

Centre of
Excellence for
Black Student
Achievement

JUNE 2025
END-OF-YEAR EDITION

IN THIS ISSUE

- ♦ Community Sessions for Parents and Caregivers
- ♦ Virtual Student Learning Opportunities
- ♦ TTC and Astrosankofa Collaboration Celebrating Colleen Russell-Rawlins
- ♦ Black Student Summer Leadership Program
- ♦ Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten 10 Year Anniversary Celebration
- ♦ Pathways to Public Health
- ♦ Meet the Scientist and A Day of Discovery with Sunnybrook Health Sciences
- ♦ Life Education Program – Black Boys Healing with System Social Workers
- ♦ Veterinary Medicine Event



COMMUNITY SESSIONS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is committed to meaningful caregiver engagement to support the advocacy and systems navigation of Black families and families raising Black children. From January to May, we offered a variety of community and caregiver sessions to amplify Black children's voices, foster hope, healing and inspire joyful learning.

Some of the sessions that were offered include, but are not limited to:

- ♦ Equity and Belonging Begins at Home with Dr. Andrew B. Campbell.
- ♦ ABC's of Literacy in collaboration with the TDSB English/Literacy department.
- ♦ Parenting for Liberation with Trina Greene Brown.
- ♦ 123's of Numeracy in collaboration with the Mathematics and Numeracy Department.

In honour of Black Mental Health Week, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in collaboration with TDSB Mental Health and Wellbeing Professional Support Services, and Teachers Learning and Leading, hosted a session with award-winning playwright of 'Da Kink in My Hair', actor and wellness expert Trey Anthony. Parents, caregivers, students and community members were able to join Trey virtually as she discussed the importance of cultivating joy and resilience in combatting the systemic and personal impacts of anti-Black racism. Drawing from her personal journey and work, Trey discussed how Black communities can reclaim power and triumph through joy in the face of adversity.

VIRTUAL STUDENT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout the winter and spring, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement collaborated with community-based artists and organizations to offer virtual programming and student learning experiences.

TDSB staff and students participated in curriculum-focused learning opportunities such as:

- ♦ Honouring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with Randell Adjei who provided a virtual spoken word poetry event for students in Gr. 4 to 12.
- ♦ “My Blackness Is...” Identity Affirming Poetry with Order of Ontario Appointee Dwayne Morgan for students in Gr. 4 to 10.
- ♦ TonyxTones provided Afrofuturism as Counter Culture digital collage workshop for students in Gr. 6 to 10.
- ♦ Power of Stories with Itah Sadu. This storytelling session explored the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

These experiences help affirm Black identities and explore the lives and stories of the past.





Image of Colleen Russell-Rawlins with TDSB students and staff standing in front of a TTC bus that is wrapped in art.



Portrait of Colleen Russell-Rawlins from the Astrosankofa Arts Initiative.

TTC AND ASTROSANKOFA ARTS INITIATIVE CELEBRATING COLLEEN RUSSELL-RAWLINS

Colleen Russell-Rawlins, former TDSB Director of Education, was honoured during Black History Month through a collaboration between the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) and the Astrosankofa Arts Initiative. Community-based artists from the Astrosankofa Arts Initiative designed portraits of Black community trailblazers which were wrapped around TTC buses and at select TTC stations.

The bus wrapped with the image of Colleen visited the Africentric Alternative School and Winston Churchill Collegiate Institute on February 25, 2025. Students from the Africentric Alternative School, Winston Churchill CI and Willow Park JPS got to meet artists from the Astrosankofa Arts Initiative, and students got to ride the bus which was decorated with the image of Colleen, and engage in arts-based activities.

Colleen Russell-Rawlins was honoured for her notable accomplishments in leadership and education, including her contributions to creating the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, developing leaders and advancing equity.

Other honourees included Dr. Akua Benjamin, Debbie Douglas, Adonis Huggins, Louis March, and Angela Robertson. A bus featuring Louis March who was a dedicated community leader and founder of the Zero Gun Violence Movement in Toronto visited Downsview Secondary School.

