



The Peel District School Board Action Plan to Support Black Male Students

In the new *Peel Board Plan for Student Success*, one of the four goals is “Achieve inclusion for all through our continuous progress on equity.” In the 2015-16 school year, we held focus groups with our black students as part of the specific plan for Student Success project to support black male students.

October 2016

We Rise Together: The Peel District School Board Action Plan to Support Black Male Students

In the new *Peel Board Plan for Student Success*, one of the four goals is “Achieve inclusion for all through our continuous progress on equity.” In the 2015-16 school year, we held focus groups with our black students as part of the specific Plan for Student Success project to support black male students.

That report, *Perspectives of Black Male Students in Secondary Schools*, clearly identifies key areas where the board needs to act. Certainly the results demonstrate that there is significant room for improvement. Though the report reflects what has been seen in similar studies across North America, the response needed, however, is to act.

In previewing the need for this work, Director Tony Pontes said at Starting Point, “what matters most is not what is said **in** the report, but what we do about it. And so, I commit that we will act on the report—together. We will be unflinching in response to the findings, and not resort to defensiveness. We will be bold, courageous and decisive. We will do what needs to be done, because that is the work of inclusion—that is how we make sure our students—all students—can truly *rise*. “

We Rise Together: The Peel District School Board Action Plan to Support Black Male Students is a comprehensive response to that challenge. The plan is both defined and open—there are clear, detailed first steps, and also a commitment to continue to consult with the community on these steps. The goal is to balance the need to act on the findings without delay, while we honour and respect the powerful knowledge and insight in our community to refine that work. The bottom line is that this action plan will not succeed without the genuine involvement of the community. We can only rise together.

The attached action plan is really an intervention plan. A plan with clear, bold actions, defined outcomes, and community involvement. The plan has an overarching purpose: to identify, understand, minimize and eliminate the marginalization experienced by black males in Peel schools. This action plan is separated into four focus areas:

Engage with the community

Deliver anti-racism and bias awareness professional development

Integrate the experiences of black Canadians into curriculum

Inspire black student leadership and engagement

Each of the four focus areas has defined aims, activities, short-term outcomes and long-term outcomes. The areas reflect the findings of the *Perspectives of Black Male Students in Secondary Schools* report. These focus areas provide an immediate roadmap for action, and also a starting point for our rich consultation with the community.

With our work on these focus areas, together we rise our students, our community, our schools and the Peel District School Board. That is how we will achieve our mission to inspire success, confidence and hope in each student.

Focus area: Engage with the community

AIM <i>What do we want to achieve?</i>	ACTIVITIES <i>What needs to be done to achieve these aims?</i>	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES <i>What are short term changes we want to be able to show and measure?</i>	LONG TERM OUTCOMES <i>What are the long term changes that we want to be able to show & measure, to demonstrate we have been successful?</i>
<p>Host a community forum to consult with community partners, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black Community Action Network of Peel • Malton Black Development Association • Peel Association of African Canadian Educators (PAACE) • Peel board Trustees • Peel Regional Police • United Achievers' Club • United Achievers' Community Services • United Way Peel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule community forum and invite community partners • Establish common menu of questions to ask each group, each focused around themes identified in the interim report through consultation with the Peel board's Research department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepen community understanding of main themes that emerge from the Peel board's focus group interim report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black parents/families and community members feel welcomed in schools, valued and have opportunities to engage with schools and school activities • Schools and/or system structures enable black families to participate in school activities • Black parents/ families/ community members have regular communications from schools re school functions, practices and programs etc.
<p>Consultation with other school boards to investigate the various targeted interventions developed to address opportunity and achievement gaps experienced by black males</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduled consultation. Determine who will be involved, i.e. Peel board Equity Team • Establish common menu of questions to ask around themes identified in the interim report through consultation with the Peel board's research department 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools encourage reciprocal conversations with black families - there are mechanisms in place for parents/families to participate fully in the schooling/education of their children • Ongoing opportunities exist where black families engage in reflections about and act upon ideas regarding the inclusiveness of schools • All school success goals reflect both ministry and board equity and inclusive education policies and are communicated clearly to black families

Focus area: Deliver anti-racism and bias awareness professional development

AIM <i>What do we want to achieve?</i>	ACTIVITIES <i>What needs to be done to achieve these aims?</i>	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES <i>What are short term changes we want to be able to show and measure?</i>	LONG TERM OUTCOMES <i>What are the long term changes that we want to be able to show & measure, to demonstrate we have been successful?</i>
Culturally responsive pedagogy training with a focus on inquiry, student voice, critical literacy and social justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims in the curriculum focus area (see above) will support this work • Develop a workshop for teachers on the Big Ideas behind the refresh of The Future We Want Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff participate in culturally responsive pedagogy training system-wide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through purposeful/ intentional professional development activities - teachers are equipped to create inclusive teaching and learning environments that promote the intellectual engagement of black males and reflect their, narratives, interests, strengths and cultural perspectives
Cultural competence training with a focus on black history and blackness (i.e. Dr. Beverly Jean Daniel and Lawrence Hill)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with individuals such as Dr. Beverly Jean Daniel and Lawrence Hill • Build on work developed in Curriculum (described above) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators regularly engage in personal and professional reflections that encourage them to identify/challenge personal privileges and biases and the impact these have on equitable outcomes for black males
Develop an ethic of care with respect to all black students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with Climate for Learning and Working team to build this work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate teams begin to see anti-racism as the work of their teams too 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators value and treat black males with care, respect, empathy and demonstrate a belief in the ability of black males to succeed

