



The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

To: Committee of the Whole

Date: 10 June, 2020

Report No.: 06-20-3899

Strategic Directions

- Transform Student Learning
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

Recommendation

It is recommended:

- a) That the establishment of a centre for the success of Black students, as presented in the report, be approved;
- b) That costs for implementing the initiative at Part (a) be incorporated in the 2020-2021 budget development process.

Context

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) serves more than 246,000 students, each of whom come to school with different lived experiences, histories, resources, capabilities and needs. This report proposes changes to Action Plans in the Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) focused specifically on the academic success and experiences of belonging of Black students to develop a new TDSB Centre of Excellence for Black¹ Student Achievement.

¹ For the purpose of this report: "Black" refers to individuals of African descent who may also self-identify as Black demographically. These individuals may include, but are not limited to, those of North American, African or Caribbean descent. Social categorizations such as race, class, sexuality, ability, and gender applied to a given individual or group create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage is described as an intersectionality. TDSB recognizes the intersectionalities of identities among individuals who self-identify as Black.

Background

In December 2017, after one of the Board's largest consultations, the Enhancing Equity Task Force (EETF) engaged in extensive discussions with community members, students, families, and staff to determine which equity strategies have worked and where challenges remain. From these consultations "Enhancing Equity Task Force" presented a report with specific recommendations for system change (Appendix A) including the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement within the TDSB.

The work of the EETF surfaced systemic barriers that many students are facing in the TDSB and identified the areas of focus including ongoing barriers faced in classrooms and schools by Black students. The Task Force heard specific issues related to anti-Black racism — both the stories and lived experiences of Black students and the data and research that support their individual stories, especially with regard to the relationship between race, achievement, and well-being (e.g., Queiser & De Araujo, 2017).

The Enhancing Equity Task Force Report cited: Black students in general are less satisfied with their overall school experiences, more likely to report being bullied physically, and have less positive relationships with adults and peers in school (Yau et al., 2015). School safety data show that they have higher suspension and expulsion rates than other students (Zheng, 2013, Zheng et al., 2020). By the time Black students finish high school, 42% have been suspended at least once, compared with 18% of other students (James and Turner, 2017). Of the 200 students who were expelled between 2011 and 2016, nearly half self-identified as Black. The Ontario Human Rights Commission's 2017 report, which supports that statistic, notes that "racialized students receive harsher treatment or punishment than their White peers for similar behaviour." EETR, p.4

The work of the EETF surfaced systemic barriers that many students are facing in the TDSB and identified the areas of focus including ongoing barriers faced in classrooms and schools by Black students. One of the recommendations was to establish a "Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement" within the TDSB, with a focus on generating solutions, based on evidence, and providing support for Black students and their families.

Some of the Task Force's recommendations were adopted in the Director's Response to the Enhancing Equity Task Force Report (Appendix B) and subsequently interpreted through the priorities in the MYSP - Action Plans.

Specifically, with the MYSP Action Plans, is the Development of a Strategy for Black Student Achievement and Excellence - in lieu of the creation of a Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. This focused strategy to support Black students is an

important and essential component of equity, anti-racism and transforming student learning and is necessary until we are able to make meaningful gains for Black students in the areas of early years, reading, graduation rates, suspensions and expulsions, access to academic programming, and changes to trends in Special Education and to family and community engagement. The Action Plans also committed to providing professional learning in addressing anti-Black racism to staff starting with principals/vice-principals which was directly connected to a recommendation from the EETF Report.

Those plans include: *Transforming Student Learning: Toward the Excellence in the Education of Black Students* in the MYSP outlined actions and commitment to address the following:

- [Transforming Learning, Achievement and Well-being – Leadership Development](#)
- [Transforming Learning, Achievement and Well-Being – Pathways & Transitions](#)
- [Transforming Learning, Achievement and Well-Being – Special Education](#)
- [Transforming Learning, Achievement and Well-being-Suspensions and Expulsions](#)
- [Transforming Learning, Achievement and Well-Being – Early Years](#)

While specific gains in many areas have been demonstrated in TDSB's data (Appendix C) in a series of annual reports to the Board of Trustees, the current rate of improvement in closing the achievement gap and enhancing school climate is ultimately insufficient.

Prevalence of Anti-Black Racism

Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions and many attempts to address it have fallen short. There is daily coverage of the persistence of anti-Black racism despite decades of studies and strategies put in place to dismantle it. Anti-Black racism is seen as a root cause of the over-representation of children of Black-African descent in child welfare, higher mortality rates, educational attainment and underemployment as adults.

For Black families, present initiatives and newly developed policies and procedures need to promote faster positive change for the benefit of their children and all children to live in a more just world where everyone's human rights are respected. Families have a right to expect more from us as educators, allies and aspiring leaders at the forefront of human rights, equity, and anti-racism.

