



# Ontario Institute for Education Leadership

## *Ontario Leaders Collaborating for Student Achievement, Equity and Well-being*

### STRENGTHENING EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AWARENESS

#### All Religions Welcomed

A new student to the school has enrolled in the grade 11 a World Religions course. The teacher of this course is also new to the school, having been hired the previous year. This student is Muslim and has requested to leave class to pray. The teacher, not being familiar with such a practice, refused to dismiss the student. The student ignored the teacher, stood up and started to leave the classroom. As she went by, another student grabbed her hijab and told her to stop. It ended up being a shoving match, with the student running out of the class in tears. She immediately went to find her brother, who stormed into the class and told the teacher he was a racist. The teacher told them both to go to the office and that they should both transfer to another school if they didn't like his rules. They both left the school and went home.

The Principal receives an urgent call from the students' parent, who indicates her children have never been so mistreated. She also wonders why her daughter was not allowed to go to pray, when she was assured there was a place for Muslim students to pray when the intake took place.

We live in challenging times. In our diverse society, human rights challenges we face in schools and districts continue to increase in their complexity. The need to bring a solid grounding in our understanding and application of human rights principles is both urgent and critical.

We recognize that all people:

- Have human rights that cannot be infringed upon or dismissed
- Have individual dignity and worth
- Are entitled to equal rights and opportunities without discrimination
- Need a climate of understanding and mutual respect, so that everyone feels a part of society and can contribute fully to it.

Discrimination happens when:

- a person experiences negative treatment or impact, intentional or not, based on a Code ground. The grounds are: citizenship, race, place of origin, ethnic origin, colour, ancestry, disability, age, creed, sex/pregnancy, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, receipt of public assistance (in housing) and record of offences (in employment).
- Can be direct and obvious or subtle and hidden, but harmful just the same

#### REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. What steps will you take as a principal or a supervisory officer to address these concerns?

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2. What are key questions in your role as principal or supervisory officer that you will consider in your investigation?

- When investigating, who is involved? What is their role? What conversations need to take place?

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- What are the goals of the investigation?

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- What process would result in a positive outcome?

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- What are the implications and next steps as a school? As a system?

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- What ideas, values and beliefs led to the discrimination?

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- How do stereotypes and prejudice apply and how do they relate to discrimination?

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- What is the effect of discrimination on the individual and others who are involved?

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3. What are key considerations in the scenario that has implications for human rights and equity?

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4. What are the effects of discrimination on individuals and systems?

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5. What are promising practices that school and system leaders enact to eliminate discrimination in schools and districts?

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6. What else can we do as individuals to apply a human rights approach to education?

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