

# Affirming Muslim Student Identities and Dismantling Islamophobia Strategy





## Design Inspiration

The design of the **Affirming Muslims Student Identities and Dismantling Islamophobia Strategy** (the “*Dismantling Islamophobia Strategy*” or the “*Strategy*”) is inspired by the intricate beauty of Islamic geometric designs and motifs. Geometric patterns and motifs such as circles and squares played a significant role in knowledge translation throughout Islamic history.<sup>1</sup>

Islamic art and design connect many knowledge sources such as science, mathematics, spirituality, and astronomy.<sup>2</sup> Pillars are a common motif in Islamic design and ways of knowing. Pillars represent the foundation from which knowledge is built upon. It is common for Islamic architecture to include pillars, domes and minarets which represent aspects of knowledge and learning.

As we engage in foundational work to challenge forms of oppression and hate, this strategy is a critical pillar to further PDSB’s commitment to equity and inclusion. This strategy will lay the foundation for the ongoing work that is necessary to challenge Islamophobia and affirm Muslim identities at the PDSB.

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# Land Acknowledgement

The following Territorial Acknowledgement was co-created with our Treaty Partner, Nancy Rowe, from Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation:

The land upon which we work, live, and sustain ourselves is the ancestral and treaty lands of the Miichizaagiig Anishinaabek also known today as the Mississaugas of the Credit, the rightful caretakers and title holders of this land. We also recognize the rich pre-contact history and relationships which include the Anishinaabek and the Onkwéhonwe. Since European Contact, this land continues to be home to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As responsible community members, we value the diversity, dignity and worth of all people. Colonialism displaced and dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their ancestral lands and continues to deny their basic human rights, dignities, and freedoms. We are committed to learning true history to reconcile, make reparations and fulfill our treaty obligations to the Original Peoples and our collective responsibilities to the land, water, animals, and each other for future generations.

Early Muslim settlers have formed meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities since the early 1900s. In 1905, Ali Ahmed Abouchadi arrived from Lebanon and married from among the Cree. He learned to speak Nêhiyawêwin (Cree), established a store and fur trade among the Indigenous living in Lac La Biche, Alberta, and was known as Alexander Hamilton. In 1910, Ahmad Ali Ferran, known also as Jack Baker, came as a settler from Lebanon. He learned Indigenous languages, Slavey and Dogrib, and established a trapping and fur trade among the Indigenous in the Northwest Territory, where he taught them basic economics. He faced discrimination as a Muslim and was pressured by the Canadian government to stop economic development with Indigenous peoples. In 1964 a mostly Indigenous population in the Northwest Territory voted for Jack Baker, making him the first elected Muslim politician in Canada.<sup>3</sup> These stories exemplify what it means to be committed to ongoing allyship with Indigenous communities. As settlers on Turtle Island, Muslims have the responsibility to honour and uphold treaties, partner, and ally with Indigenous Peoples, disrupt and dismantle anti-Indigenous racism and continue to inform our communities of the need, and moral obligation to support the Indigenous people of this land.

# Gratitude

We would like to begin by expressing our deepest appreciation to the **We Rise Together 2.0, Black Student Success Strategy** team for laying out the foundations upon which this document is modeled. The mirroring of the two strategies acknowledges that although each group has unique historical experiences and faces oppression in different ways, both oppressions are connected and the path to disrupting and dismantling oppression requires solidarity and ongoing action. It is important to note the intersectionality of those who identify as both Black and Muslim. The earliest Muslims in Canada were likely of West African descent, forcibly brought to British North America through the transatlantic slave trade. They were prohibited from identifying as Muslim or practicing Islam. Historians suggest up to 30% of enslaved peoples would have identified as Muslim. As Peel Region continues to receive an influx of Black African Muslim families (Somalian, Nigerian and others), the need to support Black Muslim identities is paramount to the implementation of both strategies.<sup>4</sup> The principles of anti-racism and anti-oppression apply to all groups that experience oppression. By improving outcomes for one, we all truly rise together.

It is of utmost importance to note that this strategy would not and could not exist except through the efforts of the Black community and the PDSB in supporting strategies to disrupt and dismantle anti-Black racism. The resources, commitment and emotional labour of the Black community must be recognized as the foundation for all anti-racism work in our schools and society. It is this struggle for equality and unity that has opened up the doors for dialogue and action to disrupt and dismantle all forms of oppression.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the many people who contributed to and supported the development of this strategy. This strategy would not be possible without the organizing of Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA), the Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR), and Peel students and families in advocating for the motion to be introduced. We are grateful to former Trustee Nokha Dakroub, who worked alongside the community to put forth the motion for a strategy to address Islamophobia. We are also grateful for the contributions of the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM), as well as the parents and staff members who were part of the development of this strategy.

The work of creating a safe and nurturing space for Muslim students and staff has been ongoing for decades. We give thanks to the many past and present Peel District School Board staff, senior administrators, principals, teachers, students, and families who have tirelessly worked to create inclusive spaces for students and staff. It is upon your shoulders that we stand and write this strategy today.