<p>Equity training for Senior Leadership, School Administrators and School Success Action Teams (including school social workers and guidance counsellors) to include: power and privilege dynamics, race (societal constructs of whiteness and blackness), identification and unpacking of personal stereotypes, bias and racial stereotyping of students, understanding student resistance when it manifests in the classroom and overall school environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This work is being conducted through the “Mandatory Equity Leadership Training” project led by Robert Lobovsky in Leadership Development and School Support Services, and the Journey Ahead Steering Committee group in support of Journey Ahead Finding 33 • Full-day equity program, designed to sharpen administrators' equity lens to better understand and navigate the complex landscape of identities within their teaching staff, support staff, parent/guardian community and student population. It will cover such topics as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical Race/Anti-Oppression Theory - Deconstructing Identity Bias - Intersectionality and Identity Politics - The negation of the Racialized experience as a form of oppression - Equity and Organizational Change - Understanding Privilege - Gender Inequity and Its Impact on School systems - Inclusive Mechanisms and Practice • Support administrators to build explicit EIE and anti-racist school success planning goals through the following supports (already identified in the Draft EIE Implementation Roadmap): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish administrator led EIE Working Groups within the steering committees of all 13 SOE units (by 2018), and within four SOE units (Haarmann, Rossall, Daws, Roberston) by the end of 2016-17 2. Develop draft terms of reference for each EIE Working Group to adapt and adopt 3. Develop and deliver ‘train-the trainer’ modules to each EIE Working Group 4. Provide administrators with a menu of EIE goals to support implementation of EIE into their school success planning goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equity and Inclusive Education (EIE) Teams become a permanent feature of annual Superintendent of Education (SOE) planning (or EIE becomes an explicit focus for every SOE Steering Committee) • EIE becomes a permanent professional development focus in every Peel school in two to three years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff have the requisite training/skills needed to support personal success, achievement and well-being of black males • Educators work with students, family members and colleagues, engaging student voice to build learning environments that are relevant, authentic and meaningful for black students and are free from discriminatory bias
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Focus area: Integrate the experiences of black Canadians into curriculum

AIM <i>What do we want to achieve?</i>	ACTIVITIES <i>What needs to be done to achieve these aims?</i>	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES <i>What are short term changes we want to be able to show and measure?</i>	LONG TERM OUTCOMES <i>What are the long term changes that we want to be able to show and measure to demonstrate we have been successful?</i>
<p>Explicit curriculum connections of black historical and contemporary contributions and identities, and Blackness ingrained within all curriculum areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request a literature search from the Research department, focusing on established bibliographies/resources regarding black history and identities, contemporary cultural connections and blackness • Winter 2017: Workshop with teacher librarians on how Learning Commons can support student and teacher understanding of black history and identities, contemporary cultural connections, and blackness ingrained within all curriculum areas • 2017-18: Collaborative Inquiry (CI) on using multiple sources to examine race, racialization, and anti-racism in the Social Studies/History/Geography curriculum • Develop a report and workshop from the above CI for 'train the trainer' book/resource talks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher librarian workshop along with the Collaborative Inquiry will provide early data regarding Peel readiness and needs to engage with black history and identities, contemporary cultural connections and blackness ingrained within all curriculum areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have engaging and inclusive curricular that reflect the identities, lived experiences, cultures and histories of black Canadians and support high achievement for black males • Black males will see themselves reflected in classroom curriculum, learning materials, displays and learning resources and will feel valued, respected and included
<p>Further development of black history resources for schools (in consultation with African diasporic community partners), providing schools with greater resources to celebrate and recognize Black History Month</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activities from the above aim will also help to achieve this aim. • Consultation with PAACE and other community members about resources that could help to supplement school resources around Black History Month • Consultation and support through the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) about key Black History Month resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and further development of resources to support black history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse voices, stories, cultures and histories of black Canadians are included in our classrooms, curriculum, learning materials, displays and learning resources • A more intentional focus and celebration of Black History Month and a celebration of black history beyond the month of February

