Black Voices

Of Students, Staff and Families of TCDSB

Toronto Catholic
District School Board

November 2022
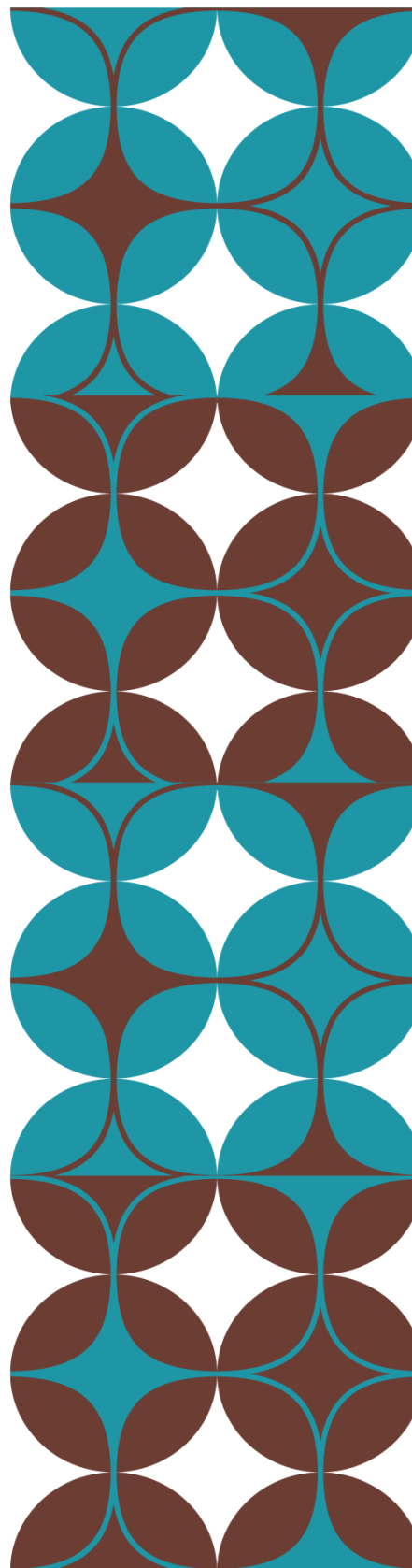
Acknowledgements

The research analyzed and summarized in the Black Voices Study is the result of a collaboration between the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), the African Canadian Advisory Committee (ACAC), the Department of Equity, Diversity, Indigenous Education, and Community Relations, the Equity and Human Rights Advisor Office (HREA), and the Department of Educational Research.

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The African Canadian Advisory Committee (ACAC) is devoted to ensuring that the interests of all TCDSB members – students, staff, parents, and stakeholders – are advanced within the African Diaspora. The ACAC strives to provide "success in areas of Black student achievement and well-being, Black parental engagement, and Black staff development within the operations of Catholic educational service delivery, based on data that enhance culturally relevant and responsive pedological practices" (Toronto Catholic District School Board, n.d).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to explicate the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism that lives within the TCDSB. No school board is without it despite efforts to provide racialized individuals with safe and inclusive spaces; anti-Black racism and anti-Blackness continuously invades the Canadian education system. As noted by Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021), "[e]ducation and schooling continues to be the site of anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism". For Black students and staff to succeed, we must examine their experiences of racism within the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB).

The Black Voices Study was a critical inquiry that was undertaken to analyze and amplify the voices of Black students, staff, and parents within the TCDSB. The analysis and findings in this report will be used to inform the Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy Plan and the TCDSB Equity Action Plan. In addition to informing TCDSB strategic documents, we expect that the subsequent reflection and voices in this report will help improve educational practices and build a stronger relationship with Black students, staff, and parents within the TCDSB.

We conducted focus groups with Black students, (n = 21) Black teachers and administrators, (n = 17) and surveys with Black staff (n = 297), and, Black Parents, Guardians and Caregivers (n = 711) whose children attend TCDSB. We heard from a total of 1,046 voices. Based on the information communicated, significant work must be done to address anti-Black racism and anti-Blackness at the TCDSB. One of the most resonant findings from this study is the fact that the TCDSB needs to enact more diverse and equitable hiring practices to address the lack of Black teacher and leader representation. A lack of Black teacher representation results in Black students reported being heavily scrutinized by teachers, hall monitors, and principals. Staff/administrators and parents also noted that in comparison to Black students, White students are more likely to be pardoned from infractions.

Summarized Recommendations for the TCDSB include:

1. Mandated professional and sensitivity training for all TCDSB staff;
2. Ensure and monitor inclusive teaching and curriculum with authentic Culturally Responsive and Relevant content (CRRP);
3. Design and communicate strategies for the ethical and diverse hiring of Black staff and teachers;
4. Provide increased supports for the Black community;
5. Immediately implement a Black Student Association, and;
6. Design, implement and monitor a racism reporting tool.

In summary, the Black Voices Study sought to move equity forward by amplifying typically neglected and marginalized voices. The end objective was to gain the Black perspective, examining and identifying gaps within the Board. Using qualitative and quantitative analyses, the Black Voices Study allowed for a deeper conversation regarding the prevalence of anti-Black racism – providing direct empirical evidence from staff, students, and parents.

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INTRODUCTION

Canada prides itself on being inclusive and multicultural, accepting and celebrating its various identities. This assumption often leads many to believe that anti-Black racism is only prevalent in the United States or is non-existent in Canada. Jeff Reitz notes that "Canadians have as part of their self-image the belief in being inclusive, open, multicultural […] it would be inconsistent to then believe that there's pervasive discrimination" (Voices of Ontario Black Educators, 2015, p.3). However, research and studies point to the prevalence of anti-Black racism. Recent findings point to the racial disproportionality in streaming and the over-policing of Black students resulting in higher incidents of discipline, suspensions, and expulsions compared to White students (Ontario, 2017). For instance, Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan indicates that there is an unbalanced number of students from low-income, racialized, Indigenous, and special needs education in applied courses resulting in their underrepresentation among students who graduate and pursue post-secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2017, p.16). The Ministry's plan further states that these students are further overrepresented in data regarding suspensions and expulsions (Ministry of Education, 2017, p.16).

Critical Black Education scholars such as Lopez and Jean-Marie contend that "[e]ducation and schooling continues to be the site of anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism. Black students and families are often constructed as the problem, pathologized […] families are not perceived as resourceful and knowledgeable" (2021, p.54). Parents of Black Children (PoBC), an advocacy group that supports and advocates on behalf of Black children and families, developed a school racism reporting tool. Data collected indicated that 24 percent of cases came from Catholic school boards (2022). They further note that "many of the more egregious instances of harm to Black students are coming from the Catholic School Boards in Ontario" (Parents of Black Children (PoBC) ,2022, p.13). Similarly, 4.6 percent of cases (14 cases) came from the Toronto Catholic District School Board (PoBC, 2022, p.12).

Anti-Black racism affects not only students but educational staff as well. In 2022, The Parents of Black Children (PoBC) report stated that 57% of Black staff working in Ontario school boards report negative experiences such as stereotyping, microaggressions and discrimination. The authors of the PoBC report further argued that "Black educators and administrators who are doing the work of eradicating and dismantling anti-Black racism are often targets of abuse and harassment" (2022, p.6). Similarly, Brown (2015) found that Black educators in Ontario experienced racism on the job, stating that being Black impacted their chances of promotion, heard the "N" word used in staff rooms, and have been mistaken as a trespasser.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that not all individuals have the same experiences and perceptions as the dominant White identity. This is a critical report, meaning it challenges dominant narratives about education in Ontario. This report aims to bring awareness to the experiences of Black students, staff, and parents at the TCDSB. Examining the experiences of Black students, staff, and parents will allow for increased awareness and understanding of how anti-Black racism is contextually prevalent within the TCDSB.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers Positionality

Author 1: Natalie Young, M.A., identifies as a Black woman with lived experience within the Canadian education system. Attending school in Ontario, Canada, lived experience means that the author has personally been impacted by the implications of colonialism, anti-Blackness, and anti-Black racism, and how the Canadian education system continues to oppress racialized groups in Canada. The author's goal is not to speak on behalf of participants but to showcase their varying experiences of anti-Black racism and their experiences as Black individuals within the TCDSB.

Author 2: Brandy Doan, Ph.D., identifies as a middle-class, able-bodied, White woman who brings certain privileges, perspectives, and assumptions to her research. Dr. Doan is the Chief of Educational Research at the TCDSB and an adjunct associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Windsor University, where she engages in feminist anti-oppression and anti-racist research using critical mixed methods. Her work continues to inform her commitment to social justice. Dr. Doan acknowledges and understands that by reading, listening, and feeling the experiences of others, she will never fully understand the lived experiences of racialized people. As such, she works to continue to push boundaries and humbly offer allyship with respect to social change.

Both authors of this paper analyzed the data and wrote the findings. There were different researchers and staff involved in the original design of the focus groups and surveys. The sampling, recording of data and survey deployment were done prior to the first and second authors employment in their current roles at the TCDSB.

Study Design

This study was pluralistic in design, meaning we utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to explain context, truth and lived experience. The design was intentionally created to ensure a holistic picture of Black experience. The multiple quantitative survey results support and validate the qualitative focus group voices. Findings from both methods of inquiry support research from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and research on anti-Black racism from around the world.

