



Research Paper Summary

In 2021-22, the Supports for Student Learning Program (SSLP) within ESDC contracted seven research projects to better understand barriers and facilitators to educational attainment in Canada. Each project was led by an external researcher(s) and involved a literature review, a scan of provincial/territorial programs and services, and a discussion paper. The objective of this research series was three-fold:

- 1. Build the knowledge and evidence base and refine the SSLP's understanding of the various groups of clients served (i.e., the barriers they face);*
- 2. Improve the SSLP's capacity to engage in targeted outreach with groups and organizations that serve specific groups or underserved populations (e.g.: Black and racialized students, Indigenous students, 2SLGBTQI+ students, youth in care, youth experiencing homelessness, students with disabilities, and youth facing a digital divide);*
- 3. Inform future directions for the SSLP (e.g., to identify priority streams supporting specific population groups or projects reaching certain underserved students or partners who have expertise in addressing specific barriers).*

Below is an overview of the research project examining the experiences of Black and Racialized youth. The project was completed in March 2022.

Supports for Student Learning Program Research Series: Investigating Barriers to Education Faced Black and Racialized Youth

CONTEXT

According to the 2016 Census, the high school dropout rate for youth from visible minority groups¹ was 5.5%, half the dropout rate for non-visible minority youth (10.9%). However, disparities between visible minority groups persist. While Korean (1.9%), Chinese (2.2%) and Japanese (2.5%) youth had the lowest dropout rates, Black (10.4%) youth had one of the highest dropout rates among visible minority groups. In addition, while children of immigrants generally have higher educational attainment than the population of white Canadians, the high school dropout rates were highest for immigrant Black (13.4%) youth.

This research sought to examine the systemic inequalities related to the educational outcomes of Black and racialized youth.

¹ In this summary, the term 'visible minority' is used when referring to Statistics Canada data. Elsewhere, the term 'racialized' is used to refer to non-Caucasian individuals.



Research Questions

Specifically, the project was funded to examine the following questions:

- 1) What are the barriers to education faced by Black and racialized students?
 - a) What factors may prevent Black and racialized students from fully engaging in their studies and how might these barriers affect completion of high school as well as transitions to and persistence in post-secondary education (PSE)?
 - b) Beyond barriers that may be experienced in the formal education system, what external factors may affect Black and racialized students' attachment to their learning and social networks, thereby contributing to their overall sense of belonging and academic motivation?
 - c) What recent trends are emerging as challenges facing this underserved population? Particularly following and during the COVID-19 pandemic, what barriers have recently changed, been highlighted, or worsened or improved?
- 2) How do varying identity factors (e.g., sex or gender, age, mental or physical disability, household income(s), newcomer status, etc.) intersect with race to influence educational outcomes and experiences among Black and racialized students?
- 3) What services are provided and/or investments have been made by provincial and territorial governments to reduce these barriers? What gaps or overlaps exist?
 - a) What recommended actions could ESDC's SSLP take to reduce these barriers, enhance learning experiences, and overall improve educational outcomes for Black and racialized students?

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER(S)

Keisha Evans (Child and Youth Care Practitioner, author, MSW, B.A) works in the Toronto District School Board to support African, Afro-Caribbean and Black (ACB) students and their families in their development in academic achievement, social-emotional growth, PSE access and career planning. Ms. Evans has written about the invisibility of Black girls in Education, the over-policing and surveillance of Black youth, and produced various research and literature using anti-racist and social justice frameworks.

Dr. Grace-Camille Munroe (Manager of Project and Operations for Toronto Metropolitan University's Presidential Committee to Confront Anti-Black Racism, PhD in Adult Education and Community Development from U of T) is a published

researcher with extensive experience in the field of education. Dr. Munroe's research centres on the intersection of youth and adolescent development, education and community. Their work uses a social justice framework, and is informed by a transnational perspective that explores systemic barriers in education, students' resilience, and community-based responses to support the academic progress and social and emotional learning of ACB students in Canada and the Caribbean. Dr. Munroe has also worked extensively with the Ministry of Education in Jamaica in various research positions, as well as Caribbean Policy Research, USAID, UNICEF, etc.

KEY FINDINGS

Pre-existing inequities related to systemic racism were exacerbated by COVID-19

- **Black and racialized learners experienced a 'dual' pandemic:** The pandemic has exacerbated ongoing challenges confronted by Black and racialized learners which include, among others: racial bias, stereotyping and discrimination, linguistic barriers, issues of belonging and cultural ties, alienation, invisibility, internalized oppression, and lack of representation in school administration (Sundar 2008, Elkord 2016; Parada, Olivo & Bravo 2021; Cui 2019).
- **Black and racialized learners were hit harder by the 'digital divide':** Survey data from the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2021) revealed that 52% of racialized students in Canada were handling virtual learning negatively. Studies suggest that cessation of schooling for short or long periods leads to learning loss and widens achievement gaps among Black and racialized students. These gaps are attributed to the inability of low-income students, often-times Black and racialized students, to afford extra classes or extra-curricular programs aimed at enhancing academic performance and educational outcomes.
- **Black and racialized learners were more likely to face mental health challenges:** There is a shared concern among educators for students' heightened sense of anxiety and stress due to isolation and lack of contact with support staff and peers during the pandemic. For example, a survey of school principals across Ontario highlighted growing concern about the lack of human resources to support students' mental health (People for Education, 2020/21). According to a 2020 Statistics Canada survey, for most measures of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, participants from the Black visible-minority group reported poorer self-rated mental health and greater financial insecurity compared with White participants.

