# TOWARDS RACE EQUITY IN EDUCATION

## The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area

**April 2017**

# Contents

*Black students are as capable, as competent, as creative, and as determined as all other students. The ways that Black students are constantly misjudged and mistreated by teachers and guidance counsellors is an injustice to our community. As educators who seek to enrich an increasingly diverse nation, it is your duty and responsibility to encourage, motivate, challenge and strengthen Black students like all others. When you begin to see Black students as part of your community, only then will you effectively fulfill your job as an educator.*

**~ Black Student**

This report is the result of a collaborative project between Dr. Carl James, Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community & Diaspora at York University; the African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC); and the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (ONABSE). The community consultations were organized by the ACLC and ONABSE, while the research (data collection, analysis, and report writing) was led by Dr. Carl James with Tana Turner.

## JEAN AUGUSTINE CHAIR IN EDUCATION, COMMUNITY & DIASPORA

The Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community & Diaspora is a university chair in the Faculty of Education which aims to advance access, equity and inclusivity to education through community engagement and collaborative action.

First launched in 2008, the chair holder initiates, facilitates, directs and engages in research, educational programs, and community partnerships which are culturally responsive and relevant to the educational and social needs, interests and aspirations of Black and other racialized communities – both those inside and outside of the university. Through university-community partnerships, the chair aims to address the ways in which marginalization and racialization act as barriers to individuals' achievement of their educational and career ambitions.

Through the wide range of activities described below the chair will foster understanding of the diverse cultural and educational needs of students; facilitate leadership on matters of access, equity, inclusivity and social justice; strengthen university-community partnerships and engagement; and build educational and social capacity among students and community members.

## ACTIVITIES

**Research** – engage in research about and for Black and other marginalized/racialized communities that will inform policies, programs and advocacy. The research data and reports, which community agencies and members will be able to collaboratively engage and access, will contribute to the Chair becoming a Research Hub, serving as a central source of evidenced-based information (bulletins, lectures, presentations and discussions).

**Partnerships** – build strategic partnerships with other units at the university, as well as school boards, schools and community agencies and/or organizations to initiate, develop, and implement social and educational programs that are relevant and responsive to the needs and aspirations of university and other students and their parents.

**Community Engagement** – work with both the university and wider communities on initiatives such as community-based and action research, partnership events (such as workshops, conferences, lectures, students visits to the university, and other shared leadership projects), and education mobilization that work to the benefit of communities, particularly Black and other racialized communities.

**Student Engagement** – work with undergraduate and graduate students (through workshops, seminars, conferences and program initiatives) to provide assistance and support in their pursuit of post-secondary education and university engagement. Work with schools to create opportunities for high school students to visit and become familiar with the university (including enabling students to learn about and develop suitable mentorship, forge and maintain beneficial networks, and develop leadership through research and community initiatives).

### The current Chair, Dr. Carl James

Dr. Carl James was appointed as the Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora for a 5-year term effective July 1, 2016. Dr. James brings a strong record of scholarship and community engagement to this key position; and as Chair he will focus on addressing issues and concerns related to Black and other marginalized groups within a framework of equity, inclusivity, and social justice.

Committed to evidenced-based policies and actions, James has extensive experience in youth studies, Black studies, participatory action research, and community advocacy work. He is widely recognized for his work on equity and inclusivity issues relating to race, class, gender, racialization, immigration and citizenship. As well, he is known for his mentorship and volunteer work with social service and community agencies, educational institutions, and government units.

### The Honorable Jean Augustine

In 1993, Canadian politician Jean Augustine became the first black woman elected to the Parliament of Canada. An energetic advocate of social justice, Augustine was an elementary school principal before entering federal politics. She was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister of Canada, Chair of the National Liberal Women's Caucus, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, and Assistant Deputy Speaker. As well, she was appointed Ontario's first Fairness Commissioner where she advocated for foreign-trained professionals to ensure that their international credentials and training are treated fairly. Augustine holds an Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) from the University of Toronto; and in 2007, she was honoured by the University of the West Indies with a Caribbean Luminary Award, recognizing her significant contributions to the Caribbean diaspora.

### The Jean Augustine Fonds

Jean Augustine has donated her personal records to the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections at York University Libraries in Toronto, Canada. Over 13.4 linear metres of administrative and personal records in the form of textual documents, audio-visual material, artwork and objects are available for research. The materials in Augustine's fonds chronicle her four decades of public service and her advocacy on diverse issues, such as women's rights, urban education, Black youth, and the betterment of the Black community. Her private papers reveal much about her political sentiments and her sense of community.

### AFRICAN CANADIAN LEGAL CLINIC

The ACLC is a not-for-profit organization established in October 1994 expressly to address anti-Black racism in Canadian society.

As a specialty clinic funded by Legal Aid Ontario, the ACLC provides advice and represents African Canadians in a number of legal forums through test cases. The ACLC also administers the African Canadian Youth Justice Program, Adult Justice Program, and Youth Justice Education Program.

### ONTARIO ALLIANCE OF BLACK SCHOOL EDUCATORS

The purpose of ONABSE is to promote and facilitate the education of all students, African Canadian students in particular; to establish a coalition of African Canadian educators and others directly or indirectly involved in the educational process; to create a forum for the exchange of ideas and strategies to improve educational opportunities for African Canadians; to identify and develop African Canadian professionals who will assume leadership positions in education; and to influence public policy concerning the education of African Canadian people.

# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the students, parents, advocates, educators, school administrators, community agencies, and others interested in the education of Black students for attending the consultations. We are indebted to the over 300 individuals who generously shared their time, experiences, perspectives, and recommendations to achieve equity of outcomes for Black students in Ontario's education system.

We have made every effort to fairly and accurately reflect the perspectives of all participants. We hope they find their voices reflected in this report and that both school boards and the community find the report useful in their efforts to achieve race equity in education.
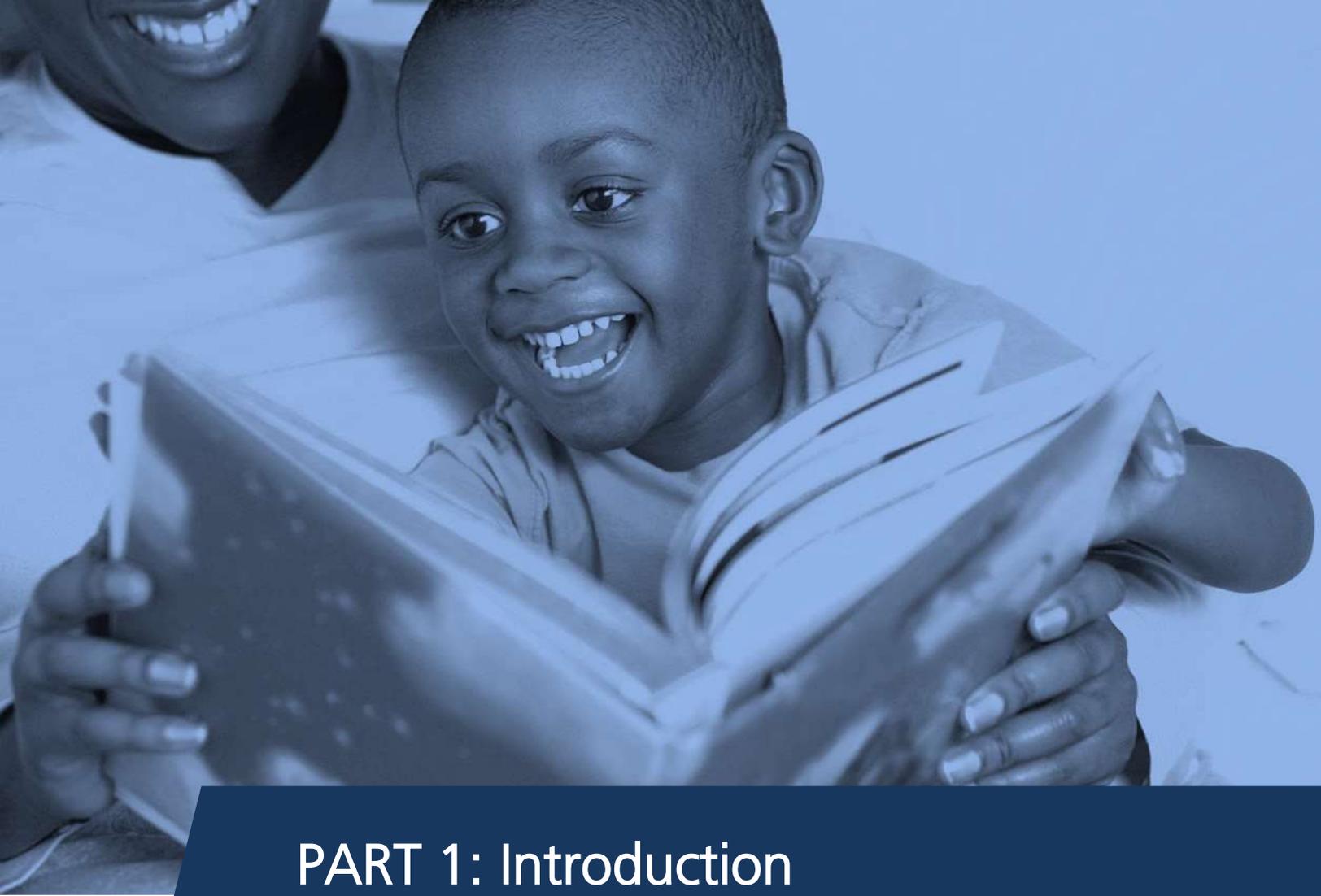
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# PART 1: Introduction

On Saturday, April 1, I attended a conference at the University of Toronto for Black university students aspiring to become medical doctors. Student panelists shared their stories of being either the only or one of very few Black students in their classes at the university's medical school. What struck me was that in a city and country as diverse Toronto and Canada, there are not more Black medical students. Throughout the day it was evident how the representation of Black students at university reflected the poor outcomes for Black students in the education system throughout the Greater Toronto Area.

While the University of Toronto recently announced an initiative to increase the number of Black students at its medical school, achieving this goal will be difficult if we do not address the poor educational outcomes for Black students in today's public school system. Both of these issues need to be addressed if we are to have medical practitioners who reflect the full diversity of a population that we can expect to become even more diverse.

Before conceiving of this project, I heard from a number of individuals in Toronto and in the surrounding regions of Peel, York, and Durham about their need for data on the outcomes of Black students in their respective school districts. While I was able to share the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data with which we have been working, I was unable to provide data

specific to the other GTA regions. Of course, as individuals work within their respective communities, they will need data for their advocacy and as a measure of whether equity and inclusivity are addressed and attained. Without the data or research studies to support individuals' perceptions of anti-Black racism, then experiences and concerns may never be taken seriously by school administrators and educators. Some individuals with whom I spoke also talked of a number of incidents with Black students and parents and were seeking data to challenge their respective school boards' assertions that these incidents were not connected to anti-Black racism in the school system, but instead were "isolated incidents."

These requests for evidence to make a compelling case for school boards to acknowledge and address systemic anti-Black racism in education prompted us to conceive of this project. The goal was to use the available TDSB data to generate a conversation about the experiences of Black students in GTA school boards. While this data does not capture the outcomes for all school boards in the region nor does it capture the outcomes for Black students in the Catholic, French, and French Catholic boards, it does offer some insights into the experience of Black students on which consultation participants could reflect.

We were fortunate to conduct this research at a time when other reports point to the need for attention to anti-Black racism in society and in the education system in particular. For instance, there is the investigation by Donna Quan – resulting from a partnership between the Ministry of Education and York University – into additional province-wide data collection to further inform understanding of student outcomes. The report is expected to be released shortly. Further, the province recently established the Anti-Racism Directorate and the Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism, recently tabled legislation that would enable the provincial government to mandate data collection and anti-racism impact assessments in various sectors, including education. The Minister also announced a $47 million fund for Black youth aimed at reducing the disparities they face. And the results from the Black Experience Project which examined the experiences of the GTA's Black communities will also be released in the coming months.

With all this focus on Black youth, it is important to reflect on the gaps in our knowledge and the need for ongoing research and support for Black youth if they are to become full and successful participating Canadians citizens. Additional research should focus on the different experiences of Black male and female students, as well as the experiences of Black Muslim students who face both anti-Black racism and Islamophobia. While some of these issues were touched upon in these consultations, the limitations of this project did not allow us to explore these issues fully.

Certainly the experiences of Black LGBTQ students also deserves further research. I was struck by a conversation years ago in which I was told of a Black student who experienced homophobia in a largely Black school, and he transferred to the alternative school for LGBTQ students. He returned to his home school within two weeks because he felt that the racism he experienced in the alternative school was far worse than the homophobia he had been

experiencing. Our focus on LGBTQ students often fails to address the issues facing Black LGBTQ students while our focus on Black students again often overlooks them.

We also acknowledge that while this report focuses on the similarities of experiences in schools in Toronto, Peel, York, and Durham, there may be issues particular to each school district that need to be explored.

In addition, the focus of our attention and efforts must extend beyond the public school system. While the postsecondary students we talked to were forceful in sharing the challenges that they faced in high school, they also shared their concern that little attention is being paid to their experiences in Ontario colleges and universities. They shared feelings of isolation within their programs, lack of engagement with curriculum that teaches and reinforces anti-Black racism, and alienation from campuses on which they experienced anti-Black racism. While they were organizing conferences for Black high school students to encourage and support them to pursue post-secondary education, they welcomed the same support and encouragement themselves. At the current time, Black student groups at both the University of Toronto and York University have issued demands for these universities to acknowledge and address the anti-Black racism that students experience. Among their demands are the collection of disaggregated race-based student and faculty data, addressing the under-representation of Black students and Black faculty, and providing culturally-appropriate mental health services for Black students.

In preparing this report I was once again reminded that this is not the first study of the experience of Black students in Ontario schools. While the former Toronto Board of Education began examining these issues in the 1970s through their student census and other studies, we believe this is the first community-led project that captures the issues from the perspective of Black community members, parents, students, and educators. As such, we hope that it will be used by Black communities as a tool to advocate for changes within the Ontario Ministry of Education as well as their local school boards. We also hope that the Ministry and school boards use this report and the recommendations we offer to create immediate change and also as a starting point for further conversation and research.

Carl E. James
Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community & Diaspora
York University

## Methodology

In October and November of 2016, five consultation sessions were conducted with Black communities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) intending to gather input about the issues that Black students and parents face within Ontario's public education system. In total, 286 students, parents, educators, school administrators, trustees, and community members attended these consultation sessions in the following regions:

- Toronto West (North York) - 32 participants
- York Region - 45
- Durham Region - 43
- Peel Region - 110
- Toronto East (Scarborough) - 56.

In January 2017, these community consultations were supplemented with sessions with 38 Black young people held at York University and the University of Toronto, who are current and former university and college students.

In total, 324 people participated in these consultations. The vast majority (approximately 80%) were Black parents, community members, educators, school staff and trustees. White and other racialized educators, school staff, trustees and parents of Black children also participated in the consultations. Following these sessions, we also received written input from seven individuals.

At the beginning of each consultation and focus group session, Tana Turner (Turner Consulting Group Inc., Facilitator) and Carl James (Professor of Education, Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora) used Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data to provide a profile of Black students in that Board. It was also used to frame and contextualize the issues that were being discussed. While this data has its limitations, in that it does not include students in the Catholic, French, and French Catholic Boards, which are attended by a significant number of Black students, it nevertheless provides one of the most comprehensive snapshots of the educational experiences and outcomes of a subset of Black students in Canada's largest school district. Despite its limitations, the TDSB data offers useful insights into the schooling and education of Black students beyond what any other data source currently provides—including the Canadian Census—and is the only source of its kind that exists in Ontario and in Canada generally.

Following the presentations, there were small group discussions with 5 to 10 participants with a facilitator and a note taker. In these small groups, participants reflected on the data and discussed the extent to which their own experiences in their respective school communities were either similar or different from that what was captured in the TDSB data.

With TDSB data as reference, and based on their own experiences as parents, educators, community members, and students, participants also spent time reflecting on two main questions:

- What is happening in the schools that impact Black students that contribute to their educational outcomes?

- What is happening in the homes and communities of Black students that contribute to these outcomes?

Once participants identified key factors affecting Black students, they were asked to think about what changes are needed to support the educational success of Black students. Additionally, participants formulated recommendations to the Ministry of Education, school boards, school administrators, teachers, as well as to Black community organizations and other stakeholders.

The consultations were also used as an opportunity to educate participants about the legal rights and responsibilities of students and parents. Lawyers from the African Canadian Legal Clinic gave presentations at each of the sessions on a range of legal issues pertaining to education performance, participation, outcomes, as well as suspensions and expulsions.

This report summarizes the experiences, issues and concerns raised during the consultations. The information shared by participants are supplemented with Canadian Census data, TDSB data, and various research studies which serve to contextualize this current report's findings. The recommendations made by consultation participants form the basis of our recommendations included in Part 6 of this report.

We begin our exploration of the education and schooling of Black students in the GTA with a summary of the current context.

# PART 2: The Current Context

For as long as they have been in Canada, people of African descent have been involved in advocacy in order to have equal access to a quality education. In this section, we summarize the more recent history of government and school board research and initiatives that have specifically focused on Black student achievement. This section is meant to provide an overview of issues and initiatives rather than a comprehensive review.

## Provincial Initiatives

For at least 30 years, the provincial government has been aware of and has tried in various ways to address unequal educational outcomes for Black students.

In 1987, a Provincial Advisory Committee on Race and Ethnocultural Relations was formed following a provincial conference on race and ethnocultural relations. The Committee prepared a Working Paper in 1988 entitled *The Development of a Policy on Race and Ethnocultural Equity* (Ministry of Education, 1988).

In the aftermath of the "Yonge Street Riot" in 1992, Premier Bob Rae commissioned Stephen Lewis to examine "race relations" in Ontario. The Stephen Lewis Report, released in June 1992,

named anti-Black racism as a concern, the first for a government report. He stated the following:

> First, what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-Black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping-out, it is housing communities with large concentrations of Black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is Black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of 'multiculturalism' cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target (Lewis, 1992, p. 2).

In this report, Lewis commented on the lack of progress within the education system, despite years of government and educators knowing that Black students face anti-Black racism in the education system:

> Undoubtedly, some progress has been made. But often, as I listened to students of all ages and all backgrounds speak out at the many gatherings we had, it was as though we were back to square one. The lack of real progress is shocking. And I believe it signals the most intractable dilemma, around race relations in contemporary education: How do you get the best of policies and programs into the individual classrooms? It raises searching questions of communications and accountability (p. 20).

Lewis also identified the lack of racial diversity among the teaching workforce and in teacher education programs as a cause for concern. In advocating for "Affirmative Action" programs to diversify the teacher population, he asks:

> What makes me want to pinch myself is that it's 1992 for heaven's sake, why did it take so long? Why are there still Faculties of Education out there that rely on marks alone, that won't provide educational upgrading, or transitional help, prior learning assessment or simple employment equity in order to make our schools a reflection of our society? (p. 23)

The report highlights the various educational concerns that Black students from Toronto and the surrounding regions shared during the consultations with Lewis: lack of racial diversity among teachers; Black people and Black history not reflected in the curriculum; tolerance of racist incidents in schools; harsher discipline of Black students; streaming of Black students into courses below their ability; and Black students being discouraged from attending university. The students also noted that the issues they faced didn't begin in high school but had their

origins in elementary school. Lewis's recommendations included employment equity, monitoring of the implementation of anti-racism policies in school boards, and the revision of curriculum to reflect the diversity of Ontario.

Another report, *Towards a New Beginning,* a joint initiative between all orders of government, was released in 1992 shortly after the Stephen Lewis Report. The Working Group was also initiated following the Yonge Street Riot, with the goal of "developing an integrated, strategic plan of action to address the urgent concerns of the Black Community in Metropolitan Toronto." (Four-Level Government/Black Canadian Community Working Group, 1992, p. vi). The Working Group heard from community members that the education system was one area of concern. Some of the presenters were quoted in the report as saying:

> *Let's be frank with each other; a lot of problems start in the school system. And as long as they continue, we're going to continue to turn out youths with problems.*
>
> *The school system seems to have a built-in deafness; it doesn't hear what it doesn't want to hear* (p. 75).

The report identified many concerns for Black students, including streaming, high drop-out rates, lack of Black educators, Eurocentric curriculum, and interpersonal racism. The report recommended that the TDSB undertake a 5-year project known as "Focused Schools." They suggested that the Focused Schools would include, among other things, a high proportion of Black educators, anti-racism curriculum, community-based culturally specific services, school clubs that support positive self-image of Black students, and youth leadership programs.

The Provincial Advisory Committee on Race and Ethnocultural Relations' report and the subsequent reports formed the basis of the NDP government's 1992 amendments to the *Education Act*. These amendments called for school boards to develop and implement anti-racism and ethnocultural equity policies that would focus promote the identification and elimination of systemic inequities and barriers to equitable education for students and encourage equitable education practices for all staff. The NDP government also passed employment equity legislation in 1994 and established the Anti-Racism Secretariat. All, however, were short-lived and dismantled by the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris following the 1995 election.