Qualitative research methods aim to describe, understand, and explain the experience in the context of social processes. It is not objective nor intended to be generalizable to all populations (Creswell, 2013). The term qualitative research is used to describe a set of approaches that analyze data in the form of natural language (i.e., words) and expressions of experiences based on logic and inquiry. It is the process of examining meanings within an iterative process and looking for patterns to analyze. Patterns emerge in the analysis and lend to new ways of understanding (Levitt et al., 2018). The data presented in this paper represent patterns in experiences across parents/caregivers and guardians, staff and students. High-quality qualitative research is judged by its trustworthiness, logic and transparency, which is based on the judgments of its readers and its ability to be presented to them in a convincing manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In summary, the value of qualitative research is not to present data that explains everyone's experiences but to share data about the shared experiences of Black students and staff who share the same social context.

Traditional quantitative methods are treated by academics, the media and policy makers as different and superior to qualitative methods reporting numbers as facts, objective, authoritative and neutral. Numbers used in this way can be used to ensure inequality is upheld and legitimized (Gillborn et al., 2018). Alternatively, critical quantitative (QuanCrit) research methods are a relatively new approach, grounded in social justice and critical theory based on six assumptions First, the analysis of quantitatively collected data such as the survey data presented here, are based on the assumption that structural racism and oppression exists is central to the analysis. Second, data and methods are not neutral or "objective," meaning questions in the survey were designed in context to the reality that racism is an explicit fact. The third assumption posits that data cannot speak for itself. Fourth, identity is socially constructed. Fifth, identity is also dimensional and intersectional. The last assumption in critical quantitative methods requires researchers to place great value on lived experience (i.e., acknowledging power and privilege).

Thus, all data were critically analyzed using the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT has been utilized to address the challenges racialized individuals experience (Lopez, 2020). It is arguably one of the most important approaches globally for the study of racial inequality (Gillborn et al., 2018). The majority of racism remains hidden beneath a facade of normality and it is only the more obvious forms of racism that are seen as difficult by most people (Gillborn, 2018; Lopez, 2020). CRT in this research context was used as an analytic method only, not as a teaching philosophy. As noted by Lopez (2020), "CRT is offered as a tool to analyze race and racism in general, it is, at its inception in education […] an attempt to make sense of and respond to institutional racism, as this racism is experienced and endured by Black people" (p.1938). For Black people our stories can be a form of resistance and healing. CRT is meant to bring an alternative and amplified perspective to voices who are relegated to social margins and its dispelling notions of colorblindness to better understand the disparities present in our society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data Sources

This report utilizes analysis of qualitative focus-group data that was collected by the Toronto Catholic District School Boards' Educational Research and Equity Departments on behalf of the African Canadian Advisory Committee (ACAC). In addition to the focus groups, we also collected primary data from surveys. Both the focus groups questions, discussion items and surveys were developed in collaboration with Charis Newton-Thompson, a member of the ACAC, the TCDSB Educational Research department, TCDSB Equity department, with input from Black Catholic Student Leadership Impact Team (CSLIT) members, several Black teachers and a Black social worker. Focus group questions were developed to facilitate conversation allowing participants to share their experiences and perspectives. Focus groups and surveys were managed through the Equity Department and coordinated with self-identified Black focus group facilitators and note-takers. Black students and staff were invited to participate in the focus groups through various communication strategies. CSLIT and the student leadership team helped facilitate the call out or invitation to all TCDSB Secondary Students of African Descent who identify as Black to participate through social media and posters they helped co-develop. This was also further promoted through school-level student councils. For staff, the invitation was sent to all teachers (and then all administrators) through the global email system; it was intended for anyone identifying as Black. Staff who ran the focus groups were all Black identifying. The staff who ran

the focus groups transcribed the discussions into Word documents during the focus groups for subsequent analysis. This was done to remove any identifying information about the students and staff who participated in the focus groups. There were separate focus groups for students, teachers, and administrators; these were organized by geographic areas, as well as by panel (elementary/secondary) for teachers and administrators. The qualitative analysis of these transcripts was conducted by the second author of this paper.

RESULTS

Part A – Focus Group Results: Black Students

Focus groups were held between December 2020 – February 2021 across the city. There was a total of 21 Black-identifying students from grades 9-12 who participated. Analyzed data from the focus groups are presented in themes as they emerged in the data. Quotes to support the themes are verbatim notes of the direct quotes facilitators and note-takers recorded during the focus groups.

Student Demographics

Participants discussed racial/ethnic representation within their school. Students within the focus group indicated that they were the minority within the school. One student noted, as summarized by facilitators, that most of the students in their school were of Asian descent (Filipino, Chinese, Korean), followed by White students (primarily Italian). Another student echoed this sentiment stating that European and Asian students dominated the school. A female participant further expressed that within her school, she could count the number of Black students on one hand.

Having limited Black student representation within one's schools may cause an individual to feel isolated or displaced. For instance, facilitators wrote:

> "[I] don't really go to anyone. Mostly I just go home and cry and keep going because you don't want to make it worse or alienate yourself, especially because of the disproportionate population of White and Asian students to Black students and the fact that you have to be around them for the rest of your time in school."

> "Going to a predominantly white school, you do what you're told to do so that you don't stand out badly. When it comes to authority figures like teachers, you don't speak up and mess up your chances or grades. For example, when a White male teacher said he doesn't see colour, [I] didn't challenge him even though [I] wanted to. […] White fragility makes bringing up the topic of race very touchy."

Microaggressions

Microaggressions can be characterized as every-day, subtle, intentional – and often unintentional – interactions or behaviours that communicate bias towards historically marginalized groups (Sue et al., 2007). Students shared their experiences with microaggressions. According to facilitators and note-takers, students said:

> "I feel like it's ingrained. A lot of people make jokes, and you just get tired of it, or you don't pay attention to it. Sometimes, I feel like they are not open-minded. For example, one time when the lights were off someone said, "I can't see you." Nothing serious, mainly around jokes. I just roll my eyes and ignore it. They know I'm not laughing with them, but I don't say anything."

"I was called to the office because of my head wrap. I was told, "you are on the Student Council, we expected more from you." I was wondering why I should be looked down upon because of a head wrap. I had to get a note, they were questioning how long I was going to be able to wear the wrap. "When is your hair going to be done?". They wanted a timeline for me being "allowed" to wear my head wrap."

"I've witnessed a teacher ask a Black female student to take off her wig. Even though the girl didn't want to get in trouble or escalate the situation, [I] refused to take off the wig. Also, while studying the book, *How to Kill a Mockingbird*, the teacher kept using the 'N-word.'"

Stereotypes

Stereotypes can be considered characteristics imposed on groups of individuals because of their race, nationality, or sexual orientation (Nittle, 2021). Such characteristics are simplifications of the groups involved. Within the focus groups, participants expressed that they were negatively stereotyped by teachers. To illustrate, facilitators wrote students said:

"Some of the Black students, especially the males, fit into the stereotypes that the teachers think of them as being unfocused, rowdy. So as long as she was not like "them" (the other Black students) then it is "whatever." But no expectations to be better. No personal expectations to be great."

"[…] one of my teachers had low expectations of me. I felt like she had preconceived notions. Then, she looked at my file and told me she was impressed, and I was offended that she was so surprised I was a good student".

Opportunities

Students within the focus groups believed that, in comparison to other students, they were not offered or awarded the same opportunities as non-Black students. As noted by a facilitator, one participant expressed that due to the school being predominately White, they felt that more is expected from White students. The student further stated that the school is racist and prejudiced to students of colour based on their home environment – "they do not have the same opportunities as non-students of colour". Another participant stated within the focus group that within their school, many students are on IEPs, resulting in less opportunities.

Students further expressed:

"[…] The demographics determine the opportunities. Not a lot of Black students stepping up to leadership positions. There is just one Black girl in the student council."

"[…] teachers have their favourite students and tend to give more opportunities to their favourites. Which goes back to as long as you do "good enough."

"Teachers will only look to their favourites and not to us (Black students). Black students have to jump to get opportunities. Teachers do not let Black students know about opportunities. They say it low-key to their favourite students, which their favourites are usually Filipinos. Black students have to go directly to the teacher to get any opportunities."

Student Expectations

Students highlighted that they did not believe that they were given high expectations by teachers within their school.

"[…] the reason students of colour do not believe they have the same opportunities as non-students of colour is a combination of 1) not being offered many opportunities and 2) having lower expectations from teachers."

"I don't think that there are any expectations for me to do anything. I don't really feel any type of pressure or feel like I'm getting any special treatment."

"[…] expectations are much higher for non-Black students because Black and other students of colour are usually at the bottom. People in the school do not expect them to succeed. White students are most likely to get help to reach their goals as opposed to Black and other students of colour."

A notetaker further summarized that one participant stated that teachers did not have high expectations for them or Black students. One student explained that one of her teachers would degrade all Black students or students who did not come from Asia. According to this participant, the teacher would shout and consistently come after students of colour.

Experiences of Anti-Black Racism

Students further discussed that they have experienced anti-Black racism from students and teachers. One facilitator wrote that one participant stated they felt as if their teacher favoured Filipino students over Black students. The participant expressed that this specific teacher would cluster them into groups – having Filipino students closer to the teacher's desk and Black students towards the corners of the classroom. Students that were placed closer to the desk received high marks, whereas students further would be given 60s. The participant further stated that Black students would never get their assignments back or grades on their papers and that feedback was vague. The teacher's attitude made it feel as if they were doing them a favour by giving a mark that was higher than 60.

