



CCNCTO June 2023 Delegations at YRDSB

Spoken delegations by Jessie Tang and Virginia Pang (invited as a representative of ACENet; written content not shared with CCNCTO)

Written delegations by Xinlin Wu, Kennes Lin, and Kate Shao (see below)

Name: Jessie Tang

Date: June 6, 2023

Speaking on behalf of the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO)

To the Board, I want to thank you for listening to what we have to say in this meeting. My name is Jessie Tang and I am currently working as the executive director at the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (short for CCNCTO). Over the past few years, CCNCTO has been working with Chinese Canadian students, parents, guardians, and community members to advocate for justice. Today, we're speaking to you alongside and on behalf of some of these folks that we work with. Most of them are immigrants, community members with precarious immigration status, and working class families.

As CCNCTO has worked with Chinese Canadians in the Greater Toronto Area since 1980 to advocate for equity, social justice, inclusive civic participation, and respect for diversity. You may recognize our name and some of our work, including our Fight COVID Racism reporting platform that we co-developed during the pandemic in response to growing anti-Asian racism. In addition to our COVID reporting platform, we have published various community research reports highlighting anti-Asian racism in Canada and systemic barriers facing Asian Canadians. The reports has been cited by all levels of government, academics, and school boards to advocate for issues relating to equity, diversity, and inclusion and also used by other community organizations and local and national media. Our work is centered around our community members and aims to visibilize the invisible nature of anti-Asian racism.

For the past three years, our organization has been working with students, parents, education staff, and community members to create a more equitable education system. Our efforts to fight for equity in education include building the leadership capacity of youth and parents, providing accessible information sessions and resources about accessing education opportunities to folks, and strengthening our partnerships with stakeholders such as community organizations and school boards. Addressing anti-Asian racism has been identified as a top priority in this process. This is why it's necessary for us to have our voices heard, especially this Asian Heritage Month. While the York Region District School Board is celebrating Asian Heritage Month, our community members are demanding more than just 'celebration'. We cannot highlight Asian folks for this month, and this month only, without acknowledging and also working to combat barriers and inequities that they face. For the past few years, our Asian community members have experienced disproportionate amounts of discrimination, violence, racism, and hate. This hate has not only impacted East and Southeast Asian identifying folks across the country and in

our schools, but has also increasingly impacted South Asian folks in the past few years. In fact, our organization has been collecting the data. This data is essential in visualizing systemic racism in Canada and documenting *our* stories, which are so often ignored, dismissed, invisibilized, and disappeared. In our work with community members, we can see that students in our schools are targets of anti-Asian discrimination, violence, racism, and hate. In fact, in 2021 we documented a 286% increase (from 2020 statistics) in anti-Asian racism reports from children and youth under 18, with many incidents being reported in schools.

Education plays a significant role in the lives of children and youth. For the past few years, our community members have been asking what's being done to keep our students, staff, parents, and families safe? Our youth spend the majority of their day at school, but schools are not always safe spaces for our students. Anti-Asian sentiment and racism exist systemically within our schools and through everyday interactions that students and their parents, guardians, caregivers, and families have with their peers, teachers, and other school staff.

As we transition into this recovery period that we're in now, where we're finding our new normal, we *continue* to ask - what has been done to ensure that Asian students, parents, staff, and families are safe? This includes addressing 1) how is the YRDSB holding folks (students, teachers, etc) accountable for anti-Asian racism? **and** 2) how is the YRDSB being proactive when it comes to addressing and dismantling anti-Asian racism?

Today, as I speak and as others have and will be speaking and many more have also submitted written delegations for your consideration, we ask that you pay attention to the issues facing our community members, make space to hear our concerns and solutions, and work with us to dismantle anti-Asian racism. The number of folks who have chosen to speak up and/or write in is significant, given that for many of our community members it's extremely difficult to open up and share our stories. We are often belittled or invalidated when we share our experiences with anti-Asian racism and many of us experience trauma entering spaces such as these, because of how inaccessible and hostile meetings and community consultations can be. As I share my story, I hope trustees can think about all of those who *can't* or *won't* share their stories because of the barriers they face in meetings, such as this one, and because of other compounding and negative experiences they have had with seeking accountability.

Although we have spoken to folks at the YRDSB numerous times and have been promised action, we have yet to see it. Unfortunately, a lot of discussion has happened but this has not ended with concrete action. While we were in contact with various trustees, superintendents, and senior administrators throughout the years, we have continued to see the issue of anti-Asian racism being put on the backburner for folks at the YRDSB.