Elected on an anti-employment equity platform and the promise of a zero tolerance policy for bad behaviour in schools, the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris ended the requirement for school boards to develop anti-racism and ethnocultural equity policies. In April 2000, then Minister of Education Janet Ecker released a *Code of Conduct* for Ontario schools. She then followed that up with changes to the *Education Act*, granting legal force to the *Code of Conduct* giving principals and teachers more authority to suspend and expel students. The *Act* was passed in June 2000 and came into effect in September 2000.

The *Act* made expulsions and suspensions mandatory for serious infractions and set out a zero tolerance policy for inappropriate behaviour. This approach to school discipline was criticized for suspending students for minor incidents and for dealing more harshly with Black students (Puxley, 2007). An internal Ontario Ministry of Education draft document, Special Education Monograph No. 5, *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Ministry of Education and Training's Violence-Free Schools Policy with respect to Exceptional Pupils and Others with Special Needs*, showed that the government had been aware since at least 1997 that the use of suspensions and expulsions in schools might have a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities. At that time, there was also a great deal of research on the negative impact of zero tolerance policies on Black students in the United States, United Kingdom, and Nova Scotia. Regardless, the provincial government enacted the amendments to the *Education Act* (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

In responding to the concerns of Black and other communities, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) initiated human rights complaints against the Ministry of Education and the TDSB. The complaints raised concerns about the discriminatory impact of the *Act*'s zero tolerance policy on racialized students and students with disabilities. In 2007, the OHRC and the Ministry of Education finalized a settlement to end the provincial zero tolerance policy and replace it with a progressive discipline approach to dealing with inappropriate school behaviours (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

In 2008, the Liberal government commissioned Roy McMurtry and Alvin Curling to explore the social conditions that are the root causes of youth violence. The report, *The Roots of Youth Violence*, identifies education as the "root of the immediate risk factors" and explores five problematic elements of Ontario's education system: safe schools policies, the curriculum, the approach sometimes taken to guidance and counselling, the composition and training of the teaching force, and the way the education system can contribute to the criminalization of youth. At that time, they sounded the alarm about the long-term consequences of the Mike Harris government's zero tolerance policy:

> And we are also very concerned that Ontario will have to deal with the long-term consequences of the previous policies, in force from September 2001 to early 2008, and the gaps in the new policy, noted in Chapter 9, for a long time to come (McMurtry & Curling, 2008, p. 53).

*The Roots of Youth Violence* also notes that suspensions and expulsions contributed to what is now referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline. And it references community workers who noted that suspended and expelled students were more likely to drop out of school entirely and often got involved with criminal activity and, because they were not in school during the day, came under increased scrutiny of the police. Quoting a report from the United Kingdom Department for Education and Skills (2006: 16), it was noted that:

> Exclusion from school is widely recognized as a driver for wider social exclusion. It is highly correlated with unemployment and involvement in crime. In the

words of Martin Narey, Director General of HM Prison Service (2001): 'The 13,000 young people excluded from school each year might as well be given a date by which to join the prison service some time later down the line' (cited in McMurtry & Curling, 2008, p. 56).

With reference to findings from various other reports, including the TDSB's School Community Safety Advisory Panel (2008) that called for the school curriculum to be reformed to reflect the diversity of the student population, *The Roots of Youth Violence* also draws attention to the need for curriculum reform to reflect the diversity of the student population, the negative history of Canada's interaction with Indigenous people and slavery, and acknowledge the historical contributions of racialized people. It goes on to mention the negative messages that a Eurocentric school curriculum sends to racialized youth, alienation of Black students, lack of Black teachers, and how low expectations and the streaming practices of teachers and guidance counsellors continue to discourage Black students from pursing post-secondary education.

In 2009, the Ontario government introduced the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to support the achievement and well-being of students. While the strategy required school boards to review or develop equity and inclusive education policies, it did not extend to mandating that school boards take an anti-racism approach, collect disaggregated race-based student data, or implement employment equity programs to ensure that the teaching workforce reflects the diversity of the student population.

In February 2016, the provincial government established the Anti-Racism Directorate with a mandate to:

- Eliminate systemic racism in institutions governed or regulated by the Ontario government;

- Increase awareness and understanding of systemic racism among the public;

- Promote fair practices and policies that lead to racial equity; and

- Collaborate with the community, business organizations, government, and the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

In October 2016, recognizing the issues that Black students are facing with respect to school suspensions and expulsions, Legal Aid Ontario offered a one-time grant of $200,000 for two organizations to provide legal representation, advocacy, or legal education to Black students facing suspension or expulsion hearings and who "are in conflict with the education system." This grant was part of Legal Aid Ontario's Racialized Communities Strategy that was developed following consultations with community leaders who reported that Black students were disproportionately punished, suspended, and expelled.

Following province-wide consultations, the Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism, on March 7, 2017, released its 3-year action plan to fight systemic racism. Titled A Better Way Forward, the plan includes requirements to collect race-based data, develop a plan to apply an anti-racism perspective for decision-making, and table anti-racism legislation (Government of Ontario, 2007). That anti-racism legislation was recently (April 6, 2017) tabled by the provincial government and, if passed, embeds Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate in law and enables the government to mandate data collection and anti-racism impact assessments from organizations that receive $1 million or more in public funds during the previous fiscal year. This would enable the provincial government to require the collection of disaggregated race-based data of service recipients/users in the education sector, child welfare, policing, and criminal justice systems.

## Toronto District School Board

The GTA, and specifically, the City of Toronto with its long history of racial and ethnic diversity, has been a city where efforts have been made in giving some attention to its diversity. As an institution within the city, the "old" Toronto School Board, which has historically had the largest number of Black students, has since 1970 engaged in efforts to report on, if not directly address, the education issues faced by Black students in the board. For the most part, the educational performance of Black children in Toronto schools has been a matter of continued concern for parents; and studies by the school board have consistently confirmed there is cause for concern. We recognize that many of the policies, programs, and initiatives that have been in place—both at the system and local levels—though useful, have not managed to significantly change the situation for Black students. In this section, we provide highlights of the system-wide data, issues, and strategies to support Black student success.

In 1970, the Toronto Board of Education conducted its first All Student Count survey. At that time, 3% of the board's 106,921 students came from the West Indies, Guyana, or Africa (Wright, 1971). At that time, Toronto was experiencing the impact of Canada's recently changed immigration policies, with an increase in immigration from outside of Europe. As such, the board's analysis focused on immigrant children and children for whom English was a second language. While no separate analysis of the outcomes for Black students was conducted, the report, entitled *Students' Background and its Relationship to Class and Programme in School*, revealed some concerning statistics:

- More than one-quarter of all the students learned English as a second language (Wright, 1971, p. 9), and

- Close to one-half of the students (43%) came from the lowest socio-economic level (p. 18).

A subsequent survey was conducted in 1975; and beginning in 1980, annual surveys of grade 9 students have studied the educational outcome of students by socio-economic status, ethnicity, and race. Findings from these surveys have shown continued trends of an increase in the number of Black students with poor educational outcomes.

The data from the first two student surveys led the Work Group on Multiculturalism to raise concerns about "This fundamental incompatibility between the single cultural base of the school system's operation and the multicultural base of the community" (Toronto Board of Education, 1976, p. 7). The Work Group made a number of recommendations aimed at correcting educational opportunity deficits and improving outcomes for all students.

In 1977, the board established a Sub-committee on Race Relations with a mandate to make recommendations "to combat the spread of racism in Toronto" (cited in Toronto Board of Education, 1988, p. 13). The board approved the sub-committee's 119 recommendations in 1979, to be implemented over a 5-year period.

In the 1970s, the Toronto Board of Education implemented several programs to help meet the challenges of educating an increasingly multicultural and multi-racial student population. These included the Inner City Committee, the SCORE Project (School and Community Organizing to Revitalize Education), the Early Identification and Development Program, and Appraisal for Better Curriculum. In addition, the Work Group on Learning Disabilities in its initial report stated that it had "heard concerns about possible discrimination on the basis of class, ethnic origins, or sex in placement and remedial practices" (Toronto Board of Education, 1988, p. 18).

Despite the data and the community's concerns about the poor educational outcomes for Black students, and the Board's efforts to address the issues, student surveys in the 1980s and 1990s show that the negative trends continued. In fact, the Grade 9 Student Survey conducted in 1982 showed that of the 444 Black students, 24% were taking Basic Level programs, higher than any other racial group, other than Indigenous students (Wright & Tsuji, 1983). In 1982, the board's study, *Post Secondary Plans of Grade Eight Students*, found that 50% of Black students indicated their intention of going to university, yet 35% of Black students were in special education classes. The report did examine outcomes for "inner-city schools" and concluded that "Inner-city students are more likely to be attending special programs of all kinds in comparison with the total elementary school population" (cited in Toronto Board of Education, 1983, p. 31).

In the 1982 survey, 5% of Grade 9 students reported being born in the Caribbean, with the vast majority born in Jamaica; 7% identified their race as Black. In analyzing program of study by race, the report found that "Students who identified themselves as Black or Native Canadian are among those less likely to be studying at the Advance level (33% and 22% respectively) and more likely to be studying at the Basic and Modified levels" (Wright & Tsuji, 1983, p. 53). By comparison, 55% of White students were studying at the Advanced level.

In 1985, representatives of the Organization of Parents of Black Children met with the associate director of education and identified a number of concerns, including:

- The high drop-out rate;
- Low self-esteem;

- Over-representation of Black students in non-academic schools;

- Low expectations;

- Culturally biased IQ testing;

- Lack of Black teachers;

- Lack of Black studies and Black history within the curriculum;

- Ignorance of teachers about Black culture and the history of Blacks in Canada; and

- The assumption that Black people are not part of the fabric of Canadian society (Toronto Board of Education, 1988, p. 6).

The following year (1986), the Toronto Board of Education established a consultative committee on the education of Black students in Toronto schools to explore issues raised by the Black community. The Consultative Committee, comprised of parents, trustees, and staff, issued a final report in 1988, *Education of Black Students in Toronto Schools* (Toronto Board of Education, 1988).

The report highlighted the similarities between Black students who were born in Canada and those born elsewhere noting that:

> It is important to note that, while the majority of Grade 8 students who identified themselves as Blacks in 1982 were not born in Canada, 34.6% were born here and appear to be subject to the same concerns as immigrant students (p. 6).

In a review of its Anti-Racist Education Project conducted in 1996, it was noted that in Wards 11 and 12 where the review was conducted, there were improvements in school climate, a reduction in racist incidents, increased parental involvement in schools, as well as some "growth" in the identification of Black students as gifted:

> One of the greatest changes that took place in this Family of schools was the growth in the number of students identified as Gifted. Between Year One and Year Four of the study, the Gifted Program enrolment has risen from 53 to 102 for students of all racial groups.

> Although the Gifted program enrolment pattern has not totally mirrored the population make-up in Wards 11/12 schools by Year Four, the gap has narrowed for some groups. For example, the Black male students who were substantially underrepresented in the Gifted Program in Year One have increased their representation from 4% to 11% in Year Four. While the percent of Black males in the Gifted program (11%) was still lower than the percent of Blacks in the overall male student population (18%), the extent of the underrepresentation has lessened over time (Cheng, 1996, p. 34).

An analysis of the data for the Grade 9 Cohort of the 1987 Every Secondary Student Survey examined graduation rate patterns for the 1987–1992 cohort. The report found low graduation and high drop-out rates for Black students:

> By the end of 1992, 44% of Black students in the Grade 9 cohort had graduated, compared to 59% of White students and 72% of Asian students. The "drop out" rate for Black students was 42%; for Whites, it was 31%, and for Asians, it was 18% (Toronto Board of Education, 1993, p. 4).

The 1991 Every Secondary Student Survey found that Black students made up 9% of the high school student population, with 37% identifying Canada as their birthplace, 34% the Caribbean, and 24% Africa. While 74% of all students were studying at the Advanced level, only 55% of Black students were studying at this level. When the data was examined by place of birth, it showed that 65% of Canadian-born, 43% of Caribbean-born, and 58% of African-born Black students were studying at the Advanced level. The report also found that Black students were less likely than most other student to plan to attend university but more likely to aspire to attend college (Cheng et al, 1993, p. 15).

After the 1998 amalgamation of the city of Toronto six school boards by the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris, the practice of collection and analysis of disaggregated demographic (including race identification) student data undertaken by the Toronto Board of Education ended. But in time, due to a Human Rights Tribunal settlement, the newly amalgamated Toronto District School Board was obliged to collect data on suspensions and expulsions in order to determine the impact that the government's zero tolerance approach to school discipline was having on individuals protected under the Ontario *Human Rights Code.* The settlement resulted from a human rights complaint initiated by Ontario Human Rights Commission against the TDSB in response to the concerns of the Black parents and community members about the discriminatory effects of the *Act* on racialized students and students with disabilities. (It should be noted that the communities had years of experience with the consequences of a zero tolerance approach since 1993 when the Scarborough Board of Education had adopted a *Safe Schools Policy on Violence and Weapons.* Reached in November 2005, the settlement stated that:

> The TDSB accepted and acknowledged the widespread perception of the discriminatory effect of the application of current school disciplinary legislation and policies and agreed to measures to address the concerns raised (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

Over the years, the disproportionately high rates of suspension and expulsions of Black (as well as Indigenous students and students with disabilities) have been identified as ongoing issues. In fact, data released in 2013 by the TDSB showed that Black students were three times more likely than their White counterparts to be suspended from school (Rankin et al, 2013). And in 2017, another TDSB study found that almost half (48%) of the board's expelled students were Black (Toronto District School Board, 2017).

But it is the case, that TDSB has made efforts to address the issues faced by Black students. In fact, in 2006 with community support, TDSB initiated a system-wide student census of students in Grades 7 to 12. The survey was conducted again for the 2011–2012 and 2016–2017 school years. The survey collects student identification numbers and allows the board to link census data to other student data to allow for an analysis of disparities in opportunity and achievement by race and other demographic factors. The most recent census, for the first time, will also provide data on religion. Such student data allows for an analysis of disparities in opportunity and achievement by race and other demographic factors.

In January 2008, the Board of Trustees moved to establish the Africentric Alternative School, one of recommendation from the report titled *Improving Success For Black Students* (Dragnea & Erling, 2008). The school opened in September 2009, and today it goes up to Grade 8. In recent years, the board has introduced Africentric high school programs in two schools.

A 3-year collaboration between the Africentric Alternative School, the TDSB, and York University's Centre for Education and Community involved a research study at to examine effective and transformative educational practices and resources in educating Black students. The report, *Africentric Alternative School Research Project,* noted that various aspects of the school, such as a culture of high expectations, integration of African-centred knowledge and practices, community and parent involvement, and the development of positive Black identity, have had positive influences on the students.

Other initiatives by the TDSB to address issues of equity include a revised Integrated Equity Framework and Action Plan 2016-2019, with a goal of ensuring the procedures are in place at all levels of the system for developing, implementing, and reviewing policies that promote equity and inclusion; and the establishment of a Black Student Achievement Advisory Committee with the mandate to "examine and make recommendations on strategies to create more equitable outcomes, raise achievement levels, and create safe spaces for Black students (Toronto District School Board, 2016). This Committee was approved by the Board of Trustees in June 2016.

## GTA Boards

While TDSB is currently the only school board in the GTA (and in Canada with the exception of Nova Scotia) to collect student data to allow for meaningful examination of student outcomes by race, conducting research to assess educational concerns has been longstanding. According to James and Brathwaite (1996):

> In the 1970s, for example, research was carried out by some school boards – Toronto (Schreiber, 1970; Stewart, 1975), York (Roth, 1973); North York (Fram et al., 1977) – in an attempt to understand what was then characterized as the adjustment problems and needs of the Black Caribbean students.  Independent researchers such as Ramcharan (1975); Anderson and Grant (1975) and Beserve (1976) also contributed to the understanding of the problems Black Caribbean

> students were facing in the school system.  Without exception, these studies
> showed that the difficulties of the students resulted, not only from their
> experiences of trying to adjust to a new society (for those who had recently
> arrived), but also from their experiences with discrimination based on race and
> cultural differences (p. 20).

While Toronto has historically been home to the largest Black community in the province, the Black population in the 905-region has increased over the years. With a large and growing Black population, the issue of the opportunity and achievement gap for Black students has long been a concern for the TDSB; yet the Toronto Catholic District School Board has remained silent on the issue.

Despite the growing Black population in the surrounding suburbs, the opportunity and achievement gap for Black students has only been recently taken up by these boards as a concern. Currently, GTA school boards are at different stages of considering and developing a student census to collect student demographic data.

In 2013–2014 a proposal was made to the York Region District School Board trustees to collect student demographic data. Following a series of discussions about the survey, trustees raised various concerns and made the decision to put the collection of student demographic data on hold. The board has since decided that it would conduct the student survey when mandated by the Ministry of Education (York Region District School Board, 2015).

This failure to collect data means that the YRDSB is missing opportunities to know about its students and to put into context the many issues that are occurring in the region. For instance, in October 2016, a group of York Region parents and community members released an open letter to the Ministry of Education and the Associate Minister of Education regarding allegations of Islamophobia and anti-Black racism at the York Region District School Board. The letter was signed by 142 individuals and organizations.[1] Since then, in response to their concerns with issues of racism and Islamophobia, seven families filed a joint human rights complaint against YRDSB (Javed, 2016). The Board of Trustees has been asked by the Minister of Education to address the many issues of racism and Islamophobia raised by parents and community members.

Following much community pressure, research reports, and media stories, in November 2016, Peel District School Board (PDSB) trustees approved a plan to begin collecting race-based student data. Research on this was expected to begin in January 2017, with the student census launching in the fall of 2018 (Spencer, November 2016). The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board also announced that it would conduct a student survey to gather demographic data including race, gender, and cultural background (Spencer, December 2016).

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[1] The open letter re: Allegations of Islamophobia and anti-black racism, York Region District School Board can be accessed at http://ofl.ca/index.php/open-letter-re-allegations-islamophobia-anti-black-racism-york-region-district-school-board/

A key study which called attention to the schooling experiences of Black students in the Peel region was conducted in 2015 by the United Way of Peel Region's Black Community Advisory Council, in collaboration with the Social Planning Council of Peel, the Black Community Action Network, and the F.A.C.E.S. (Facilitating Access, Change and Equity in Systems) Collaborative. The study examined the social well-being of Black youth in Peel Region using demographic and socio-economic data, as well as interview data from service providers, adults who work with youth, and Black youth themselves. The report, *Fighting an Uphill Battle*, reported that Black youth in Peel schools were dealing with: low expectations of teachers and administrators, stereotypes about their educational commitments and intellectual abilities, more severe discipline compared to their White peers, and feelings of exclusion from their school, as well as school programs, curricular materials, and a teacher population that are not reflective of them (James & Turner, 2015).

In spring 2016, PDSB commissioned a group of researchers from York University to conduct a series of focus groups with Black male students. The research explored the issue of poor educational outcomes, as well as practices and strategies that have ameliorated the social, academic, and emotional experience and schooling outcomes for Black students. The report, *Perspectives of Black Male Students in Secondary School Understanding the Successes and Challenges Student Focus Group Results* garnered considerable media attention because of the way the report incisively centered the voices of Black male students (Gray et al 2016). The students were critical of their treatment and experiences in PDSB schools as they detailed their experiences with racism, the poor perceptions their teachers had of them, and the discriminatory treatment they regularly received from their peers.

The PDSB used the findings of the report to develop an action plan to address the identified issues, *We Rise Together: The Peel District School Board Action Plan to Support Black Male Students* (October 2016). The action plan addresses four focus areas: community engagement; bias and anti-racism professional development; integrating the experiences of Black Canadians into the curriculum; and inspiring Black student leadership and engagement. The board held consultations in December 2016 and January 2017 to gather input from the community into the action plan. Input was also sought from students and the Peel Association of African Canadian Educators. The input was considered and a final action plan to support Black male students in PDSB, submitted in March 2017.

In Durham Region, local news reports in 2015 revealed parents' concerns that Black students were being "racially profiled" in both public and Catholic schools (Szekely and Pessian, 2015). The four part series examined issues faced by Black students, an Ontario Human Rights Tribunal Hearing, the Black community's calls for data on race and suspensions, and a mentoring program for Black youth. At that time, the Black community became so frustrated by the response of the board to their concerns that they began picketing a Durham high school.

Reporting on a case brought before the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal by parents from the Durham region, the online newspaper presented data that showed Black students at a particular school in the Durham Catholic District School Board where they were 7.7 times more likely than White students to be disciplined, while one out of every 127.6 White students was disciplined for fighting or bullying, for Black students it was one in 16.5 (Szekely and Pessian, 2015). In that news article, the Human Rights Tribunal vice-chair's ruling was quoted:

> "In my view, the racial disparity is so glaring as to cry out for further investigation and review by the respondent school board," he wrote. "It may be that this was an anomaly in the context of the specific disciplinable offence of fighting and/or bullying or in the context of the specific school year. On the other hand, the sheer extent of the racial disparity may point towards a deeper problem that needs to be identified and addressed by the respondent school board. One will never know unless the issue is further reviewed and examined."

The tribunal found no discrimination in the case before them. But while it was beyond the tribunal's authority to order an investigation into the larger systemic issues, they did recommend one.