Develop an explicit focus on the dynamics of race, racialization and anti-racism into age-appropriate curriculum areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the language, concepts and pedagogy of anti-racism for teachers and support staff through a workshop series akin to Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine workshop data and feedback on teacher and student understandings and readiness to engage in topics of race, racialization and anti-racism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align curriculum materials, instruction and assessment practices with the principles of equity and inclusive education, with specific focus on critical literacy, student voice and choice and the components of culturally responsive pedagogy
Development of <i>The Future We Want</i> resource – Instruction/assessment through an African diasporic black-Canadian lens built around culturally responsive pedagogy while considering student voice, critical literacy and social justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the African diasporic black-Canadian lens through: <p>A. Literature Review (for example)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ladson-Billings' Culturally Relevant Pedagogy specifically the idea of building 'cultural competence', or an education that does not alienate students away from their culture Enid Lee's work on culture and anti-racist education Mica Pollock's Everyday Anti-Racism <p>B. Professional Focus Groups (researchers/groups that examine the opportunity/achievement gaps of, and intervention programs for black students)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toronto District School Board work on Afrocentric Schools Natasha Henry Anne Lopez (OISE) Professor Carl James (York University) and the York Centre for Education and Community Grace Edward Galabuzi Course Directors from York University's Regent Park Program Anti-Racism Directorate Semester 2 Collaborative Inquiry "Exploring racial identity in grade 9 and 10 English texts" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine data and feedback on teacher and student understandings and readiness to engage in topics of race and racialization from Semester 2 Collaborative Inquiry "Exploring racial identity in grade 9 and 10 English texts" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System-wide development and use of anti-discriminatory instructional and assessment practices (inquiry, student voice and choice, culturally responsive/relevant pedagogy) that support high achievement for black male students

Focus area: Inspire black student leadership and engagement

AIM <i>What do we want to achieve?</i>	ACTIVITIES <i>What needs to be done to achieve these aims?</i>	SHORT TERM OUTCOMES <i>What are short term changes we want to be able to show and measure?</i>	LONG TERM OUTCOMES <i>What are the long term changes that we want to be able to show & measure, to demonstrate we have been successful?</i>
Student leadership conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed with planning, aiming for a 2017 or 2018 conference date. • Conference will be designed to inspire, motivate and encourage our students to want more, do more and provide pathways and avenues towards achieving success (i.e. real life role models to share their stories) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine conference and mentoring program feedback about teacher and student understandings and readiness to engage in topics of race, racialization and anti-racism 	Black males will have opportunities to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and explore personal competencies (confidence, resilience, and self-efficacy) and integrate their lived experiences into the process of leadership development • Engage with their local school communities and with their communities at large to explore their rights and responsibilities as leaders both in the school setting and in the larger community
School-based mentoring groups involving Peel board Alternative Programs, Curriculum and Instruction and Climate teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather data on method, structure and impact of Obama Effect and other mentoring groups/programs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black males are discourse partners/leaders and work with staff to create classroom and school activities that represent their interests, identities, and lived experiences
Investigate external mentorship programs specific to black males in order to implement mentoring program at 13 pilot secondary schools across each superintendency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact the non-profit organization 'Boys to Men' • Contact Donald McLeod of the 100 Strong Foundation with Justice • Contact United Way of Peel Black Community Advisory Council regarding their mentorship program specific to black youth – matching them up with mentors who look like them 		Black Males will have opportunities to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on their own identities and on ways their identities shape their leadership capacities • Develop, use and learn how to articulate ideas about their leadership skills



Perspectives of Black Male Students in Secondary School Understanding the Successes and Challenges

Student Focus Group Results

**we
RISE
together**

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Perspectives of Black Male Students in Secondary School

Understanding the Successes and Challenges

Student Focus Group Results

Introduction

Research in Canada and North America has extensively documented the Black youth experience in the educational system. This research examined issues of anti-Black racism and its impact on the well-being of Black youth. As a follow-up to this research, a number of local research initiatives have focused on the issues faced by Black youth in the Region of Peel. Through consultations, interviews, focus groups, focused conversations, and surveys; perspectives from Black adults and youth were compiled to identify issues of equity and inclusion within schools, workplaces, and communities. Of particular interest to the Peel District School Board are the findings pertaining to the educational experiences of Black youth in the Region of Peel. A brief review of the findings is provided below.

1. *Fighting an Uphill Battle: Report on the Consultations into the Well-Being of Black Youth in Peel Region.* 2015.

Consultations conducted with Black residents, Black youth, and service providers in the Region of Peel indicated that Black youth feel isolated and marginalized in school due to: low expectations; the absence of Blacks and Black culture in the curriculum; a low number of Black teachers; receiving more encouragement to engage in sports than academics; being streamed away from math, science, and academic level courses; receiving harsher discipline than non-Black students; and the presence of police in schools (F.A.C.E.S. of Peel Collaborative, 2015).

