Economic Empowerment of Black Youth: Programmatic Interventions to Strengthen the Talent Pipeline

Black youth experience overt as well as implicit discrimination in their pursuit of education. Programs must support them to equitably access academic and professional opportunities, so they have the skills, knowledge, and supports to succeed in education and the job market.

The content for this Evidence Brief is informed by the report *Outcomes Framework: Economic Empowerment of Black Youth in Ontario*[1] developed by YouthREX to support community stakeholders as well as relevant government institutions to build a shared understanding of possible interventions and outcomes under the Economic Empowerment Stream of the Black Youth Action Plan.

The Outcomes Framework is informed by the *SIDE Theory of Change for the Economic Empowerment of Black Youth* that includes four quadrants of change grounded in an understanding that an economic empowerment stream for Black youth must provide opportunities for them to develop skills and capacities but must also include institutional change strategies that address systemic barriers that they face.

SIX PROMISING PROGRAMMING INTERVENTIONS

Access to meaningful education and relevant and safe learning environments is an important component in working toward economic empowerment of Black youth. Programs aimed at strengthening the talent pipeline should be focused on one or more of the following interventions (see Logic Model on page 5):

01. ANTI-BLACK RACISM TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS.

Black youth often experience anti-Black racism (ABR) within school settings, including: excessive interactions with on-site police officers, streaming into lower educational tracks, higher rates of disciplinary action such as suspensions, and lower expectations from teachers and guidance counsellors.[2,3] This interpersonal anti-Black racism is mirrored at the curricular level, with a notable lack of Black studies and Black history integrated into school teachings.[2]

Activities to provide ABR training for educators should equip all teachers to challenge their biases – biases that result in the unfair treatment of Black students – and also provide them with the tools to offer tailored supports and education. This would contribute to *increased aspiration* for Black youth, as they are holistically supported. Over time, this should generate *raised critical consciousness* for all youth and educators about the context of anti-Black racism. This greater understanding would contribute to *supportive school environments* for Black youth and therefore *improved sense of belonging* at school.

02. SUPPORTING BLACK EDUCATORS.

Statistics show that Black Ontarians are underrepresented among educators, which denies many Black youth the informal guidance, role-modelling, relatability, and self-esteem that comes from having shared experience with one's mentors and leaders.[4] A report also found that Black teachers in the school system experience anti-Black racism.[4] For example, half of Black teachers in Ontario believed their race affected their promotability. Activities to support Black educators can help increase the number of Black teachers, as well as their longevity, success, and wellbeing in the field. This should contribute to an *improved awareness of Black success stories* among Black youth, who benefit not only from the guidance

of their Black teachers but also the knowledge of their professional wellbeing, and, as such, *increased aspiration* for Black youth, who can similarly envision themselves as advancing in their chosen fields. Over time, these changes should generate *increased self-esteem and self-confidence*, *improved sense of belonging*, *increased number of role models*, and *improved encouraging and supportive school environments* for Black youth.

03. TRAININGS, RESOURCES, AND NETWORKS TO SUPPORT AND EMPOWER BLACK PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS IN ADVOCACY.

Research shows the importance of parental and caregiver involvement in academic achievement for youth.[5] However, Black parents and caregivers do not always have the understanding and capacity to advocate for their children's education.[2] Given the anti-Black discrimination experienced by students in the school system, the importance of parental advocacy is heightened. Providing informational, social, and other resources to parents and caregivers will yield an *improvement in parent and caregiver advocacy knowledge and skills*. This will give Black youth an infrastructure of support that will help them advance academically and professionally. Black youth and their parents and caregivers should experience *raised critical consciousness* and *increased self-confidence and self-esteem*.

04. ACADEMIC SUPPORTS AND CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAMMING.

Targeted academic supports and career preparation programming, both within and outside the school setting, can help Black youth to overcome multiple barriers to educational attainment, ranging from the personal to the institutional.

- **Tutoring services** provide individualized academic support that can address academic as well as adjacent issues, such as self-esteem and self-confidence.

- **Bridging programs** that provide wraparound services that help students fill gaps in post-secondary education requirements and offer financial assistance are an important component of post-secondary success. While acceptance in a post-secondary educational program is often presented as the primary hurdle, completion of post-secondary education is a significant challenge. Research on bridging programs suggests that they should include contextualized instruction, career development, and transition services, and should provide ongoing holistic support, such as counselling, to address a range of financial and non-financial needs.[6]

- **Networking opportunities** can offer access to Black role models, as well as professional and academic contacts that can support advancement in a chosen field.

- **Career guidance programs**, which provide information about careers as well as placement opportunities, are also an important element of success. Studies show that Black youth are discriminated against within the school system at the level of informational access. Guidance counsellors often discourage Black youth from pursuing academic post-secondary educational choices and are less forthcoming on pathways and available financial supports.[2] Targeted career guidance programs can compensate for this informational gap within a setting that is premised upon Black youth's capabilities.

- **Flexible post-secondary education course scheduling**, which allows students to have non-conventional classroom schedules that make possible the fulfillment of work and other priorities, is important toward addressing the financial and other barriers to post-secondary educational attainment. Student loan debt has been known to disproportionately affect students of colour.[7] Enabling the financial self-sufficiency of Black youth in post-secondary education can be achieved, in part, by accommodating the time constraints that limit their employment options.

