

**Focussed Conversations with African, Afro-Caribbean and
Black Students, Families and Community**

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

TITLE: Focussed Conversations with African, Afro-Caribbean, Black Students, Families and Community

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Cite as: Munroe T., Murray K., Munroe G-C., Thompson G., Hardware S., Douglin M., Igbu S., Yusuf E., Walker A., & Sylvestre, D. (2022). Focussed Conversations with African, Afro-Caribbean, Black Students, Families and Community

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Introduction

Over a five-month period in 2021, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)'s Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement engaged with African, Afro-Caribbean, and Black (ACB) students, families, and community members in focus group conversations. The consultations are part of the Centre of Excellence's larger commitment to develop family-school-community partnerships, which focus on a shared responsibility to support Black students and families. This engagement includes "building on community voices as well as past and present efforts through a direct, multi-faceted strategy for meaningful and sustained change"¹ to actively support Black students' development, learning, and wellbeing in TDSB schools.

During the focus group sessions, the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement² research team sought to learn more about the experiences of each stakeholder group. This involved gathering information and recommendations on how to improve family and community engagement. This intentional approach is in line with the Centre of Excellence's mandates, which include providing a more coordinated and well-resourced approach leading to systemic transformation, enhanced support for impacted individuals, and a forum to develop solutions that are authentic and relevant for Black³ students, families, and staff.

While the needs of all Black students and families are important, the research team made a concerted effort to include in the stakeholder consultations those who are under-represented and voices that are often absent in conversations about K-12 schooling experiences. These include but are not limited to Black students and families with disabilities, newcomers, and those who represent the LGBTQ2SIA+ community. As our school board works to confront and dismantle anti-Black racism in schools, it is essential to consider the needs of Black students and families and /caregivers who experience intersectional oppression due to their social identities.

Finally, if we have learned anything from the rocky past, it is that effective education policy reform and school transformation that affirm and support Black students' needs cannot ignore the essential partnership of the family and community in their academic and developmental success.

Sincerely,

The Centre of Excellence Research Team

¹ TDSB. (2020, June 17). TDSB Creates New Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Media/News/ArtMID/2750/ArticleID/1475/TDSB-Creates-New-Centre-of-Excellence-for-Black-Student-Achievement>

² The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement hereafter is called The Centre of Excellence.

³ The authors primarily use the term "Black" to reference each stakeholder group but do utilize the acronym ACB throughout the document.

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Executive Summary

This executive report provides an overview of the key themes and recommendations from consultations conducted by the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement with the African, Afro-Caribbean, and Black (ACB) community. Three stakeholder groups – students, families and or/caregivers, and community members – participated in these consultations. Stakeholders were invited over five months (May-July; October-November 2021) to have focussed conversations. Throughout the focus group sessions, the Centre of Excellence research team consulted with over 250 participants. The research team had support from ACB staff and community advisory groups including the Student Equity Program Advisors, Community Support Workers, and the Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee, all of whom assisted with the overall approach to the consultations and outreach strategy.

Equally important to the planning and engagement process was ensuring that the research team had the historical and contemporary knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences of the stakeholders. Prior to the consultation, the team supported their own learning by researching some of the Board's current and past attempts to improve on the school experiences of Black students and families and or/caregivers. With that in mind, the focus group facilitators had a better understanding of each stakeholder group's needs as they discussed the various ways the Centre of Excellence could support and improve the Board's efforts.

The questions asked of each stakeholder group served a dual purpose. The first was to have conversations about the various ways to implement the mandates identified by the Centre of Excellence. The second involved creating opportunities for: (1) self-identifying Black students to engage in discussions related to issues that impact their wellbeing and learning needs; (2) families of ACB students to discuss issues that impact their leadership and engagement in the school community and, to give us insight into the ways the Centre of Excellence can serve them; and; (3) the Centre of Excellence to engage in discussions with community stakeholders on how to promote meaningful and collaborative school-community engagement.

Locating the Black identity in the consultation

In this report, the term "Black" is used to refer to people of African descent (e.g., Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Indigenous, Afro-Latinx, African) living in Canada. Recognizing the diversity of the Black experience in Canada as well as the more exclusive and competing definitions of what renders a person "Black," this report is focused on the Black population in Canada as a racial and cultural group and community with a shared experience or set of experiences. Participants spoke to the paradoxes and contradictions associated with being Black in Canada, using terms like beauty, joy,

pain, exhaustion, and struggle to describe what it means to be Black. Some described being Black as having a super-power or sense of purpose. Others viewed “being Black” as being knowledgeable about the history of Black struggle and passing that history on to the next generation as a fact of life.

The importance of centring the voices of the ACB stakeholders

Historically speaking, the Ontario system of public education has been challenged by ACB families, students, community, and educators for not being responsive towards the needs of Black students. It is undeniable that anti-Black racism and Eurocentrism negatively impact the academic experiences of Black youths. In many instances, the aspirations of their families are not enough to protect them from the “othering” that they experience in classroom spaces. As Kohli, Pizarro, and Nevárez⁴ argue, “Black students are challenged by the dominance of racist stereotypes, manifested by the constant and inescapable, racist, hegemonic fog in the air of the school (p. 230)”, a helpful metaphor to understand the persistence of anti-Black racism in Black student schooling experiences. Therefore, understanding how the Black identity has been constructed historically and in contemporary education remains a starting point for discussions rooted in actualizing change.

In education, ACB students and families may not be viewed as commanding authorities to bring about change which is necessary to challenge traditional narratives that are based on the normalization of whiteness and Eurocentrism. However, centring ACB communities’ diverse cultures and identities can increase their sense of belonging in the school environment. To disrupt the status quo, Board-wide interventions and mechanisms must be established within the classroom to help educators teach and empower Black students effectively. The need for education leaders to partner with Black communities is also a focal point to reimagine school environments that: (1) centre Black voices; (2) recognize the community and students as assets and (3) nurture those strengths to improve their wellbeing and overall educational success. This understanding also extends to supporting self-identifying Black educators who teach students and who also experience difficulties and barriers in their daily work environment.

Indeed, a collaborative school-family-community-wide approach is critical for systems change. Our public education system has not done a good job of serving all students equitably, especially, Black students who enter schools with their various intersectionalities (i.e., class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers). To ensure that our schools genuinely serve all students, our schools and communities must be in dialogue with each other about what

⁴ Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevárez, A. (2017). The “New Racism” of K–12 schools: Centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 182–202.

inclusion means, which barriers prevent inclusion, and how we can remove those barriers. For Black families and their children, their community is, and always has been a protective factor in their lives. Community provides comfort and familiarity and supports their self-determination as they navigate an anti-Black world.

As the Board recognizes the ongoing duty to advocate for the needs of everyone in its school communities, it remains the responsibility of school leaders and staff to address racism, equity and cultural responsiveness in their leadership practice and in the classrooms. This is substantiated fully in the annotated bibliography⁵ created for educators to develop their critical consciousness practitioner inquiries and improve classroom conditions for Black students. By providing a framework and a language for analysis, the themes and articles in the annotated bibliography highlight school-based approaches aimed at centring the importance of belonging; cultivating critical consciousness and agency (development of racial consciousness; opportunities to talk about race and racism); and supporting identity development (racial identity; positive/achievement identity).

Operating in a context that is an anti-racist, decolonial and anti-oppressive framework is fundamental to contest anti-Blackness and provide meaningful opportunities for Black students and families to engage with their school communities. The ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and make the commitment to take action to disrupt these systems — can be a gateway to academic motivation and achievement for Black students. Through such instruction and adaptive classroom strategies, educators can demonstrate to Black students how to resist in ways that overcome racism as a barrier to success, which can have positive long-term outcomes for students and their communities.

Any clear understanding and analyses of racialized discourse, pedagogy and practice, and policy process in education “must grapple with cultural disregard for and disgust with blackness” (Dumas, 2016, p. 12)⁶. We at the Center of Excellence agree with Dumas’s (2016) point and believe that being an anti-racist and socially oriented school leader includes being cognizant of how the education system is centred around anti-Blackness (Dancy, Edwards, & Davis, 2018)⁷— an understanding of which can lead to designing and implementing more implicit anti-racist school policies and practices. It is only when these critical discussions occur that we can begin to envision an education system that values the Black identity.

⁵ Prepared by Research and Development January 3, 2019 R02(Anti-Racism Directorate Black Student Excellence Strategy) Project \ Literature Review \ Black Student Excellence Annotated Bibliography (themed- 01.03.2019)

⁶ Dumas, M. J. (2016). Against the dark: Antiblackness in education policy and discourse. *Theory Into Practice*, 55(1), 11–19.

⁷ Dancy II, T. E., Edwards, K. T., & Davis, J. E. (2018). Historically white universities and plantation politics: Anti-blackness and higher education in the Black Lives Matter era. *Urban Education*, 53(2), 176–195.

Summary of Key Themes and Findings

Four overarching themes were used to capture the experiences of the stakeholder groups engaged in the consultations. These were: (1) Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (2) Learning conditions in the classrooms; (3) School and family relationships; and (4) The role of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement; and recommendations for supporting Black students, families and/or caregivers and community members. Within these overarching themes are several subthemes grouped together to support the findings.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Black Families

Stakeholders discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their families. Parents and caregivers described varying positive and negative experiences of COVID-19 on their lives and discussed the barriers of supporting their children or family members with online learning while negotiating their own work-life balance.

