

# Census Portraits

Understanding Our Students' Ethno-racial Backgrounds



**Research & Information Services**

**Aboriginal Students**

**Black Students**

**East Asian Students**

**Latin American Students**

**Middle Eastern Students**

**South Asian Students**

**Southeast Asian Students**

**White Students**



# Census Portraits: Understanding Our Students' Ethno-racial Backgrounds

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The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has the world's most racially diverse student population. While earlier TDSB studies have shown diversity *among* racialized groups, there is also great diversity *within* racialized groups, as each is made up of sub-groups from varied cultural, linguistic and/or religious backgrounds or countries of origin. The *Census Portraits* examine the unique characteristics of these sub-groups. The purpose is:

- to provide a better understanding of the similarities and differences within each racialized group; and
- to target interventions to ensure the needs of all students are addressed effectively and equitably.

### Content

The Census Portraits folder contains individual portraits for the following groups represented in the TDSB's student population:<sup>1</sup>

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| • Aboriginal     | • Middle Eastern  |
| • Black          | • South Asian     |
| • East Asian     | • Southeast Asian |
| • Latin American | • White           |

Each portrait describes the background, experiences, and achievement levels of the major ethno-cultural sub-groups within each racialized group<sup>2</sup> under the following sections:

- |                                   |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Historical Context <sup>3</sup> | • Life in School                |
| • Ethno-racial/Family Background  | • Student Success               |
| • Life Outside of School          | • Highlights of Census Findings |

### Data Sources

The findings generated in these portraits are based on data combined from three internal sources - *2006 Student Census*, *2008 Parent Census*, and the Board's central academic achievement databases. Information on students' cultural backgrounds is derived from the Board's Census data and is based mainly on their parents' country of birth. For more information about the *2006 Student Census* and *2008 Parent Census*, refer to the TDSB website: [www.tdsb.on.ca/studentcensus](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/studentcensus).

### Acknowledgements

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- Aboriginal – Catherine Pawis, Aboriginal Education, TDSB
- Black – Dr. Carl James, Professor, Faculty of Education, York University
- East Asian – Maria Yau, Research & Information Services, TDSB
- Latin American – Dr. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Assistant Professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), & Cristina Guerrero, Graduate Student, OISE, University of Toronto
- Middle Eastern – Dr. Sarfaroz Niyozov, Associate Professor, OISE, University of Toronto
- South Asian – Sangeetha Navaratnam, Graduate Student, OISE, University of Toronto
- Southeast Asian – Maria Yau, Research & Information Services, TDSB
- White – Lisa Rosolen and Dr. Rob Brown, Research & Information Services, TDSB

<sup>1</sup> Students identifying as having a Mixed racial background were not included in the analysis because the varied combinations within this group were so great that it was not possible to identify a few major sub-groups for comparison.  
<sup>2</sup> For Aboriginal students, no sub-group breakdown is provided due to the small number of students who identified themselves as Aboriginal in the *Census*. Therefore, the Aboriginal portrait compares the findings for Aboriginal students as a whole with those of the overall population.  
<sup>3</sup> Historical background is provided for a better understanding of the various racial groups and does not imply causality of student experiences and academic achievement.



# Census Portraits Black Students

## Some Historical Context

Black presence in Canadian territory dates back to the early 1600s, but the population remained low until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Severe labour shortages prompted the importation of Africans; most of them came as slaves from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. A number of freed and escaped slaves also entered Canada; in Ontario many came through the Underground Railroad. Until the early 1970s, there were modest increases in the Black population in Canada.

The 1967 immigration policy which eliminated the preference for Europeans with the introduction of the point system saw an increase in the number of Black Caribbean people entering Canada. As a consequence, the Black population, estimated to be just 34,400 in 1971 grew to 289,500 by 1981.