The above study reports findings that are based on feedback obtained from adult and youth residents of the Region of Peel and service providers in the Region of Peel. For the purposes of this project, the results regarding the educational experiences and perceptions of the Black youth participants are of particular interest (Education section found on pp. 29-37). Upon review, the following limitations were identified:

- The report notes the intent to conduct an asset-based approach to the research. However, the majority of the feedback reported in this section focuses on the issues, challenges, and barriers occurring in schools; thus reflecting a deficit model focus.
- The experiences and perceptions of a small proportion of Black youth participants ($n=23$ interviewees, $n=5$ focus group participants) may not be generalizable to the Black youth community throughout the Region of Peel.
- Much of the reported data in this section reflects the perceptions of adult informants and parents, rather than the experiences and perceptions of the Black youth participants.

2. *Voices of Ontario Black Educators: An Experiential Report.* 2015.

Survey and interview responses from a non-random selection of 148 current and retired African Canadian educators in Ontario, indicated that these Black educators experienced and/or witnessed: an achievement gap between Black and White students; the systemic racism Black students face; a lack of Black teachers as role models in schools; a lack of culturally informed relationships between

Black students and White teachers; a lack of effective classroom management strategies used by White teachers with Black students; the struggles White teachers experience when trying to build home-school connections with parents of Black students; and the high expectations Black teachers hold for Black students (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015).

The above study reports the collective findings from African Canadian educators across Ontario. However, the proportion of respondents who are educators teaching in the Peel District School Board is not reported. As a result, it is not possible to determine the extent to which these data represent the experiences and perceptions of educators in the Peel District School Board.

3. Peel District School Board Superintendent Inquiry. 2015.

In October 2015, focused conversations were conducted with a total of 18 at risk, Black male students in two secondary schools in the Peel board. Commonalities among participating students included: (1) multiple absences from school, (2) low credit accumulation, (3) special education designation, and (4) a challenging home situation. Students discussed their experiences in school, personal strengths, perceptions of success, and future aspirations. The conversation narratives will be available in the near future.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to dig deeper into the educational experiences and perceptions of Black youth in the Peel District School Board. In order to fully understand these experiences, both challenges and successes of Black male secondary students will be explored. The information obtained in this research project will illuminate areas in which students struggle, and areas of success; and will inform a plan of action for practices and programs to improve the educational experiences of Black male students.

Focus Group Methodology

During the months of May and June 2016, a total of nine focus groups were conducted with male Black students in secondary schools (N=87). Schools were selected based on: (1) relatively large population of Black families residing in the catchment area of the school (using data from Environics Analytics, 2016), and (2) geographical location – four groups were conducted in schools located in Brampton, one group in Caledon, and four groups were conducted in schools located in Mississauga. Four of the focus groups consisted of Black male students who were engaged and/or experiencing academic success in school, four groups involved students who were disengaged and/or struggling academically in school, and one group involved a mixture of engaged and disengaged students.

Students volunteered to participate in the focus groups, and were invited to attend a session through invitational posters and word-of-mouth from school administrators and teachers. Each focus group was conducted in a private room at the respective school, during the lunch hour. Focus groups lasted 1 to 1.5 hours in length.

Focus Group Questions

1. What are your thoughts about, and experiences in school?
2. What do you like and/or dislike about school?
3. What factors help you engage in, or succeed in school?
4. What factors prevent you from engaging in, or succeeding in school?
5. How can your school better support you, or improve your life in school?

Data Analysis

Content analysis was conducted on the feedback provided by focus group participants. Discussion items were coded, summarized, and analyzed for themes.

