



Toronto District School Board

**ANTI-RACISM DIRECTORATE
PARTNERSHIP, MID-YEAR REPORT:
Black Student Success and
Excellence Initiative and the
Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning
Program**

TITLE: ANTI-RACISM DIRECTORATE PARTNERSHIP, MID-YEAR REPORT: Black Student Success and Excellence Initiative and the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program

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ANTI-RACISM DIRECTORATE PARTNERSHIP: Black Student Success and Excellence Initiative and the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program

The Toronto District School Board continues to be recognized for its leadership in collecting student-identity based information, and using it to inform policies, programs, and initiatives to support Black students' success. As a board, this data is used to outline successes and gaps in achievement, well-being, and sense of belonging. This data, which includes additional research initiatives, are also used to measure the ongoing progress of system wide initiatives tied to many racialized students in public education.

In one such initiative, *Black Student Success and Excellence* (BSSE; TDSB, 2019), the TDSB has partnered with the Anti-Racism Directorate (ARD) to extend ongoing efforts to support Black students in classrooms and schools. This initiative, tied to student voice, teacher practice and leadership competencies, provides opportunities to change school culture by building the critical consciousness of educators and students alike. Research of, and with, the BSSE aims to identify scalable conditions for fostering Black student success system wide.

To date, the TDSB partnership with the Anti-Racism Directorate focuses on ensuring Black students obtain successful learning experiences in schools. The partnership focuses on two specific related but distinct initiatives in TDSB:

1. *The Black Student Success and Excellence (BSSE) Initiative*: This initiative engaged educators and school leaders around issues of anti-Black racism in schools by creating opportunities through which educators and students might build their critical consciousness in relation to race and learning in schools and classrooms.
2. *The Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program*: A pre-Kindergarten summer program that used The Nguzo Saba Africentric principles (Karenga in Oliver, 1989) and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to focus on four core areas of academic capacity in schools: 1) Belonging and Contributing, 2) Self-Regulation and Well-Being, 3) Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours, and 4) Problem Solving and Innovating.

In the fall of 2020, the TDSB proposed to continue work in support of Black student success and achievement in partnership with the Anti-Racist Directorate. This new proposal was designed to support, extend, and deepen the implementation of the recommendations from the BSSE initiative as TDSB is within its third year of the initiative. The learning and practical experiences within the BSSE initiative continue to be invaluable as the TDSB responds to dismantling anti-Black racism and improving experiences and outcomes for Black students. The recently established *TDSB Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement* draws on the experiences

and outcomes throughout the design and implementation of the BSSE as a key part of the Centre's operating principles and practices working across the TDSB.

This mid-year report provides an overview of the actions taken within the initiatives in the following core areas:

Black Student Success Excellence (BSSE) Initiative

- Implement the recommendations from the BSSE Initiative which include engaging in capacity building with over 150 educators, implementation of critically conscious practitioner inquiries; and in-class/in-school co-teaching and curriculum design with educators and administrators; the 2020-21 BSSE initiative has increased to 21 schools.
- Hire a part-time researcher to document the various components of the initiative ranging from school-based to the youth participatory action research tied to Black students' leadership.
- Engage in parent/community initiatives focusing on building Black parents understanding of the school system; and support the development and delivery of resources for families.
- Create a culture and space for authentic and meaningful engagement for families and communities; schools have been engaging in both in-person and online learning.
- Provide responsive and meaningful opportunities to build student capital, voice, and leadership to serve them both during and after their time as students; currently working in partnership with universities and colleges to extend experiences beyond graduation.
- Develop more deeply the skills, competencies, and understanding of Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression within all staff through Critical Consciousness Practitioner Inquiry (CCPI); CCPI inquiries range from educators in classrooms, administrators, and system leaders.
- Support students and staff holistically as they develop their critical consciousness and take action against anti-Black racism and oppression; engaging in professional learning sessions for all stakeholders.
- Seek to understand the direct and indirect impact of the BSSE Initiative on students and families and conditions for sustainability before expansion.