## **Consultants**

The National Council of Canadian Muslims

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National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)

Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)

Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR)

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# Introduction

The Peel District School Board is the first school board in Canada to embark on creating a strategy to affirm Muslim identities and dismantle Islamophobia. It is in direct response to the Review of the Peel District School Board (2020) which recognized that Islamophobia is an area of concern in the Peel District School Board.<sup>5</sup>

The process began with the passing of a motion for the Board to commit to the development of a strategy to affirm Muslim identities and dismantle Islamophobia in September 2021.<sup>6</sup> The strategy was eventually developed through consultation with Muslim community organizations and the formation of a writing team.

The 2018 PDSB student census indicated that Islam is the largest reported faith-based identity within the Board, with Muslims making up approximately 25% of the Peel District School Board's student population.<sup>7</sup> Experiences of Islamophobia impact Muslim students', their families', and staff's sense of safety as well as their mental health and well-being.

This strategy outlines the Guiding Principles, Pillars, Priorities, and Reporting Measures that the PDSB is committing to take as it continues its journey to dismantle systems of oppression and to decolonize practices that will deepen current anti-racist, anti-oppressive efforts. This strategy names and identifies specific actions that Peel educators, staff, students and community members are required to take to affirm student identities while dismantling Islamophobia, anti-Muslim bias, prejudice and hate throughout the Board. The enactment and enforcement of this strategy demonstrates the commitment of the PDSB to anti-racist, anti-oppressive principles which are foundational to creating positive, welcoming, identity-affirming learning and working environments.<sup>8</sup> This strategy aligns with the PDSB Anti-Racism Policy.

The development of a strategy to affirm Muslim identities and dismantle Islamophobia is only the first step in an ongoing journey. The strategy must be continuously referred to, reflected on, revisited, and improved upon to be responsive to issues as they arise. Ongoing monitoring of system, school, and classroom level actions to determine measures of success ensures accountability for the implementation of the strategy. Fostering an environment that is free from Islamophobia will require the efforts of all members of the PDSB community to meaningfully engage in this important work.<sup>9</sup>

# Guiding Principles

The following principles are foundational to understanding how Islamophobia impacts students, staff and families. It is our collective responsibility to uproot Islamophobia within PDSB.

- 1. Experiences and Occurrences of Islamophobia are Systemic and Common**
- 2. Public Education is Not Neutral**
- 3. Understanding Social Location and the Development of Meaningful Allyship is Necessary**
- 4. Action to Dismantle Islamophobia Must be Prioritized and be Ongoing**
- 5. Accountability Measures Must be Enacted at all Levels**



# Guiding Principles

## **1. Experiences and Occurrences of Islamophobia are Systemic and Common**

The PDSB acknowledges that Islamophobia is embedded in society on both an individual and systemic level and thus permeates our education system. Islamophobia has a negative impact on the identity, well-being, and outcomes of Muslim-identifying students, families, staff, and community. This impact is compounded for Muslims with intersecting marginalized identities. It is also important to note that Islamophobia has a negative effect on all communities, regardless of creed.

## **2. Public Education is Not Neutral**

The public education system is assumed to be secular. However, the reality is that the education system historically and currently frames Christianity as the norm. As noted in the **Education Act**, teachers are required to uphold the principles of “Judeo-Christian morality”.<sup>10</sup> The influence of Christianity is also evident in the organization of the school calendar and the historical recognition and centering of Christian holidays. This results in the erasure of different creeds and ways of knowing and being.<sup>11</sup>

## **3. Understanding Social Location and the Development of Meaningful Allyship is Necessary**

It is the responsibility of all members of the PDSB community to acknowledge and reflect on their social location and use their relationship with power and privilege to engage in meaningful allyship with Muslim-identifying students, staff and families.

## **4. Action to Dismantle Islamophobia Must be Prioritized and Ongoing**

Islamophobia has caused harm and continues to harm students, staff, families and community members. Understanding, disrupting and dismantling Islamophobia is a priority that requires ongoing commitment of all members of the PDSB community.

## **5. Accountability Measures Must be Enacted at all Levels**

PDSB stakeholders will be held accountable to create safe, inclusive, and identity-affirming environments. This includes recognizing creed as a protected ground under the Ontario Human Rights Code and PDSB Human Rights Policy 51. Supporting and affirming Muslim identities will be included in School and Board Improvement and Equity Plans.

# Historical Roots of Islamophobia

It is assumed that Islamophobia is a relatively new phenomenon that began on September 11, 2001. While there is no doubt that the events of 9/11 and the subsequent “war on terror” represented a significant turning point in shaping Islamophobia,<sup>12</sup> it is important to note that, “Islamophobia has been present in Western discourse since the Middle Ages... descriptions of Muslims as uncivilized and violent also helped rationalize European colonial domination of most of the Muslim majority world.”<sup>13</sup>

The term **Islamophobia** came into common usage with the publication of the *Runnymede Trust Report* in 1997 by the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. While the term was popularized through the Runnymede Trust Report, and made its way into United Nations discussions over the 2000s, the concept of Islamophobia considerably predates the current usage of the term. Notably, many scholars and activists previously relied on Edward Said’s 1978 conceptualization of “Orientalism” to name and analyze anti-Muslim policies, sentiments, and behaviours.<sup>14</sup> Orientalism remains foundational in theorizations of Islamophobia to this day.

