

Anti- Islamophobia Action Plan

**Addressing Islamophobia
in the K-12 Education System**



LETTER FROM THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

Every child deserves to feel safe, supported and included in Manitoba's schools, regardless of their faith, their background or their identity.

For Muslim students, incidents of Islamophobia in school can impact their well-being and their ability to learn. That's why in October 2024, Premier Wab Kinew announced the creation of the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group, made up of Muslim community leaders and staff from Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning.

Over the last year, the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group has worked to develop the K-12 Anti-Islamophobia Action Plan, informed by input from community members and educators.

The action plan equips educators with the resources and knowledge to make schools safer and more inclusive for all kids, and gives them the tools to help address Islamophobia.

I want to extend my gratitude to each of the individuals that worked on this action plan, especially the members of the Anti-Islamophobia working group, for your dedication to creating safe learning environments for all Manitoba kids.

This action plan is one way our government is working with communities to build an inclusive province where every kid has the opportunity to grow up well and build a good life.



Tracy Schmidt

Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning
Government of Manitoba

Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that Manitoba is on Treaty 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 Territories and the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, Ininiwak, and Nehethowuk Peoples. We acknowledge Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit. We respect the spirit and intent of the Treaties and Treaty Making and remain committed to working in partnership with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in the spirit of truth, reconciliation, and collaboration.

This action plan is rooted in the same commitments: building schools that are safe, equitable, and inclusive, and ensuring that work against Islamophobia stands alongside reconciliation and the broader responsibility to confront all forms of racism and exclusion on these lands.

K-12 ANTI-ISLAMOPHOBIA ACTION PLAN

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ANTI-ISLAMOPHOBIA WORKING GROUP

On October 29, 2024, the Manitoba government announced the creation of the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group. The working group members are:

- **Sadaf Ahmed**, National Council of Canadian Muslims;
- **Gololcha Boru**, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning;
- **Brahim Ould Baba**, Manitoba Teachers' Society;
- **Sarah Gazan**, Manitoba Teachers' Society;
- **Muhamed Hammad**, Faizan-E-Makkah Winnipeg (youth representative);
- **Haseeb Hassan**, National Council of Canadian Muslims;
- **Humaira Jaleel**, Healthy Muslim Families;
- **Kate McNeil**, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning;
- **Muhiadin Omar**, Bilal Community and Family Centre;
- **Rhonda Shaw**, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning;
- **Eve Sotiriadou**, Canadian Muslim Women's Institute;
- **Youcef Soufi**, Manitoba Islamic Association; and
- **Ayesha Sultan**, University of Manitoba Muslim Students Association.

The working group has brought together representatives from Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, community leaders, advocacy organization and educators. The group aims provide resources to support proactive strategies that prevent Islamophobia in schools. This includes raising awareness of how Islamophobia affects both students and staff, supporting professional development for educators and sharing classroom content and practices that foster inclusion.

The Anti-Islamophobia Working Group recognizes that education is central to building equity and inclusion. This work is intended to respond to present challenges and create long-term change that ensures all students in Manitoba can thrive in learning environments free from bias and discrimination.

This action plan reflects the collective voice and vision of the Anti-Islamophobia Working Group. It embodies our collective commitment to stand united against all acts of hatred. This working group believes that an intentional and collaborative community building approach is needed to create culturally safe and racism free school communities that reflect the principles of human rights and inter-cultural understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding Anti-Muslim Racism and Setting the Context

Anti-Muslim racism is often discussed in relation to Islamophobia. While Islamophobia is commonly described as a “fear of Islam,” the term has come to represent far more than fear alone. It includes prejudice, hostility, and systemic discrimination directed at Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim.

To reflect this broader reality, this action plan uses the terms Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism interchangeably.

Islamophobia must be adequately defined in this strategy before presenting various options that can aid in combating it. A nuanced understanding of the definition, its history and how it appears in its various forms is critical. There is immense diversity within the Muslim community in Canada. Therefore, how Muslims may experience Islamophobia can be vastly different.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia refers to racism, prejudice, stereotypes, fear or acts of hostility directed toward individuals who are Muslim or perceived to be Muslim, as well as toward Islam as a religion. It includes both interpersonal discrimination and systemic forms of exclusion, such as racial profiling and policies that disproportionately target Muslim communities. Islamophobia often results in Muslims being unfairly portrayed as security threats and treated as outsiders within institutional, societal and cultural contexts. Experiences of Islamophobia are shaped by intersecting identities – such as gender, race and age, which influence how individuals experience discrimination. Specific forms of these intersectionalities can include anti-Black Islamophobia, gendered Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism.



