



Ontario Institute for Education Leadership

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

STRENGTHENING EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AWARENESS

Orange Shirt Day-National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Background

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is recognized each year on September 30th. To show support for Canada's residential school survivors and to bring attention to other injustices facing Indigenous children and youth today, school staff and students are encouraged to wear orange t-shirts on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Wearing orange t-shirts was inspired by residential school survivor Phyllis Webstad's story. On her first day of school, she excitedly wore her brand-new orange shirt, only to have it taken away and replaced with an institutional uniform. The orange shirt represents her loss of identity and culture at the residential school she attended. Phyllis states: "The colour orange has always reminded me of how my feelings didn't matter, how no one cared and how I felt like I was worth nothing."

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, school districts and their schools are committed to bringing awareness to the residential school experience and gain the participation of the greater community in delivering the message that Every Child Matters.

Situation

Historically, Orange Shirt Day is a tremendous success in schools across the system. At one school, however, September 30th was a designated picture day at the school. Therefore, school staff requested that Orange Shirt Day be celebrated on September 29th instead of on the 30th. As it turned out the Terry Fox Run was also scheduled on September 29th.

A community member reached out to the principal expressing concerns about these changes arguing that to disregard the relevance of September 30th by changing when Orange Shirt Day would be held was an example of systemic racism. The community member said that this was a significant oversight and that Catholic schools in particular have to do better, as Residential schools were mainly run by Catholic orders.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. Explain how this situation can be interpreted as an example of systemic racism?

2. How should the conflicting dates have been resolved?

3. What communication and learning needs to occur at the school? For principal? Staff? Students? Families? and The School Community?

4. How can Catholic school and system leaders, provide better support for building awareness and understanding of our Indigenous students and communities including doing more than devoting one day to it?