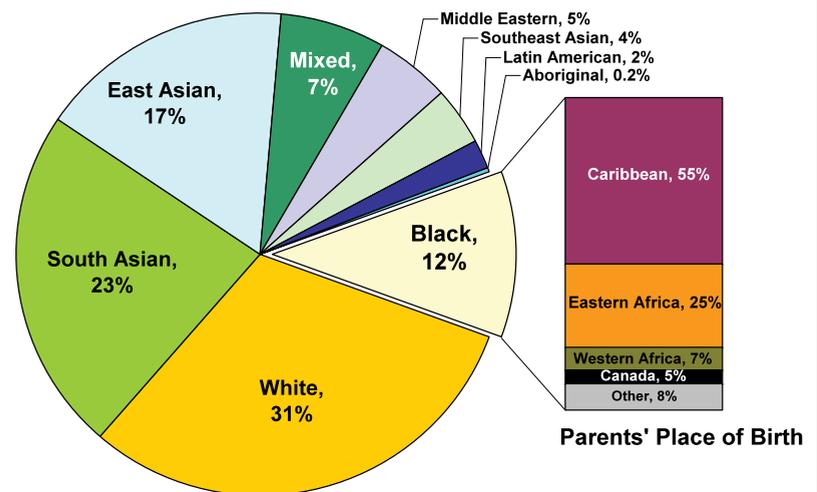
Between 1991 and 2001 the population further grew by 31% to make it 2.2% of the Canadian population. This increase in the Black population resulted from an influx of:

- West Africans – most of whom came in the late 1970s and 1980s from places like Nigeria and Ghana;
- East Africans – most of whom came in the 1990s and 2000s, many as refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia.

Today's Black population is diverse in terms of place of birth, language, religion, origin, and generational cohort. The majority is of Caribbean origin (mostly Jamaicans), and as such comprise most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> plus generation of Black Canadians. In fact, it is estimated (2001 Federal Census) that more than half of the Black population is Canadian-born. It is also estimated that well over half of Canada's Black population lives in Toronto.

## Ethno-racial and Family Background

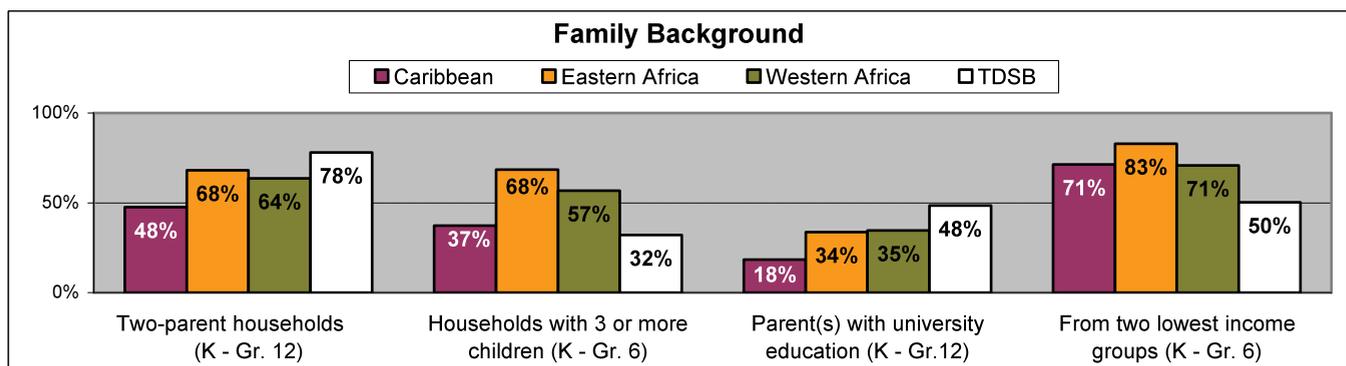
- Black students make up 12% of the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) population (about 31,800 students).
- Most of their parents are from the Caribbean (55%), Eastern Africa (25%), and Western Africa (7%). Just 5% were born in Canada.
- Most Black students (77%) were born in Canada; this figure is slightly higher for those with Caribbean-born parents (82%) than for those with East African-born (70%), and West African-born (64%) parents.
- In this portrait, Caribbean includes countries such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Eastern Africa includes countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea; Western Africa includes countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Gambia.



Students' Background

Compared to the overall population:

- fewer Black students live with two parents (this includes those living with step-parents or living half-time with each parent), especially those of Caribbean background;
- students of African background are much more likely to come from larger families;
- fewer Black parents have university degrees, especially Caribbean-born parents;
- Black students are much more likely to come from the two lowest income groups (i.e., with annual household incomes of less than \$30,000 or between \$30,000-\$49,999), especially those of East African background.