- Stakeholders spoke about the social, emotional, and economic burdens they faced. These included experiences of isolation, disruption of their care network, increased mental health issues, and job loss.
- Numerous families described the lack of support from schools (e.g., students with learning needs), technology and Wi-Fi issues, and positive or negative engagement with teachers or administrators.
- Black LGBTQ2SIA+ families discussed their approach to advocacy, addressing homophobia and transphobia, and heightened risks of anxiety and stress because of loss of regular access to affirming organizations and community support.
- Several families discussed the many ways their children were thriving. For example, reference was made to reduction in school discipline, behavioral issues, and surveillance by school staff.
- Stakeholders discussed the benefits of online learning for families. For many, it was an opportunity to address incidents of anti-Black racism, observe virtual classrooms, and listen in on course content. Others described the improvement in their child's or family member's grades and being able to support their learning needs.

Learning Conditions in the Classrooms

Each stakeholders group discussed ongoing challenges, positive and negative experiences they had with teaching staff and administrators, and overall school climate.

- Discussion focused on the intersection of the Black identity and their varying intersectionalities in K–12 education. Families described schools' in/ability to address their concerns if they experienced multiple oppressions simultaneously.
- Stakeholders talked about the need to improve teaching and learning conditions and outcomes for Black students with learning disabilities or those who identify as neurodivergent.
- Stakeholders discussed Black staff representation and the importance of their presence in the classroom to support Black students' well-being.
- Students spoke about their ongoing issues with academic instruction. These included how instruction impacts their identity and sense of belonging.
- Families and community members asked for ongoing equity training for all staff and training on how to promote anti-racist pedagogy and practice.
- Stakeholders spoke about the need to embrace and elevate Black joy in their curriculum and classrooms. This would counter the negative stereotypes and pathologizing of Black people and communities while ensuring that resistance and resourcefulness are integral pieces of the classroom environment.

School and Family Relationships

Parents and caregivers provided insights on factors that motivate or prevent parent /caregiver involvement in their children/family member's school community.

- Stakeholders described the racial politics of cultural capital as experienced by Black families.
- Issues were raised about parent advisory groups and experiences with anti-Black racism and microaggressions.
- Human Rights concerns were discussed by Black LGBTQ2SIA+ parents, caregivers, and families raising Black LGBTQ2SIA+ children. These included the lack of inclusive curricula that centred their identities and sexual orientation, bullying, lack of safe spaces, and lack of support from school administrators and teachers.
- Suggestions to improve parental engagement included both academic and non-academic experiences in the school community.
- Participants discussed the “push out” of Black students from the French programs.
- The effectiveness of teacher training programs and new teachers' unpreparedness to work in classrooms were discussed. Families and community members underscored the negative impacts of inexperienced teachers working with diverse Black student populations, especially those who do not share the same racial identity.

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement's role in supporting each stakeholder group was discussed.

- Recommendations were given on the role of the Centre of Excellence in strengthening school-family partnerships.
- Stakeholders discussed the Centre of Excellence as being a hub for the community and support to bridge the gap between families and schools.
- Families talked about the need to have coordinated resources and services to support Black students and their families.
- Suggestions were given about improving engagement with community organizations to strengthen schools' resources and provide a mechanism to respond to student and family needs directly.
- Parents/caregivers reinforced the need for the Centre of Excellence to take leadership in promoting Black academic excellence and to be a strong advocate and mediator for students and their families.

Recommendations

Students, families, and community members shared recommendations to improve classroom conditions, negotiate school communities and improve partnerships. Many of the suggestions visualized a much broader concept of education that moved beyond "schooling" at TDSB and into areas such as students' wellbeing, equity of access, parent empowerment, and increased partnerships. This coincides with the Centre of Excellence mandates and the initiatives outlined in the Board's multi-year strategic plan that underscore the need to build strong relationships with students, staff and families so they may engage in discussions and learning opportunities on critical issues that impact their schooling experiences⁸. More importantly, developing and supporting a research-based family engagement framework is essential to determine when programs are working and how to improve them. Therefore, this report concludes with a framework of action generated through the suggestions and recommendations from ACB students, families, and community members.

Methodology

Participation in the focus groups saw a strong engagement from all three stakeholder groups. The methodology stage consisted of two elements: 1) Conceptualization and 2) Logistics. The conceptualization of the focus groups followed a process that centres Afrocentric research

⁸ TDSB (2018). *Multi-Year Strategic Plan*. https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/leadership/board_room/Multi-Year_Strategic_Plan.pdf

methodologies. Utilizing Afrocentric methodologies was intended to be used to investigate pertinent research questions legitimately and effectively (that is, truthfully and inclusively), especially those methodologies that possess embedded assumptions about race and culture. Notably, Afrocentric orientations to data, or Afrocentric research methodologies, will push the inquiry into a higher realm where the methodology and the process of knowledge construction cease to take precedence over the well-being of the people being researched⁹.

Conceptualization

Initial planning meetings were held with Centrally Assigned Principal, Karen Murray, System Superintendent, Jacqueline Spence, Manager of Research and Development, David Cameron, and the Centre of Excellence research coordinator, Tanitiã Munroe. Once the purpose and the population for the research had been defined, the list of focus group interview questions was developed to be shared with participants in their invitation letters. These questions were also to be made available and shared by facilitators on a slide deck in the breakout rooms during the online focus group sessions.

Part of the planning was to ensure that the questions being asked during the focus groups served a dual purpose. The first was to have conversations on the various ways to implement the mandates identified by the Centre of Excellence. The second was the following:

- To create opportunities for students to engage in discussions and learning opportunities related to issues that impact their wellbeing and support, improve their learning needs, and amplify their voices.
- To create an opportunity for the families of ACB students to discuss issues that impact their leadership and engagement in the school community and to give us insight on the ways that the Centre of Excellence can serve them.
- To engage in discussions on how to promote meaningful and collaborative school-community engagement with community stakeholders.

Therefore, the final stage of the planning was to have information sessions about the consultations with ACB staff (e.g., Community Support Workers) and advisory groups (e.g., Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee - BSACAC) that support Black students and families and engage with community organizations. This approach informed us of any changes needed in the overall consultation and outreach strategy.

⁹ Reviere, R. (2001). Toward an Afrocentric research methodology. *Journal of Black Studies*, 31(6), 709–728.

Logistics

The research coordinator and research associates sent email reminders and followed up with text messages and phone calls on each day of the focus group sessions. Students, families, and community stakeholders appreciated this approach. Many parents/ caregivers commented on feeling inundated with emails and expressed difficulties in keeping track of important updates or information, so our communications were especially helpful.

Self-identifying Black Staff Representation

It was important that Black students, families and/or caregivers, and community members felt safe enough to share their experiences in the focus group sessions. Therefore, what was most central to their experience was Black staff representation. To that end, the Centre of Excellence understood the need for having Black facilitators that possessed a deep racial and cultural knowledge about themselves and the Black communities' experience with the education system.

All three stakeholder groups had the support of Black Social Work staff during each focus group session. The social workers were placed in a separate breakout room where participants could engage freely with them during and after each session. While participants did not readily use their support, it was important to have prompt access, given that the discussions may have led to students and family members feeling triggered. Several comments were made by participants about the significance of seeing Black social workers present. Many were not aware they existed at the Board, and several families used the opportunity to get connected to these social workers to seek support for themselves and/or their child(ren).

The consultations had the support of the Centrally Assigned Principal and System Superintendent who were also available to address any inquiries from participants and offer clarification about the Centre. The Centre of Excellence staff (i.e., K-12 Learning Coaches and Graduation Coaches) were present to share resources and information about their roles, and programs offered to support Black students. Sessions with French Immersion students had the support of French teachers. It was important that students were able to express themselves and their experience in a language they felt most comfortable.

Debriefing

After each session ended, the research team and social worker had their own debrief. This provided the team with an opportunity to raise concerns about information shared, identify issues that required immediate attention, and get support from each other on experiences that may have been difficult or triggering in the group discussions.

Black Studies' Approach to the Analysis

It was our intention to ensure that participants' voices, perspectives, narratives, and counter-narratives were represented in the interpretations and findings. This approach to the findings allowed us to understand how the collective and individual experiences are tied to the broader systemic issues. What matters is the team having “the cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences” (Tillman, 2002)¹⁰ of the communities we are engaging with.

From a critical race theory methodological perspective (e.g., Black Crit¹¹, QuantCrit¹², Community Cultural Wealth¹³) the relationship between a researcher's worldview and analysis is of extreme importance, especially when they are attempting to investigate culturally specific phenomena (Carroll, 2008)¹⁴. It was important to acknowledge and reconcile our own worldview orientation during the knowledge mobilization process. As researchers, we had a particular understanding of the very nature and sources of “acceptable” knowledge construction and representation of Black communities or people in research and documentation (Dillard, 2000)¹⁵, so we were acutely aware that the language and description utilized in this process had to mirror the stakeholders' authentic voice.

During the entire engagement and consultation process, issues of power were understood to be relational. We understood the tensions inherent in our own interests and power in relation to the students, families, and communities taking part in the consultations. Therefore, to ground ourselves and not allow our own interests to overshadow the interests of those participating in the consultations, we engaged in ongoing self-reflection at each step. Reflection and representation are connected to what Lorde (1984) declared as “learning how to take our differences and make them strengths” (p. 112). The research team understood the need for ongoing reflection to contextualize and problematize our own interpretations about the stories and knowledge being shared. There are lessons grounded in the different ways in which we interpret the things told to us and we have a responsibility as researchers to honour each community member in ways that maintain their integrity.

