



Centre of
Excellence for
Black Student
Achievement

FALL 2024 NEWSLETTER



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PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

Dear families,

We thank you so much for your support and continued engagement as we bring the fall of 2024 to a close. We had an eventful summer where over 300 students engaged in the Black Student Summer Leadership Program and the Pre-K Summer Learning Programs. This fall, we led a series of events and programs that affirm Black students and prepare them for a variety of academic and professional pathways.

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement has been supporting students and families for four years and we continue to grow and increase our service offerings. This fall, we held the 3rd Annual Youth Participatory Action Research Conference, which is the culminating event run by students in Black Student Summer Leadership Program. We also conducted the 2nd Annual Black Student Post-Secondary Engagement Symposium, connecting families with institutions and programs supporting Black students, and launched another cohort of the Black Student Leadership Course (BSLC) featuring empowering sessions in collaboration with award-winning playwright, actor and producer Trey Anthony. Additional Student programming included the Life Education Program, the Black Girls' Book Club, Webinar Wednesdays as well as some new opportunities such as Code to Creation, and Movement with Intention featuring Esie Mensah.

POST-SECONDARY ENGAGEMENT SYMPOSIUM

On November 27, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement hosted the second annual Black Student Post-Secondary Engagement Symposium.

This was an opportunity for Black students, families, and educators to connect with a variety of post-secondary institutions and learn about programs, services, scholarships, and opportunities specifically created for Black students.

The event featured an engaging panel discussion where participants heard directly from each school about what specific supportive opportunities Black students could access. The second half of the evening consisted of the post-secondary fair where students and families could engage one-on-one with all the institutions and have their questions answered and make direct connections for further assistance.

Post-secondary institutions included: Centennial College, Durham College, George Brown College, Humber College, McMaster University, Seneca College, Toronto Metropolitan University, University of British Columbia, University of Toronto, and York University.





WEBINAR WEDNESDAYS

On November 20, 2024, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement hosted an informative online panel discussion aimed at Grade 11 and 12 students, focusing on pathways to post-secondary education and skilled trades.

Panelists from the Toronto District School Board (OYAP), George Brown College, Centennial College, Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of British Columbia, Ontario Tech University, Sheridan College, and other esteemed institutions offered valuable guidance on navigating the transition to higher education or skilled trades. They provided insights into university, college, and skilled trades options, highlighting the importance of selecting a pathway that aligns with individual skills and interests. Additionally, the panel discussed crucial support systems for Black students, including scholarships, mentorship programs, and academic advising. Strategies for a smooth transition to post-secondary life were also shared, with a particular focus on neurodiverse students and the accommodations available to help them thrive. For those who missed the session, the Centre encourages continued engagement and will host more events and provide additional resources in the future.



BLACK STUDENT LEADERSHIP COURSE

The Black Student Leadership Course (BSLC) kicked off its in-person session on Saturday, November 23, 2024, with an exciting and empowering workshop led by award-winning playwright, actor, and producer Trey Anthony. The workshop focused on helping students tap into their creativity and personal experiences through a series of monologue writing and team-building exercises.

Students began by diving into the art of monologue writing, where they were encouraged to express aspects of their African/Black/Caribbean identity. Trey guided them through the key elements of crafting a compelling monologue, focusing on authenticity, emotion, and storytelling. This activity gave students the opportunity to reflect on their personal histories, experiences, and the intersections of their identities in a meaningful and creative way.

The session also included team-building exercises designed to foster collaboration, trust, and mutual support. Students worked together to build stronger connections, encouraging them to create a sense of community as they embark on this creative journey. These exercises emphasized the importance of collective energy and the power of shared experiences, preparing them to engage fully in the course and the process of co-creating their narratives.

Additionally, the students participated in a grounding exercise, helping them to centre themselves and connect deeply with their inner voices. This practice of grounding is an essential tool for self-awareness and emotional clarity, allowing the students to approach their creative work with focus and intention.

As the students move forward in the course, they will continue to develop their skills in playwriting while also deepening their understanding of African/Black/Caribbean cultures, histories, and worldviews. Stay tuned for more updates on the incredible work these students are doing as they continue to grow as writers, storytellers, and leaders in their community.



