

Toronto District School Board's

Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement: Honouring the Voices of Community



Centre of
Excellence for
Black Student
Achievement



Toronto District School Board

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TDSB Director Colleen Russell-Rawlins



We are celebrating another amazing milestone for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement originally approved by The Board of Trustees in June 2020. Opening a dedicated physical space at Winston Churchill CI for Black students and Black communities is an important part of our ongoing commitment to improving the academic outcomes and experiences for Black students and families.

Nowhere else in Canada does an educational space like this exist in a school board that brings together students, staff, elders, policy makers, co-conspirators, Black communities and leaders to construct together, new and innovative approaches for creating a more just and equitable education system.

For the past year, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement has served as a much-needed affinity space where the voices of the community are heard, and Black students' experiences and outcomes have – and can – be improved. The programming in the Centre challenges stereotypical representations that surround us each and every day and ensures that students who participate have a place of safety, affirmation, belonging, and resistance.

As the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement celebrates its one-year anniversary since its virtual launch, it continues to serve as a mirror and a window. A mirror, as it continues to reflect the often unseen ways anti-Black racism operates in hallways, classrooms and departments. Conditions in schools are improving but we know that Black students are still often invisible, marginalized and/or over-surveilled. The Centre plays an important role in also amplifying the excellence our students are capable of in the board and beyond. Their greatness and success will offer untold benefits in their life, to their families and TDSB. Lastly, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is a window into a future where your identity as a Black student (or any student) doesn't predict your educational outcome or experience.

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement has truly become the place and space which inspires and informs Black students' wellbeing, joy, brilliance and academic success.

Congratulations to everyone who has contributed to its development! Let's stay the course.

Yours in education and community,

Colleen Russell-Rawlins, Director of Education



TDSB Chair Alexander Brown



The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement at the Toronto District School Board is the first of its kind in Canada, but my hope is that other leaders in education will follow suit in creating their own centres in support of improving experiences and outcomes for all Black students.

By listening to and working with our Black communities, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement provides a community-based approach that better positions us to meet the needs of our Black students and further dismantle anti-Black racism in our system.

I, along with my fellow Trustees, believe that the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement will continue to evolve and grow as a home for programs, supports and resources that reflects the diverse lived experiences and voices of our Black communities. Our shared vision is that students, staff and communities will look back on it as a place that brought meaningful change to their lives and those around them.



TDSB Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement provides an opportunity to address social and economic disparities as they relate to education within our communities. A chance to re-evaluate what is taught and how it is taught to ensure education is provided through a lens of truth, inclusion, and equity. It means a chance to really highlight those factors both inside and outside of schools that result in these disparities and find new ways in which to address them. But most importantly the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is a chance to shape our collective futures, and ensure this generation has no questions related to the enormity of their value within these systems and society at large.

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is a place where Black students, families and caregivers feel instantly welcomed and comfortable in their own skin. A best-in-class service delivery model, where systemic barriers are eliminated to meaningfully support families and caregivers in accessing tools to help with their child's education. Through ongoing community partnerships, the Centre of Excellence offers opportunities to develop decolonized curriculum resources that reframe historical narratives through an anti-oppressive lens to ensure Black students are reflected in their learning environments. Ultimately, all of the work within and through the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement will lead to improved outcomes for Black students and normalizing Black Excellence!

The Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee believes in the importance of fostering trust with families and communities by meeting them where they're at and in culturally relevant and responsive ways to serve their interests. The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement continues to do this through partnering with local organizations and agencies to maximize funding and resources to holistically serve the needs of students and families. We also see the value of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement utilizing social media platforms to inspire, promote and educate as well as increase more access to two-way free communication. A welcoming space to seek help navigating the system from people who "get it".

The Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee looks forward to the ongoing development of and collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.



African Heritage Educators' Network - Toronto Black Educators' Network (AHEN-TBEN)



Having a Centre of Excellence that is explicitly focused on Black students, their well-being, achievement and success means that we have “actionized our care” for Black students, families and communities. AHEN-TBEN sees caring as an essential first step as this emotion moves us and the development of a Centre focused on the excellence and success of Black students is the process and product of actionizing our feelings. It is this second step, the development of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement that demonstrates to the wider community that educators, and the larger school community are committed to moving from emotion to action.

It is our hope that the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement captures the great things that Black students are doing in the TDSB each day. We hope that it captivates learners in a way where it inspires educators, students and communities to transcend to all learning across the school board.