Pre-Kindergarten Program

- Support in the re-design and expansion of the Pre-Kindergarten program.
- Utilize the learnings and best practices of the Pre-Kindergarten program within other system initiatives tied to Black Students academic success.
- Establishment of The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.
- Through the work of the Graduation Coaches for Black Students, collaborate with York University and the University of Toronto to continue a youth participatory action research initiative tied to over 40 Black student leaders representing seven high schools across all four Learning Centres within the TDSB.
- Integrate and prioritize Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression efforts in all school and system structures, policies, procedures, and programs specifically tied to Black student success.
- Implement educator and system leader work in challenging systemic racism as the Board focuses on scaling initiatives tied to Black Students Success and Excellence; currently engaging in a three-part series with over 300 educators tied to building facilitation skills to delivering anti-Black racism professional learning.
- Engage in research design to operationalize The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement mandates through Black focussed conversations with key stakeholders (e.g., students, families/caregivers, community).

In the 2020-21 proposal, specific targeted actions were outlined for work within the BSSE schools. It is important to note that although the COVID pandemic has made implementation difficult at times due to the constant changes of in-person to online learning experiences, the work within the initiative continues through commitment, flexibility, and creativity. The following outlines some of our projected actions and outcomes to date:

Projected Actions	Outcomes to Date
<p>Continued development and improvement in resources and curriculum with direct focus on teaching about race and positive racial identity development for Black students</p>	<p>Podcasts -TDSB Human Library: Conversations Around Equitable, Anti-Racist, and Anti-Oppressive Practice</p> <p>This is a podcast series, launched February 2021, comprising a collection of audio episodes on topics related to Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression in education. Episodes are open to the public and push educators to critically reflect on their pedagogy, as well as reimagine meaningful ways to deepen student engagement and community partnerships.</p> <p>Specific episodes are tied directly to Black students' success and excellence and positive racial identity development. Some of the topics and enduring understandings in the series include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Canadian experiences and the Curriculum – Natasha Henry • Centring Black LGBTQ+ students in the Classroom – Tanitia Munroe • Supporting Positive Racial Identity in Early Years – Dr. Kerry-Ann Escayg • Partnering with Community through the Arts – Randell Adeji
<p>Development and implementation of professional learning focusing on Critically Conscious Practitioner Inquiry tied to strategies that address anti-Black racism</p>	

Projected Actions	Outcomes to Date
<p>Improvement in Literacy and Numeracy for Black Students (Kindergarten to Grade 2, Adolescent Literacy) tied to the early literacy and adolescent literacy plan focusing on literacy intervention initiatives</p>	<p>Implementation of the DIAL program - Addressing Debt in Adolescent Literacy (DIAL)</p> <p>The DIAL program focused on collaborative inquiries at the school level anchored in culture-centred literacy theorists, such as Dr Alfred Tatum and Dr. Gholdy Muhammad. Dr. Muhammad kicked off the initiative with an hour-long session for TDSB educators. Dr. Nicole West-Burns led three sessions in the school year on anti-Black racism in Canada, and critical consciousness practitioner and anti-racist work. The goals of the program are to use a culturally relevant and responsive approach to literacy teaching that nurtures and affirms students’ racial, cultural, and reader identities in multiple content areas; supporting the reader in building a positive reading identity through explicit strategy and skill development that is contextualized and encouraging students and educators to take a critical stance, to respond or to take action as they engage in the critical analysis and evaluation of text as it relates to issues of equity, power, and social justice. DIAL schools and BSSE schools were supported through the purchase of the Sankofa Black Heritage Collection of non-fiction texts in addition to being provided funding to purchase professional teacher resources including Tatum and Muhammad’s work. Educators were also invited to voluntary sessions on collaborative inquiry and the critical importance of student voice in</p>

