

Addressing systemic racism in education

by *Miguelle Légère, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Learning*

In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 made its way around the world. As many of us began working from home, another tragic event occurred. In Minneapolis, George Floyd was murdered at the hands of the police. This led to street protests across the globe denouncing racial injustices that people of colour have endured for hundreds of years.

Many educators shared social media posts about equality and the Black Lives Matter movement. A comment that was often repeated was that it was time for people who hold the most privilege to step up. Without action from those who benefit from white privilege, the system will never change.

Over 25 years ago, the *BLAC (Black Learners Advisory Committee) Report* made recommendations for better representation in the education system.

“There is an urgent need to increase the number of Black administrators, teachers, social workers and guidance counsellors at all levels of administration and support.”

(*BLAC Report on Education: Redressing Inequity – Empowering Black Learners*, 1994, p. 18)

When we look around our schools, our educators, our leaders in education and unionism, it would be difficult to say significant progress has been made. Today, instead of asking or expecting traditionally marginalized groups to lead the change, it is time for everyone to step up, to do the work necessary to achieve meaningful change and implement action pieces. Racism does not exist only in “other” places, it exists right here in Nova Scotia and we

need to take individual and collective responsibility for that reality.

Talking about action is one thing, taking concrete steps to eliminate systemic racism is another. Below is a list of ways the NSTU is taking concrete steps to educate the leadership and provide support to members.

1. The Provincial Executive is committed to a book study and discussions around how to create a more diverse leadership at the NSTU. The book that is guiding the discussion is Tiffany Jewell’s *How to be an Anti-racist*. The general membership is invited to participate in these conversations. Information on these sessions is circulated via social media and NSTU email. Information on the next session is provided on this page.
2. Alongside those discussions, the professional learning department is working on a website to share with members that includes classroom and educator resources on anti-racist education. This website is a work in progress and will change and evolve over the course of the year.
3. We are creating parallel presentations to offer to Locals based on the same book.
4. All book draws in *The Teacher* will be connected to equity and anti-racist education. The simplest of action steps is to educate ourselves about the history of racism in Canada and in Nova Scotia.
5. Teaming up with the Equity and Professional Development committees will also focus discussion

on how to encourage difficult anti-racist conversations and to create professional development for NSTU members and Locals.

6. In January 2020 the NSTU created a new professional association, the Nova Scotia Association of Teachers for Equity in Education (NSATEE). The mandate of NSATEE uses an equity lens to provide NSTU members with curriculum and pedagogical learning opportunities, encouraging and assisting members in professional development activities related to equity in education.

Privilege allows many of us to navigate life without thinking about the impact of systemic racism. Those who do not benefit from white privilege do not have that luxury and should not be the ones to carry the burden of demanding change. It is time for white educators to do some of the heavy lifting. This article, these resources, these collaborations and these conversations are small but tangible steps towards the elimination of systemic racism in the education system. What steps will you take and what steps can we take together to address systemic racism in our communities?