# Equity in Edmonton Schools
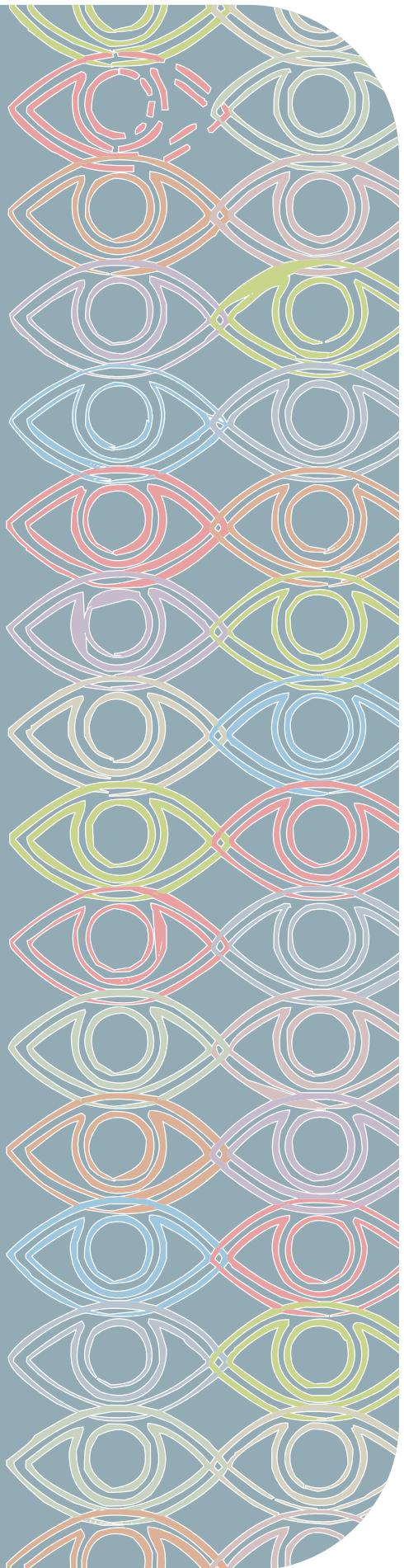
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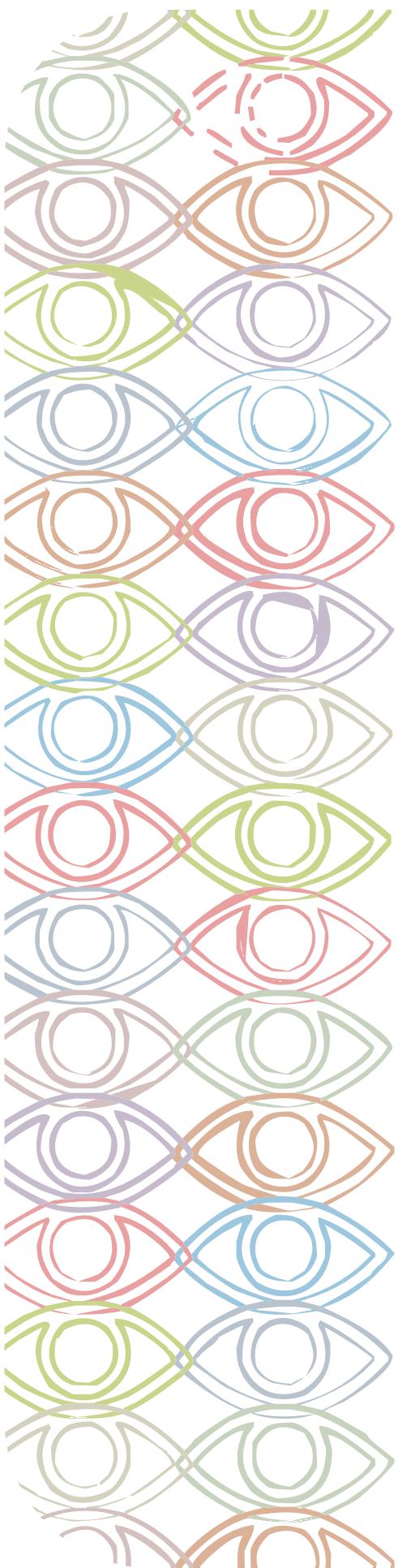
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# LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

## Literature Review Summary

Legislation at the federal and provincial level, and policies at the school board level establish the right of students to receive education that is equitable whatever their racial background, and that a safe and caring school environment be available to all. Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic School Boards have developed policies for respectful and safe learning environments.

One fifth of Edmonton's population is either visible minority (15%) or Aboriginal (5%) (Statistics Canada, 2001; Edmonton Community Services, 2000).  Visible minorities who are new immigrants are more highly educated than the average Canadian; Aboriginal people are, on average, less educated. Both groups face discrimination in all facets of their lives. Access to employment commensurate with their education and experience is substantially lower than for the average Canadian (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2000; Jackson, 2001; Lee, 2000). Looming labour shortages in the province (Alberta Human Resources, 2000) will necessitate the hiring of all qualified workers at a time when cuts to educational funding have decreased the ability of schools to meet the needs of minority students (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2002).

The term "race" is now used as a socially constructed term and not a biological concept. Racism can be expressed overtly or subtly and operate on several levels: systemic, cultural, and individual (Banton, 1998; Henry, et.al., 1995) and these are manifest in all aspects of life.

Minority students experience racism in the education system through the attitudes and behaviours of other students and adults and via systemic inequalities (Codjoe, 1999; Ng, et.al., 1995). These students experience emotional pain, leading to varied behaviours, many of which are detrimental to the recipient and to others. Teachers and all students must develop skills for appropriate reaction to racism. It is common for student bystanders and school authorities to do nothing when racism occurs, implicitly condoning it (Kelly, 1998; Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations, 2001) and leaving the recipient to react alone.

Many recipients of racism develop low self-esteem (Coreblum & Annis, 1993:10), have difficulty achieving (Calliste, et.al., 1995; Khalema, 2001), are streamed into non-academic courses (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992:11, Henry, et.al., 1995), and are more likely to drop out of school (Dei, et.al., 1997, Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1988). For English as a second language students, these problems are exacerbated by a shortage of adequate support.

Teachers frequently have lower expectations of minority students.  This is partially explained by cultural differences in student behaviour that are not well understood by teachers (Codjoe, 1999; Henry, 1992). Curriculum tends to be eurocentric and fails to acknowledge the history of racial oppression. A shortage of minority teachers, and therefore of role models for minority students, sends an implicit message that they can not succeed. Disadvantages to minority students often occur "without any particular malice" (Dei, 2000).

Anti-racist education strives to identify and change educational practices, policies, and procedures that enable racist attitudes and behaviours to continue – by providing appropriate tools to educators (Thomas, 1984). Equity is a broader term encompassing all other sources of disadvantage. Interventionist strategies for empowering minority students include the development of inclusive curricula, cross-cultural and anti-racist training for teachers, and recruitment and retention of minority teachers (Calliste, et.al., 1995, Khalema, 2001, Peres, 1998).

Equitable education must be part of the central mandate of school boards to ensure they are never "cut" (Endicott & Mukhuerjee, 1992). Current barriers to success must be acknowledged and gradually eliminated. Appropriate in-service and pre-service education of teachers, with resources and support is crucial. Inclusive curriculum resources that acknowledge past and contemporary racism and include diverse people and culturally diverse perspectives must be available.

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