On May 13, 2025, students from Gr. 6 - 12 joined us for Sankofa Cyberforge: Sculpting Techno Fossils of the Afrofuture. This virtual hands-on workshop with AstroSankofa Arts Initiatives focused on digital storytelling and digital sculpting in order to create a digital artifact. The digital artifact created explores African ancestral knowledge with speculative futures all inspired by the Afrofuturistic principles of Sankofa.

STUDENT PROGRAMS

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement offers a variety of student programs. These programs strengthen student leadership and introduce students to a variety of professional and academic pathways, provide mentorship, skill development and networking opportunities.

BLACK STUDENT SUMMER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM SEES RECORD GROWTH AND POWERFUL START TO 2024–2025

The 2024-2025 Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) has seen its highest demand to date, receiving over 600 student applications. Open to students in Grades 10 to 12, the program offers mentorship, skills development, and paid summer placements with organizations that align with students' interests—from public health and education to business, technology, and the arts.

In February and March, over 240 students were interviewed for program placement. To support them, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement hosted an Interview Preparation Workshop on February 4, where students learned how to prepare for interviews, respond to common questions, use confident body language, and navigate difficult scenarios.

Students who were successful in the interview process and accepted into the program began their Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) training on April 8, 2025. Led by an all-Black research team, YPAR empowers students to explore social issues affecting Black communities while building research, critical thinking, and presentation skills.

The first phase of YPAR wrapped up on May 27 with a closing session that was both powerful and affirming. Director Clayton La Touche joined students for the final gathering, and his presence as a Black leader in the education system held deep meaning. For many students, it was inspiring to see someone who reflects their identities in such a visible position of leadership. System Superintendent Karen Murray also attended to thank the students and research team for their incredible work and to affirm her commitment to seeing them again in July.

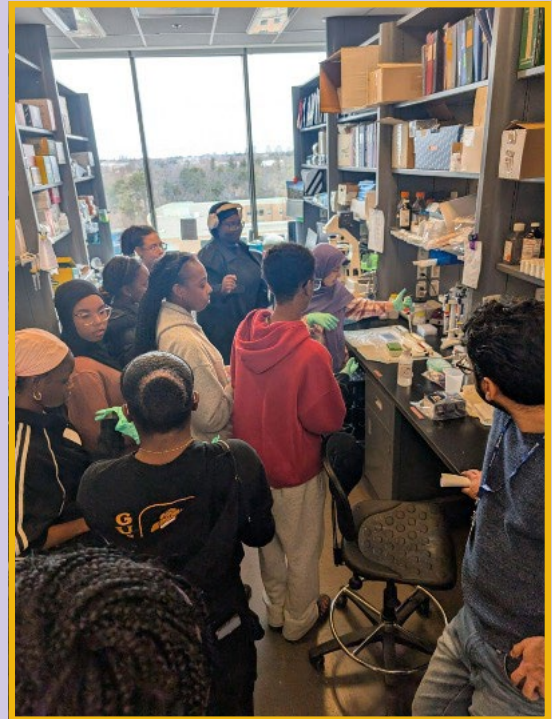
In July, students will begin their experiential learning placements across the city. From August 12 to 14, they will return to present their YPAR findings at the Summer Research Symposium, hosted at George Brown College – St. James Campus.

This year's program is already shaping up to be one of the most impactful yet—and our students continue to lead the way.

PATHWAYS TO PUBLIC HEALTH

From February 11 to March 25, 2025, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in partnership with the University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health (DLSPH) offered the Pathways to Public Health program. This six-week program for students in Grades 10 to 12 explored academic and career opportunities in public health, in fields like clinical epidemiology, health economics, and bioethics. Students also built life skills and deepened their understanding of public health concepts.

Almost 40 students enrolled in this program. Students defined the program as life-changing and meaningful. One of the participants of the Dalla Lana Pathways to Public Health program shared the following reflection:



"I really enjoyed participating in the Dalla Lana Pathways to Public Health program. I liked how the presenters shared their experiences getting into their field. My favourite presenter was the one that spoke about public health - that presentation inspired me to keep going no matter what, no matter how hard it is and that I will make it if I keep pushing. Going to the Dalla Lana building and participating in the program gave me the opportunity to learn more about the university."

- Grade 12 student, Rerel O.

Students had the opportunity to visit the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement in Scarborough and the University of Toronto, St. George Campus. At the University of Toronto, students were able to tour a variety of labs to expand their learning and envision themselves as researchers or public health practitioners.

