

EQUITY IN EDMONTON SCHOOLS

RESEARCH
REPORT

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PREPARED BY
THE NORTHERN ALBERTA
ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS
(NAARR)

RESEARCH TEAM
CHARLENE HAY
ERNEST KHALEMA
RANDOLPH HALUZA-DELAY
JAY VAN BAVEL
BEQUIE LAKE
JASMINE BAJWA

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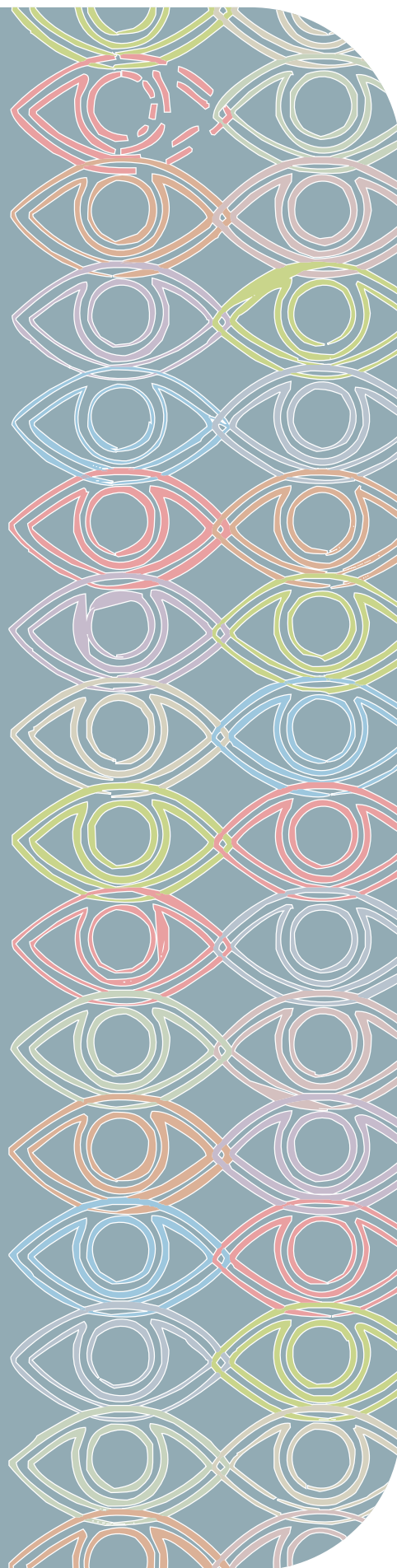
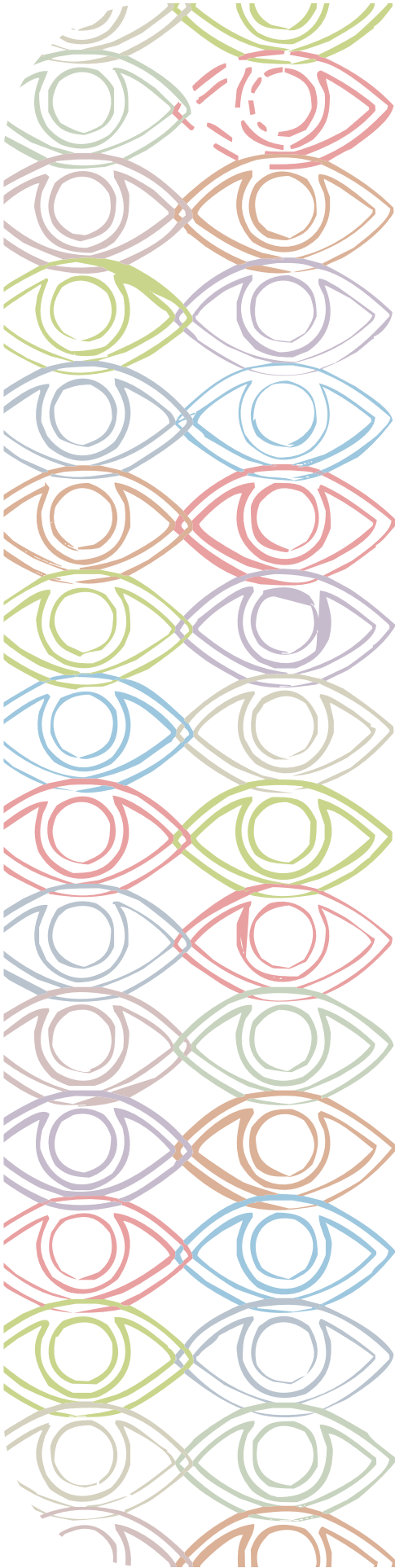


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**SECTION I:
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations

NAARR believes the following changes need to be made at the system level in each Edmonton school district and that this should be done through policy change and through adequate resources being applied to ensure practical change.