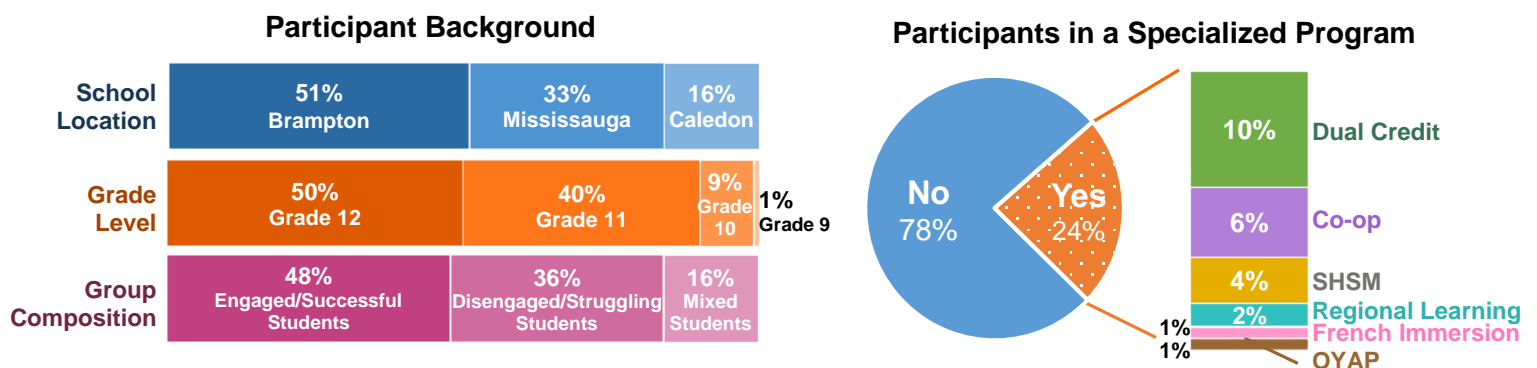
Study Limitations

The focus group participants consisted of a self-selected sample of 87 students in Grades 10-12. Therefore, the results obtained during these sessions may not be representative of the entire Black male student population in the Peel District School Board. It should also be noted that the findings reported in this study reflect the perceptions of students; and include the thoughts and experiences of Black male students only. Perspectives from other stakeholder groups, such as other racialized and non-racialized student groups, teachers, school administrators, parents/guardians, and community members were not collected. Multiple perspectives would provide a more comprehensive picture of the successes, issues, and challenges experienced by all members of the school community.