¹⁰ Tillman, L. C. (2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches: An African-American perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 31(9), 3–12.

¹¹ Dumas, M. J., & ross, kihana miraya. (2016). “Be Real Black for Me”: Imagining BlackCrit in education. *Urban Education*, 51(4), 415–442.

¹² Garcia, N., López, N., & Vélez, V. (2018). QuantCrit: Rectifying quantitative methods through critical race theory. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 21(2), 149-157.

¹³ Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.

¹⁴ Carroll, K. K. (2008). Africana Studies and research methodology: Revisiting the centrality of the Afrikan worldview. *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*, 2, 4.

¹⁵ Dillard, C. B. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(6), 661–681.

Reading this report

It is crucial to note that this report is heavy and triggering, reflecting the experiences of Black students and families and/or caregivers' history and current engagement with the Toronto District School Board. The work to diagnose the issues and analyze the themes was emotionally taxing, and thus, the ongoing work to rectify the problems and disrupt anti-Black racism will continue to be difficult, heavy, and taxing. Therefore, the report must be read comprehensively to effectively capture the recommendations and actions necessary to support the critical anti-racist work being done across the system and in schools.

As the Centre of Excellence continues to operationalize the nine mandates brought forward by Black community members and education stakeholders, there is an understanding that the work being done is a non-static process and has multiple points of entry and multi-layered forms of investment across the system. It requires a careful strategy, deft balance, constant recalibration and—in some cases—precise execution. It is the hope of the Centre of Excellence team to have engagement with TDSB educators that is reciprocal in nature to facilitate the mutual development and exchange of knowledge to address critical issues identified by the Black students and families we serve. This includes offering supports through system-wide professional learning to improve teaching and learning outcomes of Black students, which ultimately contributes to improving their wellbeing.

Emerging Themes and Findings

The analysis of findings is approached with careful thought and understanding of the social, political, historical, and contextual nuances and realities that continue to shape the lives of members of the Black communities. The terms, description and direct quotes are based on the perceptions and experiences of the ACB students, families, and communities. The themes are being shared based on the stakeholder groups' previous and current experiences with the school community. The document is written in both past and present tense, which is an intentional approach to capture the fluidity in each stakeholder's experience and reference the work that has already begun.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Families

In the consultations with stakeholders, each spoke about the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on schooling, work, and family life. The impact of the pandemic was exacerbated by many other stressors which included supporting children or family members with online learning. There was also significant consensus among Black students, parents, and caregivers about the impact of

COVID-19 and systemic racism on Black families and communities and the implications for K-12 education.

1.1 Parents/Caregivers

For parents and caregivers, balancing the additional role of supporting education at home was complicated by several factors:

- The number of children in the home, their age, and grade level;
- Children with learning needs;
- Limited understanding of the school system or difficulties communicating with staff (particularly for ESL/newcomer parents/families);
- The availability of a computer/laptop for the student(s), the number of people using the internet, Wi-Fi connectivity, and other technical issues;
- For teachers, juggling the dual responsibility of supervising their classes online and their own children at home; and
- Lack of skills and knowledge in various subject areas impeded ability to support their child or family member.

Other participants described the challenge of having to support their child(ren) while working which resulted in extreme fatigue. In some cases, there was an added burden of securing childcare. As one parent explained, “I know many mothers like myself lost their care network for their children. Some of us had to choose between our jobs and caring for our children. We had nobody to look after them.”

Despite the challenges, parents and caregivers of Black children found that online learning offered many benefits, including opportunities to get to know their children’s teachers better, observe lessons and the online classroom environment, improve advocacy skills in support of their children, increase understanding of how the system works, and intercept negative interactions or class lessons that may have caused emotional harm and hindered academic performance.

1.2 Black Students’ Views about Online Learning

“Some [teachers] are helpful, but others provided limited help and wanted to move ahead with what they are teaching.”

“It’s not been easy for me. Classes have been a struggle for me because I am not getting the help I needed from my teachers, and I graduate soon.”

1.3 Mental Health and Wellbeing of Students

Experiencing burnout because of online school-related distress was a major theme. The majority of the high school respondents reported experiencing screen fatigue. Other concerns included feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and detached from school. Students commented on the heavy workload, assignment due dates, and the expectations to complete assignments that were “stressful” and unmanageable. There was a consensus among students that they were over-tested, and the pace of instruction “[was] too quick.”

“We are in the last quad, right, so the energy level has dropped... I get tired a lot more now...I have been doing everything, like learning a lot and in just a short amount of time.”

Furthermore, students felt isolated and missed in-person instruction because of the lack of peer engagement online. Students expressed feeling uncomfortable sharing concerns with teachers, even if they were struggling. Some students pointed out that unreliable internet access and/or technology created difficult conditions, and they struggled to participate in online learning.

Parents and caregivers of younger children shared similar concerns. These included social and emotional isolation and online fatigue. Some parents/caregivers also raised concerns about the long-term impact of online learning, feeling that it would not prepare young children to move on to the next grade level, high school, or post-secondary education.

Learning Conditions in the Classrooms

Stakeholders discussed how educators can and must be part of efforts to improve classrooms for Black students. In order for educators to make a difference, they must move beyond traditional Eurocentric pedagogical practices to ensure that Black students feel comfortable and safe in classrooms. Participants felt that teachers needed resources to provide students with tools on how to engage in difficult conversations in classrooms. These include having information and links to support Black students’ mental and emotional health. Students and families asked teachers to consider embedding racial literacy in their curriculum practice when discussing issues that impacted their lives.

Participants encouraged teachers and staff to build relationships with Black students. For the majority of students, these relationships were very important. Participants agreed that every student should have a caring adult within their school environment – someone with whom they

can create a mutually respectful and supportive relationship, not only academic support, but emotional support as well. In every case, participants felt that it would make them feel empowered if their teachers took an interest in them. Several students asked teachers to “not give up on students so easily” and “work on finding out the barriers or reasons why Black students may not be able to participate in the same way as others.”

By the same token, parents and caregivers suggested that teachers offer resources, patience, and time, rather than giving up on them. Participants agreed that a sense of belonging at school can support students through a particularly vulnerable time when they are forming their identity, developing psycho-social skills, and trying to navigate the world.

2.1 Centring Joy in the Classroom and Practice

To resist the negativity and racism that students face, participants suggested that teachers reimagine classrooms by centring joy in their pedagogy and practice. For parents and caregivers, classrooms should be a place where Black students take pleasure from learning and “not being a space where students encounter trauma, feel anxious, and/or [are] afraid.” Teachers were asked to connect with Black students to the degree that they can, “make your classroom safe from bullying and sarcasm and toxicity” to the extent where they are able to, and replace those things with books, music, laughter, vulnerability, humility, conversation, and growth.

“Start from a point of joy and then work backwards from the joyful point and acquire why was this person pivotal? Why are we learning this person? You look at their accomplishment and then work backwards. We always find Black History Month starts at slavery, but we’ve got to move beyond that.

“It is a lot of re-education and is a lot of having resources available. It is having teachers that have the knowledge and the information and the courage to have uncomfortable conversations so that we can move forward.”

Participants advised teachers to learn about what joy looks like and how it is expressed among Black students. As one mother added:

“It’s even as small as having the educated understand when the children are gathered, you remember how you were talking about gathering together and they’re eliciting joy and happiness. It’s not rowdy, unruly behavior. They need to start to understand that there’s cultural ways to express happiness, joy. And it’s not always going to be quiet, sometimes it’s going to be... And it’s not an argument. Sometimes when voices get loud,

it's just passion. Like they just need to understand the cultural wants, the things that just make us tick without trying to plug it to children and suppress it. Just these are things that will help the children be better understood and not seen as unruly, undisciplined, just out of order pretty much."

Centring Black joy, for the participants, meant that teachers recognize how important it is for Black students' wellbeing and the need to create moments that they can "tap into activities and practices they enjoy" or "exhale and be okay."

2.2 Affinity Spaces for Black Students

Motivated by the renewed call to discuss anti-Black racism, police violence and deaths of Black people, students felt that a need to go deeper in their understanding of these issues has led them to seek out peers and community for support. Participants shared that they have formed study groups, attended online lectures, and joined social media groups because "many students are now more aware and are drawn together because of anti-Black racism." Participants recommended that all schools should have a safe space where Black students could come together to learn about anti-Black racism, anti-racism, racial equity, and social justice. As one student added, "I am Black young man and having somewhere I can breathe and not look over my shoulder and be among other Black kids is a relief."

Students and families suggested establishing Equity Councils in schools as another avenue to promote affirming spaces. Participants reported that the Equity Councils have had a positive impact on the schooling experience of ACB students. For example, Equity Councils provided a platform for ACB students to share their challenges in school with non-ACB students.

2.3 Teaching Black History During and Beyond the Month of February

Among all the participants, there was a unanimous call for educators to teach Black history year-round, not only in February. Students asked that teachers use the month of February to dig deeper into history and make connections to the past. Participants shared their ongoing disappointment with teachers only teaching about certain historical time periods or events (e.g., slavery), with a few suggesting it was "lazy work" or "teachers disregarding Black students' history and identity." Students suggested that most of their teachers needed to revise their curriculum, so that Black history, which is vital to understanding Canadian history, is better integrated into the curriculum in every class. Students also asked for courses devoted to the Black Canadian experience.