EDMONTON SCHOOL DISTRICTS	
1	Provide consistent, system-wide training of all school personnel on cultural awareness and racism.
2	Recognize the powerful nature of subtle racism and promote inclusion of all minority and aboriginal students in all activities and all subjects. Develop proactive ways of having students communicate with others who are different and of enhancing self-esteem for all students.
3	Work toward creation of an environment where parents and teachers of all groups are welcome and respected. Parent concerns with inequity must be received openly.
4	Reports of overt racism must be dealt with immediately and effectively - action must include support to the recipient and consequences to the aggressor. Establish clear system-wide procedures.
5	Safety of visible minority and Aboriginal youth must be a priority.
6	Teachers need to be alert for typical symptoms of a student who is being racially harassed: withdrawal, change in achievement, change in attendance.
7	Examine the equity of hiring policies across racial groups, and include recruiting and retention of minority and Aboriginal teaching staff.
8	Develop curriculum resources to assist teachers with cultural sensitivity and positive race relations.
9	Keep statistics on educational experiences of Aboriginal and visible minority students. Ask them to self-identify with racial and ethnic background. Track achievement, special labels assigned, movement between schools, disciplinary measures, and drop-out rates. Include questions on any system-wide surveys on observed or experienced racism.
10	Encourage more comprehensive assessment of racism across a wider range of Edmonton Public Schools and other school districts.
11	Develop comprehensive policy to direct procedures in system identified in this report.

Increased support:

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS	
1	Implement system-wide programs to enhance academic success, especially when students fall behind.
2	Place particular emphasis on support for transition from elementary to junior high and from junior high to high school.

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

1	Increase support to ESL students in classes other than English.
2	Reexamine policy of age-cohort placement for ESL students.
3	Consider transition program for new ESL students to include learning about Canadian schools and mainstream culture.
4	All teachers must understand cognitive benefits of maintaining mother tongue.

REFUGEE STUDENTS

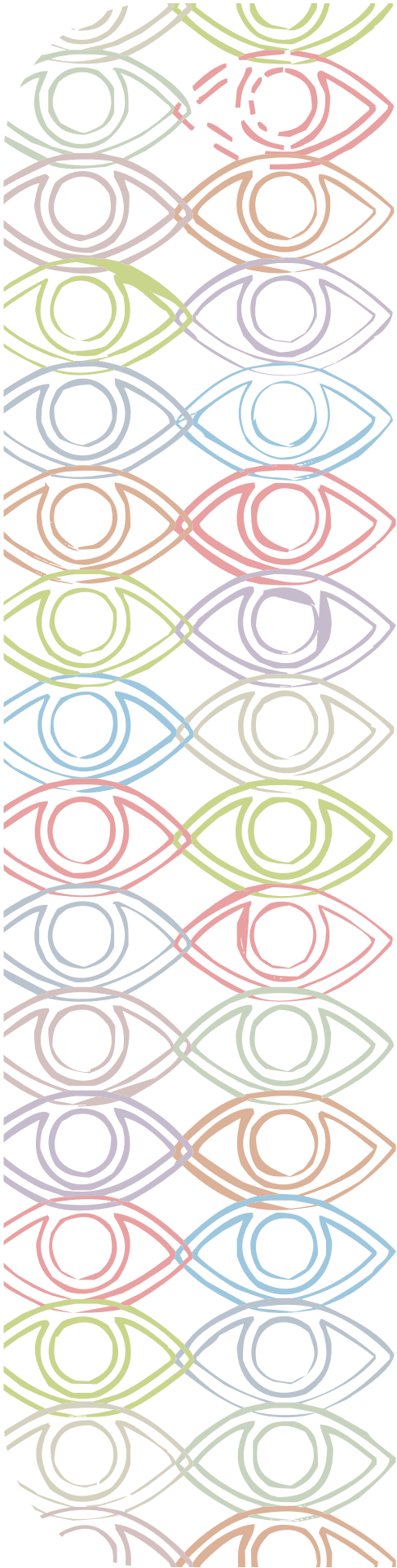
Refugee students need resources to assist them with social needs and cognitive skills when they have not had access to adequate schooling in their home country.

