

Education Forum

Building Capacity for Equity and Inclusion in Ontario Education

Integrating East and Southeast Asian Canadian Experiences and Addressing Anti-Asian Racism

March 28, 2026

Crowne Plaza Toronto - North York

Organized by: CPAC Institute

Proceedings



Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Event Overview
3. Keynote Address
4. Panel Discussion Summary
5. Breakout Session Summaries
6. Key Themes and Insights
7. Participant Reflections
8. Outcomes and Next Steps
9. Acknowledgements

Introduction

The Education Forum: Building Capacity for Equity and Inclusion in Ontario Education, held on March 28, 2026, was convened to address the persistent underrepresentation of East and Southeast Asian Canadian (ESAC) experiences in Ontario's education system, and to explore strategies for advancing equity and inclusion.

The forum was directly built upon the CPAC Institute's 2025 research report, *"Footnote in the Story: Fragmented and Marginalized Inclusion of East and Southeast Asian Canadian Experiences in Ontario Curriculum"*. This study revealed significant gaps in the inclusion of ESAC historical and contemporary experiences, as well as in addressing anti-Asian racism across curriculum content, teaching practices, and the broader institutional environment of Ontario's public education system.

This forum aimed to bring together educators, researchers, community members, and education leaders to engage in meaningful dialogue and identify actionable pathways forward.



Event Overview

The half-day forum brought together a diverse group of participants, including teachers, school leaders, researchers, and community advocates.

The program included:

- Forum Opening
- Opening keynote address
- Keynote presentation by the CPAC Institute
- Panel discussion
- Concurrent breakout sessions
- Networking reception



The event was designed to balance theoretical insights with practical discussions, while remaining accessible and engaging for participants.

Forum Opening



CPAC's Executive Director Andi Shi opened the event by highlighting that anti-Asian racism and the underrepresentation of Asian Canadians in leadership are closely linked to gaps in inclusive education. He pointed out that addressing these root causes requires coordinated efforts among schools, communities, and policymakers.



In her opening remarks, CPAC's President Helen Cao stressed that the absence of ESAC experiences from the Ontario curriculum is not just a gap in content, but also a gap in representation and belonging.

Opening Keynote

Speaker: Dr. Kevin Kumashiro, an internationally recognized leader in equity and social justice education, former Dean of the Schools of Education at the University of San Francisco and Hofstra University

Title: *Three Lenses for Countering Anti-Asian Racism and Advancing Equity through Education*

In his keynote address, Dr. Kumashiro presented three lenses for building educational capacity and addressing anti-Asian racism.

He urged the audience to slow down and critically understand the current social and political context



before jumping to solutions, emphasizing the importance of defining problems for themselves rather than adopting dominant or distorted narratives. He encouraged educators to remain firm in their commitment to equity-focused work, even when it is challenged, and to clearly explain and defend important concepts instead of avoiding them under pressure.

He argued that problems and solutions must be identified at three levels: individual, institutional, and ideological. He noted that focusing solely on individual sensitivity training often fails to address deeper policy structures or societal narratives.

He also encouraged learning through discomfort and resistance, noting that true learning often requires "unlearning" existing beliefs. This process inherently causes discomfort, which can lead to resistance that educators must proactively address. Ultimately, he advocated for equitable education that empowers students to challenge the status quo and imagine a better world for tomorrow.

Dr. Kumashiro's keynote set the tone for the forum, encouraging participants to think deeply and critically about both challenges and possibilities in education.

Keynote Presentation by the CPAC Institute

Speaker: Dr. Bailing (Kate) Zhang, Research Association, CPAC Institute

Title: *Footnote in the Story: Fragmented and Marginalized Inclusion of East and Southeast Asian Canadian Experiences in Ontario Curriculum*

The report "Footnote in the Story," presented by Dr. Zhang of the CPAC Institute, identifies critical gaps in curriculum content, teaching practices and the broader educational environment regarding the inclusion of East and Southeast Asian Canadian (ESAC) experiences in Ontario's education system. Based on a survey of 247 educators and 36 in-depth interviews, the research study finds ESAC experiences are severely underrepresented, inconsistently taught, and often reduced to superficial or token inclusion.



Dr. Zhang shared several key barriers identified in the study. Epistemic challenges, such as limited awareness of anti-Asian racism and narrow definitions of Canadian history, contribute to the marginalization of ESAC content. Operational issues, including a lack of training and resources, further hinder educators' ability to teach these topics effectively. Additionally,

institutional gaps—notably the absence of explicit references to anti-Asian racism in key policies—result in weak accountability, minimal professional development, and insufficient support.