"[I have] 100% experienced anti-Black racism and microaggressions within the TCDSB. She stated being the only Black girl in her 4th-grade class and that she was a stubborn student but not problematic. [I] remember always being isolated from [my] classmates with her desk being away from the group and her teacher never assisting her. [I] also recall an incident involving the use of the N-word by a teacher in Ottawa when she was on a field trip. [A] Black male were discussing whether it was appropriate to use the term, but non-Black students kept insisting it was ok to use since it was not used in a derogatory way."

"[…] Board-wide there is a problem. I haven't heard about what goes on in other schools, but I see it on Instagram."

Participants further discussed the use of derogatory words and comments by non-Black students and teachers.

"[…] the use of the N-word by non-Black students when listening to rap music as they are heavily influenced by pop culture. They stated they experienced mistreatment from teachers who have singled them out from behaviours the White counterparts also engage in. The student reflected on a time when a teacher who did not identify as Black, authorized the use of the N-word in class while reading the novel, To Kill a Mockingbird. The participant did not believe it was the teacher's place to make this decision. Beyond the use of the N-word, the participant also identified actions of teachers being less tolerant of Black students than White students."

"An administrator made a comment about Black students that was derogatory. In elementary school, during school dances, jokes were made about not seeing the dark-skinned students when the lights were turned off. Comments have been made […] about the size of their lips, and the student just shrugged it off and walked away because it wasn't seen as a big deal."

School Culture

Students indicated that, at times, they did not believe that their culture was reflected in the teaching curriculum and the school culture. Participants further expressed that although there are attempts to be inclusive, it can sometimes be seen as performative.

Examples of student statements, facilitators wrote the following:

"Black culture acknowledgment is limited to a Black History club and a multicultural luncheon once a year. […] the school includes these two representations just to say that they did it rather than actually caring."

"[…] they will bring Black speakers to talk about their experiences to the school but only during February. And in the cafeteria, they are allowed to play rap music, but it's the students, the school is not a part of that."

"[…] past Black alumni from the school would come and talk to them about their past experiences and their career. But it does not happen often, every few years. […] students of different races love to [culturally] appropriate the Black culture. And that the cafeteria destroys the only cultural food of theirs they have to sell – the beef patty."

Interacting with Staff

Students within the focus groups discussed interactions with staff and administrators within their schools. Participants shared stories where Black students experience harsher discipline and are treated more aggressively by staff/administrators.

> "In terms of other student experiences, there is a more of a watchful heavy eye on certain students when it comes to teachers, hall monitors and principals. The expectations are higher and vary for each gender. Black males in the hallway will have a heavier eye than White male students. I feel like the punishment is based on race. These can also be seen through micro-aggressions. There are different expectations for Black students/ certain behaviour (where they expect the Black girl to behave/react in a certain way as opposed to a non-Black student)."

> "From what I have seen it is very biased. In my Grade 10 gym class, the Black male students were reprimanded a lot but praised for Basketball. Maybe the teacher didn't mean to do it in that way. I felt like it was different for different students."

> "[…] it is a lot worst for Black students. It is like constant yelling at Black students. For uniforms, talking loudly in the hallway, teachers are unnecessarily louder at the Black students. They can make excuses because it's in a hallway, but they are louder to discipline the Black students, especially inside the classroom."

What We Heard: Key Takeaways

♦ Students discussed the lack of racial and Black representation within their school in regard to students and staff, teaching curriculum, and Black culture.
♦ Students felt as if they were negatively stereotyped, hyper-surveilled, and disproportionately disciplined.

Part B – Focus Group Results: Staff/Administrators

Results discussed in the proceeding are the sum of various focus groups held between April – July 2021. Participants included a combination of 17 Black administrators and teachers. Administrator and teacher focus groups were held separately, however to protect identity due to small numbers of participants, it could be identifying, we present staff voice data collectively. Similar to Part A, the data is presented in themes. The quotes are verbatim notes from Black note-takers and facilitators within the focus groups.

Workplace Perceptions of Identity

Staff and administrators discussed both student and staff demographics. Black staff and administrators stated that they were the only Black teacher within their school and that the population was predominantly White. As noted by facilitators, one participant stated that he was the only Black male in his school. Another participant stated: "Staff is predominantly Caucasian with a few teachers of African and South Asian heritage."

Student Expectations

Within the focus group, participants discussed Black student expectations and if they are the same in comparison to non-Black students. A participant discussed how students are viewed when they succeed in teacher expectations and the negative connotations associated with it.

Examples from several facilitators:

> "The expectations are not the same. Some teachers are surprised when a Black student does well. They often gravitate to looking for reasons why the students are doing well rather than acknowledging the fact that these students are succeeding in school because of their knowledge base and the work that they are putting in. They would rather ask the following questions: Does their doing well have to do with where they live? Are the parents well too? Do they come from a stable home with both parents in the picture?"

> "I had overheard someone say that a certain student's experience is not demonstrative of a Black experience because they came from a good home, which really threw me off and that came from a friend and colleague. It was very disappointing to hear because it was from somebody that I respected and considered to be a friend."

One participant expressed that student expectations are based on socio-economic issues and students who come from single-parent homes. Staff set lower expectations for students who come from "poor" or single-parent homes, and these students are usually racialized. The participant stated in the focus group that there is a notion that a two-parent household is more stable, so higher expectations are set for these students. The participant believes that students who come from poor homes or single-parent households should be given the same high expectations.

Several facilitators wrote:

"The expectations are not the same. Whether this is due to socioeconomic factors like (lower income or single parenting) or race I am not certain. The two things cannot be separated in my mind. I cannot divorce race from money or economics."

"There are low expectations, and it is linked to their home situation. There is this "pity." Black students are not expected to succeed because of this perception of their home challenges."

"The expectations for Black students are low. My school is a very diverse school with a mix of two major sets of students. We have students living in condos with both parents. Then we have students living with a parent or sometimes two of them in public housing. For anyone in public housing, there are low expectations. It's basically White students living in condos and everyone else in public income housing."

Student Discipline

Participants within the focus group shared stories that Black students, compared to non-Black students, were hyper-surveilled and disciplined more by staff/administration. One focus group facilitator wrote, "White students seem to be pardoned for infractions more than Black students. This participant gave an example of a time when he was approached by a White colleague seeking a White student to be allowed back on the volleyball team despite the student's behaviour. No one spoke up for the Black student who was given the same consequence for the same behaviour."

Several facilitators provided examples of disparities between the application of discipline by race:

"There was a time when we had Black students hanging out at the school, and we would constantly talk about issues of discipline a lot of times they were sticking around at the school because it was a permit and because it's a safe place. But you got 15 youths together, and they're going to fool around and look like trouble. In terms of sporting events, they started saying no spectators for basketball games for disciplinary issues, and I don't recall spectators being banned from watching any other sports in the school."

"I noticed students that were vaping outside and not going to school weren't getting in as much trouble as a Black student who was maybe lingering in the hallways. Students that didn't go to class were responded to differently. It seemed more aggressive than the other situation of lingering" (Quote shortened).

"White students seem to be pardoned for infractions more than Black students. This participant gave an example of a time when they were approached by a White colleague who was asking about a White student to be allowed back on the volleyball team despite the student's behaviour. No one spoke up for the Black student who was given the same consequence for the same behaviour."

Opportunities for Black Students

Staff/administrators within the focus group shared that Black students in their schools were not offered or provided with the same opportunities as their non-Black student counterparts.

Facilitator quotes:

> "Students are not given opportunities to be leaders. There are opportunities in the school, but Black students often have things going on that they are not able to address with anyone. The kids do not feel included. Black students will come out to participate in extra-curricular activities because I, as a person of colour, was coaching. Students can't participate in sports because their teachers did not let them because they had not done homework. So, these students were not given opportunities to do anything outside of the classroom."

> "No. Caucasian administrators and teachers seem to pick and provide Caucasian students with more leadership opportunities. There needs to be intentionality on the part of admin and staff to provide racialized students with these opportunities so as for them to show their leadership skills."

> "I can't say a strong yes that the Black students are given opportunities to be leaders. Not always. Students who are misunderstood or considered behavioural are not given opportunities to be seen in a positive light. Therefore, these students are disadvantaged. These students are not given leadership roles."

Another respondent further explained that within their school, leadership opportunities often go to students whose parents have provided the school with monetary donations.

> "[…] observed that Leadership opportunities in her school often go to parents who donate a lot of money to the school. Money talks in their school where the parent community are quite affluent."

Opportunities for Black Staff

Black staff/administrators communicated they were not offered similar opportunities to their non-Black counterparts. For instance, a focus group participant stated that when applying for a position within the board, although they had the qualifications and believed they performed well in the interview, however, they were still not successful. The participant stated that when looking into the list of successful candidates they were better qualified than most of the other applicants.

Participants further discussed that Black staff and administration need to be better represented. Many noted that this could be done through better hiring practices, making more opportunities visible to Black staff/administrators, and having more diverse committees within the board. Some participants noted that taking such steps would benefit Black students.

"I have worked at the Board for about five years. I don't see a lot of representation at a board level in terms of minority groups. I remember looking around and thinking to myself, "Where are we?" So, I don't know what's happening there. Is it that we are not applying? I feel like there could be more diversity in the higher echelons."

