



CCNCTO October 2024 Delegations at TDSB

Spoken delegations by Kedi Zhao, Eleanor Yang, Elaine Yu, and Yuze Situ

Written delegation by Patricia Quan (invited as a representative of Safe Harbour)

Name: Kedi Zhao

Date: October 1, 2024

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

Good afternoon, everyone. I am Dr. Kedi Zhao. As a board member of the Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO), I am here today to represent CCNCTO to share our work on anti-Asian racism and call for more actions on antiracism initiatives in TDSB.

As a non-profit organization, CCNCTO has been promoting social justice and equity for Chinese communities since the day it was founded. CCNCTO has been calling for the TDSB to condemn anti-Asian racism with a strategy for the past couple of years and has been working alongside community members, specifically students, parents, caregivers, and staff, to build their capacity to condemn anti-Asian racism and call for change. Facing unprecedented anti-Asian racism arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, CCNCTO had mobilized Chinese communities and organized rallies to raise the public's awareness of anti-Asian racism. CCNCTO has also created different initiatives such as the Chinese Youth Capacity Building program to empower Chinese youth to lead advocacy and promote social justice, as many Chinese youth are often marginalized from leadership and advocacy opportunities. Aligning with my personal and professional goals, I joined CCNCTO as the board member and aim to promote the well-being of Chinese communities in Canada through my expertise.

As a former international student from China who had migrated across different provinces (e.g., Quebec, Ontario) in Canada, I have lived experiences of encountering racism both at the interpersonal and systemic levels. Deeply concerned about anti-Asian racism in schools, I have been thinking about how research can help amplify Asian students' voices and promote their well-being in schools. Working with other former and current international students, I participated in the "Safe Harbor" project, a community-based study that focuses on K-12 international students' struggles within their homestays. Cultural misunderstanding, racism, and lack of intervention on the staff, school, and systemic level have emerged frequently from students' sharing.

Therefore, we urge TDSB to approve this motion to take more concrete actions to address anti-Asian racism in schools. Specifically, we call for consideration of international student wellbeing and paid community inclusion. International student wellbeing has often been dismissed, but is integral to this strategy, as just supporting domestic students creates systemic cracks that further harm international students. Inclusion of organizations and social workers in a future anti-Asian racism strategy is necessary, as it is evident that the TDSB does not always have the same reach, capacity, or lived experience in community that organizations, such as



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CCNCTO, and other working professionals do. We are hoping that this motion can be the first step to dismantling anti-Asian racism and supporting our Asian students, parents, families, and staff at TDSB.



Name: Eleanor Yang

Good afternoon everyone, my name is Eleanor Yang. I am here today as a community member and organizer who works with TDSB youth and families.

To preface what I'll share, it's important to note that for the past few years folks, including CCNCTO, have called for TDSB to raise an anti-Asian racism motion. From my work with Chinese youth, parents, and community members, it's evident that many folks are discouraged from asking for support or engaging in education reform, including supporting motions such as this one, as they are often ignored, belittled, mocked, and assumed as inferior and less intellectual whenever they engage with their schools. A student shared with me that "in addition to feeling like I do not belong in school spaces, other TDSB processes are also inaccessible, which only works to continue excluding folks like my parents from participation in our schools."

Numerous parents that I have connected with have lamented about how they are often spoken down to and belittled while engaging in their children's schools. Asian students have also shared negative impacts that systemic racism in education has had on their personal life. As their parents are effectively excluded from their school life, students are left to fend for themselves without a significant arm of support being that of their families.

While numerous folks have reported these instances of racism, systemic change is yet to happen. A lack of response reinforces the idea that anti-Asian racism at TDSB is acceptable, that the belonging, safety, and support of Asian-identifying students, parents, and guardians is not a priority.

And so, I'm here speaking today to ensure that the Board considers the following in the passing of this anti-Asian racism motion:

- Where the motion calls for the establishment of focus groups to make recommendations, it's imperative that the Board consider **accessibility, community involvement, and payment**
 - I remind trustees to consider those who *can't* or *won't* share their stories because of barriers and/or negative experiences seeking accountability.
 - I remind the Board to consider the importance of language accessibility, as translators and interpreters are **necessary** to ensure that community members can be better engaged. These need to be planned for and not an afterthought; we can't expect students to translate for their parents, because if that's the case we're Othering and placing a burden on students *yet* again.
 - Lastly, I urge the Board to include paid opportunities for community organizations and representatives in their focus group callout. Many organizations, including CCNCTO, are able to connect to community members who are otherwise marginalized by schools.