Islamophobia may impact different members of the Muslim community differently, as is noted in intersectional research studies which have led to the formulation of terms such as **gendered Islamophobia**<sup>15</sup> and **anti-Black Islamophobia**.<sup>16</sup> For example, some Muslims may experience both anti-Black Racism and Islamophobia simultaneously; likewise Muslim women may experience misogyny and Islamophobia simultaneously. These terms are analytical contributions that enrich and nuance our understanding of experiences of Islamophobia and, in turn, signal the need for a nuanced approach to tackling Islamophobia.

# Defining Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a dynamic phenomenon that makes it difficult to define. Moreover, the use of a variety of terms such as anti-Muslim racism and anti-Muslim hate adds to the complexity. Jasmine Zine (2022) notes that, “anti-Muslim racism is a manifestation of Islamophobia that is evident through the violence, hatred, and discrimination enacted against Muslim bodies, but since these acts rely upon the demonization of Islam to sustain and reproduce their racial logic, one does not exist without the other.”

**For the purposes of this strategy, Islamophobia is used as an umbrella term that encompasses both anti-Muslim racism and anti-Muslim hatred.**

In the Canadian context, a frequently cited definition is the one proposed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) in their 2015 report, “Policy on Preventing Discrimination Based on Creed.” The OHRC definition is as follows:

**Islamophobia includes racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia can lead to viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic, and societal level. One-sided, sweeping, negative portrayals of Muslim people or Islam in general play a key role in normalizing and reproducing contemporary forms of Islamophobia. These may result in Muslims being treated unequally, evaluated negatively, and being excluded from positions, rights and opportunities in society and its institutions.<sup>17</sup>**

# Defining Islamophobia

The OHRC definition is currently the working definition employed in the Government of Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy,<sup>18</sup> Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate, and by the National Council of Canadian Muslims.

It is important to note that Islamophobia is a form of oppression based on faith that often intersects with racism and other forms of oppression such as xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, and anti-Palestinian racism.

The most visible and easily identifiable manifestations of Islamophobia in the educational setting are the individual actions referenced in the definition. These include acts like vandalism, name-calling, exclusion, harassment, microaggressions, violence and hate crimes.<sup>19</sup> Muslims are also impacted by systemic practices such as racial and religious profiling and surveillance, laws governing religious attire, and discrimination in education, social services, healthcare, and law enforcement.<sup>20</sup>

# Anti-Black Islamophobia

Anti-Black Islamophobia is a specific kind of racism and discrimination experienced by Black Muslims and individuals who are perceived to be Black and Muslim. Black Muslims are situated at an intersection where both being Black and being Muslim results in experiences of oppression<sup>21</sup> and so Black Muslim communities come to be doubly marginalized resulting in compounded barriers to access and inclusion.<sup>22</sup>

## Gendered Islamophobia

Gendered Islamophobia is a form of anti-Muslim racism that is rooted in gender stereotypes and particularly harms Muslim women.<sup>23</sup> A 2015 Statistics Canada report on hate crimes identified that Muslim populations had the greatest percentage of hate crimes whose victims were female in the 224 police-reported crimes targeting Muslims.<sup>24</sup>

### Gendered Islamophobia:<sup>25</sup>

- Constructs Muslim women as inherently oppressed and in need of saving.
- Constructs Muslim women as security and cultural threats who need to be monitored, controlled and surveilled.
- Accepts Islamophobic speech and dehumanizing narratives against Muslim women and girls.



# Systemic Islamophobia

**A system of Islamophobia created through the existence of laws, policies, practices and actions that may appear neutral but actually have an adverse effect on Muslims or those who are perceived to be Muslim.**

This can allow for Islamophobia to be prevalent in both private and public spaces in the form of laws, federal and provincial policies, government-sanctioned surveillance, and an implicit hierarchy of citizenry. An example of this in the Canadian context is Bill 21 in Quebec, a law that prohibits the wearing of religious symbols such as the hijab in public sector jobs, including teaching. In the education system, this can exist through policies prohibiting headwear, limited options of athletic uniforms, and the absence of halal food options.

These systemic attitudes foster an unwarranted culture of suspicion and surveillance of Muslims and the Muslim community. An example of this is the surveillance of Muslim leaders and Muslim Student Associations (MSAs - student affinity groups or identity-affirming opportunities for sharing experiences, contributing to student life) by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and other policing bodies.<sup>26</sup> A PDSB specific example was illustrated when a Peel community member offered a monetary reward for surveilling of Muslim students at Friday prayers in schools.<sup>27</sup>

Outside of governmental policies, Muslims are often the victims of intimidation, harassment, and acts of violence – particularly against Muslim women and specifically toward Black Muslim women.<sup>28</sup> Muslims also face discrimination around issues of employment, travel, law enforcement, and schooling to name a few.<sup>29</sup> There is strong evidence of Islamophobic content being developed and delivered, through active agents, with the intent of spreading hate.<sup>30</sup> In a recent report, *The Canadian Islamophobia Industry: Mapping Islamophobia's Ecosystem in the Great White North (2022)*, Jasmine Zine, professor at Wilfrid Laurier University, notes:

*“The Islamophobia industry perpetuates fear and negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims, leading to hate, violence and discrimination. It is comprised of media outlets, political figures, academics, think tanks, far right groups and ideologues, and the donors who fund their campaigns. These individuals, groups, and institutions comprise a network that supports and engages in activities that demonize and marginalize Islam and Muslims in Canada.”<sup>31</sup>*

Actively identifying and dismantling systemic Islamophobia is a necessary step in creating safe and inclusive spaces within the PDSB community.

