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## *The Threat to DEI Initiatives* *How Ontario Teacher Hiring Policies Privilege Whiteness*

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### Abstract

*Given the recent increase in attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) policies in North America and beyond, we explore the context surrounding recent changes to hiring policies for teachers in Ontario, Canada. The pressures to revoke policies are not new, and have been present in Ontario for many years, resulting in a roller coaster of policy enactments and revocations such as with Regulation 274/12 and PPM 165. The initial enactment of Ontario Regulation 274/12 that was intended to tackle issues of racism and discrimination in hiring practices was widely misunderstood and misconstrued by those who do not support DEI policies causing regulating bodies to publish articles debunking myths surrounding the policy. However, misconception and lack of support remained, which encouraged the Ontario Government to inevitably revoke PPM 165. In this article, we explore the social and political context surrounding the policies and the policy changes to help the reader understand the true purpose and utility of policies such as Regulation 274/12. It is our hope that administrators and hiring committees will find this information helpful as they attempt to hire teachers for their schools. Given the current political climate, this type of exploration is more important than ever.*



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## Introduction

Canada is unique among its OECD peers in terms of lacking a comprehensive, national framework for education policy development and integration. Rather, provinces and territories are responsible for developing and implementing equity, inclusion and diversity policies (Abawi, 2021a; Campbell, 2021; Tariq, 2020). There are three levels of education; elementary, secondary, and post-secondary for which each of the ten provinces and three territories are responsible for. The exception to this funding and responsibility model are Indigenous schools. The Canadian federal government funds Indigenous schools on reserves, as well as band-operated schools (Campbell, 2021). The Ontario Education Act (1990) governs publicly funded K-12 education in Ontario and outlines the legal framework, powers, roles and responsibilities of the Minister of Education, school boards, principals, and teachers in addition to the responsibilities and rights of pupils and parents (Brock University, n.d.). All program policy memorandums and Ontario Regulations act as amendments or additions to the Ontario Education Act. This conceptual paper outlines the multifaceted contextual factors framing the province's initiatives to diversify the teacher workforce across political lines between the 2012 Regulation and the current PPM 165, and discursive shifts that work to perpetuate whiteness as hegemony in teacher hiring practices from Regulation 274/12 to the current PPM 165 through the lens of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) in order to frame the sustaining discourse of whiteness in Ontario teacher hiring policies.

Ontario is often globally recognized for its demographic diversity; in addition to being perceived as an anomaly with highly diverse student populations in conjunction with relatively strong international test scores (Campbell, 2021). However, this widely touted diversity has not been reflected within the province's teaching demographics with the majority of teachers in Ontario identifying as White, middle-class women (Abawi, 2021a; City of Toronto, 2019; OPC Census, 2020). An estimated 14.4 percent of Ontario teachers are white, and according to a 2020 Ontario Principals Council (OPC) Census, 17.5 percent of administrator (vice-principal and principal) respondents identified as racialized in comparison to Ontario's racialized demographics of 29.3 per cent (OPC, 2020). Prior to 2012, hiring practices varied across individual school boards (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018). Extant research outlines numerous benefits to a racially diverse workforce that is reflective of the students, the benefits extend to both racialized and white students alike; including students seeing themselves represented in role models, white students seeing racialized people in positions of influence; culturally responsive pedagogy; mentorship and the closing of opportunity gaps (Nevarez, Jouganas, & Wood, 2019; Rodriguez, 2021; Yip & Saito, 2023).

Within the Ontario educational landscape, teacher hiring has historically been largely decentralized, allowing administrators substantial autonomy in teacher hiring (Abawi, 2021b; Jack & Ryan, 2015). This led to favoritism, nepotism, and discrimination against Black and other racialized teacher applicants in Ontario for many decades prior to the implementation of Ontario Regulation (O'Reg) 274/12 and PPM 165 (Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli, 2009), each of which was implemented by a different political party. O'Reg 274 was implemented by the Liberal party with the stated intent of encouraging administrators to hire more diverse teacher applicants (Abawi, 2018). While PPM 165 was implemented by a Conservative Government. Regardless of the obvious ideological preferences of each political party, there continues to be debate and great confusion about which policy is more equitable and inclusive of diverse teacher applicants, and which one allows more subjectivity in hiring, nepotism, and discrimination against Black and other

racialized teacher applicants (Hatt, Maynes, and Mottonen, 2019; Jack, 2016). This makes the job of hiring administrators confusing and decreases the likelihood that the teacher workforce will be diversified. Hiring administrators need clear policies with accountability mechanisms to ensure hiring practices are truly equitable and inclusive (Panagos, 2002). We hope the discussion of the social and political contexts of these policies will help hiring administrators and policy writers and researchers to understand the purposes and aims of each policy and contribute to the hiring of more diverse applicants and the creation of more racially just hiring policies in Ontario and elsewhere.

Provincial and territorial educational policies passed by the governing parties are usually strongly aligned with the political ideologies of the parties. In this case, policies were passed by Canada's two major political parties: the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives with Liberals tending to favor socialism, equity, and government oversight and Conservatives tending to favor individualism, the market, and less government intervention (Sattler, 2012). When the Liberal party, led by Kathleen Wynne, enacted O'Reg 274, it included steps to centralize hiring practices in the name of equity and diversity, and curb institutional nepotism. The overarching purpose of Regulation 274/12 was to increase transparency and fairness in school board teacher hiring. The Regulation provided required terms and conditions that all school boards hiring members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA); Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO); Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation were mandated to adhere to when hiring Long Term Occasional (LTOs) and permanent teachers. As such, Ontario school boards were instructed to collate an Occasional Teacher (OT) roster for daily supply teachers, and a separate LTO roster that assigns each OT a seniority number based on their placement on the two lists. Further, in adherence to the Regulation, school boards had to post long-term teaching positions on their websites; carry out interview debriefs for unsuccessful candidates as requested; and only hire teachers to LTO and permanent positions from the LTO roster based on qualifications and seniority (ETFO, 2020; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018).

