

ADVISORY

2022-2023: 01

Prohibiting the Use of the N-word

The purpose of this advisory is to provide information to the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB) community about use of the racial slur, the N-word.

Advisory Statement

The SCDSB prohibits the use of the N-word in its unabbreviated form, verbal or written, and any variation of, on SCDSB property (including but not limited to SCDSB sporting events, competitions, online learning platforms and all SCDSB sanctioned events or trips) by any member of the SCDSB community. This includes any use of the unabbreviated N-word, or any variation, irrespective of the intent of using it and/or how the person who used it self-identifies. This includes quoting another person's use of the word, including from songs and books, or any media that have the unabbreviated word. The N-word, even in abbreviated form, should not be used or referred to.

Background

The N-word, in its unabbreviated form, whether used orally or in writing, and no matter the variation, is a hateful, racist, and derogatory term. It has been used historically, and continues to be used, as part of the oppression of Black people in Ontario, Canada, North America and globally. This includes harassment, bullying, discrimination, dehumanization of Black people, and terrorizing and perpetuating violence against Black people. There is considerable trauma and emotional harm associated with derogatory language such as the N-word, including in relation to historical contexts of slavery and colonialism and present-day forms of individual and systemic anti-Black racism. It is important to note that the unabbreviated N-word, and variations thereof, has also been used as a form of hate, racism, and dehumanization against Indigenous, African, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and other racialized and minoritized groups. The harmful impacts of the unabbreviated use of the N-word extend beyond Black individuals and can be harmful to anyone who may be exposed to the word.

Reclaiming of derogatory terminology

The reclaiming of various derogatory terms is a response taken by some members of various diverse racialized, minoritized and equity-deserving groups. Some members of equity-deserving groups feel that the reclaiming of such words and using them in contexts that are not meant to be hateful, racist, or dehumanizing can reverse the impacts and remove the historical power associated with such words. Some members of Black communities have reclaimed the N-word and may use this term in certain contexts and/or as a term of endearment with certain people. In some cases, individuals may feel that over-using the term helps normalize it, making it more commonplace, and removes the severity of the impact of its usage in extremely hateful and racist incidents, as it then would become like any other word. There is also discussion about certain derogatory terms in some communities on differences between socially acceptable in-group and out-group language, leaving some to feel that certain people can use certain terminology that others cannot based on how they self-identify. The N-word is sometimes repeated when quoting songs or books, or the telling and re-telling of stories and jokes. While some groups and

organizations may accept the reclaimed usage of the unabbreviated term, many institutions in Ontario do not, such as courts of law and places of worship, including churches with Black-identified congregations. Many members of Black communities do not support the reclaiming of this term and do not endorse the use of the unabbreviated version in any circumstance. The SCDSB does not support the verbal use of the unabbreviated N-word, irrespective of who is using it and/or their intention.

Teaching & Learning Environments

SCDSB is committed to ensuring classrooms and learning environments are free of harassment, discrimination and violence for all students and encourages respect, trust, well-being, inclusion, and a sense of belonging and community. Educators are to be regularly reflecting upon and reviewing classroom teaching materials, methods and mediums used to ensure that they are reflective of the SCDSB's commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and in line with all related policies and directives around human rights, mental health and well-being, anti-bullying and health and safety. SCDSB educators may discuss this with their administration, and/or the Principal of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

In classrooms, the N-word, as well as any other slurs and/or derogatory terms, shall not be used or referred to, in any variation. The word shall not be read out loud. If the word is required for instructional purposes, such as texts written by Black-identified authors, the abbreviated term shall be used. Learning about the impacts, current and historical, racist, and hate-based language including the emotional harm such words can cause is an important part of learning about anti-racism, anti-bullying, well-being and building empathy and inclusion. This learning can be done without using the terms. Learning about the forms of resistance that Indigenous, racialized, and equity-deserving communities have used to respond to, cope with, heal from, and address forms of hate, racism, and discrimination, such as forms of reclaiming derogatory language, should be a part of the discussions and teaching of reading from texts of authors who identify as being part of Indigenous, racialized, and equity-deserving communities. Historical and sociocultural context, authorship, and identity must be considered in the decisions of texts used in curriculum and inclusive pedagogy. Many first-person accounts use discriminatory language with the purpose of reflecting lived experiences of marginalization and oppression. Sometimes, these words are also used in the context of being reclaimed by an author who identifies as being part of the impacted group. When teaching through these texts, it is important that teachers do not use the racial slurs in the book within class discussion as that models the use of harmful language for all students and can be a form of racial trauma for Indigenous, Black, racialized, minoritized students, and students of all identities and backgrounds. It is critical that students are given structured and supported opportunities to build their understanding and reflect upon the issues, including racism and other forms of oppression. Educators shall be prepared for such conversations with setting the appropriate context and debriefing as needed, and should engage the support of staff from the SCDSB's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion department.