# Islamophobia in Canada

Islamophobia has been at the root of increased targeted hate attacks killing more Muslims in Canada compared to any other G-7 country. Statistics Canada's most recent report on hate crimes notes that in 2021, there was a 71 percent increase in police-related hate crimes being perpetrated against Muslims in Canada.<sup>32</sup>

The immediate background leading up to the passing of this motion included a brazen act of Islamophobic violence against a Muslim family in London, Ontario, on June 6, 2021 that took the lives of four members of the Canadian Muslim community and left one little boy seriously injured. For the first time, the perpetrator of this Islamophobic hate crime was charged with terror-related offences. This marked a change from how previous hate crimes perpetrated against Muslims have been historically characterized. For example, the gunman who killed six people at a Quebec City Mosque in January 2017 was charged with murder and not for any hate-motivated or terror-related offences.<sup>33</sup> These examples illustrate the pervasiveness of Islamophobia across communities nation-wide.

As a result of the overt display of Islamophobic violence and anti-Muslim hate demonstrated in the London attack, the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Chief Commissioner, Ena Chadha issued a statement reaffirming the right of every Ontarian to walk down a street, shop, work and worship without concern for their personal safety because of their religion, ethnicity and/or race.<sup>34</sup> The Ontario Human Rights Commission decried the ever-increasing hate endured by faith-based and racialized communities underscoring that actions are needed to be taken at individual and institutional levels to eliminate Islamophobia which exists in all educational, social and political spheres.

# Islamophobia in Education

The recent documentation of Islamophobia in the 2020 Ministry Review of the Peel District School Board has shed light on an issue that has always existed in the education system. As long as there have been Muslims in the education system, there has been direct experience of Islamophobia.<sup>35</sup>

The review found anti-Black racism to be a significant challenge in PDSB, and it also noted that Muslim students (comprising 23.5% of the student population according to the 2018 PDSB Student Census)<sup>36</sup> were the targets of Islamophobia within the PDSB. In addition, the review noted that blatantly Islamophobic resources and teaching materials have been used in classrooms that significantly impact the well-being of the Muslim staff and students.

The issue of religious accommodations for Friday prayers brought to the surface underlying Islamophobia, anti-Muslim bias and prejudice within Peel. In 2016, the PDSB introduced a policy that required Muslim students to use Board-approved sermons for Friday prayers. The Muslim community recognized this as a violation of their human rights and advocated for a return to the previous accommodation that had been in place for decades without issue, which allows students to create their own sermons. Although the policy was eventually overturned, this event spurred the creation of a petition by anti-Muslim hate groups calling for the end of religious accommodations in Peel, a clear violation of the Ontario *Human Rights Code* and the Board's Human Rights Policy. At the March 2017 Board meeting, protesters disrupted the meeting by ripping out the pages of a Quran and shouting Islamophobic rhetoric.<sup>37</sup> These incidents have had long lasting negative impacts on PDSB staff, students and community.

Other research conducted in Ontario has demonstrated that Muslim students and staff experience Islamophobia at both the individual and systemic levels.<sup>38</sup> Students have shared their stories of experiencing racist, Islamophobic, and xenophobic comments throughout the school system including classrooms, hallways, online chat groups.<sup>39</sup> Many students reported that they bear the burden of answering questions about, and at times, defending their faith to teachers and peers. Students also reported feelings of isolation and erasure from the curriculum, which excludes any mention of Muslim contributions, past or present, to Science, Math, Literature, or the Arts. Finally, a lack of understanding about Islam and Muslims within the PDSB community has perpetuated myths and misconceptions about Muslim identities.

# Islamophobia in Education

Studies and reports of the lived experiences of Muslim children in Canadian school systems tell us that Islamophobia takes many forms in educational contexts. This includes:

- 1) experiences of bullying and alienation by peers, including targeting, and/or excluding Muslim students or those who are perceived to be Muslim.<sup>40</sup>
- 2) lack of culturally responsive and relevant mental health supports for Muslim students, including those who have been through an Islamophobic experience.<sup>41</sup>
- 3) biased, prejudiced or Islamophobic content in curriculum.
- 4) absence of nuanced and affirming representations of Islam and Muslims.
- 5) resistance to or lack of religious accommodations for Muslim students.<sup>42</sup>
- 6) normalization of Islamophobic comments.<sup>43</sup>
- 7) absence of an intersectional understanding of Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim students, staff and families (i.e. gendered Islamophobia, anti-Black Islamophobia).