While the policy was far from flawless, Regulation 274/12 clearly outlined a seniority-based hiring process, which was intended to address the history of nepotism and racism in hiring practices in Ontario. However, extant research suggests that administrators were still able to exercise authority over hiring practices pertaining to their schools, often passing racialized applicants over in favour of white applicants. Further, schools have not historically been welcoming and inclusive spaces for many Black, Indigenous and other racialized communities (Abawi, 2021a; 2020; Review of the Peel District School Board, 2020; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014). This leads many to question whether the policy was truly intended to be equitable or whether it was a ruse. Regardless of the intent, the failure of this policy led to substantive diversification of the teacher workforce and highlights the continued need for policy analysis, discourse, and policy changes in this area to increase equity and diversity in teacher hiring. This tension between stated goals of O'Reg 274 and outcomes also opened the door for incoming governing parties to rescind the policy. Following the political shift from the Wynne administration to the Progressive Conservative Ford government, Regulation 274/12 was revoked and replaced with PPM (Policy Program Memorandum) 165. PPM 165 lists the following hiring criteria: qualifications and merit, diversity, equity, and human rights, employment mobility, fairness and transparency, monitoring and evaluation (PPM 165). The individual school boards were left to define each of those hiring criteria, in accordance with teacher union guidelines and human rights legislation. Members of the Ford government claim this new PPM will encourage meritocracy, human rights and diversity in the hiring process (PPM165). However, we argue that the implementation of PPM 165 once again allocates sweeping autonomy over teacher hiring to

administrators based on their own subjective interpretations of the hiring criteria in the PPM, with minimal ministerial oversight. The absence of a centralized hiring approach in most of Ontario's publicly funded school boards reinforces significant gaps between policy rhetoric and the realities of teacher hiring practices in Ontario. As such, widespread nepotism in hiring processes continues to shape and sustain Ontario's predominantly white teaching force (Levy, 2022; Ontario College of Teachers, 2024/2023; Thakor, 2024). An ETFO statement released in 2020 argued that PPM 165 would pave the way for nepotism and cronyism in teacher hiring practices (ETFO, 2020).

The overrepresentation of whiteness in Canada's largest and most ethnically diverse province continues to perpetuate harmful practices; notably: racialized streaming practices, disciplinary issues, low teacher expectations, the hegemony of Eurocentric curriculum; and overall, culturally deficit dispositions towards Black, Indigenous and other racialized students, families and communities. We map out the discursive shifts underpinning Regulation 274/12 and PPM 165 and how these policies are sustained through white supremacy and in practice uphold whiteness in teacher hiring practices.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This paper brings together Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) as complementary frameworks for examining how education policies shape teacher hiring in Ontario. CWS provides the theoretical foundation by analyzing whiteness as a system of power that structures institutional practices, including hiring, and renders racial advantage invisible. CPA offers the methodological approach to interrogate how these dynamics are embedded in policy discourse and practical applications. Together, these frameworks allow for a deeper examination of how claims of neutrality in education policy obscure racial inequities and how discourses of merit and professionalism reproduce whiteness in teacher hiring practices in Ontario. By using CWS to highlight the operation of whiteness and CPA to analyze how policies such as Regulation 274/12 and PPM 165 are constructed and enacted, this study situates teacher hiring within both a theoretical critique of racial power and a methodological analysis of the processes of policy application.

### *Critical Whiteness Studies*

Critical Whiteness Studies offers an interdisciplinary framework for examining how whiteness functions as a system of power shaping educational policy. Emerging as an offshoot of Critical Race Theory (CRT), CWS extends CRT's analysis by making whiteness itself the primary object of analysis and critique. Where CRT often begins from the experiences of racialized groups, CWS shifts the analysis towards of the structural and institutional dimensions of whiteness that remain unmarked and protected through discourses of merit and objectivity, particularly within educational contexts (Zemblyas, 2013; Matias et al., 2014). This paper draws specifically on second-wave CWS, which critiques the limits of first-wave scholarship that too often reduced whiteness to the identification of privilege. Instead, second-wave CWS emphasizes the operation of whiteness as a deeply embedded structure within institutional practices and relationships (Matias & Boucher, 2023). As a framework for identifying the systemic mechanisms of white supremacy, CWS centralizes the analysis on how whiteness materially shapes access to power, while simultaneously obscuring its influence by denying its existence. In this sense, whiteness

functions as the “underlying mechanism that maintains a racist system” (Viesca et al., 2014, p. 292), operating across sociopolitical contexts and organizational life, including schools.

Whiteness in this context, is understood as a social system of power that sustains a racial hierarchy through seemingly race-neutral policies and practices that continue to reinforce racial dominance through their operation (Leonardo, 2009; Applebaum, 2010). While whiteness refers to the structural, institutional, and cultural norms that define what is seen as neutral, professional or qualified, white supremacy functions as the ideological system that legitimizes power and protects those norms as natural and superior (Gillborn, 2005; Matias & Boucher 2023). In other words, whiteness describes the everyday operation of dominance, whereas white supremacy is the belief system and historical framework that sustains the status quo. The interplays between whiteness and white supremacy as an ideology and a longstanding system of racial supremacy are sustained and reproduced through hiring criteria, policy language and discursive practices that appear neutral but reinforce racial advantage (Matias & Boucher, 2023). From a systemic viewpoint, *white supremacy* constitutes the processes of racial domination which privileges those who embody whiteness and normalize “violence, discrimination and unequal power relations” towards racialized groups (Ozais & Pasque, 2022, pp. 23). This process of normalization secures access to power, privilege, resources, and sustains both material and social advantages (Harris, 1993).

