

---

## Communications and Public Affairs

5050 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario M2N 5N8 Tel: (416) 397-3220 Fax: (416) 397-3226

[www.tdsb.on.ca](http://www.tdsb.on.ca)

### **Africentric Alternative School Backgrounder**

On June 27, 2007, in response to a community request for an Africentric Alternative School, the Board requested that staff present a report on the feasibility of a pilot Africentric Alternative school. Staff undertook the usual consultative process with community and staff stakeholders under the terms of the Board's Alternative Schools Policy and Procedures.

In accordance with the Alternative Schools Policy and Procedure, a Local Feasibility Team was established comprised of superintendents, planning staff, trustees and representatives of the proposal group. The team discussed issues pertinent to the viability of a pilot Africentric school.

Community consultation meetings were held on November 8 and 12, 2007 regarding an Africentric school, followed by education forums on December 1 and 8, 2007 to discuss improving success for Black students. These consultations revealed that while there was strong support by many members of the African Canadian community of Toronto for an Africentric alternative school open to all, there was an equally strong interest in ensuring that all schools develop approaches to ensure the academic success and well-being of all Black students, and other racialized marginalized students across the school system.

Based on this consultation, staff prepared a report titled *Improving Success For Black Students* which was presented to the Board of Trustees at a special meeting on January 29, 2008. Public delegations were heard and Trustees then voted on, and approved, the following recommendations of the report:

- Establishing a Program Area Review Team to recommend the program and operational model for an Africentric Alternative School opening in September 2009;
- Establishing a pilot program in three existing schools integrating the histories, cultures, experiences and contributions of people of African descent and other racialized groups into curriculum, teaching practices and school environment;
- Establishing a Staff Development, Research and Innovation Centre in collaboration with post-secondary institutions and community agencies to assess best practices for improving the success of marginalized and vulnerable students; and
- Developing an action plan for addressing underachievement for all marginalized and vulnerable students.

In February, a staff working group met to provide input into the key components of an Africentric alternative school model. The working group described the program components and examined the advantages and disadvantages of three suggested Grade level options.

From March-May 2008, an Africentric School Support Committee of community members and staff which assumed the role of the Program Area Review Team met to develop the key components of the program and operational model of the school.

During this process, staff reviewed several school sites to determine the most suitable location for the school. Community members of the Africentric School Support Committee were interested in a school model that would accommodate a JK- Grade 12 continuum. Staff was unable to identify an available school site to accommodate this continuum. Sheppard Public School was recommended by staff as this site had available space to contain an elementary alternative school because of declining enrolment and because of public transit accessibility.

A meeting was held in May 2008 with the Sheppard Public School parent council and subsequently with the Sheppard school community to share information about the Africentric school concept and to get community feedback on the possible location of the alternative school at this site. The Sheppard School Council voted to endorse the location of the alternative school in an unused section of the Sheppard school site and communicated this endorsement to the Africentric School Support Committee.

In May 2008, the Board approved a recommendation to establish the Africentric Alternative School to open in September 2009 at Sheppard Public School as a JK - Grade 5 option, with the capacity to grow to Grade 8 in future years. The Board also requested a feasibility report on an Africentric school option at the secondary level.

In October 2008, staff reconvened the Africentric School Support Committee to resume work on the program and operational details of the school, and to implement a plan for communication and community information about the school in order to promote student enrolment for September 2009.