In December 2016, Durham District School Board (DDSB) released a statement indicating that it intended to develop a 3-year Equity and Diversity Strategic Plan, which would include:[2]

- Specific goals that will be measured and reported back

- Revised hiring practices and policies

- A series of projects for Black boys and youth

- Introduction of a summer reach ahead program to help support students traditionally taking applied-level courses to move into academic level programs.

Clearly, each school board in the GTA is taking different approaches to understanding the experiences and outcomes for Black students, and to engaging and responding to the concerns of the Black communities. While the composition of the Black communities in Toronto and in each of the surrounding regions is different, and the composition of these communities have changed over time, the Black communities have been raising common concerns about the education of Black students for decades. Their concerns have also been raised with the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, which made an official visit to Canada in October 2016. In its statement to the media following the visit, the Working Group noted that despite Canada's reputation for multiculturalism and diversity, it is deeply concerned about the human rights situation of African Canadians. The Working Group made a series of recommendations including some specific to education. These were:

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[2] http://ddsb.ca/AboutUs/DirectorsMessage/Pages/Commitment-to-Diversity,-Equity-and-Inclusiveness.aspx

- Ensure that textbooks and other educational materials reflect historical facts accurately as they relate to past tragedies and atrocities, in particular enslavement, so as to avoid negative stereotypes.

- Implement a nationwide African Canadian education strategy to address the inordinately low educational attainment, high drop-out rates, suspensions and expulsions experienced by African Canadian children and youth.

- Strengthen Afrocentric education and implement recommendations of the Black Learners Advisory Committee Report, Expanding from Equity Supports to Leadership and Results, Education Act and Education and Early Childhood Development. The provincial ministries should collect disaggregated data and ensure adequate remedies are available to African Canadian students impacted by discriminatory effects of disciplinary policies including racial profiling (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2016).

# PART 3: Demographic Overview of Ontario's Black Population

## The majority of Black Canadians live in Ontario

Canada's Black population is fast approaching one million. In 2011, the most recent data available at the time of this report, there were 945,670 people of African descent in Canada, representing 2.9% of the country's total population.

As shown in Table 1, Ontario has the largest Black Canadian population of all the provinces, with 57% of all Black Canadians living in the province. In addition, Black Canadians make up a larger proportion of the Ontario population (4.3%) than they do of any other provincial population.

| Table 1. Black Canadian Population by Province (2011). | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Province** | **Provincial Population** | **Black Canadian Population** | **% of Provincial Population** | **% of Black Canadian Population** |
| British Columbia | 4,324,460 | 33,260 | 0.7% | 3.5% |
| Alberta | 3,567,975 | 74,435 | 2.0% | 7.9% |
| Saskatchewan | 1,008,755 | 7,260 | 0.7% | 0.8% |
| Manitoba | 1,174,345 | 19,605 | 1.7% | 2.1% |
| Ontario | 12,651,790 | 539,210 | 4.3% | 57.0% |
| Quebec | 7,732,520 | 243,625 | 3.2% | 25.8% |
| New Brunswick | 735,835 | 4,870 | 0.7% | 0.5% |
| Nova Scotia | 906,175 | 20,785 | 2.3% | 2.2% |
| Prince Edward Island | 137,380 | 385 | 0.3% | 0.04% |
| Newfoundland and Labrador | 507,270 | 1,450 | 0.3% | 0.2% |
| **CANADA** | **32,852,325** | **945,670** | **2.9%** | **100%** |
| **Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011. | | | | |

## The largest proportion live in the Greater Toronto Area

The largest proportion of Ontario's Black population lives in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), an area comprised of the City of Toronto and the regions of Peel, Durham, York, and Halton. Table 2 shows the number of Black Canadians in the municipalities within the GTA and other select Ontario municipalities, as well as the proportion of the population they represent.

| Table 2. Black Canadians in Ontario by Municipality (2011). | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Municipality** | **Municipal Population** | **Black Canadian Population** | **% of Municipal Population** |
| **GREATER TORONTO AREA** | | | |
| City of Toronto | 2,576,025 | 218,160 | 8.5% |
| Peel Region | 1,289,015 | 116,265 | 9.0% |
| Durham Region | 601,605 | 41,890 | 7.0% |
| York Region | 1,024,225 | 25,870 | 2.5% |
| Halton Region | 495,440 | 10,970 | 2.2% |
| **Greater Toronto Area** | **5,986,310** | **412,155** | **6.9%** |
| **OTHER ONTARIO MUNICIPALITIES** | | | |
| Ottawa | 904,910 | 50,350 | 5.6% |
| Hamilton | 708,175 | 19,060 | 2.7% |
| Windsor | 315,460 | 10,575 | 3.4% |
| Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo | 469,935 | 10,485 | 2.2% |
| London | 467,260 | 9,255 | 2.0% |
| St. Catharines-Niagara | 383,970 | 6,340 | 1.7% |
| Barrie | 184,330 | 2,895 | 1.6% |
| **ONTARIO** | **12,651,790** | **539,205** | **4.3%** |
| **Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011. | | | |

As the table shows, 412,155 (or 76%) of the province's 539,205 Black population resides in the GTA, representing 6.9% of the region's population.

The largest number of Black Canadians (218,160) live in the City of Toronto, comprising 8.5% of the city's population. Peel Region has the next largest number of Black Canadians (116,265), comprising 9% of that municipality's population.

While as a region the GTA has the largest Black population, other cities in Ontario have Black populations as large as or larger than some of the municipalities within the GTA. For example, Ottawa has a Black population of over 50,000, which is larger than the populations in the GTA municipalities of Durham, York, and Halton. Similarly, Hamilton has a larger Black population than does Halton Region.

## Immigration is a major source of growth

Africans and people of African descent have been in Canada since the early 1600s. During the 1600s and into the 1800s, most Africans were either brought to Canada via the transatlantic slave trade or came to Canada to escape enslavement and oppression in the United States.

Since the changes to Canada's immigration policies in the late 1960s, immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa, and their children and grandchildren, now make up most of Canada's Black population. There have also been significant changes in the source regions of Black immigrants over time. While the Caribbean has historically accounted for the majority of Black immigrants to Canada, recent figures show that immigrants from continental Africa are increasing in numbers. In 2011, the top three countries of birth for recent immigrants who identified themselves as Black were Haiti, Nigeria, and Jamaica (Statistics Canada, 2013a, p. 17).

The 2011 National Household Survey shows a slight increase in the proportion of immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America over the previous 5 years. Between 2006 and 2011, 145,700 immigrants arrived from Africa, representing 13% of the newcomers who arrived during that period, up from 10% of newcomers during the previous 5-year period. By contrast, Africans accounted for 7% of immigrants to Canada during the 1990s. Similarly, those from the Caribbean, Central and South America made up 12% of all newcomers to Canada between 2006 and 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013a, p. 8).

Of the Black Ontarians who are immigrants, 17% are newcomers who arrived between 2006 and 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2013b).

## A large proportion are Canadian-born

While immigration continues to add to the growth of the Black Canadian population, the long history of people of African descent in Canada means that a large proportion are also born in this country. Of all racialized groups in Ontario, the Black population has the second largest Canadian-born population, with the Japanese community having the largest (68%). While 45% of the Black population in Ontario are Canadian-born, only 29% of the South Asian

population and 26% of the Chinese population were born in this country (Statistics Canada, 2013b).

The data shows that an even larger proportion of Black children and youth are Canadian-born. As Table 3 shows, 86% of Black children and 66% of Black youth were born in Canada.

| Table 3. Age Profile of Black, Racialized, and Total Ontario Populations by Immigration Status (2011). | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Black Population** | | **Racialized Population** | | **Total Population** | |
| **Immigrant Group** | **No.** | **%** | **No.** | **%** | **No.** | **%** |
| **Under age 15** | | | | | | |
| Non-Immigrant | 121,820 | 86.2% | 561,335 | 79.9% | 1,993,610 | 91.5% |
| Immigrant | 17,160 | 12.1% | 131,135 | 18.7% | 168,470 | 7.7% |
| Non-Permanent Residents | 2,290 | 1.6% | 10,315 | 1.5% | 16,045 | 0.7% |
| **Total** | **141,270** | **100.0%** | **702,780** | **100.0%** | **2,178,125** | **100.0%** |
| **Age 15 to 24** | | | | | | |
| Non-Immigrant | 60,245 | 66.3% | 242,715 | 48.3% | 1,137,520 | 80.6% |
| Immigrant | 27,890 | 30.7% | 234,200 | 46.6% | 299,230 | 17.6% |
| Non-Permanent Residents | 2,680 | 3.0% | 25,755 | 5.1% | 30,600 | 1.8% |
| **Total** | **90,820** | **100.0%** | **502,670** | **100.0%** | **1,702,345** | **100.0%** |
| **TOTAL** | | | | | | |
| Non-Immigrant | 241,705 | 44.8% | 1,017,535 | 31.0% | 8,906,005 | 70.4% |
| Immigrant | 284,235 | 52.7% | 2,164,385 | 66.0% | 3,611,365 | 28.5% |
| Non-Permanent Residents | 13,270 | 2.5% | 97,650 | 3.0% | 134,425 | 1.1% |
| **Total** | **539,210** | **100.0%** | **3,279,565** | **100.0%** | **12,651,790** | **100.0%** |
| **Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011. | | | | | | |

## A young age profile

Data from the 2011 National Household Survey also shows that while the racialized population has a younger age profile than the total provincial population, the Black population has an even younger age profile.

As Table 4 shows, 17% of Ontario's population is under age 15, compared to 21% of the racialized population and 26% of the Black population. Similarly, a slightly larger proportion of the Black population is aged 15 to 24 (17%), compared to the total provincial population (14%) or the racialized population (16%).

| Table 4. Age Profile of Black, Racialized, and Total Ontario Populations (2011). | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Black Population** | | **Racialized Population** | | **Total Population** | |
| **Immigrant Group** | **No.** | **%** | **No.** | **%** | **No.** | **%** |
| Under Age 15 | 141,270 | 26.2% | 702,780 | 21.4% | 2,178,125 | 17.2% |
| Age 15 to 25 | 90,815 | 16.8% | 502,670 | 15.3% | 1,702,345 | 13.5% |
| **Total** | **539,210** | **--** | **3,279,565** | **--** | **12,651,790** | **--** |
| **Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011. | | | | | | |

With a younger age profile, Black Canadians make up a larger proportion of all children than of the general population. While 2011 National Household Survey data show that Black Canadians make up 4% of the Ontario population, they make up 6% of all children under age 15.

## A fast-growing population

Statistics Canada data show that the Black population is growing at a faster rate than the overall population and therefore will comprise a larger proportion of the country's population in the coming years.

Table 5 shows the size of Canada's Black population in 2001, 2006, and 2011 and the rate of growth compared with that of the country's population.

| Table 5. Rate of Growth of Black Canadian and Overall Population in Ontario (2001–2011). | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Black Population** | | | **Ontario Population** | |
| **Year** | **No.** | **% of Ontario Population** | **Rate of Growth Since 2001** | **No.** | **Rate of Growth Since 2001** |
| 2001 | 411,090 | 3.6% | -- | 11,410,046 | -- |
| 2006 | 473,765 | 3.9% | 15% | 12,160,282 | 7% |
| 2011 | 539,210 | 4.3% | 31% | 12,651,790 | 11% |
| **Source:** Statistics Canada. Census of Canada, 2001, 2006 and National Household Survey, 2011. | | | | | |

As the table shows, the Black Canadian population is growing at a faster rate than the province's population overall. In 2001, just over 411,000 Black Canadians lived in Ontario, representing 3.6% of the population. In 2006, this number had grown by 15%, over twice the overall growth rate of the Ontario population. By 2011, the Black population had grown by 31% to 539,210, almost three times the rate of growth of the provincial population since 2001.

Projections by Statistics Canada estimate that the Black Canadian population could double in size by 2031, reaching between 1.6 million and 2.0 million people and growing to over 4% of the country's population. If 57% of Canada's African Canadian population continues to reside in Ontario, the Black population could increase to between 896,000 and 1 million people, and represent 6% of the provincial population in 2031.

# PART 4: Racial Differences in the Education of Students

## 4.1  What the TDSB data tells us about the educational situation of Black students

### 4.1.a  The data

School boards across Ontario do not currently collect race-based student data. As a result, there is limited data that allows us to examine educational outcomes for Black students. We have therefore relied on the only data available to us—TDSB's data from its student census. This data was presented in the community consultations to generate conversation among participants and is summarized in this section.

We acknowledge that the data does have its limitations in that it includes only a subset of Black students in the city of Toronto and, as a result, does not provide a complete picture of the educational outcomes for Black students in Toronto. Not included in this data are elementary students as well as students in the Catholic, French, and French Catholic school boards, which are attended by a significant number of Black students. Despite these limitations, the TDSB data does provide insight into the outcomes and experiences of Black students beyond what any other data source can provide, including the Census of Canada.

This analysis includes the data provided by TDSB to the Black Demographic Data Advisory Committee of the York Centre for Education and Community, York University. The dataset combines four successive cohorts of students (the cohorts of 2003–2008, 2004–2009, 2005–2010, and 2006–2011) and includes data from the students who completed the 2006 Student Census as Grade 12, 11, 10, and 9 students, respectively.

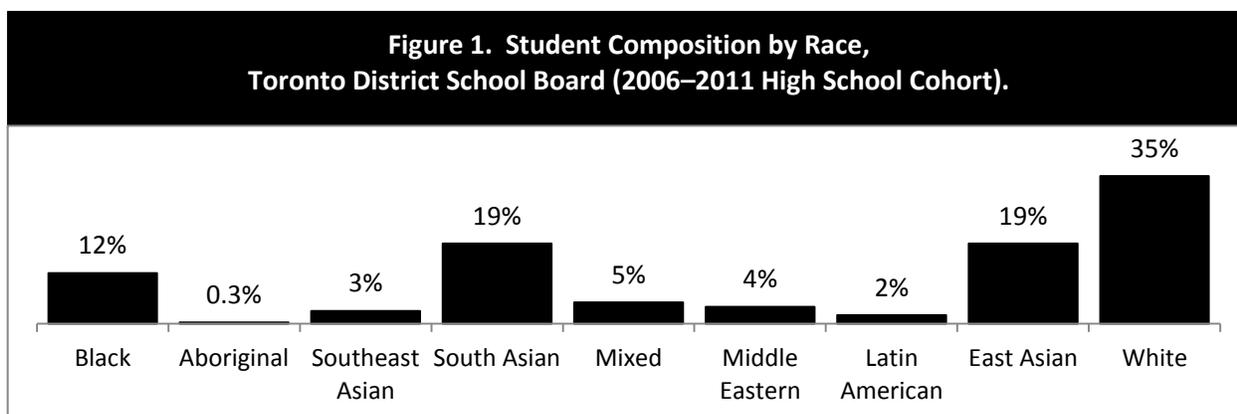This data allows us to examine five key measures of academic success:

- Program of study;

- Graduation rates after a 5-year period;

- Application to any post-secondary institution and whether students have received an offer to attend an Ontario university or college;

- Special education needs; and

- Suspension rates.

For simplicity, a comparison of the outcomes for Black and White students was presented in the community consultations, and outcomes for third-generation Black students were only discussed briefly. This report includes a more complete comparison of the educational outcomes for Black, White, and other racialized students as well as additional information on the outcomes for third-generation Black students.

This dataset includes 5,679 TDSB high school students who self-identified as Black, 27,211 who identified with another racialized group (e.g., South Asian, Chinese, Latin American, etc.), and 17,921 who identified as White.

## 4.1.b   The diversity of the TDSB high school population
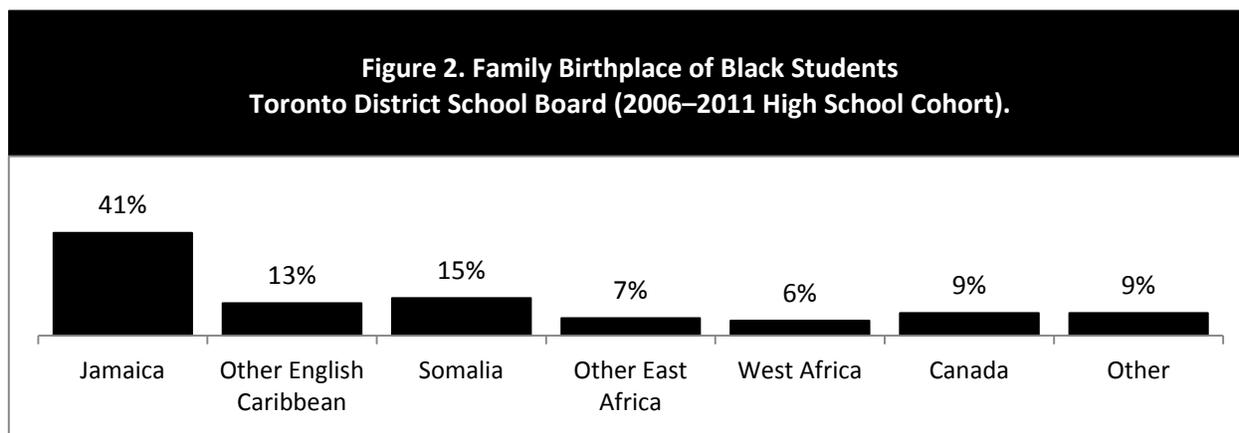
Given the younger age profile of the Black population, Black students represent a larger proportion of the TDSB high school population than they do of the general population.



**Figure 1.  Student Composition by Race, Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 High School Cohort).**

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

In fact, Black Canadians represent 8.5% of Toronto's population, and as Figure 1 shows they represent 12% of the TDSB high school population in the 2006–2011 cohort.

The data also shows that there is also a great deal of diversity among Black students, who identified 70 countries as their family birthplace, meaning that they or their parents were born in that country. As Figure 2 shows, the largest proportion of Black students identified their family birthplace as Jamaica (41%), with the next largest proportion of Black students (15%) identifying Somalia as their place of origin. Thirteen percent identified another English Caribbean country as their family birthplace, 7% identified another East African country, and 6% identified a West African country.

**Figure 2. Family Birthplace of Black Students
Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 High School Cohort).**

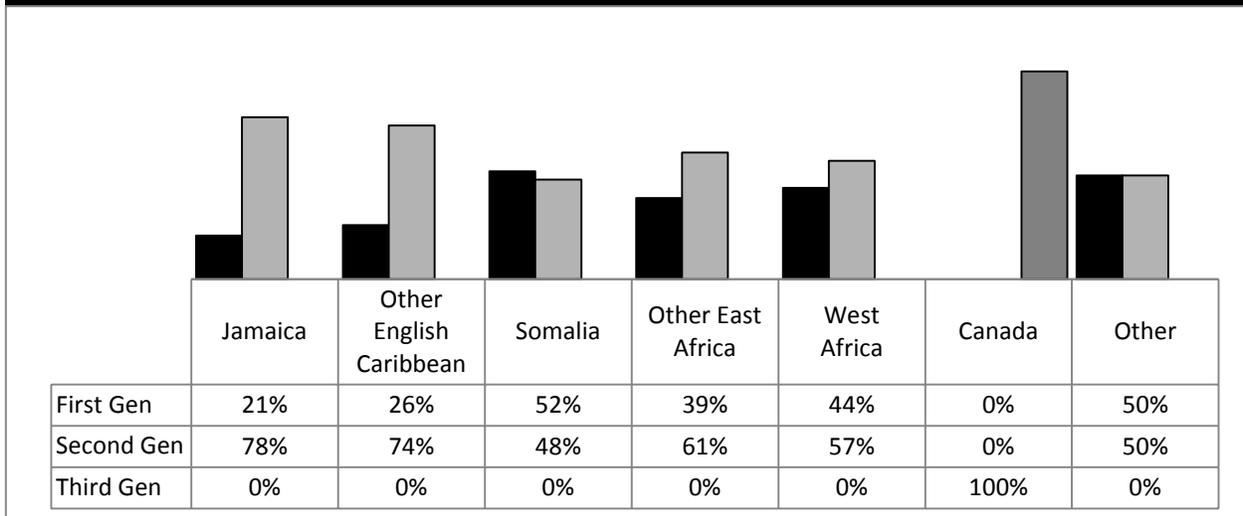| Jamaica | Other English Caribbean | Somalia | Other East Africa | West Africa | Canada | Other |
|---------|-------------------------|---------|-------------------|-------------|--------|-------|
| 41% | 13% | 15% | 7% | 6% | 9% | 9% |

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

Nine percent of Black students identified a family birthplace outside of Africa and the English Caribbean, specifically, the United Kingdom, the United States, and South American countries. Another 9% identified Canada as their family birthplace, meaning that they were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents and, as such, are at least three generations Canadian.

The generational breakdown for Black students reflects different migration patterns to Canada. People from the Caribbean have a longer history of migration to Canada, with people from Africa coming to Canada in larger numbers more recently. Figure 3 shows Black students that are first generation (those born outside the country), second generation (those born in Canada to immigrant parents), and third generation or more (those born in Canada to Canadian-born parents), by family birthplace.