She also highlighted underrepresentation of ESAC educators in leadership roles and the persistence of workplace discrimination. She concluded by calling for systemic reforms, including revising the Ontario Anti-Racism Act and related educational policies, mandating the teaching of ESAC experiences in Ontario public schools, developing comprehensive learning resources, strengthening teacher training, addressing the underrepresentation of ESAC educators in the teaching and leadership roles, and increasing dedicated funding, to move ESAC experiences from the "footnotes" into the mainstream educational narrative.

Panel Discussion

Moderator: Kien Nam Luu, Superintendent of Education, York Region District School Board

Panelists:

Gen-Ling Chang, Associate Executive Director at ALPHA Education

Karlo Cabrera, Centrally Assigned Principal of Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression, Toronto District School Board

Vidya Shah, Associate Professor at OISE, University of Toronto



The panel explored strategies for promoting anti-bias education and dismantling anti-Asian racism within the school system.

Gen-Ling Chang advocated for a pedagogy of "racial literacy," which encourages students to research and share knowledge from their own cultural backgrounds, turning classrooms into spaces where students teach and learn from each other. Through student-led projects and discussions, young people become active constructors of knowledge, often surpassing expectations and deepening collective learning. She called on decision-makers to create a "through line" that ensures anti-racism commitments made at the highest levels are transparent and visible, and actually impact the daily experiences of teachers and students.





Karlo Cabrera explored systemic strategies for addressing anti-Asian racism by moving beyond "fun, folklore, and festivals" toward deep institutional accountability. He emphasized that inclusion requires explicitly naming and addressing anti-Asian racism, rather than treating diversity as a broad, vague concept. In schools, this means embedding anti-Asian racism into concrete goals and accountability measures, such as school improvement plans, because failing to

name it can lead to it being ignored. He highlighted the important role of leadership, especially principals and system leaders, in shaping school culture and driving these efforts. Initiatives like leadership networks for Asian educators create spaces for shared experiences, support, and representation, which help counter underrepresentation—a form of anti-Asian racism itself. He stressed the need for ongoing monitoring and measurement, because without clear metrics, it is impossible to know whether efforts are making a meaningful impact or addressing the root issues.

Dr. Vidya Shah stressed the necessity of creating "third spaces"—collaborative environments where schools, academia, and communities engage in knowledge production, activism and healing. She cautioned against "divide and conquer" logics, that pit marginalized groups against each other, urging for cross-racial solidarity to challenge the broader structures of white supremacy. She argued that colonialism and white supremacy often erase or overlook existing anti-racism work, so a key priority is to recognize and strengthen what communities are already doing. The main call to action for decision-makers is to uplift, fund, and connect these initiatives, creating stronger networks so this grassroots work can grow and have greater collective impact.



The panel emphasized the need for data-driven approaches, sustained professional development for educators, and collaboration among teachers, communities and academia.

Breakout Sessions

The breakout sessions addressed six critical themes for inclusion of ESAC experiences and dismantling anti-Asian racism in the education system.

Session 1: Curriculum & Pedagogy – From Tokenism to Authentic Representation,
facilitated and summarized by: Jse-Che Lam, secondary school teacher in the Toronto District
School Board

1. Key Issues in Representation

- ESAC experiences are often limited, surface-level, or tokenistic in teaching.
- Many educators are still the first Asian teacher their students encounter, highlighting ongoing underrepresentation.
- Educators are sometimes expected to represent entire cultures, reinforcing stereotypes.
- Asian identities are frequently treated as monolithic, ignoring differences in migration, generation, and lived experience.
- Heritage months and Days of Significance raise awareness but can reduce cultures to food, festivals, and performances, rather than meaningful learning.

2. Impact on Students

- Tokenistic or limited representation can erase identities and oversimplify experiences.
- Students may feel misunderstood, invisible, or stereotyped.
- Lack of authentic representation affects sense of belonging and engagement.

3. Barriers to Integration

- Lack of educator networks and mentorship opportunities for ESAC teachers.
- Institutional and political barriers limiting access to external speakers and resources.
- Unequal access to opportunities between urban and non-urban schools.
- Many educators work in isolation, with limited knowledge-sharing across classrooms.

