



The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement Year 2 Update, 2024

To: Program and School Service Committee

Date: 05 June 2024

Report No.: 06-24-4729

Strategic Directions

- Commit to the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action
- Belong – All students belong, are engaged, and valued in an inclusive environment
- Achieve - All students reach high levels of achievement, success, and personal development
- Thrive - All students graduate with the confidence, skills, and knowledge to thrive
- Revitalize - All students and staff learn and work in inclusive, safe, and modern environments

Equity as a guiding principle: Equity is foundational to all TDSB work and will be embedded throughout the strategic directions.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement Year 2 report be approved.

Context

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement (“Centre of Excellence” or “the Centre”)¹ is the first of its kind in public K-12 education in North America. Established in 2021, it was built on community voice following the recommendations, advocacy, and

¹ <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/CEBSA/About-Us>

work of Black² communities. Honouring the ongoing work in the Centre of Excellence, staff continue to partner with Black students, families and community to identify challenges that must be met and provide results of well-implemented programs and initiatives centred on school, family, and community partnerships.

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

This report highlights key actions from June 2023 to present which align with the Centre's mandates to:

1. 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).
2. Use evidence to highlight promising practices and engage in meaningful research on topics relevant to Black students, which are then integrated across schools and at the system level within the TDSB.
3. Identify, develop and facilitate culturally responsive and relevant healing practices for groups of students.
4. Engage in strategic community partnerships related to education within the annually identified and approved budget for this purpose.

Purpose of the Report

Discussing a multidisciplinary team approach to work collaboratively across the Board to support Black students, this report presents an overview of how connections with families and community can be organized to improve and enhance family engagement and involvement in schools.

This report also summarizes research and recommendations offered by students through their experiences in various Centre programs and initiatives, which can further assist with academic success and improved well-being in TDSB schools. There are now more systematic strategies for planning, implementing, evaluating, and improving effective programs of family and community involvement offered by the Centre of Excellence. Leading with the 2022-2023 inquiry question (*"In what ways might we identify, develop and facilitate Black affirming healing spaces and processes for students, families and communities?"*), the Centre of Excellence continues to prioritize mental health and well-being as part of operationalizing its mandates.

The 2016-2017 Student and Parent Census highlighted Black students' perceptions of school. Compared to the overall population Eastern African students stated they were as satisfied as other TDSB students about their overall school experience and the

² The term Black refers to individuals, peoples or communities of Black /African descent living in Canada. This may include, but are not limited to individuals or peoples from the Black diaspora with varying geographical, historical, cultural, national, ethnic, religious, and ancestral origins and influences (e.g., African, African-Canadian, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latin, Afro-Indigenous, Afro- Europeans).

support they received from school. Comparatively, Black students from other backgrounds were less satisfied. The data further suggested that students of Eastern African background felt positive about their school experience. This included feeling a sense of belonging and getting the support they needed from school. While those with Caribbean, Western African, and Canadian born parents were less positive about their school experience.

Since the 2016-2017 Student and Parent Census, there has been intentional work to increase the overall well-being and engagement for Black students at TDSB. At the Centre of Excellence, this involves working alongside various departments to find ways to comprehensively monitor Black students' progress and unique challenges. The collaborative approach is ongoing as we continue to find ways to use evidence-based qualitative and quantitative analyses to capture Black students' overall sense of belonging and caring connections at schools.

In addition, Black students' engagement is another indicator of student success that has received attention in recent years. Like their peers, Black students' success has been identified as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, student voice acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence and post-high school performance, to highlight a few. The Centre of Excellence staff continue to utilize existing literature and best practices to examine ways educators at TDSB are able to provide learning opportunities for students both in schools and through community partnerships. Recognizing that to improve post-secondary preparation and success rates of Black students, a coordinated effort is required involving all education stakeholders: families, communities, schools and post-secondary institutions.

Data from the 2023 Census supported the four focus areas that guide the work at the Centre and demonstrate our ongoing engagement with Black students and families each year.

- **Student Leadership and Programming**

One important facet of preparing Black students for the future is through student leadership and access to post-secondary and career pathways programs. The Centre of Excellence continues to provide opportunities for Black students by partnering or collaborating with community organizations and educational institutions. The student centred programs provide Black students from middle to high school with useful information to broaden their knowledge on graduation and career pathways, access to workshops, skills development and peer leadership opportunities.