From our work with Chinese youth, parents, guardians, and grandparents, we've heard numerous stories of persistent bullying, discrimination, harassment, abuse, etc in schools. While



some have reported these issues, many have felt disempowered by the lack of action taken in schools to address their issues. And when time and time again they see a lack of accountability, these folks begin to lose trust and faith in the systems in place at schools. In addition to a lack of accountability, often folks' experiences of anti-Asian racism are swept under the rug and dismissed as 'microaggressions' (without regard for their macro consequences). Too often our community members are gaslit into believing that their issues and inequities facing them are singular experiences, or inevitable. Instead of working to address inequities facing them, our community members are told to create changes in their life to mitigate instances of anti-Asian racism. For example, several of the students in our network have chosen to switch schools as a way to deal with anti-Asian racism they've experienced. Others have opted to use English names, rather than their Chinese names, to avoid mispronunciations and name calling.

As an immigrant from Taiwan myself, I have been engaging in community organizing at different capacities, including as a worker, tenant, community legal worker, and as a community organizer. I have heard countless stories about how racism and anti-Asian racism have impacted our community, with individual stories telling a collective reality that our Asian community members are valued only as cheap labour, as model immigrants, and as someone who needs to fight for access and belonging in every space. All the numbers and statistics we read in the reports and on the news are just a fraction of how anti-Asian racism has impacted our community. When being left out of the picture is your daily reality, harm compounds and the results are us internalizing racism, practicing self-blame, passing trauma to the next generation, and increasing confusion of our own language, culture and identity.

These folks are the students, parents, guardians, and grandparents in your school district. Because of how they are impacted by systemic racism in other aspects of their life, when you ask things like 'why didn't you report this incident?' or make folks jump through hoops to address accessibility barriers, like contacting multiple administrators to receive necessary translation or interpretation services, you are contributing to and piling onto the many inequities that they already face. You are making folks feel like it is *their* individual fault and responsibility to overcome systemic barriers and as such you are working to disempower our community members.

So we must ask the YRDSB, at what point will you stand up against anti-Asian racism? How many folks need to be harmed before action is demanded? Last year in May, CCNCTO sent joint collective letters signed by 13 organizations and individuals requesting that YRDSB put forward a motion to address anti-Asian racism. It was signed by multiple stakeholders, such as the Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, Hongfook Mental Health Association, the Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice, National Association of Japanese Canadians, along with academics including Professor Izumi Sakamoto, Professor Lin Fang, and Dr. Mary Reid from the University of Toronto. In addition to East Asian groups, other community organizations serving Asian Canadians, such as Council of Agencies Serving South Asians and



Tamil Canadian Centre for Civic Action, Anakbayan Toronto, have also signed onto our letter to demand change from the YRDSB. While a year has passed, there have been no concrete items, resources, or supports identified and provided by YRDSB.

YRDSB continues to point at their anti-Asian racism report, which has *yet* to be released, which did not include many community organizations in the writing process, and which we believe failed to meet a threshold to be considered as engaging in adequate community consultation, given that 2 students from YRDSB participated in online focus groups. You also speak about your anti-hate and anti-discrimination framework, which we want to ensure can be specialized to address anti-Asian racism in ways that create relevant and genuine change for students, parents, staff, and community members on the ground. **As such**, we urge the YRDSB to prioritize community-first solutions that recognize our lived experience and expertise! How much more data does the YRDSB need to collect in order to prove that anti-Asian racism *does exist* and impact our community? You don't *need* any more data, the data is in the stories you've heard today and that you've heard time and time again!

With a significant population of Chinese and Asian students and staff at the York Region District School Board, we strongly urge the Board of Trustees to take a *proactive* approach to responding to, dismantling, and supporting folks experiencing anti-Asian racism. We are calling for better supports for Asian students' well-being and an increase in YRDSB capacities to address anti-Asian racism by working to hire staff, including in senior administrative levels, who are representative of the community; investing in professional development and workshops for educators focused on anti-racism and anti-Asian racism; and initiating changes to the curriculum so that it is representative of the diversity in YRDSB classrooms. We are hoping that these calls can be the first step to dismantling anti-Asian racism and supporting our Asian students, parents, families, and staff at the YRDSB. And we are looking forward to continuing to work together on these calls.



Written delegations by Xinlin Wu, Kennes Lin, and Kate Shao

Name: Xinlin Wu

Date: June 6, 2023

School: Bill Hogarth Secondary School

While the York Region District School Board is celebrating Asian Heritage Month, our community members are demanding more than just 'celebration'. We are asking for folks to pay attention to the issues facing our community members and to make space to hear our concerns and solutions.

As a Chinese student who immigrated to Canada in grade 4, I have experienced a lack of language support in the school system. I stepped foot in this country with my family and we were by no means fluent in English. At age 9, when all the other kids were having fun playing sports or video games after school, I had to bitterly translate all the letters sent home from my school, word by word, using google translate (Google Translate always got things wrong when it came to a big chunk of text). Just think about how exhausting that would have been for a 9 year-old. Countless times I wanted to cry, frustrated from typing into Google Translate. That, however, was actually the easy part. At least I had Google translate.