While students discussed the importance of Black students learning about their history, they also believed non-Black students must learn and understand the humanity of Blackness. This includes the long history of systemic racism that remains present and affects their Black peers. To achieve this goal, one student added that Black peoples' histories should be included in all courses and "mandated by the Ministry and TDSB." For the participants, this approach to Black history, along with teacher training, changes in the curriculum, and the inclusion of diverse texts, would "make a lasting impact on the education of future generations."

References were made to the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario's Black Canadian Curriculum which was not being used and which few teachers were aware of. It was recommended that Black history should focus on the successes and achievements of Black people and not be presented only from the perspective of trauma. Participants also discussed the need for all teachers to promote cultural and racial consciousness in the curriculum. They suggested the importance of understanding that all knowledge is valid and can influence how teachers engage with all students, what frameworks they use, and how they interpret the materials they are using to teach.

2.4 Anti-racist Pedagogy and Practice

Parents and caregivers suggested that teachers broaden and deepen their understanding of anti-racist pedagogy and practice —and then actively do the work to tear down those racist beliefs and structures. Participants believed that teachers must start from a place of acknowledging that racist beliefs and structures are pervasive in all aspects of Black students' lives in order to "understand how to support their learning and wellbeing."

Participants called on administrators and staff to question how the curriculum has impacted "students that are often not represented in books and text." For several participants, there is a need for teachers to engage in ongoing self-reflection of their social position. This includes understanding that their own identities are not static, that they possess both privilege and power, and that their socialization and intersecting identities can have an impact on their teaching and engagement with Black children beyond the classroom.

Several parents and caregivers suggested ongoing self-reflection from teachers, which they viewed as an important further step in anti-racism work. This self-reflection required teachers "to have the humility to know that they are a work in progress, both as individuals and as teachers." A participant further stated, "teachers must understand that anti-racist pedagogy is not a ready-made product they can simply apply to their courses, but rather it is a process that

begins with them as individuals.” Others discussed the many practical ways that teachers could apply an anti-racist analysis into their course content, pedagogy, and activities.

2.5 Representation: An Essential Component in the Affirmation Process

Representation in schools and classrooms was discussed as an essential component of affirmation. Participants referred to the importance of many elements of representation including positive images of Black people on school walls and in classrooms, and representation in curricula and educational materials, such as books, films, and podcasts. Representation was particularly important for students in the lower grades. Additionally, participants believed that teaching materials need to normalize Blackness.

“...it’s easy to simply follow along the Eurocentric message. And many teachers don’t even bother to bring in materials, no matter how much they understand that our education system has been founded on historically racist practices, including silencing those from disenfranchised communities.” – Grade 11 student

“It’s not just white students who need to see themselves in the literature or history they study. Black students need to hear those perspectives as well, just as straight and cisgender students need to read LGBTQ+ stories.”- Grade 9 student

Students, parents, and caregivers valued the importance of having representation from racialized staff. All participants expressed the need for schools to be more intentional with their hiring practices, which includes Black administrators, educators, teachers, and guidance counsellors. The main intent is to enable Black students to identify with Black authority figures and to have people who understand them. For example, participants shared stories of incidents that could have been avoided had teachers or administrators had the same racial or cultural background of the students.

“Teachers and school administrators with different backgrounds from their students find it difficult to understand their students’ challenges. Plenty of times when you hear white teachers and Black students getting into it, we know it’s their bias and lack of understanding. Sometimes they read the situation differently. A Black staff will understand. They know how to deal with things.”

Underscoring the importance of Black staff representation, French Immersion parents added:



“One of my reasons for putting them in French immersion because from Grade one, my son has had the Black male French teach directly, which I think was pivotal in his success and self-worth. And half of those teachers were in the formative years, (which) I think was really good. And if others could have that experience, it would really be encouraging.”

“At my kids’ elementary school, it helped having the Black children see educators that look like them, that can relate to them. Being able to talk to the parents about their children with an understanding, it helps with parent engagements.”

Participants noted that a lack of representation may undermine the teacher’s effectiveness in inspiring Black student performance. This concern was discussed when parents and caregivers referenced the absence of educators affirming Black students’ identity. This included understanding the difference in the steps that Black and non-Black teachers would take to help close the gap that included learning about Black students’ cultures. Participants also discussed the challenges of existing stereotypes, recognizing that many non-Black teachers are not taking the initiative to introduce inclusive instructional materials to counter the negative narratives of the Black community.

2.6 Lifelong Learning

The idea of lifelong learning was brought up by French Immersion students who made comments about what skills or attributes a “good educator” should possess to support their wellbeing in classroom spaces. The students indicated that more could be done within the walls of the school to make sure that students continue and want to learn. According to the students, teaching “is not merely content,” as many participants want educators to cultivate an environment where they continue learning after graduating from high school. Some students agreed that many Black students “want to continue learning for our entire lives.” The participants suggested that teachers should not only think about the idea of cultivating an interest in lifelong learning, but how they engage Black students in learning should demonstrate that.

As one student stated: “The importance of building relationships goes beyond the content being delivered to me ...I think teachers should possess the ability to inspire students.” For the students, becoming a lifelong learner is truly invaluable, both personally and for their future career or profession. Instilling this trait in Black students is important for their own sake and for teachers. For many of the participants, it means supporting students to value learning.

2.7 Improving Learning Outcomes of Black Students



Parents, caregivers, and students underscored the need to have access to quality education to achieve the goal of improving their outcomes in the school environment. According to participants, schools should put greater effort into reducing or eliminating the achievement gap for Black students. Participants felt that schools needed to help Black students build their skills and academic achievement. Most of the participants believed that in order for the Board to make substantive changes in closing the achievement gap, schools must create more opportunities for Black students' voices to be amplified and decrease their underrepresentation in certain fields.

It is important to note that several participants shared different experiences about the efforts made by schools to address the achievement gap. Many described interacting with teachers who were more culturally aware and who attempted to support students and make their learning environment welcoming. Students discussed meeting a few teachers who "saw them and saw the worth of Black students" in and outside their classrooms. Other students described teachers who created opportunities for Black students to be supported and helped them with resources.

2.8 Racial Literacy

Participants spoke about the need for all teachers to develop racial literacy skills in order to engage in critical conversations and guide students to do the same in their learning. This would create a domino effect as students would have the necessary language and vocabulary to have classroom discussions that are not harmful to Black students. Parents and caregivers asked that teachers use language and vocabulary in liberating rather than disempowering ways.

"So how are you talking to them? What is being said about our communities must not always be negative. We are more than slavery. We are more than what is said in the media. Teachers must be reframing that dialogue and to do that means it starts with them learning how to use affirming language."

To support a safe classroom environment, participants asserted that teachers needed to do more than stand by when they have witnessed or heard a racist remark. Not replying in the moment was seen to convey tacit agreement. For some parents, understanding racial literacy in schools meant having "healthy comeback lines" to use in the face of racial trauma or anti-Black racism.

"Part of their job is to recognize and react in the moment and not leaving Black students to sit in the classroom feeling upset. You know what I mean? And I don't think any other

cultural group from what I've seen must really go through that as much as Black students do. Teachers need the tools and language to deal with things.”

For several parents and caregivers, a teacher's ability to confront anti-Black racism or microaggressions in the moment means not only expressing their disapproval, but also shifting the responsibility to the perpetrator to explain their actions. In other words, participants asked that both teachers and students learn how to use these racist moments and take action to address them, ensuring that everyone leaves with a greater understanding of how racism impacts Black students.

Overall, to validate Black students and create healthy learning and safe classroom conditions, participants shared the following suggestions for educators: i) be more sensitive and attuned to the needs of Black students; ii) prioritize students' safety and voice; iii) acknowledge the improvement efforts made by Black students; iv) be aware of their unconscious biases; v) do away with racial stereotypes; vi) build positive relationships with Black students; vii) integrate topics related to Black students within the broader curriculum; and viii) make the class a safer environment for students to learn.

School and Family Relationships

3.1 Black Cultural Capital in the School Community

Parents and caregivers called on school staff to understand the different community resources available to support Black student success. These include understanding and valuing how community members are involved in supporting families inside and outside of school. Participants discussed how they often resist the despair and hopelessness brought about by negative encounters with school staff by relying on community support. Instead of continuously viewing their worth from the dominant social group's standpoint, participants described how resourceful the Black community is and suggested that schools should learn how to engage with elders. This would help foster community pride and sense of belonging among Black students. As one participant noted:

“Elders are like living breathing history and should become part of the teaching and learning at schools. I think using other folks too, storytellers and dancers and drummers. Yeah, just know that we are filled with resources, and it does not have to come from one home or one parent alone.”

Participants also discussed the need for schools to tap into the knowledge, talents and skills in the Black community and bring in guest speakers with whom Black students can identify. They also suggested more space be created on student senates and student councils for ACB students.

Participants appealed to teachers and other school staff to refrain from saying Black families do not care about their children's education. Participants described other strategies that families use to supporting Black children in the home and community. These included using the community as a resource to support a family's needs or being involved in cultural activities to affirm their child's Black identity. To illustrate, families discussed getting involved in the arts, and engaging with movies, songs, and books at home and in community to counter their absence in schools. According to participants, this sort of cultural capital that exists in Black communities "help[s] to shape their identity and retain their culture" and is positively associated with positive educational outcomes for Black children. Parents and caregivers understood the direct correlation between parental involvement and academic success. They urged educators to recognize the barriers that may prevent their engagement and acknowledge the work they do in their homes and community settings.