"[…] I do think the board can make us aware of some of the things that are available to us centrally. I think that it would be really good if some of these committees at the board were diverse. After all, it would be […] good if it wasn't just the responsibility of Black teachers to talk about Anti-Black racism or Black history."

"TCDSB should hire more Black and racialized staff so that students can see themselves represented. Representation matters."

Pathways for Black Students

Participants felt that Black students are often streamed into specific programs or areas. To illustrate:

"There are different pathways available; however, most students are streamed into Applied or Locally developed programs. If there are opportunities at those levels then they are given a chance. However, we need Black students to focus more and put forth the effort. They have to work twice as hard."

"I definitely think at my school we have more applied and college-bound courses at our school. That's because when they started, they were taking applied courses. We had 400 students, and everything was virtually applied college level. Most students are at the applied level; in some cases, I would like to say to some students why are you in this class, you should be at a higher level. Students in our school have a lot of other issues outside of school and are missing so much and have gaps. […]. It usually comes down to the students' confidence because they don't feel they are good enough to complete the course, and when you call the parents and tell them they really don't understand."

"Most Black students go to college, do apprenticeships or go on to workplaces after graduating. Most get jobs in high schools and just continue because they need the money or they don't value the money over what education might do for them. They might not have access to money if OSAP is not available. They may not know how to get bursaries."

Another participant noted that there should be more advocacy for alternative pathways:

"Students do graduate, and there's a lot of work that needs to be done in terms of the pathways, we shouldn't just look at College or University as the only options. I tried to push a lot of students towards the trades, and it's difficult to tell a lot of these parents this. Black parents for example, that are African think this is the only way to be successful; they must know what the different pathways are, I think it's important to educate families and staff as to why it's important."

Staff and administration shared they believed that pathway guidance and high school preparation should begin during the elementary years and continue onwards to further support Black student success.

> "[…] grade 7 and 8 is too late to have students thinking about high school. We should start earlier in the Junior division. In Junior, we can have students start thinking about their passions and interests. I have had many conversations over the years with Black students. I think that mentorship programs for Black students where they get to witness Black professionals and educators would be great. Students can come to see that success can come in many different forms."

Experiences of Racism

Black staff and administrators discussed situations in which Black students have confided in them about experiences of anti-Black racism.

> "[…] I have been told a lot about anti-Black racism. I think it's always the topic of conversation in my school. Particularly from a behavioural standpoint. I think it's always a topic of conflict with parent and parent communication. Kids are aware of it. In our school, we have to address it. There is a good population of kids who understand the injustice and the social ills faced by Blacks. I think it can be used by some who feel targeted."

> "I get complaints about this a lot. Kids will come and tell you that a student called them the N-word. Instances like this happen all the time, almost every day. Kids will comment that so and so talked about my hair or my skin colour. The kids who speak this way, they get it from somewhere. They come to school with those attitudes that they get from home. Maybe their parents will speak this way. So, it is there. We cannot deny that."

One facilitator wrote about one participant who shared their experience where a Black student was called the 'N-word by a White student. The participant thought that the White student would be suspended but he was not. After inquiring with administrators about what would happen following this infraction, the response they gave her was that the student pronounced the word differently from the way the 'N-word is typically pronounced.

Black staff and administrators further discussed their personal experiences of anti-Black racism within the board.

> "I have witnessed and experienced microaggressions from staff and from admin. It is hard to explain. It is a feeling of not being welcomed and being targeted. I did not understand it at first. When I was experiencing it from admin, I thought maybe it was because I was a new teacher and maybe I didn't understand my role as a specialty teacher within the school. I was the only person of colour on staff. It was always me getting into trouble. I would get called into the office right away or when parents are complaining. There would be a meeting right away instead of following the proper process. I did speak to the Union, but I didn't mention the racial piece because I did not think that I could prove it. I knew that no one would admit that I was being targeted because of my race. At another school, I have

had other teachers accuse me of being aggressive when I was just making my point calmly. I feel like I have experienced racism. This is terrible because we are supposed to be role models for the kids."

"During the rounds to get a permanent job, I went for an interview. I've been told that I look great on paper. I got the interview, and so I went. I was on time. The principal walks in, takes one look at me and says, "You're not going to fit in here." That was the interview. Looking back, I think I should have taken that on. But at the time, no. So, I moved on. I said to myself that I probably didn't want to work with him anyway. But it was a traumatic experience."

Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP) and School Culture

Culturally responsive and relevant teaching or pedagogy can be understood as teaching that supports the achievements of all students (Richards et al., 2007). The authors contend that within culturally responsive classrooms, "effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally supported, learner-centred context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement" (p.64).

Staff and administrators were asked if they believed the curriculum and school culture were culturally responsive or reflective of Black culture. Participants expressed the need for Black culture to be incorporated into the teaching curriculum and for continuous discussions of Black culture year-round.

Examples from facilitator notes:

"[…] Black kids don't see themselves in the Canadian curriculum. I think that there should be a greater effort to really identify the experiences of blacks in the curriculum. I was 21 years old on a Black history tour in Toronto when I realized for the first time that there had been black slavery in Canada. That's problematic. What exactly are we teaching in our classrooms? There was this idea that slavery was an American thing. But that is not true. It happened right here. So, talking about this is important. It helps people realize that it is happening here as well."

"Non-Black colleagues are afraid of saying the wrong thing. As a Black teacher, leadership in this area is thrust upon you. Sometimes it is successful, and sometimes, it is not. At one school I was at, I was asked to do a Black history presentation. I was the only Black teacher. It was just me. And I did the standard Martin Luther King presentation. I spoke about his dream, and then I asked the students to talk about their own dreams. During the presentation, I could see my teacher colleagues looking at the sky and looking at the ground. It was so uncomfortable. The following year, I was not asked to do it again. It is such an uncomfortable topic. That does not mean we should not do it. That is exactly why we should do it. I've also had the experience of teachers saying to me that since we only had a sprinkling of Black students, we don't need to do Black history."

A focus group participant further discussed the importance of Black students seeing themselves reflected within their schools.

> "[…] [t]here needs to be more opportunities for students to see themselves in their local communities. We need to give them the opportunity for them to think about who they want to be and what they want to do when they leave. I think there need to be more opportunities for empowerment."

Support for Black Students

Participants discussed ways to provide better support for Black students. Staff and administrators expressed the need for more conversations between all TCDSB stakeholders (e.g., parents/guardians/caregivers, parish, students, staff, Trustees). Examples from facilitator notes:

> "I think that there are three parts (school, home and church) […]. We need to work better together. There needs to be more community. We need to communicate better. There shouldn't be separate entities. There shouldn't be home over here and then school over there. I was at one school where everyone [worked] together. It was one community of parents and teachers and children and everyone together. It was wonderful to see that. Everyone was represented."

> "The Black Community needs support from the Board. Parenting support from professionals would be valuable. These kids have potential, but they require more assistance from their parents. We need to help support parents."

> "I think that more should be done around anti-Black racism. It shouldn't just be the principal. It should also be the Board's initiative. I just took an Indigenous education AQ that was paid by the board. This is an excellent way to support change."

A participant further noted that visual representations of Black excellence would aid in supporting students.

> "Having pictures of alumni in the hallways and in the gym that way students know what people have done in the past. Having a visual representation of excellence or Black excellence so that it would vibrate around the school. In my office, I think you would see Black excellence in terms of representing my culture and who I am and what I'm about. I would hope it would be an open and warm environment that any student could come into."

What We Heard: Key Takeaways

♦ Staff discussed the lack of other Black staff working within their school. At times, respondents were the only Black staff within their school. They further expressed that the school population was often predominantly White.
♦ The majority of the staff spoke about their experiences of racism which included, microaggressions, and stereotypes.

Part C - Survey Results: Staff and Administrator Voice

Black staff and administrators were invited to participate in an anonymous survey regarding their experiences within the TCDSB board in March 2022. There were 297 participants who consented to participate in the survey. Detailed results in tables can be found in Appendix A. A summary of the findings is presented here.

Please note that sample sizes in each section may vary as some respondents did not answer all survey questions. The low response rates to some of these questions indicate staff were either not comfortable with the questions or they did not trust that the survey was truly anonymous.

Demographics

Respondents were asked a series of demographic questions. There were 297 respondents who responded to the question, for this survey the term 'Black' includes people of African, Afro-Caribbean and/or African Canadian descent? The majority, 163 (55%), indicated they were Black, followed by 29 (10%) who indicated that they were Black bi-racial. There were 36 (12%) who indicated that they were Black multi-racial, 35 (12%) indicated that their race was not listed, and, 34 (11%) did not answer the question.

The survey then asked respondents to provide some indication about the role they worked in at TCDSB. Out of the 297 respondents who responded to this question, 191 (64%) stated that they were school-based, 16 (5%) stated that they were non-school-based, 13 (4%) stated that they were a combination (e.g., centrally based and/or support schools) and 77 (26%) did not answer the question.

Respondents were asked to describe the visible demographics of their workplace, however, 93% of survey respondents did not answer this question. The few who did, stated they were either the only Black staff member or that there were only a few Black staff members at their workplace.