The Centre remains committed to working alongside educators to build strong school communities which affirm Black students' identity and encourage the success and engagement in their schools. Therefore, students continue to share their voices through program evaluations (see Appendices A to F). In addition, the 2023 Student Census³ provided information to support the focus areas mentioned above. It is important to note that Black students represented 13.3% of the student population that participated in the census.

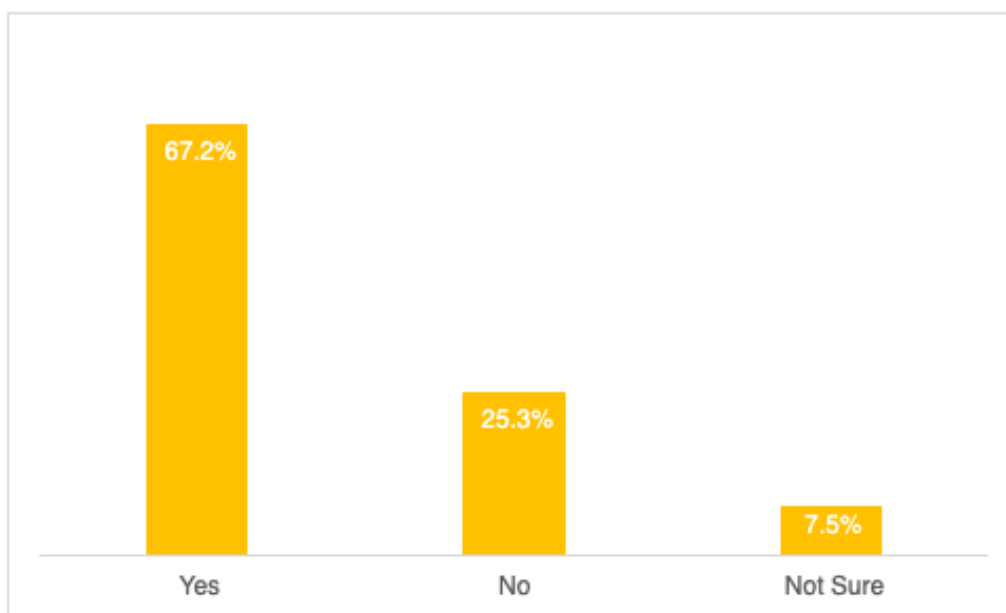
Note: While some of the data in the charts are in decimal format, they have been rounded off to the nearest whole number in the description for ease of understanding and presentation.

- **Graduation Pathways**

Census data demonstrate that Black students felt better prepared for life beyond high school: 67% were prepared, while 25% said they were not and the remaining 7.5 % were not sure (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1

“I feel prepared for life beyond high school.”



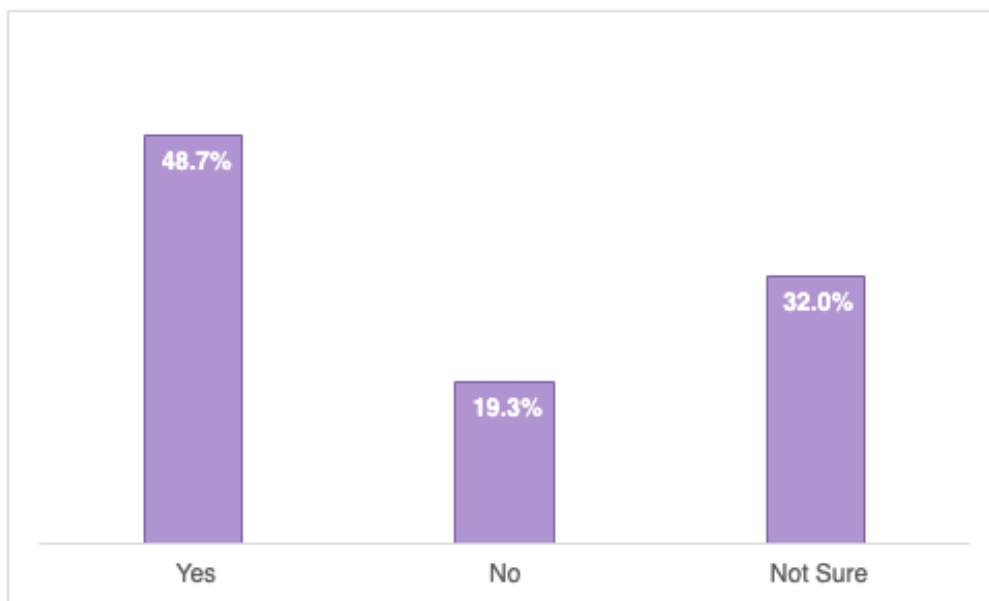
Forty nine percent (49%) of Black students stated they have been given support by school staff and educators to explore graduation pathways. Nineteen percent

