Special Education: Ableism & Equity, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression

Karen Murray
System Superintendent, Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression

tdsb.on.ca

Terms Guiding the Conversation

Ableism

Ableism is a set of stereotypes and practices that devalue and discriminate against people with disabilities. It assumes that the bodies and minds of non-disabled people are the "default," placing value on them based on society's perceptions of what's considered "normal."
Talila Lewis

Ableism

Ableism is the preference and/or privileging of ability resulting in:

- Bias and discrimination against students perceived as unable or disabled
- Tension on -How ability is understood, perceived and responded to in schools?
- Disproportionate representation of racialized students, students from lower income families, some immigrant communities and male students (e.g. Black males) in Special Education programs

(Gaymes San Vicente, Murray, Parekh, in print 2023)

Barriers Students with Disabilities Encounter

Inadequate Funding	Physical Inaccessibility	Accommodation Process	Lack of Individualization	Ineffective Dispute Resolution Mechanisms	Negative Attitudes and Stereotypes
Decisions are made based on budgetary considerations rather than on an assessment of the actual needs of students with disabilities.	Encountering physical barriers to educational services, such as a lack of ramps, heavy doors, inaccessible washrooms, and/or inaccessible transportation to and from school.	Accommodation is often insufficient; delays at many stages of the accommodation process; long waiting lists for professional assessments.	Some education providers are relying on blanket approaches to accommodation; suspension and expulsion policies are at times rigidly applied.	Appeal process are time-consuming and overly litigious and does not allow for appeals regarding programs and services.	Lack of knowledge, racism, anti-Black racism , stereotyping

Source: Ontario Human Rights Commission Fact Sheet

Tanitia Munroe, 2022

Critical Disability in Education

One of the major obstacles to centering disability in classrooms is that teachers are not impervious to cultural narratives of disability that too often lead to aversion or erasure of disability. This is particularly true of the K-12 system, where disability can remain the sole domain of special education for both students and teachers.

Equity, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression looks like……. Multiyear Strategic Plan

Toward Excellence in the Education of Black Students: Transforming Learning, Achievement and Well-Being – Special Education

What is our goal?

To create professional learning models that support inclusion and reduce the over-representation of Black students in Special Education programs (specifically Home School Program, Intensive Support Programs and other congregated programs).

How will we achieve it?

- Identify schools where models of inclusion have successfully changed the opportunities and access of Black students to engage in programs in which high expectations for learning contribute to improved well-being. Create opportunities for those schools to coach, document and share the implementation of their models with other schools (Ongoing)
- Invest in building the capacity of educators to successfully implement inclusion with groups of Black students by
    - deepening their awareness of the principles of anti-racism and culturally relevant pedagogy and with regards to current research in relationship to their practice
    - improving staffs' abilities to use instructional approaches such as Inclusive Design to meet the diverse needs of a range of students (ongoing)
- Create professional learning for Professional Support Services and Special Education staff to reflect how their practice is aligned with the principles of anti-Black racism, and other current research (e.g., Critical Disability studies) and that impacts Black students in Special Education programs (ongoing)
- Staff identified the over-representation of Black boys in Special Education Kindergarten programs and are focused on working collaboratively, across departments, to disrupt the practices that have created systemic barriers (ongoing)