Islamophobia in Manitoba and Canada

Islamophobia has deep historical roots and continues to shape Canadian society today. While its visibility increased following events such as September 11, 2001, its origins trace back centuries, with Western portrayals of Muslims as irrational or violent used to justify colonial expansion. These legacies persist today, influencing public perceptions and policy.

In Canada, the impact of Islamophobia has been significant. Tragic events such as the Quebec City mosque attack (2017) and the murder of the Afzaal family in London, Ontario (2021) highlight the consequences of anti-Muslim hate. Legislative measures, such as Quebec's Bill 21, have disproportionately affected Muslim communities, particularly women who wear religious attire, and highlighted how Islamophobia is embedded in broader systems and structures.

In Manitoba, Muslims represent approximately 2 per cent of the population and contribute significantly to the province's social, economic and civic life. The Manitoba Islamic Association, established in 1960, has played a central role in community development. In recognition of these contributions, Manitoba proclaimed October as Islamic History Month in 2013 and formally enshrined Islamic Heritage Month in legislation in 2024.

Beyond overt acts of violence, Islamophobia is also evident in everyday discrimination. Recent Manitoba-based research highlights the critical role of schools in addressing Islamophobia. Reports from the Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO) and Healthy Muslim Families (HMF) reveal that educational settings are among the most common spaces where Muslim youth experience discrimination. Students report self-censorship, differential treatment based on religious attire and a lack of support when expressing cultural identities.



PURPOSE OF THE ACTION PLAN

Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning recognizes that addressing Islamophobia is an essential part of its broader commitment to anti-racism and equity in education. Islamophobia, like other forms of racism and discrimination, undermines students' sense of safety, belonging and wellbeing. By embedding anti-Islamophobia strategies within a comprehensive anti-racism action plan, we aim to create learning environments that affirm diverse identities, challenge prejudice and promote respect for all cultures and faiths. This approach ensures that efforts to support Muslim students and families are aligned with our shared vision of inclusive, culturally responsive and equitable education for every child.

This action plan outlines Manitoba's high-level commitments to addressing Islamophobia in the K-12 education system over the next three years. It builds on community collaboration and aligns with broader anti-racism efforts across the province and within Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning.

The plan is meant to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive environments where students, staff, families and community members are respected and supported. It provides a framework to both prevent and address Islamophobia while promoting collaboration across the education system.

The action plan is divided into four focus areas:

- **Recognize and Celebrate:** Support schools to recognize and value Muslim identities through programming and educational initiatives, so that Muslim students feel safe and supported to express themselves and all students have the chance to learn about members of their community.
- **Equip and Empower:** Support, highlight and share training and resources that support school staff to address Islamophobia and remove systemic barriers, so kids feel safe at school and have access to every opportunity to learn and succeed.
- **Wellbeing and Belonging:** Explore measures that support and prioritize mental health, well-being and belonging of Muslim students and staff.
- **Partnerships:** Support school divisions in building relationships with Muslim communities through community connections, consistent engagement and collaborative problem solving to make sure that programs and policies are inclusive of all students and families.

FOCUS AREA 1: RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE

Creating school environments where Muslim identities are visible, valued and respected is essential to fostering inclusion. This focus area highlights the importance of including Muslim culture and contributions in our education system. By recognizing and celebrating diversity, schools can challenge stereotypes, promote understanding and affirm the identities of Muslim students and staff.

Goals

- Recognize Muslim identities and histories in school culture, curriculum and resources to promote understanding and respect.
- Promote inclusive programming that reflects the diversity of Muslim communities.
- Support educators with resources to teach about anti-islamophobia and challenge stereotypes.
- Encourage recognition of significant Muslim observances and contributions.