In school, things were much more difficult. I was put into an ESL program, which stood for English as a Second Language, and I thought great, now I could be supported in English! Right? Right, but that wasn't enough. I learned to read children's books. Not that learning to read children's books was a bad thing to do while learning English, not at all, but it didn't allow me to understand the questions on Math tests, and I was still very confused about what was happening in Science and History. Not only so, but everything that had to do with school was in English. The most desperate feeling had to be requiring help from a teacher, but not knowing how to ask for it. I felt like I was a burden when I had to ask for help and it made me stand out even more. I also didn't even know where to start when asking for help. Despite ESL having contributed greatly to my journey of learning English, the simple truth was that ESL didn't give me the immediate help I so desperately needed.

My story is by no means unique. Even to this day, the same problem still exists for my international student peers. They are struggling in courses not because the content is too difficult, but because they don't understand the questions. They don't always know how to navigate through the school system since they don't understand what certain things mean. I was lucky to have done the ESL program at age 9, because high school isn't so forgiving when it comes to marks, and most of the international students I know are afraid if they'll even be able to get into *any* university, nevermind the university/program they have always dreamt of, solely because the ESL program didn't give them the help they needed. They are falling through the cracks of an education system that was never built (or intended to) truly support them... I think



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about this often and about how *lucky* I was to come when I did, but I also think that it shouldn't be about *luck* or timing for when we come to Canada. Why are we setting these students up to fail??

With a significant population of Chinese, East Asian and Asian students and staff at the York Region District School Board, we strongly urge the Board of Trustees to consider creating better supports for Asian students' well-being and increasing YRDSB capacities to address anti-Asian racism, including through creating additional resources for international/foreign newcomer students, such as translating services for letters sent home and in different courses, additional mentorship programs for newcomer and international students that will help them succeed in school, and dedicated counselling services to help them understand and navigate the school system. I am hoping that these changes can be the first step to dismantling anti-Asian racism and supporting our Asian students, parents, families, and staff at the YRDSB.



Name: Kennes Lin

My name is Kennes Lin, Anti-Asian Racism Advisor for the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter, co-authoring four anti-Asian racism community reports with recommendations linked below. I am also a Registered Social Worker and psychotherapist. I, alongside other community advocates, mobilized nationally to document interpersonal incidents of anti-Asian racism during the COVID-19 pandemic. This tool, *Fight COVID Racism*, is still receiving self- and witness-reports across Canada. It collects and acknowledges all the experiences of anti-Asian racism that would not have met the threshold of evidence to be considered a hate crime.

Anti-Asian racism operates uniquely, creating specific phenomena like the model minority myth, the perpetual foreigner, and the significant number of occurrences of microaggressions. It creates significant doubt in the victim, formulated from the repeated dismissal of the “off” feeling experienced as justifiable mistreatment. Coupled with the stereotype that Asians are well-to-do, it is no wonder anti-Asian racism is seen as unimportant and ignored.

YRDSB is one of the largest and leading school boards in Canada, responsible for providing education to also the largest Asian Canadian population in Canada. The recommendations to school board administration, school trustees, and teachers in the report [Another Year: Anti-Asian Racism Across Canada Two Years Into The COVID-19 Pandemic](#) that shows students continue to be targets of racism, discrimination, hate, and violence, documenting a 286% increase in anti-Asian racism reports from children and youth under 18 in 2021, have not been addressed.

Specifically, I highlight two calls that have not yet been addressed by the YRDSB:

- #1: “All school boards to disaggregate and strengthen curricular content on past discriminatory government policies and actions, recognizing Indigenous, Black and Asian history and struggles in Canada with key events and specific historical discrimination of Asian Canadian communities should be disaggregated as standalone content” ([CCNCTO and Project 1907, 2022, p. 19](#)).
- #3: “The inclusion of anti-Asian racism as a form of racism in board-wide strategies and action plans on student well-being, equity, inclusion and diversity, effective instruction, and ethical leadership” ([CCNCTO and Project 1907, 2022, p. 19](#)).

When students and families see staffing representative of them, they are more engaged in their learning. Asian educators and administrators have anecdotally told me they “have not even done anything” yet students and families have therefore spoken up and thanked them for their presence. Without addressing the above two calls, Asian students and families continue to be excluded from the foundation of belonging to the school.



Similarly, it is extremely intimidating for students and parents to open up and share their stories, fearing again the helpless dismissal and also the intimidating nature of institutional processes like community consultations - with procedural formalities and English language barriers. I remind trustees to consider those who *can't* or *won't* share their stories because of the barriers they face in meetings, such as this one, and because of other compounding and negative experiences they have had with seeking accountability.