In Ontario, seniority-based hiring under Regulation 274/12 reinforced a disproportionately white teaching force that was maintained in the shift to PPM 165 which similarly reproduced whiteness as the invisible norm (Turner, 2015). Whiteness shapes societal perceptions of race through normalized racial stereotypes and prejudices on racialized groups (Ozais & Pasque, 2022), which in turn directs hiring practices toward candidates who align with dominant white norms of credentialing, professionalism and communication. These norms function as everyday mechanisms that sustain whiteness by marking those who reflect them as competent and those who do not as less suitable for employment in Ontario schools. In this context, professional engagement often privileges white, middle-class standards such as classroom management styles that emphasize control and authority over relational approaches, dress codes rooted in Eurocentric aesthetics of formality, so-called ‘accent-free’ English, name biases in recruitment, as well as credentialing pathways which favours Canadian-educated teachers (Jackson & Denis, 2024; Sidhu & Pexman, 2025). By embedding these expectations into definitions of merit and professionalism, institutions reinforce whiteness as the normative baseline by which all others are measured. Such norms limit racialized educators’ access to stable employment but also constrain what is recognized as legitimate teaching practice, framing these educators as less fit for teaching roles when they embody different cultural, linguistic or pedagogical practices, even when these align more closely with the diverse student populations they serve. As such, these norms sustain pedagogical practices and a teaching workforce to sustain settler-colonial ideals rather than responsive hiring practices to support the needs of Ontario’s diverse student population.

There is a direct relationship between the history of colonial practices in education in Ontario, and the long-standing history of ant-Black racism and general hiring discrimination in Ontario against racialized teacher applicants (Pollock, 2010; Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli, 2009). Turner (2015) suggests hiring decisions based on personal connections reduces racial diversity within the workforce and “reproduces the status quo” (pp. 21). Turner’s study indicated that 68% of respondents shared that hiring practices within boards were biased toward “teachers with personal connections to others on the board” (pp. 20). Turner’s Report: *Voices of Ontario Black*

*Educators: An Experiential Report* was prepared for the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (ONABSE) and outlined the experiences of Black teachers in Ontario. The Report spoke to rampant anti-Black racism embedded within school cultures across the province. It should be noted that findings from the recent report: *Dreams Delayed: Addressing Systemic Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario's Public Education System* also speak to the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism in Ontario schools (OHRC, 2025). Data from a large-scale study on the nature of the Principalship (Pollock et al., 2014) supports the findings of Turner, calling on the Ontario Principals Council to interevent. Statistics obtained in 2017 concerning racial demographics in one school board in Ontario, the Peel District School Board (PDSB), Data from the PDSB, Ontario's second largest suggests, suggests and underrepresented school population were 67% of teachers are white but 84% of pupils are racialized (Chadha et al., 2020, pp. 4). It is noteworthy that these practices continue to have profoundly negative impacts on racialized and Indigenous educators (Abawi, 2021b). For instance, those in administrative roles often hire relatives and companions under the guise of neutrality, such as hiring based on 'merit' or the 'best fit' for the classroom, (Rushowy, 2019; Goodfield, 2020). The following section discusses the myriad ways in which policies operate to shape educational policies such as teacher hiring.

### *Critical Policy Analysis*

Critical Policy Analysis is a social-justice oriented method used to examine how education policies are shaped by and reinforce existing power structures. CPA explores the roots of policy creation, distribution of power, compromises, as well as gaps between policy rhetoric and practice (Apple, 2019; Bacchi, 2012; Ball, 1994; Diem et al., 2014). Critical policy analysts define policy as text in official documents as well as the practices, discourses and struggles through which policies are enacted and interpreted (Ball, 1994; Shaw, 2004; Winton, 2013). Critical Policy Analysts reject policy as value-neutral and seek to uncover its role in producing and sustaining power imbalances that contribute to social inequities and injustices by examining contextual nuances and strategic rhetoric in the context of the broader sociopolitical arena (Diem et al., 2014; Winton, 2013).

In this paper, CPA is employed to analyze the ways in which provincial hiring policies such as Regulation 274/12 and PPM 165 are influenced by political shifts and how they shape the experiences of racialized educators, students and community members. Using CPA as a guiding framework, this study examines how social, political and institutional forces shape teacher hiring policies and practices in Ontario. We focus on how these policies impact the experiences of racialized educators, students and the community at large particularly through constraining or enabling access to equitable hiring. Through an analysis of provincial education policy documents, we explore how discourses of diversity and equity are mobilized to either maintain or disrupt existing power structures or as openings for structural change. This approach supports a deeper examination and understanding of teacher hiring in Ontario where whiteness and merit intersect with political ideologies to influence who gains access into the profession.

Notably, while teacher hiring practices are shaped by formal policies, they are also shaped by the racial ideologies embedded within leadership practices. Internationally, research has shown that even in jurisdictions that promote diversity and inclusion, whiteness continues to function as an unmarked norm, continuing to disadvantage racialized educators in both explicit and implicit mechanisms (Weiner et al., 2022). For example, studies of African American women aspiring to leadership in U.S. schools found that white-dominated networks and subjective definitions of

leadership limited their access to administrative positions, despite equity-centered rhetoric (Weiner et al., 2022). Educational leaders in multiple contexts apply diversity policies selectively, relying on credentialing and professional norms to gatekeep or to avoid racially conscious hiring, often due to personal bias or political pressures (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020). Similar tensions are documented in the United Kingdom, where Sánchez-Monedero et al. (2020) found that automated hiring systems, adopted under the guise of objectivity, reproduced discriminatory patterns. These systems relied on data and algorithms that encoded existing racial and gender biases, resulting in the exclusion of racialized candidates. In Sweden, Larsson et al. (2024) similarly showed that algorithmic recruitment tools reinforced inequities because of opaque data practices and limited accountability. These findings demonstrate how hiring processes and policy frameworks must be critically interrogated to reveal the racialized assumptions that underpin them.

## **Context**

Following the heinous murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man in Minnesota by a white police officer; many white people across Canada and the United States were confronted with their whiteness for the first time. Large scale equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives followed; in a reactive attempt to perform racial justice and reckoning. While racism in the United States is often visibilized through media outlets across the globe, Canada has been portrayed as a kinder, less racist society. Education in Ontario and Canada has long operated as a tool of colonial logic to oppress various racial groups; from overt genocide against Indigenous people, segregated schooling, and deficit thinking accompanied by violent practices such as streaming and disproportionate disciplinary measures (Eldon, 2025; Eizadirad et al, 2023; Heck, 2021; James, 2020; James & Turner, 2017). In this juncture, differences are weaponized, whereby non-conformity to whiteness results in punishment and violence; from overt settler-colonial systems of oppression to vastly inequitable outcomes and opportunities between white Canadians and Black, Indigenous and racialized communities (Colour of Poverty, 2019; United Way, 2019). It is important to be mindful that because of the nuances of how whiteness operates, it cannot be assumed that all racialized teachers will be antiracist educators and they, too, can perpetuate and enact colonial practices.

