



May 12, 2009

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education
Ontario Ministry of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Ms. Diane Giangrande
Chair of the Board
York Region District School Board
The Education Centre – Aurora
60 Wellington Street West, Box 40
Aurora, Ontario
L4G 3H2

Ms. Catherine McGinley
Principal
Keswick High School
100 Biscayne Boulevard
Keswick, Ontario
L4P 3L5

Ms. Barbara Hall
Chief Commissioner
Ontario Human Rights Commission
180 Dundas Street West, Suite 2201
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 2G5

Dear Minister Wynne, Ms. Giangrande, Ms. McGinley, and Commissioner Hall:

Re: April 21, 2009 Incident at Keswick High School and Racism in Schools

We are sending you this second open letter because we remain deeply concerned about the incident of April 21, 2009 at Keswick High School and wish to ensure that there are concrete and appropriate steps undertaken to address the incident and its wider effect on the community.

As you are aware, the Federation of Asian Canadian Lawyers is a diverse coalition of Asian Canadian legal professionals whose purpose is to promote equity, justice, and opportunity for Asian Canadian legal professionals and the Asian community. On May 6, 2009, we (along with a number of other organizations engaged in human rights and anti-racism advocacy) wrote to you to express our disappointment and concern with the inadequate initial response of the School's administration and the York Region District School Board to the April 21 incident. We called on the School and the Board to exert every effort to confront racism and publicly commit to concrete steps to apply the Board's Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy. We sought to have the reprimands expunged from the Asian Canadian student's record, as well as to meet with the Board to discuss how they might effectively address our other concerns.

On May 7, 2009, we received a letter from Ms. Giangrande stating, among other things, that "the School and the Board ... acknowledge that mistakes have been made in dealing with [the April 21 incident], have sincerely apologized to those affected, and have already begun to review and plan for improvement to our processes." While we are somewhat encouraged by this response, we remain concerned that no concrete measures have been outlined to ensure the accountability of public education officials for the safety and dignity of students or to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.

As such, we are again asking the School and the Board, as well as the Ministry of Education, to engage the community in meaningful and constructive dialogue, in part to better explain what happened on their end, but more importantly, to describe what steps have been taken since and what changes will be made going forward in respect of incidents of this nature. We, along with our counterpart organizations, hope to facilitate and be directly involved with this dialogue, and in particular, to be engaged and consulted with respect to steps and new policies that the Board and School can adopt to address incidents of racism.



We also understand that the Board will be meeting on May 28, 2009, and its Race Relations Advisory Committee will be meeting on May 14, 2009. We trust that the matters raised in this and our previous letter will receive due attention and be adequately addressed at those meetings.

Finally, we are asking Minister Wynne and the Ministry of Education, and Commissioner Hall and the Ontario Human Rights Commission to provide logistical support and expertise to ensure that any steps taken on these issues are consistent with the promotion of the public interest and human rights principles.

We await a further response from each of you and look forward to a continuing dialogue on these issues.

Sincerely,

Federation of Asian Canadian Lawyers