AHEN-TBEN sees the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement as a space and place for Black students to express all that they have learned from community while simultaneously learning all that they can express in community. It is truly a space where education can dialogue with community for deep learning and to wholistically nurture and represent Black students' hearts and minds.

In partnership,

AHEN-TBEN



Administrators' Black Caucus of Ontario



The sum total of the collective efforts by members of the Black community, educators, students and families is what has been realized at the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. This is a historic opportunity to address Black student achievement and is an opportunity to demonstrate proven evidence of excellence and Black joy reaffirming Black student identity, culture and a sense of belonging.

We hope for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement to challenge the fallacy of race and race neutrality and foster critical consciousness in education. This can be done through the analyses of written and unwritten policies and practices, rules and procedures and guidelines that uphold anti-Black racism and oppression in Ontario schools and school systems. We hope for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement to foster mentorship, sponsorship and professional learning for students, families and educators.

As the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement develops, we wish for it to continue to establish reciprocal, viable and collaborative partnerships with key education affiliates to ensure Black representation and the highest standards of professionalism and accountability in service to Black students, families, communities, staff and educators. We look forward to the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement serving as a means to demonstrate leadership in all its varied forms.



Ontario Ministry of Education: Assistant Deputy Minister, Educational Equity Secretariat, Patrick Case



For me, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement means that we have a platform that can focus on both the needs of individual Black students, while simultaneously addressing the systemic roots of anti-Black racism. In doing so, we can truly disrupt, and challenge the factors that negatively contribute to the success, achievement and wellbeing of Black students.

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement continues to develop best practices and provide innovative experiences to share with other school boards facing similar issues. I am optimistic about the ability of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement to arrive at better outcomes for Black students within the TDSB and beyond. I hope that through the ongoing work of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, we will be able to motivate teachers and educational leaders to see and realize the potential of Black students within the education system. The TDSB has to be applauded for establishing the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, and for nurturing it towards success.



TDSB Associate Director, Learning Transformation & Equity, Audley Salmon



It is my pleasure to congratulate all the staff that have worked diligently since the creation of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement to bring us to the point of the opening of the new home at Winston Churchill Collegiate Institute. The Centre represents an acknowledgement that student voice in combination with parent advocacy and staff commitment to address anti-Black racism in all its forms can bring about change that will have a lasting impact on our community and enhance the academic outcomes for Black students across the Toronto District School Board. To all staff, students, parents, and community members who played a part in bringing the Centre to fruition we want to extend our utmost appreciation and thanks. As we continue this journey to better support Black students and families, we know the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement will play a vital role in ensuring the success of Black students across our Board well into the future.

**With much gratitude,
Audley**

TDSB Superintendent of Learning Network 13, and former System Superintendent, Equity, Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism and Early Years, Jacqueline Spence



The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is an acknowledgement of the 40 plus years of relentless advocacy from the Black community to realize a promise of public education that leaves no one behind! This means that the daily lived experiences, historical and current day contributions, skills, talents and brilliance of our Black students and families will inform the curriculum.

I look forward to the ongoing growth and contributions of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.



TDSB System Superintendent, Equity, Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism and Early Years, and former Centrally Assigned Principal, Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, Karen Murray



The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is a fulfilment of a promise to the diverse Black communities in the Greater Toronto Area and beyond. We are proud to be the first district school board to create such an affinity space in K-12 education in Canada. The Centre of Excellence exists because of longstanding community advocacy for systemic change and for an educational space where there can be an intentional focus on Black Joy, Brilliance, Excellence and Success as we dismantle anti-Black racism in all its manifestations.

As the former first Centrally Assigned Principal of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, I am proud of all we were able to accomplish in our inaugural year. From launching virtually on June 1st, 2021, our outstanding collaborative team dedicated the year to improving the experiences and outcomes for Black students. We designed, implemented and facilitated learning that addressed the importance of affirming students' sense of belonging and building a curriculum that reinforces a positive identity. We were able to witness students' joy as they engaged in collaborative experiences with community educators and partners that not only provided them access to opportunities but allowed for their dreams and aspirations for their future to flourish.

Through our multifaceted family engagement strategy, we supported families with the holistic care of their children through responsive healing efforts and continued advocacy. Over the course of the school year, we built the capacity of staff through enriching professional development opportunities, as we highlighted promising practices and topics relevant to Black students' academic achievement and well-being in school. A special thank you to all community educators, partners and agencies who provided these inspirational opportunities.