Dominant settler-colonial norms continue to epitomize the archetype of teacher identity; far from a neutral identity, teacher identity is encapsulated by whiteness and empire; as white women have historically been on the forefront of ‘civilizing’ endeavors, from residential schools to missionary work (Eizadirad et al, 2023; Schul, 2021). As such, teachers who embody white, feminine, Eurocentric values are discursively constructed as ideal teachers to impart coloniality (read Eurocentric pedagogical approaches, developmental trajectories, and school culture). We draw on the conceptualization of coloniality from Eizadirad et al, (2023) to frame colonial logic in education as a tool that can be weaponized to mobilize deficit thinking, and more recently, propaganda (anti-woke) to justify the degradation and mistreatment of selective communities and identities. The teacher and administrative diversity gaps are by no means accidental, but rather due to structural, institutional and systemic structures that prevent racialized access to the profession (Abawi 2021a; Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020; Ryan et al, 2009). Missionary work and the toxicity of white womanhood intersect and inform colonial and settler-colonial work in civilizing missions and the violent oppression of Black and Brown communities. This ethos continues to undergird the educational system today, with Ontario’s Education Act (1990) suggesting that the role of the teacher is to convey the “principles of Judeo-Christian morality and the highest regard for truth,

justice, loyalty of country...and all other virtues” (s. 264). These narratives remain entrenched in the province’s Education Act and frame the duties of teachers against the backdrop of whiteness and white saviorism. Whiteness in Ontario’s education system continues to play out through the national myth of and discursive practices of multiculturalism, which depict Canada as a place of social cohesion and harmony. As such, recent resistance to the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education have resulted as they challenge such mythologies and force settler-colonial structures to name, acknowledge and dismantle whiteness (Butler et al, 2024). Structures of whiteness not only determine suitability to be a teacher but also reinforce white norms of behaviour; notably: disciplinary practices, communication styles, parenting and child development norms and so on, whereby white womanhood enacts racial violence on students, families and communities as punishment for non-conformity. Whiteness in the teacher and administrative workforce also acts as a gatekeeper as to what knowledge is considered valid, this is also true when it comes to teacher education programs and admissions processes, as teacher education programs operate within the axiology of whiteness (Abawi, 2021b).

The salience of whiteness in Ontario’s education was recently highlighted by the vilification of a Black woman who was targeted and blamed for the suicide of a white principal. Kike Ojo-Thompson, a Black woman and antiracism educator was blamed for the suicide of former Toronto principal, Richard Bilkszto for questioning his understandings of anti-Black racism (Bernhardt, 2023; Hristova, 2023). In July 2023 the Toronto District School Board commissioned a third-party investigation concerning the circumstances that led to the passing of Bilkszto. The investigation is ongoing (TDSB, 2025).

Policies pertaining to equity, diversity and inclusive education have fluctuated significantly depending on provincial politics. At the federal level, under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau Canada’s Multicultural Act was passed in 1971, followed by the 1988 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms under Brian Mulroney; despite the ongoing horrors of residential schools that remained in operation. The first provincial legislation pertaining to employment equity in the province was the Ontario Employment Equity Act of 1986 which sought to remove barriers to accessing opportunities based on social identities. The Act was repealed by Conservative Premier Mike Harris in 1995 as part of his *Common Sense Revolution* that sought to cut back social programs, weaken unions, deregulate university tuition, and tax cuts (University of Toronto Libraries, n.d.).

The first policy initiative that emphasized antiracism in publicly-funded K-12 education was the introduction of PPM 119 in 1993 under New Democratic Party (NDP) leadership. The 1993 PPM was the first to acknowledge the prevalence and impact of racism within Ontario schools and called for comprehensive changes to curriculum delivery to improve educational outcomes for racialized students. Stark racial inequities came to the forefront of public consciousness when in 2007, the Ontario Human Rights Code filed a lawsuit against the Toronto District School Board based on their Safe Schools Act that applied a zero-tolerance lens to disciplinary action. Because the Safe Schools Act adopted a neutral, racially-evasive framework and was at the discretion of overwhelmingly white teachers and administrators, the consequences were devastating for racialized communities (Turner & James, 2017). Following the 1993 version, PPM 119 has since been revised numerous times, under Liberal leadership, the 2009 and consecutive 2014 PPM called on school boards to collate their own equity, inclusive and diversity-focused educational policies, with little oversight and expertise. The updated PPM acknowledged the importance of increasing diversity among the teacher workforce but advocated for a ‘bias-free’



approach, which encouraged majority white administrators to be objective when assessing the suitability of candidates. This emphasis on bias-free and neoliberal hiring approaches allowed for the centering of whiteness to inform hiring through the blatant omission of power relations, which allowed for the continuation of the status quo—in other words, the privileging white teachers (Abawi, 2021a). Further, as Shah (2023) suggests, educational leadership paradigms are contextualized by meritocracy, which cannot be unpacked without critically disrupting whiteness, by interrogating one's own positionality by developing racial self-awareness and intersectional identities.

Despite the implementation of Regulation 274/12, unchallenged power relations and the absence of critical antiracism approaches provided for the continuing passing over of racialized candidates for white applicants (Abawi, 2018; Review of the PDSB, 2020). In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Anti-Racism Directorate aimed to eliminate systemic racism within publicly funded educational institutions in addition to raising public awareness of the prevalence of systemic and institutional racism (Turner & James, 2017). In 2016, the Ministry was commissioned to provide a review of the York Region District School Board considering widespread and blatant Islamophobia, including anti-Muslim, anti-refugee social media posts on the part of a principal. The board lacked accountability in addressing the principal's racist transgressions and failed to proactively engage with the community to discuss their concerns. Moreover, the Report pointed to vast racial discrepancies in disciplinary practices, in addition to the silencing and ostracization of educators engaged in equity and antiracism work, including the sabotaging of their careers (Review of the YRDSB, 2017). Following these commitments, the 2017 Equity Action Plan was enacted and included more detailed action items concerning the importance and commitment to teacher representation. While the Equity Action Plan employed more critical antiracist jargon, many of the same processes, such as discriminatory hiring practices continued unabated.