MEET THE SCIENTIST AND A DAY OF DISCOVERY WITH SUNNYBROOK

The Centre for Excellence for Black Student Achievement in collaboration with Sunnybrook Research Institute engaged Black students through two programs this year, the Meet the Scientist program and A Day of Discovery.

Through the Meet the Scientist program, which held three sessions in February (Feb. 12, Feb. 19, and Feb. 26) Black students in Grades 7 to 12 had a unique opportunity to learn about the different pathways in the field of medical technology and research. In addition, students also learned about brain imaging technology and how artificial intelligence could lead to a better understanding of the brain.

On April 16, 2025, 80 students participated in the A Day of Discovery excursion. A Day of Discovery gave Black high school students the opportunity to tour various research labs, learn about career pathways in the healthcare sector and about the exciting work being done in the medical sciences. Students had a hands-on interactive experience, were able to interact with scientists and learned about some of the latest advances in medical research. This annual program aims to inspire the next generation of health care professionals and medical researchers.



Image: A group of students at A Day of Discovery



Image: Students listen to a speaker
at A Day of Discovery

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: LIFE EDUCATION – BLACK BOYS HEALING WITH SYSTEM SOCIAL WORKERS

For its third consecutive year, the Life Education Program has supported the healing of Black Boys within the Toronto District School Board. The purpose of the program is to provide students with culturally relevant and responsive mentorship spaces that help to identify and facilitate Black-affirming healing practices and strategies to address stigma, anti-Black racism and racial trauma within educational institutions.

First piloted at AY Jackson SS during the 2022-2023 school year, different iterations of the program are making its way across the TDSB and this year the program was offered at Winston Churchill CI, Central Technical School, AY Jackson SS, Charles Gordon PS and Ellesmere-Statton PS. Highlights of the program included field trips to MLSE Launchpad, high attendance and participation rates, support for the accumulation of credits, learning and dialogue, and Black Boy Joy.

This February, we also hosted a professional development session for school-based staff which focused on anti-Black racism (ABR) in schools. The professional learning session described how ABR presents for students, staff and caregivers, the impact of ABR on mental health, importance of identity affirming groups/activities in schools to support belonging and wellbeing, and considerations for developing Black Youth identity-affirming spaces.

PRE-KINDERGARTEN TO KINDERGARTEN 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

On February 22, 2025, we celebrated 10 years of the Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten Africentric Program. The milestone event was held at the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement and featured a keynote and caregiver workshop by Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg along with interactive Africentric learning experiences for Black children aged 3 - 7 years old.

Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg is a scholar, writer, creative and storyteller. She is an anti-racist and anti-colonial scholar committed to fostering pan-african unity and racial equity in the early years. The event also featured artistic performances by Coco Collective.



Image: Students painting

VETERINARY MEDICINE EVENT

On April 2, 2025, Black students interested in STEM, science, or the medical field were invited to explore a future in veterinary medicine. Hosted by BlendVet in collaboration with the Black Veterinary Association of Canada (BVAC) and the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement was an exciting one-day event where students engaged in hands-on activities and learned about the latest advancements in veterinary medicine.

Students were able to explore various fields including Surgery, Emergency Medicine, General Practice and Zoo Medicine and heard from leading Black veterinarians and STEM professionals about their journeys and experiences. Students also received valuable information on educational pathways, scholarships and career opportunities in the veterinary field. This immersive, hands-on event was designed to inspire and empower students to explore the veterinary profession.



Image from BlendVet event. Students are learning about animal dental hygiene.



Image of students practicing sutures.

Mailing List

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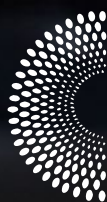
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TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR BLACK STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement site will be undergoing HVAC construction which commenced May 29, 2025. Our office located within Winston Churchill Collegiate Institute and classrooms will be closed until September 2, 2025, and will not be available for visitors, meetings etc.

During this time, Centre of Excellence staff will be relocated to other sites across the district and all planned programming such as the Black Student Summer Leadership Program will continue. We look forward to re-opening our doors in the fall and continuing to engage with students, community and staff in the 2025-2026 school year.



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