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About Us

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is the first of its kind in public education in Canada. The Centre is dedicated to improving the experiences and outcomes for Black students and aims to be responsive to the voices of Black communities who continue to advocate for systemic change within educational institutions and for dismantling anti-Black racism at the TDSB.



December Message

On June 13, 2022, we opened our doors with the grand opening of our physical site. This fall marks our first term within the new Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

This term, we ran a series of exciting programs for students and professional learning sessions for staff on topics connected to affirming Black student identity and creating healing spaces. We collaborated with community partners to better serve students, families and staff.

In December, our ongoing dedication to dismantling anti-Black racism and improving the experiences of Black students was honoured by the community. The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is the 2022 recipient of the Racial Justice in Education award presented by the Urban Alliance on Race Relations. We would like to thank the members of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations and the various Black communities for continuing to provide us with guidance, encouragement, and support. Without each of you, the Centre of Excellence would not exist. We thank you!

This newsletter features an overview of our fall programming and various January 2023 offerings.



Life Education Program

This fall, we piloted the Life Education Program at AY Jackson Secondary School. The program was led by System Social Worker Ryan Fuentes, and Graduation Coach for Black Students Keisha Evans, and supported by school staff. The purpose of the program is to provide Black students with a space to identify and facilitate healing practices and strategies. This is done by helping students to address cultural stigma, systemic anti-Black racism and racial trauma caused by various systems like education.

There are four central topics covered within the program: academic achievement, mentorship, emotional intelligence, and mental health through a Black mental health approach.

The weekly sessions incorporated play therapy activities, resource sharing on accessing appropriate Black mental health supports, and building mental health literacy through workshops. Students were also able to develop their own personalized coping and healing strategies.

Through preventative and intervention-based programming students were provided with knowledge, skills and tools for centering their mental health and well-being using a lens of anti-Black racism.

The first cohort of this program had 16 self-identifying Black male students and in the coming year this program will be offered to students in additional TDSB schools.

Pathways to Veterinary Medicine

New this year, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement collaborated with the Black Veterinary Association of Canada to invite Black identifying-students in Grades 7 to 12 to explore career opportunities as veterinarians or veterinary medical paraprofessionals (e.g., veterinary technologists, animal care attendants, animal hospital managers, etc.).

The 6-week Pathways to Veterinary Medicine program seeks to educate Black students on the various aspects of veterinary medicine, including but not limited to what veterinarians do, career opportunities, and the requirements to apply to veterinary colleges. This program offers further support and mentorship to Black students interested in pursuing a career in veterinary medicine.

The sessions include: Introduction to Veterinary Medicine, Harnessing Your Passion panel discussion, Planning your Journey into Veterinary Medicine and mentorship sessions.

To learn more about this program contact, Graduation Coach for Black Students, Veronica Montague at veronica.montague@tdsb.on.ca.

Black Girls' Book Club

Launched by Graduation Coaches for Black Students, the Black Girls' Book Club (BGBC) is a space for self-identifying Black girls enrolled in TDSB secondary schools to build community, explore new stories and ways of creative expression. The club meets in-person or virtually to celebrate the voices of Black women authors.

Registration for the middle school session will open in the spring.



This fall, students read *Muted* by Tami Charles.

The Black Girls' Book Club cultivates identity-affirming spaces for Black girls. One of the purposes of the book club is to speak to the diversity of the Black identity, while also developing the literacy skills of the participants.

To learn more about the Black Girls' Book Club or to express your interest, contact keisha.evans@tdsb.on.ca.

Student Testimonial

Thoughts from Black Girls' Book Club participant, Donielle Francis. Entry has been edited for length.

Just knowing that once a week I'm able to connect with girls who look like me and understand my struggles makes my life a lot easier. It's like another outlet for me where I know I'll be safe to share my thoughts. I didn't grow up around a lot of Black people, so this club means the world to me. Having more spaces for Black people, specifically Black girls is something that I've wanted for a long time. The BGBC is that space for me and continues to remind me that I'm not alone in my struggles of being a Black female in Canada.

The people at the BGBC keep me coming back every week. Ms. Evans and the other facilitators (who I have maintained a friendship with) have been there for me and continue to be good people in my life. I enjoy creating the slides for the participants and working with the other facilitators. The conversations we have always leave me with goosebumps because they are so deep and meaningful, I almost wish I could record them.

A major highlight of the program is the fact that it is only for Black girls. This highlight alone proves that Black girls have a different experience from Black boys, and it is important to talk about that and to have a space for Black girls to share their truth in an environment that makes them feel comfortable. At the BGBC, we put an emphasis on a brave space that allows us to talk about deep meaningful conversations that in other spaces wouldn't be allowed to prosper.

Pathways to Public Relations

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in collaboration with Code Black Communicator Network and Humber College conducted multiple sessions this fall to introduce students to the field of public relations and communications.

Enrolled students explored different jobs and career pathways within the public relations and communications industry and scholarship opportunities.

Students were also able to hear from professionals working in public relations and communications and who have hands-on experience and direct knowledge of the profession.

[Sessions](#) included: Overview of Public Relations, Career Mapping in Public Relations and Communications, and Scholarship Support with Humber College.

[Registration](#) is open for an additional session on January 17.

To learn more about this program and scholarship opportunities, contact Graduation Coach for Black Students, kai.gordon@tdsb.on.ca.