CELEBRATING BLACK YOUTH LEADERSHIP AT THE THIRD ANNUAL YPAR CONFERENCE

On October 26, 2024, the Toronto District School Board's Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement hosted the Third Annual Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Conference at Toronto Metropolitan University. This powerful event celebrated Black youth leadership, social change, and academic achievement, with students presenting research developed during the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP).

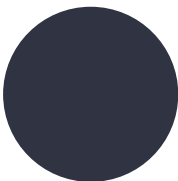
The theme, *"It Takes a Village: Nurturing and Celebrating Black Youth Identity in K-12 Schools and Community,"* emphasized the vital role of community support in the success of Black students. A panel discussion featuring student leaders and experts explored how families, educators, and institutions can work together to create more inclusive, supportive environments for Black youth.

The conference also showcased student-led research on key topics impacting Black students, including mental health, anti-Black racism, differentiated instruction, student voice, and career pathways. Through their presentations, students shared valuable insights and recommendations aimed at improving educational experiences and opportunities for Black youth.

The YPAR Conference was not only a space for students to share their research but also for them to lead in organizing the event, embodying the principles of Youth Participatory Action Research—youth as leaders and agents of change. As the event concluded, it was clear that the work of YPAR continues to inspire advocacy and activism for lasting change in education.

Thank you to all our community partners who helped make this conference a success and continue to support Black youth empowerment!

- *Submission on behalf of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement team.*



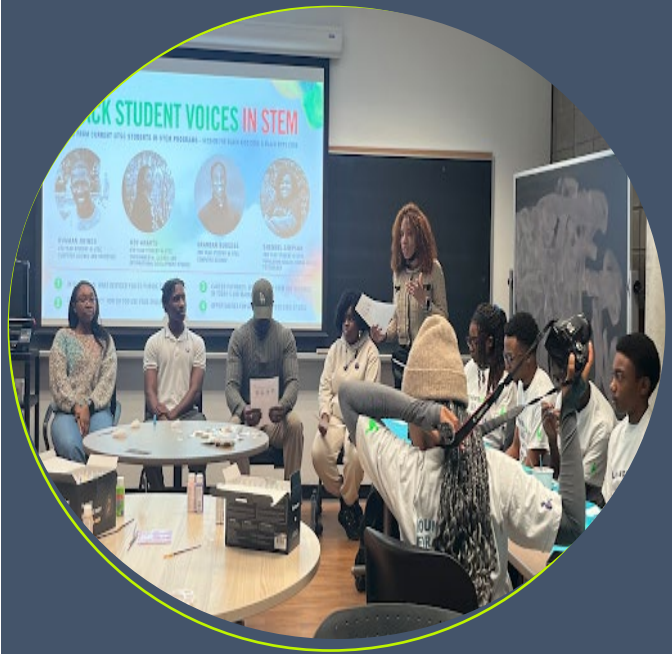
CODE TO CREATION

The Centre of Excellence in collaboration with Black Boys Code invited Black TDSB students in Grades 9 - 12 for a 2-day program entitled *Code to Creation*. Five (5) schools across the TDSB participated in this initiative.

This 2-day hands-on experience introduced students to 3D printing training workshops where they designed and created their own 3D objects using TinkerCAD. During this session, students learned about the basics of 3D modelling and printing from expert instructors. As a result of this learning and exploration, students designed a number of items including: personalized keychains, shoes, action figures and animals.

On the second day of the program, students visited the Makerspace Lab at the University of Toronto, Scarborough (UTSC), where they finalized the 3D printed objects they created during the first session. Students discussed the impact of 3D modelling on society from UTSC Faculty of Engineering staff, observed a demo print, and engaged in conversations about scholarships and opportunities available within the Faculty of Engineering (UTSC). A special component of session two consisted of a student panel conversation, *Black Student Voices in STEM*, where they heard from current UTSC students in STEM programs. TDSB students were offered key insights into career pathways alongside the role community and mentorship play in supporting Black students in STEM.

We look forward to our continued journey to advance STEM equity and promote greater representation of People of African Descent within STEM fields.