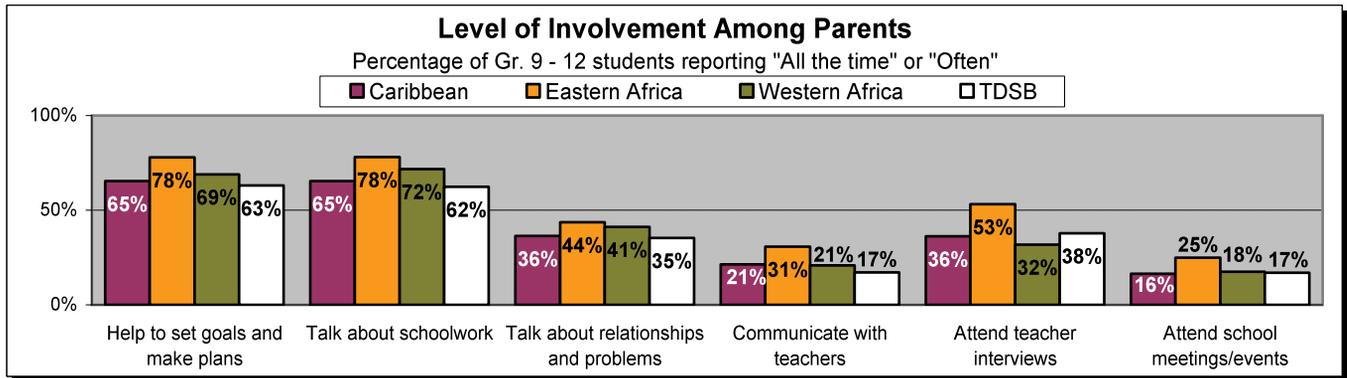


## Life Outside of School

### Parent Involvement In and Outside of School

Compared to the overall population:

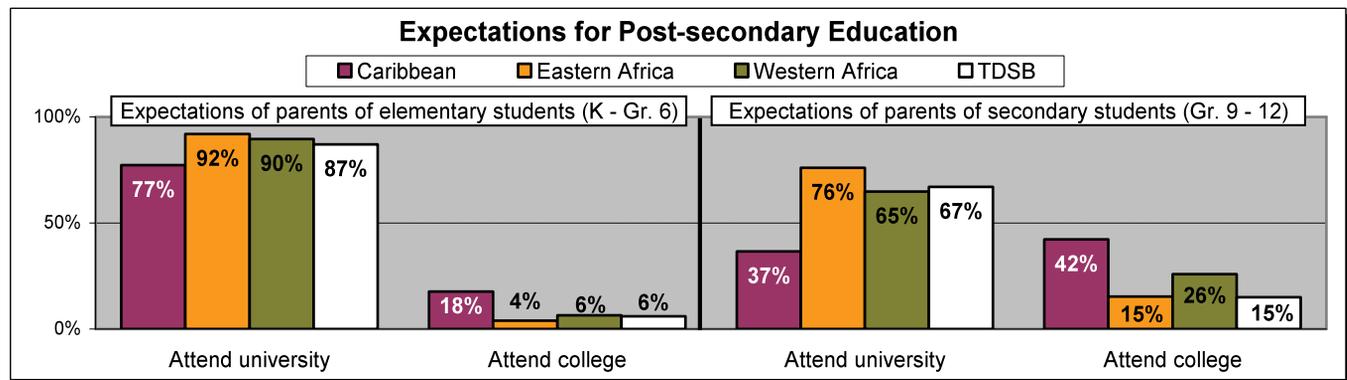
- all three groups of Black parents are as or more involved in their children's education in and outside of school; this is especially true for African-born parents, particularly those from Eastern Africa.



### Post-secondary Expectations

Compared to the overall population:

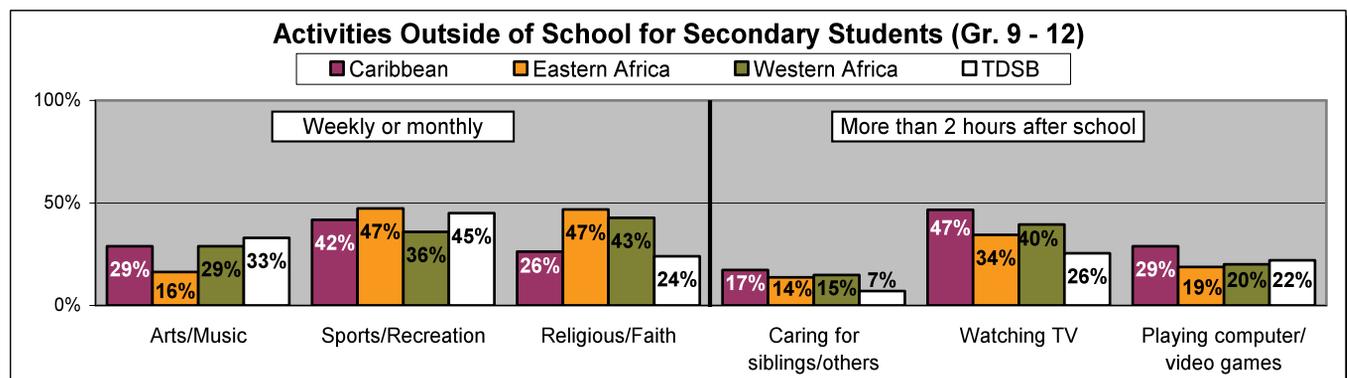
- Caribbean-born parents are more likely to expect their secondary school children to go to college rather than university;
- East African-born parents are much more likely to expect their children to attend university;
- a higher proportion of West African-born parents expect their secondary children to go to college, although the majority still hold university expectations for their children.