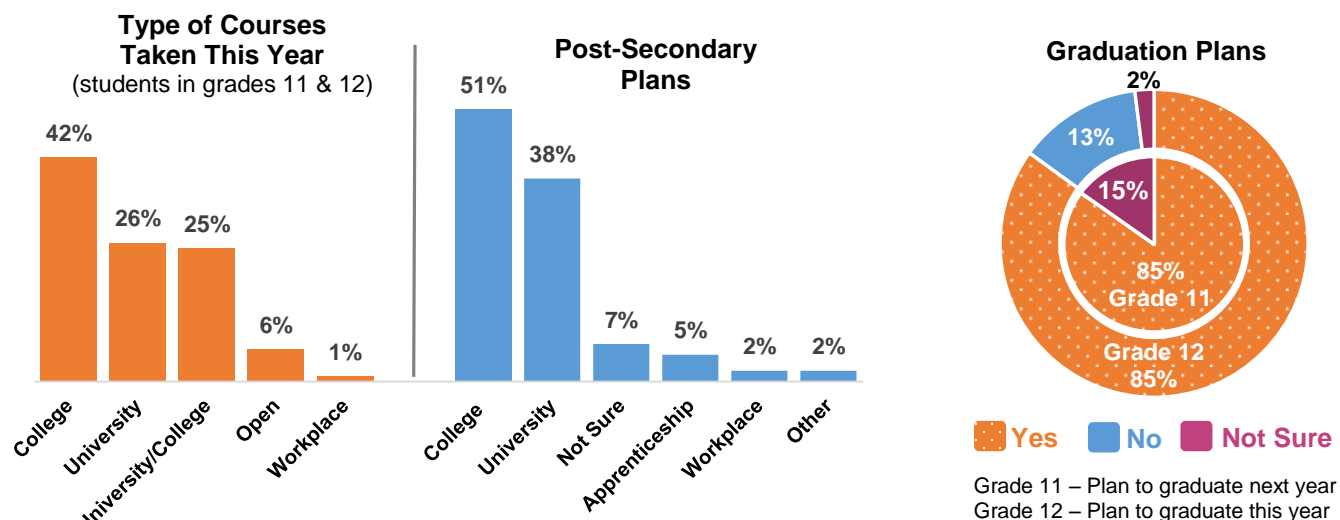
Participant Information

Student Background

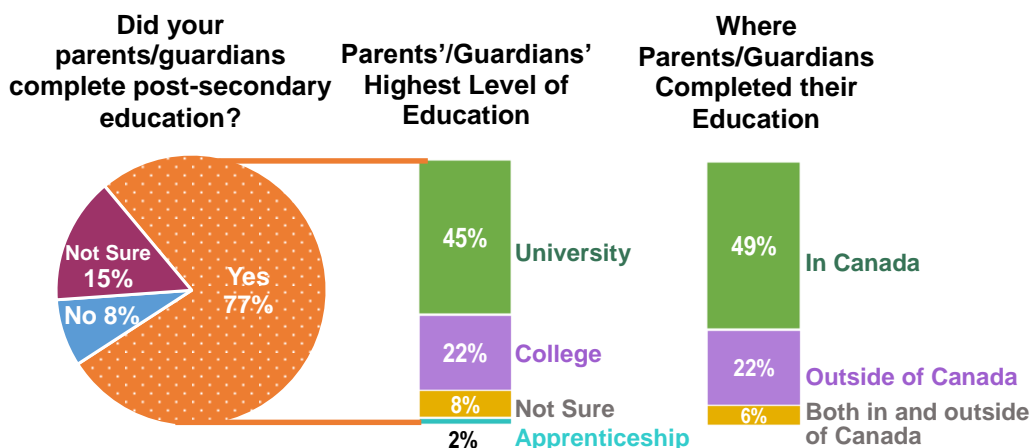
Number of students = 87



Educational Information

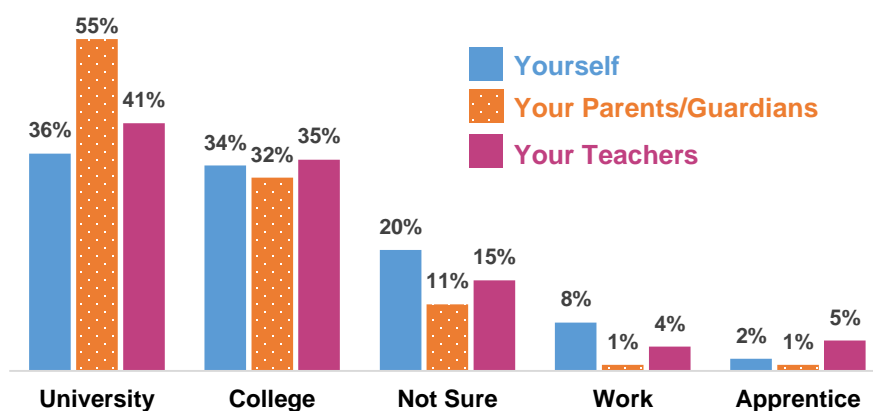


Parent/Guardian Education



Expected/Suggested Pathways

In Grade 8, what pathway did you, your parents/guardians, and your teachers expect/suggest for you?



Focus Group Results

The following section presents an analysis of the focus group discussions conducted with 87 Black male students in grades 10-12. The emerging themes and connected elements reflect the perceptions, perspectives, and reported experiences of participating students.

Students' Experiences in School

Racial Separation

- In school and in the community, Black students primarily hang out with other Black students, South-Asian students stay together, and White students hang out with White students.
- In school, non-Black students rarely play sports with Black students. Black students suspect this happens because Black males are seen as aggressive, their serious spirit of competition is viewed as arrogance, and White students are intimidated by Black students.
- When Black students join a stereotypically “non-Black” sport in school (baseball, cricket), or a team without Black students, they are sometimes excluded from conversations (other languages are spoken) and/or they are made fun of.

Academic Expectations

- Teachers and students hold low academic expectations for Black students. Some non-Black students and teachers show surprise or disbelief when Black students do well or receive a good grade, while others suspect that Black students cheat if they perform well on an assignment or test. Students make offensive remarks when Black students succeed in school (e.g., “you talk white,” “you’re a smart Black guy”).

Stereotyping and Stigma

- Black students struggle to “fit in” at school and, at times, feel ostracized by their peers. Many non-Black students will not speak to Black students.
- Students, teachers, and the police are quick to judge Black students based on their appearance (i.e., clothing), race, and behavior. They think all Black people are from rough neighbourhoods, and are quick to conclude that Black people are “gangsters” or “drug dealers.”
- When Black students talk about their interests, pathways, or careers, other non-Black students joke about their choices, criticize them, or act surprised if the choices are not within the “Black stereotype” (i.e., if they [Black students] indicate that they would like to be a film maker or a pianist).

Racial Profiling

- Teachers frequently stop Black students in hallways and ask if they should be in class at that time. Teachers will also approach Black students first if something (negative) happens at school.
- In school, police blame school incidences (e.g., graffiti, vandalism) on Black students without asking questions first. In the community, Black students are stopped or randomly pulled over by police more frequently than non-Black students (e.g., for walking with headphones on, driving their parent’s luxury car).

Experiences in the Community

- Community store owners and staff do not trust Black students. When a group of students enter a store, staff will often follow the Black students, ask them to remove their knapsacks, and/or request a receipt of purchase before they leave the store. At some stores, staff will restrict the number of Black students who enter the store at one time.

What Students Like About School

School Staff

- Some teachers are nice to all students, treat all students equally, take the time to help struggling students during class time and after school, make learning fun and interesting, and genuinely care about all students.
- Black teachers understand the challenges of Black students better than non-Black teachers. Black teachers treat all students equally, and with more respect, care, and interest than other non-Black teachers.
- Guidance counselors help all students with course selections, ensure all students are on track with required courses, and talk to students about their interests and future jobs/careers.
- In some schools, the administrators are very helpful and friendly. These principals treat all students equally, show an interest in all students, and attend many school events (i.e., sport competitions).

Friends

- Friends are a large reason why many students attend school every day. Students look forward to spending time with their friends during the lunch hour and during spares. Black students feel a strong sense of camaraderie with other Black students. They rely on each other for friendship and support during the good times and the tough times at school.

Sport Teams

- Participating on school sport teams is one way Black students have successfully connected with non-Black students. If a Black student is athletic or good at a sport, he/she receives more respect from other students, and is able to develop friendships easier with non-Black teammates. Connections that form between Black and non-Black students during practices and sporting events can carry over into school where friendships continue to develop.

Opportunities

- Students value the range of opportunities that are available to them at school. In particular, students enjoy participating in the selection of different sports (intermural and competitive), playing musical instruments during class time and in the school band, and engaging in leadership opportunities.