Black Student Expectations and Opportunities

Respondents were asked if they believed there were high expectations and opportunities for Black students. Out of the 297 who answered the survey, only 108 individuals answered this question. Of the 108, only 19% strongly agreed there were high expectations and opportunities. Forty-six provided explanations to their answers. Respondents expressed that Black students are not encouraged in comparison to other students are often stereotyped, and that expectations are dependent on the teacher. When survey respondents were asked to comment on whether or not they believed Black students had the same high expectations and opportunities as non-Black students, only 124 answered the question. Nineteen percent strongly agreed that Black students were similar to non-Black students in expectations and opportunities, while 22% somewhat agreed, another 22% somewhat disagreed, 15% strongly disagreed with this statement, and 22% said they didn't know. When asked to provide explanations, 37 people provided comments stating that Black students are stereotyped, judged, experience inequalities when it comes to opportunities, and have lower expectations in comparison to White students.

A similar pattern emerged when asked about whether Black students were given leadership opportunities. Of the 106 who replied to this question, 20% strongly agreed, 27% somewhat agreed, 16% somewhat disagreed and 13% strongly disagreed with the statement. Thirty percent of individuals provided explanations. Participants expressed that Black students are provided with opportunities, but the opportunities are dependent on the student, and stereotypes can have an impact on opportunities given to Black students.

Black Staff Opportunities

Respondents were asked if they believed that Black staff are given as many opportunities to be leaders as other staff. There were 102 responses to this question. A small number, (4%) indicated that Black staff are given more opportunities to be leaders than other staff, 41% indicated Black staff are given less leadership opportunities than other staff, 16% stated it was equal, 21% were unsure, and 18% selected "other".

Pathways for Black Students

Respondents were asked about the pathways Black students are on when they graduate and their opinions on Black students successfully completing their high school education. There were 106 respondents who answered the question, "which pathway(s) are most Black students on when they graduate from high school?" Four percent indicated that they were on the pathway to apprenticeship, 21% indicated that they believed most Black students were on the pathway to college, 8% indicated that they were on the pathway to university and 13% indicated they believed most Black students were going into the workforce. Half of those who responded to this question stated they were unsure (50%) and 4% selected "other".

Participants were then asked if they believed Black students are typically successful in completing their high school education. Of the 125 who answered this question, 34% said they weren't sure. Almost half (47%) strongly or somewhat agreed that Black students successfully graduate. On the other hand, 18% somewhat or strongly disagreed that Black students do not successfully graduate.

Student Discipline

Respondents were asked about the differences in discipline when it comes to Black students. Compared to other students, a little more than half, 53% of the 105 who answered this question believed that Black students at the TCDSB are disciplined more severely for the same or a similar situation. One quarter believed it to be about equal (22%) and a small number of respondents believed that Black students were disciplined less severely (5%). Approximately a quarter stated they weren't sure (20%). When asked to explain their answer, respondents stated that Black students are suspended or threatened with suspension by principals, staff have a lower tolerance for Black students, and that Black students are treated unfairly when it comes to discipline.

Support for Black Students

There were over 60 comments discussing how to support Black students during their transition to kindergarten. Respondents stated that creating better relationships with Black families through

parent and information nights will help support Black students. Respondents further expressed that understanding cultural differences, implementing a more diverse curriculum, and hiring more Black/racialized staff members will aid in providing support.

Respondents discussed how to support Black students' transition into high school. Of the 72 comments, respondents stated that providing encouragement and guidance, opportunities to catch up, increased programs, and educating students on their various pathways will help support Black students. Fifty-three comments also discussed how to support students when transitioning from one stream to another. Respondents expressed it would empower students by providing mentorship and hiring Black staff. It would help to provide better educational tools, increasing funding and reduce bias and stereotypes to support students' transition from one stream to another. Similar comments and views were made when asked about ways to support Black students in succeeding in secondary school.

Diversity and Curriculum

Respondents were asked several questions regarding the reflection of the Black Canadian experience in their workplace and in the curriculum. There were 113 respondents who answered the question, "are Black experiences reflected in the school curriculum? (Anything that happens in the class and school counts as curriculum)". Twelve percent stated mostly and always, whereas 68% stated sometimes, rarely or on special occasions. A smaller portion stated they were unsure (6%) or never (14%).

There were 104 who answered a question about whether they believed the school reflected Black culture. More than half of respondents (57%) also stated they felt that Black culture is sometimes, rarely, or only during special occasions reflected in the school. Twenty-three percent said Black culture is never reflected in their school's culture. Only 14% stated schools reflect Black culture most of the time or always and a small percentage weren't sure (6%).

Experiences of Anti-Black Racism

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences of anti-Black racism in the TCDSB. Out of the102 respondents who answered the question, "in thinking about the students, have you witnessed (or have you been told about) anti-Black racism in your school or elsewhere in the TCDSB?" The majority, 72% stated they had witnessed or been told about incidences of anti-Black racism among students whereas 28% had not. When asked how they felt having witnessed or been told about incidences of anti-Black racism among students, respondents expressed feeling angry, disappointed, confused, frustrated, sad, powerless, and unsupported. They were further asked about how they dealt with the situation. Respondents stated that they had a discussion with the student(s) to provide support, spoke with administration and parents, and/or did nothing/ignored the situation. Respondents were also asked to explain why they decided to deal with the situation the way they did. Respondents stated they wanted to advocate for the student(s) and help improve the school climate.

With respect to witnessing or been told about anti-Black racism concerning staff, of 96 individuals who answered this question, 69% had witnessed it or been told about it. Staff and administration

described how witnessing (or hearing about) racism made them feel angry, frustrated, disappointed, disgusted, helpless, neglected, and shocked. They were asked what they did when they witnessed it or heard about it. Many respondents stated that they educated the offender, addressed the situation, spoke with administration, and supported the individual affected. Respondents further described why they dealt with the situation the way they did. Respondents stated they dealt with the situation in the way that they did in order to create change, bring awareness to racism, and support the individual.

When asked if respondents themselves had experienced anti-Black racism directly at school or elsewhere in the TCDSB, 66% said yes, they had experienced it themselves. Respondents described their experiences included being subjected to microaggressions, and stereotypes, experiencing racism directly by other staff, have been called racial slurs, and have been isolated/ignored. Respondents further described how experiencing racism made them feel angry, sad, disrespected, embarrassed, lonely, invisible, offended, and uncomfortable. In response to experiencing anti-Black racism, many of the respondents expressed that they did nothing or ignored the situation, contacted administration or the board, confronted the individual, and/or confided in close friends. There were 52 comments that discussed who staff go to when they experience anti-Black racism. Several said they confided to other Black/racialized staff and family members, spoke with their supervisor or manager, prayed to God, and/or went to no one.

Recommendations

Respondents were asked to provide advice to the TCDSB in the form of recommendations or strategies used to dismantle anti-Black racism. There were over 170 comments which discussed possible recommendations for the TCDSB. Of those 170 comments, most staff stated that the hiring of more Black staff and providing Black staff with equal opportunities would be very helpful. Respondents further expressed that there should be stronger relationships with Black parents and families, more culturally relevant training and workshops, more discussions regarding racism within the TCDSB Black community, accountability, support, and fair treatment amongst all students and staff.

What We Heard: Key Takeaways

- ♦ Respondents expressed that Black students are stereotyped and are not encouraged in comparison to other students.
- ♦ More than half of respondents believed that Black students were disciplined disproportionately compared to other students.
- ♦ Almost one-third indicated that Black culture is never reflected in their school.
- ♦ Almost two-thirds stated that they had witnessed or experienced anti-Black racism themselves.

Part D – Survey Results: Parent/Guardian/Custodian Voices

Parents, guardians, and custodians of Black students were invited to participate in a confidential survey in March 2022 regarding their personal and children's lived experiences within the TCDSB. There were 1,624 individuals who opened the survey and consented to participate but did not answer enough questions to be included in the analysis. Viable responses range from 433 to 741, meaning respondents skipped or did not answer all the questions. Detailed results in tables can be found in Appendix B. A summary of the findings is presented here.

Demographics

There were 711 or 79% of parents, guardians, or caregivers that self-identified as Black, 5% identified as Black bi-racial, and 5% identified as Black multi-racial. Eleven percent stated that their race was not listed and were asked to specify. Other races included White and Latinx. Fifty-four percent indicated their child was Black, 15% were bi-racial, 9% stated their child was Black multi-racial and 22% stated their child's race was not listed and they were asked to specify. Respondents stated other races included Asian, Hispanic, Latinx and White. Most of the parents, guardians, or caregivers (71%) who answered the survey stated their child attends a TCDSB elementary school, and 29% attend a TCDSB secondary school.

School Demographics

Survey respondents were asked about the students and staff in their child's school. Of the 515 respondents who responded to this question, 60% indicated that there were a few students at the school who were Black, 11% stated that most of the students at their child's school were Black, 2% stated they believed their child was the only student at the school who are Black, 12% were unsure, and 15% selected there were "other". Parents, Guardians or Caregivers were asked if they saw Black staff working in TCDSB schools, and what role they were in. Of the 741 who answered this question, 4% were stated to be in principal roles, 3% were vice-principals, 27% were teachers, 40% were education assistants or other support staff. Twenty-six percent stated Black staff occupied other roles such as supply teachers, and lunch supervisors. Several respondents stated there were no Black staff at their child's school.

Black Student Expectations and Opportunities

Survey respondents were asked about expectations and opportunities for Black students. Of the 695 respondents who responded to the question, are there high expectations in the school for your child, as a Black student, to be successful? Seventy percent somewhat or strongly agreed that there are high expectations for their child and 30% somewhat or strongly disagreed with this statement. Respondents were provided with the option to explain their responses. Individuals expressed that there were low expectations for Black students, that teachers had negative attitudes and stereotypes towards Black students, and that the schools did not provide enough support for Black students.