- Where the motion calls for additional professional learning about anti-Asian racism, it's necessary that learning is **mandatory** and rooted in **student, parent, staff, and community** experiences
 - Learning about anti-Asian racism in theoretical ways, through numbers and data, is disconnected from the material ways in which racism is experienced on individual and systemic levels. The only way to create change, accountability, and support is to include folks in the construction of these professional learning opportunities.
- Lastly, where the motion notes the need for an anti-Asian racism strategy, we urge the Board to consider
 - How community organizations can fit into this strategy to amplify the impact of work being done
 - And how curriculum change can improve public education about diverse experiences of Asian diasporic communities

I hope that when voting to pass this motion, the Board can really consider these recommendations shared so that we can move forward to taking the first step to dismantling anti-Asian racism together



Name: Elaine Yu

Thanks for having me share my story at this meeting. My name is Elaine; in the past more than 13 years, I've walked many impacts of anti-Asian racism as a past international student, an educator and once a homestay parent. It's the most heartbreaking when the students I taught shared with me multiple times being told to get off the bus during COVID-19, racial slurs in school's washrooms and social isolation experienced during recess periods simply because they are international students from different parts of Asia. Many of these resulted in them leaving TDSB and their neighbourhood.

I'm fully aware that TDSB is looking to provide a respectful and culturally safe learning environment for all students. But, most funding and strategies combating racism do NOT include international students' experiences of xenophobia and the mistreatment they receive being called "educational tourists." While the TDSB has a significant amount of international students, many of these students fall through the cracks due to their temporary and precarious immigration statuses. Students often had to rely on overly priced third-party agencies to access safe accommodation, health care, set up bank accounts, cell phone plans, as well as course planning for university applications. Although many of these services were linguistically available to international students and their caregivers, these spaces often became a place of exploitation, to which TDSB denies any responsibility. And this is due to the inability of the current system to provide what they need. As a result, racialized international students do not stand on a level playing field. Even though there are many services and programs, they are not accessible to them because of their immigration status; despite this fact, there are no alternative services and programs promoted by the TDSB to support these students. TDSB has a critical role in recognizing their unique needs, which might differ from domestic students. For example, many students' parents are abroad and live with homestay families; how could TDSB ensure students are physically safe and ready for school? Is TDSB equipping these students with the skills and necessary support to live independently or with families they've never met? And when abuse happens, and exploitation happens, are there harm reduction and counselling services provided to them that are accessible? Based on my experience as an international student and working with them, I witnessed how they created support systems and networks so they could blend in and integrate. These are always inspiring, but often through many trials and errors, and sometimes risks that can endanger their livelihood, status and healthy development. However, TDSB is part of the eco-system of international education in Canada and follows the Canadian International Education Strategy; it is morally irresponsible for TDSB to accept (and rely on the funding of) international students without adequate support. We have seen the rise of anti-Asian racism and xenophobia, particularly targeted at international students, in the past several months, and issues like this begin at the elementary and high school levels.

While TDSB is discussing an anti-Asian racism motion today, the Board must include international students, organizations, and representatives working with these students in focus



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groups to understand better issues impacting international students and recommendations proposed to address anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. Many of these actions have been pointed out by CCNCTO, including conducting meaningful and linguistically accessible community consultations, etc. (See Dismantling Anti-Asian racism in the TDSB and YRDSB campaign).

Thanks for listening. **As someone who's had both ends of the experience—as an international student, as someone who has supported international students, and now as an educator—I call on you to act and work with communities like CCNCTO to support racialized international students.**



Name: Yuze Situ

Hello, my name is Yuze Situ. I want to begin by recognizing my privilege as a second-generation Chinese immigrant. The struggles of my first-generation parents have paved the way for the opportunities I have received in education as a current third year social work student. For me, speaking English fluently without an accent has meant that I can easily gather information for myself. But this isn't the case for everyone and was definitely not the case for my immigrant father. In 1991, my father immigrated to Toronto at the age of 16, alongside my grandma who was a single mother. Living on Bathurst St, he attended Central Technical School, where he received little support and was alienated by the teaching staff and administration. Information and resources were inaccessible to him as both his mother and him could not speak English, impacting his ability to receive the same quality of education as his classmates. As a result, he was forced to navigate confusing bureaucratic procedures and language barriers alone as a child.

It is now 2024, and exactly 33 years since my father immigrated to Canada. Almost nothing has changed. It has been 3 decades and members of my community, family, friends, and myself continue to experience alienation and racism at the hands of not only our peers but also our teachers, under the roof of the Toronto District School Board. Similarly to my father's experience, I too was forced to translate school forms, and act as an interpreter to my parents during parent-teacher interviews. These responsibilities, which are meant to be held by adult professionals, were placed upon myself who was a child at the time. But my experience is not unique. Many children of immigrants are forced into these unfair situations where they must take on the tasks of professionals that the school refuses to provide to students and parents. All of these are seemingly small inconveniences. But they accumulate into a message of exclusion, a message that me, my parents, and my community do not deserve to receive the same quality of education, care, and support as everyone else and that we do not belong here. With CCNCTO, I've learned more about school advocacy and about how often racialized student voices are ignored and are assigned tasks such as interpreting and supporting international students. Responsibilities that should be placed in the hands of adults, not children.