Systemic and individual acts of anti-Black racism have been normalized and are insidious therefore difficult to identify, address and prevent. The prevalence of anti-Black racism in schools has been tracked this year through requests for instructional coaching support from the four K-12 Equity Coaches. Those referrals highlighted that 50% of all requests were tied to anti-Black racism with 88% of these requests occurring within elementary classrooms and schools. In addition, Human Rights Procedure (PR 728) tracks all incidents and the upcoming Human Rights Report will show that anti-Black racism is among one of the most reported incidents in TDSB schools and departments.

While existing plans in the MYSP have been a positive first step in shifting toward anti-racist attitudes and pedagogies in specific schools, they are insufficient to uproot such a deeply entrenched form of oppression across the district. It is difficult to change not only the mindset of staff, parents and students and the systems that have been in place for decades that have not changed the educational structures and practices in ways that ensure that all TDSB employees are engaged in preventing, addressing and responding to anti-Black racism.

There is no path to racial equity that does not involve a direct confrontation with interpersonal, institutional and structural racism (Gorski, 2017).

A Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

It is vital for children and youth to be supported to see their own brilliance, celebrate their innovations and unique perspectives, value their distinct forms of expression and view themselves as essential contributors to a better Canada. A Centre for Excellence for Black Student Achievement aims to respond to this explicit need in an ongoing educational and community-informed approach to promoting the achievement and well-being of Black students.

A Centre for Excellence for Black Student Achievement offers a multi-pronged strategy for bringing about meaningful change and sustained change. It would provide a more direct, coordinated and well-resourced approach must be adopted to ensure that systemic transformation is achieved through greater support for impacted individuals, transparency and accountability.

This Centre would be among the first of its kind in Canada in public education within a Kindergarten to Grade 12 district school board - would be a gathering place for people with expertise to collaborate on innovative approaches to promoting Black student success in school. It would offer a forum for developing solutions that are authentic and relevant for Black students, families and staff as well as for staff of all identities. It has the potential for making significant contributions toward transforming professional

practice, educational programs, pedagogy and policies in educational institutions and Boards across the province.

A common misconception tied to centres that specifically focus on Black students and communities is that they foster separatism and self-segregation. It is important to recognize that communities of African-descent in Canada are not a monolithic identity of who identifies as Black and why they require a centralized space. In TDSB for example, while 77% of students who identify as Black are born in Canada the Black student population has diverse family/cultural backgrounds that span large regions of the *Caribbean, West Africa, East Africa, and Canada (TDSB, 2011)*. With this in mind, Patton (2006) reminds us that Black students require a space in which to come together to address their common experiences of anti-Black racism.

It is also a misconception that those who hold the title “equity” are the experts and are primarily responsible for tackling system change. Further some may believe this work is most urgent in racialized communities. Nothing could be further from the truth. Tackling anti-Black racism, hate and oppression must be owned by everyone. This Centre holds the potential to be transformative but will not resolve all aspects of the discrimination faced by young people in education.

Mandate for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement:

- Provide support to Black students in TDSB schools in combating racism, navigating complaint processes and identifying barriers to success and accessing appropriate resources (e.g., scholarships);
- Use evidence to identify promising practices and engage in meaningful research on topics relevant to Black students that are then integrated across schools and at the system level (where needed) within the TDSB;
- Create professional learning in anti-Black racism and collaborate with other staff in facilitating learning in decolonization, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression & human rights recognizing the similarities and intersections of various forms of oppression;
- Identify, develop and facilitate culturally responsive and relevant healing practices for groups of students;
- Inform changes to policies and procedures so that all students may benefit from the learning and innovative practices developed by the Centre;
- Establish effective mechanisms for monitoring improvement in the achievement of Black students;
- Provide annual reports and recommendations to the Board of Trustees and staff;
- Support meaningful engagement and advocacy of caregivers for their children in TDSB schools and programs and improve communication to them about Black student success, system navigation and complaint processes; and
- Engage in strategic community partnerships related to education within the annually identified approved budget for this purpose.

Current Resources to Support Indigenous Education & Equity, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression & Human Rights

The focus on addressing all forms of discrimination and hate such as anti-oppression, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism, and other forms of racism and discrimination against racialized groups, such as Sikhs, Roma, people from Latin America as well as homophobia, transphobia, the discrimination faced by those with physical and intellectual disabilities (MYSP, 2019) will continue in as described under Leadership for School Improvement as well as, the Equity Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Action Plans.

The Urban Indigenous Education Centre infuses Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum for all students as well as by providing direct wrap-around support to enhance the overall achievement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students throughout the TDSB.