While the Muslim community is a highly educated community within Canada, it is still overrepresented in unemployment and under employment rates.<sup>44</sup> With this context in mind, Muslim student success and Muslim excellence are key areas that need to be prioritized in anti-Islamophobia work in education.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond the student experience, Muslim parents, educators, and administrators often face Islamophobia. This can include parents being unreasonably dismissed for their concerns, discrimination in employment and promotions for teachers and administrators, harassment, and toxic spaces. In our consultations, educating to build awareness of Islamophobia and identify sentiments that provoke anti-Muslim hate was consistently identified as a long-term solution towards eradicating all forms of xenophobia, and towards ending the violence faced by Canadian Muslims today.

# Documented Evidence:

## The Urgency to Dismantle Occurrences of Islamophobia in the Educational System

### **2013 The Journey Ahead**

An action plan for equitable hiring and promotion in PDSB was created in 2013 in response to the biased hiring processes that created barriers for applicants from diverse and racialized backgrounds.

### **2014 Ministry's Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario**

This document created by the Ministry of Education is premised on the belief that every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or other factors. The importance of this document is that it sets forth the imperative in all spheres of education to expand access to and dismantle barriers to educational success for all students' identities.

### **2015 Policy on Preventing Discrimination Based on Creed**

The protections under the Ontario *Human Rights Code* include creed as a prohibited ground of discrimination. As such, "the right to be free from discrimination based on creed reflects core Canadian constitutional values and commitments to a secular, multicultural, and democratic society. People who follow a creed, and people who do not, have the right to live in a society that respects pluralism and human rights and the right to follow different creeds."<sup>46</sup> The Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Policy on Preventing Discrimination Based on Creed* names Islamophobia and recognizes that the "interconnection between religion, race, and ethnicity for many creed communities has exposed many religious minorities in Ontario to intersecting forms of prejudice, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination and harassment based on race, creed, ethnic origin, place of origin, and ancestry."<sup>47</sup>

### **2016 The Tessellate Institute: Examining Islamophobia in Ontario Public Schools<sup>48</sup>**

Three themes emerged from the accounts of Muslim students in Ontario public schools:

- Students expressed feelings of isolation and alienation.
- Lack of awareness about Islam and Muslims among peers and teachers.
- Lack of representation of Muslims in teaching and curriculum.

### **2017 National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) Town Hall Report<sup>49</sup>**

The report captures the experiences of Muslim students across Ontario.

Students expressed the need for:

- Providing teachers with training about Islam and Islamophobia.
- School-wide strategies to deal with Islamophobic rhetoric and actions (i.e. microaggressions and other offences).
- Muslim counselors to address mental health and well-being needs.
- More opportunities for Muslim students to build their identity in affirming environments/school programs.

### **2017 A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan<sup>50</sup>**

The strategic plan represents the province's commitment to make change and break down barriers in order to advance racial equity. The urgent need to address Islamophobia was noted and a commitment was made to develop public education and awareness initiatives that aim to mitigate and prevent Islamophobia.

### **2018 Student Census: Overall Board Report (Kindergarten to Grade 12)<sup>51</sup>**

- Islam was the largest reported faith group in PDSB.
- Approximately 25% of students identify as Muslim.

### **2020 Ministry Review of the Peel District School Board<sup>52</sup>**

- The review of the PDSB found that Muslim-identifying students have been targets of Islamophobia both in the school and in the community.
- Directive 8 further to the 2020 Ministry Review requires the Board to retain an expert to conduct an appraisal of the Director's performance, specifically including their performance in relation to addressing anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and other equity issues.
- Directive 14 to address the disproportionate experiences Muslim-identifying students face as a result of the paucity of curriculum representation and barriers to creed practice.

### **2021 National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) Recommendations for the National Action Summit on Islamophobia<sup>53</sup>**

- The federal government subsequently announced the National Summit on Islamophobia to take place on July 22, 2021 to identify ways to combat Islamophobia across the country.
- NCCM engaged in a process of developing recommendations after hosting consultation sessions with mosques, community organizations and collectives from British Columbia to the Atlantic provinces, representing a diverse intersection of Muslims in Canada.
- Through community consultations, education was consistently identified as a long-term solution towards eradicating all forms of xenophobia, and towards ending the violence faced by Canadian Muslims today.
- Recommendation #53 to the National Action Summit on Islamophobia noted having school boards adopt an Anti-Islamophobia Strategy.

### **2021 Focus Groups: Understanding the Experiences of Muslim-Identifying Students. PDSB Equity Accountability Report Card: Exploring the Equity Gap by Faith/Spirituality<sup>54</sup>**

This report presents the narratives of Muslim-identifying students gathered through student focus groups. Muslim students noted:

- Common experiences of being labeled a terrorist or other dehumanizing words.
- Feeling a lack of acceptance, safety, and belonging in relation to their identities and cultures.
- Absence of positive representation in curriculum and materials.
- Students and teachers need to build their awareness of Islamophobia and its impact on students.
- The need for a safe space to discuss experiences.
- The need to see themselves represented in teaching staff and guidance counselors.
- The need to address incidents of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred.