4. Strategies for Meaningful Integration

- Integrate ESAC perspectives across subjects and throughout the year, not as add-ons.
- Use interdisciplinary approaches (e.g., history, arts, social sciences).
- Encourage collaboration and resource sharing among educators.
- Create affinity spaces and mentorship networks for support and professional growth.
- Provide experiential learning opportunities (e.g., film programs, guest speakers, community-based learning).

5. Resources & Supports

- Leverage teacher-librarians for resource acquisition and curation.
- Utilize platforms such as:
 - CBC Gem
 - The National Film Board of Canada
 - Facing History and Ourselves
 - Toronto District School Board Virtual Library
- Engage with local cultural institutions, theatre, and community organizations.

6. Broader Considerations

- Need to encourage more ESAC individuals to enter teaching, addressing underrepresentation.
- Recognize intra-community diversity and internal biases.
- Strengthen mentorship for early-career educators.
- Emphasize the importance of ongoing collaboration and dialogue, with a role for CPAC in sustaining connections.

Overall Message

Moving from tokenism to authentic representation requires systemic change, collaboration, and sustained effort, ensuring ESAC experiences are meaningfully embedded in curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture.

Session 2: Capacity Building & Educator Support: Equipping the Frontlines for Meaningful Change, facilitated and summarized by selena tandon (she/her), Teacher; Equity Consultant & Facilitator; Vice President of ACENet

1. Professional Development & Educator Support Needs

- Educators require systemic, sustained, and identity-affirming supports to confidently address anti-Asian racism.
- Effective support includes:
 - Vetted, curriculum-aligned resources integrated across subjects
 - Ongoing, paid professional development (PD) that is critical and reflective
 - Facilitators with lived and intersectional experience
 - Dedicated time for planning and collaboration (e.g., Professional Learning Communities)
 - Training on microaggressions, erasure, and the “null curriculum”
 - Institutional protection for educators facing pushback
- Current gaps include limited meaningful resources, shallow PD, and insufficient leadership support.
- Participants highlighted the role of organizations like CPAC, ACENet (Asian Canadian Educators Network) in supporting educator-led and community-driven initiatives.

2. Key Barriers to Implementation

- Narrow and repetitive ESAC narratives that limit representation
- Asian content treated as “add-on” or “special interest”
- Uneven access to resources and knowledge among educators
- Limited integration beyond social studies
- Lack of intersectional representation
- Cultural misunderstandings of student participation and engagement
- Impact of the model minority stereotype on student support
- Systemic challenges:

- Overreliance on top-down mandates
- Underfunded and invisible grassroots efforts
- Limited pathways for educator and community voices to influence policy

3. Collaboration & Resource Sharing

- Emphasis on cross-sector collaboration among educators, families, and community organizations
- Key strategies:
 - Strengthen parent and caregiver engagement
 - Partner with organizations such as CPAC and ACENet
 - Support educator networks and affinity groups
 - Develop shared systems for resources and ongoing engagement

4. Coalition Building & System Change

- Coalition building is essential for accountability, sustainability, and shared power
- Requires collaboration across unions, community groups, and professional networks
- Promotes participatory models where stakeholders are co-creators of change

Overall Message

- Addressing anti-Asian racism requires systemic, sustained, and participatory approaches
- Educators emphasized the need for high-quality resources, meaningful professional development, and institutional support to build confidence and capacity.
- Grassroots leadership—supported by organizations like CPAC and ACENet—is critical to driving relevant and sustained change.
- Moving forward, progress depends on centering lived experiences, strengthening collaboration across sectors, and embedding accountability into policies and practices to ensure efforts are transformative rather than performative.

Theme 3: Addressing Anti-Asian Racism Through School Leadership, Policy, and Institutional Accountability, facilitated and summarized by Kevin Ko, Centrally Assigned Principal with YRDSB with responsibilities for Digital and AI Literacy, Museums and Archives, Library services and Parent Engagement.

1. Key Gaps in Current Practices

- Anti-Asian racism is often not explicitly named or discussed, leading to invisibility.
- Existing anti-racism efforts tend to be broad and “one-size-fits-all,” lacking specificity.
- There is limited accountability, with few clear mandates, directives, or enforcement mechanisms.
- Incidents are often treated as isolated issues rather than systemic problems.
- Leadership and policy direction are not consistently driven from the top, resulting in uneven implementation.