³ 2023 TDSB Student Census

(19%) shared they have not received any support and 32% revealed they were not sure (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2

“I have been given support to explore the pathways I am interested in (like apprenticeship, college, university, workplace).”



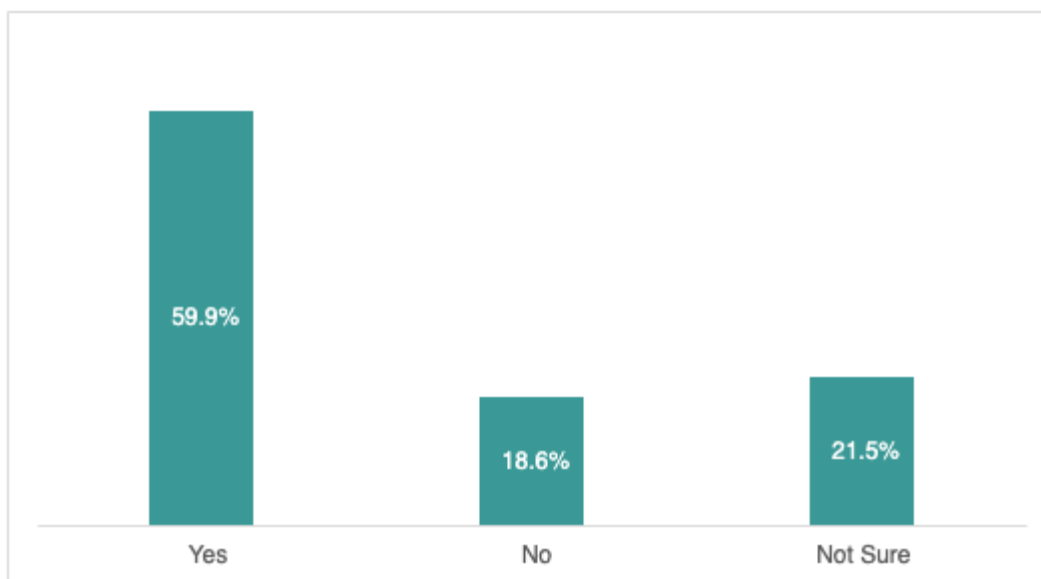
The results are in line with the Centre’s efforts to consistently operate towards and support the educational trajectory of Black students. We continue our efforts to examine the extent to which our programs are another variable that would relate to increased awareness of graduation pathways and planning for post-secondary or the workforce.

- **Caring Connections**

Based on census data results, 60% of Black students at TDSB felt they have caring connections, with 19% saying no and 22% responding they were not sure (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3

“I have a mentor (like a coach, counselor, teacher, Elder Knowledge Keeper, other trusted adults, etc.) in my life who shares their skills and/or experience to help me to develop and grow as a person.”