Even though most parents, guardians and caregivers believed their child had been benefitting from high expectations for success in school when asked if they believed the expectations were the same for students who were not Black (n = 696) only 44% somewhat or strongly agreed with this

statement. When asked if Black students are given as many leadership opportunities as other students, of the 696 who answered this question, 42% somewhat or strongly agreed, while 39% somewhat and strongly disagreed, and 19% were unsure.

Taken together, parents, caregivers and guardians believe their children are given high expectations to succeed and lead, but when contrasted with other students of other races, there is less support for these statements. Reasons given for these differences were related to the belief that no one gets special treatment, stereotyping, microaggressions, unequal treatment, being overlooked, or due to COVID-19.

Curriculum

Respondents were asked about the reflection of the Black Canadian experience in what their child is learning at school. Respondents were asked to refrain from including Black History Month activities in their responses in order to determine prevalence outside this event.

Six-hundred-and-ninety (690) respondents answered the question: Is the Black Canadian experience reflected in what your child is learning at school? (e.g., subject areas, school outings, books, guest speakers, movies, posters, podcasts, etc.). Only 18% stated "always" or "mostly", whereas 20% stated "sometimes" and 40% stated "rarely" or "only during special occasions." Twelve percent said "never," and 9% said they were unsure. Respondents stated that the Black Canadian experience is only reflected during Black History Month. Survey respondents stated that Black material is present but minimal, and that Black culture is, at times, completely absent.

Student Discipline

Survey participants were asked if they believed that student discipline differed for Black students compared to other students for similar infractions. There were 512 Parents, Guardians and Caregivers who responded to this question. Almost half, 45% were unsure, and just over one-third (37%) indicated they believed that Black students were disciplined more severely. Fifteen percent believed Black students were disciplined equally to others, and 3% were disciplined less severely.

Experiences within the TCDSB

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences and interactions as a parent/guardian/custodian of a Black child in the TCDSB. Participants were asked about their interactions with their child's school when it came to the program/course/placement selection process. Out of the 498 participants who responded to this question, 80% indicated that they had either a positive or somewhat positive interaction. Eleven percent indicated that they had either a somewhat negative or negative experience, and 9% selected not applicable.

Of the 441 respondents who responded to the question regarding interactions with their child's school and student discipline, 35% indicated that they had a positive and/or somewhat positive interaction, 21% indicated that they had a negative and/or somewhat negative experience, and 44% selected not applicable. When discussing communication at the board level (n = 445), 44% of

participants expressed that they had a positive/somewhat positive experience, 15% expressed that they had a negative/somewhat negative experience, and 41% selected not applicable.

Experiences of Anti-Black Racism

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences of anti-Black racism in the TCDSB.

Fifty percent (50%) of 696 respondents answered yes to "have you witnessed or heard of anti-Black racism at your child's school or elsewhere in the TCDSB?" Those who answered yes were asked to share how they felt. There were 207 comments explaining how witnessing or hearing anti-Black racism made them feel. Respondents stated they felt angry, sad, apathetic, appalled, hurt, disappointed, afraid, frustrated, concerned, disturbed and hopeless. Respondents further expressed how the situation made the individual feel. When asked what they did when they encountered the anti-Black racism, 162 respondents shared that they used it as a teaching experience, contacted the school/board, and/or did nothing about the situation.

Forty percent (40%) of 641 respondents answered yes to, "has your child experienced anti-Black racism at their school or elsewhere in the TCDSB?" There were 173 comments describing how their child felt. Respondents indicated that their child felt sad, depressed, angry, frustrated, excluded, unsafe, embarrassed and had low- self-esteem. One hundred and sixty-five (165) stated that they themselves felt hopeless, angry, frustrated, devastated, hurt, and disappointed by their child's experience with anti-Black racism. Respondents stated that they contacted their child's school or the board, did nothing about the situation, and/or used the situation as a teaching experience for their child.

Parents/guardians or caregivers were asked if they had experienced anti-Black racism at their child's school or elsewhere in the TCDSB. Of the 610 who answered this question, only 26% had stated they had experienced it themselves. Comments (n = 72) describing their personal experience expressed that either themselves or their child were subjected to unfair treatment, microaggressions, and stereotypes. They were often excluded and ignored by other parents and staff. Respondents further expressed how their experience made them feel sad, angry, ignored, disappointed, and disrespected. Respondents stated that they either contacted the school/board, walked away, did nothing about the situation, and/or discussed the situation with other individuals (e.g., family, friends, and children).

What We Heard: Key Takeaways

- ♦ More than half of respondents stated that there were few Black children in their child's school
- ♦ Respondents stated that at times, there were no Black staff in their child's school
- ♦ More than one-third of respondents stated that the Black Canadian experience was rarely or only represented during special occasions
- ♦ More than one-third of respondents stated that Black kids were disciplined more severely
- ♦ Almost half of respondents stated that they either witnessed or heard of anti-Black racism in their child's school or elsewhere in the TCDSB

DISCUSSION

Information from focus groups and survey data show that the board needs to enact better hiring practices to address the lack of Black teacher representation. Callender (2020), who examined the absence of Black male teachers in schools, contends that assumptions and stereotypes impact Black male teachers. Stereotypes and assumptions can impact their positionality within schools – "the construction of the [B]lack male teacher is influenced by and integrated with wider perceptions of [B]lack males and that this is inextricably linked to popularised discursive articulations of the presence and experiences of [B]lack males in schools" (p. 2020). Vangool (2020) expressed that having more Black, Indigenous, and people of colour in teaching will encourage racialized students to join the profession and can aid in reframing narrow-minded thinking. By hiring more teachers of colour, Vangool contends that it "counter[s] white privilege" and will inspire students to speak out against racial hierarchies within society and the education system.

TCDSB's Black community is experiencing racial discrimination. As mentioned by Cardoza et al., "racialized aggressions in the classroom can, unsurprisingly, impact success in the classroom […] students who are targeted may choose to disengage from environments that foment these aggressions" (2017, p.5). Such behaviours and attitudes can result in a negative, uncomfortable, and unsafe learning experience for students and staff – hindering one's ability to engage meaningfully. Similarly, Winter (2020) states that "these experiences and outcomes are signs of an unhealthy work [and school] environment that devalues DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion], and […] repeated exposure to an unhealthy workplace takes a physical and emotional toll on workers [and students]." When it comes to the parents of Black students, their experience within the education system is complex, as their children are racially targeted by staff and students (Parents of Black Children (PoBC), 2022). As discussed, PoBC, Black children and families often face barriers resulting in feelings of isolation. Similarly, they are further characterized as "disadvantaged," "at-risk," and "underprivileged" – stereotypes that continue to reproduce inequalities and racism (Lopez and Jean Marie, 2021).

Participants discussed the difference in treatment among Black students. Students indicated that when it comes to Black students, they are heavily watched by teachers, hall monitors, and principals. Staff/administrators and parents further noted that in comparison to Black students, White students are more likely to be pardoned from infractions. Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera, as cited by Lopez (2020, p.1944), contend that great attention should be brought to the number of Black students that are being disciplined as it has become the "new equity issue as educators wrestle with the disproportionate number of incidents involving Black students". Black students outnumber all other groups when it comes to discipline. Black students "represent the ultimate threat to authority; the disciplining of Black children can be understood as the definitive reinforcement of security and order" (p.1944). As noted by YouthREX, the devaluing of Black youth as disposable – as lives that are not important, create consequences for Black youth who already experience anti-Black discriminatory and racist practices (2021, p.8). Oba (2020) further states that Black youth may experience harsher punishments due to the fact that their teachers do not believe their reports of racism. Oba emphasizes that a "school culture of race erasure ensures Black students [are] the ones to get in trouble, be suspended, expelled, and even arrested for

resisting racism" (2020). These findings reflect data found within both focus groups and survey results.

Black students, staff, and parents/guardians/caregivers had mixed opinions when it came to expectations. Some contended that they believed Black students had high expectations until contrasted with students who were not Black. Similarly, academic streaming can be attributed to low student expectations. The overrepresentation of Black students in requiring Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), accommodations and streaming in secondary school into Locally Developed, and Applied streams is due to preconceived ideas and stereotypes regarding Black students (Cruz et al., 2021). According to Glogowski and Rakoff (2019), the streaming of students is sometimes based on one's race and socioeconomic position rather than one's ability. This perspective was echoed by staff and administrators, as some believed that student expectations were based on a student's home life. When high numbers of Black students are pathologized and streamed into Applied, and Locally Developed courses, their chances of completing high school decreases and the probability of being involved in precarious work situations increase. The authors note that low expectations adversely affect academic achievement and contribute to Black individuals being concentrated in precarious, low-wage, and unstable work. Thus, we must consider how the term is conceptualized when discussing student expectations, specifically for Black students. Depending on the individual answering the question, student expectations can mean anything. For instance, is student expectation defined in relation to White students, grades, and/or behaviour? Such consideration is needed to understand the implications of student expectations fully.

LIMITATIONS

Applied research can be understood as a process that allows researchers to provide answers for complex issues and problems. Although such an approach provides a high level of realism, there can be limitations when it comes to data analysis, methodology, and interpretation. Examining research limitations aids in research development, demonstrates an in-depth understanding and analysis of the research subject, and further allows for an examination of the impact of those limitations on the research at hand.