### **2021 The Peel District School Board Passes a Motion to Create a Strategy to Dismantle Islamophobia**

- Community organizations worked with PDSB Trustees to support the creation of a Dismantling Islamophobia Strategy.<sup>55</sup>
- The plan includes mandatory anti-Islamophobia training for all board staff members.
- The plan aims to eradicate misunderstanding around Islam, to bring in “diverse narratives” about Muslim communities, and to make sure educators have the tools they need to ensure that classrooms are inclusive.

### **2022 Ontario Announces Funding to Develop Resources to Combat Islamophobia<sup>56</sup>**

- Funding announced to create guides, resources, and materials to counter Islamophobic narratives in culture, online and in the classroom.
- Resources designed for school staff and students, and to support Muslim families, students and educators.

### **2022 Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights – Islamophobia**

The committee engaged in a study on how Islamophobia promotes hate and violence against Muslims. The study also examined the forces of Islamophobia and its impact on individuals including mental health and physical safety. They consulted with students, teachers, community, and faith leaders from Peel on their experiences with Islamophobia.

### **2022 The Canadian Islamophobia Industry: Mapping Islamophobia’s Ecosystem in the Great White North<sup>57</sup>**

A 240 page report that maps out the political, ideological, institutional, and economic networks that instigates Islamophobia fear and moral panic in Canada. The four-year study unveils a well funded and orchestrated ecosystem that comprises media outlets and Islamophobia influencers, white nationalist groups, far right groups, self-professed “Muslim dissidents,” think-tanks and their designated security experts, and the donors who fund their campaign.<sup>58</sup>

# Pillars of Implementation



# Pillar 1: Build Capacity to Lead Implementation of the Strategy

Trustees, senior leaders, and administrators develop the knowledge and skills to lead the implementation of this strategy. All members of the PDSB community will develop an understanding of Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim students, families, and communities.

## **PDSB COMMITS TO THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:**

- 1.1** Providing professional learning for trustees on equity, human rights, anti-racism, anti-oppression, intersectionality and Islamophobia at the beginning of and throughout their term.
- 1.2** Ensuring that ongoing professional learning is provided for senior staff, administrators, and all school staff about Islamophobia and its impact on Muslim students, staff and families.
- 1.3** Ensuring that superintendents and administrators include performance goals that support the implementation of this strategy through the School and Board Improvement and Equity Plan (SIEP and BIEP). This will include using the School Equity Audit Tool (SEAT).
- 1.4** Ensuring that superintendents routinely consult with their respective school administrators to assess the implementation of this strategy through the SIEP framework.
- 1.5** Establishing a Strategy Implementation Team (coordinating principal, coordinator, resource teachers) as well as an advisory group that includes staff from a wide variety of roles in the board that represent diverse identities of Muslims and staffing groups.

## Pillar 2: Affirm and Celebrate Muslim Identities

Muslim students will see themselves reflected within the curriculum through positive, identity-affirming representations to help foster feelings of acceptance, belonging, and well-being. As stated in the PDSB Anti-Racism Policy and the PDSB Human Rights Policy 51, curriculum and pedagogy should reflect students' identities and experiences.<sup>59</sup>

### **PDSB COMMITS TO THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:**

- 2.1** Critically reflecting on their own social location, staff will identify and confront Islamophobic biases, prejudice and hate.
- 2.2** Using anti-racist, anti-oppressive, culturally relevant and responsive frameworks to inform pedagogy and practice. This includes interrogating how resources are chosen and used, and understanding their impact on Muslim identities.
- 2.3** Including resources and learning that affirm Muslim identities and contributions across curricula (e.g. Math, Science, History, Arts, etc.) as a means to counter the erasure of the Muslim identity in the historically Eurocentric curriculum.
- 2.4** Developing students' understanding of Islamophobia and its connections to other forms of oppression (such as anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism and anti-Palestinian racism) in an age-appropriate manner.
- 2.5** Developing and supporting schools with board-created anti-racist resources to celebrate Islamic Heritage Month and affirm Muslim student identities throughout the year. These resources will include but are not limited to lesson plans, guest speaker lists, Muslim affirming resources for school libraries.
- 2.6** Requiring all schools to provide meaningful learning opportunities for staff, students and families that affirm and celebrate Muslim identities during Islamic Heritage Month and beyond.
- 2.7** Offering counternarratives, contemporary and historical, to actively combat Islamophobic narratives in society that are highlighted in the media and in daily practices within Peel communities.
- 2.8** Creating intentional learning opportunities where students can critically examine, interrogate and interrupt Islamophobia found in literature, media, daily contexts, etc.

# Pillar 3: Create Learning and Working Environments That Intentionally Disrupt Islamophobia

In accordance with the PDSB Anti-Racism Policy, all PDSB community members have an ethical responsibility to prevent incidents from happening through education and creating spaces that are safe and inclusive.<sup>60</sup> Board and school leadership will ensure an environment that is welcoming, inclusive, and meets the needs of all learners. This will be accomplished by proactively identifying and dismantling barriers that are known to be obstacles to students or staff who identify as Muslim.

Teachers will use principles of Universal Design for Learning to design inclusive programs which ensure that Muslim identifying students can maximize their participation in classroom and school activities while maintaining their faith practice. Although there is currently a religious accommodation policy in place, it is important that the system works proactively to meet the needs of learners who identify as Muslims.