**Figure 3. Black Students By Generation and Family Birthplace,
Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort).**

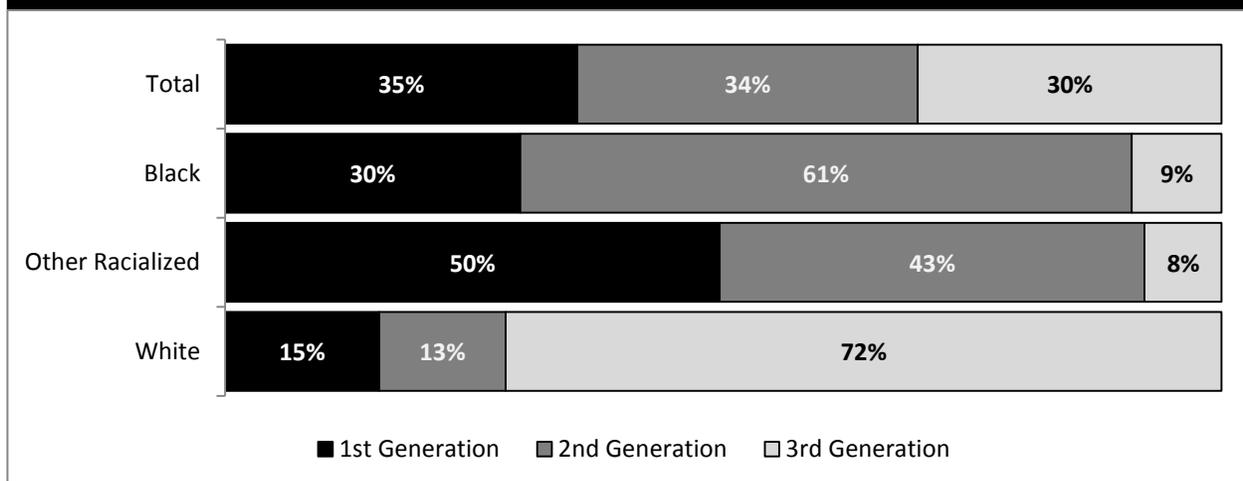| | Jamaica | Other English Caribbean | Somalia | Other East Africa | West Africa | Canada | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| First Gen | 21% | 26% | 52% | 39% | 44% | 0% | 50% |
| Second Gen | 78% | 74% | 48% | 61% | 57% | 0% | 50% |
| Third Gen | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 100% | 0% |

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

Figure 3 shows that there is a great deal of variation in the generational breakdown of Black students by family birthplace. The largest proportion of those with a Jamaican family birthplace are second-generation Canadian (78%), while Somalia has the smallest proportion that are second-generation Canadian (48%).

Similarly, the different histories of migration to Canada for Black, White, and other racialized students are reflected in their generational breakdown, as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Black, Other Racialized, and White Students By Generation,
Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort)**

| | 1st Generation | 2nd Generation | 3rd Generation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 35% | 34% | 30% |
| Black | 30% | 61% | 9% |
| Other Racialized | 50% | 43% | 8% |
| White | 15% | 13% | 72% |

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.
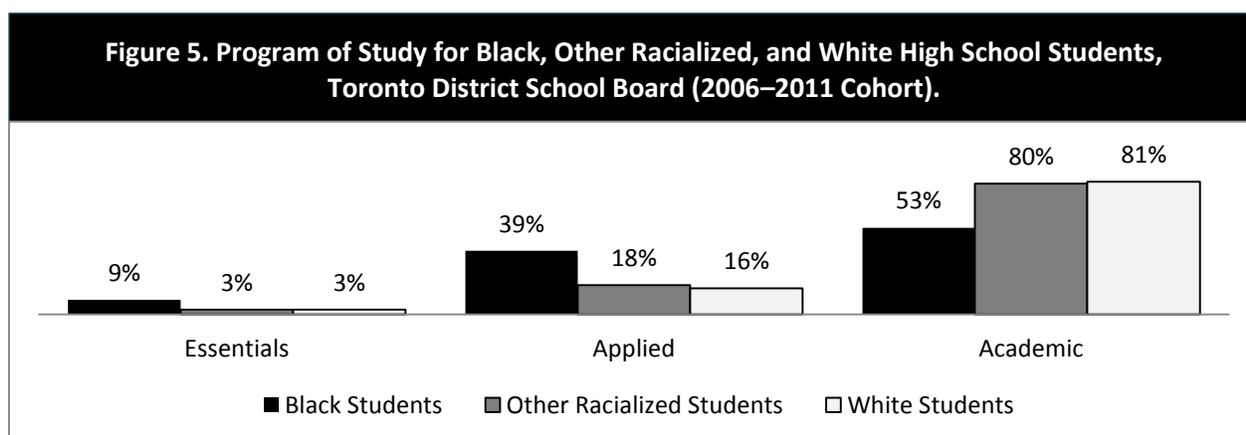
While almost one-third of the total student population in this cohort are in each of the first, second, and third generations, this varies significantly when the data is disaggregated by race. As Figure 4 shows, the majority of Black students are second generation (61%), while the majority of White students are third generation or more (72%). For other racialized students, 50% are first generation, 43% are second generation, and 8% are third-generation Canadian.

## 4.1.c   Program of study

Program of study refers to the academic level of study in which students are enrolled in Grades 9 and 10. There are three levels of study: Academic, Applied, and Locally Developed / Essentials. Students are classified into program of study according to the majority of courses taken. The program of study is "Undefined" if no clear program of study could be identified, and includes some students with Special Education Needs, those taking non-credit courses, and students entering the TDSB in Grade 11 or 12. Students for whom no clear program of study could be identified—those taking non-credit courses and students entering TDSB in Grades 11 and 12—are not included in this analysis.

"Academic" courses are the most academically challenging and are required for University Preparedness courses taken in Grades 11 and 12. This program of study is required if the student intends to apply to university. "Applied" courses prepare students for College Preparedness courses in Grades 11 and 12 and to enter college after high school. The "Locally Developed/Essentials" program of study provides students with flexibility and support in meeting compulsory credit requirements. It helps students meet their educational needs if they are not working at grade level. The program also prepares students to leave high school and secure a job. Students who graduate from an Essentials program of study are unable to go directly to college or university.

Figure 5 compares the proportion of Black, other racialized, and White students enrolled in the three programs of study in the TDSB.



**Figure 5. Program of Study for Black, Other Racialized, and White High School Students, Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort).**

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

The data shows that other racialized students are enrolled in the three programs of study at similar rates as their White counterparts, while there are stark differences for Black students.

Compared to White and other racialized students, a smaller proportion of Black students are enrolled in the Academic program of study, while a larger proportion of Black than White and other racialized students were enrolled in the Applied and Essentials programs. As Figure 5 shows, 53% of Black students, 81% of White, and 80% of other racialized students were in the Academic program of study. Conversely, Black students were over twice as likely to be enrolled in the Applied program (39% compared with 16% of White and 18% of other racialized students) and three times as likely to be in the Essentials program (9% versus 3% of White and other racialized students).
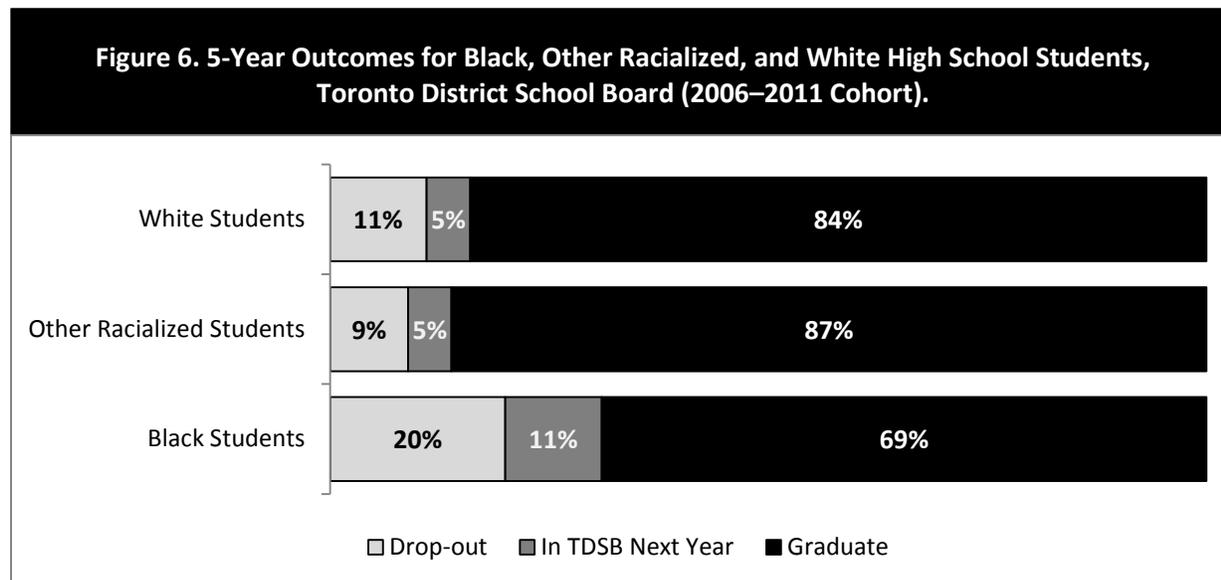
Additional research by the TDSB shows that the program of study for Grade 9 and 10 students affects their program of study in Grades 11 and 12 as well as whether they graduate on time (i.e., after 4 years of high school). The TDSB reports that 78% of students in the Academic program of study in Grades 9 and 10 went on to take the majority of their courses at the university level in Grades 11 and 12 (Toronto District School Board, 2013a). Over half of the students in Applied and 60% of students in Essentials continued in the same program of study in Grades 11 and 12. In addition, 82% of students who took the Academic program of study in Grades 9 and 10 graduated on time, compared to only 39% of students in Applied and 20% of students in Essentials.

For the first time in 2011–2012, the TDSB also examined the post-secondary pathways of students who were in Grade 12. They found that confirmation of an offer to university is closely related to the program of study in Grade 12—59% of Grade 12 students who took the majority of their courses at the university level confirmed an offer to an Ontario university. Conversely, there were no university confirmations for students in the college or workplace programs of study.

While the policy of streaming—that is grouping students based on ability—was to have officially ended in 1999, People for Education has found that streaming as a practice continues to disadvantage students. Their research has found that students in Applied English and math classes were less likely to: meet the provincial standards on math and reading tests; graduate high school; and attend post-secondary education. The study also found that schools with more Applied classes are attended by students from families with much lower incomes (People for Education, 2014).

## 4.1.b  Graduation rates

Graduation rates provide a good indicator of how well schools are performing in educating Black students. Figure 6 shows the outcomes for students at the end of the 5-year period.

**Figure 6. 5-Year Outcomes for Black, Other Racialized, and White High School Students, Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort).**

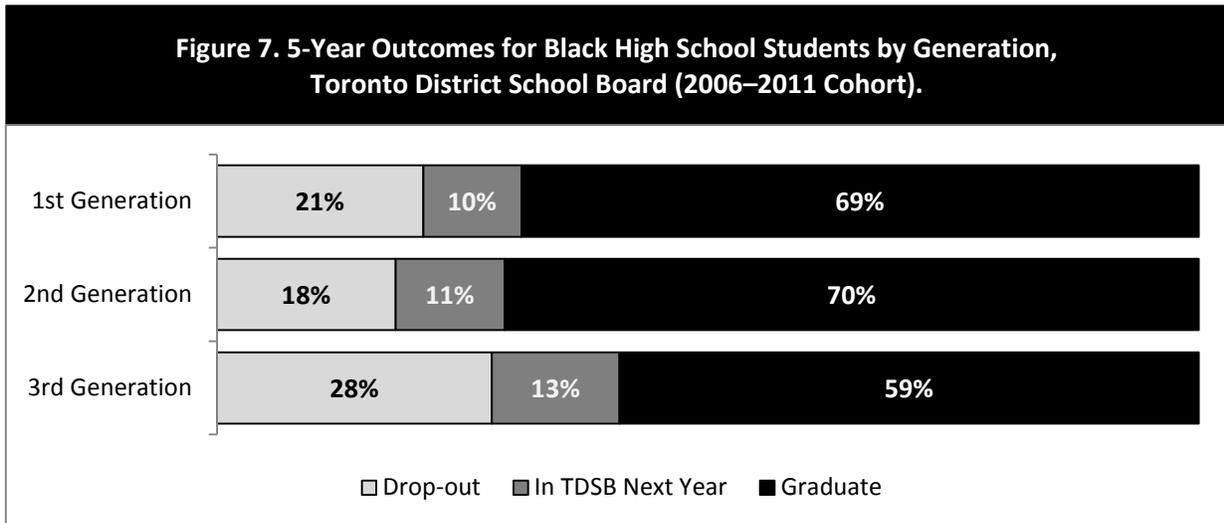| | Drop-out | In TDSB Next Year | Graduate |
|---|---|---|---|
| White Students | 11% | 5% | 84% |
| Other Racialized Students | 9% | 5% | 87% |
| Black Students | 20% | 11% | 69% |

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

Within this cohort, 84% of White students had graduated from high school at the end of 5 years, compared to 87% of other racialized students. By contrast, only 69% of their Black peers had graduated from high school over the same 5-year period.

Similarly, Black students were twice as likely (11%) as White and other racialized students (both 5%) to be returning to high school the following year and twice as likely to have dropped out (20%) compared to White (11%) and other racialized students (9%).

Further analysis of the TDSB data by generation shows that the longer the family has been in Canada, the worse the outcomes for Black students. That is, for the most part, second-generation Black students have worse educational outcomes than their first-generation counterparts, with third-generation Black students having the worst outcomes. Figure 7 compares the graduation and drop-out rates for first, second, and third-generation Black students.

**Figure 7. 5-Year Outcomes for Black High School Students by Generation, Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort).**

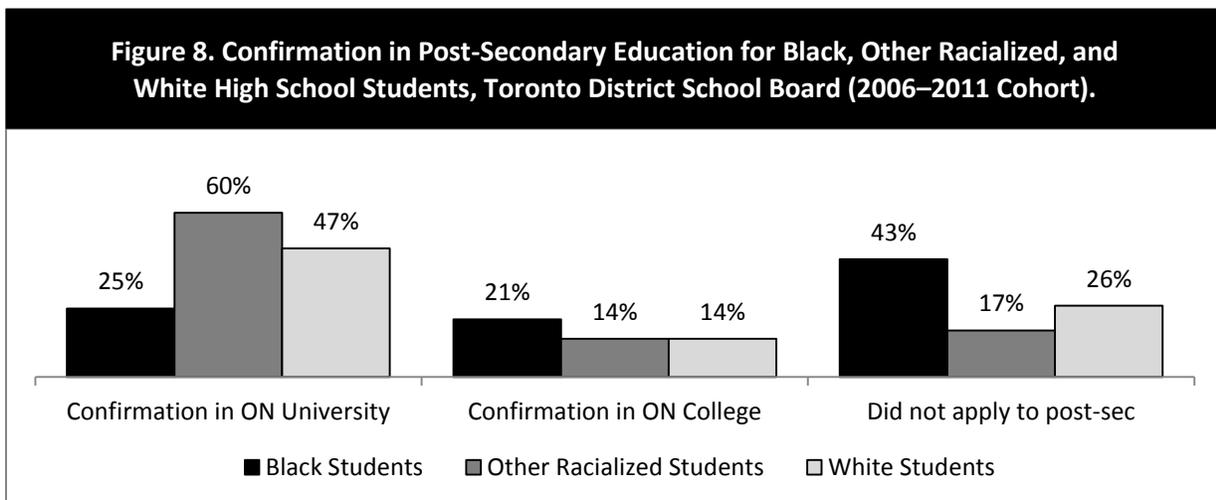| | Drop-out | In TDSB Next Year | Graduate |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st Generation | 21% | 10% | 69% |
| 2nd Generation | 18% | 11% | 70% |
| 3rd Generation | 28% | 13% | 59% |

☐ Drop-out ■ In TDSB Next Year ■ Graduate

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

As the graph shows, first and second-generation Black students graduate at about the same rate (69% and 70%, respectively) and drop out of high school at about the same rate (21% and 18%, respectively). Third-generation Black students, however, have a lower graduation rate (59%) and a higher drop-out rate (28%).

## 4.1.c Post-secondary confirmation

Figure 8 compares the post-secondary plans of Black and White high school students in the same cohort.

**Figure 8. Confirmation in Post-Secondary Education for Black, Other Racialized, and White High School Students, Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort).**

| | Confirmation in ON University | Confirmation in ON College | Did not apply to post-sec |
|---|---|---|---|
| Black Students | 25% | 21% | 43% |
| Other Racialized Students | 60% | 14% | 17% |
| White Students | 47% | 14% | 26% |

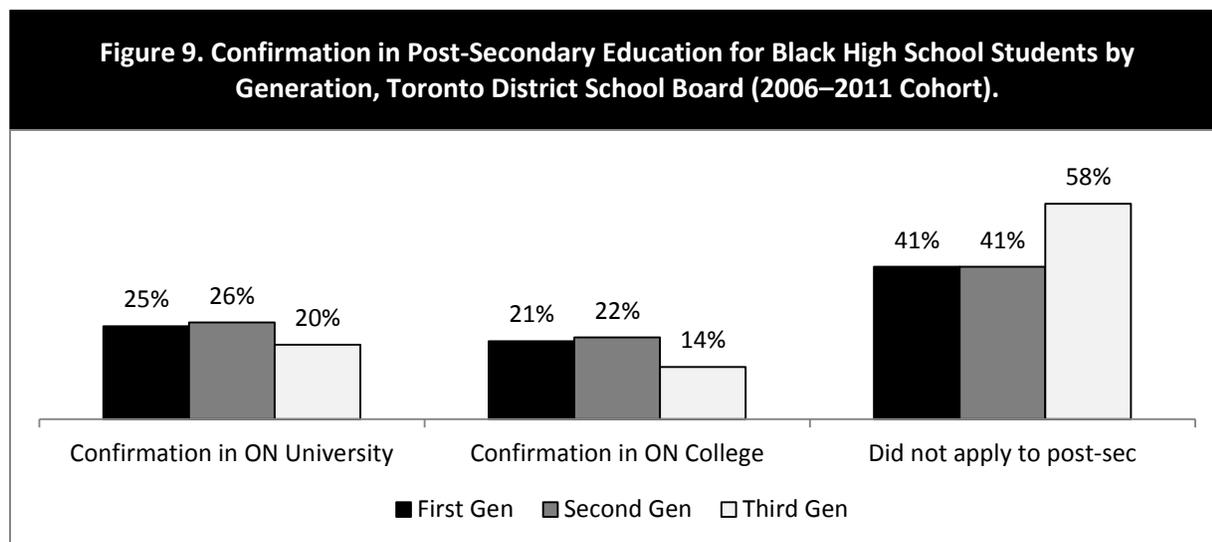■ Black Students ■ Other Racialized Students ☐ White Students

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

As the graph shows, almost half (47%) of the White students in this cohort applied to and were accepted by an Ontario university. A larger proportion of other racialized students (60%) in this cohort applied to and were accepted by an Ontario university. By contrast, only a quarter of Black students (25%) applied to and were accepted by an Ontario university.

Conversely, a greater proportion of Black students applied to and were accepted by an Ontario college than their White and other racialized counterparts (21% versus 14%). Of note is the high rate at which Black students did not apply to a post-secondary institution. Black students did not apply to attend post-secondary education at almost the same rate as White students went on to university in Ontario (43% versus 47%).

Figure 9 compares the post-secondary plans of Black high school students in this cohort, by generation.



**Figure 9. Confirmation in Post-Secondary Education for Black High School Students by Generation, Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort).**

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

As the graph shows, first and second-generation Black students are confirmed in an Ontario college and university at about the same rate. Similarly, 41% of both first and second-generation Black students did not apply to attend a post-secondary institution. However, only 20% of third-generation Black students were confirmed to attend an Ontario university, and 14% were confirmed to attend an Ontario college. Conversely, 58% of third-generation Black students did not apply to go on to post-secondary education.