In 2020, the Ministry was once again called upon to set up a committee to review the Peel District School Board in light of ongoing advocacy and calls for ministerial accountability. The results of the Review were scathing and exposed endemic racism in addition to nepotism and favoritism in teacher and administrative hiring and promotion. The findings revealed that administrators routinely held positions for people they knew and actively discouraged candidates from applying to postings; with racialized participants being passed over for white hires. The Review describes this racialization of hiring practices as follows: "racialized candidates being passed over for promotions and not being invited to interview for positions for which they were clearly qualified" (p. 31). The review points to widespread calls from students and parents alike for the board to hire more racialized teachers, in particular more Black teachers. The lack of representation of Black teachers in the board led to harmful disciplinary measures and streaming tactics, such as offering markedly different academic and extracurricular information to Black parents and families than other communities (Wilson, 2015). This calls for more racialized teachers expressed by participants align to the extant research that outlines the various benefits of a diverse teaching workforce, from Black, Indigenous and other racialized teachers as role models showing non-white students that people of colour can be in professional and leadership positions, to impacting pedagogical practices; such as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in the classroom so that their lived experiences are validated (Dei, 1995; Escayg, 2010; Jack, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ryan et al, 2009).

Findings from the Ontario Human Rights' Commission *Dreams Delayed* Report speak to poisoned school environments whereby anti-Black racial slurs are normalized in addition to other

forms of discriminatory treatment and harassment. These racial transgressions affect not only students, but also educators, parents and caregivers. For example, Black teachers reported experiencing exclusion from formal and informal networks, lack of mentorship and professional development opportunities, assignments to less coveted positions and are often subject to surveillance by administrators. Moreover, the Report stated that Black educators are more likely to be labeled through racial stereotypes as aggressive and confrontational should they disagree with non-Black colleagues (OHRC, 2025).

Following the Conservative government's Review of the Peel District School Board, Regulation 274/12 was scrapped by Education Minister Stephen Lecce and replaced with PPM 165 'School Board Teacher Hiring Practices', which would afford the majority white administrators increasing autonomy in teacher hiring. Although diversity, equity and inclusion training and policies have proliferated across the province following the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer in Minneapolis, the structures and powers of white supremacy remain firmly intact. The ministerial reviews of major Ontario school boards have shed light on the harmful practices of white supremacy that operate to disenfranchise Black, Indigenous and other racialized students, staff, families and communities. As such, much of the discourse around such commitments to antiracism and anti-oppression and the diversification of the teacher workforce has largely remained performative, as is evident in the new hiring legislation.

### **Analysis: Policy Shifts and the Reproduction of Inequity**

Ontario's Regulation 274/12 was presented to address nepotism in teacher hiring processes by requiring school boards to interview from established seniority lists. The text of the regulation emphasized 'fairness', 'consistency,' and 'transparency' (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012), but it did not define equity in terms of outcomes for racialized educators. In practice, the regulation preserved access to permanent positions for those already embedded in the profession. Given that Ontario's teaching force was and continues to be disproportionately white, the regulation consolidated incumbency rather than expanding diversity and opening access to teaching positions (Turner, 2015). The repeal of Regulation 274/12 and the introduction of PPM 165 reframed the problem of hiring. Instead of focusing on transparency, the policy prioritized 'efficiency,' 'flexibility,' and 'best fit' (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020). These terms are vague and left undefined, granting administrators broad discretionary authority. Research on hiring practices shows that when criteria remain open-ended, decisions are often shaped by implicit bias and dominant cultural norms (Rivera, 2012; Pollock et al., 2014). The reliance on subjective categories such as professionalism and merit creates openings for administrators, who are themselves predominantly white (Abawi, 2021b), to reproduce existing racial hierarchies under the appearance of neutrality.

While Regulation 274/12 and PPM 165 differ in their procedural mechanisms, the ideological underpinnings of both policies reproduce racial inequities by normalizing whiteness as the benchmark for teacher hiring. Regulation 274/12 was introduced with the stated goal of standardizing fairness and reducing nepotism by requiring hiring from seniority lists (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). PPM 165, by contrast, emphasized flexibility, efficiency, and the pursuit of "best fit" in hiring (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020). A critical reading reveals that although these policies appear to diverge, both adopt language that evades race and equity. The former elevated procedural fairness, while the latter re-centres merit and discretion, yet neither

confront how whiteness structures who has access to the teaching force and who is inhibited from full-time opportunities.

**Table 1.**

Comparative Analysis of Regulation 274/12 and PPM 165 through CPA

| <b>Policy Element</b>                 | <b>Regulation 274/12</b>                                                                                                        | <b>PPM 165</b>                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><i>Policy Rationale</i></b>        | Framed as a measure to ensure fairness and limit nepotism through seniority-based hiring (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). | Presented as promoting flexibility, efficiency, and “best fit” in teacher hiring (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020). |
| <b><i>Decision-making power</i></b>   | Restricts principal discretion by requiring reliance on centralized seniority lists.                                            | Expands principal and administrator discretion, emphasizing local judgment of candidate suitability.                    |
| <b><i>Implications for equity</i></b> | Protects teachers already in the system, maintaining a disproportionately white teaching force (Turner, 2015).                  | Reintroduces subjective criteria such as professionalism and cultural fit, which act as racialized filters.             |
| <b><i>Clarity of expectations</i></b> | Procedural rules are clearly defined but do not address racial disparities.                                                     | Terms like “flexibility” and “best fit” are undefined, leaving space for discretionary bias.                            |
| <b><i>Outcome</i></b>                 | Entrenches advantage for white-majority incumbents in the teaching force.                                                       | Reproduces whiteness by embedding subjective criteria tied to dominant norms.                                           |

Decision-making authority illustrates this continuity. Regulation 274/12 constrained administrator discretion through seniority rules but in practice this entrenched incumbency within a teaching force that was already disproportionately white (Turner, 2015). When the regulation was revoked, PPM 165 shifted power back to principals and administrators, allowing them to rely on subjective criteria such as professionalism and qualities such as communication style. CWS makes clear that these categories function as gatekeeping mechanisms, sustaining whiteness as the unspoken norm in teacher hiring to reconfigure how exclusion in hiring practices operates (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013; Matias & Boucher, 2023).

