∞ NEWS

RACISM PROBE FINDS 'MARGINALIZATION. DISCRIMINATION. HARASSMENT' IN PEEL SCHOOL BOARD

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Just weeks into their probe of racism and dysfunction in the Peel public school board, three provincial reviewers say they have already "consistently heard painful accounts of traumatic experiences in schools and school communities."

The "narratives shared with us signal a profound lack of respect in relationships, demonstrated by stories of marginalization, discrimination, differential behaviour, and harassment," says their interim report, obtained by the Star.

Ena Chadha, Suzanne Herbert and newly appointed reviewer Shawn Richard are looking into complaints of racism - in particular anti-Black racism - as well as hiring and leadership.

reached out for help as it of anti-Black racism, a trustee who referred to a diverse McCrimmon middle school as "McCriminal," and after a senior administrator in charge of anti-discrimination launched a human rights complaint.

So far, the review team has received more than 350 E interview requests as well as email/mail and phone submissions, which they characterize as a "strong" public response.

The review began December, and that month alone they spoke to 50 people, both individually and in groups.

Richard, a lawyer, was appointed later last month after concerns that no one from the Black community was on the front lines.

At the time, Lecce noted School Board.

The trio filed their interim report on Peel to Lecce on Dec. 30, and their final report is due by spring.

In a statement, Lecce issues overall with equity, said he has met with the re-Education Minister Ste- stand their immediate obphen Lecce ordered the in- servations of systemic antivestigation in early Novem- Black racism, and lack of ber after the Peel board adherence to governance, grappled with allegations duct" and hiring and promotions practices.

families deserve better," Lecce said. "It is my hope that the final report will build momentum for the transformational change racialized families are seeking, after a period of in-

that the entire review was being overseen by assistant deputy education minister and human rights lawyer Patrick Case, a prominent member of the Black community who was part of a review team in 2017 - with Herbert - that issued a scathing report on racism and a lack of leadership in the York Region District

the review."

spect to access to program-

ming, services, academic

achievement, transitions to

post-secondary education

and the workforce, hiring,

and promotion, as well as

discipline measures both in

education and employ-

"profound lack of respect

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crimination, differential

behaviour, and harass-

ment. To date, these senti-

ments relate to leadership,

governance, human re-

sources, anti-Black racism,

Islamophobia and other

forms of inequities put for-

ward by students, parents,

educators, staff, senior ad-

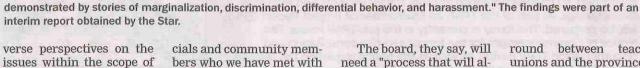
ministrators, elected offi-

"They go on to say that a

viewers "to better underleadership, trustee con-

"I believe students and action.

Their interim report says "we have received written and oral submissions from many individuals and groups representing di-



thus far." The reviewers have also The Peel District School been examining "various Board is the second-largest documentation, minutes of in the province, with more board meetings, board polthan 155,000 students in icies and data. We have con-Brampton, Mississauga sistently heard painful acand Caledon schools, and counts of traumatic experiabout 17,000 staffers. Its stuences in schools and school dent body is highly diverse, communities that speak to with the three largest systemic and historical disgroups identifying as South parities between and Asian (45 per cent), white across racial, ethnic and (17 per cent) and Black (10 cultural groups with reper cent).

So far, the reviewers say that "all stakeholders, from students and parents to educators, staff, senior administrators, trustees and community members, have expressed consensus that the review is a much needed intervention to better understand the challenging and compounding dynamics operating within the (Peel board) and broader community."

However, there has been some criticism that given the tight timeline, the review will not be as comprehensive as needed. The reviewers say they will identify the problems and make recommendations, but more work will need to be

The board, they say, will need a "process that will allow community members to directly 'speak their truth' to trustees and senior staff" in order to "regain public confidence that will

be necessarily longer-term and that will be monitored by the ministry," they wrote. Those they've inter-

An investigation into racism and dysfunction in the Peel public school board has found "a profound lack of respect in relationships,

viewed "have told us that they expect that this review will assist the (Peel board) to become more transparent and responsive in its commitment to provide inclusive learning and working environments where all students and staff feel respected."

Last month, Lecce himself met with some Peel community members who told him part of the problem is a lack of diversity among teachers.

Lecce said that Regulation 274, which was brought in under the former Liberal government. impedes boards in hiring because it forces schools to hire the most experience supply teachers for full-time jobs, rather than their top choice or who will be the best fit.

The regulation is a part of the current negotiating round between teacher unions and the province.

Shree Paradkar/Toronto Star

The Peel review team had at least 13 days of interviews in January - in Brampton, Mississauga, Malton, Etobicoke and Toronto - and notes that "considering the urgency to complete this review and the volume of requests to participate in the review process, we will not be able meet with everyone who has expressed interest" but promises that all written submissions will be looked

Lecce said he wants families to know the government "is listening and is fully committed to combatting racism and improving equity and opportunity for their children."

He pledged to "continue to empower students - notably from racialized communities - to be a part of the solution, to have a voice, and to work collaboratively to eliminate obstacles to academic success and well-being."

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