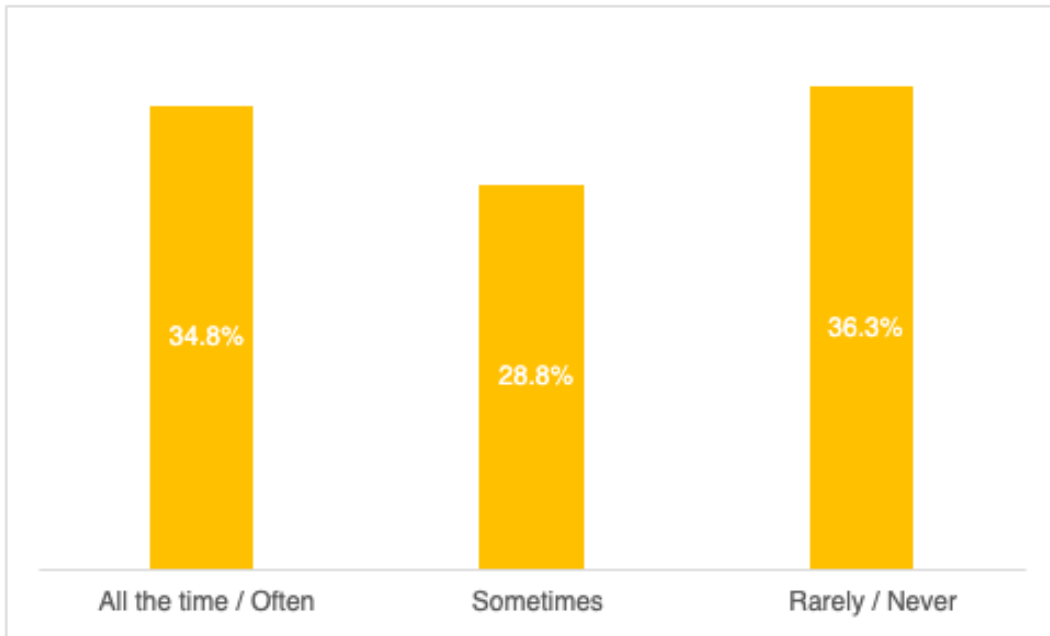
The importance of caring connections is amplified in student programs and is important for teachers and school staff to see themselves as responsible for empowering their students. The participating community partners at the Centre of Excellence continue to exhibit ethical care toward Black students and provide positive experiences during the programs. This is a critical step toward betterment of educational experiences for them.

- **Student Voice**

Given the assumption that student voice can increase student engagement in K-12 education, such efforts to give students more ownership of their education may be linked to improvements in student outcomes. Data from the 2023 TDSB Student Census revealed that 35% of Black students felt they had the opportunity to share their opinions in school improvement decisions, while 29% indicated they sometimes had this opportunity. Additionally, 36% responded that they never or rarely had the opportunity to share their opinions in school improvement decisions (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4

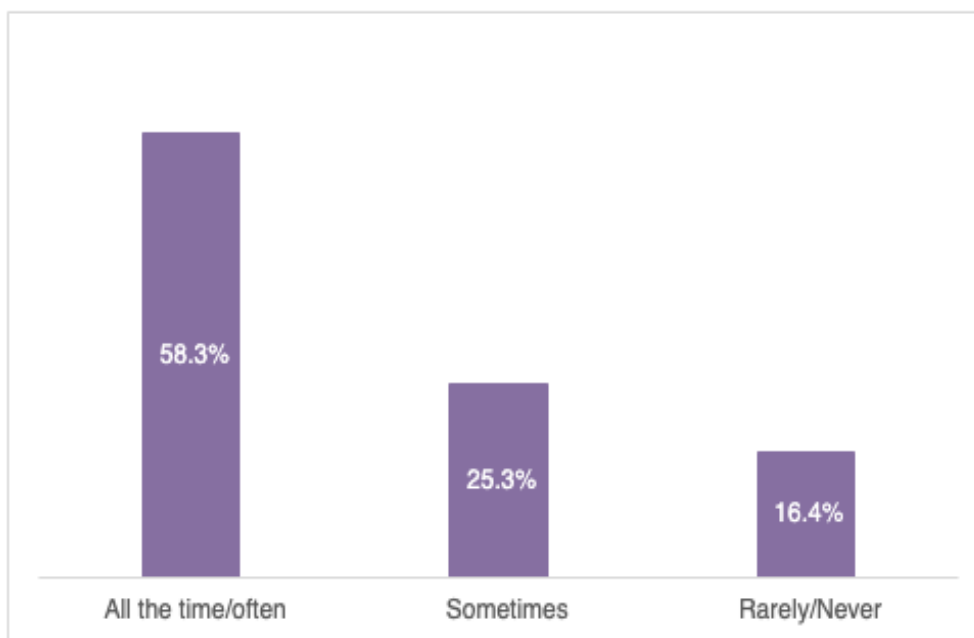
“At school, I have the opportunities to participate in school improvement decisions (like what the school can do better to help students).”