These experiences are not solely individual, but a form of systemic racism aimed to exclude Asian students and families from the TDSB. It's important for the TDSB to recognize that acts of anti-Asian racism are not solely individual, appearing through the use of slurs, derogatory language, physical harassment, and hate-crimes. It also appears as systemic procedures of exclusion and Othering. When children are forced to take on the responsibilities that adults within the Toronto District School Board could not provide themselves, it becomes a structural issue.

TDSB serves one of the most diverse and multicultural student bodies in the province. With a significant population of various Asian students and staff, I hope that the Board of Trustees



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hears my story as not just a personal tale, but as a representation of the anti-Asian racism experienced by many folks in my community. Although I know the motion will likely be passed, I urge you all to ensure that the voices of parents and students can be heard. The numerous newcomers and immigrants within the school board have clearly conveyed their experiences, making it evident that TDSB needs to pay special attention to ensuring that language accessibility is prioritized and that access to resources and a quality education is available to all.



SafeHarbor Project Delegation at TDSB / Oct 1, 2024

Written delegation

Name: Patricia Quan

My name is Patricia Quan (she/her), the Principal Investigator of the [SafeHarbor Project](https://safeharborproject.org) funded by Laidlaw Foundation. I am also a former international student in the GTA, and now a Registered Social Worker in Ontario. I, alongside Dr. Kedi Zhao, who you will hear in-person, and other impacted students, conducted this youth-led community research initiative, in collaboration with Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. This research focuses on examining the experiences of K-12 international students in poorly regulated homestay accommodations in the GTA. Through extensive community-based participatory research, we have identified systemic challenges these students face, which include significant instances of cultural misunderstanding, racism, and xenophobia within their homestay environments. Today, we wish to bring findings in [our report](#) to your attention and to highlight how these systemic issues affect international students' well-being and academic success at TDSB.

Lack of regulation and the systemic risks to international students' wellbeing

As the largest and leading school board in Canada, TDSB has a long-standing history of welcoming international students, the majority of whom come from Asian countries and are encouraged, by TDSB, to live in homestay accommodations. Despite the growing reliance on homestay accommodations for these students, this sector remains largely unregulated. Our report pointed out that these secondary international students are vulnerable to neglect, malnutrition, cultural isolation, and in many cases, blatant racism and discrimination in the homestays.

We urge TDSB to recognize that these are not isolated incidents, but rather systemic failures of a poorly regulated homestay system and lack of support for international students. When students struggle in their homestay environments, it directly impacts their mental and physical health, and in turn, their academic performance and overall experience within the TDSB system. As a school board responsible for the education and welfare of these students, it is important that TDSB take a proactive role in addressing following systemic gaps:

1. **Lack of regulation and unclear responsibilities:** The current "guides" and "best practices" in the homestay sector fail to clearly define the responsibilities of homestay providers, agents, custodians, and school support staff. This leaves students confused and allows others to shift responsibility, making it difficult for student issues to be properly addressed. (Also read this [CBC report](#))
2. **Inadequate training and resources:** Homestay providers and school staff often lack the proper training to understand the unique needs of secondary international students. Even when they want to help, they face a shortage of training opportunities and resources, as many community services are inaccessible to these students due to their legal status, leaving staff without effective options for support or referrals.



3. **No clear incident reporting mechanisms:** Students lack safe, clear channels to report issues in their homestays, leading to unreported maltreatments. Even when students are proactive and courageous enough to raise concerns, staff often don't know how to respond effectively (as mentioned in the previous point).
4. **“Go home” as the default solution:** When challenges arise – often due to the unreported issues – [our report](#) found that a common response from the schools is to send the students back to their home countries, reflecting Xenophobic and anti-Asian racist sentiments.

A call for action

I would like to specifically highlight two calls raised by participants in our research, including impacted students, public education sector workers, and support staff who work directly with secondary international students in the GTA.

1. **Implement stronger regulation** of the homestay sector, ensuring that homestay providers, agents, and custodians are held accountable for the safety and well-being of the students they host.
2. **Develop stronger, dedicated support systems for international students** by providing safe spaces to report issues and access mental health services. Ensure staff and homestay providers receive targeted training and resources tailored to the unique needs of this population, rather than grouping them with Asian domestic students.

With the significant number of Asian international students at TDSB, I strongly urge the Board of Trustees to consider creating better regulation and support for international students' well-being and increasing TDSB's capacities in addressing anti-Asian racism and discrimination happening both in school and in homestays. We are hoping that this can be the first step to understand and dismantle the challenges experienced by secondary international students living in homestay accommodations and to support our students, parents, and staff at TDSB.

Sincerely and in solidarity,

Patricia Quan, MSW, RSW
Principal Investigator, SafeHarbor Project

Read our community report: [In Search of a Safe Harbor: An Exploration of the Experiences of K-12 International Students in Unregulated Homestays](#) documenting the experience and systemic neglect of K-12 international students living in homestay accommodations