



*Driving Black Student Success on a
System-Wide Level:
Symposium Presentation*

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Abstract:

Qualitative and quantitative data indicators from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and York University highlight the crucial need for a holistic Black Student Success and Excellence (BSSE) strategy to address systemic racism that Black students face in all aspects of their schooling. To this end, TDSB developed a program to foster critical consciousness in educators.

The initiative partnered educators, school administrators, central support staff, associated researchers and initiative leaders in an inquiry-based journey relevant to their role(s), space(s) and experience. The study took place in 17 secondary and elementary schools. Results demonstrate that participants fostered their own critical consciousness and that of their students' through the research or inquiry process. The symposium details experiences from across this work. It also explores the direct and indirect effects of the initiative on participants related to the conditions and mechanisms for entry, implementation, mobilization and sustainability, and processes within the initiative at micro and macro levels. As an extension of this work, TDSB and York University also piloted a Black Student Summer Leadership Institute to provide Black secondary students with opportunities to understand and develop leadership and agency in challenging anti-Black racism through principles of Youth Participatory Action Research. As part of their inquiry, students in the summer program also identified the following key themes to describe the Black student experience: sense of belonging, stress, engagement, body/self-image, neglect, student voice and safety. Overall, this panel highlights the different components, challenges and successes with this initiative and implications for expanding this work.

Keywords: anti-Black racism; academic achievement; well-being; culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy; critically conscious practitioner inquiry; racial identity; urban education; advocacy; social change; action research

Symposium Presentations

Black Student Success and Excellence: Fostering Critical Consciousness as a Policy for School Success
Authors: Karen Murray, Nicole West-Burns, Stefanie De Jesus, Sarah Armson and Aakriti Kapoor

Big Data Indicators: What we know About Black Student Achievement and Well-Being
Authors: Carl E. James, Karen Murray and David H. Cameron

Student Centered Leadership through Youth Participatory Action Research
Authors: Karen Murray, Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh and Aakriti Kapoor

Biographical Notes

Karen Murray is currently a centrally assigned principal for Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression in the Toronto District School Board. She engages in work with educators, administrators and superintendents to deepen their understanding in these areas. Karen leads the TDSB initiative Black Students Success & Excellence from K-12.

Nicole West-Burns, PhD, is a professional development consultant on equity issues. For over a decade, Nicole has worked with school boards across the province of Ontario. Nicole is currently a co-facilitator, research partner and critical friend with Toronto District School Board in multiple initiatives related to Black student achievement.

Stefanie De Jesus received her doctorate from Western University and is currently a research coordinator with the Toronto District School Board. Her work involves researching and evaluating policies, programs and services in areas such as equity and anti-racism, early years, professional learning and support models, staff well-being and student discipline.

Sarah Armson received her doctorate from the University of Oxford and is currently a research analyst with the Toronto District School Board. She supports a wide range of research at the TDSB including program and policy evaluations in areas such as French programming, equity and anti-racism training, and early years reading.

David Cameron is a senior research manager with the Toronto District School Board. He is an educator and education policy sociologist with research interests in school change and the interrelationship between educational policy intentions or design and peoples' experiences with policy frameworks.

Aakriti Kapoor is a researcher and educator with interests in anti-racist education policy and knowledge mobilization of equity literacy. She currently works as a research and information analyst at the Toronto District School Board and is also a Canada Graduate Doctoral Scholar at Queen's University's Faculty of Education.

Carl E. James holds the Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora in the Faculty of Education at York University. His research examines how race, ethnicity, gender, class and citizenship/immigrant status intersect and mediate accessible and equitable opportunities and outcomes in education and employment for racialized youth—Black youth, in particular.

Beatrice Anane-Bediakoh is a fourth-year PhD in Sociology candidate at York University. Her academic work is motivated by her unwavering commitment to the collective struggle for Black freedoms and life forms. Her dissertation focuses on racialized spatial practices of concealment and boundary-making in Toronto and the Region of Peel that obscure Black personhood(s).