## **PDSB COMMITS TO THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:**

- 3.1** Developing and implementing annual mandatory anti-Islamophobia training for staff.
- 3.2** School leadership committees will include a focus on identifying and dismantling different systemic barriers that Muslim students and staff may face (board-wide and site-specific).
- 3.3** Establishing spaces for prayer or contemplation for staff and student use.
- 3.4** Muslim students will be made aware of and offered faith-based accommodations, as per their needs. This may include a space for prayer or accommodations for fasting students during Ramadan.
- 3.5** Ensuring the completion of the School Equity Audit Tool (Ministry Directive 18)<sup>61</sup> as per completion timelines.
- 3.6** Informing all students, families, and staff about their right to safe and respectful learning and working environments and the process for making a complaint when an issue does occur. All members of the school community should also understand their right to be protected against reprisal for coming forward with a complaint.<sup>62</sup>

- 3.7** Communicating the Board's response and procedure regarding discrimination and the use of discriminatory statements to address the use of Islamophobic and anti-Muslim comments, statements or slurs by any member of the PDSB community.<sup>63</sup>
- 3.8** Developing a guide for staff that communicates board policies, procedures and expectations on how to consistently and immediately interrupt and address acts of discrimination, including those stemming from Islamophobia, that they witness or have been made aware of.
- 3.9** Liaising with Employee Resource Groups, specifically the Muslim Employees Association of Peel (MEAP) annually to better understand and dismantle the challenges and barriers that staff and students may be facing at the PDSB in relation to their Muslim identities.



## **Pillar 4: Foster Meaningful Engagement with Muslim Communities**

In order to support the well-being and success of Muslim students, the PDSB will effectively engage with Muslim families and communities. Meaningful engagement will recognize the intersectional and multiple realities of Muslim families at the PDSB which includes racial, ethnic, linguistic, sectarian, and different practices of faith and spirituality.

Meaningful engagement will also center accessibility such as access to information and resources, creating affinity spaces for Muslim families in schools, and meeting parents where they gather. This will include better and more transparent communication, making welcoming spaces for Muslim families at school and community events.

### **PDSB COMMITS TO THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:**

- 4.1** Developing partnerships with community agencies to identify, understand, and address issues that concern Muslim families, and to ensure culturally appropriate referrals to services and resources.
- 4.2** Developing resources for Muslim families about the education system and supporting them to engage as partners in their child's education. These resources should inform Muslim families about who to contact when issues arise, especially incidents of Islamophobia; the process for addressing issues; and how families will be informed of the outcome.
- 4.3** Partnering with the MEAP, advisory committees and community organizations (e.g., NCCM) to host parent engagement events for Muslim families.
- 4.4** Seeking the input of Muslim students, staff, and community on issues that concern them, including the implementation of this strategy.

## Pillar 5: Support the Mental Health and Well-Being of Muslim Students and Staff

The PDSB recognizes that Muslim students are subject to different forms of Islamophobia both implicit and explicit that continue to “other” and limit the development of Muslim identities. Students with multiple intersecting and marginal identities, including students from the Black, Indigenous, Palestinian,<sup>64</sup> 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, as well as students with special learning needs, English language learners, and newcomers, have faced compounding oppression and barriers to forming a positive identity, community, and faith practice.

The NCCM Student Town Hall report spoke to the positive impact on students when an effort is made to know and understand students’ ways of knowing and being.

### **PDSB COMMITS TO THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:**

- 5.1** Supporting and affirming Muslim identities will be included as part of the PDSB BIEP and each school’s SIEP goals, which includes student and staff voice. This will be included in the Mental Health, Well-Being & Engagement section of the BIEP and SEIP goals.
- 5.2** Ensuring that Muslim identities are affirmed through anti-racist, anti-oppressive, culturally relevant, and responsive pedagogies. This will be evident through the inclusion of Muslim contributions in the curriculum and the selection of culturally relevant and response texts and resources.
- 5.3** Ensuring diverse and intersectional Muslim identities are represented and recognizing that Muslims come from all areas of the world, representing all racial groups.
- 5.4** Recognizing that Muslim beliefs and practices may differ between individuals and different Muslim identifying groups.
- 5.5** Providing opportunities for the creation of Muslim safe spaces, such as Muslim Student Associations (MSA), where students can discuss issues related to the specific needs of Muslim students.
- 5.6** Hosting opportunities for Muslim Student Associations to convene throughout the school year.
- 5.7** Supporting programs that affirm Muslim student identities and allow Muslim students to maintain a strong and positive sense of self. These programs and spaces may include mentorship programs, summer camps, as well as leadership opportunities.

## Pillar 6: Implement Responsive Hiring and Supportive Practices

The PDSB recognizes that all students and community members benefit from seeing educators from diverse communities and identities in a variety of roles in their schools and throughout the Board. Having Muslim-identifying teachers, administrators, and staff in positions of authority or responsibility creates conditions to challenge and disrupt systemic barriers and stereotyping. As such, it is imperative that more Muslim-identifying staff are hired, promoted, and supported in positions of responsibility throughout the Board.