2. Roles and Responsibilities Across the System

- School Leaders (Principals):
 - Set the tone by explicitly naming anti-Asian racism and responding consistently to incidents.
 - Embed equity into school improvement planning, staff learning, and daily practices.
 - Model leadership through courageous conversations and visible action.
- School Boards:
 - Provide clear policy direction, training, and practical tools for implementation.
 - Establish accountability measures and monitor patterns of harm using disaggregated data.
 - Ensure leadership and staffing reflect community demographics where possible.
- Education System (Policy Level):
 - Align curriculum, data collection, and reporting systems with lived student experiences.
 - Allocate resources to address identified gaps and support sustained efforts.
- Students, Families, and Communities:
 - Play a key role in advocacy and storytelling, helping to surface lived experiences.
 - Support bottom-up change by contributing to dialogue and accountability.

3. Recommended Actions and Policy Changes

- Name and address anti-Asian racism directly in policies and school planning.
- Integrate actions into School Improvement Plans with measurable goals.
- Establish clear processes for reporting, documenting, and responding to incidents.
- Provide ongoing, job-embedded professional learning for educators.
- Centre student and parent voices through surveys, consultations, and community dialogue.
- Promote culturally relevant curriculum and representation.
- Encourage grassroots and community-driven initiatives alongside top-down leadership.
- Ensure transparency, monitoring, and continuous evaluation to track progress and impact.

Overall Message:

Effective change requires coordinated action across all levels, combining strong leadership, clear policies, community engagement, and sustained accountability to move beyond symbolic commitments toward meaningful, systemic impact.

Theme 4: Empowering East and Southeast Asian Canadian Representation and Leadership in Education, facilitated and summarized by Sandy Yep, recently retired Education Officer, Inclusive Schools Unit, Ministry of Education; Co-Founder of the Asian Canadian Educators Network (ACENet).

1. The “Bamboo Ceiling” in Education Leadership

- Participants widely affirmed the existence of a “bamboo ceiling” limiting ESAC representation in leadership roles.
- Many only became aware of this barrier when applying for senior positions, noticing:
 - A small pool of ESAC applicants
 - A lack of Asian role models in leadership
- Experiences included:
 - Nepotism and network-based hiring (“who you know” vs. merit)
 - Being overlooked despite equal qualifications
 - The influence of unconscious bias and the “power of whiteness”
- Internalized racism (e.g., self-doubt about leadership ability) further reinforces barriers.

2. Key Barriers to Leadership Advancement

Individual-Level Barriers

- Stereotypes of ESAC educators as:
 - Less innovative, introverted, or not “leadership material”
- Cultural behaviours (e.g., humility, deference) misinterpreted as lack of confidence
- Perpetual foreigner bias (e.g., accent discrimination)
- Exclusion from informal networks (e.g., social or cultural spaces where opportunities arise)

Systemic Barriers

- Ineffective employment equity policies with limited accountability
- Persistent underrepresentation in leadership roles
- The model minority myth, masking inequities
- Limited understanding or minimization of anti-Asian racism by system leaders
- Inclusion efforts often remain symbolic or checklist-based, not systemic

3. Strategies & Recommendations for Change

Awareness & Advocacy

- Increase awareness of the bamboo ceiling among policy-makers, school boards, and communities
- Amplify ESAC voices through research, advocacy, and leadership forums
- Work with allies to highlight systemic inequities and lived experiences

Mentorship & Support Systems

- Develop structured mentorship programs for ESAC educators
- Strengthen affinity groups and professional networks
- Create “third spaces” for support, dialogue, and leadership development
- Encourage shifts in self-perception and leadership identity

Collaboration & Institutional Action

- Partner with organizations such as ACENet
- Support cross-sector collaboration among schools, academia, and communities
- Enhance policies and practices to ensure accountability and equitable pathways to leadership

4. Role of Organizations & Community

- Organizations like CPAC and ACENet can:
 - Facilitate mentorship and leadership development initiatives
 - Support research, advocacy, and community engagement
 - Help sustain networks and collaborative spaces for ESAC educators

Overall Message

- Addressing the underrepresentation of ESAC educators in leadership requires systemic change, cultural shifts, and sustained support.
- Progress depends on challenging bias, strengthening networks, building leadership pathways, and embedding accountability across the education system.

Theme 5: Cross-Sector Collaboration Among Schools, Academia and Communities, facilitated and summarized by Stella Kim (she/her), Long time school teacher, queer stepmom, graduate student in education, and community activist.

1. Diverse Community Experiences

- Participants identified varied challenges shaped by generation, immigration status, culture, language, and race.
- These differences influence how individuals experience belonging, identity, and systemic barriers.