The current resources devoted to the implementation of the specific goals and actions in these plans will continue to be implemented by the staff currently assigned to the Human Rights Department, Equity Team of K-12 Coaches and other school-based, Learning Centre and central staff in Leadership for Learning and Equity, Well-Being and School Improvement.

Efforts to Respond to Systemic Discrimination Outside of the TDSB

Other levels of government have also sought to recognize the stigmatization of Black people and respond to systemic discrimination. Specifically, in 2017, The City of Toronto's City Council adopted the [Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism Report](#) (Appendix D) which created an Anti-Black Racism Unit. The City of Toronto Anti-Black Racism Report provides an in-depth overview which can offer a roadmap for the proposed TDSB's Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. Similarly, in 2017 the Provincial Government established an Anti-Racism Directorate and a corresponding [strategy](#) (Appendix E). The Federal Government has also instituted an Anti-Racism Secretariat and developed a financial plan to build capacity and support community initiatives. There are lessons to be learned from each of these approaches in the development of a Centre in TDSB.

Appendix F contains a brief literature review on organizations with a similar mandate. Research has shown that Black Cultural Centres provide numerous benefits for Black students who negotiate within predominately white institutions, where they experience regular acts of discrimination, feelings of isolation and overt racism (Patton, 2006, p.3). Toronto Public Health's 2013 study examining racialization and health inequities found that experiencing discrimination triggers harmful biological, psychological and

behavioural responses. These centres provide Black students with safe spaces to share and develop cultural knowledge; cultivate a sense of belonging; gain leadership experiences; access community resources and enhance their positive sense of racial identity.

Closing

It is recognized that this is a staff report. However, it is important to note that the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement was a recommendation that came from community members through the EETF over two years ago after a lengthy consultation. The idea is not new. It has been contemplated in Black community spaces for many years and at the Black Student Achievement Advisory Committee. The TDSB had a Fran Endicott Centre which was a resource library and room for professional learning but was not consistently resourced nor modernized to reflect the changing system needs. The current realities of the historical impact of anti-Black racism on students, staff, families and communities propels us to act and be creative in our actions. We are compelled to act in new ways and be accountable to the requests from Black communities for change.

Action Plan and Associated Timelines

Critical Path	Responsibility	Timeline
Seek Budget Approval through Finance, Business and Enrolment Committee (FBEC)	Associate Director - Equity, Well-Being & School Improvement	June - August 2020
Staff Hiring & Training	Superintendent of Equity & Early Years	June - Fall 2020
Consultation with the Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee on Mandate	Associate Director - Equity, Well-Being & School Improvement	September 2020

Development of a Communication Plan	Associate Director - Equity, Well-Being & School Improvement & Communications Department	June 2020 - ongoing
Development of a Culturally Responsive Research Framework to Understand Impact	Black Student Success Initiative Research Team Superintendent of Equity & Early Years	Fall 2020
Development of a Year 1 Action Plan for the Centre & Revision of the MYSP Action Plans for Transforming Student Learning for Black Students	Associate Director - Equity, Well-Being & School Improvement Superintendent of Equity & Early Years	June 2020 - August 2020
Mid-Year Report to Committee of the Whole	Associate Director - Equity, Well-Being & School Improvement	February 2020 or March 2020
Central Accommodation Team (CAT)	Superintendent of Equity & Early Years	June 2020 - Fall 2020

Budget Implications

Proposed Organization of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

POSITION	NEW OR EXISTING	FUNDING SOURCE	FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME
Social Worker	New	Grants for Students' Needs (GSN)	1

Child & Youth Counsellor	New	GSN	1
Graduation Coach for Black Students	Existing	EPO (3) GSN (2)	5
Central Coordinating Principal	New	GSN	1.0
Communications Officer	New	GSN	0.25
Research Associate	New	GSN	0.25
Community Support Worker	Existing	GSN	2
Student Equity Program Advisors (SEPA)	Existing	GSN	2
K-12 Coaches	New	GSN	3
Office Administrator	New	GSN	1

Salary & Benefits (New Staffing Allocation) = \$509,268

\$175,000 Discretionary Funding

\$10,000 Start Up Costs

\$30,000 Strategic Community Partnerships focused on Well-Being & Achievement

The total new funding requested for this centre (staffing and discretionary budget) is \$724,268.

Communications Considerations

A communication plan will be developed.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

Appendices

- Appendix A: The Enhancing Equity Task Force Report (DEC 2017)
- Appendix B: The Director's Response to the Enhancing Equity Task Force Report
- Appendix C: Overview of System Data for Black Students
- Appendix D: The City of Toronto's City Council adopted the [Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism Report](#)
- Appendix E: The Province of Ontario's Anti-Black Racism Directorate's Strategy
- Appendix F: Literature Review

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