Factors that Support and Prevent Parental or Caregiver Involvement and Engagement in the School Community

The factors of low level of participation and engagement by families in the school community included work commitments and long work hours. Many parents and caregivers who did shift work had difficulties engaging with school activities and highlighted the meeting times as another barrier. Participants discussed the lack of trust, past traumatic experiences in the school system, and negative interactions with school staff. Other factors included parents' limited knowledge about how to get involved in their children's school, what their role would be in the school system, and how to access resources. For several newcomer families, they highlighted lack of knowledge of the school system, cultural and language barriers, and perceptions about "whether their voice would be heard." Other factors noted were the extent to which the school made parents feel welcome. Some parents/caregivers spoke of not feeling comfortable in the school or not being treated in a respectful manner.

"And I think there could be some more intentionality with the principals to encourage parents to participate and knowing that school council isn't the only way to participate. There are other things that you can do. And there's things that you can do that would be of interest to the community."

“I think that a major part is the lack of healing of past trauma from parents and their experiences within the school board. So, lack of trust. The fact that every time there’s more, not all the time, but quite often schools are contacting parents, always with a negative context.”

“There’s a bit of a fear, I think, around that new parent that’s coming in and that involvement. I think we feel more empowered to come forward and say, I want to do this. This is my school too, rather than taking a back seat. I’ve noticed that and I’m hearing that a lot and it’s causing a lot of friction. So, who’s negotiating and navigating the conversation when those frictions come up between parents and the school? And then the principal’s kind of in the middle.”

“But I think there is a need to come up with strategies in education for the educator. Whether it be to combat their biases or to bridge that gap to make parents, Black parents, [Indigenous] parents. Because again, we know of all the trauma that’s been put on the Black and [Indigenous] community through education and the education system, right? And we know, through Black students because I grew up in the TDSB education system, right? So, I know a lot of the traumas that would have been maybe instilled or pushed on me as an individual. That might make me uncomfortable in the space or even engaging with a teacher, right?”

Participants discussed the need for schools to have ongoing communication with parents/caregivers in a positive and respectful way. It was suggested that different methods be used to meet the needs of all parents. These included emails, face-to-face meetings, newsletters, interactive websites, phone calls, videos, and webcasts. These methods would help meet the needs of the diverse families that make up the Black community. Participants asked that support be given to Black families to help break down the barriers that hinder their engagement.

“I’m actively engaged at my daughter’s school meetings, but it was always at the school. Could it be somewhere else? Are there opportunities for parents who do shift work? So, that’s part of the engagement, but I think it also signals (something) to parents. And it’s always, at least in my experience, has always been a few families participating, right. Not all the families but a few families who are involved. How can we create that affirmation for the whole community?”

While Black parents and caregivers problematized their parent involvement as gendered, class-based, raced-based and Eurocentric, it is equally important that educators be aware of the problems that Black LGBTQ2SIA+ families encounter when interacting in schools. Their family composition, gender identity and sexual orientation are other factors that influence parents' or caregivers' experiences in their children's schools. LGBTQ2SIA+ families described their experiences which include: (1) homophobia and transphobia among school staff, (2) religious beliefs of school professionals, (3) experience with intersectional discrimination and anti-Black racism, (4) inability of school staff to address the discrimination LGBTQ2SIA+ students encounter as a human rights issue, (5) anxiety about traditional male and female gender roles, (6) unwillingness of school staff to view gender as non-binary, (7) unfamiliarity with the vernacular used to discuss LGBTQ2SIA+ issues, (8) lack of representation in the curriculum with respect to Black LGBTQ2SIA+ people and communities, and (9) fear of conflict with the dominant heterosexual parents on school councils.

Parent Council

A common theme expressed by participants was the lack of opportunities available for Black parents/caregivers to be involved on the school parent council. The gatekeeping and power exerted by some members revealed participants' experiences with microaggressions, anti-Blackness and bullying when Black parents tried to take on leadership positions. Many indicated the difficulties they had when they were either "the only one on the parent council" or "only a few Black parents" trying to be in these positions which were already taken by white parents who wanted to protect the status quo.

"I think what supports me in being involved in a leadership role is my education experience and my experience in the work field. I'm comfortable with certain soft skills that allow me to present, advocate, be a leader and take on that role. But I get a lot of push back from white mothers who try to shut down my ideas."

"I joined my daughter's parent council, and it was me and another mom and a dad, and whenever we would try to suggest things, you would see the looks on these white parents face. It's like how dare we come and try to change things. Once in a planning meeting, one of the Black parents suggested we change something and a white mother said, "we have certain standards here and we do things this way at this school." We all knew what that 'standard' meant."

One participant further noted that the only positions which appeared to be available were assisting with fundraising and bake sales. Several mothers suggested that was how white mothers and teachers regarded them and their skills and contributions, “to only make bake goods.” A parent and caregiver who had participated in one of these activities in the past said that they willingly assisted but were “jokingly” asked “not to deal with the funds because Black people could not be trusted with money.” Another parent, who shared their own experience with being involved in school fundraising activities over the years, added:

“...we’re the parents and we must be treated with dignity because sometimes we feel like we’re not welcome, no matter what you do or how you try to support your child’s school. Sometimes they want you to go and not come back, and then they will say, ‘These parents are not involved in their child education’...”

According to participants, another factor affecting their involvement in the school community was the attitude of school staff towards Black parents who try to be involved in school activities. A significant number of participants shared their perceptions of problematic relationships with teachers and other staff who they felt made assumptions about their lack of involvement in school activities and expected little of them. They asked that schools recognize that the relationship between teachers’ social background and teachers’ evaluations of family’s involvement in their child(ren)’s schools is problematic as they are often judged based on their “socio-economic status and postal code.”

“They make these assumptions that we don’t want to be involved. Some of us work shifts and do what we can to keep up to-date.”

“Sometimes they would make these underhanded comments, ‘like, oh well, you could try to show up at least once’ and I often shake my head. What’s the difference, I know my mom went through this when I was a kid too.”

Low income and single parents had the greatest difficulties with teachers as Black parents were often evaluated as less capable of taking care of their child(ren). For example, while discussing some of their school experiences, a mother described the cultural cues they felt a teacher used in the classroom.

“I mean, I am a single mom, and I should not be made to feel ashamed of that. I remember talking to my child’s teacher when she was in middle school about a field trip that was coming up and she was like, “Oh I understand if you don’t have the money to do a bit extra, you can probably talk to the office.” I asked her why she believed I couldn’t afford

the “extra” and she leaned in as if she wanted to whisper to tell me how difficult it must be. Like in a condescending way. I have never forgotten that. It has stayed with me all these years.”

“We have to stop making assumptions about Black single families and their involvement. We’ve got to create environments where Black single mothers feel welcome. And I think there could be some more intentionality with the principals to encourage all parents to participate and know that school council isn’t the only way to participate. There are other things that you can do. And there’s things that you can do that would be of interest to the community. Show us you are part of the community.”

In addition, most parents and caregivers were clear in stating that school administrators had the power to change the dialogue and shift how Black families were received in schools. They stated that change starts with principals reminding their staff to shift their language and approach and “do some proactive reaching out,” rather than accepting the stereotypical narrative of Black families’ lack of engagement and involvement.

School Leadership: Experiences with School Administrators

Experiences with school administrators varied for many participants. Parents and caregivers felt that more needed to be done by administrators to make them feel welcomed and have their perspectives valued, encouraged, and heard. Similar to the Centre of Excellence’s mandate that identifies the use of evidence to highlight promising practices (see Appendix A), participants recognized the need for administrators to educate themselves about Black communities.

“What I do know is, it starts from the leadership at the school. I have worked at schools where the language from the principal was that Black kids were low. You would think the principal would ask for help to help these “low” Black students. But he didn’t.”

“If you have a principal being racist towards Black students or their families, what do you think the school culture will be? I am thinking about that and having to put my foot down once or twice when I was talking to my child’s principal. They sometimes don’t even hide how they discriminate. They are very condescending towards us as Black families. Especially if you don’t know the rules of the school system.”

Participants felt that having administrators who demonstrated cultural competence allowed them to be more aware of how to interact with Black families.

“I know this has probably been said a million times, but principals and vice principals that understand the racial and cultural make-up of the students and families they serve are more understanding. They know how to speak to us and not let us feel like we do not belong in schools.”

“As Black trans dad that has encountered so many transphobia, misgendering and anti-Black racism from different teachers, it was good encountering one vice principal who took the time to learn, to understand my identity and how to support me and my child.”

Equally important, participants shared their thoughts and experience with having administrators who “went above and beyond” for the Black student population:

“There are some administrators you know they care, the way they invite you into the schools and sit and talk with you. They make you feel seen and heard. They follow up and check in.”

“My daughter has wonderful admins, they do so much for the Black students at her school. The school climate is very good. I remember going to one of them and telling them what I wanted and what I expected and what I knew I deserved, and the principal listened. And I will tell you I have good support. You could see the admins made their staff accountable for things. So, I felt supported.”