Phase I of the data collection (2020/21) took place during COVID restrictions, when students were not in school. This impacted the outreach as well as necessitating that the focus groups were conducted virtually. There was also an added burden of participating during this time. One barrier identified, was the need for parental consent for students (under age 18) to participate in the focus groups; this may have deterred participation for some students. Additionally, there was not a good mechanism to reach out directly to Black stakeholders, so all communications went to the general groups (students, teachers, administrators, other staff, and parents/guardians) with text to highlight the intended audience. Further outreach would have been helpful to ensure that potentially marginalized stakeholders (especially student voice) are encouraged to share their perspectives and experiences.

Results indicated that some respondents did not complete or respond to all survey questions. Response rates for questions could conceivably be a product of design differences. For instance, respondents were provided with the option to provide repeated explanations to their responses. Though this allows respondents to expand, it can be time-consuming, and repetitive resulting in survey fatigue. Similarly, low respondent rates could conceivably be a product of respondent mistrust. Although the survey indicates that all responses were anonymous and confidential, participants may have feared repercussions in sharing their perspectives. Moving forward, survey design should limit recursive or repetitive questions, maximize open-ended responses, and provide clearer more direct explanations regarding data custodianship and stewardship to increase trust and response rates.

Regardless of the limitations mentioned in the proceeding, the consistency of what students, staff and families stated regardless of whether the data were collected in the focus groups or a survey, are startlingly consistent across all stakeholder groups. The information provided by respondents within the focus groups and surveys brings great attention to the prevalence of anti-Black racism within the TCDSB.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are summaries based on the shared experiences of the staff, students, and parents, guardians/caregivers who participated in this research. We hope the following recommendations will allow the Board to better serve the TCDSB Black community along with addressing the prevalence of anti-Black racism and anti-Blackness.

1. **Mandated Intensive Professional Development for Staff:** Provide TCDSB employees with mandatory as well as optional deeper learning programs to target anti-bias, anti-oppression training that focuses on implicit bias, microaggressions, stereotypes, intersectionality, privilege, and power. As discussed by the Youth Research and Evaluation Exchange (YouthREX), "education in anti-Black racism, anti-Black ideologies that frame Black people as 'less than' can be challenged with the recognition and celebration of Black history, culture, and success (2021, pg.12). Likewise, the Equity Action Plan should track what is being offered, participation numbers, feedback and implementation fidelity demonstrating the scope, intensity, spread and internalization of the learning in practice.

2. **Continued Emphasis on CRRP**: A more concentrated focus on how to create, deliver and assess culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy in the classroom. As William et al. (2022) noted, "many school staff have not received professional learning on the nuances of Black culture, how to help Black students succeed, how to incorporate content by and about Black people, life, and culture." Participating in anti-racist/anti-oppression professional development will allow TCDSB staff to reflect critically on their position and how it explicitly and implicitly maintains and reproduces systems of oppression and colonialism. Such conversations and learning opportunities will aid in unlearning practices and approaches systemically embedded into our education system. Implementing Canadian Black History and the achievements and contributions of Black individuals will allow Black students to see themselves being represented. Schools and teaching should foster a culture of belonging by implementing materials and readings dedicated to anti-oppressive and decolonial practices. Similarly, inviting guest speakers from the Black community will also enhance the teaching curriculum. This will provide the Black community with individuals who can relate to them on a personal and reflective level and give the school community insightful perspectives. The TCDSB Equity Action Plan should track the prevalence, use and assessment of CRRP board wide.

3. **Increase the Number of Black Staff**: Continue to aggressively pursue the hiring, recruitment and retention of Black educators, administrators, support staff, mental health staff, and senior team members. Black mentorship programs and leadership ascension programs for racialized staff will lead to better representation within TCDSB schools. Hiring panels should be equipped with diverse individuals from varying backgrounds. Studies show that individuals are more likely to hire individuals like them. Knight (2017) noted that in her Harvard Business Review article, being unconsciously biased can result in hiring decisions that favour one individual or group over another. Zuhra Abawi, as cited by Levy (2022), notes that "teacher hiring is centralized around the decisions of one principal […] [b]ecause most teachers are White, most people who are becoming principals are White, and teacher hiring is very decentralized. Principals have a lot of autonomy

regarding teacher hiring, and studies show that people are more likely to hire those who look like them and those they like". Having diverse panels will aid in improving the recruitment of Black individuals. In addition, areas of the TCDSB that lack Black representation should be addressed. Within focus groups and questionnaires, respondents indicated that, at times, they were the only Black individual or that there was a lack of Black representation resulting in more emotional labour. Addressing this will ease the burden off these individuals. As noted by Iris Bohnet "seeing is believing […] if we don't see male kindergarten teachers or female engineers, we don't naturally associate men and women with those jobs" (Knight, 2017).

4. **Increased Support for the Black Community:** Continue to actively listen to the concerns of Black students, staff/administration, and families to increase trust between the TCDSB and the Black community. Active listening includes putting words into action will show the Black community that their concerns matter and that the TCDSB is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Increased support can further be provided through partnerships with local Black community organizations.

5. **Black Student Association:** A Black Student Association should be implemented in all TCDSB schools. Black Student Associations should be comprised of Black-identifying students – providing Black students with a safe and encouraging atmosphere where Black students can build friendships and foster collaborations during their educational careers. Implementing Black associations or clubs, "challenge the discrimination, power structures and unfair resource distribution and provide a space for questioning the reproduction of systems and ideolog[ies] that have negatively impacted their lives and communities (YouthREX, 2021, pg. 12). A similar association should be established for Black-identifying staff, administrators, and parents. This will provide Black individuals with a space to share their experiences and concerns – judgment free.

6. **Racism Reporting Tool:** A tool or resource to report incidents of racism and how they are addressed. This will allow Black students, staff/administrators, and parents to report experiences of racism. Individuals fear reporting their experiences of anti-Black racism and anti-Blackness due to the fear of retaliation and backlash. Tracking metrics should be reported via the Equity Action Plan. A similar reporting tool has been utilized by Parents of Black Children (Parents of Black Children (PoBC), 2022, p.11).

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Appendix A
Survey Results: Staff and Administrators

Respondent Demographics

Table 1: For this survey the term 'Black' includes people of African, Afro-Caribbean and/or African Canadian descent. I identify as:

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 297)
TOTAL	297	
Black	163	55%
Black bi-racial	29	10%
Black multi-racial	36	12%
Not listed above (please specify):	35	12%
Missing	34	11%

Table 2: My role is:

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 297)
TOTAL	297	
School-based	191	64%
Non-school-based	16	5%
Combination (e.g., centrally based, but also support schools)	13	5%
Missing	77	26%

Table 3: When you look around your workplace, what do you see?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 297)
TOTAL	297	
Few staff members are Black	11	4%
I am the only Black staff member in my workplace	7	2%
Other	3	1%
Not listed above (please specify):	77	26%
Missing	199	67%

Table 4: When you look around your school, what do you see? (Regarding students)

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 297)
TOTAL	297	
Most of the students are Black	32	11%
Few of the students are Black	58	19%
There is only one Black student in the school	1	<1%
Other (please specify):	23	8%
Missing	183	62%

Table 5: When you go into your assigned schools, what do you see? (Regarding students)

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 297)
TOTAL	297	
Most of the students are Black	3	1%
Few of the students are Black	2	<1%
There is only one Black student in the school	1	<1%
Other (please specify):	4	1%
Missing	287	97%

Table 6: When you go into your assigned schools, what do you see? Regarding staff (administration, teaching, and support staff)

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 297)
TOTAL	297	
Most staff members are Black	2	<1%
Few staff members are Black	75	25%
I am the only Black staff member who is in the school	32	11%
Other (please specify)	14	5%
Missing	174	59%

Black Student Expectations and Opportunities

Table 7: Are there high expectation in your school for Black students to be successful?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 108)
TOTAL	108	
Strongly agree	21	19%
Somewhat agree	28	26%
Somewhat disagree	23	22%
Strongly disagree	12	11%
I don't know	24	22%

Table 8: Are the expectations for Black students the same as for students who are not Black?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 124)
TOTAL	124	
Strongly agree	24	19%
Somewhat agree	27	22%
Somewhat disagree	27	22%
Strongly disagree	19	15%
I don't know	27	22%

Table 9: Are Black students given as many opportunities to be leaders as other students?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 106)
TOTAL	106	
Strongly agree	21	20%
Somewhat agree	29	27%
Somewhat disagree	17	16%
Strongly disagree	14	13%
I don't know	25	24%

Black Staff Opportunities

Table 10: Are Black staff given as many opportunities to be leaders as other staff?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 102)
TOTAL	102	
Black staff are given more opportunities to be leaders than other staff	4	4%
Black staff are given less opportunities to be leaders than other staff	42	41%
Black staff are given equal opportunities to be leaders as other staff	16	16%
I don't know	22	21%
Other	18	18%

Pathways for Black Students

Table 11: Which pathway(s) are most Black students on when they graduate from high school?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 106)
TOTAL	106	
Apprenticeship	4	4%
College	22	21%
University	9	8%
Workplace	14	13%
I'm not sure	53	50%
Other	4	4%

Table 12: In your opinion/experience, are Black students in the TCDSB typically successful in completing their high school education?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 125)
TOTAL	125	
Strongly agree	18	14%
Somewhat agree	41	33%
Somewhat disagree	16	13%
Strongly disagree	7	5%
I don't know	43	34%

Student Discipline

Table 13: Compared to other students, Black students at the TCDSB are disciplined (for the same or similar situation)?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 105)
TOTAL	105	
More severely	56	53%
Less severely	5	5%
Equally severely	23	22%
I don't know	21	20%

Diversity and Curriculum

Table 14: Is Black culture reflected in your school? (Think pre-COVID; for example, cafeteria food, field trips, prom venues, catering for school functions, games, films, music, etc)

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 104)
TOTAL	104	
Always	8	8%
Mostly	6	6%
Sometimes	18	17%
Rarely	21	20%
Only during special occasions	21	20%
Never	24	23%
I don't know	6	6%

Table 15: Is Black culture reflected in the schools you support? (? (Think pre-COVID; for example, cafeteria food, field trips, prom venues, catering for school functions, games, films, music, etc)

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 10)
TOTAL	10	
Sometimes	3	30%
Rarely	4	40%
Never	1	10%
I don't know	2	20%

Table 16: Is the Black Canadian experience reflected in your workplace? (e.g., cafeteria, food, posters on the wall, guest speakers, website, PD, etc.).