School Climate and Safety

- Students generally feel safe in school, and some students appreciate the positive and respectful atmosphere in their school. Although some schools have reputations for being unsafe, students question these reputations and assume it is a result of the media, or past events unrelated to their school.
- In some schools, students feel police presence has a positive impact on school climate. When police are visiting these schools, student behavior and the school atmosphere improves.

What Students Dislike About School

Student Behaviour

- Black students feel that many non-Black students are afraid of them. As a result, non-Black students avoid Black students in hallways, in the cafeteria, and on the school yard.
- Black students are subjected to insults, racist jokes, and name-calling by non-Black students.

Teacher Behaviour

- Some teachers are disrespectful and display negative attitudes toward Black students (e.g., use sarcasm, will not listen, provide negative responses on assignments or tests, do not choose Black students when a question is asked in class). Students also noted that some teachers “expect us [Black students] to mess up.” Consequently, Black students feel they have to prove they are good kids before teachers give them a chance.
- Some teachers choose to ignore Black students, or are scared to confront them. These teachers do not approach Black students if they use their phone during class time, if they act up in class, or are loud in the hallway. Instead, these teachers overlook these behaviours or send students directly to the office.

Minimal Acknowledgement of Black History Month

- In some schools, the focus placed on Black History month is limited. Examples include: (1) activities reflecting Black history are restricted to the end of the month, (2) Canadian Black history is not discussed, (3) only Black students and Black teachers help organize events and/or participate in the activities, and/or (4) teachers only focus on the contributions of Martin Luther King. Students also noted that Asian Heritage month receives far more attention by teachers and students than Black History month.

Preferential Respect for School Sports

- In some schools, there is a lack of respect and pride for basketball. Students feel that this is because basketball is a sport that is predominantly played by Black students. Accomplishments achieved by school basketball teams are not acknowledged, or included in school announcements to the same extent as other sports (e.g., rugby, curling, skiing).

Lack of Leadership Opportunities

- Leadership opportunities are very limited for students who are not popular, or are not “in with the cool crowds.” At some schools, running for the Student Activity Council is not open to all students, and often resembles a popularity contest.

Factors That Help Students Engage or Succeed in School

Family Members

- Students value the support they receive from their family members. Students noted that their parents/guardians, older siblings, and aunts and uncles consistently motivate them to attend school, support their goals, talk to them about the importance of an education, encourage them to attend college or university, and discuss future job and career opportunities.
- Students who were experiencing success in school also noted that their parents/guardians often pressure them to achieve high grades, and encourage them to choose friends who also do well in school.

Friends

- Students are highly motivated to attend school and go to their classes because they are able to spend time with their friends.

Teachers

- In general, teachers motivate students to succeed in school if students show they are interested in learning, participate in class, and do the work. In some instances, teachers will take the time to talk with Black students when they [students] are “going astray.”
- Black teachers hold high expectations for Black students regardless of their academic performance and behaviours in the classroom.

Self-Motivation

- All students value their future and want to be able to support themselves when they are adults.
- Students who were experiencing success in school noted that they believe it is their responsibility to push themselves to do well, and to achieve the best they can for themselves and their future.
- Some students have a strong desire to do well in school in order to prove to others that Black people can be successful.

Other Peoples' Situations

- Students observe and reflect on the lives of other people (family members and friends) who have dropped out of school or did not pursue post-secondary education. They see how these people struggle, live in poverty, and/or constantly worry about money and being able to pay their bills. Students do not want to live like this.

Extra-curricular Activities

- The extra-curricular activities available at school keep many students interested and engaged. Participating in school-based events adds variety to life at school, allows students to be with their friends, and enables students to pursue their personal interests.

Factors that Prevent Students from Engaging or Succeeding in School

Teacher Behaviour

- Some teachers do not understand, or choose to ignore the various challenges students face personally and at home. These challenges may impact punctuality, attendance, and/or achievement at school, but teachers continue to reprimand students without considering the reasons for their behavior.
- Students noted that guidance counsellors are quick to recommend that Black students enroll in college level courses, when some of these students would do fine in academic courses and in university. Black students feel they need to prove their intelligence and/or their work ethic more than non-Black students.

Lack of Interest in School

- Some students generally do not feel connected to school, and others lack the motivation to apply themselves. These students are not interested in many of the courses they are required to take, or learning the material being taught. In addition, students do not see the relevance or value of the material they are learning in school. These students find it difficult to make connections between what is being taught in school and the real world. They are bored in class and feel that the teaching styles used by many teachers are ineffective.
- For many students, participating in extra-curricular activities is their favorite part of school. However, in some schools, there are a limited number of activities offered that address students' interests (with the exception of sports). Some schools focus on academic achievement rather than developing life skills or personal interests.