2. Student Experiences & Impact of Anti-Asian Racism

- Participants' stories highlighted the lasting impact of anti-Asian racism in schools, including experiences that may go unrecognized until much later in life.
- One example emphasized a parent learning, years later, about their child's negative school experiences, which influenced future decisions about education.
- The group stressed the need for increased educator awareness and the ability to actively address and interrupt racism in classrooms.
- There is a need for inclusive classroom resources that affirm identity and foster pride in cultural heritage.

3. Intergenerational & Intercultural Dialogue

- Participants emphasized the importance of dialogue between children, youth, adults, and elders.
- Newcomers must navigate complex systems while also building understanding across generations and cultures.

- Encouraging youth to share their lived experiences, alongside elders sharing their histories, can strengthen community understanding.
- Social media and storytelling projects were noted as valuable tools for preserving and sharing community narratives.

4. Importance of Ongoing Collaboration

- The gathering itself demonstrated the value of bringing together diverse Asian communities across sectors.
- Participants emphasized the need to sustain conversations and collaboration over time and across spaces.
- All underscored the importance of continuing and sustaining our conversation, across time and space, and urged CPAC to facilitate this important collaborative work moving forward.

Overall Message:

Addressing anti-Asian racism and supporting diverse Asian communities requires sustained, collaborative, and cross-sector efforts, grounded in lived experiences, intergenerational dialogue, and shared responsibility.

Theme 6: Anti-Asian Racism and Students' Mental Health, facilitated and summarized by Jaclyn Wong (she/her), public school teacher, co-creator of social justice initiatives for East Asian students, and graduate student in Education working on anti-oppressive education, well-being and East Asian activism in Canada

1. Anti-Asian Racism & Representation in Schools

- Anti-Asian racism is often minimized or not prioritized in some educational settings, which can invalidate and silence students' experiences.
- Asian identities are frequently treated as monolithic, despite significant differences in lived experience
- Students in rural or predominantly white areas may experience isolation differently than those in more diverse Asian communities.
- Microaggressions, even when unintentional, contribute to exclusion and invisibility.

2. Mental Health & Cultural Barriers

- Mental health stigma in some Asian families prevents open discussion and support.
- Students may understand mental health concepts but still feel unable to share struggles at home.
- Academic pressure and cultural expectations around emotional restraint can discourage help-seeking.
- Some students internalize stress, and in severe cases, may engage in self-harm.

- Language and disciplinary practices in schools can be culturally triggering and require greater educator awareness.

3. Family Dynamics & Generational Differences

- Parenting approaches vary widely across generations, from traditional strict discipline and comparison to more relational, friendship-based models.
- Differences between immigrant generations contribute to identity negotiation and code-switching among students.
- Asian parents may not explicitly discuss mental health but often remain deeply engaged in areas like extracurricular achievements.

4. School Systems & Support Gaps

- Mental health support in schools is limited by large class sizes and overextended educators.
- Guidance counselors often act as gatekeepers, creating barriers to timely support.
- Educators themselves require stronger institutional support to meet student needs effectively.
- Schools lack clear policies for emerging issues such as AI and technology.

5. Recommendations & Ways Forward

- Schools need more culturally responsive and relevant mental health approaches.
- Stronger pre-service teacher education and improved recruitment practices are needed.
- There is a need to improve professional standards and educator preparedness.
- Participants emphasized creating “third spaces” for ongoing dialogue between educators, communities, and institutions.

Overall Message:

Anti-Asian racism, cultural stigma, and systemic gaps in schools intersect to shape Asian students’ mental health and identity experiences. Culturally responsive support, stronger educator preparation, and ongoing community dialogue are essential to fostering belonging, safety, and meaningful student well-being.

Participant Reflections

Participants demonstrated strong engagement throughout the event. Many actively contributed to discussions, shared their experiences, and followed up afterward to express interest in continued engagement. Some participants also expressed interest in forming a working group to advance the work further.



A recurring reflection among participants was a deeper understanding of how absence and invisibility in the curriculum can affect students, and of the multiple ways in which anti-Asian racism operates across different levels and contexts.

Outcomes and Next Steps

Immediate Outcomes:

- Increased awareness of ESAC inclusion and anti-Asian racism
- Strong engagement and dialogue across sectors
- New connections and potential collaborations

Next Steps:

- Develop and share resources for educators
- Support ongoing dialogue and collaboration
- Explore formation of a working group
- Continue research and public engagement initiatives

To conclude, the forum served as an important starting point for sustained work in advancing equity and inclusion in education.

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