Data shows that the shift from Regulation 274/12 to PPM 165 has done little to expand access to the teaching profession for racialized educators. Although racialized people make up 26 percent of Ontario's population, they represent only 13 percent of the teaching force (Turner, 2015). In the Peel District School Board, where 84 percent of students are racialized, 67 percent of teachers remain white (Chadha et al., 2020). These disparities indicate that neither procedural regulation nor discretionary memorandum has altered the racial imbalance in the profession. Rather, both have sustained whiteness as the implicit norm that governs entry into the teaching force. This continuity is captured through CWS by showing how claims of neutrality in policy language obscure the reproduction of whiteness as a system of power. Under Regulation 274/12, seniority lists appeared neutral but rewarded incumbency within a workforce already overwhelmingly white, ensuring that new racialized teachers had limited opportunities for entry or advancement. With PPM 165, the emphasis on 'best fit' and 'professionalism' introduced a more discretionary framework that privileges candidates who embody dominant white cultural norms of comportment and communication, further entrenching whiteness as the standard of suitability for teaching. In both cases, the policies reproduce inequities by embedding racialized gatekeeping into procedural rules and evaluative criteria, illustrating how reforms framed as neutral continue to sustain whiteness within Ontario schools (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013; Annamma et al., 2017; Matias & Boucher, 2023).

As such, the progression from Regulation 274/12 to PPM 165 illustrates how policy shifts can alter mechanisms of hiring without addressing underlying inequities. One policy restricted access through seniority, the other through subjective discretion but both avoided explicit attention to race and equity. The absence of accountability measures tied to hiring outcomes allows inequities to persist while the language of fairness and merit obscures their reproduction. As a result, the policies exemplify how education reforms framed as neutral can continue to reinforce the racialized status quo.

### **Discussion: Disrupting Whiteness from Regulation 274/12 to PPM 165**

While school boards across Ontario claim to strive for equity, diversity and inclusion; many fail to consider how this work is influenced by white supremacy. When an institution utilizes the term 'diversity' it conjures up positive images and narratives that mask exclusionary practices. As such, institutional language, as we have seen in the case of Ontario's teacher hiring policies, circumvents authentic and meaningful diversity and social justice work. As indicated, students and staff in publicly funded schools across the province experience lower overall well-being than their white counterparts, due to the continuation of white supremacist and white settler-colonial structures that make schools hostile spaces for many racialized people (Shah, 2021; 2023). To help combat these issues and create a more equitable and diverse school culture across the province of Ontario, former Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Liberal party mandated Regulation 274/12 to curb nepotism in teacher hiring practices within Ontario publicly funded school boards.

The regulation managed the underemployment of a surplus of teachers through the creation of two lists, one for long-term occasional (LTOs) who are occasional, or supply teachers contracted for longer-term assignments, and the other for occasional teachers (OTs) (Hatt et al., 2019). Under the Regulation, all boards were expected to maintain these two lists for OTs and LTOs, with preference given to the latter, based on seniority and higher qualifications (EFTO, 2012; Province of Ontario, 2013). In addition to seniority lists, the number of university acceptances for bachelor

of degrees in education was cut in half, and the programs were extended from one to two years (Hatt et al., 2019). Once the regulation was enacted, Premier Wynne recognized, “there may have been an over-correction in terms of some of the issues that had been brought forward” (Ferguson et al., 2013). While the rhetoric displays a commitment to providing the most experienced teachers with stable employment, as well as a clear pathway to permanent employment in a heavily saturated market, the implementation of the policy was not closely regulated (Turner, 2015). According to a study carried out by Pollock et al, (2014), administrators expressed that the regulation circumvented their autonomy and effectively tied their hands; suggesting that the legislation acted as a deterrent for getting the best teachers in the classroom. Administrators asserted that they were put into a position to hire less qualified teachers. What is omitted from this analysis is the mechanisms through which whiteness upholds constructions of the ‘best’, qualified, or ideal teachers in the classroom. This narrative begs the question of how the administrators are doing the hiring, and the human resources offices of school boards are defining what it means to be most qualified to meet the needs of diverse communities of students.

On October 29, 2020, the Ontario government under Education Minister Stephen Lecce revoked regulation 274/12 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Significant employment demands were sparked by unprecedented transitions to online learning and smaller classes due to physical distancing. The hiring processes specified in Regulation 274/12 were not only perceived as a mechanism for the government to keep boards accountable to diversifying the teacher workforce and posed challenges to fill vacancies in a timely manner during the pandemic (CBC News, 2020; Rushowy, 2019). Upon revoking Regulation 274/12, Minister Lecce noted, "It's about giving school boards more flexibility...and it is about hiring teachers who meet all students' needs and will inspire them to achieve success" (Morgan, 2020, para. 6). While Regulation 274/12 was far from ideal, the Regulation provided for mandated oversight, included a process of recognizing and abiding by seniority, and a process for candidates to have a voice by participating in interviews based on not only their seniority, but also their qualifications.