As we move forward and continue to grow the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, it is my hope that in the years to come we will nurture and encourage the next generation of Black leaders, scholars and changemakers who can not only call this space home, but can say it was the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement that opened up a world of possibilities and inspired them to dream their biggest dreams.

Congratulations to the team that is inspiring Black students to reach for success and aim for nothing less than excellence.

Karen Murray



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Setting Context

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is the first of its kind in K-12 public education in Canada. It is one of Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) responses to dismantle anti-Black racism within the school board and improve both experiences and outcomes for Black students. The creation of the Centre of Excellence is also responsive to the voices of the Black communities who consistently advocated for deeper systemic change within the TDSB.

The concept of a Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement was first proposed through community voice over a decade ago and then in TDSB in 2017 by the Enhancing Equity Task Force. This work involved extensive community consultation which surfaced systemic barriers that are experienced by many TDSB students and disproportionately impeded the academic success of Black students. The Task Force's recommendations led to a number of action

plans in the Board's Multi-Year Strategic Plan, specifically pertaining to Toward Excellence in the Education of Black Students. These action plans have the goal of removing practices that stream students and decrease the educational opportunities of underserved groups of students, especially Black students. On June 17, 2020 TDSB Trustees unanimously approved funding to create the new TDSB Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

On June 1st, 2021, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement launched virtually highlighting the aspirations of current TDSB students and alumni and key messages from community advisory groups. The launch event also featured a research-informed panel of leading scholars and experts in the fields of Black student achievement and community-based approaches to African-centred education.



Imagery

Cover Image

“Ascent Towards the Light”, designed by the Order of Canada recipient, Robert Small, is an oil painting capturing the essence of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. The waves illustrate the turbulence and difficulties Black youth face within the educational system. The mountains represent the adversity Black youth face in society. The light on the top of the mountain represents the hopes and aspirations of African-Canadians. The confidence on the face of the teenage girl (the artist’s daughter Sade Ali Small) who appears in this painting demonstrates the strength, confidence and ability of Black youth to reach the top of the mountain.



Logo Design

The logo for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement was designed by award-winning Toronto multidisciplinary artist, graphic designer, muralist and cultural curator Danilo Deluxo McCallum (@DaniloDeluxo). It takes inspiration from a detail of a well-known African wax print (Ankara) design often referred to as “Record” (vinyl record), which also gives the impression of a shining rising sun. Many smaller shapes converge into the centre of the design, representing the many people, communities, and ideas, coming together in collective harmony.



The logo was designed to have an emphasis on the centre of the circular form (half-circle) to correspond with the name, as well as the idea that the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement will be a central space and hub for our community. At the same time, the design also forms the letter “C”. The circular form of the logo for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement reinforces the holistic nature, while the repetition creates a sense of movement as the Centre of Excellence serves as an incubator for educational innovation and change.



Mandates of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement builds on community voices as well as past and present efforts through a direct, multi-faceted strategy for meaningful and sustained change. The Centre of Excellence focuses proactively on academic success and experiences of belonging of Black students through ongoing authentic relationship building initiatives with community partners. It provides a more coordinated and well-resourced approach leading to systemic transformation. Through the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, there are enhanced supports for impacted individuals and a forum to develop solutions that are authentic and relevant for Black students, families and staff.



The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is guided by the following mandates:

Students

- Provide support to Black students in TDSB schools to combat racism, navigate complaint processes, identify barriers to success and access appropriate resources (e.g., scholarships, networking, mentoring);
- Identify, develop, and facilitate culturally responsive and relevant healing practices for students;
- Establish effective mechanisms for monitoring improvement in the achievement of Black students; and
- Inform changes to policies and procedures so that all students may benefit from the learning and innovative practices developed by the Centre.

Families/Communities

- Support meaningful engagement and advocacy of caregivers for their children in TDSB schools and programs and improve the lines of communication to them about Black student success, system navigation and complaint processes; and
- Engage in strategic community partnerships related to education within the identified approved annual budget for this purpose.

Staff/System

- Use evidence to highlight promising practices and engage in meaningful research on topics relevant to Black students that are then integrated across schools and at the system level within the TDSB;
- Create professional learning in anti-Black racism and collaborate with other staff in facilitating learning in decolonization, anti-racism, anti-oppression, and human rights, while recognizing the similarities and intersections of various forms of oppression; and
- Provide annual accountability reports and recommendations to the Board of Trustees and staff.