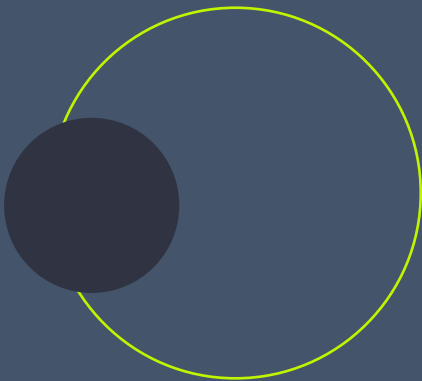


MOVEMENT WITH INTENTION

In November, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in collaboration with award-winning choreographer, director, dancer, movement director, educator and TedX speaker, Esie Mensah Creations hosted mindfulness through movement workshops for Black girls in Grades 7 and 8.

Over the course of three sessions, students reconnected with their bodies through healing-inspired dance and reflective conversations. As part of this experience, students explored the relationship between their physical presence and the energy they exude through their various interactions and relationships.

Through dance and movement therapy, students were offered opportunities to explore their bodies as vessels of self-love, wholeness, beauty and intention. These sessions culminated with students co-developing their own choreography, and final dance shared at Chief Dan George Public School.



ADVANCING STEM EQUITY - VISIONS DAY FAMILY EVENT

In collaboration with Visions of Science, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement welcomed families raising Black children to a special STEM Family Event on November 30, 2024.

This event featured a Keynote and Caregiver workshop by Visions of Science CEO Dr. Eugenia Duodu Addy exploring STEM awareness and how caregivers can engage their children in STEM. While caregivers were learning alongside Dr. Duodu Addy, Black children were guided through hands-on activities to build understanding of the scientific process and spark curiosity.

At the end of the event, each child was offered a STEM Kit to take home. The kit included activities like building a straw rocket and creating bath bombs, to further explore concepts like aerodynamics and chemistry while having fun!

We look forward to our continued partnership with Visions of Science, as we collectively explore strategies to enhance STEM learning for Black students. In the new year, further opportunities will be provided to educators to reflect, and plan actionable steps to prove equitable outcomes around student engagement and achievement in STEM.



BLACK STUDENT SUMMER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) offers Black high school students a transformative, paid opportunity to gain hands-on experience, develop professional skills, and engage in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Throughout the program, students are supported by a multi-disciplinary team of staff, including Graduation Coaches for Black Students.

In addition, students are paired with an experiential learning placement matching their area of interest, including, but not limited to:

- Arts & Culture
- Communications, Marketing & Public Relations
- Justice & Community Services
- Information Technology (IT)
- Skilled Trades
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)
- Public Health

The BSSLP allows students to explore different career paths, gain exposure to industries historically underrepresented by Black professionals, and develop essential work and leadership skills.

A key component of the Black Student Summer Leadership Program is Youth Participatory Action Research. YPAR, empowers youth to research and address issues impacting them in their schools and communities. Through YPAR, students will explore meaningful topics, work on real-world issues, and learn how to present their findings. This is an excellent opportunity for students to develop their voices and take action on topics that matter to them.

To apply for this program, students must be a Black student enrolled in Grades 10-12 at a TDSB school and be 16 years old by July 1, 2025. For more details, [please view the flyer](#). The [application](#) opens December 13, 2024 and closes January 10, 2025.

Best of luck to all applicants!



BSSLP STUDENTS CONNECT WITH TMU LEADERSHIP AT SPECIAL LUNCHEON

On November 5, students from the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) who are now attending Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) gathered for a special luncheon organized by Anamika Baijnath, Director of Experiential Learning, Quality Assurance and Strategic Initiatives. The event provided an opportunity for students to meet with university leaders, including Dean Kiaras Gharabghi and Dr. Grace-Camille Munroe, who discussed the importance of post-secondary engagement with K-12 education and the increasing enrollment of Black students at TMU.

Keosha Love Dwyer, Black student support facilitator in the Student Life and Learning Support team, introduced a new website offering resources for Black students, including wellness programs, financial aid, and the Black Student Lounge. The TMU students also shared their first-year challenges and received immediate support, while connecting with faculty and staff in an empowering community-building environment.

A Graduation Coach for Black Students, Jason Brissett, from the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement was also present and offered support and guidance to encourage the BSSLP graduates and their ongoing success at TMU.

Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

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