### Activities and Opportunities Outside of School

Compared to the overall population:

- students of Caribbean background participate as frequently in activities outside of school;
- students of West African background are less often involved in sports and recreation while those of East African background are less active in arts or music, but both groups are much more involved in regular religious activities;
- Black students – especially those of Caribbean background – are more likely to spend over two hours on a regular school day looking after their siblings/other family members or watching TV; students of Caribbean background are also more likely to spend over two hours daily playing computer/video games;
- secondary school students of East African background spend the same amount of time per week on homework and studying (12 hours), while those of West African background spend less time per week (11 hours), and those of Caribbean background spend even less time (9 hours).

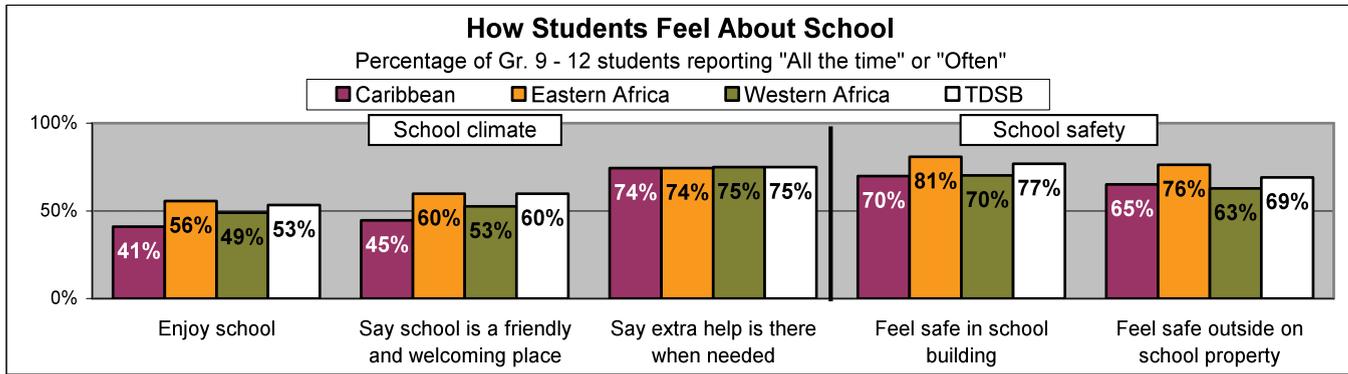


## Life in School

### School Climate and School Safety

Compared to the overall population:

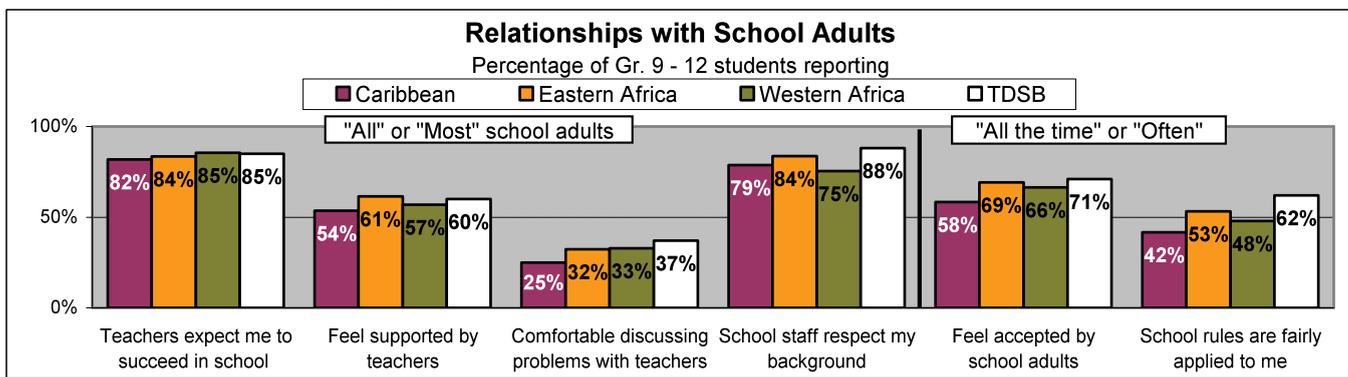
- the same proportion of Black students feel that extra help is available when needed;
- more students of East African background feel safe outside on school property;
- students of West African background are less likely to say school is a friendly and welcoming place, and are less likely to feel safe in school or outside on school property;
- students of Caribbean background are less likely to say they enjoy school, that school is a friendly and welcoming place, and that they feel safe inside school.