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 18)
TOTAL	18	
Always	1	6%
Mostly	3	17%
Sometimes	1	6%
Rarely	4	22%
Only during special occasions	7	39%
Never	2	11%

Table 17: Are Black experiences reflected in the school curriculum? (Anything that happens in the class and school counts as curriculum)

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 113)
TOTAL	113	
Always	8	7%
Mostly	6	5%
Sometimes	24	21%
Rarely	27	24%
Only during special occasions	26	23%
Never	15	14%
I don't know	7	6%

Experiences of Anti-Black Racism

Table 18: In thinking about your colleagues, have you witnessed (or have you been told about) anti-Black racism in your workplace or elsewhere in the TCDSB?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 9)
TOTAL	9	
Yes	7	78%
No	2	22%

Table 19: Have you experienced anti-Black racism in your workspace or elsewhere in the TCDSB?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 18)
TOTAL	18	
Yes	15	83%
No	3	17%

Table 20: In thinking about the students, have you witnessed, (or have you been told about) anti-Black racism in the schools you support or elsewhere in the TCDSB?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 10)
TOTAL	10	
Yes	7	70%
No	3	30%

Table 21: In thinking about the students, have you witnessed (or have you been told about) anti-Black racism in your school or elsewhere in the TCDSB?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 102)
TOTAL	102	
Yes	73	72%
No	29	28%

Table 22: In thinking about staff, have you witnessed (or have you been told about) anti-Black racism in your school or elsewhere in the TCDSB?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 96)
TOTAL	96	
Yes	66	69%
No	30	31%

Table 23: Have you experienced anti-Black racism in your school or elsewhere in the TCDSB?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 97)
TOTAL	97	
Yes	64	66%
No	33	34%

Appendix B
Survey Results: Parent/Guardian/Custodian Voices

Demographics

Table 1: My child is:

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 1385)
TOTAL	1385	
Black	750	54%
Black bi-racial	204	15%
Black multi-racial	124	9%
Not listed above (please specify:	307	22%

Table 2: I identify as:

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 711)
TOTAL	711	
Black	560	79%
Black bi-racial	34	5%
Black multi-racial	40	5%
Not listed above (please specify):	77	11%

Table 3: My child attends a:

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 717)
TOTAL	717	
TCDSB elementary school	506	71%
TCDSB secondary school	211	29%

School Demographics

Table 4: Who are the students at your child's school?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 515)
TOTAL	515	
Most of the students are Black	57	11%
Few of the students are Black	305	60%
My child/ren is (are) the only Black student(s) in the school	9	2%
I don't know	62	12%
Other (please specify)	82	15%

Table 5: In what role(s) do you see Black staff at your child's school?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 741)
TOTAL	741	
Principal	28	4%
Vice-Principal	22	3%
Teachers	197	27%
Teaching assistants (e.g., EA, DECE, CYW, etc.)	151	20%
Support Staff (e.g., custodian, secretary, lunchroom supervisor?	149	20%
Other	194	26%

Black Student Expectations and Opportunities

Table 6: Are there high expectations in the school for your child, as a Black student, to be successful?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 695)
TOTAL	695	
Strongly agree	242	35%
Somewhat agree	244	35%
Somewhat disagree	128	18%
Strongly disagree	81	12%

Table 7: Are the expectations for Black students the same as for students who are not Black?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 696)
TOTAL	696	
Strongly agree	163	23%
Somewhat agree	144	21%
Somewhat disagree	103	15%
Strongly disagree	159	23%
I don't know	127	18%

Table 8: Are Black students given as many opportunities to be leaders as other students?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 696)
TOTAL	696	
Strongly agree	130	19%
Somewhat agree	162	23%
Somewhat disagree	116	17%
Strongly disagree	152	22%
I don't know	136	19%

Curriculum

Table 9: Is the Black Canadian experience reflected in what your child is learning at school?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 690)
TOTAL	690	
Always	69	10%
Mostly	58	8%
Sometimes	139	20%
Rarely	147	21%
Only during special occasions	128	19%
Never	84	12%
I don't know	65	9%

Student Discipline

Table 10: Compared to other students, Black students at the TCDSB are disciplined (for the same or similar situation?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 512)
TOTAL	512	
More severely	191	37%
Less severely	15	3%
Equally severely	78	15%
I don't know	228	45%

TCDSB Interactions

Table 11: How would you describe your experiences as a parent/guardian/custodian of a Black child when interacting with the school?

	Frequency	Positive	Somewhat Positive	Somewhat Negative	Negative	N/A
Academics						
Program/course/placement selection process (e.g., French immersion, SHSM, academic/applied/locally developed/AP/IB courses)	498	218 (44%)	178 (36%)	34 (7%)	21 (4%)	47 (9%)
Special Education (e.g., IPRC/IEP process)	457	142 (31%)	98 (21%)	33 (7%)	24 (6%)	160 (35%)
Participation in parent-teacher meetings	455	207 (45%)	151 (33%)	35 (8%)	18 (4%)	44 (10%)
Alternative learning schools (e.g., Msgr Fraser, SAL, Expulsion Program)	437	80 (18%)	63 (14%)	24 (6%)	24 (6%)	246 (56%)

	Frequency	Positive	Somewhat Positive	Somewhat Negative	Negative	N/A
Non-Academic						
Guidance supports (e.g, career counseling)	469	131 (28%)	113 (24%)	25 (5%)	24 (5%)	176 (38%)
Mental Health supports (e.g., social work or psychology)	458	115 (25%)	97 (21%)	33 (7%)	26 (6%)	187 (41%)
Other supports (e.g., EA, CYW)	439	103 (23%)	73 (16%)	25 (6%)	17 (4%)	224 (51%)
Student discipline (e.g., detention, mediation, suspension, expulsion, police intervention)	441	74 (17%)	78 (18%)	55 (12%)	38 (9%)	196 (44%)
Communication						
Classroom teacher	470	260 (55%)	139 (30%)	36 (7%)	23 (5%)	12 (3%)
Other teachers and staff (e.g., special education, ELL etc.)	456	163 (36%)	132 (29%)	35 (8%)	13 (3%)	113 (24%)
Main Office	483	236 (49%)	164 (34%)	38 (8%)	25 (5%)	20 (4%)
Board Level	445	105 (24%)	90 (20%)	34 (8%)	33 (7%)	183 (41%)
Governance						
Trustees	461	92 (20%)	85 (18%)	24 (5%)	30 (7%)	230 (50%)
Senior Team (Director, Superintendent)	439	87 (20%)	78 (18%)	22 (5%)	26 (6%)	226 (52%)
Inclusive/Welcome						
In school community	465	192 (41%)	147 (32%)	43 (9%)	19 (4%)	64 (14%)
In the Parish	439	183 (42%)	106 (24%)	16 (3%)	12 (3%)	122 (28%)
Volunteer Opportunities						
Class/field trip	466	149 (32%)	105 (22%)	19 (4%)	12 (3%)	181 (39%)
School Committees (e.g., Safe Schools, fundraising)	450	154 (34%)	118 (26%)	27 (6%)	14 (3%)	138 (31%)
School Events	451	158 (36%)	123 (27%)	25 (6%)	10 (2%)	135 (29%)

	Frequency	Positive	Somewhat Positive	Somewhat Negative	Negative	N/A
CSPC – Catholic School Parent Council	433	132 (31%)	91 (21%)	23 (5%)	18 (4%)	169 (39%)
Board Level	422	91 (22%)	61 (14%)	21 (5%)	9 (2%)	240 (57%)

Experiences of Anti-Black Racism

Table 12: Have you witnessed or heard of anti-Black racism at your child's school or elsewhere in the TCDSB?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 696)
TOTAL	696	
Yes	351	50%
No	345	50%

Table 12: Has your child experienced anti-Black racism at their school or elsewhere in the TCDSB?

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 641)
TOTAL	641	
Yes	257	40%
No	384	60%

Table 13: Have you experienced anti-Black racism at your child's school or elsewhere in the TCDSB

	Frequency	Percentage (Out of 610)
TOTAL	610	
Yes	159	26%
No	451	74%