With a significant population of Chinese, East Asian and Asian students and staff at the YRDSB, I strongly urge the Board of Trustees to consider creating better supports for Asian students' well-being and increasing YRDSB capacities to address anti-Asian racism, including through hiring and training initiatives. We are hoping that this can be the first step to dismantling anti-Asian racism and supporting our Asian students, parents, families, and staff at the YRDSB.

Sincerely and in solidarity,

Kennes Lin, MSW, RSW
Anti-Asian Racism Advisor, CCNCTO

Read our community reports:

- [Another Year: Anti-Asian Racism Across Canada Two Years Into The COVID-19 Pandemic](#) showing students continue to be targets of racism, discrimination, hate, and violence, documenting a 286% increase in anti-Asian racism reports from children and youth under 18 in 2021.
- [A Year of Racist Attacks: Anti-Asian Racism Across Canada One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) documenting the upsurge of anti-Asian racist incidents the first year of the pandemic
- [2020 in Hindsight: Intergenerational conversations on Anti-Asian Racism during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) documenting qualitatively the realities beyond the numbers

Name: Kate Shao
To the YRDSB:

I am writing with respect to the Learning, Equity and Well-Being Standing Committee that is scheduled for May 16, 2023. I am a community member, labour lawyer, and part of the Asian diaspora. I have been actively involved in advocacy efforts against anti-Asian racism, including through my work as a former Director of the Chinese Canadian National Council (Toronto Chapter) (“CCNCTO”) Board throughout the years of the pandemic.

My experience with anti-Asian racism is personal and professional. I have been a victim of and bystander to anti-Asian racism and know firsthand the devastating impact of these encounters when left unaddressed. Acts of othering, from blatant name calling to subtle microaggressions, shape the core of one’s identity, which is the most vulnerable and pliable during the school-age years.

As a union-side labour lawyer, I have also seen what racism can do to a workplace. Bullying, aggression, and prejudice can create a toxic workplace, leaving lifelong impacts on workers. Employers have legal obligations to maintain safe and harassment-free workplaces under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. They also have obligations under the *Human Rights Code* to foster discrimination-free environments. These obligations also extend to the classroom.

There is no question that anti-Asian racism exists – in classrooms, on the playground, and on the streets. Anti-Asian racism is ubiquitous. While it has always been there, it became hyper prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the first year of the pandemic, CCNCTO documented over 1150 incidents of racist attacks on its [Fight COVID Racism](#) reporting platform. That figure continued to grow as the pandemic progressed, disproportionately affecting youth. In the report, [Another Year: Anti-Asian Racism Across Canada Two Years Into The COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (the “Report”), CCNCTO found a 286% increase in anti-Asian racism reports from school aged children under 18.

As home to one of the largest Asian Canadian populations in the country, YRDSB holds a special responsibility to address anti-Asian racism. Specific attention must be paid to dismantling anti-Asian racism. The Report cites two calls to action that YRDSB has failed to meet:

- #1: “All school boards to disaggregate and strengthen curricular content on past discriminatory government policies and actions, recognizing Indigenous, Black and Asian history and struggles in Canada with key events and specific historical discrimination of Asian Canadian communities should be disaggregated as standalone content” ([CCNCTO and Project 1907, 2022, p. 19](#)).



- #3: “The inclusion of anti-Asian racism as a form of racism in board-wide strategies and action plans on student well-being, equity, inclusion and diversity, effective instruction, and ethical leadership” ([CCNCTO and Project 1907, 2022, p. 19](#)).

Anti-Asian racism is unique and nuanced. It manifests through internalized and externalized stereotypes, such as the model minority myth and the perpetual foreigner archetype and is espoused in numerous forms of microaggressions. These stereotypes lead to a refusal to see anti-Asian racism as serious or worthy of attention. Coupled with barriers within Asian Canadian communities to draw attention to these issues, such as language barriers or being unfamiliar with one’s rights or the YRDSB’s processes, these issues too often go ignored.

As a result, I call on you to act – on the behalf of the Asian Canadian student population and for the generations to come.

Sincerely,

Kate Shao, JD

Board of Directors, CCNCTO (2018-2021)

CCNCTO’s community reports on anti-Asian racism are below:

- [A Year of Racist Attacks: Anti-Asian Racism Across Canada One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) documenting the first year of anti-Asian racism during the first year of the pandemic.
- [Another Year: Anti-Asian Racism Across Canada Two Years Into The COVID-19 Pandemic](#) documenting the continued racist attacks during the second year of the pandemic, including a 286% increase in incidents targeted at youth under 18.
- [2020 in Hindsight: Intergenerational conversations on Anti-Asian Racism during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) documenting the personal stories behind the numbers.