

Students and family advocates to help Black children in school: Province

By Brock Weir

Black students in the GTA and beyond will get a boost towards achieving their educational goals through the creation of a new initiative fostering student and family advocates.

On Monday, the Province announced \$6 million in funding over the next three years to help Black children and youth achieve their educational and career goals.

The advocates will provide community-based and culturally relevant supports to Black students between the ages of six and 25 while also speaking up for Black families within the education system.

The move follows a 2020 review of the Peel District School Board which found Black students are disproportionately subject to disciplinary measures, with Black students making up only 10.2 per cent of the high school population but representing 22.5 per cent of students receiving suspensions, said the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services in a statement.

A 2020 Statistics Canada survey showed that, across Canada, 94 per cent of Black youth ages 15 to 25 said they wanted to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher level of education, but only 60 per cent believed that they could.

The new cash infusion is part of doubling the funding earmarked for Ontario's Black Youth Action Plan, an addition of \$60 million over the same three-year time period. Programs within the Action Plan are delivered by more than 70 community-based and culturally-focused partners in the GTA, Ottawa and Windsor.

Our government is committed to helping Black children and youth achieve their full potential. That's why we are expanding programming under the Black Youth Action Plan and creating community-based initiatives like the Student and Family Advocates, said Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. We are working directly with community organizations to ensure these advocates are in the best position to help students achieve their academic, career and life goals by helping them overcome barriers and access more resources within the school system.

Beginning this spring, Student and Family Advocates will work out of local organizations to provide specific supports tailored to the individual needs of Black students, including:

Working with students and families to develop a plan for achieving their goals

Attending meetings with teachers, guidance counsellors, and school administrators to discuss student progress

Developing trust-based relationships with participants and helping them build positive relationships with educators, student peers, and community members

Connecting students and families to resources and supports like community programming, learning opportunities, tutoring and mentorships, job placements and scholarship or leadership opportunities.

In addition, student advocates will provide leadership, advice and support to schools on anti-Black racism and work alongside community partners, participants and schools to amplify the voices of Black students and families to activate changes in Ontario's education system.

Since I started in the role of Advocate for Community Opportunities in December 2019, I've consistently heard from parents, youth, and grassroots community groups that we need to build community capacity to navigate the education system and hold schools

accountable," said Jamil Jivani, Ontario's Advocate for Community Opportunities. "The Student and Family Advocates initiative builds on the great work already being done in Black communities for years, by providing needed resources to those who work directly with students and parents."

An additional investment of \$1.2 million will be made over three years to help young Black entrepreneurs and Black-owned tech start-ups access the resources and tools that they need "to succeed in the Province's changing economy."

The funding will be provided through Ryerson University DMZ's Black Innovation Programs, which support Black-led businesses by connecting them with customers, capital, experts and a community of entrepreneurs and influencers.