mitigate these systemic and emerging issues is creating a position for an Arabic-speaking coach who also understands the dynamics of Anti-Arab discrimination as well as the various manifestations of anti-Palestinian racism, which has been on the rise for the last a few months and tends to be mostly unreported due to fear of further marginalization. The coach who will support and advocate for students and families who are faced with anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism. The coach will also be able to raise awareness and advance the conversation about combating this type of racism while ensuring necessary training and professional development is offered to both administrators and educators. By investing in culturally competent support and training, we can work towards fostering a more equitable and inclusive educational environment where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered to succeed.

Thank you

Sincerely,
Dina Shalabi

11.2 Report back to staff members: Revise [PR.515.SCO](#) Student Suspensions and Expulsions to reflect legislative obligation under the *Education Act* to report back to the staff member who reported the incident, about the outcome of the investigation.

SYSTEM ISSUE 12:

Inconsistent approach to religious accommodation

There is a lack of clarity about how to appropriately accommodate religious beliefs and practice including prayer. This leads to students being denied the right to access prayer space at appropriate times, and being asked invasive questions such as why they need to pray at that particular time or to explain how long it takes to pray, etc. It also leads to students and families requesting to be excused from participating in activities related to 2SLGBTQ+ identities, citing their religious beliefs. The lack of clarity also impacts staff members who seek accommodations.

12.1 Religious accommodation procedure: Develop a procedure on religious accommodation for students and for staff.

12.2 Training competing rights: Provide training to Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) as well as administrators and educators on religious accommodation for both staff and students, to ensure consistency in application across the District. Review as well how to consider competing rights.

SYSTEM ISSUE 13:

Lack of central level, identity-based support for Arab students

At the OCDSB, Indigenous, Black, Jewish and 2SLGBTQ+ identity-specific supports are available for students. Data suggests that approximately 14.7% of the student population identify as Middle Eastern and 19.3% identify as Muslim. This is a gap and means that there is not adequate support to prevent and address anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia when it occurs.

13.1 Arab student support role: Establish a central level identity-based position focused on community engagement, support for Arab and Arabic speaking students and families, and advocacy and support to schools and the District on issues related to Islamophobia and anti-Arab discrimination.

SYSTEM ISSUE 14:

Mentoring, appointment and handover process for administrators

Currently placement of an administrator at a school is determined in large part by a process whereby administrators are asked where they would like to work. This means that schools with more complex needs have fewer administrators putting their name forward. Additionally, administrators tend to be assigned within the same superintendency, rather than placed anywhere in the District, based on need. While the O-HREA recognizes that it is important for employee wellness to listen to and consider employee preferences, this must be balanced with

SYSTEM ISSUE 17:

Educators in the International and Indigenous Languages Program require guidance on addressing sensitive issues

Educators in the IILP program are often new to the OCDSB and not always familiar with OCDSB policies and procedures. They have also not benefited from ongoing professional development within the OCDSB on equity and human rights, and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

17.1 Revise induction materials: Induction materials for teachers for the International and Indigenous Languages Program (IILP) should be revised to include learning on how to navigate sensitive discussions including about religion, checking and identifying personal biases, creating inclusive spaces for all students and identifying and addressing Islamophobia.

Emerging Human Rights Issues

In addition to the system issues that emerged above as a result of investigations undertaken by the O-HREA, during this reporting period the O-HREA identified and raised several emerging human rights issues within the District. The issues include:

- tension between the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism and the application of its working examples and the expression of Palestinian identity, anti-Palestinian racism, and discussion of human rights abuses committed in Israel and Palestine;
- tension between religious beliefs and non-discrimination towards members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community including in relation to celebration of Pride month, access to gendered spaces by transgender students, and inclusive learning about 2SLGBTQ+ identities;
- clarification about religious accommodation, including accommodation of religious beliefs and practices that is possible and is not possible, while ensuring the OCDSB upholds its obligation to ensure non-discriminatory learning spaces;
- disability forms for employees are not inclusive of gender diverse people and are not designed to accommodate people with permanent disabilities, including learning differences or people who are neurodivergent;
- current employee benefits packages appear to discriminate against same-sex parents by denying them equal benefits when they build their family through surrogacy;
- strict application of Board by-laws to refuse delegations from people outside the Ottawa area, could inadvertently prevent marginalized groups from accessing important advocacy support that does not exist within the Ottawa area.

Our Story by the Numbers

Valuing Voices: Identity Matters!

Knowledge and understanding of the wide range of lived experiences, hopes and dreams of students at the OCDSB is foundational to serving them well. The Valuing Voices: Identity Matters! Student Survey, 2020 tells a story of the diversity of identity and perceptions of the students whom we serve. The categories below reflect the language used in the Valuing Voices survey and were developed using the data fields recommended in Ontario’s anti-racism data standards¹. In addition, the OCDSB also wanted to understand the individual and intersecting impact of gender identity and income.

Demographic Categories	OCDSB (%) JK-6 (Parents)	OCDSB (%) 7-12 (Students)	Ottawa (%) 2016 Census
Indigenous			2.1%
First Nation	2.3%	2.5%	1.2%
Métis	0.9%	1.1%	1%
Inuit	0.7%	0.6%	0.1%
Other*			0.1%
Status in Canada			
Born in Canada (YES)	83.1%	77.9%	74.7%
Born in Canada (NO)	16.9%	22.1%	23.6%
Racial Background			
Black (African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian descent)	7.3%	9.3%	6.6%
East Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese descent)	8.5%	11.4%	5.1%
Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, Inuit descent)	2.0%	2.4%	2.5%
Latino/Latina/Latinx (Latin American, Hispanic descent)	2.1%	2.8%	1.2%
Middle Eastern (Arab, Persian, West Asian descent, e.g. Afghan, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Turkish, Kurdish, etc.)	15.3%	14.4%	5.5%
South Asian (South Asian descent, e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Indo-Caribbean, etc.)	8.1%	8.2%	4.2%
Southeast Asian (Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Thai, Indonesian, other Southeast Asian descent)	3.2%	4.0%	2.6%
White (European descent)	62%	57.7%	73.7%
A racial group not listed above (Central Asian-Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan- Indian, Mixed.	3.1%	1.2%	0.3%