Given the importance and visibility of school leaders, participants also felt that it was important for the Board to consider increasing the representation of Black administrators. This included getting educators the help and support they needed to become principals. As suggested, “educators that are Black or Indigenous or racialized bring unique strengths and when Black families and students see this, it helps to replace the stereotyping and racism.” Participants believed that if schools are focused on serving all students, they should also make it a priority to have a diverse critical mass of principals.

Teacher Education Programs

Participants raised the issue of teachers in training and suggested that more work needs to be done to educate them on anti-Black racism and equity practices and give them the tools and

resources necessary for this work before they are hired. Students from both French and English programs discussed the importance of teacher education programs in training teachers to confront their biases and prejudices towards Black people before they are placed in schools and have authority over Black students. Many participants alluded to the irresponsibility of teacher education programs and according to one student, “it is dangerous to send them into such a position of power as new teacher without most of them ever checking their own privilege, especially white teachers.”

Families discussed their child(ren) encountering new teachers who were unable to control the classroom climate and gave several examples of their inability to discuss social justice issues safely and sensitively with students. They emphasized that teaching does not happen in a vacuum and that new teachers should be trained and educated to understand how systemic oppression operates in education.

Anti-Black Racism

Participants discussed examples of racism including classroom incidents, and engagement with guidance counsellors, with many of them receiving inadequate advice on their academic choices. Black parents and caregivers expressed concerns that Black students are under-represented in academic-level courses and STEM programs. Further, concerns were raised that Black students are not receiving the benefit of mentorships and that older students are not understanding next steps for their learning or their options when they transition out of high schools.

Participants appealed for training for educators on anti-Black racism and the need for staff to acknowledge and work on unlearning their biases. It was suggested that teachers be educated on allyship and the lived experiences of Black students to enable them to teach without doing harm. Parents and caregivers also identified the need for educators to engage in critical and uncomfortable conversations about racism and current events covered by the media and stressed the need for educators to call out racist behaviour in class.

Parents and caregivers described in detail the ways in which they were treated by staff when they tried to intervene on behalf of their child(ren) or family member. Many participants stated that staff often reacted in negative ways when they suggested a different approach to their engagement or teaching style.

“I remember this happening to me twice, both my kids at different schools. With my first child, the teacher was very rude when I asked her not to dismiss my child and to make her feel comfortable learning. My eldest used to complain about the stereotypes this

woman would come with in Black History Month. For my second child, I was told off. Her teacher said, “this was her curriculum, and she tries to relate to everyone in her class” and I was like, who are you relating to? Certainly not the one Black student in your class. I felt so angry and didn’t bother going to the principal. They often support their staff and do nothing about it.”

“I don’t understand why they [teachers] act that way when we ask that they treat our kids the same way. Why do Black parents face so much microaggression? Why are some of these teachers so downright racist against us when we ask for them to see our kids as belonging in their classrooms?”

“I remember having to escalate an issue when my daughter was, I believe in Grade 9 or Grade 10. I had to go to the principal after I was getting nowhere with this rude teacher. I think when you’re a parent that you know your rights and you’re willing to hop over whatever level and you’re willing to go as far as possible to demand changes or demand that an incident is addressed. Teachers don’t like that and sometimes you fear them reacting to your child. They know their power; they know nothing will happen to them. So, they continue being awful and racist.”

Parents and Caregivers of Black Students in French Immersion Programs

Participants discussed the “push out” of Black students from the French as a Second Language programs. Several of them shared their experience with schools that continue to find ways to keep Black families out of French Immersion schools. Anecdotal examples were given of school administrators and teachers demonstrating anti-Blackness or creating conditions that led to families removing their children from schools.

Parents and caregivers also reflected on how deeply problematic the French Immersion school culture was and felt these schools only benefitted “certain families.” Participants suggested that the attitudes and ideology in the French programs created a division along the lines of race, gender and class.

“Girls are more likely to be enrolled than boys. I can count the Black boys in my daughters’ program and my friend’s son’s program. They all know each other because they are a few of them. They get kicked out early you know..very..very early.”

“I am from a French speaking country in Africa and when I came here, I discovered that there were programs like this. I was happy, but I was shocked at how they spoke to me and my

wife. They even tried to tell us they had no space for my children, and we should enroll them in the English programs. My wife wanted to not fight with them but insisted that my kids be placed there.”

“When my [child] entered, there was a lot of Black students that entered. By the time Grade 1 hit, they’re practically all gone because they couldn’t deal with the teacher saying, “Oh, we can’t do this.” “They’re not talking.” “They’re not understanding.” “They’re not catching on.”

Participants also had difficulties getting the support they needed, especially when there were so few Black families at their schools. For parents and caregivers that decided to remove their children from French Immersion programs, they discussed being told that “it was difficult to support their child(ren)” or “schools not being equipped to serve their needs.” Participants felt that this practice was committed under a false pretence and belief that French immersion is too difficult for students with special education needs.

“I realize that my son needed extra support and it felt I didn’t deserve to ask for it. They acted funny towards me and dismissive whenever I asked about the resources or told the teacher about things that worked at home.”

“Before I switched my child, they would always suggest that I take her to an English school to get the support. I would ask why they can’t do it there and they would smile and respond with their made-up excuse. I got tired of it. I got tired of fighting them.”

Though French Immersion and extended programs are developed to give non-Francophone students the ability to study and develop their proficiency in French, many participants found that Black children are robbed of the opportunity of being successful at learning French. Notably, participants suggested that this type of exclusion demonstrates how racism has an impact on enrolment practices and sense of belonging in the French programs. For many that shared their experiences, it confirmed that little has improved in terms of Black student representation and retention, or positive interactions with Black families in French immersion and extended programs.

[Finding Ways to Advocate and Disrupt Racist Schooling Experiences](#)

Though participants discussed the problematic behaviour of school staff, they also discussed the ways in which they disrupted anti-Blackness. Many families shared stories about emailing superintendents and administrators about their concerns or racist incidents. They also talked about getting support from community members and organizations. For example, many parents

and caregivers got help with resources and having a community member being present at meetings with administrators or teachers. Participants discussed the need for all Black families or parents of Black children to educate themselves on board policies and learn how to make the “system work for them.” Participants highlighted the importance of knowing their rights as Black parents and using them as tools for accountability. For one parent who described their approach to advocacy, it meant “having the attention of the school after seeing the lengths I would go for my children or myself to be treated fairly and just telling them being racist is wrong.” Another parent suggested that their concerns were only taken seriously after teaching staff recognized that the parent “would take it all the way to the Human Rights Office or the media.” As the parent stated, “really let those teachers know we can advocate.”

Others asserted that the adjustment in the teachers’ behaviour should not happen when they feel their job and livelihood is threatened. They felt that teachers must learn that equity and inclusion “means treating all students fairly.” It was further pointed out that teachers need to ask themselves why they entered the teaching profession and do ongoing reflection on their own bias against Black students and families. Participants suggested that educators challenge themselves to unlearn racism and seek ways to improve themselves. Even if there are feelings of discomfort in this process, they should “think about how Black children and families are made to feel and discriminated against”, both historically and currently.

Re-building Community Relationships with Schools

Community participants described their skepticism about institutions, particularly educational institutions, such as TDSB, that are creating or implementing initiatives to combat anti-Black racism. As part of the process of re-building trust, clarity, and formal partnerships between communities, schools and the Centre of Excellence, participants asked for the following:

“The purpose of the Centre of Excellence must be clearly defined and communicated to ACB community members.”

“More information must be provided to improve transparency between communities and schools and to prevent the process from being long and difficult. This will help the community with clarity about and accessibility to the Centre.”

“Holding the Centre of Excellence accountable to its mission and commitments to ACB students and families is important.”

Parents and community members suggested that re-building community relationships can be supported through an annual summit hosted by the Centre of Excellence. The summit would include a discussion on what the Centre of Excellence has accomplished throughout the school year, what was done with the research and consultations, and what will be done going forward to ensure that they are driving policy changes within TDSB. More importantly, the ACB community asserted that the policies should be driven by the data produced from conversations with ACB families to provide families with a sense of ownership of the data.

“There has to be deliverables. As time has evolved, the school to prison pipeline has been a large concern for our community. When we have consultations, do something about it! We want to see action, measurables and implementation. We need to improve the relations by following through.”

Families and community participants understood that data collection is “a necessary part of the board’s responsibilities” to influence and inform practice and policies. However, they suggested the data be made available for use by school staff, department leaders, administrators “to have their stories heard and implement[ing] the recommendations given, in all schools, as[a] move to support Black students’ needs.” For several participants, this demonstrates the Board’s efforts in being accountable and transparent.

Stakeholders stated that all the evidence is consistent in regard to family-school-community partnerships having a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life. For many, they asked that the importance of the partnerships be understood . As one participant added “when schools, families, and our community folks work together to support learning, our children fair out better, they feel confident, they know they have support from everywhere in the Black community.” Strengthening this partnership and re-building the trust meant the following for stakeholders:

“Schools must be willing to engage families in ways that are linked to improving Black students learning outcomes.”

“When schools build partnerships with us as Black families, and respond to our concerns and honor our contributions, they are more successful in sustaining connections that are aimed at improving our children’s achievement.”

“When Black families and community members share their concerns about schools being accountable to Black students’ wellbeing and overall success, it means schools across TDSB must make take that extra step to have positive changes in policy, practice, and resources.”