RESOURCES

Allocate resources to ensure equity and **enhance communication** with all minority and Aboriginal students and their families. Provision of cultural and community liaison workers is one effective means, independent of school administration to ensure openness. Adequate and culturally appropriate counseling is another.

ALBERTA LEARNING

1	Relax age cap of 20 for ESL students.
2	All curricula and curriculum resources need to be continually revised to ensure they are inclusive of all cultures and belief systems. English and Language Arts must include compulsory reading of literature set in non-mainstream cultures. Social studies must include accurate and comprehensive study of the Aboriginal culture and history. Social studies must include the study of countries of Africa and other countries that are not economically powerful.



SECTION 2:
**EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY**

Introduction

This summary will triangulate qualitative and quantitative data gathered in this research project. Before doing so, it is imperative to recognize its strengths and limitations. This is exploratory research, given that comprehensive research on racial equity has not been done in the city of Edmonton. The ethnographic research of Jennifer Kelly and Ernest Khalema and community consultations carried out by NAARR and other community groups have identified issues but there is not a significant body of research on which to build.

The findings derived from focus groups identify a number of areas of concern about racial equity in the schools of three school systems: Edmonton Public, Edmonton Catholic, and the Francophone school district (Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord). The 133 participants in these groups will not represent the whole parent population, as the parents who did not have concerns would not likely attend these meetings. It must be noted that this is a large number of individuals to include in a qualitative study, these people were keen to have their issues heard, and committed to spending time explaining their concerns. One strength of this type of data is that issues can be explored in depth, with detail, and other parents in the group can add their own experiences to any topic. Parents have knowledge about their children's experiences in school over their entire school career; students were asked questions only about their current academic year. Parents have more understanding of subtle and systemic inequities; students were not asked questions that would solicit this kind of information and would understand the broader issues less. Parents would be more willing to offer criticisms of schools; students would be more hesitant to do so.

Findings from 148 Edmonton Public student surveys do point out some areas of concern. Because all students in grade 10 social studies were invited to participate, the sample is more representative of the entire school population. Large differences in response rates from different academic levels and from different schools will affect the results. There are also limitations due to the unlikelihood of students including more subtle kinds of discrimination in questions asking about their experiences. They tended to speak of situations that were blatant and overt – other research and the qualitative data from this project describe the powerful effect of subtle racism. Students also did not comment on systemic forms of discrimination.

It is also important to note that the qualitative data, as well as recent Census Canada data indicate that both black and Aboriginal people experience more intense racism than do members of other visible minorities and this study involved only 6 black (4%) and 2 Aboriginal (1%) students.

School Culture

There was evidence from both data sets that some individual schools had created positive environments that were accepting of minority and Aboriginal students and that dealt with racial incidents effectively. Surveys showed considerable differences among schools, in areas such as respect for cultural differences, frequency of racial incidents, sense of safety, discrimination because of cultural difference and language proficiency, and comfort level in speaking out against racism.

Individual Racism

Student to Student

Subtle forms of racism were identified in student surveys when minority students felt less safe than mainstream students; and when minority students found other students did not respect cultural differences. Focus group data and survey comments indicated that minority students were frequently excluded from working groups inside the classroom and from social groups outside the classroom. In high schools, this is manifest in the “hallways” that are informally segregated by racial group.

Overt racism between students was identified in student surveys, with racial jokes being fairly common, verbal harassment less common, and racially motivated violence the least frequent. The fact that more than 1/3 of students observed this type of violence monthly indicates the extent of the problem. Emotions are running very high when violence erupts and indicate many issues are under the surface. Focus groups identified verbal harassment like name-calling to be common. This data set described how verbal harassment progressed to violence when it was not dealt with adequately by school authorities. There were a few references to gang violence in both the focus groups and the surveys.

Parents and Teachers as Recipients

Focus groups described exclusion of minority teachers and parents, but surveys were not given to parents or teachers.

Systemic Racism

Shortage of Role Models

Focus groups noted there were few minority teachers in Edmonton schools. Participants felt there must be inequities in hiring practices. The identity of the minority or Aboriginal student is affected with the subtle message that they will not achieve professional positions. Inclusion of non-mainstream teachers would enhance cultural awareness and understanding of racism among other staff. Surveys did not request feedback on this issue from students.

