



**Parents of
Black Children**



**EARLY
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A Summary of Pertinent Gaps between WCDSB's Stated Policies and the Treatment of the 4-Year Old Black Child and Parents by John Sweeney Catholic Elementary School. This summary is extracted from the Final Investigation Reports of the Events.

Note: While the investigation report has not been made public, this summary aims to support the advocacy engagement of the involved local agencies with the WCDSB.

1. WCDSB Commitment to Inclusion.

The WCDSB commitments include:

- WCDSB Equity, Diversity and Inclusion framework states on their webpage “In our Catholic/Christian tradition, we have a moral imperative to act intentionally to ensure those we serve – staff, students and communities – are treated with respect and dignity. *We work intentionally* to disrupt oppressive systems for the benefit of future generations.”
- The Equity and Inclusion section commits to “educator use of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy that enables students from diverse backgrounds to see themselves reflected in the curriculum and school environment”.

Investigative Report Outcome

Although the WCDSB has information on inclusion on the website, their statements and commitments were not borne out in the treatment of the child and family. In this case, the administrators and educators at John Sweeney:

1. Made negative assumptions such as the child/family not speaking English, which significantly impacted the relationship built between the child and family. Shortly after the child started school, the teacher called to ask the parents if the child spoke English. This highly discriminatory question, based on the parents' perceived foreign accent, informed the school's deficit view of the family and contributed to their not involving parents in decisions regarding their child.
2. Failed to involve the family in decisions regarding their child:
 - Made a decision on the first day of school regarding the child and informed the mother only after the fact
 - Initiated an information-gathering process, completing the form (A1) without the parent's knowledge. The policy states that the parents **MUST** be notified.
 - Initiated a school-level team action plan (A2) without the parent's knowledge. The policy states that parents **MUST** receive a copy of the action plan. This was not followed.



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- Contacted the family after completing the 2 processes of which the parents had not been informed, and required them to sign consent forms
- Used coercion and threats of removing the child from school to force the parents into signing consent forms.
 - Were unwilling to utilize the resources that the mom made available. These included:
 - i. Willingness to be physically available for a few hours daily to support the settling in of the child who had never been separated from home or siblings (largely due to COVID-19) prior to attending JK
 - ii. Request for the school to initiate a voice/video call if the child was distressed so that the mom could help calm him
- Failed to involve the WCDSB equity and inclusion officer whose office is primarily to “eliminate barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups” and to promote diversity and inclusion

2. Educational Support procedures as stated WCDSB Handbook.

The information-gathering process when there are concerns about a child (A1), requires that the educator/teacher:

- Gather information and record concerns about a child
- Develop and provide accommodations to support the child
- Implement those accommodations for a minimum of 6-8 weeks
- Conduct a review after the minimum time has elapsed
- Request an in-school team meeting (A2) if additional support is required.

Violation of the A1 process in this case:

- The A1 identified behavioural concerns but failed to list any accommodations to support the child
- The A1 did not indicate any focus on understanding the child to support the development of child-centred accommodations
- The A1 was implemented for 2 days, after which an A2 was put in place • In the column for documenting the child’s progress, the few comments regarding the child were all negative including phrases like “immature” and “he is a big boy” • The family was not invited, involved or notified

The A2 and A3 processes

- The purpose of the A2 is to discuss the effectiveness of strategies in place and identify other supports

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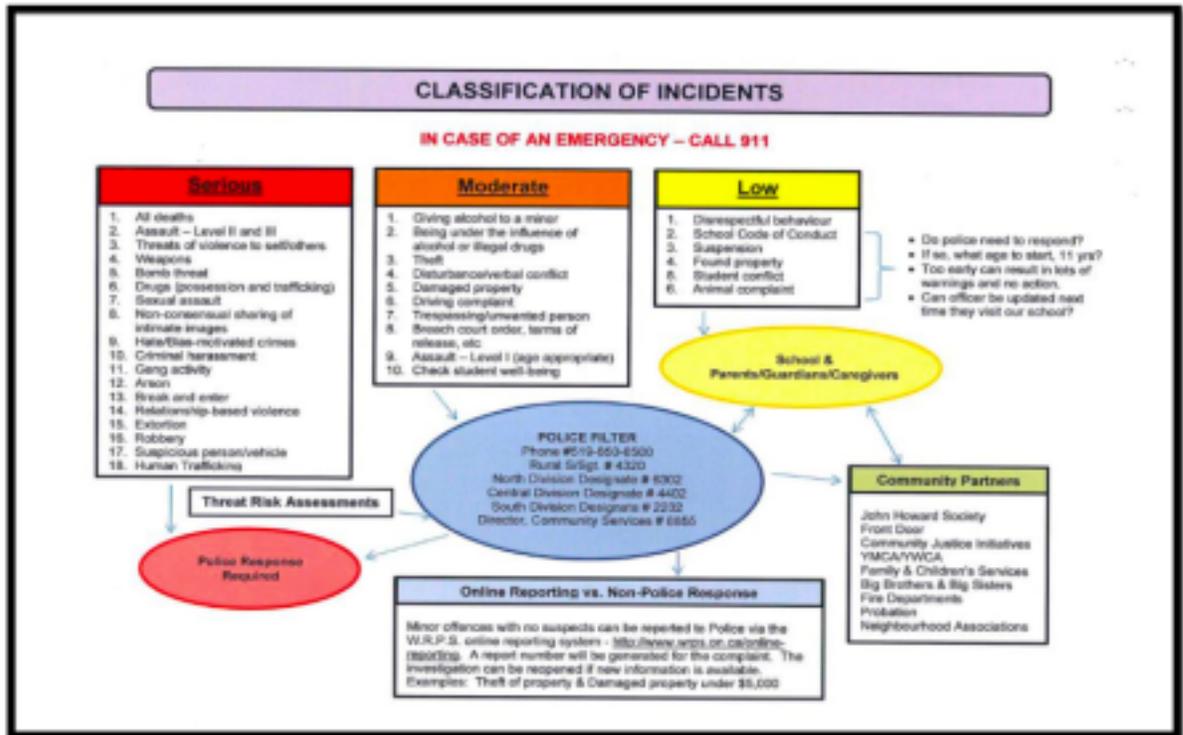
- Determine the need to move to A3 which is a referral to a collaborative team, with parent consultation an intrinsic part of the collaborative team services