The Role of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement; and Recommendations for Supporting Black Students, Families and/or Caregivers and Community Members

It must be noted that several recommendations were made about how the Centre of Excellence could support Black families and students. Each stakeholder group perceived the Centre of Excellence as playing a pivotal role in collaborating with school leadership, educators and policy stakeholders in areas such as:

- 1) Black students' identity development, mentoring; and creating an affinity space for Black families and the community for networking, connecting, and healing;
- 2) classroom conditions: training in cultural responsiveness and implicit bias for teachers and school staff;
- 3) communicating, coordinating, and sharing information and resources;
- 4) building partnerships with community members and organizations;
- 5) leadership and advocacy; and
- 6) further focus group research.

1. The Centre of Excellence's Role in Identity Development, Mentoring, and Providing Affinity Spaces for Connecting, Networking, and Healing

A key recommendation made during the focus group discussions was the need for the Centre of Excellence to support the growth of Black students' identity and development. Suggestions for accomplishing this objective include celebrating their achievements, creating grants specific for Black students, supporting the transition of students to high school, post-secondary education and apprenticeships, offering tutoring and mentorship programs, lunch and after-school programs, an Elders-in-School program, extracurricular activities that engage students outside of school, and hosting cultural events, activities, and programming throughout the year. As one participant said: "This must be done for Black students to have recognition and showing them that they're important." Participants also discussed access to STEM and other specialized curriculum programs for Black students.

Mentoring

Community members discussed the importance of developing and enhancing Black students' networking and mentorship from a young age. This was seen as significant because it provides Black students with opportunities to network with Black professionals who can serve as role models and provide them with tools and information about how to attain professional careers. Community members also identified connecting with Black professionals as central to combatting

the “lack of belief that teachers and guidance counsellors have it [sic] in for Black children/youth.” Participants also suggested creating a database of Black agencies and professionals to give Black students opportunities for placements that, depending on their professional interest, could count towards their volunteer service hours requirement. It was suggested that the support for Black students must be envisioned as a long-term, continuous goal over the entire year. Community participants also recommended that a coordinated peer mentorship program be developed in schools to provide unique mentorship and educational opportunities for Black students. These would include personal, academic, and professional development opportunities that create a fulfilling student experience and can enhance community members' engagement and awareness. Participants added that these are tangible ways that schools can build bridges with the Black community and show an interest in issues affecting Black students.

Suggestions were also made that the Centre of Excellence build connections between students and create opportunities for parents and families to connect and network while also providing “affinity spaces.” Participants also discussed the significance of having the Centre of Excellence located in an actual building where families could go with the intention of finding safety, connection, support, and inspiration.

“We need to make sure that we have a network. It doesn't matter where we are, whether you live in the east, the west, whatever, so that we can come together because we have a tie that binds. We all have children within this umbrella, and we need to be able to connect them with strength. With numbers, there's strength.”

Participants asked that the Centre of Excellence facilitate the creation of spaces for healing for the Black community and provide counselling to deal with issues, such as internalized racism and generational trauma.

They also proposed the implementation of an Ombudsman at the Board to understand parents' experiences with anti-Black racism.

In addition to the recommendations and thoughts shared, participants asked that no one be left out of the conversation within the umbrella term of ACB. Participants stated that while there is a recognition that the term ACB is comprehensive, it also omits self-identifying Black members (e.g., Afro-Latinx, Afro-Indigenous). Therefore, schools must see the need to continuously be intentional in connecting with Black community members, families and organizations that are often not present.



2. The Centre of Excellence’s Role in Supporting Classroom Conditions through Training Teachers and School Staff in Cultural Responsiveness and Implicit Bias

Accountability measures

In order to support student success, participants asserted that the Centre of Excellence must provide teacher training on cultural responsiveness, implicit bias, and how teachers can relate to Black students. They also suggested that the Centre of Excellence provide teaching resources in all subject areas to incorporate diverse Black voices from the Canadian and African diaspora. As part of an accountability measure, it was recommended that schools report back yearly to the Centre of Excellence on the progress they have made to achieve ACB representation and inclusion.

Newcomer Black families

Community members also discussed the barriers and discrimination many newcomer families encounter when seeking assistance or engaging with TDSB schools. It was suggested that school staff should display more awareness and cultural competence and “know not all ACB families speaks the official languages.” Therefore, finding different ways for school staff to communicate and share information with families would increase accessibility and make school environments more welcoming.

3. The Centre of Excellence’s Role in Communicating, Coordinating, Organizing, and Sharing Information, Services, and Resources

Transparency in Communication

Participants stated that parents/caregivers and families should be made aware of the Centre of Excellence’s role, mandate, and plans going forward. As noted by a grandparent, “many of us don’t know what the Centre of Excellence does or is, so the staff needs to make its presence known more broadly, through social media and by sharing information year-round at school assemblies, parent-teacher interviews, and Student Council.” Participants also recommended that information about the Centre of Excellence’s role and mandate be advertised in the broader community. It was further suggested that the Centre of Excellence reach out to Black families through schools and invite them to attend a virtual session in order to inform them about its mandate and to collect contact information from families in a database.

Parents/caregivers also requested that the Centre of Excellence provide information about Board policies and procedures, changes taking place in the school system, and research that has been conducted with Black students.

Participants emphasized the need for timely and accessible communications to ensure that community members receive information in a clear, direct, and easy to understand manner.

In fulfilling its communication role, it was suggested that the Centre of Excellence coordinate, organize and share information on a variety of topics relevant to Black students and their families, including community activities and programs, mentorship and work opportunities, scholarships and grants for Black students, a list of easily accessible tutors, Black-focused resources and organizations, community supports, and TDSB resources.

Hub for Resources

Participants expressed the need for the Centre of Excellence to act as a “hub” where families could receive services and assistance that they need, such as mental health resources, food security, support with settlement/immigration, employment services, child welfare, and create and/or coordinate care services for students whose parents are working multiple jobs to support their families.

“I wonder if there is a way to have resources in one place that you could direct families to, so they can access what they need. In general, we're very private people who don't want to have to tell you that I need help with this or whatever. But if there was just a general information that they could go and go to this website, and they could find it or call this the number or something set up somehow, that they could talk to somebody directly.”

“I do think that it is important for us to have a hub in which that unity can flourish, and I think the Centre has a unique ability to kind of be a hub ...the Centre will be able to synthesize the resources and the services that the community organizations are able to give out.”

Coordination of resources was seen as a very important strategy for aiding parents/caregivers to better advocate for and support their children.

Community members discussed the essential need for the Centre of Excellence to provide information to families on navigating the education system. It was also suggested that the Centre of Excellence provide guidance to parents/caregivers on the types of questions they could ask during parent-teacher interviews.

Curating Resources and Partnerships

Community members shared the importance of conducting a needs assessment of services and resources available internally and externally to TDSB. Such an assessment would be helpful in

identifying the gaps in accessing resources. Community members also suggested that an inventory of resources be developed to direct families in need of support. It was suggested that the Centre of Excellence connect with schools to gather that information. One suggested strategy for the needs assessment is community mapping (identifying the location of organizations) to find out what is available within the community and sharing that information with ACB community members. It was recommended that the Centre of Excellence partner with existing organizations doing impactful work in community mapping. Community participants underscored the need for such information as “families need to be informed because they are unaware that there are services available to them, such as laptops for students, services for students with special needs.”

4. The Centre of Excellence’s Role in Partnering and Collaborating

Participants emphasized that increased collaboration with ACB communities must be centred on building partnerships in order to improve classroom conditions for Black students’ identity development.

Additionally, participants asserted that the Centre of Excellence must collaborate with educators through professional learning to develop their awareness about community resources available to support Black students’ success. This includes understanding and valuing how community members are involved in supporting families in and outside of school. The Centre of Excellence must support schools in understanding and valuing the cultural capital that exists in the Black community. A key success factor of a collaborative school-community engagement is recognizing, seeking, and valuing the varied knowledge of ACB communities that teachers could draw on in classrooms. Participants suggested that these collaborations need to be well-defined and communicated in relation to Black communities. It was added that this intentional collaboration leads to the redistribution of power between schools and ACB communities, where parents/caregivers and other community members are instrumental in the partnerships and decision-making processes that impact their Black children or family members.

Differentiation in Partnerships

Participants further emphasized that community partnerships need to be tailored to smaller agencies, grassroots organizations, community activists and individuals doing work within ACB communities that may not have the same number of resources as larger organizations. In the focus group discussions, several community members emphasized the need to be intentional when developing these relationships and the need for different models of engagement that decenter hierarchical models of partnership rather than the “one-size-fits-all” approach.

Staff in the Centre of Excellence were also encouraged to explore the many opportunities to partner with ACB service organizations.

It was also recommended that the Centre of Excellence partner with Afrocentric organizations to ensure a more comprehensive teaching of African history. Another suggestion was that the Centre of Excellence collaborate with universities on pathway planning.

Participants proposed that the Centre of Excellence establish partnerships with community groups that already have experience with Black organizations.

“I think there needs to be a better level of openness to community organizations... If it is going to be the same ol’, same ol’, where there is a wall, between us, the community and particularly the Black community and the TDSB, we are going to have challenges, but if the philosophy is to be open, then you know, it works both ways.”

5. The Centre of Excellence’s Role in Leadership, Advocacy, and Bridge Building Between ACB Communities and Schools

Parents/caregivers reinforced the need for the Centre of Excellence to take leadership in promoting Black academic excellence and to be a strong advocate and mediator for students and their families.