Culture and Teaching

This was highly significant for parents, whose experience was that teachers did not understand non-mainstream cultures and that this was central to creating an inequitable learning environment. The Aboriginal experience carries the heavy shadow of residential schools that taught them their culture had no merit and was inferior. Mainstream values of assertiveness, competition, and academic achievement conflict with many other cultures that value quiet, listening, cooperation, and building self-esteem. Parents believed that educating teachers about cultural difference was crucial, as did students in open-ended questions. Responses in this category were not generated through the closed questions on the student surveys.

Curriculum and Culture

Parents saw the whole curriculum presented within the mainstream context. When their cultures were discussed, they were separated from everyday instruction and dealt with superficially – differences in dress, diet, and dance. The impression is that other cultures are less developed and that poverty is rampant. Aboriginal people felt their history is inadequate and in many cases, inaccurate. Curriculum has its basis in Christianity; other religions are also not recognized or understood adequately. One remedy is to include literature set in other cultures.

Other Systemic Issues

Immigrant students who are learning English as a second language are disadvantaged by being placed with their age cohorts without adequate support. They also have inadequate support to help them understand a vastly different school system. Aboriginal students also require support and do not receive much of it.

Aboriginal parents were extremely angry that their children were almost universally labeled with a problem, when most of their children were normal, just frequently behind due to unsuccessful teaching and cultural difference. Parents believed schools were most interested in the extra funding that came after a label was assigned.

Inadequate support, excessive labeling, and lower expectations led to high streaming of immigrant and Aboriginal students into non-academic courses.

Inequity and the Student

Emotional response to all types of racial inequity are sadness, anger, and fear.

Focus group data indicated that students experiencing racial inequity were less able to achieve academically and developed low self-esteem. This could evolve into a reluctance to attend school and a tendency to drop out. In severe cases, students became depressed and parents felt there was a higher risk of suicide in students exposed to racism. These responses reflect behaviours of youth who tend to channel their emotions inward. The survey revealed that visible minority students felt less safe than other students.

Outward-directed emotions manifested in socially inappropriate behaviours and occasionally in violence. Focus groups detailed student experience of intense and overt racism that resulted in the recipient responding with violence when no support was available.

Inequity and the Parent

Parents in focus groups knew racial inequity to be a serious issue that required them to be constantly monitoring their child's experience in school. Barriers to their doing so included not understanding the local school system, working several jobs and not having the time, intimidation due to cultural differences, and overcoming a low respect for themselves from the schools. There was also an element of fear that bringing concerns forward to a school would result in the situation becoming worse. Parents would occasionally move their child to another school hoping to find a better situation

When Schools are Confronted

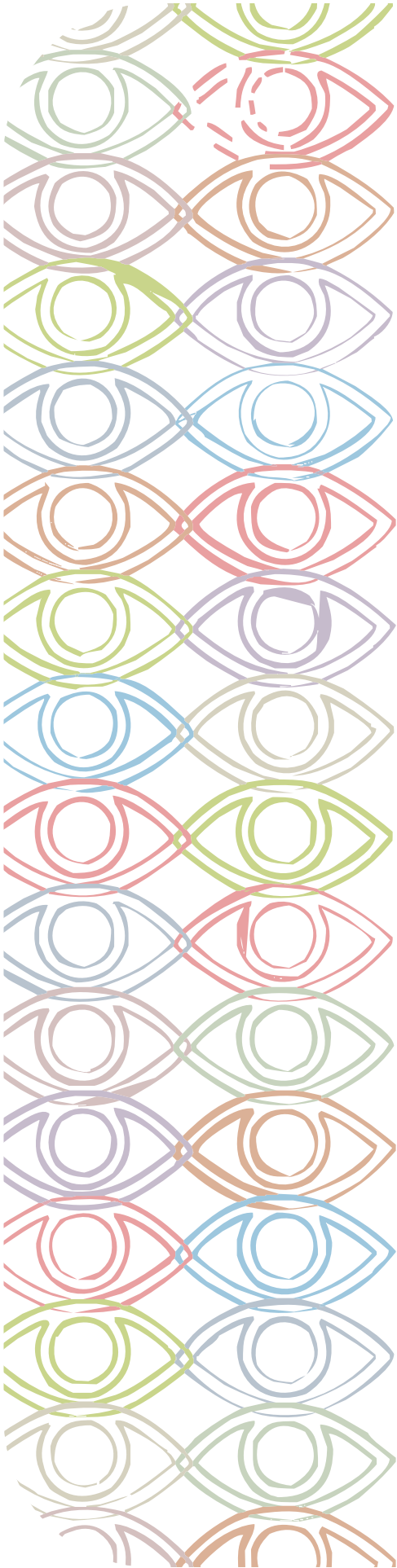
The data from student surveys showed that two-thirds of students felt teachers dealt with bullying and racism adequately. Focus group data outlined problems in this area. Parents described a few schools that had positive and equitable environments. Similarly, surveys highlighted significant differences between schools. When other schools were approached with a racial problem, participants described school response as inappropriate, ineffective, too late, or no reaction at all. Parents found schools unable to recognize or understand racism – either when it was subtle or when it became overt. A frequent school reaction was defensiveness and denial that any problem existed. Part of the reason for inappropriate reaction was lack of knowledge about cultural difference and racism, said the parents.

