

# Executive Summary



## The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement (“Centre of Excellence” or “the Centre”) 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 work of Black 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.

## Introduction

Each year the Centre of Excellence utilizes a collaborative, multidisciplinary team approach to support Black students. Key actions for 2023-2024 continue to 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.

There are now more systematic strategies for planning, implementing, evaluating, and improving effective programs offered to Black students. The desired impacts are not limited to students alone. The Centre of Excellence aims to find ways to increase Black parents and caregivers and community involvement and engagement.

## Focus Areas for 2023 - 2024

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

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

<sup>2</sup> 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)

## Student Leadership and Programming

The Centre of Excellence provides opportunities for Black students by partnering or collaborating with community organizations and educational institutions to provide Black students with useful information to broaden their knowledge on graduation and career pathways, access to workshops, skill development and peer leadership opportunities.

Focus Area	What is the data telling us?
Graduation Pathways	<p>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. Also, forty nine percent (49%) of Black students stated they have been given support by school staff and educators to explore graduation pathways. Nineteen percent (19%) shared they have not received any support, and 32% revealed they were not sure.</p>
Caring Connections	<p>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. Based on census data results, 60% of Black students felt they have caring connections, with 19% saying no and 22% responding they were not sure.</p>
Student Voice	<p>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. 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. 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.</p>

	<p>Schools and teachers can solicit and incorporate Black student voices in many ways. For example, programs such as Black Girls Book Club, the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP), and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) continue to provide students the opportunity to actively engage in conversations with educators about their perspectives and experiences. The implementation of these strategies is important to incorporate student voice through different avenues including Professional Learning opportunities.</p>

## Family Engagement and Involvement

Research outlines a clear need for parent and caregiver involvement in their child's or family member's educational experience. To support this effort at the Centre, several programs were offered:

- **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.
- **ABCs of Literacy:** a program designed to help Black parents and caregivers deepen their understanding of literacy and numeracy, and offered as an alignment 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.
- **2024 Black Mental Health Week:** A holistic and professional learning opportunity to join Trey Anthony and her mother to discuss the mental health and well-being of Black families and community members, and focused on amplifying Black voices and raising awareness of the historical and ongoing impact of systemic anti-Black racism on the mental health and wellness of Black communities.

## Staff Professional Learning and System-Wide Initiatives

The well-being and experiences of Black staff comes with multiple understandings of the support and work of creating an inclusive and welcoming environment to support Black students in TDSB schools.

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<sup>3</sup> [Black Girls Book Club \(2022/23 Report\)](#)

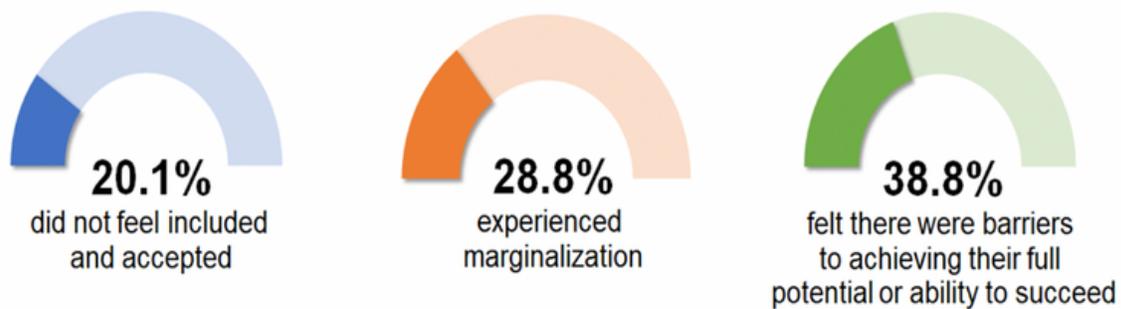
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tdsb.on.ca/CEBSA/Programs/Youth-Participatory-Action-Research-Conference>

<sup>5</sup> <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002937/ontario-launches-plan-to-boost-math-writing-and-reading-skills>

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 1 below). Among these staff, between half to two-thirds believed that their racial identity were grounds for these workplace experiences. Ethnicity and TDSB structures, policies, and/or procedures were other prominent grounds that were shared.

**Figure 1**

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.

## 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.

## 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.

Area of Focus	Action
Student Feedback	<p>Black students share their voices through program evaluations, and we solicit feedback and opportunities for suggestion implementation when feasible, conveying to students that their insights, leadership and that their voices are at the center of the work that we do.</p>
Best Practices	<p>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. Staff continue to utilize existing literature and best practices to examine ways TDSB educators provide in-school and community-based learning opportunities for students.</p>
Post Secondary Preparation	<p>The Centre of Excellence will continue to partner with post-secondary institutions to bring awareness and support.</p>
Research Based Student Improvement Strategies	<p>The Centre works alongside various departments to find ways to comprehensively monitor Black students' progress and unique challenges through evidence-based qualitative and quantitative analyses to capture Black students' overall sense of belonging and caring connections at schools.</p>