## 4.1.d   Special education needs

Students with special education needs are defined by the TDSB as students who "have unique strengthens and needs (behavioural, communication, intellectual, and physical) that may require more specialized or intensive programs and supports" (Toronto District School Board, 2013b). "Non-identified" special education needs are not always formally identified through an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee. Instead, they can be identified through
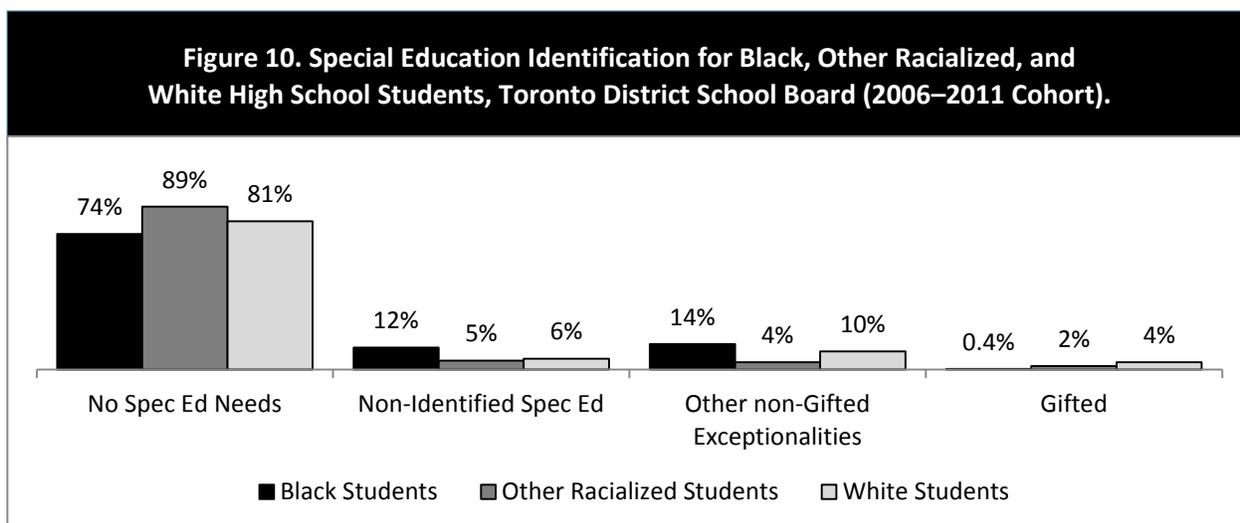
the School Support Team and placed in a Special Education Program. Some of these students may have an Individual Education Plan which allows them to receive direct assistance in the classroom, rather than being placed in a Special Education Program.

Gifted programs provide specialized instruction or other services to meet the needs of students considered especially bright or talented. The Ontario Ministry of Education has adopted the following definition of "giftedness":

> An unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated (Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards).

Each school board has its own process and tests to identify whether students show evidence of giftedness. In most cases, it is the teacher who recommends the student for evaluation. Parents can ask that their child be evaluated for giftedness, but the school is not obligated to do so. If the school is unwilling to test the child, parents can pay for a private assessment.

Figure 10 compares the proportion of Black, other racialized, and White students in this TDSB high school cohort who have special education needs.

**Figure 10. Special Education Identification for Black, Other Racialized, and White High School Students, Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort).**



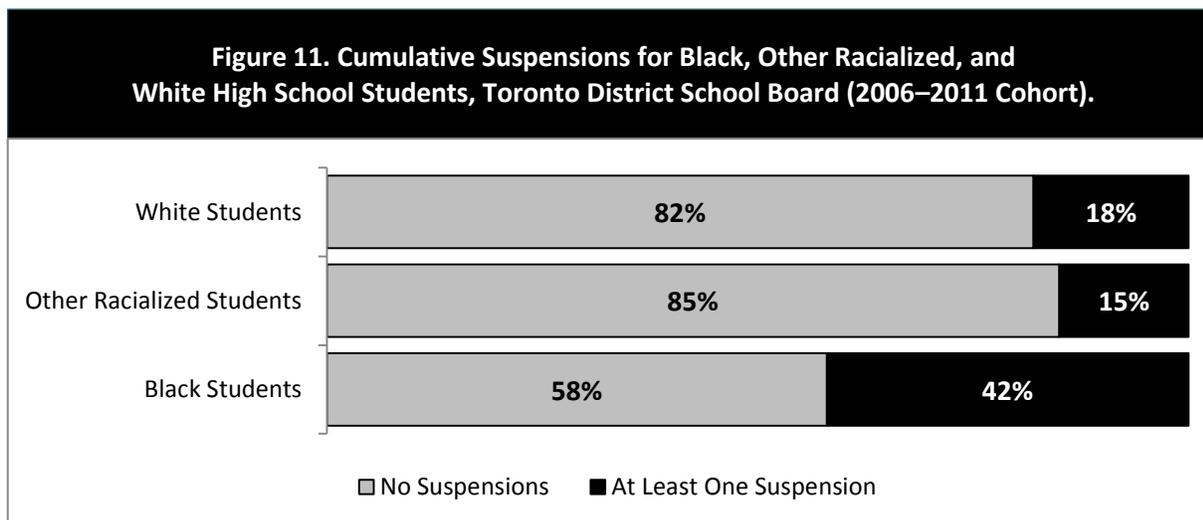Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

This graph shows that fewer Black students (74%) than White (81%) and other racialized (89%) students in this cohort had no special education needs. Further, when identified as having a special education need, a greater proportion of Black than White and other racialized students were identified as having non-gifted exceptionalities (14% versus 10% and 4%, respectively) and non-identified special needs and/or an Individual Education Plan (12% versus 6% and 5%, respectively).

Conversely, White students are more likely than both Black and other racialized students to be identified as gifted. Of all White students in this cohort, 4% were identified as gifted compared with only 2% of other racialized students and 0.4% of Black students. This means that of the 5,679 TDSB Black high school students in the 2006–2011 cohort, only 23 had been identified as gifted. If Black students were identified as gifted at the same rate as their White counterparts (i.e., 4%), there would be 227 Black students in gifted programs in the TDSB.

## 4.1.e  Suspensions

Suspension rates are an important indicator of school success, as they reflect lost instructional time, which reduces students' opportunities to learn. Further, suspension can undermine the attachment of students to their school, particularly if they feel they have been unfairly treated.

Figure 11 shows the cumulative suspensions received by Black, other racialized, and White students during their time in high school.



**Figure 11. Cumulative Suspensions for Black, Other Racialized, and White High School Students, Toronto District School Board (2006–2011 Cohort).**

Source: York Centre for Education and Community/Toronto District School Board, 2015.

Black students in this cohort were more than twice as likely as their White and other racialized peers to have been suspended at least once during high school. In fact by the time they finished high school, 42% of all Black students had been suspended at least once, compared with only 18% of White students and 18% of other racialized students.

Recent data released by the TDSB also shows that Black students are disproportionately expelled from TDSB schools (Toronto District School Board, 2017). Figure 12 shows expulsions by students of all ethno-racial backgrounds. As the graph shows, of the 213 students who were expelled over the 5-year period (2011–2012 to 2015–2016), 48% were Black students.
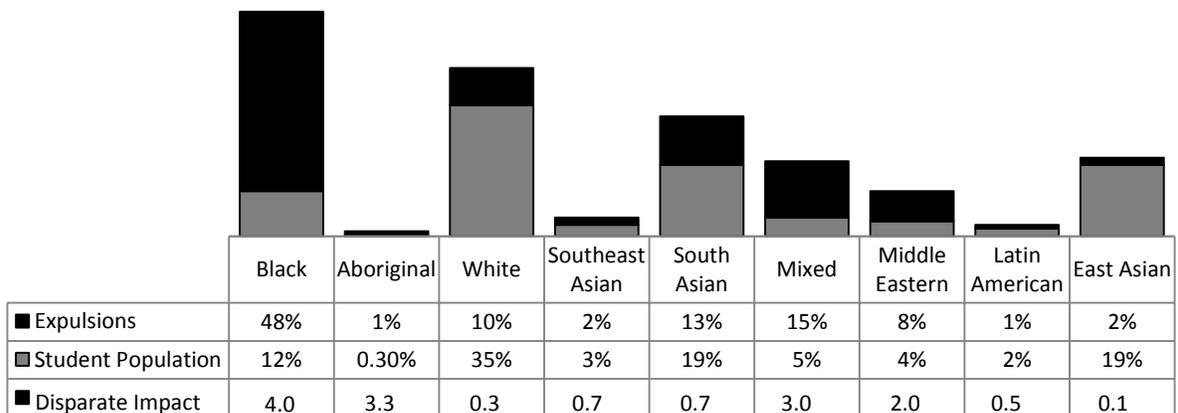
**Figure 12. Distribution of Expulsions by Student Ethno-Racial Background, 2011–2012 to 2015–2016.**
**(N = 213)**
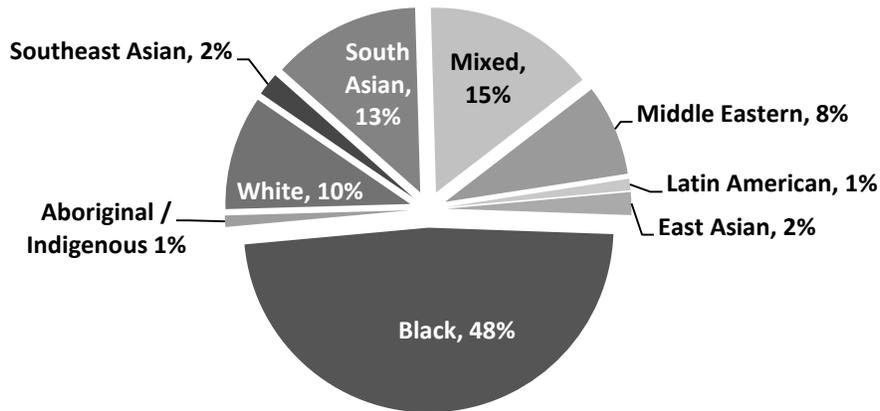


Source: Toronto District School Board, 2017.

Further analysis of the expulsion data shows that Black, Aboriginal (or Indigenous), Mixed, and Middle Eastern students are disproportionately expelled from TDSB schools when compared to their representation among all students. Figure 13 compares the representation of students among the student population, previously shown in Figure 1, with the expulsion rates from Figure 12.

**Figure 13. Comparison of Expulsion Rates with Representation in the Student Population by Student Ethno-Racial Background.**



| | Black | Aboriginal | White | Southeast Asian | South Asian | Mixed | Middle Eastern | Latin American | East Asian |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ Expulsions | 48% | 1% | 10% | 2% | 13% | 15% | 8% | 1% | 2% |
| ■ Student Population | 12% | 0.30% | 35% | 3% | 19% | 5% | 4% | 2% | 19% |
| ■ Disparate Impact | 4.0 | 3.3 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 3.0 | 2.0 | 0.5 | 0.1 |

Source: Toronto District School Board, 2017.

Figure 13 shows a disparate impact analysis which divides the representation of students among expelled students by their representation in the student population. A value of 1.0 indicates that there is no disparate impact and that students are expelled at a rate that reflects their representation among the student population; the higher the number, the more significant the disproportionality, and hence the disparate impact.

As the disparate impact analysis shows, disproportionality for Black, Aboriginal, Mixed, and Middle Eastern students who represent a much higher proportion of expelled students than they do of the overall student population. Black students have the highest disparate impact rate, at 4 times their representation in the student population. Similarly, Aboriginal students are over-represented among expelled students, with a disparate impact rate of 3.3; even though they represent only 0.3% of TDSB students, they comprise 1% of all expulsions during this period. The opposite is true for the other students, with White and East Asian students experiencing the lowest rates of expulsion compared with their representation in the student population.

Much of this data was presented to consultation participants and served as a point of discussion. The participants shared their individual experiences and perceptions, which helped to personalize this data and explore the underlying reasons for the outcomes evident in the data. While individual stories are often dismissed as "anecdotal," the TDSB data shows that the individual stories of Black students throughout the GTA are evidence of a broader, systemic issue. It is these stories which remind us that behind the numbers are parents who have dreams for their children, and Black children who are ambitious, excited about learning, and deserve the quality education offered to other children in Ontario.

## 4.2 Perspectives From The Community

## 4.2.a Reflections on the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) data

### "It's the same" in the other school boards

Participants in the community consultations were largely unsurprised that the TDSB data shows poor outcomes for Black students. Parents, students, and community members felt that the data corroborated their realities in Peel, York, and Durham regions in both public and Catholic boards. Hence, they suggested that the outcomes reflected in the data are certainly not unique to the TDSB. Participants agreed that the data reflect what they have heard from individuals in their respective communities and their experiences when interacting with schools. As well, many educators and school administrators who participated in the consultations felt that the data reflects their own experience and what they see in schools on a day-to-day basis.

For many participants, this was the first time they had seen any quantitative data on the educational outcomes for Black students. They suspected their own experiences were part of a much larger problem throughout the education system, but they were unable to provide any supporting evidence because of the lack of collection of disaggregated race-based data by school boards. Many felt that the lack of data has allowed school boards to continue to ignore their prolonged calls for systemic change by arguing that negative experiences and outcomes for Black students are isolated incidents and the result of individual issues.

Referencing their decades of community work, advocates and community members also pointed out that the quantitative data reflects the long history and systemic nature of anti-Black racism in Ontario schools. They lamented seeing the same issues and the same patterns emerging year after year, and noted that while students and parents might be successful at resolving issues at the individual level, the systemic nature of the issues remains unacknowledged and unaddressed.

### The data is a call to action

Participants in the consultations agreed that the promise of a quality education remains elusive for Black students; a situation that is evident in all the school boards—including the Catholic, French, and French Catholic school boards. They felt that the TDSB data provides a portrait of Black students that should prompt school boards throughout the GTA—if not all of Ontario—to look at their own situation.

Participants in Peel, York, and Durham regions were concerned that their school boards were not collecting disaggregated race-based student data. They felt that because the TDSB is the only board to collect this data the focus remains on the TDSB, allowing the same issues to go unacknowledged and unaddressed at the other school boards. Some participants even suggested that the outcomes for Black students may even be worse at these other boards because of the lack of attention to ensuring equitable outcomes for Black students and addressing the racism that they may experience. In Peel Region, with the second largest Black student population outside of Toronto, participants welcomed the fact that the board had begun to focus on the educational outcomes for Black students, but shared their hesitations,

concerns, and doubts as to whether the board's action plan would make systemic change to the education system. They also commented on the lack of participation of DPCDSB trustees, staff and educators at the consultations and generally in the broader conversations about Black students. In York Region and Durham Region, participants shared their concern that the racism faced by Black students in some schools was on the rise at the same time that school board efforts to address racism were being rolled back. Participants felt that Black students in the regions outside of Toronto were further disadvantaged because these communities lack the Black community agencies that provide advocacy, social services, and tutoring supports available in Toronto.

While participants in the regions outside of Toronto felt that the TDSB had made a great deal of progress on the issues, consultation participants in Toronto noted that the collection and sharing of the data does not necessarily bring about change and highlighted the challenges that Black students continue to face in the TDSB despite a decade of data collection.

Participants in all regions maintained that they did not see that the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* has had any significant impact on the respective board's equity work pertaining to Black student achievement and well-being. They noted that generalized equity and diversity efforts often fail to address anti-Black racism and improve outcomes for the Black population—anti-racism strategies are needed to address anti-Black racism.

### The data indicates the historic and systemic nature of anti-Black racism

Many participants felt that the poor educational performance of Black students was the result of the historic and systemic nature of anti-Black racism embedded in Canadian society and institutions—including Ontario's education system. It was argued that while Canada takes pride in saying that it is a diverse society with an official policy of multicultural, it is nevertheless just beginning to come to terms with its history of genocide and oppression of Indigenous people, impelled by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And to this scenario, participants contended, must be added the fact that Canada was also built on the enslavement and oppression of people of African descent. Hence, to understand the state of today's education system, the racial gap in education must be placed within the context of "racial oppression." Participants felt that without acknowledging this history, the necessary structural changes needed to achieve race equity in education will not take place.

It was recognized that the Ontario Ministry of Education has made efforts to improve the overall graduation rate and to ensure that the education system is more responsive to the diversity of the student population through the *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.* But missing from attempts to analyze and address the differences in opportunities and achievements of students has been acknowledgement of the systemic ways in which Black students are dealt with and disenfranchised in their schooling and the resultant outcomes.

Furthermore, in their critique of the education system, participants pointed to the larger context within which schooling operates. It was acknowledged that schooling is part of a web

of interconnected and interdependent systems that reproduce inequities which contribute to poor social and educational outcomes for Black Canadians. While these systems have changed somewhat over time in response to public pressure, the racism that is inherent in each system (i.e., labour market, education, child welfare, policing, criminal justice system, media, etc.) combines in ways that reinforce the unequal treatment individuals experience in Canadian society. As such, it was argued that the education system is no better or worse than any other public institution in the ways it operates to disadvantage Black people.

The role of the entertainment and news media in creating and reinforcing negative images of Black people was also discussed, particularly with regard to how educators and other school board staff internalize and operate on these subtle and/or subliminal negative messages. Informed by these sources, school personnel develop particular images of Black students that in turn contribute to the differential treatment of these students. This bias in turn leads to poor educational outcomes for Black students through the under-estimation of their abilities to achieve the same outcomes as their White and other racialized counterparts. Ultimately, the differential outcome helps to concentrate Black workers in precarious work, with low wages. Dr. Beverly-Jean Daniel commented on this pattern in the Peel Region session:

> *It is important for the community to have conversations about the way in which Black kids are affected by the school system. I would also ask for us to look at it from a capitalist perspective and to recognise that the system makes a profit on Black failure. The system functions to produce failure within the Black community because they can justify the hiring of more police officers, more judges, more lawyers, build bigger jails, etc. There is no benefit to the system to stem the failure amongst our children. We as a community need to identify different ways of fostering success amongst our children to ensure that the system does not continue to make money off our children. We need to focus on markers of success and strategies for building wealth and power so that we can control the outcomes. We need to help them to understand the ways in which education can lead to empowerment and to provide them with messages of strength and success. It is important that we change the focus from Black student failure to Black student success and resilience.*

## Race-based data collection must be mandated by the Ministry of Education

While the existing data does not paint a positive picture of Black students, participants were happy to have evidence of their educational outcomes. Though participants expressed concerns about how race-based data would be collected and who would be involved in its analysis and interpretation, the majority of participants expressed that disaggregated race-based data is critical to understanding the experiences of and outcomes for Black students. They felt that systemic change within all areas of education would not occur without the collection and analysis of disaggregated race-based data.

## 4.2.b  Education programs of study, expectations, and outcomes

Building on the profile of Black students' educational situation represented by the TDSB data, consultation participants discussed the individual, institutional, and societal factors that explain what the data shows and that might be similar and particular to their local context.

### Streaming of Black students and the resulting educational inequities

Streaming—the grouping of students based on perceived ability and/or potential—was thought to explain a good deal of the school participation and educational outcomes of Black students in the data presented previously in this report. Participants observed that for Black students, streaming operates in ways that cause them to be placed in courses below their level of ability—a practice that reflects the lower expectations educators and other school staff have of them. The resulting over-representation of Black students in Applied and Essentials programs of study reflects the assumption that Black students do not have the capacity to succeed, or do not belong, in Academic courses.

Some participants went on to suggest that existing data pertaining to the graduation rates of students fail to highlight a key issue for students who graduate from the Essentials program of study. Specifically, even though these students may have graduated from high school, they are often unprepared to find suitable employment, and if and when they do, they are likely be trapped in precarious, low-wage jobs.

Parents, community members, students, and educators alike agreed that streaming continues to be an issue for Black students throughout the GTA, with Black students feeling encouraged and in some cases actually pressured by teachers and guidance counsellors to take Applied rather than Academic courses. Throughout the consultations, participants shared stories of students who had a B average in Grade 8 and were told that they "could get As if they took Applied courses in high school." Some students with an A average in Grade 8 were told that high school would be "much harder" if they took Academic courses, and on that basis they "were encouraged to take Applied courses to maintain their A average." Still other students were told that there was no point in taking Academic courses because they "are not cut out for post-secondary education." In other cases, when meeting with guidance counsellors for their Grade 9 course selection, students reported that, without any prior knowledge of them and without even reviewing their academic record, the guidance counsellor assumed they would be enrolling in Applied courses. Some students even reported that although they had selected Academic courses on which their parents had signed-off, educators nevertheless enrolled them in Applied courses.

For students with ambitions of going on to university, the implications of taking Applied courses, regardless of grades, was sometimes not explained by the guidance counsellor. Some students reported they were surprised to find out in their final year of high school that they could not apply to university because they were in the Applied program of study.

A number of the Black students who participated in our sessions claimed that while their White peers were encouraged to take Academic courses and were "supported to do well" even as they struggled in the Academic courses, Black students were not given similar support and encouragement. One social worker who participated in a session in one of the suburban regions concurred with the viewpoint of these students:

> *As a social worker, during student success meetings, I am infuriated at how often the guidance counselor suggested changing pathways for Black and visible minority students whenever they are not receiving a passing grade. This is not suggested as often for White students. Over and over again, I notice how a White student's poor grades are explained away based on mental health issues, family circumstances, and other concerns. The assumption is that their grades will improve and there will be no need for them to move down to the Applied level. However, Black students who struggle must be 'placed in the proper track for their academic potential.'*

And as one White educator, who teaches Applied courses, added:

> *I routinely see Black students in my classes who should be in Academic. I <u>never</u> see students from other races in Applied who should not be there.*

Participants noted that the allocation of funds to schools with a large Black student population reinforced the streaming of Black students into Applied courses. They contended that schools in low-income neighbourhoods with a significant population of racialized and predominantly Black residents were not set up to support these students to take Academic courses and to go on to university. In the words of one student:

> *I went to a school that had a great kitchen and trades classrooms. They are decked out with all the newest equipment and tools. But in the academic classes, like law, we had to share textbooks.*

Accordingly, students who wished to attend university were required to attend a school outside of their neighbourhood where they would be able to take Academic courses and have more course options. It was felt that children in low-income neighbourhoods, where limited resources and poverty were part of their reality, start with disadvantages that are made worse by a school system that does not help them overcome these disadvantages.