These activities contribute toward *improved knowledge and skills that match career choices*, *increased career and professional mentorship opportunities*, and *increased aspiration* and *increased confidence and self-esteem*. As academic spaces become more inclusive, Black youth would experience an *improved sense of belonging* and *improved encouraging and supportive environments*.

05. MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMING.

The Black Experience Project found that 20% of surveyed Black university graduates believed that having Black role models in their chosen fields would have made it easier for them to reach their post-secondary educational goals.[8] Indeed, several Ontario-specific reports have identified low self-esteem and self-confidence among Black students as a persistent issue.[2] These are issues that mentorship programs can help to address.[9] Furthermore, mentoring programs help build social capital for Black youth, as mentors who have themselves faced similar barriers to those of their mentees can help them to navigate academic and employment terrain. Race-matching has been shown to be an important component within mentorship programming.[10] Black youth describe a lack of visible role models as an impediment to their development, and having *improved awareness of Black success stories* can contribute to Black youth's *increased aspiration*. Group mentorship, as opposed to one-on-one mentoring, has also been recommended as being more generative and facilitative of success.[10]

Ultimately, mentorship programming could yield *improved knowledge and skills that match career choices* and *increased career and professional mentorship opportunities for Black youth*, thus streamlining their academic careers in the most fruitful directions. Over time, and as a result of an *increased number of role models*, this should contribute to *increased self-esteem and self-confidence*, *improved sense of belonging*, and *improved encouraging and supportive school environments* for Black youth.

06. FINANCIAL SUPPORTS.

Lack of financial access represents a significant barrier to educational attainment. Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to attend post-secondary educational institutions,[11] and, given the relationship between race and class,[12] this disproportionately impacts Black youth. Financial barriers impact upon educational success – given that income does not only affect the ability to fund post-secondary education but also scholarly achievement[13] – and have far-reaching negative implications. Investments in scholarships, bursaries, and the increased availability of student loans (i.e., lower barriers for qualifications, more lenient and forgiving repayment timelines, and amounts that more accurately represent the cost of living) for Black youth are necessary for rectifying a significant hurdle toward the pursuit of post-secondary education. Paid work-based learning opportunities are another way of providing financial support to Black post-secondary education students, while also contributing toward their professional and academic advancement, networking needs, and the economy.

Research recommends that programs move beyond a focus on financial literacy and toward financial capability, which entails "knowledge and competencies, ability to act on that knowledge, and opportunity to act".[14] Programs must dually focus on developing people's competencies while also linking them to the financial institutions they need to actualize those competencies and achieve financial health.[14]

With adequate financial supports, knowledge, and access, Black youth will experience *increased aspiration* and be more motivated to seek out *knowledge and skills that match career choices*. Over time, this should yield *increased confidence and self-esteem*, *improved sense of belonging*, and *improved encouraging and supportive environments* as academic spaces become more inclusive of Black youth.

SUMMARY

These programming interventions can contribute to *increased social capital for Black youth*, who have the financial, social, academic, professional, psychological, and emotional skills and capacities to pursue education and professional development, and participate fully in their economies and societies. Furthermore, as educational and career development spaces become proactive in addressing anti-Black racism, and more representative of the racial diversity of the population, Black youth should have *decreased feelings and experiences of racial discrimination and targeting*.

Logic Model for Pillar #1: Strengthening the Talent Pipeline[1]

Situation: Black youth experience overt as well as implicit discrimination in their pursuit of education. Programs must support them to equitably access academic and professional opportunities, so they have the skills, knowledge, and supports to succeed in education and the job market, ultimately contributing to Ontario's economic prosperity.

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES		
		Short-Term	**Intermediate**	**Long-Term**
Funding for activities by organizations that have the following characteristics that indicate they can effectively support Black youth: • Black leadership and direction • Diverse authentic representation • Sustainability • Responsiveness and accountability • Focus on youth development[15] Youth involvement that prioritizes youth voices and paid opportunities for Black youth[16] Monitoring and evaluation supports	**ABR Training for educators** **Supports for Black educators** **Mentorship programming (ideally with Black mentors, in group settings and with incentives/compensation for mentors)** **Academic supports & career preparation programming within educational institutions and out-of-school for Black youth** • Tutoring • Bridging programs (to fill gaps in PSE requirements, provide wraparound services, financial assistance, etc.) • Career guidance (information about careers, pathways to careers, income associated with different fields, ideally with placement opportunities, matching education with aspirations) • Flexible PSE course scheduling • Networking opportunities (volunteer and civic engagement programs; career-related networking programs at high schools and PSEs) **Trainings, resources, and networks to support and empower parents and caregivers in advocating for children** **Financial supports for Black youth** • Scholarships, bursaries, work-based learning, student loans & financial capability programming	Improved knowledge & skills (academic, career-related & financial capability) Increased career & professional mentorship opportunities for Black youth Improved awareness of Black excellence Increased advocacy knowledge and skills of parents and caregivers Increased aspirations of Black youth	Raised critical consciousness Increased self-confidence and self-esteem Improved sense of belonging Improved encouraging and supportive environments Increased number of role models	Increased social capital Decreased feelings and experiences of racial discrimination and targeting

ENDNOTES

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