By March 31, 2021, the Ministry of Education mandated PPM 165, the ‘School Board Teacher Hiring Practices’ legislation, outlining the purpose of the policy as follows:

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide direction to school boards on the development and implementation of fair, consistent, and transparent teacher hiring policies and practices...this memorandum is informed by leading research on pedagogy and best practices in creating a well-prepared, qualified and diverse workforce in the education sector. (PPM 165, 2021)

The PPM centres on five principles, including: qualifications and merit; diversity, equity and human rights; employment mobility; fairness and transparency; and monitoring and evaluation (PPM 165). The document does not specify which purported experts were consulted, nor does it allude to any literature consulted in the formation of the policy. None of the constructs administrators are supposed to use to guide them in the hiring process are operationally defined, which is unusual for policy and program memorandums and regulations in Ontario. There is a lack of oversight over the new policy initiative, with vague information on such monitoring and evaluation, instead placing largely unchecked ownership on school administrators to adhere to the tenets of the PPM, whilst deflecting responsibility to school boards that are merely expected, not mandated to collate transparent and fair policies for teacher hiring. One way we can be certain of a lack of oversight on this process is the new hiring guidelines were announced and formalized as a Policy Program Memorandum (PPM) and not added as a regulation that comprises the Ontario

Education Act. Generally, when legislation is intended to be legally binding in Ontario, it is formally incorporated into the Education Act. Amendments to the Education Act go through a different approval process and are more legally binding, the government can upload the legislation in a way they cannot with a PPM. Legally, A PPM is more of a suggestion than an actual policy. From a legal standpoint, this effectively means school boards can basically hire teachers in whatever way they see fit, with the only legal recourse for those impacted by this situation, and the only legal safeguard for equity and diversity being the Ontario Human Rights Act. This policy change has damning implications for the goal of attaining equity and diversity in hiring practices in Ontario.

Although data on hiring demographics and policy implications is not as extensive in Ontario as it is in other jurisdictions (which is a large part of the problem), the evidence that does exist was not cited by the Ford government in their policy making decisions, although PPM 165 states that it is informed by evidence. The evidence that does exist demonstrates that providing such autonomy to school boards and administrators alike, continues to allow the hiring and promotion of white employees for permanent teaching positions, as well as leadership roles thus perpetuating white settler-colonial structures of education (Abawi, 2021b; Pollock, Wang, and Hauseman, 2014; Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli, 2009; Shah, 2021). Based on the data released by the Ontario Principal's Council Census and the OCT Surveys, the teacher diversity gap, calculated by dividing the percentage of racialized teachers by the province's racialized population, sits at 0.49. Whereas 1.0 would indicate full representation. The gap between racialized administrators and the percentage of the population that is racialized is 0.60 (OPC, 2020; Turner, 2015). It is worthwhile to note that the survey was drawn from the OPC's membership database with a 52 percent response rate-which does not accurately account for the entirety of the province's school administrators. There has not been an updated census on Ontario's principal demographics since 2020.

Further, because most permanent teachers in the province are white, the pool of which administrators are recruited and promoted is also white (Abawi, 2021b), fostering the reproduction of whiteness (Logan, 2018). The dominant white administrators continue to hire and promote those who not only look like them, but also candidates that exude neoliberal notions of leadership and merit (Abawi, 2021b; Rivera, 2012). The implementation of PPM 165 upholds white privilege in teacher hiring; whereas Regulation 274/12 provided for checks and balances on administrative authority; PPM 165 removes such restrictions and largely allows for administrators to hire based on their subjective constructions of 'good teachers', (read: those who will not disrupt the status quo) which is discursively rooted in settler-colonial norms operating at the nexus of whiteness and empire (Eizadirad et al, 2023).

According to Abawi & Eizadirad (2020), social policies are rarely bias-free and are intentionally constructed by dominant groups who perpetuate the status quo. As Abawi (2021) asserts, "Canada is a racially stratified society that privileges whiteness over access to resources," which leads to the disproportionate hiring of white teachers over other races (pp. 81)—inhibiting a racially diverse student population from access to a comparably representative teacher population. A heterogeneous teaching staff provides students with representative leadership, illustrating possibilities of achievement and for school leadership to understand and interact with the lived experiences of students. As cited by Curren and Blokhuis (2011), schools endow students with various possibilities of flourishing through exposure to diverse formative influences. Schools work to offer various perspectives, experiences, and relationships that cannot be offered by parents

who do not hold the capacity to achieve this as singular persons (Curren & Blohkus, 2011). The question remains: if the dominant representation are white educators, how does a diverse student body establish an awareness of the possibilities of flourishing to which they are entitled? Some examples of what this might look like are to involve communities, caregivers and community activists through consultations, as well as including these members on hiring panels. Educational leaders determining what is best for a particular school ecosystem is problematic in itself as it incentivizes a colonial model whereby a group who holds power is positioned to speak on behalf of a community that is not theirs.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

The revocation of Regulation 274/12 and replacement with PPM 165 incorporates progressive rhetoric; nonetheless, as much as inclusive vocabulary is desirable, eliminating systematic inequality in teacher recruiting requires a comprehensive integrative strategy. A critical policy analysis of both policies demonstrates that while Regulation 274/12 entrenched incumbency in a workforce already disproportionately white, PPM 165 reintroduced broad discretionary authority under the language of flexibility and best fit. Both avoided explicit attention to race, illustrating how policy framed as neutral sustains whiteness as the implicit norm. The following recommendations are grounded in these insights, targeting the structural and discursive mechanisms identified through the analysis.

### *Critical Anti-racism Education*

Dedicated attention to the accessibility and consistency of anti-racism education is critical for cultivating a far-reaching paradigm shift to dismantle systematic racism at all structural levels. However, short-term anti-racism interventions such as single training sessions have shown to be ineffective and long-lasting to maintain shifts in attitudes and beliefs about the impacts of systemic racism (Brottman et al., 2020). As such, consistent, tailored training and instruction at all levels will contribute to transforming attitudes and beliefs and reinforce a broad awareness of how systemic racism is embedded in school policies and practices and how this may impact a diverse student population. CPA shows that PPM 165 concentrates hiring authority at the level of administrators, making equity-focused leadership preparation especially urgent. Leadership training should be directly tied to anti-racist frameworks to counter discretionary biases that vague policy language enables.

Beginning with faculty of education programs, shifts in the messaging around who is suited for teacher-education programs must be attended to (Cranston, 2021). Further, the integration of anti-racism education and training should be integrated into professional development courses within the B.Ed. and M.Ed. programs to foster opportunities for educators to confront racial biases and prejudices before gaining experience in classrooms (McKamey, 2020). Leadership preparation and training should be more connected to the unique and individual needs of school-community ecosystems.