Physical Location

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is located within Winston Churchill Collegiate Institute located in the Dorset Park neighbourhood of Scarborough. This location was selected for several reasons, including but not limited to:

- The Leonard Braithwaite Program (LBP), the first Africentric program offered at the secondary school level in Canada. The Africentric curriculum delivers a student and community centred approach to learning, highlighting the perspectives, experiences, history and knowledge systems of people of the African diaspora;
- Availability of a large, safe and accessible environment to continue strengthening community relationships and partnerships with families across the system; and
- Proximity to transit to ensure programs, initiatives and opportunities made available by the Centre of Excellence are readily accessible to Black students, their families and communities.

Staffing

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement has 21.5 full time staff positions, all focused on improving Black students' experiences, identifying various ways in which anti-Black racism is operating in TDSB and implementing possible solutions to eliminate it. Staff composition consists of:

- Centrally Assigned Principal
- Program Coordinator
- Graduation Coaches for Black Students
- K-12 Learning Coaches
- Research Coordinator
- Social Workers
- Child and Youth Counsellor
- Communications Officer
- Office Administrator
- Community Support Workers
- Student Equity Program Advisors

The staff at the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement are guided by the following five action plans within the Multi-Year Strategic Plan entitled *Toward the Excellence in the Education of Black Students: Transforming Learning, Achievement and Well-Being*:

1. Leadership Development
2. Pathways and Transitions
3. Special Education
4. Suspensions and Expulsions
5. Early Years



Honouring Student Voice

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement offers a variety of programs, initiatives and engagement opportunities for students and families. Program offerings are designed to fulfill the student-facing mandates and aim to ensure students have equitable access to programs and resources and increased opportunities that lead to success. Therefore, at the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, all programs, initiatives and opportunities are focused on honouring Black students' experiences and strengths and ensuring their needs are met.

Student Focus Groups

In May of 2021, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement convened a series of focus group sessions. This was done to engage self-identifying African, Afro-Caribbean and Black (ACB) students in discussions related to their schooling experience. Students shared their views on how the Centre of Excellence can help support and/or improve their learning needs and amplify their voices.

Students were asked: "What do educators need to do within schools and classrooms to affirm the experiences and knowledge of African, Afro-Caribbean and Black (ACB) students and families?"



“Maybe in class discussions and lessons bring in other worldviews from people who speak French outside of Europe. Teachers should try to understand that many of us or our parents come from French speaking countries in Africa and the Caribbean. Bring that in the lessons and classrooms!” (Grade 9 French Immersion Student)

“I have met a few teachers who see me ...see my worth and don't try to limit what I can achieve” (Grade 10 student)

“

“There needs to be a lot more like training of teachers to be actively anti-racist and to question their own biases, otherwise we will have harm being done to students from all the way from kindergarten to graduation” (Grade 11 student)

”

“

“The importance of building relationships goes beyond the content being delivered to me ... I think teachers should possess the ability to inspire students.” (Grade 12 student)

”

“

“Teachers must learn more about our different cultures, backgrounds and communities from where we come from and don’t reflect on the prejudices you [they] have about us and don’t make assumptions about who we are.” (Grade 8 student)

”

Through the series of focus group sessions, students shared the following recommendations to support the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in operationalizing student mandates:

- Take leadership in promoting Black academic excellence.
- Be strong advocates and mediators for students and their families.
- Facilitate the development of a coordinated peer mentorship program in schools to provide unique mentorship and educational opportunities for Black students.
- Support Black students’ access to STEM and other specialized curriculum programs as a pathway to post-secondary education and as a means to alleviate barriers in education.
- Coordinate and share information on a variety of topics relevant to Black students including community activities and programs, mentorship and work opportunities, scholarships and grants, a list of easily accessible tutors, Black-focused resources and organizations, community supports, and TDSB resources.

Student Programming and Opportunities

The commitment of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement to improve the academic outcomes and experiences of belonging for Black students, has cultivated nurturing and sustainable partnerships with community organizations. These partnerships have led to the co-development of 10 multiple week-long student programming opportunities and 3 scholarship and internship-based experiences. All of these opportunities and experiences were grounded in areas of student mentorship, development of transferable skills, supporting pathways to career opportunities and holistic enhancement of student positive racial identity.

