



Fall 2021

Anti-Racism Reminders for BC Administrators

This is not a checklist. Engaging in any one of these items listed below for the first time will be valuable for yourself, your school, and your larger community. Doing one activity, or several, will lead to important learning and allow you to create safe, brave, and inclusive spaces for your student body and staff so that they may feel not only seen, but also empowered.

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Acknowledge that systemic racism, oppression, and white supremacy culture exist.

(Yes, white supremacy culture isn't just hoods and burning crosses.) Do this publicly. Get comfortable with the discomfort that comes with this understanding, and with your staff's expectation that you will work to end these systems that perpetuate inequity.

Recognize that, as leaders, we are responsible for addressing systemic racism and oppression.

Be aware that doing nothing and/or staying silent is giving our tacit approval for the continuation of oppression: as leaders, we can no longer sit idly by when evidence of oppression surrounds us. Don't wait for someone to tell you what to do. As a leader, it is on you to set a clear direction for your staff. Your personal growth plan and your school growth plan are excellent places to publicly commit to this important work.

Own where you are.

Acknowledge your own implicit biases. Own your blind spots, own when you make a mistake, and commit to listening, learning, and doing better. The mistakes are inevitable. Be ready and comfortable to apologize for and learn from the missteps that you will make. That doesn't make the mistakes okay, or minimize the harm you may cause, but inaction is not acceptable.

Start learning.

Take a course. Read books: *Until We Are Free*, *The Skin We're In*, or *21 Things You May Not Know About The Indian Act* are all good starting places. Listen to podcasts: *Be Anti-Racist* or *Colour Code*. Read the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Any of these resources may be of assistance in writing your personal and/or school growth plans.

Remember impact over intent.

Microaggressions / Macroaggressions are direct/indirect, intentional or unintentional discriminatory interactions against members of marginalized groups. These commonplace actions happen every day, with many marginalized folx never speaking about the harm caused by these interactions. If someone 'Calls You In' based on a negative interaction or experience that took place, please remember your intent does not matter. Regardless of your intent for sharing an idea or thought or activity, if the impact of this action is seen as negative please be ready to listen, learn, and do better when concerns are brought forward.

Know your 'Why'.

Once you have come to terms with the existence of systemic racism, oppression, and dominant/white supremacy culture and how it influences everything we do, take a moment to ask yourself why this work is important for you. This centering is important because it will guide you when you feel discomfort, when you need to continue moving yourself or your school community forward, or when you receive pushback and feel unsettled. In the end, this is about removing barriers and providing equitable learning opportunities for your students and community. Engaging in this work makes the world a better place not just for students of the global majority, but for your non-racialized students as well.

We must be courageous in providing permission and protection for our teachers to take risks in teaching about anti-racism, and to our staff for addressing racism.

Be prepared to walk alongside them as they are on their own journeys, working through implicit biases they may have and how they choose to address systems of inequity in their classrooms. Be ready to defend them and their pedagogical choices around anti-racism if parent or community pushback occurs.

Recognize that racialized members of your staff are not employed to teach the rest of the staff about racism.

They may – or may not – want to share about their experiences with, and knowledge of, anti-racism. Do not lean on them for this, or expect them to speak as experts on groups they are a part of: racialized groups are NOT monoliths with homogenous experiences and beliefs. Additionally, conversations around racism and anti-racism may be triggering for racialized members of your staff.

Develop a critical friend group.

Share your ideas and observations from your campus, as well as the actions you plan on taking, with a trusted group you can meet with regularly. Stay accountable to this group, check in on progress, and how the steps you are taking are moving forward. Invite diversity into your group; remember that it is not the job of racialized members of your circle to educate you about racism or speak as a representative of any groups that they may be a part of. Think about forming affinity groups and spaces with your racialized administrators within your district and from surrounding districts. These can be safe spaces to explore where you are in this work.

Connect with marginalized students on your campus.

Do this organically, and try not to tokenize these students. Make sure to listen to them: we are trying to amplify their voices and experiences. It is important to validate their experiences and feelings. What are their experiences? What is their day-to-day life like, on your campus and in their community? How and what can you learn from these students that we may not know enough about, and how can we then act on what we learn from them? What are the celebrations and customs that are important to them, but not recognized by the school community? How do you foster better awareness in your school?

Decolonize your language.

'At-risk' has been used as an adjective to describe our students, when really it should describe the systemic barriers and conditions they may face. 'Minority' is another word that can be used to describe students who do not meet the norm and/or centre of whiteness. These are just some examples that influence how we may view and discuss families in our school community. Try to choose more empowering words such as 'minoritized', 'underserved', and 'marginalized', which focuses more on external social conditions affecting students' access to society. Also refrain from using racist phrases such as 'low person on the totem pole', 'Powwow', and 'the peanut gallery', or responding with 'no can do'. These phrases have racist origins and connotations. Ableist language such as 'crazy' and 'insane' has negative connotations in regard to mental health. Also, using proper pronouns and exchanging words such as 'folks' for folx (a spelling used to include members of the LGBTQ2S+ community) instead of 'guys' makes everyone feel more included.

We need to be cognizant of our use of language, as these phrases may negatively impact our families, staff, and school community. In the end, remember that the best way to honour students, staff, and school community members is to always use the names, pronouns, and words by which people and communities have chosen to identify themselves.

Is this a lot? Yes. Is this only a start? Yes. Is this journey, of personal reflection and learning, and courageous anti-racist leadership, ever over? No.

Will this be hard? Yes. But not as hard as the systemic inequity that so many of our students and staff face every day. Remember, this work will be heavy, so it is important to think about self-care. Think as well about your racialized staff, colleagues, and students: they shoulder the heavy burden of dealing with racism every day of their lives. We are not suggesting that non-racialized individuals do not face hardships, but the colour of their skin is not one of them. Our goal is to recognize what we can do, and then do better.