Projected Actions	Outcomes to Date
	<p>teacher collaborative inquiries. The “Show Me Literacy” series (co-developed by the TDSB’s Equity department and English/Literacy department) highlighted culture-centered literacy strategies using a variety of Black authored text (poems, graphic novels, novels).</p>
<p>Develop Kindergarten to Grade 12 de-streaming, academic, inclusive, and critical work in relation to both content of learning and race – with school entry expectations of academic engagement and ultimately post-secondary education experience</p>	<p>Numeracy through De-streaming</p> <p>Initiatives have been underway to support numeracy development and academic success in mathematics for Black students in the TDSB. Schools have undertaken collaborative inquiries to infuse social justice issues into elementary and secondary mathematics programs. Lessons that explore, for example, proportional reasoning through transit fare enforcement and police carding data have allowed students to see the power of mathematics to uncover and tackle societal injustice that occurs within their own communities. Disrupting academic streaming in secondary mathematics is also well underway in the TDSB. More Black students in schools that have historically been skewed to high Applied math enrollment are now accessing Academic programming with greater prospects for long-term success and post-secondary entrance. Finally, there has been an emphasis on professional learning focused on differentiated instruction, universal design for learning, and culturally responsive pedagogy in mathematics across all secondary school mathematics lead</p>

Projected Actions	Outcomes to Date
	<p>teachers to built system capacity in these areas so that math teaching and programming honours and leverages the lived experience of Black students and is more inclusive for all.</p>
<p>Continue to develop school and system leadership focusing on strategies to address anti-Black racism to support implementation in schools and within the organization</p>	<p><i>Anti-Black Racism: Facilitating, Interrupting and Disrupting (three-part series)</i></p> <p>As part of the ongoing professional learning within the BSSE, Karen Murray and Dr. Nicole West-Burns are engaging in a three-part series focusing on building the critical consciousness of administrators to address, and interrupt and disrupt issues of anti-Black racism at their schools and site of practice. The series, originally intended for BSSE administrators, was open to the entire system. There are close to 300 administrators engaging in this experience.</p>
<p>Continue to expand on programming to support Black parent engagement and advocacy</p>	<p>Dr. Carl James Parent Engagement Session</p> <p>Dr. Carl James, York University’s Jean Augustine Chair, has been engaging in parent engagement workshops across the BSSE schools. To-date, Dr. James’ sessions have reached families and caregivers across all four Learning Centres within the TDSB.</p>
<p>Continue to expand Pre-Kindergarten programming for summer learning</p>	<p>The 2021 Pre-Kindergarten program has been expanded this summer to include 13 school locations and four remote learning sites.</p>

Projected Actions	Outcomes to Date
<p>Development of Black student focused leadership programs tied to Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in collaboration with Toronto universities (e.g., York University and/or University of Toronto)</p>	<p>Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) comprised of up to 20 students every Saturday.</p>
<p>The TDSB Research and Development department will continue to develop research frameworks to support the development of The Centre for Excellence in Black Student Achievement and the development of student researchers tied to Black Student Leadership YPAR initiative.</p> <p>Research and Development will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the tracking and monitoring of the recommendations of the BSSE initiative. • Continue to monitor and track progress of initiatives related to addressing anti-Black racism within the TDSB through internal and external partners and in collaboration with the BSSE Research Committee and the Anti-Racism Directorate. • Continue to seek and ensure professional and participatory representation and reflection from the diversity of the Black population. 	<p>The TDSB has hired a Research Coordinator who is leading the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upcoming Black focused conversations tied to unpacking the mandates of The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. • Co-development of the Black Students’ Summer Leadership Program – supporting student researchers. • Monitoring and tracking of the initiatives tied to BSSE Research and addressing anti-Black racism.

Next Steps

The BSSE program is an ongoing and iterative professional learning program that uses collegial collaborative insights, student partnership, and critical research literature to deepen the critical consciousness of both educators and students in relation to race and racism in society as well within learning experiences in schools.

As previously noted, the evidence gathered from the ongoing research tied to the BSSE Initiative, continues to suggest that this work has the potential to interrupt historical and ongoing systemic patterns of anti-Black racism and oppression within public education. This year we have expanded the initiative to 21 schools and have intentionally focused on building the leadership capacities of administrators within the schools who have been part of the program for the last three years. This focus on mobilizing administrators to mentor, facilitate and guide the initiative at a local level has begun to highlight the various personal transformations among educators' beliefs and perceptions, and changes to educators' pedagogy and practices.

Our next steps will be to continue to operationalize the actions tied to the proposal as we move towards launching the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

References

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