



Centre of
Excellence for
Black Student
Achievement

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PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE



Dear families,

We welcome you to 2026 and trust you had a joyful holiday season. I am Thando Hyman, Centrally Assigned Principal of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. 2026 represents the fifth anniversary of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement at the Toronto District School Board. Five years of offering programming that supports the growth and development of Black students and supports Black families and communities raising Black children.

This newsletter shares a summary of the Centre's offerings from September 2025 to February 2026.

February is African Heritage Month. We had a full [menu](#) of community and caregiver offerings which can be found on our website.

On February 12, 2026, we hosted the Black Foundation of Community Networks (BFCN) Scholarship Navigation and Directory session. Students from Grades 7 - 12 and their families were invited to a virtual scholarship application

workshop to learn how to search, prepare and apply for scholarships and bursaries.

On February 18, 2026, in collaboration with the Early Years Department we hosted Webinar Wednesday: Families as First Teachers - Nurturing Early Literacy Strategies. Black families and families raising Black children were invited to a virtual session where we explored early literacy behaviours for learners in kindergarten to Gr. 3, including the foundational pillars of literacy development. Additionally, attendees learned examples of classroom practices, and strategies to nurture literacy exploration and play at home.

In collaboration with the Black Opportunity Fund on February 26 students, families and educators were invited to an exclusive screening of episodes of the groundbreaking Black History docu-series - Black Life Untold Stories. The screening was followed by a curated discussion regarding the development of the series and the educator guide. This event took place at Winston Churchill C.I. In addition to community and caregiver opportunities, during the month of February we also hosted a series of student and staff experiences such as an interactive identity-affirming poetry session with Dwayne Morgan, OOnt and Afrofuturism and Ancestral Memory presentation in collaboration with the Aga Khan Museum and featuring AstroSankofa Arts Initiatives Director QuentinVerCetty.

YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CONFERENCE



On November 1, 2025, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement hosted the 4th Annual Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Conference: From the Village to the Vision: Youth Leading Change. Featuring the stellar work of over 50 student researchers, the 2025 YPAR conference was informative, empowering and transformational.

Held at Highland Hall at the University of Toronto's Scarborough Campus, the event brought together students, educators, administrators, families and beloved community members to support and elevate the voices of Black student leaders.

At the YPAR conference, Black student leaders from Grades 10 to 12 and recent graduates shared their thought-provoking research on topics surrounding issues that matter most to them and to Black learners. Research topics included anti-Black racism in schools, healthcare, justice and more. Remarks were also given by former Director of Education Clayton LaTouche, Associate Director Audley Salmon, System Superintendent Karen Murray and Centrally Assigned Principal Thando Hyman.

Dr. Tanitia Munroe, Senior Research Coordinator for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement and one of the lead organizers for the YPAR Conference writes, "This is more than a conference—it is a call to action. It is a reminder that fostering Black student well-being and achievement requires authentic partnerships between schools, families, and communities. It is also a testament to what happens when we invest in youth leadership: the future we imagine begins to take shape in the present."

YPAR puts power in the hands of youth while using Afrocentric research approaches to create solutions to problems in the world around them. Through the success of the conference, we've learned that when students are given tools, mentorship and a platform, academic achievement and growth takes place.

TD MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

In November, we launched the second year of the TD Mentorship Program. This program engages Black high school students who are in Grade 12 and curious about careers in finance, banking, and business. Bi-weekly sessions are led by staff from TD Bank and representatives from the financial services industry, and students are receiving career and financial guidance from professionals and student alumni.

“What makes this program really valuable is the exposure to real-world professionals that the students get to interact with regularly, and the students’ ability to ask direct questions about different career pathways or interests they may have,” says Jason Brissett, Graduation Coach for Black Students.

Over the course of the program, participants explore topics such as capital markets and associated careers, investment banking, risk infrastructure and technology, financial literacy, business strategy and career development, while also building confidence and expanding their professional networks. Students have also learned about special scholarship and internship opportunities. A bonus engagement is that students get to visit and tour a trading floor.

WEBINAR WEDNESDAYS

In November, we hosted the informative Webinar Wednesdays: Pathways to Post-Secondary Education and Skilled Trades. This was the first Webinar Wednesday for the 2025-2026 school year and was designed to support Black students and their families in learning about various pathways beyond high school.

The webinar featured guest speakers and representatives from a variety of different post-secondary institutions who shared programs offered by their institutions. The session highlighted skilled trades as a valuable and meaningful post-secondary pathway, and services and supports available for students, including neurodiverse learners.

In February, we hosted Webinar Wednesdays: Families as First Teachers - Nurturing Early Literacy Strategies in collaboration with the Early Years Department.

Webinar Wednesdays is a virtual series led by the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement designed to engage parents and caregivers, and in support of Black students and families.

BLACK GIRLS' BOOK CLUB

The Black Girls' Book Club for high school students hosted five inspiring and thought-provoking sessions from November 12 to December 16, 2025. This cohort of students were reading *Underrated Royalty* by Toronto's first-ever Youth Poet Laureate Shahaddah Jack. 21-year-old Shahaddah was a guest speaker and facilitator for sessions one and five.