Student program offerings in the 2021-2022 school year included:

ADVANCE Music Industry Discovery Program

In collaboration with ADVANCE Canada's Black Music Business Collective, grade 11 and 12 students with a passion for music business explore pathways into the Music Industry (e.g. content creator, data analyst, royalty administrator, marketing manager, etc.). This 9-week Music Industry Discovery Program features high profile guest speakers and mentors from a variety of areas in the business.

Black Aviation Professionals Network (BAPN) Partnership

Learning experiences and experiential opportunities that promote professional aviation careers to Black students are provided by Black

professionals currently in the industry. This includes programming for students who have identified an interest and already enrolled in the Aviation and Aerospace SHSM within the TDSB, and also students who have a passion in aviation.

Enhancing Literacy Skills in Black Students

The Black Girls' Book Club establishes identity-affirming spaces for Black girls. This literary opportunity provides Black girls with the opportunity to read current literature that speaks to the diversity of the Black identity and also develops their skills and competencies as readers. This year, three iterations of the Black Girls' Book Club have been held: two sessions for self-identifying Black girls in secondary school, and one offering for middle school.

As we move into our second year, we look forward to advancing the literacy development of students who self-identify as boys and gender non-binary.

Black Students in Business Collective

In collaboration with Ivey Business School at Western University, Schulich School of Business at York University, and Smith School of Business at Queen's University, grade 10 Black students with an interest and passion within business are able to explore different career pathways in business, postsecondary programs and receive guidance throughout their business journey.

Black Student Leadership Courses:

- Grade 11 CPC301 - Politics in Action: Making Change
- Grade 12 HSE4M1 - Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice





PreK-K Africentric & Culturally Relevant Summer Learning Program

The *Inspired to Excel* Pre-Kindergarten - Kindergarten Program connects play and learning to a child's identity and interests. It aims to value and affirm families and their community as partners within the educational process. Designed through Africentric and Culturally Relevant and Responsive frameworks, *Inspired to Excel* focuses on embedding strong literacy and numeracy practices for Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten student development. A special component of this program is that families receive a resource package of texts and learning materials to use at home throughout the program centred around children's unique lived experiences, background, history and culture. Students and families also have the opportunity to engage in rich and relevant learning with community-based arts educators.

Pathways to Public Relations

In collaboration with Humber College Faculty of Media and Creative Arts along with Code Black Communicators Network, students in grades 11 and 12 explore academic and career pathways in Public Relations and Communications (e.g., media relations, social and digital media communication, public affairs, event management, content creator, etc.). This 3-week program supports an understanding of areas that are not often explored in traditional education settings, and also includes support for scholarship submission.

Informational Technology and Coding

In partnership with Interac Inc., this quarterly program offers an opportunity for students with an interest in coding and informational technology through various learning experiences and experiential opportunities.

Lead with Cause - Social Innovation Challenge

In collaboration with Intuit, participating schools co-identify and address barriers Black students, families and communities have with regards to financial literacy, digital equity and design thinking for innovative community-based change. This core programming also includes professional development opportunities for staff and experiential learning experiences for students.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

Over the last 4 years, we have been actively working with TDSB Black students in collaboration with Research Associates and the Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora, York University, on Youth Participatory Action Research initiatives.

Student scholarship and internship offerings in the 2021-2022 school year included:

Sunnybrook Hospital Focused Ultrasound Lab Summer Internship

In collaboration with Sunnybrook Hospital, Black students in Grade 11 and 12 interested in the fields of health science and engineering were



offered an opportunity to learn more about the Focused Ultrasound Lab Summer Internship. Students hired through the Sunnybrook Hospital Ultrasound Lab Summer Program will explore education and career pathways in the fields of health research, science and engineering while contributing to new ideas. Students will receive 1:1 mentorship, gain hands-on knowledge through project areas including Experimental, Programming, Biology or Engineering and Technology Development.

University of Toronto Engineering Blueprint

In collaboration with University of Toronto, Faculty of Engineering, Black students in Grade 10 and 11 with an interest in careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math were offered an opportunity to learn more about the Blueprint program. Blueprint is an academic enrichment program that includes 4 weeks of summer programming taking place from July 11 to August 5, 2022. In addition to year-long student engagement— including monthly webinars and scheduled meet-ups—students will have the opportunity to hear from researchers in the STEM-fields.

TDSB Learn and Work Bursary Program

The Learn and Work Bursary Program provides a \$1,000 bursary to Grade 11 and 12 students who face diverse barriers in completing their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). In collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, 29 Black students received this bursary to mitigate financial barriers these students may be facing and support them to stay in school.