Focus groups saw schools approaching issues of racism by dealing with the symptoms and not the root causes. With inward focused behaviours like withdrawal and low achievement there was rarely an attempt to find a cause. And when behaviours were directed outward, as with violence, it was only the violence that was dealt with. Parents noted that schools took decisive action when the recipient of racism was a white student.

Parents noted that schools were mostly unable to receive criticism on racial inequity. Lack of understanding, defensiveness, and denial were reasons for this, thought parents, but there also seemed to be a fear of becoming a school that is known for having racial problems.

At the System Level

When issues were taken to the district senior administration level, there was denial that racism was a problem. Black and Aboriginal parents were skeptical that system-wide changes were possible, others agreed change would take a long time.



SECTION 3:
**SUMMARY OF
FINDINGS**

EQUITY IN EDMONTON SCHOOLS: ACROSS RACIAL GROUPS	
CANADIAN RESEARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Education is not equitable across racial groups
FOCUS GROUPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 12 groups ■ 132 participants (mainly parents, some youth & other adults)
SURVEYS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Edmonton Public Schools ■ Grade 10 Social Studies ■ 148 participants

FINDINGS	
1	SCHOOLS ARE OVERWORKED AND UNDERFUNDED.
2	<p>SCHOOL CULTURE</p> <p>SOME SCHOOLS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Accepted minority & Aboriginal students. ■ Dealt with racial incidents effectively.
3	<p>INDIVIDUAL RACISM</p> <p>A) STUDENT TO STUDENT (SUBTLE):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Exclusion of minorities and Aboriginals ■ Cultural differences not respected ■ Minorities felt less safe <p>B) STUDENT TO STUDENT (OVERT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Racial jokes common ■ Verbal harassment occasional ■ Racially motivated violence occurs
4	<p>MINORITY PARENTS AND TEACHERS</p> <p>ALSO FELT EXCLUDED</p>
5	<p>SYSTEMIC INEQUITY</p> <p>A) SHORTAGE OF MINORITY AND ABORIGINAL TEACHERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hiring practices are perceived to be inequitable ■ Implies minorities can't achieve <p>B) CULTURE AND TEACHING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Teachers lack cultural knowledge

5 (Cont.)	<p>C) CURRICULUM AND CULTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Curriculum is mainstream ■ Minority cultures separated and superficial (dress, diet & dance) <p>D) OTHER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ESL & Aboriginal – inadequate support ■ Near universal labeling of Aboriginal students ■ Tendency to stream to non-academic ■ Inequitable discipline across racial groups
6	<p>INEQUITY AND THE STUDENT</p> <p>EMOTIONS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sadness ■ Anger ■ Fear <p>INWARD-DIRECTED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Low achievement ■ Low self-esteem ■ Reluctant to attend school ■ Tend to drop out <p>OUTWARD-DIRECTED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Inappropriate behaviour ■ Violence
7	<p>INEQUITY AND THE PARENT</p> <p>PARENTS HAD TO CONSTANTLY MONITOR CHILD'S EXPERIENCE</p> <p>BARRIERS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ don't understand our system ■ work several jobs ■ intimidated – cultural difference ■ overcome low respect <p>FEAR – MAKE SITUATION WORSE</p> <p>MOVE CHILD TO ANOTHER SCHOOL</p>

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WHEN SCHOOLS ARE CONFRONTED

QUALITATIVE RESULTS:

- No reaction
- Ineffective
- Inappropriate
- Too late
- Denial of racism, defensiveness
- Deal with symptom, not root cause
- Remove the student (recipient)

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS:

- 2/3 of students were confident teachers would deal with racism effectively



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