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Black Parent Council hosts info night following release of UGDSB human rights review

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Amid the release of a human rights review of the Upper Grand District School Board's (UGDSB) approach to addressing racism in its schools, a group of parents has formed an advocacy group to campaign for change. The Black Parent Council, formed from black parents and allies from across the UGDSB, sought to directly push the school board to address what they see as systemic failures to address racism in schools across its district.

The group hosted an information session on April 18 featuring human rights lawyer Patrick Case to break down the lengthy human rights review for parents and community members.

The meeting engaged in an open discussion focused on clarifying the review process, its findings, and what potential actions could follow.

Patti Thomas, an Orangeville mother and member of the Black Student Council, said that the event was very helpful in getting a better understanding of what was being discussed. She said that Case broke it all down in an easy-to-digest fashion.

?Honestly, for myself, I understood it a little bit, but not deep into the context,? she said. ?Case explained everything, then it made it more understandable for people like me that didn't understand the longer documents.?

After learning more about the review, Thomas said she agrees with the findings, the shortcomings, and the next steps to improve. However, she remains skeptical about how these changes will be implemented going forward, given how long they have been campaigning for change.

This fight is personal for her, as she said that her own daughter has experienced racism at a local school ran by the UGDSB. She wants to see concrete plans for change moving forward.

?What are your next steps in moving forward as the board?? Thomas said. ?What are you going to do to work with the findings that were provided to you and make a change? You can say we've worked on it, we've dealt with it, but I want to see how you've dealt with it. What are the findings after incidents are addressed? Do the families feel like they've been supported??

These sentiments were echoed by Black Parent Council President Nia James, who said that the information session was necessary because the review had not been widely enough shared, leaving many families unaware of its contents or significance.

?In our opinion, it was released too quietly,? she said. ?There was coverage from a couple of reporters, but as for the knowledge being spread across the board in a way that would be more informative and have people realize it was out there, it was kind of like a self-discovery for us. It wasn't like ?Hey, the review's done, this is what it found', you had to go through several links on their website to be able to get to the actual review to read it.?

The meeting also served as a space for community members to discuss next steps and the importance of maintaining public attention on the issue. A central theme throughout the evening was accountability, with participants emphasizing that the review's recommendations will require sustained pressure to ensure they are implemented in practice.

?I think that it's going to be a matter of external pressure as well as internal pressure, because I think there's many people in the education system and in Upper Grand who do want to see these changes happen,? James said. ?Having the board commit and follow

through will be the next step, that means dates, deadlines and clear plans.?

The independent review itself examined policies, procedures, and lived experiences across the board, drawing on thousands of survey responses, written submissions, and interviews with students, parents, and staff.

The UGDSB has acknowledged and accepted the review in a statement released on their website.

?We asked for this review because we wanted an honest assessment of how well we are supporting human rights across our schools and workplaces,? the statement read. ?The reviewers gathered information from students, staff, families, and community members through surveys, interviews, and written submissions. More than 4,000 students and hundreds of staff and community members participated.?

The review acknowledges that the board has taken steps toward improving equity, including establishing a human rights office and developing new policies, though it also identifies ongoing systemic issues.

Findings related to anti-Black racism point to persistent inequities in student outcomes and experiences.

The review also outlines broader concerns that contribute to these inequities, including inconsistent handling of discrimination complaints, lack of clear and accessible reporting processes, and uneven implementation of policies across schools.

The review recommends stronger accountability measures, clearer complaint pathways, expanded data tracking on identity-based outcomes, and mandatory training focused on anti-Black racism and human rights practices.

The board has acknowledged shortcomings and systemic problems that persist in the school system and has promised to implement changes to address them.

?We accept the results of this report,? the UGDSB statement read. ?We are committed to taking action on recommendations included in the report, and to continuing the work already underway. This includes strengthening reporting and response processes, improving learning and support for staff, creating new advisory committees, improving communication and transparency, [and] providing regular public updates on our progress.?

The statement continued, ?We know this work will take time. We are committed to listening, learning, and improving. We will share regular updates so our community can see how this work is progressing.?

Going forward, the UGDSB has posted a tracking page on its website for visitors to monitor progress toward addressing the recommendations and concerns from the review. It is a step towards greater transparency that parents have been asking for.

For attendees at the Orangeville information session and the Black Parent Council, however, it is just the beginning of the changes they want to see. The focus now shifts to ensuring that those recommendations are enacted and lead to measurable change within the school system.

To view the review, the UGDSB response and their tracking page, go to ugdsb.ca/page/human-rights-review and ugdsb.ca/page/human-rights-tracker.