### Relationships with School Adults

Compared to the overall population:

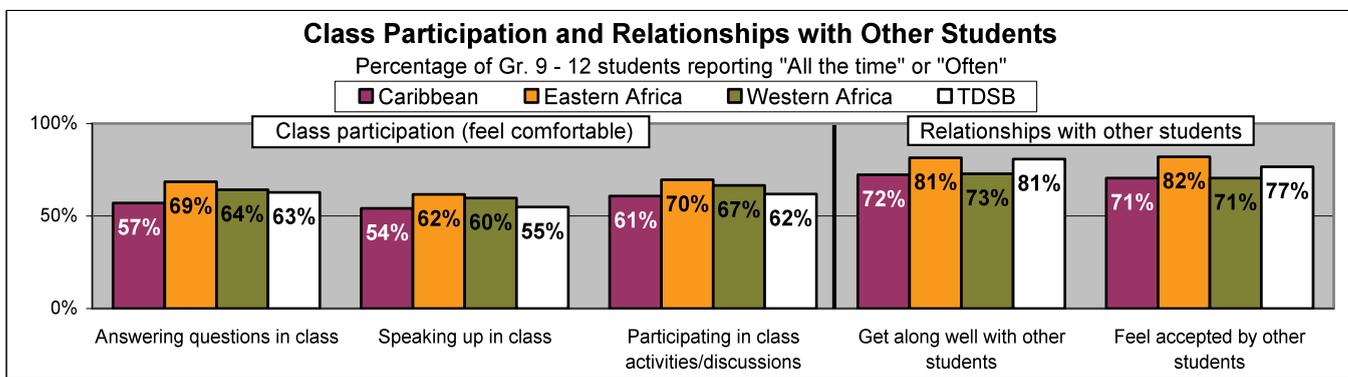
- Black students are generally less likely to feel that staff respect their background, or that school rules have been fairly applied to them, but they are as likely to feel that all or most teachers expect them to succeed in school;
- students of Caribbean background are less likely to feel supported by teachers or accepted by school adults, and are less likely to feel comfortable discussing problems with teachers.



### Class Participation and Relationships with Other Students

Compared to the overall population:

- students of Caribbean background are less likely to feel comfortable answering questions in class, while students of East African background are more likely; and students of African background are more likely to feel comfortable speaking up in class and participating in class activities and discussions;
- fewer students of Caribbean and West African background get along well with or feel accepted by other students, while more students of East African background feel accepted by other students.



### Learning about One's Culture/Race

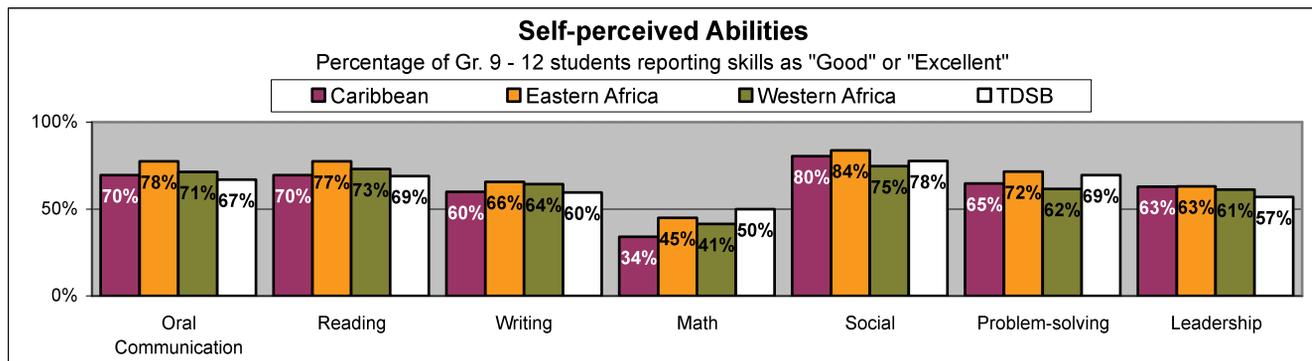
Most Black students say that learning more about their own culture or race would make learning more interesting for them (78%), help them enjoy school more (66%), and help them do better in school (56%).