Shahaddah shared with the participants, consisting of Black teenaged girls, her story growing up in Scarborough and being an alumni from Clairlea P.S. and East York C.I., and a former French Immersion student who was involved in many clubs at school. She was inspired by a community-based artist who visited her school and taught her spoken word poetry. While in elementary school, she auditioned for TDSB creates and got into the program with her poem. Poet and artist Randell Adjei started mentoring her when she was just 12 years old. By the age of 12 or 13 she started getting paid for her poetry, an art which speaks to the Canadian Black experience and anti-Black racism.

Students thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity. "I would just like to start off by saying that this Black Girls' Book Club is an experience I will never forget... I truly wish I had longer with the Black Girls' Book Club but the time we had together was short and sweet. Thank you for everything. -Destiny D.

The Black Girls' Book Club for high school students is offered yearly and it is a space for Black girls to build community, explore new ideas and new ways of self-expression. The club is a forum to celebrate the voices and stories of Black women writers.



PROFESSIONAL LEARNING UPDATES

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement remains committed to strengthening educator capacity to understand and address the manifestations and impacts of anti-Black racism in education. In alignment with our staff mandates, the Centre of Excellence delivered diverse professional learning opportunities from October - December 2025 to support staff across the district in fostering equity and belonging for Black students. Learning opportunities included:

- Affirming Black Students' Identities in Curriculum Series
- Black Student Success and Excellence System Initiative
- Addressing Anti-Black Racism and the Use of the N-Word Series

The Centre of Excellence continues to explore innovative approaches, in collaboration with community partners, to build the skills and awareness necessary to create identity-affirming, responsive learning environments. In addition to system-wide sessions, the Centre of Excellence also supports local school-based learning aligned with school improvement action plans.

LIFE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Year 4 of the Life Education Program at the TDSB is in full swing. With this initiative Black boys are provided with culturally relevant and responsive mentorship spaces where they engage in Black-affirming healing practices and strategies which address stigma, anti-Black racism and trauma, which they may have encountered within educational institutions and their communities.

This academic year, the program is offered at eight schools and is led by System Social Workers Ryan Fuentes and Shand Licorish from the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. The schools are Amesbury MS, Lawrence Heights MS, AY Jackson SS, and Ellesmere-Statton PS. In the spring, sessions will also start at Weston CI, Cedarbrae CI, Winston Churchill CI and Charles Gordon PS. This represents consistent growth since the program was first piloted in 2022-2023 at AY Jackson SS.

The facilitation of the program is a response to long-standing community organizing around increased access to appropriate mental health services and social-emotional support, particularly for Black boys. The goal of the Life Education Program is to provide a safe space that focuses on prevention, healing, identity affirmation and building a strong sense of community where Black students can reach their full academic and health potential. We look forward to continuing the growth of the program across the TDSB.

BLACK STUDENT SUMMER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



Closing the Opportunity Gap: How the Black Student Summer Leadership Program Is Reimagining Employment Pathways for Black Youth

For many Black students in Toronto, the transition from classroom to career is not simply about ambition, it is about access. Data consistently shows that Black youth face disproportionately higher unemployment rates than their non-Black peers, a systemic gap shaped by barriers that extend beyond the resume. In response, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is not waiting for change, it is creating it.

At the heart of this effort is the return of the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP), a paid, six-week program designed specifically to support Black high school students in Grades 10 to 12 with meaningful, identity-affirming employment opportunities.

The BSSLP is not just an internship, it is a deliberate intervention aligned with the Centre's mandate to identify and remove systemic barriers while improving outcomes for Black students.

Through partnerships with a diverse network of experiential learning employers and community organizations, students gain hands-on work experience in real-world settings—building skills, confidence, and professional networks that are often harder to access.

New this year, interested students can choose between two distinct pathways - YPAR or ElevatEd. Both pathways honour Black student leadership, identity, community connection, mentorship, and experiential learning job placements.

In preparation for welcoming students to the program the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement hosted a virtual information session on November 27 and an Employment Readiness Workshop on December 2. These two sessions introduced students and families to the benefits and structure of the program, supported students with the application process and their resume.

These sessions reflect a broader approach: meeting students where they are, and ensuring they are fully equipped to succeed. To learn more about the Black Student Summer Leadership Program, please view our [website](#).

Latest News

[Black TDSB Graduates Receive Architecture Scholarships](#) | Caribbean Camera – March 16, 2026

[Advancing Black Excellence in Architecture](#) | Toronto District School Board – March 9, 2026

[TDSB & Me: Andre Harriott](#) | Toronto District School Board – February 5, 2026

[Connecting Students with Scientists](#) | CTV News Toronto at 6 (42:17 mark) - February 25, 2026

[‘Meet the Scientist’ Program Inspires Black Students to Consider Careers in Science](#) | City TV News – February 25, 2026

[Black youth lead research revolution at transformative TDSB Conference](#) | Toronto Caribbean News – December 7

BSSLP Articles

[Journalism is the calling for this high achieving BSSLP student](#) – February 9, 2026

[Aspiring electrical engineer receives hands-on experience through the Black Student Summer Leadership Program](#) – March 31, 2026

[Meet the student artist who designed the BSSLP logo](#) – March 31, 2026

[Aspiring OB-GYN learns first-hand about the profession through the Black Student Summer Leadership Program](#) – March 31, 2026

[The Black Student Summer Leadership Program inspired this Peer Mentor to continue pursuing research](#) – April 1, 2026

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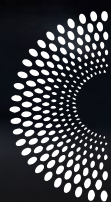
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