It was reasoned that given the low expectations that elementary and middle school teachers have of their Black students, which are premised on the notion that they were not academically inclined, many Black students tended to be emotionally and academically unprepared for Academic courses when they entered high school. As one teacher in a Toronto consultation stated:

> *These students are so damaged by the time they get to high school; they believe they can only take Applied courses.*

Another teacher from a region outside of Toronto echoed this sentiment:

> *The over-representation in Applied is a manifestation of their conditioning.*

The tendency for school staff to focus on the athletic prowess and aptitude of Black students was also identified as a means by which the academic success of Black students is undermined. Participants shared stories of Black students being recruited to ensure success of the school's sports teams. These Black youth then were seen primarily as having solely athletic contributions to the school, to the detriment of genuine care and attention for their academic success. While these students were lauded for their athletic skills, competencies, and achievements, their academic abilities and educational potential were not similarly supported. Many participants noted that the Black students who played on their school's sports teams were allowed to continue playing sports even while having poor grades or not attending classes. As some participants noted:

> *There are two ways Black students are treated. High performing athletes get attention. The rest are ignored.*

> *Black boys are encouraged to excel in athletics—at the expense of academics.*

> *Black students like sports because when they are in sports they get positive reinforcement. They don't get this in the classroom.*

> *Teachers need to know that Black students are not thugs or just people who are good at sports.*

Young people in the consultation sessions talked of the important role their parents played in helping them resist educators' suggestions that they take Applied courses. Those who were successful in resisting and are now in university credit their own active and consistent resistance to being steered into Applied courses and/or the persistent advocacy of their parents with their educational achievements. The following comments reveal their experiences while in high school:

> *I was forced to fight with the guidance counsellor to stay in the academic program.*

> *The guidance counsellor was pushing me into Applied classes. She asked me to drop all my STEM courses. I had to stop going to the guidance counsellor and went to the VP to choose courses.*

But other students who were stuck in the Applied programs into which they were placed contended that in many cases their parents did not always understand the different programs of study and the impact that course selection would have on their opportunities to pursue post-secondary education. As such, many felt that their parents were not equipped to advocate for them and to ensure they were enrolled in courses that reflected their abilities and supported their interest in pursuing post-secondary education.

## Testing and placement: not gifted but special education students

The TDSB data indicates that only 0.4% of the Black high school students in that board are identified as gifted and hence get the opportunity to be in the gifted program. While participants in Toronto expressed concern that Black students in that board were "robbed" of the opportunity to get into this enriched program, those with children in the suburban regions insisted that if data were available, we would see that Black students in these other regions were also under-represented in gifted programs.

Participants felt that stereotypes of Black students operated to limit teachers' ability to see Black students as academically competent individuals whose abilities, talents, and strengths went beyond the artistic and athletic. In fact, one participant in a region outside of Toronto remarked on this limitation:

> *Nobody knows what to do with bright Black students.*

Furthermore, participants hypothesized that the over-representation of White students in gifted programs was likely a reflection of their parents being better "able to lobby the teacher and principal" to conduct assessments of their children. As well, given their "higher and more disposable income," White parents were thought to more likely have the financial resources to pay for independent assessments of their children.

In contrast, Black parents tend to rely on schools and the efficacy or good intention of teachers to encourage testing their children for giftedness and not just for special education needs like learning disabilities. But many parents reported having difficulty in getting their Black children assessed for giftedness. The experience of one student and her mother is a pertinent example. This Black female university student described her experience of coming to Canada and being placed in a grade with children of the same age, "Despite," as she said, "having been in school since I was two years old." She indicated that she was academically "far ahead of my classmates, and rather than being given an enriched curriculum or being evaluated for giftedness, I was simply given more of the same work to complete." She reported that even though her mother repeatedly asked that she be evaluated for giftedness, teachers refused. She described being bored in class, slacking off, and acting out, and went on to suggest, "If my mother hadn't pulled me out of public school and enrolled me in [a private Christian school with predominantly Black students], I would not have even graduated from high school."

Further, the location of gifted programs in the respective school boards was identified as one of the factors that made access to these programs a barrier for Black students, and hence a

concern. Participants observed that gifted programs tend not to be placed in schools located in low-income neighbourhoods or neighbourhoods with a high proportion of racialized students. As such, many students who have been assessed and identified as gifted are required to travel out of their neighbourhood to attend the gifted program. In such cases, we heard that some families and/or students made the decision to remain at their neighbourhood school.

In addition to location, participants felt that the culture of gifted programs was also a barrier for Black students. Examples were shared of Black students withdrawing from gifted programs and returning to their home school because of their experiences in gifted classrooms. Submitting that the culture of gifted programs is problematic for Black students, some educators wondered about the "negative effects" that placement in such programs had on student well-being, mental health, and behaviours. As one educator noted:

> *Black kids don't last long in gifted programs. They don't fit in with the school culture, so they choose not to come back. Or they are identified as having a behavioural issue and they are sent back.*

In such circumstances, parents and students are placed in the position whereby they must choose between prioritizing students' psychological well-being and their academic performance and possibly their educational future.

Additionally, cultural biases inherent in gifted tests were seen as an additional barrier in the identification and assessment of Black students for giftedness. In this regard, participants, especially educators who were quite familiar with the testing instruments, advised that the tests, and all standardized tests, should be assessed for cultural biases.

The streaming of Black students into special education programs was a matter of concern, particularly regarding the inclination to identify Black students as having learning disabilities. Called into question was the reliability of the "diagnostic tests" that are used in the assessment process and whether tests are used at all in some cases. Some individuals revealed that there had been occasions when teachers had "diagnosed" their children as having a learning disability or ADHD and then went on to suggest that the child should be medicated. These participants reported that the teachers' "diagnosis" was often done without any form of testing and without the teacher getting to know the child to identify alternative issues that might explain specific learning patterns, educational performances, and behavioural tendencies. Others shared the opposite concern, that school authorities were testing Black children for learning disabilities at very early ages and, in some cases, without parental knowledge or consent.

A significant part of participants' concern in this area was the lack of adequate resources and support given to students once they have been identified as having special learning needs. One parent wrote to us following one of our consultation sessions, saying:

*As the mother of an energetic 8 year old boy, I have felt the pressure from the school board to have my son identified as having a learning disability or ADHD. The school was willing to encourage me to have him tested, but were not capable of providing me with any resources to have him assessed by a professional psychometrist. Instead, they advised me that the wait list for that service would be 1-2 years. Luckily, I was able to access a private psychometrist who was able to assess my son, but the fee was substantial, and required a great deal of financial planning on my part. The reports were thorough and provided his teachers with the tools needed to support him. Without them he would have most definitely fallen through the cracks and not received the appropriate supports needed for him to be successful. It has been my experience that the school is willing to identify children as having special education needs, but not provide them with any tools to be successful.*

Some participants also felt that special education and behavioural classes had become "warehouses" for Black students and the processes by which they were removed from regular classrooms, thereby creating racially stratified school environments and educational outcomes. Some also wondered whether the over-identification of Black students as "special needs students" was a strategy to increase Ministry funding, which then is diverted into general revenues.

Inadequate assessment of English-language needs was further identified as part of the problem in the schooling of Black students. Students for whom English was their first language were said to be unnecessarily placed in classes for English-language learners. At the session with university students, the students hypothesized that their misplacement was based on the assumption that because their parents spoke English with "an accent" and came from an African country, they lacked the necessary English-language skills. Conversely, others shared that their English-language needs were not assessed. One newcomer student who did not speak English when she entered school reported that she was assessed in English which resulted in her being identified as "intellectually deficient" as opposed to merely having English-language learning needs. The placement—more to the point, misplacement—of newcomer students means that they were unable to access the appropriate educational services and much needed social supports.

The labelling of Black students' behaviours, which contributes to their being placed in "behavioural classes," was yet another concern relating to placement of some students. Participants suggested that this practice, which many admitted begins as early as kindergarten, serves to remove Black students from regular classrooms or exclude them from programs such as French immersion. Some parents reported that teachers or school authorities use "behavioural problems" as the reason for removal; and in other cases, school superintendents would use threats of expulsion ("over minor behavioural issues") to get them to "voluntarily" move their child to another school or program. The message that some participants took from this practice was that teachers did not want active, engaged Black students. On this point, one participant in the York Region session surmised:

*The goal is to have docile Black students who are quiet and do things "right."*

Ultimately, the inappropriate "labels" that were given to Black students because of a lack of appropriate testing, and which then proved to be unhelpful and ineffective in the schooling placement and educational performance of a number of Black students, was seen to be a consistent problem in all regions. Some educators were concerned that such labelling of Black students discouraged parents from getting their children tested when there were indications of learning issues or problems. They admitted to understanding why parents would refuse to have their children tested; that is, parents feared that their children would be stigmatized and their success in school undermined. Nevertheless, these educators advanced the idea that an Individual Education Plan can, in fact, help students.

## The racism of low expectations and the normalization of poor outcomes

The strength of stereotypes contributes to the low expectations teachers and school administrators have of Black students, which in turn is played out in educators' recommendations regarding course selections and the supports provided to students in terms of their educational pursuits. It is understandable, therefore, that a recurring theme throughout the consultations was how stereotypes helped to shape perceptions of Black students as not capable of excelling academically, and the conclusion that basically, in the words of one participant in the York Region session:

> *Racism is a barrier that blocks the ability of Black students to focus on academics.*

Parents, students, and educators alike reported having experiences in which low expectations were openly communicated to Black students, with teachers actively discouraging them from working hard. As one parent revealed:

> *I was appalled the first day of my son's Grade 9 math class when the teacher expressed that not all students are capable of academic level work. Before teaching a single class he planted in their minds the idea that they should move down to the Applied if they found the work too challenging.*

And high school students at the sessions revealed what they, too, heard from teachers:

> *One teacher said, "I'm not going to bother teaching you guys because all of you are going to be back next year."*

> *A teacher told us, "Your work is good enough for college, don't worry."*

Reflecting on their experiences, some students shared that in some cases, teachers seemed to be annoyed by their abilities, since their doing well in school challenged the teachers' long-held assumptions about Black students:

> *Teachers don't seem to like Black students—especially if they do well in school without even trying.*

> *Some teachers interpret student engagement, such as asking questions, as a threat to their authority.*

High-achieving Black students whose school work and educational commitment contradicted the stereotypes noticed that teachers would attribute their good work on submitted assignments and/or tests to plagiarism or cheating. As a consequence, students would be accused, sometimes in front of their classmates, of copying from their peers or having someone do their work for them. One student who helped her brother with a class assignment told of his experience with his teacher:

> *My brother submitted an essay on Nelson Mandela and was told in front of the whole class that he was incapable of writing the essay. The teacher refused to mark it, because he said that it was not his work. The issue went to the principal and the principal sided with the teacher because he said that my brother is a class clown and called him a nuisance to the school and the community.*

Participants also reported experiences with teachers giving Black students low grades that did not reflect the quality of their work. In some cases, they suspected that teachers gave such grades without reading the assignments. In his support of this assertion, one student recalled an occasion when his teacher gave him a grade of 50% for an essay; and seeing no comments, or corrections for spelling or grammar, he challenged the grade. This student supported his action by saying that on the same assignment his White friend received a higher grade, which he felt was not as well written as his. In the end, the teacher agreed to re-grade the essay, and the student received a grade of 80%. Similarly, a parent reported that when she questioned the poor grade her child received on an assignment, which she felt did not reflect the quality of the work, she was told by the teacher that her child "was not an A student." The parent asked other teachers to review the assignment. Those teachers agreed with the parent and felt that the student should have received a higher grade. With experiences like these, it was felt that students become demotivated and as a result put less and less effort into their school work because their effort tends not be acknowledged by their teachers.

A pervasive sentiment among participants was that the racism of low expectations permeates the public school system, beginning in kindergarten for many Black students. It was emphasized that this racism has particular and significant implications for Black male students, whom teachers expect to be underachievers, troublemakers, and more interested in athletics than academic work. These students are thought to be, as one person put it, "throwaway kids" who are unworthy of their teacher's empathy and time. So when Black male students

engaged in relatively minor inappropriate behaviours, the behaviours were taken as more serious and used to push these boys out of regular classrooms or to push them out of school altogether through the use of suspensions.

Our consultations with university students provided useful insights into how teachers' low expectations impacted school participation, academic performance, and educational outcomes of Black students. They indicated that teachers constructed them as threats, thugs, low achievers, and uneducable. Even when students received high grades on their assignments and tests, their teachers still saw them as intellectually limited. These students maintained that many of their teachers "refused" to recognize their academic abilities, and as such, did not engage them in their classes the way they engaged other students. The following excerpt from a university course paper written by a participating student about her high school experiences and shared with us is especially informative:

> *Whenever I would raise my hand to speak, teachers would hesitate to call on me because they couldn't quite gauge what I was going to say. More often than not, I surprised them with my grasp of class content and my understandings of the English language. Some of the things they would say were "I'm glad to see you're keeping up" or (whenever I raised my hand during discussion) "did you have a question", as if I was constantly confused with nothing to contribute … I find these comments demeaning and hurtful on all accounts, but on the greater scale there's something at work here. My experience as a Hijabi is one that denotes how exactly these attitudes towards Muslim students are understood as part of the hidden curriculum* (Moallim, 2015).

Participants maintained that low academic achievement of Black students is evident throughout the education system—a system in which, as one person participating in the Peel Region session noted:

> *No one expects Black students to be successful.*

The racism of low expectations contributes to the normalization of the streaming of Black students into courses below their level of ability. This normalized expectation is believed to be sustained by a racially stratified high school system in which "Black students are always at the bottom." Thinking of their experiences in the high schools they attended, some students observed:

> *I went to a majority Black school, yet the awards still went to Asians.*

> *My school was not full of Black kids, but Applied was full of Black kids. This tells me they were picking and choosing which kids were put into Applied.*

> *I never saw a White kid in Applied. They were in Academic, unless they had a special need.*

And signalling that what we were hearing from parents, students, and community members was generally true, a number of educators, school administrators, and board staff in attendance in each region commented that they did not need quantitative data to know that there are disparities in the treatment of Black students in their schools. They felt that the stark differences in the racial make-up of gifted, behavioural, and special education classes should serve as sufficient evidence of a problem—a systemic problem that has simmered for years and desperately needs to be addressed.

Referencing the TDSB data as representative of the situation of Black students in the school boards across the GTA, participants asked why a 69% graduation rate for Black students was not ringing alarm bells across all school boards and gaining the attention of the Ministry of Education. That these outcomes have been permitted to continue for decades has meant, according to participants, that they have become "normal" and so entrenched that these disparities are accepted by educators as well as the student population. They felt that the poor educational outcomes for Black students justifies their marginalization in the schools and is used to support prevailing notions about them (i.e., the stereotypes), rather than serving as evidence of a problem with the education system.

Contrary to the stereotypes, participants argued that Black children begin kindergarten with ambition, confidence, excitement to learn, and high self-esteem, but are "gradually worn down" by teachers' attitudes toward them and the education system in general. They noted that without a firm grounding in elementary and middle school in academics, study skills, and confidence in their ability to learn, Black students are likely to fail in high school. In fact, given the current schooling context, it was assumed that by the time Black students enter high school, many have internalized the negative messages that the education system has been sending them, and therefore resigned themselves to those low expectations. Hence, there was concern that by high school some Black students are so far behind their peers that they are unable to successfully compete academically.

At the two consultation sessions held in Toronto, participants spoke about the Africentric Alternative School and reminded us of the powerful effect that high expectations has on all children. They talked about the benefits and value of Black students seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum and having school administrators and teachers who believe in them. In praising the school, one parent said:

> *The Africentric school is a place that fosters a sense of pride and not a sense of being a minority. Children benefit from being the centre of the conversation. Their mental wellness is supported by seeing themselves reflected with the curriculum and the school family. There should be an Africentric school in the east.*

And at the Durham Region session, a parent whose daughter attends the Africentric school in Toronto commented on the impact the school has had on her child:

> *She raves about the experience. Her academic performance has improved. And her self-esteem has as well.*

## Role of teachers and guidance counsellors in the education process

Mention was repeatedly made of the ways in which teachers and guidance counsellors contribute to the schooling problems and educational performance of Black students—specifically, that teachers and guidance counsellors tended to discourage Black students from taking Academic courses and from applying to university; in doing so, teachers and counsellors consistently and actively undermined Black students' academic and career ambitions. Here, we expand that discussion with regard to parents, students, educators, community members, and education advocates' concerns with how teachers' attitudes and behaviours toward Black students, and Black boys in particular, create, contribute to, and reinforce the "school-to-prison pipeline."

Some participants talked of the "racist attitudes and inappropriate behaviours" of teachers that principals frequently tended to ignore. Troubled by this situation, one mother commented:

> *As the mother of a 14-year-old daughter, my husband and I were constantly having to attend the school as a result of teachers, in particular substitute teachers, using profanities to address the children. There was one substitute teacher who referred to my daughter and her cohort as 'savages' — the class was predominantly filled with Brown and Black children — needless to say, the school was upset, but the sub was not removed from her duties and continued to sub that class for the remainder of the week.*

And some students voiced their suspicion that some of their teachers resented Black students who had the ambition of attending university:

> *I didn't have issues with teachers until I said I wanted to go to university. That's when the relationships went bad.*

> *They told me to go to college; that it is "more realistic, practical and attainable."*

> *When I got into university, one teacher was telling everyone that it was because of the principal. She said I wasn't smart enough to get into university on my own.*

These comments are consistent with the negative experiences of some students with their guidance counsellors, whom they would meet to complete their application to university. They felt that the guidance counsellors actively tried to keep them from attending university. And in discouraging some students from applying to universities, guidance counsellors would suggest

college instead, as one student commented, "without even looking up my marks." This practice of guidance counsellors appears to be consistent with what one community member in the Scarborough session articulated:

>*The "guidance system" is not set up to point Black students to long-term success.*

For their part, students reported being given nothing more than "minimal assistance" in applying to universities, and received no help in understanding the differences between the various universities or programs offered; so, too, regarding the difference between university and college. As two university students shared:

>*I can see why Black students don't apply to university. We are told that "it is not for you." I would have dropped it if my parents didn't push me to apply to university.*

>*My guidance counsellor didn't want me to apply to the University of Toronto. When I insisted, she said, 'Don't be discouraged when you don't get in.'*

Participants reflected on the problems for Black students in a school where they are in the majority, and where the teachers are predominantly White and enveloped in a culture of fear of Black students. Commenting on this culture of fear in her high school one student participant observed:

>*The teachers disliked Black students, or feared them.*

Another said:

>*We can sense that they fear us, and view us as criminals in schools.*

It was suggested that in such a context, teachers and other school staff tended to lack the skills, and in some cases the willingness, to engage with Black students and create a positive social and learning environment conducive to educational success.

Understandably, participants wondered, if White teachers were afraid of Black students, why would they be assigned to schools with a large population of Black students? And why would they choose to work in such schools? Participants admitted that while it might not be possible for the teaching staff to similarly represent the diversity of the student population, it is critical for educators and staff to have the skills, abilities, and desire to work in culturally diverse and marginalized communities. Clearly, then, more needs to be done, as participants insisted, to create a diverse teaching workforce that is reflective of the increasingly diverse student population. Participating students decisively affirmed this contention, with some saying that they had had only one or two Black teachers, while others reported that they had not had a single Black teacher over their entire public school career in GTA schools.

Relatedly, students raised concerns about the few Black teachers in their schools, noting that these teachers were often given the responsibility of disciplining Black students. For many of these students, then, the only interactions they likely would have had with a Black teacher was negative. Similarly, the only interactions that these Black teachers would have had with a number of Black students would be also negative. This was submitted as a concern for the students, since the results of their interactions with Black teachers likely contributed to these teachers forming negative impressions of them. Additionally, the students asserted that since Black teachers are indeed critical to creating safe and positive environments in schools with large numbers of Black students, more Black teachers need to be hired.

Throughout the consultations, many people spoke of the positive role that Black teachers have played and are likely to continue to play in counteracting the stereotypes that are held of Black students' educational abilities and skills. It was suggested that while racial representation is important and that all students need to see capable and compassionate teachers and school administrators of all racial backgrounds, Black teachers' presence in schools goes far beyond the symbolic. Parents shared the excitement their children expressed for school when they had a Black teacher and the impact Black teachers had on their children's learning. Further, they felt that the high academic and behavioural expectations that Black educators had for Black students meant that these teachers would also go out of their way to support Black students' successes; and in return, the academic performance of these students improved. According to some students:

> *Black teachers made an effort for us. They went above and beyond to help us succeed.*

> *I had one Black teacher and it was the greatest game changer.*

And emphasizing that all students need caring educators who believe in them and are concerned about their educational and social well-being, one participant in the Peel Region session had this to say:

> *Having a caring adult to guide and mentor our youth in making decisions that affect their education and future is important. Having adults who <u>believe</u> in our young, Black youth, and making leadership opportunities available to them is important. We do not need teachers having low expectations for our children with a limited capacity to engage in real discussions with our youth.*

When we asked the students in the consultation sessions about the messages they wanted to send to teachers, they responded by saying:

> *Black students aren't inherently violent and don't deserve to be treated differently and criminalized at a young age.*

*We don't bite. Invest some time and you might find we're just like any other student.*

*We are equally capable. We are equally able to succeed. We just need fair treatment and support.*

*Black students are capable of performing at the highest level. If provided with adequate resources and support, we too can succeed.*

*Black students are not dumb, have behavioural issues, and come from broken homes—Black students are all bright and important.*

*We want to do well and may show it differently. Some of us are hopeless and feel like a teacher in their past has crushed us. So remind us that you are different.*

*Black students notice the treatment they receive from teachers, which discourages them from striving for success.*

*Your investment, passion, and love for learning matters to us.*

*Black students are as capable, as competent, as creative, and as determined as all other students. The ways that Black students are constantly misjudged and mistreated by teachers and guidance counsellors is an injustice to our community. As educators who seek to enrich an increasingly diverse nation, it is your duty and responsibility to encourage, motivate, challenge, and strengthen us like all others. When you begin to see us as part of your community, only then will you effectively fulfill your job as an educator.*

## 4.2.c  School climate, student well-being, and disciplinary concerns

Experiences with streaming, teacher expectations, testing, and the ways in which the low educational performance of Black students has become normalized, of course, speak of a schooling structure and climate that sustain anti-Black racism, as participants named it. The naming conveys participants' understanding that the schooling structure, and concomitantly the climate, affirm a system of inequity with regard to the differential and particular ways in which behaviours, expectations, and educational performance of Black students and their parents are treated by school staff, educators, and school administrators.