Recommendations:

- Promote resources that include lesson plans, videos and literature reflecting diverse Muslim experiences, such as the [Manitoba Islamic Association's Embracing Diversity in Manitoba Education K-12 Toolkit](#).
- Offer culturally appropriate food options, including halal food options, through the Universal School Nutrition Program.
- Develop inclusive programming that highlights Muslim cultural traditions, such as storytelling, art, music and food.
- Ensure school calendars reflect and acknowledge cultural and religious observances from diverse communities, including Islamic celebrations such as Ramadan and Eid, to promote respect, understanding and belonging for all students.
- Host events or assemblies to recognize and increase awareness of important dates for Muslim students and their families for example, Islamic Heritage Month and the National Day of Remembrance and Action Against Islamophobia in Canada.

FOCUS AREA 2: EQUIP AND EMPOWER

Educators play a critical role in creating inclusive learning spaces. This focus area prioritizes building staff capacity to identify, prevent and respond to Islamophobia through professional learning and systemic support. By equipping educators with tools, resources and strategies, schools can dismantle barriers and ensure equity is embedded in classrooms.

Goals

- Support staff capacity to identify, prevent, and respond to Islamophobia through professional learning and systemic support.
- Embed equity and inclusion into professional development and curriculum planning.
- Support the development of policies and practices that address incidents of hate and discrimination.

Recommendations

- Collaborate with Muslim educators and community members to share and co-create classroom resources and guidance documents.
- Offer templates and guidance for schools to respond to incidents of racism in a consistent and supportive manner.
- Partner with community organizations to co-host professional development sessions that explore cultural bias, anti-Islamophobia strategies and inclusive teaching practices.
- Promote hiring practices that value cultural diversity and lived experience.



FOCUS AREA 3: WELLBEING AND BELONGING

A sense of safety and belonging is foundational to student success. This focus area prioritizes mental health and wellbeing for Muslim students and staff by promoting culturally responsive supports and fostering peer connections. Through initiatives that affirm identity and encourage student leadership, schools can create environments where all individuals feel valued and supported.

Goals

- Ensure Muslim students and staff feel safe, supported and valued in school environments.
- Promote mental health supports that are culturally safe, responsive and community informed.
- Encourage student-led initiatives that create belonging and peer support.

Recommendations

- In alignment with the Responding to Religious Diversity in Manitoba's Schools guidelines, facilitate religious accommodations for Muslim students, including providing quiet spaces for daily prayers.
- Engage community partners who can offer resources and supports tailored to individual school communities.
- Share culturally responsive mental health resources through school mental health teams and community partnerships.
- Facilitate student associations or ally groups that encourage peer connection and leadership.
- Support students with the organization of cultural activities, such as meals, storytelling circles or student-led presentations.



FOCUS AREA 4: PARTNERSHIPS

Strong partnerships between schools and Muslim communities are vital for sustainable change. This focus area highlights the importance of authentic engagement and collaborative problem-solving. By working closely with families and community organizations, schools can ensure policies and programs are inclusive of all students.

Goals

- Strengthen relationships between schools and Muslim communities through engagement, shared understandings and collaborative problem solving.
- Collaborate with Muslim organizations to inform policy and programming.
- Improve communication and access to resources for Muslim families.
- Support school divisions in building sustainable, reciprocal partnerships with community leaders.

Recommendations

- Establish partnerships with Muslim community organizations, starting with the ones that are engaged with students and their families in the school division.
- Collaborate with community partners to co-host events, provide input on school initiatives or offer cultural workshops to students and/or staff.
- Translate key school communications into languages spoken by students of the school community.
- Invite and support parents and caregivers from Muslim and other cultural communities, especially those new to Manitoba, to participate in advisory groups and school events and celebrations.

SHARED PATH FORWARD

The Manitoba government, in collaboration with school divisions and community partners, affirms its commitment to building inclusive, culturally safe and equitable learning environments for all students.

This action plan represents a shared vision to recognize and celebrate Muslim identities, equip educators with the tools to address Islamophobia, support wellbeing and belonging and build meaningful partnerships with Muslim communities. This work will be led by the Anti-Racism and Equity unit in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Learning, who will work with school divisions and community partners to facilitate implementation of this action plan.

We recognize that implementation will vary across school divisions and schools as student demographics are different from division to division and school to school. The action plan aligns closely with ongoing work in the Manitoba government on anti-racism and equity and will be shared broadly with school divisions, partners and community as we work towards implementation.



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