Student Learning Experiences

To complement educator curricular experiences, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement offered 35 live-streamed student experiences over the course of 3 months (January - March 2022). A calendar of events offering rich and relevant livestreamed learning opportunities led by community-based educators was developed. This compilation of resources was created to promote positive identity development, enhance joy and belonging and affirm the identities and well-being of students.



Honouring Caregiver and Community Voice

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement recognizes that the process of dismantling anti-Black racism and improving outcomes for Black students requires the ongoing collaboration and support of families, communities and partner organizations. The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement aims to be responsive to the voices of Black communities who continue to advocate for systemic change within educational institutions through strategic community engagement initiatives and educational partnerships.

Families and Caregivers

In education, African, Afro-Caribbean and Black students and families may not be viewed as commanding authorities to bring about change which is necessary to challenge traditional narratives that are based on the normalization of whiteness and Eurocentrism. However, centring African, Afro-Caribbean and Black communities' diverse cultures and identities can increase their sense of belonging in the school environment. To disrupt the status quo, Board-wide interventions and mechanisms must be established within the classroom to help educators teach and empower Black students effectively.

During the consultation held by the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement with parents and caregivers of Black children, the following question was asked: **What are some factors that motivate (or prevent) parents /caregivers to become involved in their children/family member's education?**

“

“We have to stop making assumptions about Black single families and their involvement. We’ve got to create environments where Black single mothers feel welcome. And I think there could be some more intentionality with the principals to encourage all parents to participate and know that school council isn’t the only way to participate. There are other things that you can do. And there are things that you can do that would be of interest to the community. Show us you are part of the community.”

”

“

“I know this has probably been said a million times, but principals and vice principals that understand the racial and cultural make-up of the students and families they serve are more understanding. They know how to speak to us and not let us feel like we do not belong in schools.”

”

“

“As a Black trans dad that has encountered so much transphobia, misgendering and anti-Black racism from different teachers, it was good encountering one vice principal who took the time to learn, to understand my identity and how to support me and my child.”

”

“

“I think there could be some more intentionality with the principals and staff to encourage parents or family members to participate. Knowing that school council isn't the only way to engage. There are other things that we can do and showcase the richness of Black community members. So there are things that staff can do to engage us and make us feel like we belong... that would be of interest to the community.”

”

Through the focus group sessions, parents and caregivers of Black children shared the following recommendations to support the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in operationalizing families and caregiver mandates:

- Build partnerships and relationships with Black families and honor their contributions. This is important to sustain connections that are aimed at improving Black children's achievement.
- Educators can aid in parental and caregiver empowerment by asking for their assistance, views, and suggestions as a means to better prepare their child or family member.
- Establish a rapport with parents and caregivers. Communication with families must not be limited to only problems with children. This may help to eliminate the negative connotation that parents or caregivers have towards schools, especially if they feel as if teachers only contact them with negative news.
- Be proactive with outreach, especially with newcomer families who may be struggling to settle into a new environment.
- Welcome families in consistently appropriate and culturally competent ways. This would support families feeling welcome at all events and engagement opportunities.
- Educators must build cultural competency at both systemic and individual levels.



Communities

Creating school–family–community approaches for working with Black students is critical to improve their academic outcomes and overall well-being in K-12 education. To overcome all the challenges they face, it requires ongoing partnership, collaboration, and engagement as one system cannot do it alone. Advocates in schools and communities must work with families

to create equitable practices and provide the opportunities, support, and resilience that Black students need to survive and thrive. To ensure that TDSB schools genuinely serve all students, during the conversations with community members and partners, they were asked to share their insights to two questions.

In what ways can the Centre of Excellence help to facilitate opportunities to expand and strengthen the school and African, Afro-Caribbean and Black (ACB) community relationship?

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“Advocacy is important. The community is constantly advocating for students, and we also need the Centre to advocate.”

”

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“Be the voice for us, because you know the system and can speak on behalf of us and our children, and you can get into places as ACB staff that we individually may not be able to. So, I think that’s really important.”

”

“

“I do think that it is important for us to have a hub in which that unity can flourish, and I think the Centre has a unique ability to kind of be a hub ... the Centre will be able to synthesize the resources and the services that the community organizations are able to give out.”

”

What are the key success factors of an effective school to promote Black community engagement?

“

“We need to make sure that we have a network. It doesn't matter where we are, whether you live in the east, the west, whatever, so that we can come together because we have a tie that binds. We all have children within this umbrella, and we need to be able to connect them with strength. With numbers, there's strength.”