Based on their experiences with anti-Black racism, participants maintained that the learning environment contributed to the low self-esteem, low self-confidence, and internalized anti-Blackness found among many Black students. Also, the school climate accounted for the sporadic, and in some cases the absence of, parental participation in schools. It was not that

students did not understand the value of education or that parents did not understand the significance of participating in their children's school; instead, it is that they do not find schools to be welcoming. According to participants, these educational experiences of Black students, which are not fully captured by existing school board data (since they focused more on educational outcomes), "undermine the future success of Black children far more than does the lack of a high school diploma." And some of the student participants added that in schools with large numbers of Black students, the stereotypes of them seem much more pervasive, thereby contributing to a learning environment that is not conducive to academic success.

Significant to creating a positive schooling climate is the curriculum. In fact, most people accepted that the poor outcomes for Black students were partly a reflection of a curriculum that is not responsive to their needs and interests, nor culturally relevant to, or reflective of, their cultural worlds:

> *Some Black students struggle to relate and feel motivated due to the curriculum often being centred around European success.*
>
> *Black history is being "white-washed" in the school curriculum.*

Repeatedly, participants commented on the value of students seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum; for, in this way, schools would be sending a message to students and parents about their adherence to cultural diversity, equity, and inclusivity, especially of Black students. It was noted that while some teachers did try to integrate Black cultural and historical materials into the curriculum, in some instances their lack of knowledge limited their ability to be successful in this regard.

For many individuals, while Black History Month (or African Heritage Month in some school) was thought to offer an opportunity for schools to acknowledge and celebrate Black history, the fact that not all schools and not all teachers used this opportunity, or used it effectively, meant that a main opportunity to bring Black educational material into schools was lost.

Making the case that there is a direct relationship between Black students' behaviours and school context, participants advanced the idea that subtle and overt individual and institutional racism experienced by these students since kindergarten have contributed to their behaviours. Furthermore, it is reflective of the cumulative impact of spending up to 14 years (JK to 12) in a school system that many Black students experience as culturally unsafe and racially hostile. One participant expressed concern about the impact the school environment has on many Black children:

> *Over time these negative interactions with teachers cause a great deal of emotional harm. If teachers aren't openly hostile, students are exposed to constant micro-aggressions. What impact does this have on the psyche of a young child?*

One parent shared the impact of a negative school environment on her children:

> *My children were driven to the point where they have been curled up and crying and not wanting to go to school.*

Some students theorized that the perceived negative behaviours exhibited by Black students, such as talking back to teachers or school administrators when they are being unfairly treated and speaking out in class so that their existence is acknowledged, are forms of active resistance to the racism and discrimination they experience in school. They also noted that these behaviours could be an effort to preserve their self-esteem and counteract the damage of racism they experience not just in school but in society.

Links were also made between school climate, disciplinary practices of educators, and the high suspension and drop-out rates of Black students. Specifically, it was believed that in terms of disciplinary practices, Black students were dealt with more severely even for minor offenses and were disciplined more often than their peers from other racial groups. Such treatment, participants claimed, begins as early as preschool and kindergarten, and contributes to a situation in which they have been "targeted" throughout their schooling career.

It was observed that despite having the latitude to exercise discretion, disciplinary practices of teachers and school administrators resulted in the differential treatment of Black students in suspensions, expulsions, having the police called, and even being threatened with going to jail. In fact, we heard that threats of calling police were regularly used to manage the behaviour of children in elementary school. One student remembered:

> *At age 7, I was play fighting with a boy and punched him. The teacher told me you can go to jail for that.*

One parent recalled:

> *I have found that it has been very difficult for my son. Early on, he was identified as having a speech and language delay; and due to his young age, he would become frustrated with teachers and ECEs that were not trained to address his needs. When the teachers grew frustrated they would send him to the office; at which point I would receive a phone call from the principal. There was one incident that I will never forget. The principal advised me that if my son, 4 years old at the time and in JK, had been in Grade 6 or 7, he would have to call the police on him for his behaviour. As shocked as I was, he said it in a very cavalier manner.*

While the provincial zero tolerance policy was repealed by the current Liberal government in 2008, lawyers, advocates and students indicate that some schools continue to enforce a zero tolerance approach to discipline. One lawyer noted that this issue continues to come up when dealing with school suspensions. She is concerned that not all school administrators

understand that they are to be taking a progressive discipline approach to address inappropriate behaviours. She shared the concern of others in the consultations who felt that school approaches to discipline had a disproportionate impact on Black students. These repeated suspensions for what many consider to be "minor infractions," contribute to a situation where students stop attending school. In other words, some of the disciplinary practices of schools operate to "push out" students, and thus these situations are not simply a case of students dropping out of school.

Enforcement of dress codes (for instance, students not having the "proper uniform pants") was cited as an issue that caused repeated suspensions of some Black students, something that some participants deemed to be related to the financial situation of a family. Insofar as students or families might not have the means to address this situation, repeated suspensions of a student would "simply lead to students not coming to school," or as a number of parents and community members saw it, being "pushed out of school." Other incidents cited that participants saw as used to disproportionately suspend Black students were being late, laughing in class, and talking back to teachers. In declaring that she was singled out for laughing, a student said:

> *Something funny happened in class. We were all laughing. But I was the only one sent to the office.*

One student reflected on her own suspensions and the contrast she has witnessed between how Black students and White students are treated:

> *The behaviours of White kids and Black kids get explained differently. A White kid with mood swings would get in-class suspension. A Black kid behaving the same way would "have an attitude" and get a suspension. White students get the chance to talk to the social worker; Black students get suspended. Or, like in Grade 6, they would call the police and put the Black kid in handcuffs.*

The presence of police in schools was discussed as having a "devastating effect" on Black students, in that it contributed to a process of criminalization of Black students and the entrenchment of the school-to-prison pipeline. There was concern that school boards were more likely to place police officers in schools with large Black student populations because of the stereotypes about Black students. In one region outside of Toronto, an educator shared that a school with a large Black student population was referred to as "McCriminal." She noted that this nickname was not earned because of criminal activity, but because of the racial composition of the school.

Students also felt that teachers and school administrators often acted on stereotypes rather than evidence, which served to further label, marginalize, and criminalize Black students. For example, students shared the different approach to suspected drug use in schools with a significant Black student population versus schools which were predominately White. In their experience, in schools with a large population of Black students, school administrators and

police were vigilant in seeking out drugs. Yet, students reported that in schools that are predominately White and in which there was higher rates of drug use, school administrators were not as vigilant and, as one student reported, "ignored" evidence of drug use.

Essentially, the regular presence of police in schools (often referred to as School Resource Officers) was a concern to most parents, students, and community members. Black students reported that in these schools they felt more unsafe than safe, and minimized their "involvement in school activities in order to limit contact with officers." According to one student:

> *Students don't trust the police. They make you feel like a criminal before you even do anything. They instill fear in the school and change the culture.*

Participants were also concerned about how the education, police, and child welfare systems work together to push Black children into the criminal justice system. Rather than these institutions working with each other to address the problems and mistreatment of Black children, they were thought to compound the negative treatment of Black children and their families. Participants referred to cases in which teachers repeatedly contacted the Children's Aid Society (CAS) to coerce parents into moving their child to another school or program. And they were concerned about the CAS's failure to hold the education system accountable for its treatment of Black children. Other concerns included teachers calling the CAS when a child acted out (under the assumption the issue was in the home, while ignoring racist bullying at school), police being called when a child got into a fight in response to racist bullying, and contacting police when Black parents expressed their anger about how their children are treated in school.

Generally, it was surmised that the disciplinary practices administered to Black students served to hurt their relationship with teachers and school administrators; it is particularly damaging when students interpret their treatment as evidence that the school staff do not care enough about them to understand or address the underlying issues behind their behaviours. In the words of one participant:

> *Black students are treated by the school like they are unwanted. Why would they stay?*

Participants indicated that the current approach to discipline should be replaced with a restorative justice approach, which they felt would focus attention on the root causes of students' behaviours, not just deal with the symptoms.

Furthermore, participants expressed concerns with how school boards were collecting data on suspensions, and whether any analysis was conducted by race to identify issues. Some educators and school board staff shared the subtle ways in which school boards manipulate their suspension and expulsion data such that these figures are under-reported so as not cause alarm. For instance, they report that there are students in the expulsion programs of various

school boards, but technically these students have not been expelled from school. They shared that the parents of these students were pressured to "voluntarily" place their children in these programs. Because these are "voluntary" placements, the data would fail to capture these students.

Participants called for the collection of disaggregated race-based data along with the number of suspensions received, the number of days students are suspended, and the total number of lost school days for each student so that the full impact of suspensions on Black students could be fully assessed and addressed.

Highlighting that the underlying issues explored in the consultation sessions are related to racism, particularly anti-Black racism, participants indicated that they are nevertheless expected not to name or challenge racism or raise concerns about its negative consequences. And in cases where the word "racism" was used, they felt that the issue became the use of the word itself rather than the behaviour that was identified as racist. They felt that both parents and students paid a high price for bringing up issues of race and racism. As one student noted:

> *Students who named and resisted racism suffered more.*

Some parents reported that they did not challenge the school on all the issues that arose because they felt that it might make the situation worse for their child, who was in the school six hours a day. As such, they felt that they had to carefully choose the issues on which to challenge the teacher or school administrator. In addition, Black educators and other school staff disclosed that advocating for Black students was "a career-limiting move" for them. As some of them commented:

> *Advocacy is viewed as rude and disrespectful.*

> *Black teachers are afraid to advocate for students for fear of losing their jobs.*

Despite the personal risks, teachers of all backgrounds shared the many ways they support Black students and parents including coaching them on how to better navigate the school system.

## 4.2.d   Parental involvement in schools and the need to take responsibility

A lawyer whose practice includes cases pertaining to Black students who have been suspended or expelled from school shared the following:

> *As a lawyer, I have noticed that, for the most part, behavioural issues in schools transcend race and socio-economic status. However, the outcomes are very much dependent on these factors. Black students are far more likely to be perceived as threatening, defiant and violent, and are disproportionately suspended and*

> *expelled from school. Perhaps more than any other group, Black students require present and involved parents and advocates to protect their right to an education.*

A parent echoed the need for parents of Black children to be vigilant:

> *We shouldn't have to advocate so hard for our children to get a decent education. But if we don't, there's no telling what the result would be.*

These observations are consistent with the sentiments expressed by the vast majority of participants in the seven consultation sessions. In particular, it was recognized that there are many issues within the education system that negatively impact Black students, and it is precisely because of these issues that Black parents must be involved in the education of their children. There was agreement that if Black students are to be successful in Ontario's education system, then Black parents, and indeed the entire Black community, must ensure that their presence is seen and felt. They must be consistent, persistent, and vigilant in engaging with the education system and advocating for a public education system that fulfills what it promises to all children in Ontario.

While we heard of the need for Black parents to be more engaged if their children are to be treated fairly and receive a good education, some parents shared the resistance with which they were met when they did try to become more involved at the school or engage with school personnel. A number of parents shared their experiences of trying to get onto parent councils and/or volunteer for various activities, but never being selected to participate. Some told of being chastised for being bad parents when they went to the school to deal with a suspension or other behavioural issue. Others went to the school to raise a concern and when they became angry with the school's responses to their issues, the teacher or school administrator perceived the emotion they expressed as threatening. Some parents shared that, as a consequence, the police were called. In one case, a parent was issued a trespass order, and hence was unable to return to the school.

There was agreement throughout the consultations that Black parents need to become better informed about the school system and post-secondary education options to be able to support their children in choosing the right career and education pathway. Participants felt that parents of Black students cannot trustingly drop off their children at school and assume they will get the same education as their peers. Instead, parents must understand that they need to work in partnership with the school—from kindergarten to graduation. This means building relationships with teachers and school administrators so that issues can be addressed early in their children's education process, rather than waiting until things become more serious. Some also felt that it was important for Black parents to be engaged to counteract teachers' biases about Black parents' absence from their children's lives:

> *There is bias among teachers against students whose parents aren't able to attend parent–teacher meetings. The assumption is that parents who don't attend are parents who aren't engaged with their child's education or just don't care.*

The engagement and advocacy of parents was seen as critical to helping Black students resist the negative impacts of the education system. Many participants also felt that parents should be educated about how anti-Black racism is operating in the education system so that they understand why it is important for them to be engaged and so that they are able to effectively advocate for their children.

Parents also commented on the amount of effort it took for them to ensure that their children were receiving a quality education. As one parent commented:

> *The level of education and awareness required of parents to assist their children in the educational system is alarming. As the mother of a boy with a learning disability, I have had to be his advocate through every step of his education. My profession and education predisposes me to issues of marginalization and bias in the school system. I was prepared to deal with the teachers who were not able to see all of the endearing qualities of my son, but were focused on his deficits and were quick to label him. Without my working knowledge of the system, resources for my son and being one of those parents that make themselves familiar with the principal, the trustee and his rights as a child that has been identified as having an LD, I would most definitely fear for his emotional, social and educational well-being while he is at school.*

When discussing the reasons for the perceived lack of engagement of Black parents with their child's education, various challenges were raised, including shift work, limited English-language ability, and low levels of literacy. In the suburban communities outside of Toronto, long commutes were also given as a reason, since many parents travel into Toronto to work at jobs that may not allow the flexibility needed to attend meetings and events at school. There was also the notion that immigrant parents' expectations that Canada's "first world" education system would provide the kind of education their children needed, hence there was no need to check in with teachers. Further, it was offered that because many immigrant and refugee parents lack familiarity with racism in Canada, they don't understand the need for vigilance to ensure that their children are treated fairly at school. In this regard, it was felt that parents of Black children need to not only pay attention to homework and school assignment completion, but also to both the student–teacher and parent–school relationships.

The Black students with whom we spoke felt that their parents often had too much faith in the education system and too often believed teachers over them when issues arose. As such, they felt that unfair and unwarranted suspensions and poor grades went unquestioned and unchallenged, while the student's education disengagement caused by negative school experiences and unfair treatment went unaddressed. To forge a better parent–school partnership and build positive relationships, it was suggested that Black parents need to better understand the school system, understand how to effectively engage with teachers, know what questions to ask, and know how to advocate for their children's right to a high-quality education.

Students went on to suggest that some parents are afraid of the education system because of its close connection to the child welfare system. From their perspective, some parents limit their interaction with the school system, including not attending parent–teacher interviews, because they fear that the teacher may interpret something they say or a stern look at their child as a sign of abuse. As one student noted:

> *For immigrant parents, parent–teacher interviews feel like surveillance from the government. There is the power dynamic, plus the lack of English-language skills and the fear of referral to child welfare that makes them limit contact with the school.*

And when asked to share a message with teachers about what they should understand about Black parents, the students responded by saying:

> *They have an interest in the well-being of their children.*

> *Black parents care about their children's academic success. They want them to excel in their studies without the fear of being marginalized in the school system due to their socio-economic status or ethnicity.*

> *Don't take advantage of my parents' full confidence in you.*

> *Teachers should know that Black parents do care about their children's education and so should the teacher. End the stereotype that Black parents don't care about their children's education, causing you not to care too.*

> *You should know that Black parents trust you. They trust the system too much and they are not thinking that anything could go wrong. When they seem like they don't care because they don't show up to meetings to talk about their child's success it's because they think you know more than them. Parents need to know that you need them to help, so ask for their help.*

In sharing the issues faced by Black parents in advocating for their children, participants discussed the important role that community members and community organizations continue to play in advocating for a more responsive education system. In the Durham Region consultation, participants discussed how the community can leverage the current focus on specific incidents to advocate for systemic change, noting that the issues that catch the attention of the media are symptomatic of much larger issues. In Peel and York regions, the community organizations in attendance used the consultations as an opportunity to reach out to parents and concerned community members to coordinate their educational advocacy efforts.

# PART 5: Discussion & Conclusion

On the first weekend of our consultations in Toronto, a Black youth was murdered, and the school administrator who knew him and had been working with him on his social and educational needs, emailed us to two days after our session to affirm the urgency of our consultations and needed action. She wrote:

> *His death reminds me why it is so important to do something now. He was a bright young man who just needed a place to belong. We are losing too many of our young men to the streets and the violence that surrounds them. Hopefully creating an education system that does not negate or demonize Black bodies is a small but powerful request.*

And from students we heard that we should be concerned about students—many of them Black boys, their friends and classmates—who are being pushed out of school and onto the streets; some of whom are now either in prison or dead. They noted that these boys were not

different from them; in some cases, they were brighter, but were made to feel that school was not a place for them. As one student noted:

> *Many of them are now in prison. If these Black boys were engaged in school, they would not be in prison.*

Throughout the consultations community members, parents, students and educators welcomed the insights that the TDSB data provided, noting that the profile of Black students—and in light of the recent spotlight on Black boys—confirmed for them that race plays a significant role in producing the unequal outcomes for Black students. They affirmed that the "web of stereotypes" (Howard, 2008, p. 966) operates to "racialize and marginalize these youth and structure their learning process, social opportunities, life changes, and educational outcomes" (James, 2011, p. 467).

Participants also talked of how the racial stereotyping of Black students contributed to the racial stratification we observe in classrooms with a significant number of Black students concentrated in Applied and Essentials programs of study as well as in special education and behavioural classes. In comparison, their White and other racialized peers are concentrated in Academic programs of study and gifted classes. Students also told of being treated differently than their non-Black peers in the classrooms and hallways of their schools, and shared their wish to be treated like every other student.

With regard to why the poor educational outcomes persist for Black students, participants concurred with the position expressed by James (2011) about the situation of Black males. He rhetorically asked:

> Might it be because of education authorities' persistent disregard for, or unwillingness to acknowledge, race and racism as factors influencing students' gendered schooling and educational experiences—a perspective informed by the color-blind discourse[3] of Canada's multiculturalism? Such disregard might explain why schooling produces and maintains rather than reduces inequities.

Media representations of Blacks as underachievers, athletic, violent, and not academically-inclined operate to inform perceptions of Black students' educational performance. These processes, according to Joe Feagin, form "White racial frames," which are:

> An organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate… A strong conceptual frame captures territory in the mind and makes it difficult to get people to think about that captured territory in terms other than those of the accepted frame. If facts do not fit a person's frame, that

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[3] In the Canadian discourse, culture, and not race or color, is believed to account for differences and diversity among people. But the irony is, in practice, culture is read unto bodies of those who are racially different, or in Canadian parlance, "visible minorities." By default race or color is used to represent difference.

person typically ignores or rejects the facts, not the frame (Feagin, 2006. p 25-26).

This White racial frame informs interactions in society and policies and practices within public institutions. In addition, White racial frames interpret and inform how racial disparities in society including high drop-out rates, high rates of interactions with police, and high rates of poverty are understood. These poor outcomes are seen as evidence of the failing of individuals, families, or cultures, rather than a failing of our public institutions. A such, poor educational outcomes, rather than causing the educational system to reflect on itself, reinforces and holds in place the White racial frame and the related stereotypes teachers and administrators have about Black students.

The perspectives shared in the consultations support the findings of a number of research studies conducted in the United States. A recent Yale University study found that Black students are three times more likely to be identified as gifted by a Black teacher than a White teacher (Nicholson-Crotty et al, 2016). As such, much of the under-representation of African-American students in gifted programs isn't because of their abilities, but instead reflects the negative perceptions of teachers and the lower likelihood that the student will be referred to be evaluated for gifted programs. The study shows that Black teachers have more positive perceptions of Black students—which affects their assessment of the student—and goes on to suggest that Black teachers not only have a different relationship with Black students, but also view Black students' approaches to learning, self-control, and other behaviours through a different lens.

A study by Johns Hopkins University concluded that low income Black students who have at least one Black teacher in elementary school are significantly more likely to graduate from high school. The study found that having a Black teacher reduces the chances of dropping out of high school by 39% and increases interest in pursuing post-secondary education by 29% (Gershenson et al, 2017). "We're seeing spending just one year with a teacher of the same race can move the dial on one of the most frustratingly persistent gaps in education attainment—that of low-income black boys. It not only moves the dial, it moves the dial in a powerful way," said co-author Nicholas Papageorge (Rosen, 2017).