Violation of the A2 and A3 processes

- The parents were not involved or notified at any step along the process
- Parents were communicated with ONLY after decisions had been made and ONLY with a requirement that they sign a consent
- The A1 had no accommodations which effectiveness could have assessed and therefore there were no child's needs informed foundations for developing additional supports
- The focus of all the strategies developed was to manage the presenting behaviours rather than identify environmental factors that initiated, sustained and escalated the behaviours of concern

3. Involving the police

- The WCDSB Police Protocol chart below sets out the serious situations in which police should be called. The protocol indicates that calling the police may be too early, when it involves including students under 12 years of age and those with special education needs.



- In interviews, all school-based persons involved with the child on the day of calling the police, identified that there was nothing unusual about the child's behaviour on that day



- The decision to call the police was made based on the inability to reach the parents within 30 minutes of the first call
- The caller reported concerns about the child's health but made the call for police rather than an ambulance

4. WCDSB Guidelines on the Use of Exclusion

Specific procedures are laid out in the WCDSB guidelines. These include a time limit, a plan for return, provision of information related to parents' rights of appeal to the Board of Trustees and guidance to access those rights, portfolio of curriculum guides to support the ongoing education of the child during the period of exclusion.

Violation of the exclusion guidelines:

- The parents were verbally informed of the exclusion
- The mom's request for online participation was denied
- The mom's request for a plan for return was denied
- The mom's request for partial day re-introduction was denied

- The exclusion letter was provided several days after the child had been excluded •
- The exclusion letter did not provide information regarding the parent’s rights to appeal the decision or guidelines on how to do that
- The Superintendent failed to return the parent’s call of appeal to their office

A significant point to note: Exclusion was used to circumvent the Ministry of Education’s ban on the suspension of students grades k-3. The ban was put in place in 2020 to address overwhelming evidence of the disproportionate application of suspension to racialized, especially Black students.

Additional overall violations of protocol, procedure and equity

1. Nurturing environment: staff reported that the student has a good relationship with one educator and would become stressed in their absence. In contradiction to meeting the child’s needs, the child was frequently removed and placed under the supervision of several and various strangers
2. Disregard the parent’s partnership in developing strategies to support their child 3. Disregard for the parents’ concerns given that the behaviours reported at school were non-existent at home, which fact was further documented in a visit by staff to the home 4. Complete disregard for the parents as employed professionals, in the school’s requirement that they respond within 15 minutes of a call from the school

Direct Extracts from the report (pg. 33)

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“Systemic racism is a pervasive power relation that is reinforced every day through lack of knowledge or ignorance – sometimes ‘wilful ignorance – and through policies and practices that may appear to be neutral, but have the effect of sustaining and fortifying the status quo” (Cranston, 2020).¹

“Anti-Black racism is about racism specific to those of African descent, but it is also reflected in the failure of those from the dominant culture to acknowledge the realities of Black life, and the ways in which systemic discrimination shapes it”.

A Report of the Human Rights Tribunal on Ontario States:

“Black children may be perceived to be older, bigger, stronger, faster or more of a threat than they really are simply because they are Black. Canadian research has shown that Black children engaging in exactly the same behaviour as White children are perceived to be older, more muscular, more aggressive than they actually are with the result that it is perceived that more force is needed to control a Black child than a White child”.²

¹ Cranston, J. (2020). Systemic Racism in Education. Available at: shorturl.at/jyEP7.

² *JKB v. Peel (Police Services Board)* 2020 HRTO 172. Available at: <https://canlii.ca/t/jc9x2>.