School administration, in consultation with the educators of the school, are expected to regularly review learning materials and instructional resources to ensure they reflect the diversity of learners, communities and society. Materials and resources that are considered biased, inaccurate, or otherwise harmful should be removed. Selection and use of learning materials and resources should consider the developmental age of the students, the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, appropriate SCDSB policies to ensure they present current language and terminology, as well as a global perspective, including that of historical events. It is also important that a broad

range of diverse authors are showcased, particularly from equity-deserving groups including Indigenous, Black, and racialized contemporary writers. Reading texts written through the lens of diverse individuals with lived experiences of identifying as part of Indigenous and equity-deserving communities is essential and critical for all students.

For all teaching and learning matters surrounding the use of this term, including use of texts, administrators may further consult with their Area Superintendent.

SCDSB Employees

The SCDSB employees are prohibited from use of the N-word in its unabbreviated form, verbal or written, and any variation of, on SCDSB property (including but not limited to SCDSB sporting events, competitions, online learning platforms and all SCDSB sanctioned events or trips) and any such use is subject to discipline. This includes when the word is being used by a Black-identified employee and/or being used with the intent of it being a form of reclaiming and/or as a term of endearment. This also includes when quoting a song or text, replaying a song, and/or any materials and media, visual or auditory, with the unabbreviated word.

SCDSB is responsible for creating and maintaining a safe, healthy, and respectful work environment free of harassment, discrimination, and violence for all employees. Hateful, racist, and derogatory words such as the N-word can be harmful to employees (as with students) in several ways including emotional harm and impacts to mental health and well-being. If you have concerns as a staff member, please speak with your administrator or direct supervisor. If it involves your direct supervisor, then speak with your next level supervisor.

Managers and administrators play a critical role in creating and maintaining a safe, healthy, and respectful work environment free of harassment, discrimination, and violence for all employees. Managers and administrators are to address concerns of inappropriate language, including use of the N-word, in a timely manner and consistent with applicable policies and procedures.

All employees are obligated to report incidents of race, bias and hate involving students using the *SCDSB Race, Bias, and Hate (RBH) Form*. There may be minor exceptions of photographing the unabbreviated word where primary evidence may need to be preserved (such as taking photographs of graffiti, screenshots, etc.) for the purposes of reporting the incident. When typing up the incident, quoting what was said, and/or citing a text, staff are to refrain from using the full word and are to use the abbreviation only, if it must be used.

SCDSB Students

SCDSB students, as members of the SCDSB community, play an important role in maintaining a safe, healthy, and respectful learning environment. SCDSB prohibits the use of the N-word in its unabbreviated form, verbal or written, and any variation of, on SCDSB property (including but not limited to SCDSB sporting events, competitions, online learning platforms and all SCDSB sanctioned events or trips) by any member of the SCDSB community. The use of the N-word, as with other derogatory language, are violations of the student code of conduct, by students anywhere on SCDSB property (including sporting events and competitions) and all SCDSB sanctioned events or trips at any location is subject to discipline. This includes:

- when classroom settings are remote and when utilizing SCDSB online platforms;
- when the word is being used by a Black-identified student and/or may be used with the intent of it being a form of reclaiming and/or as a term of endearment; and,

- when quoting a song or text, and/or if replaying a song, and/ or any materials and media, visual or auditory, with the unabbreviated word.

Matters that require corrective action in the SCDSB are based on the principles of progressive discipline and consistent with the Code of Conduct. This includes considerations of various factors of the particular situation and context. The SCDSB is committed to ensuring that there is no disproportionate impact of discipline to students who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, marginalized, and/or students with disabilities, and/or any other equity-deserving group of students.

The SCDSB has discussed with community advocacy groups serving Black communities in Simcoe County that the N-word is not acceptable at the SCDSB, even though some Black students may choose to use this word in other settings outside of SCDSB.