Other studies point to a key reason why Black teachers matter: they have high expectations of Black students. A study co-authored by Papageorge found that race plays a big role in how teachers judged a student's abilities. The study found that when evaluating the same student, White teachers were 40% less likely to expect their Black students to graduate high school and 30% less likely to predict that they will complete university (Gershenson et al, 2016).

The TDSB data shows that by the time Black students graduate from high school, 42% of Black students have been suspended at least once compared to only 18% of White students. While data for elementary students are not available, U.S. data for the 2013–2014 school year show that even Black pre-schoolers are suspended 3.6 times more than their White peers (Schott

Foundation, 2016). A recent study by Yale University's Child Study Center attributed some of this racial disparity to discriminatory practices:

> Regardless of the nature of the underlying biases, the tendency to observe more closely classroom behaviors based on the sex and race of the child may contribute to greater levels of identification of challenging behaviors with Black preschoolers and especially Black boys, which perhaps contributes to the documented sex and race disparities in preschool expulsions and suspensions (Gilliam et al, 2016).

Throughout the United States, organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children are questioning the continued use of suspensions for young children when they have been found to be an ineffective intervention, particularly for young children. The Association issued a policy statement to this effect:

> A child's early years set the trajectory for the relationships and successes they will experience for the rest of their lives, making it crucial that children's earliest experiences truly foster—and never harm—their development. As such, expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings, two stressful and negative experiences young children and their families may encounter in early childhood programs, should be prevented, severely limited, and eventually eliminated. High-quality early childhood programs provide the positive experiences that nurture positive learning and development (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nd).

The policy statement goes on to state that not only do suspensions hinder a child's social-emotional and behavioural development, they also remove children from learning environments that contribute to healthy development and academic success later in life.

Students, parents, advocates, and lawyers who participated in the consultations felt that Black students were more often suspended for issues related to attitude than behaviour. This finding is supported by a California study, which found that since the California government eliminated the use of "willful defiance" as a reason to expel students, suspension rates have dropped by 40% (Rumberger & Losen, 2016).

The presence of police in Ontario schools has increased dramatically in the past several decades, resulting in increasingly compounded negative outcomes for Black students. While the impact of police in schools has not been studied in Ontario, in the United States the data show that police in schools have served to increase arrests of Black students (Na and Gottredson, 2011). The data points to the presence of police in schools as one aspect of the school-to-prison pipeline—which refers to the connection between the education system and the criminal justice system—that undermines Black students' educational success and funnels them into the criminal justice system.

Drop-out rates provide an indication of the future life chances of Black students, given that failure to obtain a high school diploma significantly reduces one's chances of securing a good job and creating a promising future. The failure to receive a high school diploma places individuals on a pathway to low-wage work, unemployment, and incarceration (Crenshaw et al, 2015, p 8).

Moreover, there is a high social cost associated with high drop-out rates. Failure to complete high school is connected to incarceration rates. Further, because many of those who have not completed high school are destined for a life of low-wage jobs and insecure employment, failure to complete high school also bears heavily on the likelihood individuals will rely on social assistance, public housing, and other public services. One study which quantified the cost of a student who does not complete high school, concluded that the public cost in lost tax revenue, increased health care costs, and increased criminal justice expenses to be $755,000 USD over the life of each student (Rumberger, 2016). As such, it is important, and far less costly to society, to keep all students in school and support their educational success.

# PART 6: Recommendations

Community members, educators, parents, and Black students confirm what the TDSB data shows: Black students face an achievement and opportunity gap in GTA schools. All evidence point to the need for action if the decades-old problem is to be addressed.

The recommendations that follow are informed by the voices of the individuals who participated in the community consultations and suggest a way forward to develop policies and practices that will support better outcomes for Black students. While the focus is on Black students, the implementation of these recommendations will create an education system that better reflects and serves an increasingly diverse student population.

## 1.    Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education administers the *Education Act* and allocates funds to school boards using the education funding model. The Ministry is also responsible for:

- Developing curriculum;

- Setting policies and guidelines for school trustees, directors of education, principals, and other school board officials;

- Setting requirements for student diplomas and certificates; and

- Preparing lists of approved textbooks and other learning materials (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

### LEADERSHIP

If the Ontario public school system is to achieve race equity, it requires the ongoing leadership of the Ontario Ministry of Education.

As such, the Ministry of Education should:

1.1    Publicly acknowledge that anti-Black racism in education negatively impacts the educational outcomes for Black students and exacts a social cost. To that end, the Ministry should develop a province-wide commitment to race equity in education and to addressing anti-Black racism throughout Ontario's public education system.

1.2    Engage all stakeholders to become actively involved in supporting better outcomes for Black students by validating the experiences of Black students and highlighting the social return on investing in Black students. This includes working with leaders in education, including school board trustees, directors of education, and the public, to raise awareness and understanding of systemic racism and the impact it has on Black students throughout Ontario's public school system as well as the collective benefit when these challenges are meaningfully addressed.

### DATA COLLECTION

If the challenges facing Black students in Ontario are to be meaningfully addressed, then data collection and research must move beyond the colour-blind approach that the Ministry of Education has so far taken to assess student achievement.

As such, it is recommended that the Ontario Ministry of Education:

1.3    Require school boards to routinely collect disaggregated race-based data that allows for the examination of the experiences and outcomes of Black students, including but not limited to suspensions (by reason and days), expulsions, program of study, graduation rates, drop-out rates, special education identification, and confirmation in post-secondary education.

1.4    Require school boards to publicly report annually on student enrollment in their Section 23 schools by race, gender, and outcomes.

1.5    Analyze student achievement data using an intersectional approach. This will allow for an analysis of outcomes for Black male and female students and will help to identify and address the issues faced by Black students who are also LGBTQ and/or Muslim as well as Black students with disabilities.

1.6    Update the Ministry of Education's School Climate Survey to ask students to identify their race and gender to allow for the identification of issues for Black students and the targeting of supports and interventions.

1.7    Update the Ministry of Education's School Climate Survey to ask students about their treatment by not just their peers, but also by teachers, school administrators, support staff, police in schools, and all adults (named by their roles) that they interact with in their schools.

1.8    Update the Ministry of Education's Survey for School Staff About Equity and Inclusive Education, Bullying/Harassment to inquire about the experience of school staff themselves, and ask staff to identify their race and gender to allow for the identification of issues for Black teachers and staff in order to design specific supports and interventions.

1.9    Update the Ministry of Education's School Climate Survey for Parents About Equity and Inclusive Education, Bullying/Harassment to ask about the racial background of students. Update the section that asks parents about their child's experience of bullying to include treatment not just by their peers but also by teachers, school administrators, and other school staff.

1.10    Ensure that all future school surveys allow students, staff, and parents to identify their race in order to allow for an assessment of issues affecting Black students in the education system.

## APPROACH TO SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Black students are disproportionately affected by school suspensions and expulsions, which undermines their ability to fully engage in their education and to successfully graduate from high school. Suspensions and expulsions, particularly for elementary school children, can undermine the foundation for their academic success in later years.

As such, the Ministry of Education should:

1.11    Strongly communicate to all school boards that the zero tolerance policy put in place by the Mike Harris government was repealed in 2008 and that they must communicate this information to all school administrators and teachers.

1.12    Reiterate the new policy and institute monitoring and complaints mechanisms to ensure schools follow the provincial approach to school discipline.

1.13 Require that school boards eliminate the racial disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions by adopting age-appropriate alternative discipline approaches, such as restorative justice practices, which will address underlying issues, help students change behaviour, and create a safer and more positive school climate.

1.14 Eliminate the use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for children in Grade 6 and under, and require that they be replaced with more compassionate, humane, and rehabilitative approaches to school discipline. Monitor and publicly report on in-school suspensions by race for students in Grade 6 and under.

1.15 Make available funding for social supports to address the root causes of inappropriate school behaviours, rather than the symptoms. This includes ending the regular presence of police in schools and replacing them with social workers, child and youth workers, and other social supports that have specific training on how to deal with Black children for schools with a high proportion of Black students.

1.16 Require that all law enforcement personnel who regularly interact with schools are adequately trained to ensure they have the skills and understanding to effectively interact with children and youth. Topics for training include:

- o Trauma-informed practice;
- o Child and adolescent development and psychology;
- o Conflict resolution;
- o De-escalation techniques; and
- o Violence prevention and intervention.

1.17 Ensure that students and parents are informed and have quick and easy access to the complaint process should they have issues about police conduct in schools.

1.18 Require that police services collect and publicly report on all in-school arrests and other interventions, disaggregated by the race of the student.


**RACE EQUITY LENS**

The Ministry of Education needs to reflect the full diversity of Ontario students in completing its mandate of:

- Developing curriculum;

- Setting policies and guidelines for school trustees, directors of education, principals, and other school board officials;

- Setting requirements for student diplomas and certificates; and

- Preparing lists of approved textbooks and other learning materials.

As such, the Ministry should:

1.19    Develop and apply a race equity lens to the development and implementation of all education policies, programs, curriculum, policies, guidelines, learning materials, etc.

1.20    Implement an Employment Equity Program to ensure Ministry staff reflect the full diversity of the student population.

1.21    Hear from Black parents, Black students, and the Black community about issues of concern, and allow them to provide input and share insights on proposed policies and curriculum. This may be done by establishing a Black Advisory Committee to advise the Ministry on all aspects of the education system—from the conceptualization stages of policies to their final form, along with goals and timetables for monitoring and accountability.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

The Ministry should hold school boards accountable for achieving equity in educational outcomes for Black students.

As such, the Ministry should:

1.22    Require each school board to develop 3-year Race Equity Action Plan to address the issues identified through the analysis of disaggregated race-based data. These action plans should be submitted to the Ministry and made publicly available.

1.23    At the end of the 3-year period, school boards should also report publicly on activities implemented and outcomes for Black students.

## DIVERSIFY THE TEACHING WORKFORCE

All children should have access to caring adults and be able to imagine their future selves through relationships with caring adults who look like them. While Ontario is becoming increasingly diverse, the teaching workforce is failing to reflect this diversity. Statistics Canada data shows that while 26% of the Ontario population is racialized, only 10% of Ontario teachers are racialized. In the Toronto CMA, 47% of the population is racialized, compared to only 19% of the teaching workforce. Statistics Canada projects that by 2031 racial minorities could make up 63% of the Toronto CMA population (Turner, 2015). If attempts are not made to close the teacher diversity gap, this disparity will only worsen.

As such, the Ministry of Education should develop a strategy to diversify the teaching workforce that includes:

1.24    Encouraging Black students to pursue a career in teaching.

1.25    Requiring universities to diversify the students entering their teacher education programs.

1.26    Requiring all school boards to implement an Employment Equity Program, to help create a workforce (both academic and non-academic) that reflect the diversity of the student population.

## TEACHER EDUCATION

With the increasing diversity of Ontario's student population, teacher education programs should ensure that all teachers and teacher educators are equipped to effectively teach students from diverse backgrounds.

As such, the Ministry of Education should:

1.27    Require education in anti-colonial and critical race theory, with a specific focus on anti-Black racism, as part of all teacher education programs in Ontario, including not only elementary and secondary school teacher training programs but also early childhood education programs.

## CURRICULUM

The curriculum reflects back to students their place in, and value to, Canadian society. As such, all students should see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

The Ministry of Education should:

1.28    Ensure the Ontario curriculum reflects the full diversity of the student population, in particular the Black population. This should not only be the case in Canadian history, but also throughout the JK to Grade 12 curriculum.


## 2.    School Board Trustees

Trustees provide a link between the local communities and the school board. As elected representatives, they bring the issues and concerns of their constituents to board discussions and decision-making.

School board trustees must understand that not all children have equal access to education, nor do they experience equal outcomes from Ontario's public education system. As such, trustees should also recognize that in today's environment, a commitment to equity and anti-racism is integral to their work. This understanding should then guide their decision-making and interactions with schools and parents.

As such, school board trustees should:

## DEMONSTRATE A COMMITMENT TO RACE EQUITY

2.1    Recognize that anti-Black racism in education negatively impacts Black students and develop a stated commitment to race equity and addressing anti-Black racism.

2.2    Receive ongoing training on equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression with a specific focus on anti-Black racism.

2.3    Establish a board-level Black Advisory Committee to hear from Black parents, Black students, and the Black community about issues of concern to them.

**ENSURE THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION IS COMMITTED TO RACE EQUITY**

2.4    Ensure equity-related competencies are included in the job description and performance appraisal of the director of education.

2.5    Ensure that in the hiring process candidates for the director of education are asked about issues of education equity, racism, and oppression, their demonstrated commitment to education equity, and their plans to address the identified issues in their new role.

**UNDERSTAND THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE COMMUNITY SERVED AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION**

2.6    Receive regular updates on the changing demographics of the community served and what it means for the school board in ensuring race equity in outcomes for all students.

## 3.    School Boards

There ae 72 district school boards in Ontario that operate the province's publicly funded schools. These school boards include 31 English-language public boards, 29 English-language Catholic boards, 4 French-language public boards, and 8 French-language Catholic boards.

These school boards are responsible for:

- Determining the number, size, and location of schools;

- Building, equipping, and furnishing schools;

- Providing education programs that meet the needs of the school community, including needs for special education;

- Prudent management of the funds allocated by the province to support all board activities, including education programs for elementary and secondary school students, and the building and maintaining of schools;

- Preparing an annual budget;

- Supervising the operation of schools and their teaching programs;

- Developing policy for safe arrival programs for elementary schools;

- Establishing a school council at each school;

- Hiring teachers and other staff;

- Helping teachers improve their teaching practices;

- Teacher performance;

- Approving schools' textbooks and learning material choices, based on the list of approved materials provided by the Ministry of Education;

- Enforcing the student attendance provisions of the *Education Act*; and

- Ensuring schools abide by the *Education Act* and its regulations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

Given that the size of the Black population varies greatly across the province, strategies to address these issues will depend on the size of the Black student population within the schools as well as the extent of the issues for Black students. For example, a school board with a large Black student population in the GTA will take a different approach than a school board with a smaller Black student population concentrated in a few schools. Regardless of which part of the province they live in, Black students should have access to the same education as their White and other racialized counterparts, as measured by student achievement data.

*If the Ministry does not require the previously made recommendations of all school boards, we recommend that they be voluntarily undertaken by school boards.* In addition, it is recommended that school boards:

## DEVELOP A STRATEGY TO IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS ANTI-BLACK RACISM

3.1    Supplement the disaggregated race-based data with qualitative data from focus groups and interviews with Black students, parents, educators, and advocates to identify the underlying issues resulting in the opportunity and achievement gaps identified through the data.

3.2    Develop a system-wide action plan to address the disproportionality and disparities experienced by Black students. Where disparities exist within individual schools, require action plans at the school level. Ensure these action plans are developed with the input of the Black community, from conception to implementation to evaluation, and made publicly available.

3.3    Create a Superintendent of Equity position that has the responsibility of embedding equity throughout the organization and addressing all forms of racism and oppression, particularly anti-Black racism.

3.4    Provide funding for equity resource teachers to share strategies for supporting Black student success, similar to the math lead teachers assigned to support the implementation of the province's Renewed Math Strategy.

3.5    Develop strategies that create racism-free school environments, which all schools are expected to implement. Include ways to assess the effectiveness of these strategies by collecting information from Black parents and students.

3.6     Annually report to the community on the implementation of the Race Equity Action Plan, including outcome data such as Black student achievement data, as well as the number, disposition, and outcomes of race-related complaints.

**PARENT ENGAGEMENT**

3.7     Develop resources and supports for educators, school administrators, and other school staff to appropriately engage Black parents.

3.8     Create a Black parent liaison position to engage with Black parents and support them to understand the education system, engage with schools, and to advocate for their children.

3.9     Educate parents and students about the process by which inappropriate student behaviours are handled. Inform them about the complaints and appeal mechanisms available to them should they feel their children have been unfairly suspended or expelled.

3.10    Inform all parents and students about the complaints and appeal mechanisms available to them should there be issues with school policies and practices.

3.11    Ensure documents sent home are in the appropriate language for parents and that interpreters are available when needed for parent–teacher interviews and any school–parent interactions.

**ENSURE SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES AND PRACTICES SUPPORT RACE EQUITY IN EDUCATION**

3.12    Review all policies and practices through a race equity lens to ensure that they do not have an adverse impact on Black students.

3.13    Assess all students for giftedness rather than have teachers serve as gatekeepers to evaluation.

3.14    Ensure that all tests used to identify giftedness have themselves been reviewed to eliminate possible cultural bias.

3.15    Eliminate streaming.

3.16    Inform all teachers and school administrators that the zero tolerance policy is no longer in effect and educate them as to how inappropriate student behaviours are to be dealt with.

3.17    Establish restorative justice and alternative dispute resolution strategies, policies, and procedures to eliminate the need for out-of-school suspensions.

3.18    Require all schools to celebrate Black History Month / African Heritage Month to ensure that Black students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and in Canadian history, and to ensure they understand the history of Africa and people of African descent beyond slavery. Ensure all schools have access to appropriate tools and resources to support these learning opportunities.

3.19    Ensure that all students are adequately assessed before they are placed in classes for English-language learners, special education, and other programs and classes.

**CREATE SAFE SCHOOLS THROUGH POSITIVE SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE MEASURES**

3.20    Train school staff to create and maintain safe and positive school climates. Ensure appropriate staff are available in schools to support safe and positive school climates, including social workers, behaviour interventionists, counselors, and other support staff to prevent and address safety concerns and conflict by addressing the root causes of conflict and disruptive behaviours.

3.21    Prohibit schools from calling law enforcement for disciplinary matters, and create a list of specific behaviours for which police cannot be called, such as defiance or profanity.

**DIVERSIFY AND EDUCATE STAFF**

3.22    Incorporate equity and anti-racism competencies into job descriptions, as well as the hiring and promotion criteria, for all educators, school administrators, and school staff.

3.23    Implement ongoing teacher education to help reduce anti-Black racism, ensure culturally appropriate pedagogy, and ensure a curriculum that reflects the full diversity of Ontario students.

3.24    Provide anti-racism training to educators, school administrators, and staff that reflects their roles and responsibilities. Ensure that anti-racism training is embedded into ongoing professional development and not provided as one-off training.

3.25    Support educators and school staff to build safe, caring, and supportive learning environments by building relationships with students.

## 4.    Black Community

The Black community has a critical role to play in advocating for change both at provincial and local levels. Advocates and community agencies can also educate Black parents about the importance of engaging with their children's school and supporting them to advocate for their children.

As such, the Black community should:

4.1    Contact the Minister of Education to advocate for a public education system in which Black students thrive and achieve their full potential.

4.2    Engage with local school boards and schools to support the identification of issues facing Black students and the implementation of appropriate strategies for change.

4.3    Support Black parents and individuals from the Black community to engage with their local schools, including joining parent councils.

4.4     Support individuals from Black communities, and with diverse identities, to run for school board trustee.

4.5     Get involved in local municipal elections to ensure the election of school board trustees who understand issues of anti-Black racism in the education system and are prepared to create an education system that ensures equitable outcomes for all students.

4.6     Develop toolkits and in-person sessions to educate Black parents about Ontario's education system, how systemic anti-Black racism in the education system impacts Black students, how to effectively advocate for their children, and how they can support their children's academic success.

4.7     Develop and advertise tutoring programs to ensure that Black students have access to the supports needed to close the opportunity and achievement gaps.

4.8     Support Black parents and students to challenge suspensions and expulsions.


## 5.      Parents of Black Children

Parents have a critical role to play in their children's education and are their children's biggest advocate. Parents need to be involved if Black children in particular are to receive the quality education that all children in Ontario deserve. They must be active participants in their children's education and schooling, from the moment their children enter kindergarten until they complete high school, and as they complete post-secondary education.

As such parents of Black parents should:

5.1     Ensure their children are prepared to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

5.2     Set high expectations for their children and support that with ongoing learning at home.

5.3     Make sure their child is in school every day, on time, and ready to learn.

5.4     Ensure that each teacher knows them from the first day of classes, and that they are engaged and involved parents.

5.5     Debrief with their children on a daily basis by not just asking about what they've learned at school, but also ensuring that the school is a safe and caring learning environment.

5.6     Support their children to complete homework and assignments.

5.7     Intervene early if issues arise, such as bullying or mistreatment, suspension or expulsion, or if the child falls behind or needs extra help or needs additional support to learn.

5.8     Know who the principal and trustees are and contact them if need be.

5.9     Attend parent–teacher interviews to get information about their child's performance, and use these interviews as an opportunity to work collaboratively with their children's teachers and talk to them about goals and expectations for their child.

5.10    Participate in family engagement and volunteer opportunities at the school.

5.11    Find out about the different learning streams in high school to ensure that their children are taking courses appropriate to their level of ability and in line with their post-secondary education plans.

5.12    Learn about the various paths to a successful career so that they can guide their child's course selections.

5.13    Take their children to tutoring programs to support the learning they are already engaged in at school.

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