Black Student Summer Leadership Program

Registration for the 2023 [Black Student Summer Leadership Program](#) is now open. Students who are interested in registering can do so until January 31, 2023.

The Black Student Summer Leadership Program provides mentorship, skill development, and paid experiential learning placements to self-identifying Black students enrolled in Grades 10 to 12.

A key highlight of this program is that over the summer, students are paired with experiential learning opportunities that represent one of their identified passions. In addition, there is an option to gain co-operative education credits.

For organizations and students interested in participating in the 2023 program, information sessions will be held in January.

This past summer, almost 100 students received mentorship, training and experiential learning placements through the Black Student Summer Leadership Program. Students were also able to complete Youth Participatory Action Research and explored and presented on various social justice topics which impact their lives.

For more information, contact Graduation Coach for Black Students, kai.gordon@tdsb.on.ca.

Meet the Scientist!

New this fall, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in collaboration with Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre invited Black-identifying students in Grades 7 to 12 to engage with researchers, scientists and professors in this 3-week program.

Meet the Scientist! offered Black students opportunities to build an understanding of various career pathways in the field of science, explore research-based career opportunities in a hospital and/or research lab and connect with current scientists who facilitated the learning sessions.

Student Equity Collective

Launched in 2022, twenty-four students representing schools from across the TDSB have been chosen to lead positive change to address racism, hate and discrimination at the Board. Guiding the collective on their equity journey is the Director of Education, Colleen Russell-Rawlins.

In collaboration with various community artist-educators and activists, students in the Equity Collective continue to explore and engage in strategies which could lead to transformative change within the TDSB.

Music Industry Discovery Program

Following on the success of the first collaborative program, ADVANCE has returned. The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in collaboration with ADVANCE, Canada's Black Music Business Collective invited Black-identifying TDSB students in Grades 11 and 12 who are interested in career opportunities in the music industry to participate in this 6-week program.

The Music Industry Discovery Program explores pathways into the music industry (e.g., content creator, data analyst, royalty administrator, marketing manager, etc.) and supports an understanding of the music industry, which may not often be explored in traditional education settings.

Throughout the program, students receive mentorship and support in the development of transferable skills and obtain increased access to professional and academic opportunities. In addition, participants are connected with industry executives and professionals in the music business.

ADVANCE
CANADA'S BLACK MUSIC BUSINESS COLLECTIVE

EnVision Conference

Join us at the annual EnVision Conference in-person from Tuesday, February 28 to Wednesday, March 1. The focus of this year's conference is 2SLGBTQIAP+ Indigenous, Black and Racialized Joy, Intersections, and Futurity.

This year's EnVision Conference invites 2SLGBTQIAP+ elementary and secondary students, as well as their allies/co-conspirators, to honour and celebrate belonging, and come together in collective care to address biphobia, homophobia and transphobia. Students will have opportunities to come together as a class, with their GSA, or other student action group.

Along with keynote speakers, there will be workshops on a continuum for those beginning their journey in allyship and those who would like to engage in student action.

The entire conference will be an opportunity for students to share the multiple ways gender and sexual diversity can be celebrated within the Toronto District School Board.

Featured Stories:

[TDSB makes history with first student-led Youth Participatory Action Research Conference](#)

[Black CAP and the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement collaborate to help students realize their passions](#)

[Black Student Summer Leadership Program brings student closer to his dreams](#)

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Screening of *Subjects of Desire* - January 25 from 6:15 - 8:45 PM

Join the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement for a virtual screening of *Subjects of Desire* and conversation with the writer, director and producer of the film Jennifer Holness!

Subjects of Desire explores the cultural shift in North American beauty standards towards embracing Black female aesthetics and features while exposing the deliberate and often dangerous portrayals of Black women in the media.

Told from the point of view of women who aren't afraid to challenge conventional beauty standards, the film explores the positive and negative portrayals of Black women in media and asks what is the impact today?

TDSB Families, Caregivers and Community - Register [here](#)

Platform: Zoom (link shared with registrants only.)



YPAR Conference

In October, the student leaders involved in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) made history!

We had 13 Black-identifying students work together to execute the student-led and student-organized YPAR Conference, *Using Student Voice to Inform School Policies and Practices*—the first of its kind in the country!

Through their involvement in the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) students researched and transformed their findings into presentations that were shared with TDSB students, community members, and university faculty from across the United States and Canada as part of a virtual five-panel discussion. The goal of the conference was to have students share their experiences, perspectives and realities with attendees on topics which are grounded in their lived experiences and concerns. All of which fell under the broader categories of pathways and transitions, the Black identity in K-12 education, and equitable learning opportunities for Black students.

This conference was an opportunity to not only learn about each student's unique aspirations and perspectives, but it also strengthened their leadership, agency, academic achievement, and their social and emotional health.

We are so proud of all the students who worked so hard to make this conference a success!



Professional Development Opportunities for Staff:

[Black Student Success and Excellence - Foundational Series](#)

Dates: January 19, February 9 and March 9, 2023
Time: 4 - 6 p.m.

[Honouring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with Itah Sadu](#)

Date: January 16, 2023
Time: 10 – 11 a.m.

[Racial Literacy and Addressing Anti-Black Racism](#)

Dates: February 8, March 8 and April 20, 2023
Time: 4 - 6 p.m.

Staff will need to login and register on MyPath to access the sessions.

Mailing List

Sign-up for our [mailing list](#) so you can receive future updates directly from the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

www.tdsb.on.ca/cebsa

cebsa@tdsb.on.ca