Classrooms are places where Black students not only gain knowledge but also discover themselves through engagement and participation in every aspect of their learning. Input on course content was also identified in the 2023 Student Census data: 58% stated they have been given the opportunity to offer feedback, 25% said sometimes and 16% said they rarely or never had the opportunity to give input about what they learn in their classes (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5

“At school, I have opportunities to give input about what I learn in my classes (like topics we study, books we read, etc.).”



Schools and teachers can solicit and incorporate Black student voices in many ways. For example, the success of programs such as Black Girls Book Club⁴ and the Black Student Summer Leadership Program/Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)⁵ continues to provide students the opportunity to actively engage in conversations with educators about their perspectives and experiences. The implementation of these strategies matters greatly to the Centre of Excellence staff and efforts to incorporate student voice through different avenues, including Professional Learning opportunities.

Next Steps

Following the collection of the student census data in spring of 2023, the Centre of Excellence has actively worked towards having ongoing conversation with Black students and families about the student census results. In particular, conversations have already identified and will continue to identify aspects of the results that speak to the focus areas and student programming aimed at improving the overall experience of Black students in TDSB schools. The data reflects positively with our approach to support Black students participating in leadership and programs.

We continue to ask for feedback throughout the year and, when feasible, implement their suggestions. Black student feedback not only examines the effectiveness and efficiency of programs, but it also conveys that the Centre of

⁴ [Black Girls Book Club \(2022/23 Report\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/CEBSA/Programs/Youth-Participatory-Action-Research-Conference>

Excellence values their insight, leadership⁶ and that their voices are at the center of the work that we do (see Appendix G).

- **Family Engagement and Involvement**

Research outlines a clear need for parent and caregiver involvement in their child's or family member's educational experience. When families are engaged in school, their children are more likely to succeed. To support this effort at the Centre, we provide a platform entitled *Webinar Wednesday*, a quarterly virtual session designed to equip families with the information and strategies needed to be actively engaged in their children's learning and success in schools. For the 2023-2024 school year, the Centre of Excellence partnered with educators to provide a workshop on literacy and numeracy (see Appendix H), which aligned with the Ministry of Education's new initiative to raise standards, ensure consistency, and focus students' time in the classroom on building life, job, and critical thinking skills.⁷

At a more holistic level, the Centre provided families and community members with a professional learning opportunity during 2024 Black Mental Health Week to discuss their mental health and well-being. This year's theme, "Growth and Reflection," tied in with the final year of the UN's International Decade for People of African Descent. Parents, caregivers, students in Grades 7-12, and community members joined Trey Anthony and her mother for a virtual session. Both women discussed the stigma surrounding mental health in Black communities, shared their family experiences and offered practical solutions. Black Mental Health Week is an annual event focused on amplifying Black voices and raising awareness about the historical and ongoing impact that systemic anti-Black racism has on the mental health and wellness of Black communities. [Please view session recording here.](#)

- **Staff Professional Learning and System-wide Initiatives**

The well-being and experiences of Black staff come with multiple understandings of the support and work of creating an inclusive and welcoming environment to support Black students in TDSB schools. The 2022 Staff Census data reflected the following themes among Black staff: 20% did not feel included and accepted, 29% experienced marginalization, and 39% felt there were barriers to achieving their full potential or ability to succeed (see Figure 6 below). Among these staff, between half to two-thirds believed that their racial identity were grounds for

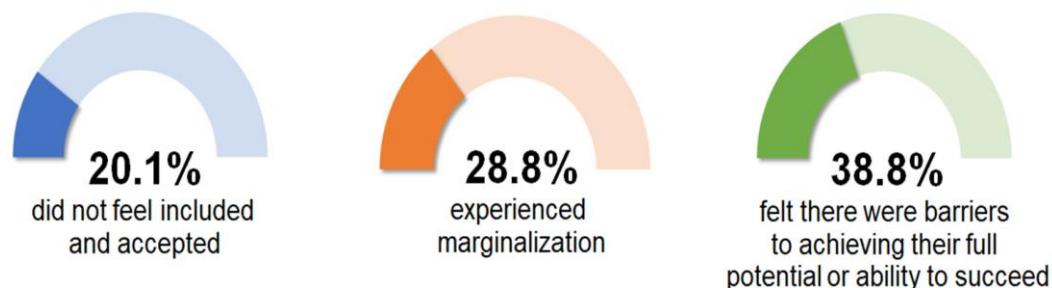
⁶ <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/CEBSA/Black-Student-Summer-Leadership-Program>

⁷ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002937/ontario-launches-plan-to-boost-math-writing-and-reading-skills>

these workplace experiences. Ethnicity and TDSB structures, policies, and/or procedures were other prominent grounds that were shared.