Remember:

- The N-word is a racial slur and has no place in the workplace or learning environment.
- Using the N-word creates an unsafe and hostile learning and work environment for Black colleagues and students.
- Single use of the N-word can be deemed harassment, even if no one says anything at the time.
- The N-word should not be said, including any variation of it, even in the quoting of songs and texts.
- No member of the SCDSB community is to use the N-word in its unabbreviated form, verbal or written, and any variation of, on SCDSB property (including but not limited to SCDSB sporting events, competitions, online learning platforms and all SCDSB sanctioned events or trips).
- It does not matter who the person is, how they identify, the variation that is used, and/or the intention behind using the word, what matters is the impact of the unabbreviated word to anyone who may see or hear it.

The SCDSB Human Rights and Equity Office is available to provide support and guidance with respect to any issues or questions that may arise as you work to ensure that the human rights of all members of the SCDSB community are upheld, including responding to accommodation requests. Please contact us at humanrights@scdsb.on.ca.

References

Infographics created by Turner Consulting Group Inc. (attached)

[Policy 3130 – Equity and Inclusive Education](#)

[Policy 4140 – Selection and Approval of Learning Media](#)

[Policy 4240 – Safe, Inclusive and Accepting Schools](#)

[APM A1350 Information and Computing Technology and Internet Appropriate Use Guidelines](#)

[APM A4002 – Reporting of Workplace Illness/Injury](#)

[APM A4065 – Workplace Violence Prevention](#)

[APM A4071 – Reporting Violent Incidents in the Workplace under the OHSA](#)

[APM A4075 – Dispute Resolution Procedure Arising from Workplace Harassment or](#)

[Objectionable Behaviour](#)

[APM A7100 - Reporting Violent Incident](#)

[APM A7125 – Equity and Inclusive Education](#)

[APM A7630 – Code of Conduct](#)

[APM A7635 – Student Discipline Procedures](#)

[APM A8040 – Selection and Approval of Learning Media and Addressing Concerns](#)

[APM A9000 – Human Rights and Equity Guidelines](#)

[HS 05-32 – Domestic Violence in the Workplace](#)

[Anti-Black Racism Professional OCT Advisory December 2021](#)

[Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan, Ontario Ministry of Education](#)

[SCDSB Student Handbook and Student Code of Conduct](#)

[Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#)

[SCDSB Race, Bias and Hate \(RBH\) Incident Form](#)

[The Trillium List, Ontario Ministry of Education](#)

Tahmena Bokhari, Human Rights and Equity Manager
November 23, 2022

As a teacher, can I use the N-word at school?

Are you...

Calling someone the N-word?

It is a private conversation.

You have Black friends and they don't have a problem with you using the word.

You are racialized.

You are Black and saying the word with an 'a'.

Educating students about the word?

Discussing someone else's use of the word?

Reading it aloud from a novel?

Reading it aloud from a historical text?

While it is now sometimes used as a term of endearment between Black people, not all Black people are comfortable with this usage or with overhearing it in their workplace.

No!
The N-word is a racial slur and has no place in any workplace.
Using it even once amounts to harassment/poisoned work environment, even if no one says anything at the time.
The N-Word should not be used by anyone in any context in a workplace or learning environment.

No.
You could be creating unsafe working and learning environments for Black colleagues and students.

No!
The N-word is a racial slur and has no place in a learning environment. By using the word, you are creating a hostile learning environment for Black and other students.
Where reference to the N-word may be required for instructional purposes, the word should be referenced in its abbreviated form ("the N-word").



As a student, can I use the N-word at school?

Are you...

Calling someone the N-word?

You think you have a pass to say the N-word because you have Black friends and they don't complain when you use the word.

You are racialized.

You are Black and are saying the word with an 'a' or you are "reclaiming the word".

Playing or repeating lyrics of a song that contain any form of the N-word?

Reading the N-word aloud from a text or reciting it during a presentation?

Discussing someone else's use of the word?

While it is now sometimes used as a term of endearment between Black people, not all Black people are comfortable with this usage or with overhearing it in their learning environment.

No!

The N-word is a racial slur and has no place in any learning environment.

Using it even once amounts to harassment or bullying, even if no one says anything at the time.

The N-word should not be used by anyone in any context in a learning environment and a student could be disciplined for doing so.

No.

You could be creating an unsafe learning/working environment for other Black students or staff.

No!

The N-word is a racial slur and has no place in any learning environment.

Where the N-word is included in a novel or text, neither students nor teachers should be using the full word.

When referring to the word or reading it, the word should be referenced in its abbreviated form ("the N-word").