In schools, administrators should be expected to indicate their commitments to equity and justice through identifying clear and practical strategies with an associated timeline of integration. To sustain the confidence and capacities of teachers to uphold anti-oppressive pedagogies, educators must have ongoing access to in-school consultation to support the discomfort and challenges educators might face while enacting such practices. Access to dedicated staff such as

an equity, diversity and inclusion team will support the integration and adaptation of confronting racism within schools, which will have a far-reaching impact on the efficacy of associated advocacy work at the individual and systemic levels.

### *Transparency of Policy Adaptations*

In-tandem with ongoing access to education and training, policy changes and expectations must be clearly communicated and understood by school administrators. The CPA analysis shows that Regulation 274/12 relied on procedural clarity while PPM 165 relies on vague language of “flexibility” and “best fit.” Transparency is therefore essential to counter the discretionary bias that such vagueness enables. The community should have some level of access to the hiring practices taking place within their local schools as a form of accountability to the community. Publishing clear reports on the current expectations around hiring practices and the steps taken to uphold these expectations might foster opportunities for dialogue around whether these practices are upheld. One such place for these conversations to take place might be within a community-oriented hiring committee. The 2023 enactment of Bill 98 *Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act* has enabled further centralization of publicly funded education in the province. The Act is amended to add ministerial powers, regulation-making authority, and other provisions respecting provincial educational priorities around student achievement. Further, such regulation-making powers are added governing boards’ participation in the prescribed activities and relating to school board-controlled entities.

### *De-Centralized Hiring Practices*

A consistent challenge throughout previous iterations of Ontario teacher hiring practices occurred due to centralized hiring practices. As this work refers to publicly funded education, diverse parents, advocacy groups, and community members have a say in hiring decisions, as determining which teacher will be a good ‘fit’ for the school cannot simply be based on such notions that are inundated by whiteness. Rather than allotting concentrated power to an administrator to hire, accountability can be maintained by establishing a hiring committee to maintain the equity goals of schools. Hiring panels should comprise community members and parents for a broader view of the best fit teachers for the school community. Clear guidelines should be in place to consider the range of diverse identities and experiences that would best-inform the committee members. This responds directly to the CPA finding that shifting authority from centralized lists (Regulation 274/12) to individual administrators (PPM 165) each created inequities through different mechanisms. A shared governance model can interrupt both incumbency and discretionary bias. As offered by Abawi (2021a), moving forward, it is important for individuals who assume the responsibilities of hiring teachers to sustain and develop through training workshops to inform teachers, administrators, board members, policy members and stakeholders alike of the roots of ongoing systemic racism.

### *Collecting Race-Based Data*

The lack of demographic statistics for the teaching workforce is notable and troubling considering what might occur under the surface of measurable processes and outcomes (Turner, 2015). Without specific statistics to illustrate racial disparities in hiring processes, enacting social and policy-based change will remain difficult due to the inability to gauge the current context. The



lack of demographic data on hiring renders the issue invisible, impeding collaborative solutions to address the underrepresentation of racialized educators. However, this paper primarily focuses on racial diversity, this is not the exclusive determinant of diverse hiring practices. Other forms of crucial diversity within classrooms are related to gender identities, sexual orientation, nationality, SES, religion, dis/ability, ethnocultural backgrounds, age, and languages spoken, to name a limited few. Employers should develop a greater awareness of parties applying to jobs and make applications accessible to as many individuals as possible. Firmly, the concerns of those most impacted by hiring practices should be prioritized when legislation is created and implemented. CPA shows that the absence of such data enables racial evasiveness by allowing inequities to persist unacknowledged. Collecting and publishing race-based data is therefore a necessary mechanism of accountability.

The emphasis on merit undermines structural legacies of racial disparities, which create barriers for new and racialized educators from attaining access to employment. While the new Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, repealed this policy in October 2020, the legacy of seniority and hierarchies within hiring will remain. A singular policy will not be enough to address the teacher diversity gap. Promoting a diverse teaching staff remains crucial to student wellness for the promotion of representative leadership, access to diverse formative influences and the creation of a school culture to promote diversity within the student body. While this policy was implemented to ensure bias-free hiring, it continued to fail racialized and new educators. Moving forward, it is critical to find a balance to ensure equitable hiring practices that center on race, in tandem with intersecting elements of diversity rather than ignoring the influence the social identity has on outcomes of power and privilege. Teaching associations, unions, and leadership organizations such as the Ontario Principals Council should be involved in a concerted effort to diversify the teacher and leadership workforce in Ontario. If the organizations involved in education truly cared about equity and diversity, like many claim to, there is much more they could do beyond government regulations to work towards equity and diversity in Ontario Schools. Looking to the future, it is critical to obtain demographic data on teacher hiring practices to measure the outcomes of Memorandum 165. However, even with a more diverse teaching workforce, the systems and structures to support racialized teachers must be intact to circumvent burnout and attrition rates.

## **Conclusion**

The transition from Regulation 274/12 to PPM 165 demonstrates how Ontario's teacher hiring reforms have shifted procedures without disrupting the racial hierarchies that structure access to the profession. Regulation 274 entrenched incumbency in a predominantly white workforce, while PPM 165 reinstated discretionary judgments under the rhetoric of flexibility and candidates who embody the qualities of best fit for the role. The overrepresentation of white teachers in Ontario is by no means a new phenomenon, as extant literature on the lack of diversity in the province's teacher workforce has been discussed as far back as 2009 with a paper entitled: *Teacher Diversity in Canada: Leaky Pipelines, Bottlenecks, and Glass Ceilings*. The paper suggests that Canada's racialized teaching population has not kept pace with the overall racialized population (Ryan et al, 2009). Indeed, this work highlights the lack of progress made in terms of diversifying the teacher workforce so that educators are representative of the students and communities they serve. Both avoid explicit engagement with systemic racism, thereby sustaining whiteness as the unspoken standard of professionalism. By applying Critical Policy Analysis

alongside Critical Whiteness Studies, this paper shows how policy discourse obscures inequity while reshaping, rather than dismantling, exclusionary structures. Addressing these dynamics requires structural accountability, race-based data collection, and meaningful community participation in hiring, so that the teaching force can more equitably reflect and serve Ontario's diverse student population.

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