Figure 6

Staff Census Data



The Centre of Excellence recognizes that a systemic approach is needed to identify and disrupt structures that continue to have disproportionate effects on the well-being, experiences, access to opportunity, and outcomes for Black staff. Therefore, a variety of professional learning opportunities are offered to develop and enhance the capacity of staff and educators. This approach is to deepen educators' understanding of Anti-Black racism, Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP), and Culturally Responsive Healing for an inclusive working environment.

Please see Appendix I which displays the Professional Learning Menu of the Centre of Excellence 2023/2024 school year.

- **Community Engagement and Outreach**

Fostering community involvement and engagement in the educational process can have a profound impact on Black student success. The Centre is committed to ongoing efforts to be responsive to the recommendations from families, build partnerships, encourage collaboration, and involve various stakeholders (e.g., post-secondary institutions). The end goal of these efforts is to increase support and resources, enhance learning experiences and strengthen community relationships with the Centre of Excellence's Community Support Workers. This is our continued commitment to foster collaborative relationships with families and communities to improve their education experience and the well-being of Black students.

For more information on the continuity of the Centre's work please see 2023 PSSC report.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

Next steps are as follows: Identify proposed action(s), the staff members responsible, and a relevant timeline for implementation of the recommendation(s). Where applicable, include this information in your annual planning and reporting process, and provide information about community engagement including objectives and/or activities planned.

The Centre of Excellence continues its work in partnership with educators, institutions and within the community. This includes:

- Increasing our support and involvement with Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) Access Pathways for Black Educators, such as ongoing participation in the Black Future Educator's Pathway (BFEP) workshop and supporting the placement of Black educators within BSSE schools.
- Providing more opportunities for staff to engage with members of the Centre's Council of Elders and Advisory Committee.
- Continuing our work to centre and amplify Black students' voice both in schools and their community, such as the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Conference, Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP), College Board Conference, Black Brilliance Conference.
- Providing leadership and mentorship opportunities for Black students to build their capacity and support their graduation and career pathways.
- Maintaining our focus on professional learning experiences with educators across the Board using culturally responsive healing strategies and approaches to cultivate positive education experiences for Black students, staff and families.
- Utilizing every opportunity to provide Black parents and caregivers and families raising Black children with support through resources and workshops offered at the Centre of Excellence.

Resource Implications

The following websites outline and provide guidance for the work at the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement:

- Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/CEBSA>
- Combatting Hate and Racism - Student Learning Strategy
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/Equity-Anti-Racism-and-Anti-Oppression/Student-Learning-Strategy>

- Urban Indigenous Education Centre
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/Indigenous-Education>
- Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression
<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/Equity-Anti-Racism-and-Anti-Oppression>

Communications Considerations

Communications will be completed in collaboration with the Centre's Communication Officer and TDSB Communications Department. Communications plan is to be drafted in consultation with the Centre's Communications Officer, if required.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

- Policy P037 – Equity
- Policy P031 – Human Rights
- Protecting and Promoting Human Rights and Addressing Discrimination in Schools

Appendices

- Appendix A: Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center: Meet the Scientist Program
- Appendix B: Exploring Pathways to Public Health Careers: The Dalla Lana School of Public Health Program
- Appendix C: Executive Summary: 2023 A Day in Aviation Program
- Appendix D: The Interac Experiential Learning Program
- Appendix E: The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement: 2023 Black Student Summer Leadership Report
- Appendix F: The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement: Life Education Program
- Appendix G: Summary of Student Recommendations from Centre of Excellence Programs
- Appendix H: The ABC's of Literacy
- Appendix I: Professional Learning Menu for the Centre of Excellence
- Appendix J: Executive Summary

From

Audley Salmon, Associate Director, Learning Transformation & Equity at
Audley.Salmon@tdsb.on.ca

Karen Murray, System Superintendent Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression at karen.murray@tdsb.on.ca

Dr. David Cameron, Senior Manager, Research and Development at david.cameron@tdsb.on.ca

Tanitiã Munroe, Senior Research Coordinator, Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement at tanitia.munroe@tdsb.on.ca