## Student Success

### Self-perceived Abilities

Compared to the overall population:

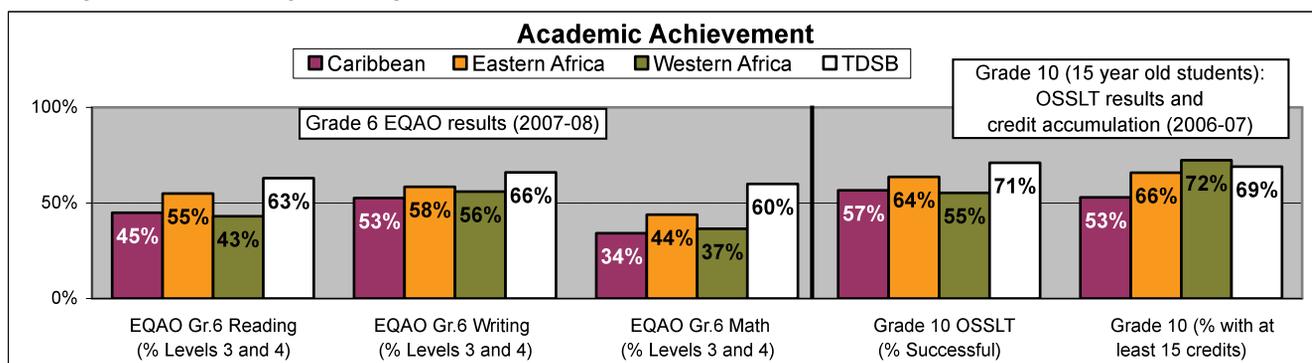
- Black students are generally confident about their abilities. This is especially true for students of East African background, who are more likely to rate themselves highly in communication, reading, writing, social, and leadership skills;
- students of West African background are less likely to rate their problem-solving skills highly;
- fewer Black students – especially those of Caribbean background – feel confident about their math skills.



### Academic Achievement

Compared to the overall population:

- fewer Black students meet or exceed the provincial standard (Level 3) on Gr. 6 Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests for Reading and Writing, and even fewer meet the standard on the EQAO Mathematics test; also, fewer pass the Gr. 10 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT);
- compared to students of Caribbean and West African background, students of East African background have the highest EQAO performance;
- fewer students of Caribbean background earn the expected number of credits (at least 15) by the end of Gr. 10, putting them at greater risk of not graduating on time.



## Highlights of Census Findings

The three main sub-groups of Black students share several commonalities. Compared to the overall population:

- Black students are less likely to live with two parents, or to have parents with university degrees; this is especially true among those whose parents are Caribbean-born; all three groups, particularly those with parents from Eastern Africa, also tend to come from larger families and from the two lowest income groups;
- despite their challenges, parents of all three groups are as or more involved in their children's education;
- outside of school, students from all three groups tend to spend more time looking after siblings and watching TV;
- in school, all three groups feel less positive about school rules or school staff respecting their background;
- except for math, all three groups are as or more confident about their abilities; however, academically, all three groups generally do not fare as well as the overall population.

There are also some differences among the sub-groups. For example:

- African parents, especially those from Eastern Africa, are more likely than Caribbean-born parents to be actively involved in their children's education, and to expect their children to attend university.
- Students with East African parents are also more likely than the other two groups to feel safe at school, accepted by other students, comfortable participating in class, and confident about their abilities in many areas. Their achievement levels are generally higher than those of the other two groups as well.
- Caribbean-born parents are more likely to expect their children to attend college instead of university. Outside of school, their children are more likely than the other two groups to spend more time watching TV and playing video games, and less time doing homework. Compared to the other two groups, students of Caribbean background generally feel less positive about school and relationships with school adults, and have the lowest percentage earning at least 15 credits by the end of Gr. 10.

## Census Portraits

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