- **Black and racialized learners are at greater risk of experiencing declining social mobility:** The pandemic is exacerbating racial inequities in education and widening social inequities, disparities, and vulnerabilities within Black and racialized communities. Poorer neighbourhoods have the greatest barriers to learning and are more vulnerable to COVID-19. For instance, during the earlier period of the pandemic, many Black and racialized students from the northwest region of downtown Toronto were living in overcrowded housing, had parents who were essential workers, and relied on public transit, all of these factors contributed to high infection rates, which were 10 times higher than that of the least infected parts of the city. (Bascaramurty, & Alfonso, 2020).
- **Black and racialized parents face more barriers to engaging in their children's education:** The voices of Black and racialized parents are often excluded from decision-making processes at the school level because of deficit perceptions and systemic and institutional barriers, and this pattern of exclusion has led to trust issues and decreased parental involvement in learners' education pathways (James & Tuner, 2017).

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Training for SSLP and service provider staff

- SSLP staff need to be equipped with race-conscious awareness and critical understanding of race/racism, and analytical tools to engage with and confront racism. To build individual and collective capacity and confidence, SSLP could initiate required readings, training sessions with subject matter experts, and create a community of practice to share experiences and hold one another accountable. Examples of relevant lenses/approaches include: [Critical race theory](#); [Intersectionality](#); [Positive youth development](#); [Human flourishing](#); [Academic resilience](#); and [Targeted universalism](#).
- Provide training for teachers and educators to help them understand, identify, and respond to students' social and emotional needs – particularly in schools with a higher proportion of at-risk students. While the authors focused on teachers, such training could be of benefit to frontline staff providing after-school and wraparound services as well (Davis et al., 2020).

Program Design

Continue support for Research Series

- The researchers recommended that SSLP focus on system barriers and the impact of COVID-19 on distinct Black and racialized communities outside Ontario where research is limited. Particular attention should be paid to

learners who identify as 2SLGBTQI+, immigrant/newcomers, learners with disabilities, as well as learners who have experience with: homelessness, “pushout” from the education system in Canada due to racial discrimination, the youth criminal justice system and/or food security issues. The researchers also encouraged continued focus on individuals with intersectional identities. In addition, the researchers called for increased focus on the support needs of students at the post-secondary level (in addition to early interventions and supports for K-12 students).

- Build on P/T scan by identifying Black or racialized youth-led/serving organizations who could potentially deliver programming and share learnings in the future.

Continue and expand support for after-school programs for youth/learners and their families

- In particular, the researchers called for support for organizations that employ positive development, resilience and human flourishing approaches; that support multiple identities employing an intersectional lens; and that focus primarily on initiatives such as mentorship, leadership, academic enrichment and tutoring programs, and ethno cultural programs. Moreover, the researchers recommended that SSLP expand support to organizations that: disrupt the ‘school-to-prison pipeline’; focus on STEM; provide newcomers/immigration services; address food security; and/or offer supports to learners and families to navigate access to community resources, transition and retention in PSE, and/or offer legal support for youth in the criminal justice system.

Provide socio-economic support to families

- Support grassroots and community-based organizations that provide parent/family-focused socio-economic supports, such as financial support, access to social and mental health services, and services that support parents in navigating the school system.
- Provide access to mental health supports and resources to help them and their families cope with the disruption and stress caused by the pandemic.

Explore the implementation of a partnerships model

- The researchers suggested that SSLP could:
 - **hire a consultant** to explore proposed models of community-based partnerships across sectors, in consultation with grassroots and non-governmental entities; or
 - **conduct a needs assessment** among partners to explore the feasibility of a partnerships model, convene a symposium of experts and implement a pilot study focusing on successes, challenges, lessons learned and best practices, as needed according to collected data and

insights. This could lead to the development of a toolkit to encourage prospective partnerships.

Evaluation and Engagement

Conduct ongoing impact assessments

- Conduct assessments of targeted audiences to i) better assess the extent to which program goals are being achieved, ii) highlight measurable outcomes and value-added (i.e., social rate of return), iii) identify best practices and lessons learned, and iv) find opportunities for scaling effective programs.

Engage Black and racialized learners in the program's design and evaluation

- Encourage partner organizations to develop youth participatory action programs that equip learners with the critical understanding and tools to confront anti-racism and anti-Black racism in their schools and communities. SSLP should engage Black and racialized youth learners to co-create and improve SSLP programming.

CONTACT

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