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“More information must be provided to improve transparency between communities and schools and to prevent the process from being long and difficult. This will help the community with clarity about the intentionality of schools wanting to build relationships with community partners.”

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“Improve the policy and practice by taking the concerns of family members. When Black families and community members share their concerns about schools being accountable to Black students' well-being and overall success, it means schools across TDSB must take that extra step to have positive changes in policy, practice, and resources.”

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“Rely on our elders to support and nurture the younger generation. Elders are like living breathing history and should become part of the teaching and learning at schools. I think using other folks too, storytellers and dancers and drummers. We are filled with resources, and it does not have to come from one home or one parent alone.”

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“The Centre of Excellence provides teaching resources in all subject areas to incorporate diverse Black voices from the Canadian and African diaspora. As part of an accountability measure, they should do ongoing anti-Black racism training across the system.”

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Through the focus group sessions, community members shared the following recommendations to support the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in operationalizing community mandates:

- Develop and foster collaborations with African, Afro-Caribbean and Black (ACB) community organizations that are centred on building partnerships to improve classroom conditions for Black students' identity development.
- Collaborate with educators through professional learning to develop their awareness about community resources available to support Black students' success. This includes understanding and valuing how community members are involved in supporting families in and outside of schools.
- The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement must support schools in understanding and valuing the cultural capital that exists in the Black community. A key success factor of a collaborative school-community engagement is recognizing, seeking, and valuing the varied knowledge of African, Afro-Caribbean and Black (ACB) community members that teachers could draw on in classrooms.
- Develop community partnerships that are tailored to smaller agencies, grassroots organizations, community activists and individuals doing work within African, Afro-Caribbean and Black (ACB) communities that may not have the same number of resources as larger organizations. The Centre of Excellence should be intentional in its efforts to develop these relationships, using different models of engagement that decenter hierarchical models of partnership or the "one-size-fits-all" approach.
- Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement should partner with Afrocentric organizations to ensure a more comprehensive teaching of African history/ies.





Community Partnerships

Over the course of the 2021-2022 school year, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement has been actively engaging in increasing the number of Black-identifying, Black-serving community organizations and service providers partnering with the TDSB. In response to the mandates of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, we have actively developed a new community-based process that is grounded in principles of reciprocity and relationality with educational partners. This process, leveraging the expertise and brilliance of community organizations and service providers, has led to the co-development of 10 educational programming opportunities with community partners for Black students within the TDSB. These partnerships are essential to ensuring representative organizations who offer educational programming centring the identities, experiences and cultural legacies of people of African descent.

As of May 2022, we currently have over 80 community organizations and service providers affiliated with the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement focused on African Heritage educational programming. This list continues to be updated through our relationship with the TDSB Partnerships Office and ongoing community outreach efforts.



Centre of
Excellence for
Black Student
Achievement



Staff Mandates of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

After the launch of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, diverse capacity-building sessions and leadership opportunities were provided to educators to deepen their understanding of anti-Black racism, Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) and principles of Africentricity.

Professional Learning and Capacity Building

Over the 2021-2022 school year, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement has been facilitating learning experiences guided by our inquiry question: *In what ways might we cultivate the necessary conditions to support building positive racial identity within instructional programming to promote the achievement and well-being of Black students and disrupt deficit narratives rooted within anti-Black racism?*

As part of this inquiry, the Centre continues to engage in a multi-faceted strategy of professional learning opportunities to support educators in cultivating school and classroom environments

focusing on enhancing joy, building positive racial identity development and affirming students' experiences and identities. These experiences build on research-based understanding of the topics presented, and explore concrete strategies for building children's positive racial identity focused on Blackness and African-centred practices. Some of the synchronous professional learning experiences offerings include:

- 11-part Positive Racial Identity Development Series
- 3-part Anti-Black Racism: Facilitating, Interrupting and Disrupting Series
- 4-part Black Student Success and Excellence Foundational Series (this series was provided twice throughout the year)

To support ongoing professional development, some of the capacity building sessions were recorded. These opportunities can be accessed on our TDSB Staff Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement website along with accompanying guides for continued educator growth.



Black Student Success and Excellence

In collaboration with Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate and the TDSB Research Department, the Black Student Success and Excellence (BSSE) initiative focuses on improving the achievement of self-identifying Black students across the system. This professional learning and student engagement initiative engages secondary schools and their elementary feeder schools serving high populations of Black students.