Differential Treatment

- Students feel teachers favor non-Black students. Some teachers overlook Black students when they request help, and/or spend more time helping non-Black students with school work. Teachers also tend to dictate where Black students sit in the classroom (at the front of the class or away from others), and/or assign harsher consequences to Black students for behaviours displayed by other non-Black students as well (e.g., arriving late to class, swearing).
- South Asian students are viewed by teachers as “model” students. Teachers tend to “play favorites” towards these students, show these students more respect, compliment their work more frequently, and are more patient with them, when compared to Black students.

School Environment

- At school, Black students feel they are under surveillance. Some students feel like they are being followed by school staff, or that staff are constantly checking on them.
- For many students, school offers a safe and comfortable environment. However, other students feel uneasy. Although police presence in school is supposed to make students feel safe, for some Black students, police presence has the opposite effect due to the racial profiling they have experienced.

Personal Behaviour

- Students concur that sometimes they create problems through their own actions. At times, they may have a bad attitude, dress poorly, or display inappropriate or disrespectful behaviours in school. Students also realize that they engage in behaviours that prevent them from succeeding in school (e.g., get very little sleep at night, come to class unprepared, choose not to focus during class time).

Suggestions for Supporting Students in School

Curriculum

- Teach material and skills that are directly relevant to life after school (e.g., mortgages, taxes, bills, budget, household management).
- Enhance and expand on the curriculum and school-wide activities during and beyond Black History month, and ensure activities involve all (including non-Black) staff and students.

Teaching and Learning

- Ensure teachers are enthusiastic and interested in teaching. Encourage/train teachers to incorporate engaging and relevant learning activities into their instruction.
- Teachers need to be more helpful. They need to help students when they ask for help, slow their instructional pace down, support students in developing their interests, and understand and address students' learning needs.

Staff Expectations

- Teachers need to raise their expectations for Black students, acknowledge that Black students want to succeed, and provide the support students need to achieve success.
- Guidance counsellors need to guide Black students with high expectations in mind. They should provide students with information relating to all course level options, including academic/university level, and allow students to choose the type of courses they wish to take.

Extra-curricular Activities

- Offer more and diverse extra-curricular activities that align with student interests and encourage student camaraderie. For example, a *Boys to Men's* club that offers outings periodically (i.e., sporting events) would allow students of all backgrounds to bond over similar interests. In addition, a student support group, where students can share their thoughts, successes, and challenges with each other, may foster friendships among students with different backgrounds.

Additional Student Support

- Offer the *Counting on You* program to students in grades 11 and 12. Extending this program to higher grades will provide older students, who struggle in math and literacy, with extra support.
- Organize a mentorship program that will pair younger and older students together. Older students can mentor the younger students, assist with their transition to secondary school, and help them with school-based experiences.

Respect and Inclusion

- Teachers need to treat all students the same, regardless of student race, gender, academic performance, and learning needs.
- All students should be able to participate in the school clubs of their choice (including leadership-based clubs). Ensure that all students are informed and aware of the clubs, and that all students have an equal opportunity to participate in elections for leadership roles.

Considerations for Next Steps

In an effort to better understand the experiences of Black male students in the Peel District School Board, a series of focus groups were conducted to capture their perceptions of school, identify the successes and challenges they encounter while in school, and explore factors that impact their engagement and success. In an attempt to obtain a wide range of experiences, the focus groups involved both successful and struggling Black male students attending schools across the Region of Peel. Overall, students reported perceptions and experiences that are primarily framed by the behaviours of students and staff, stereotyping and stigma, academic expectations held by others, relevance of the curriculum, and opportunities available at school.

Many of the findings in this research project emulate those reported throughout the vast array of literature addressing the underachievement and marginalization of Black students. In response to these findings, research has also explored a variety of strategies used within classrooms and schools to improve engagement among Black students, enhance their learning environments, and foster a climate of equity and inclusion. In addition to this research, a review of the literature suggesting evidence-based, effective practices would add value to the project. Considering the reported challenges of our Black students, it seems they may benefit from implementing classroom, school, and board-wide strategies that have demonstrated success among Black youth. Research in this area can help guide and direct our next steps for creating school environments that are welcoming, respectful, and inclusive of our Black students.

Findings from the focus groups indicate that Black students desire change to occur within their classrooms and their schools. Specifically, students suggested implementing culturally responsive and relevant curriculum, respectful and supportive school staff who hold higher expectations of them, programs that support academic and social success, and equal opportunities to participate in activities that align with their interests. In order to fully address these areas, it may be helpful to consult with various stakeholder groups in schools and throughout their communities. Such groups can include school staff; parents/guardians of Black students; and local networks, agencies, and advocacy groups that represent and support Black communities throughout the Region of Peel. By sharing and discussing the focus group findings, and honoring the ideas of various stakeholder groups, we can co-create a strong plan of action involving strategies and solutions designed to effectively address the academic, emotional, and social needs of Black students in the Peel District School Board.

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