### **PDSB COMMITS TO THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:**

- 6.1** Supporting racialized employees' advancement into leadership roles, that are responsive to school demographics, such as department heads, resource teachers, coordinators, school-based administrators, managers, controllers, executive leads and superintendents to reflect the diversity of the PDSB community.
- 6.2** Recruiting regulated health professionals (e.g., psychologists, social workers, speech pathologists) to reflect the diversity of the PDSB community and provide culturally reflective, responsive and faith focused services through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens.
- 6.3** Advocating with the third-party provider of the Board's Employee and Family Assistance Program to ensure that Muslim-identifying staff have access to Muslim therapists and resources to ensure they receive culturally responsive support.
- 6.4** Providing prayer accommodations for Muslim employees for those that request it.
- 6.5** Supporting MEAP to ensure that Muslim-identifying staff have safe spaces in which to gather and share experiences (e.g., hold meetings, network, organize affinity-focused engagements).

# Reporting Measures

The criteria listed below is intended to support the collection of baseline data which will guide the formulation of the accountability framework including goal setting and the implementation of the strategy. The data collection will be centrally coordinated in a manner that can be communicated to the system via the work of the Strategy Implementation Team.

## Mental Health, Well Being & Engagement

### Improved Student Mental Health and Well-Being

- % of Muslim students in Grades 4-12 who feel their school is a safe and inclusive environment.
- % of Muslim students in Grades 4-12 who report feeling comfortable seeking supports for their mental health.
- % of schools that have implemented activities that promote school connections for Muslim students, including extracurricular activities (such as MSA, Muslim Student mentorship programs and learning opportunities).
- % of schools who engage with community organizations who deliver culturally relevant, healing centered mental health programming for students (e.g. Naseeha).

### Improved Student, Parent, And Community Engagement

- % of Muslim parents who feel they have opportunities to be involved in their school community (e.g. School council).
- % of Muslim parents who feel they belong in the school community.
- % of schools engaging with community organizations who offer culturally responsive and relevant learning programs for students, staff, and community.

## Human Rights and Equity

### Build Anti-Racist Capacity

- % of superintendents of education (SOEs), principals and vice-principals whose annual growth plan includes goals to address inequities/response to disproportionate outcomes.
- % of Family of Schools (FOS) and individual schools that have included dismantling systemic racism, including dismantling Islamophobia, as part of their SIEP goals.

- % of superintendents, principals/vice-principals, managers, controllers, executive leads that have provided professional learning (e.g., presenter, delivery of content, access to module) on dismantling Islamophobia for all their staff on an annual basis.

### **Faith-based Accommodations**

- % of students and staff who feel their faith-based practices and identity is respected and understood.
- % of human rights complaints made with Human Rights Office that involve the denial of and/or barriers to faith-based accommodations.
- % of staff trained on human rights policy and practices that includes faith-based accommodations (e.g. Jumma prayers, Ramadan accommodations, daily prayers etc.).
- % of schools who have explicitly shared with parents and students how to make a human rights complaint and have included the link to the human rights complaint form on their website and in the Fall newsletter to their parent/caregiver community.

### **Address Human Rights Complaints and Hate-Based Incidents**

- # of human rights complaints made with the Human Rights Office related to Islamophobia raised and % resolved (informally and formally).
- # of reported hate-based incidents related to Islamophobia and other intersecting oppressions (e.g. Anti-Black Islamophobia, Gendered Islamophobia, etc.) that are reported using the DSS.
- # of complaints about Islamophobia that are reported using the DSS.
- # of schools who, when reporting an Islamophobic incident, results in incident-specific support to repair the hurt and harm caused by the incident, as reported on the DSS .

## **Reimagining Learning Environments**

### **Improved conditions for learning and belonging**

- Ongoing assessment of classroom learning environment and culture, including the purchase and use of identity-affirming learning resources (via the School Equity Audit Tool - SEAT) to ensure inclusion and engagement of Muslim students.
- % of Muslim students in Grades 4-12 who report they see themselves reflected and affirmed in their learning.
- Supporting development of programs that affirm and celebrate intersectional Muslim student identities (e.g. Muslim student conference, MSA, mentorship/leadership opportunities, Islamic Heritage Month activities, etc.).

## Hiring and Supporting Muslim Staff

### Representation

- % of teachers who identify as Muslim compared with the % of students who identify as Muslim.
- % of school administrators who identify as Muslim compared with the % of teachers that identify as Muslim.
- % of non-instructional staff who identify as Muslim needs to reflect % of Muslims in the community.
- % of support staff (e.g., mental health clinicians, resource teachers, Professional Student Services Personnel (PSSP) who identify as Muslim compared with the % of students who identify as Muslim.

### Well-Being/Work Climate

- % Muslim employees' reporting a sense of belonging and well-being in the workplace indicated via the Staff Climate Survey conducted every five years.
- Conduct workforce census to ensure diversity of the workforce better represents the Muslim communities and student populations it serves.
- Increase in the programs and resources to help foster inclusion and engagement by Muslim employees (captured through the workforce census data).

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