The Black Student Success and Excellence (BSSE) initiative entered Year 4 within the 2021-2022 school year. This year sought to implement the recommendations from previous iterations which include engaging in capacity building with over 150 educators; implementation of critically conscious practitioner inquiries; and in-class/ in-school co-teaching and curriculum design with educators and administrators. Furthermore, participating schools increased from 17 to 23 schools across all four learning centres. As part of the BSSE initiative, schools have been engaging in parent/community initiatives focusing on building Black parents' understanding of the school system which includes supporting the development and delivery of resources for families.

Black Studies Courses

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement continues to provide a menu of courses exploring African heritage and history, as well as building positive Black identity development. This two-part conversation, which began August 19, 2021, was launched with a keynote by Natasha Henry who shared strategies, conditions and explorations of Black Canadian Counternarratives. 62 administrators and system leaders were engaged in an exploration of six staff-developed Black-focused courses. The following courses were highlighted:

- Sound Messages
- Politics in Action
- Equity and Social Justice: From Theory To Practice
- Deconstructing Anti-Black Racism
- The African Diaspora
- Redefining the ManDem

Two of the Black focused courses mentioned above are available on our TDSB Staff Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement website.



Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) Access Pathways for Black Educators

In collaboration with Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement continues to advance structures and supports that enhance the numbers and experiences of Black educators in the preservice program. Intentional placements of 14 Master of Teaching candidates with educators within the Black Student Success and Excellence initiative were coordinated. Through this partnership, candidates engage in action research inquiry projects with school personnel, promote intentional development of affinity spaces during the six-week practicum block and curate purposeful teaching experiences with students.

Resource Development

In collaboration with various TDSB departments, and community organizations, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement curated resources aimed at dismantling anti-Black racism and supporting students and families. These resources included:

Let's Talk about the N-Word

The Human Rights Office in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement has created a series of professional learning videos and resources for staff to learn more about the N-Word. The launch of this video series is intended to educate staff about the N-Word, its historical context and impact on the Black community and educational spaces, as well as provide guidance on the official stance of the TDSB on the N-Word.

Sankofa Black Heritage Collection

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in collaboration with English/ Literacy and Teachers Learning and Leading departments developed a Teachers' Guide to model for junior and intermediate teachers the use of anti-racist and culturally relevant pedagogy within literacy development. Rubicon's Sankofa Black Heritage Collection is a series of 15 books, each written by an author of African Descent. Each book includes a variety of genres, historical and contemporary content, identifying past and present views of the African-Canadian experience.

Human Library Podcast Series, Season 2: Conversations around Black Student Success and Excellence

Season 2 of the TDSB Human Library Podcast Series, comprises a collection of audio episodes on topics that challenge educators to critically reflect on their pedagogy. This edition highlights strategies that support meaningful engagement and advocacy of caregivers and communities, and offers guidance with navigating the education system. Some of the topics and enduring understandings include:

- i. Supporting Positive Racial Identity in the Early Years - Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg
- ii. Teaching & Learning: The Archeology of Self, Unpacking of Self in Anti-Oppression Work - Dr. Nicole West-Burns
- iii. Accountability and Recommendations from Consultations - Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement Research Team

Staff Consultations

In the upcoming school year, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement will be engaging in a multi-layered approach to acquiring TDSB Staff voice (e.g., surveys post-sessions to further inform professional development). To ensure we are responsive to the needs and aspirations of self-identifying Black staff, we will be curating a series of consultations to hear from staff pertaining their experiences, concerns and aspirations through a collaborative approach in the Fall of 2023.





Connect with the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement continues to actively connect with families, caregivers and community through a variety of channels, leveraging both traditional and digital media. Messages are shared daily with our community through social media channels including the [@tdsb_cebsa Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts and shared through the TDSB social media channels.

Communications Officers also distribute content to our audience via newsletters that are emailed directly to a mailing list of over 1400 subscribers. The newsletter, which also captures the voices of students, staff and partners through feature stories, can be found on both internal and external TDSB web platforms.

Furthermore, traditional media channels such as the CBC, Globe and Mail, Toronto Star as well as Caribbean Camera, Share and ByBlacks.com have

shared information about the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement to a national audience, thus increasing the awareness and the reach of the department. The current programs, opportunities and resources offered by the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement can be found on the newly launched Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement public facing website tdsb.on.ca/cebsa. In addition, resources for staff can be found on an [internal staff website](#), which continues to be updated regularly to offer diverse staff and student learning opportunities.

