

PEEL DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Go Beyond Words:

Human Rights at the

Peel District School Board



**HUMAN
RIGHTS**

GO BEYOND WORDS

Go Beyond Words: Human Rights at the Peel District School Board

The Right Thing To Do

Most of us realize that to insult someone's race, or touch them inappropriately, is a form of harassment. But what if you mimic a colleague's accent? Make an obscene gesture? Rate a student's attractiveness on a scale of 1 to 10? Out someone as gay? Tell a student to only speak English at school, because this is Canada? Or, display a cartoon in the office that makes fun of a religious group?

All of these actions are considered harassment under the Peel District School Board's human rights policy. This policy—number 51—was recently updated and strengthened. This brochure shares what the policy is about, and how it applies to each of us as students, staff or community members.

Human Rights Policy #51 is based on the Ontario Human Rights Code. Why does the board have such a comprehensive human rights policy? Not just because it's the law, but because it's simply the right thing to do.

Everyone has a right to be treated with respect and dignity, and to teach, learn and work in an environment that's free from discrimination and harassment. Our commitment to human rights isn't just the words of a policy – it must be demonstrated by our actions every day.

Together, we share the duty to prevent and eliminate discrimination and harassment in the Peel District School Board. We want to help you know your rights and fulfil responsibilities under the board's policy. By learning more about human rights, we can go beyond words, and help achieve our goal to create equity for students and staff.

The human rights policy applies to more than staff—on and off site

Of course, the policy applies to anyone who works for the Peel District School Board, including trustees. It also relates to those who attend school and use or repair school facilities including:

- students
- parents
- volunteers
- permit-holders
- visitors
- contractors

The human rights policy covers behaviour not only at our schools and offices, but also at any board or school-related function - field trips, conferences, training sessions, work done off site, social functions, etc. This applies whether the contact is face-to-face, by phone, fax, e-mail, Internet or Intranet, or by any other means of communication.

The grounds for discrimination are clear and defined

Based on the Ontario Human Rights Code, discrimination can be any action or rule, including harassing comments or conduct that affect someone in a negative way, based on their:

- Race
- Colour
- Ancestry
- Place or origin
- Ethnic origin
- Citizenship
- Creed (religion)
- Sex (gender)
- Sexual orientation
- Age (in employment, 18 - 65)
- Marital
- Same-sex partnership status
- Family status (parent and child relationship)
- Disability (actual or perceived)
- Record of offences (pardoned conviction, un-revoked under Criminal Records Act employment only)

It does not matter if someone doesn't mean to discriminate. Harassment is behaviour that is known, or ought to be known, to be unwelcome and offensive. What's important isn't the intent but the result of the action - a feeling of discrimination or harassment - of being treated differently.

There is a shared responsibility to protect human rights

Although the board has the overall responsibility for human rights, everyone is personally responsible for his or her behaviour. What should you do?

- Know your rights—understand what protecting human rights is all about
- Fulfill your responsibilities—with our rights come responsibilities to others
- Learn more—seek out the information that helps you protect human rights.

These are the key actions for each of us to go beyond words and foster safe and equitable places to learn and work.

There are consequences for those who discriminate

The Peel District School Board takes discrimination seriously. People whose conduct is found to be discriminatory face serious consequences -- regardless of their status, seniority or tenure, or position.

- For people working for the board -- discipline, including dismissal.
- For trustees-- discipline, including recommendations for removal.
- Students-- may be suspended or expelled.
- Others (visitors, volunteers, permit-holders, contractors, etc.)-- Limited or denied access to board premises; permits or contracts revoked or not renewed.

Follow these steps if you experience discrimination or harassment

Learn more—if you believe you have experienced discrimination, help and support are available. A detailed, formal process is in place to address allegations of discrimination and harassment. Check www.gobeyondwords.org for the human rights policy. You will also be able to see, privately and confidentially, other resources on complaint procedures, accommodating staff with disabilities, and discrimination-related topics. Copies of the policies and procedures are also available at all schools and sites from the principal or manager.

Know who to call—you can also call the board's human rights officer at 905-890-1010, ext. 2440, for questions or help with the human rights policy or complaints procedure. These calls are confidential.

Remember that some actions may be criminal—Please report these matters to the police and the appropriate manager, supervisor or administrator. Examples of activities that need police attention include display of hate-based graffiti or pornography, sexual assault or the threat of it, gay bashing, or transmitting/storing pornography or other electronic communications that incite hatred and violence.

If discrimination or harassment occurs, take action

- To start, seek the advice of the appropriate resource person. For staff, parents and visitors, that could include a superintendent, supervisor, principal, manager, the human rights officer, or some other person in authority. For students, the right people to go to include a teacher or other staff member, the principal, or the equity/race relations officer at 905-890-1010 ext. 2625. Don't forget about the resources at www.gobeyondwords.org .
- Employees involved in a complaint can take advantage of counselling and other support services available through our Employee Assistance Program --905-819-9923.
- If you lodge a complaint, whether verbally or in writing, and the conduct seems to meet the definition of discrimination or harassment, a thorough investigation has to follow. This includes interviews with witnesses and the collection of evidence.
- Once the complaint is made, the person alleged to be the harasser must be notified of the allegations. He or she will be given the name of the complainant, has the right to answer the allegations and provide names of witnesses.
- Another person--such as a friend, lawyer or union representative--may represent the complainant and the alleged harasser during the process.
- If the complaint is dismissed, there are other options, such as appealing to the superintendent of schools. You can also seek information from the Ontario Human Rights Commission (416-326-9511 or 1-800-387-9080), even when you are going through the steps of the board's human rights policy.
- If you make or participate in an investigation you have the right to do so without fear of reprisal. If you experience a reprisal, such as intimidation, please contact the person conducting the investigation immediately

You have the right to be treated with respect

We expect that anyone associated with the board, in any role and at any site, will behave appropriately and courteously at all times. It's all part of the effort to ensure that the at the Peel District School Board, everyone receives a fundamental right - to be treated with respect.

Lots of behaviour that doesn't fall within the definitions of discrimination or harassment can still be considered disrespectful or inappropriate - for instance, slamming doors, swearing at teachers, publicly berating the people who work for you or bullying.

If you experience such behaviour, help is available. Immediately seek the advice of the appropriate resource person. For staff, parents and visitors, that could include a superintendent, supervisor, principal, manager, the human rights officer, or some other person in authority. For students, the right people to go to include a teacher or other staff member, the principal, or the equity/race relations officer at 905-890-1010 ext. 2625. Don't forget about the resources at www.gobeyondwords.org.

This brochure is just the starting point

As an organization, and as individuals, we must take action to protect human rights. This brochure shares some of the basics about our human rights policy, and your rights and responsibilities.

But it will not be our policy until we each find ways to go beyond words. Visit www.gobeyondwords.org to learn your rights and find out how to fulfill your responsibilities under the policy. Then, act on what you have learned. Look for ways to foster equity at your site—and return to www.gobeyondwords.org to share your suggestions.

Together, we will turn a policy into practice by going beyond words with human rights.

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This brochure is available in alternate formats at www.gobeyondwords.org.
Questions? Call Communication Services at (905) 890-1010, ext. 2809
or visit www.peelschools.org.

“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization”

Mahatma Gandhi



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