Community members and organizations identified advocacy as a very central success factor for achieving effective school-community engagement. They highlighted advocacy as critical in redressing the “history of broken promises with TDSB” and improving the quality of relationship between the TDSB and ACB communities.

Participants asserted that the Centre of Excellence cannot be neutral and must engage in action-oriented advocacy to counter institutionalized anti-Black racism and gatekeeping that Black students, families, and communities’ encounter. Proposed proactive actions were highlighted to actively confront the unequal power dynamics and structures between schools and ACB communities. These include assessing policies, programs, curricula and hiring practices to ensure that they are equitable.

Voice and Advocacy

Participants expressed the need for the Centre of Excellence to be a voice for Black families. As one father suggested, “be the voice for us, an advocate for us, because you know the system and can speak on behalf of us and our children, and you can get into places as ACB staff that we

individually may not be able to. So, I think that's really important." As part of its strong advocacy role, it was suggested that the Centre of Excellence staff act as a mediator between schools and families facing discrimination or anti-Black racism in school. As several parents/caregivers added, this could be done by addressing the socio-emotional needs of students, and/or supporting families that "do not understand how the system works or those of us that experience repercussions for speaking out."

Bridge to Re-engagement

In addition to the topics of leadership and advocacy that were discussed, community representatives suggested that the Center of Excellence act as a "bridge" to re-engage families and community organizations with schools. They discussed the need to repair the trust that has been broken between schools and the community over the years: "intentional connections with ACB organizations are needed to repair the relationship." Demonstrating accountability, deliverables, and transparency were suggested as key factors for regaining trust and strengthening partnerships.

"Advocacy is important. The community is constantly advocating for students, and we also need the centre to advocate."

"The trust in doing the best for the student has to be repaired. This trust has been broken that they have the best interest in the student's development. We [Black people] bring a culture that we trust schools, but this trust has been broken because the students cannot succeed in the "normal" pathway, so they create their own."

6. The Centre of Excellence's Role in Undertaking Further Focus Group Research

It was proposed that additional focus group research be undertaken with young children to gain insight into their schooling experiences and to hear the experiences and stories of families.

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Appendix A

Mandates	Community Recommendation
<p>Student</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide support to Black students in TDSB schools to combat racism, navigate complaint processes, identify barriers to success and access appropriate resources (e.g., scholarships, networking, mentoring). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence should take leadership in promoting Black academic excellence and be a strong advocate and mediator for students and their families. • As part of its strong advocacy role, the Centre of Excellence staff must act as a mediator between schools and families facing discrimination and anti-Black racism in schools. Staff also need to address the socio-emotional needs of students and support families. • The Centre of Excellence must coordinate, organize, and share information on a variety of topics relevant to Black students and their families, including community activities and programs, mentorship and work opportunities, scholarships and grants for Black students, a list of easily accessible tutors, Black-focused resources and organizations, community supports, and TDSB resources. • The Centre of Excellence must coordinate resources, enabling parents/caregivers to better advocate and support their children. • The Centre of Excellence must support the identity and development of Black students. Specific suggestions include celebrating their achievements, creating grants specific for Black students, supporting the transition of students to high school, post-secondary education and apprenticeships, offering tutoring and mentorship programs, lunch and after-school programs, an Elders-in-School program, extracurricular activities that engage students outside of school, and hosting cultural events, activities, and programming throughout the year. • The Centre of Excellence must build connections between Black students. • The Centre of Excellence must develop and enhance Black students' networking and mentorship starting at a young age. It must provide Black students with opportunities to network with Black professionals who can serve as role models and provide them with



	<p>tools and information for attaining professional careers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence must facilitate the development of a coordinated peer mentorship program in schools to provide unique mentorship and educational opportunities for Black students. • Teaching resources should be provided by the Centre of Excellence in all subject areas that incorporate diverse Black voices from the Canadian and African diaspora.
<p>2. Identify, develop, and facilitate culturally responsive and relevant healing practices for students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence needs to facilitate the creation of healing spaces for the Black community and provide counselling to deal with issues such as internalized racism and generational trauma.
<p>3. Establish effective mechanisms for monitoring improvement in the achievement of Black students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Ombudsman must be assigned to the TDSB to understand parents' experiences with anti-Black racism. • The Center of Excellence must take proactive actions to actively confront the unequal power dynamics and structures between schools and ACB communities. These actions include the assessment of policies, programs, curricula, and hiring practices to ensure that they are equitable. • There must be an advisory committee created for the Centre of Excellence. • The Centre of Excellence must support Black students' access to STEM and other specialized curriculum programs as a pathway to post-secondary education and as a means to alleviate barriers in education.
<p>4. Inform changes to policies and procedures so that all students may benefit from the learning and innovative practices developed by the Centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role and mandate of the Centre of Excellence and plans going forward must be clearly articulated and communicated to parents/caregivers, families, and the broader community. • The Centre of Excellence must inform parents/caregivers about Board policies and procedures, changes taking place in the school system, and research that has been conducted on Black students. • The Centre of Excellence needs to provide timely and accessible communications to ensure that all



	<p>community members are receiving information in a clear, direct, and easy to understand manner.</p>
<p>Families/Communities</p> <p>5. Support meaningful engagement and advocacy of caregivers for their children in TDSB schools and programs and improve the lines of communication to them about Black student success, system navigation and complaint processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence needs to act as a “hub” where families could receive services/assistance needed, such as mental health resources, food security, support with settlement/immigration, employment services, child welfare, and create and/or coordinate care services for students whose parents are working multiple jobs to support their families. • The Centre of Excellence cannot be neutral and must engage in action-oriented advocacy to counter institutionalized anti-Black racism and gatekeeping that Black students, families, and communities’ encounter. • The Centre of Excellence must be “a voice” for Black families. • The Center of Excellence must act as a “bridge” to re-engage families and community organizations with schools to repair the trust and broken relationship between schools and the community. • The Center of Excellence must create opportunities for parents and families to connect and network while also providing “affinity spaces” for them. • The Centre of Excellence must provide information to families on navigating the education system and provide guidance to parents/caregivers on the types of questions they can ask during parent-teacher interviews. • The Centre of Excellence must connect with schools to identify gaps in accessing resources and compile an inventory of services that are available internally and externally to TDSB families. • The Centre of Excellence must create opportunities for students to network and for parents and families to have “affinity spaces”. • The Centre of Excellence must be located in an actual building where families could go with the intention of finding safety, connection, support, and inspiration.
<p>6. Engage in strategic community partnerships related to education within the identified</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence needs to establish intentional connections with ACB organizations. Demonstrating accountability, deliverables, and



<p>approved annual budget for this purpose.</p>	<p>transparency were suggested as key factors for regaining trust and strengthening partnerships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence must develop and foster collaborations with ACB communities that are centred on building partnerships to improve classroom conditions for Black students’ identity development. • The Centre of Excellence must collaborate with educators through professional learning to develop their awareness about community resources available to support Black students’ success. This includes understanding and valuing how community members are involved in supporting families in and outside of schools. • The Centre of Excellence must support schools in understanding and valuing the cultural capital that exists in the Black community. A key success factor of a collaborative school-community engagement is recognizing, seeking, and valuing the varied knowledge of ACB community members that teachers could draw on in classrooms. • The Centre of Excellences needs to create a database of Black agencies and professionals, providing Black students with opportunities for placements which could count towards their volunteer service hours requirement. • The Centre of Excellence needs to develop community partnerships that are tailored to smaller agencies, grassroots organizations, community activists and individuals doing work within ACB communities that may not have the same number of resources as larger organizations. The Centre of Excellence should be intentional in its efforts to develop these relationships, using different models of engagement that decenter hierarchical models of partnership or the “one-size-fits-all” approach. • The Centre of Excellence staff must explore the many opportunities to partner with ACB service organizations. It was recommended that the Centre of Excellence partner with Afrocentric organizations to ensure a more comprehensive teaching of African history.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence must partner with organizations doing impactful work in community mapping. • The Centre of Excellence needs to work with universities on pathway planning. • The Centre of Excellence must establish partnerships with community groups that already have experience with Black organizations.
<p>Staff/System</p> <p>7. Use evidence to highlight promising practices and engage in meaningful research on topics relevant to Black students that are then integrated across schools and at the system level within the TDSB;</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence is called upon to support school staff with evidence-based plans to support promising practice that will improve the learning conditions of Black students. • The Centre of Excellence must engage in the work of providing support to educators and administrators to build their critical consciousness practitioner inquiries. Also implement guidelines for schools to conduct thorough equity audits, family and community engagement plans, teacher diversity initiatives, and professional development on transformative practices and social and emotional learning.
<p>8. Create professional learning in anti-Black racism and collaborate with other staff in facilitating learning in decolonization, anti-racism, anti-oppression, and human rights, while recognizing the similarities and intersections of various forms of oppression.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Centre of Excellence should provide teacher training in cultural responsiveness and implicit bias, and training on how teachers can relate to Black students. • The Centre of Excellence should also provide training for school staff to address the barriers and discrimination that newcomer families encounter in TDSB schools.
<p>9. Provide annual accountability reports and recommendations to the Board of Trustees and staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To fulfill its measure of accountability, schools must report back yearly to the Centre of Excellence on the progress they have made to achieve ACB representation and inclusion. • More focus group research should be undertaken with young children to gain insight into their schooling experiences and to hear the experiences and stories of families.

