

College Board Canada Forum Pathways to Postsecondary Success: Reimagining Equity Through Student Voice and Community Collaboration

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(Front Row (L-R): Kai Gordon (Graduation Coach), Karen Murray (System Superintendent), Tanitiä Munroe (Research Coordinator), Donielle Francis (Grade 12 Student), Kahmahrah Joseph-Prince (Grade 12 Student), Lois Obeng (BSSLP Alum).
Back Row: Mariam Sheikhali (Teacher), Meron Bayu (BSSLP Alum), Ebla Sulaiman (Grade 12 Student), Aman Musa (Grade 12 Student), Crystal Amondi (Grade 12 Student), Audley Salmon (Associate Director), Roni Felson (System Superintendent), Jemaine Wallace (Centrally Assigned Principal). Pictured at the opening day of the College Board Canada Forum, representing the Toronto District School Board.

A Transformative Gathering: Highlights from the 2025 College Board Canada Forum

On May 22 and 23, the 2025 College Board Canada Forum brought together students, educators, policymakers, and community partners for two impactful days of learning and collaboration. Co-hosted by York University, the Toronto District School Board, the Peel District School Board, and the College Board—with support from KPMG—the forum remains Canada’s only national gathering focused on equity and access in postsecondary education.



Aman Musa presents his research poster and engages with attendees during the College Board Canada Forum.

This year, student leadership was at the heart of every conversation. Black students connected to the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement at TDSB led panels, shared original research, and moderated sessions. Their message was clear: **“Access isn’t just about opening doors—it’s about redesigning the room.”** Students named who continues to be left out—including neurodiverse peers and those facing layered marginalization—and offered intersectional solutions grounded in lived experience and care.

The forum opened with remarks from Audley Salmon (Associate Director, TDSB), affirming the importance of centering Black and Indigenous student voices and urging cross-sector commitment to real change.

Highlights included sessions led by Karen Murray (System Superintendent, TDSB), on how Black youth navigate education and employment systems, and Dr. David Cameron (Director of Research, TDSB), on the role of identity-affirming data in supporting student pathways.

Also central to the memorable experience of student leaders was the presence of trusted Black educators. Jemaine Wallace (Centrally Assigned Principal of Equity, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression, TDSB), Sheldon Dixon (Graduation Coach for Black Students, TDSB), and Mariam Sheikhali (Educator at York Memorial C.I.) moved alongside students throughout the forum—offering consistent support, encouragement, and care. Their presence exemplified what it means to lead with purpose and to show up for young people in ways that are authentic, relational, and deeply empowering.

For many, the forum was more than an event—it was a space of affirmation and action, where student brilliance was not only seen, but centered.



Poster presenters Cynthia Acheampong and Thalia Wright, both Grade 12 students, pictured with Dr. Andrew B. Campbell, Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, during the College Board Canada Forum.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR): Centering Student-Led Inquiry

Student researchers from the Centre of Excellence Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) shared findings from projects developed using a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) framework. These inquiries, grounded in students' lived realities, offered powerful critiques of educational inequity while advancing imaginative, community-rooted alternatives.

"We are not just students—we are researchers, advocates, and experts in our own lives."

— YPAR Presenter

YPAR Project Spotlights

Aman Musa – Unlocking Potential: Addressing Barriers for Black Students in Academic Competitions.

Examined exclusion in AP courses, STEM contests, and debate tournaments. Recommended equitable access to mentorship and culturally responsive academic environments.

Cynthia Acheampong – Underrepresentation of Black Students in STEM

Identified impostor syndrome and lack of representation as major obstacles. Advocated for early STEM exposure and trauma-informed mental health supports.

Ebla Idris Sulaiman – Navigating Microaggressions and Mental Health

Documented the emotional toll of everyday racism on Black male students and called for anti-racism educator training and identity-affirming school supports.

Thalia Wright – Equity in Action: Transforming Classrooms for Black Neurodiverse Students

Highlighted how racism and ableism intersect to marginalize neurodivergent students. Emphasized inclusive teaching practices and stronger school–family partnerships.

Crystal Amondi – The Path to Success: Barriers Faced by Black High School Students in Post-Secondary Education.

Focused on structural barriers rooted in anti-Black racism that limit postsecondary access. Her recommendations included strengthening guidance, expanding culturally relevant career planning, and improving systemic responsiveness to Black student needs.



From left to right: Dr. David Cameron (Research Manager), Ebla Sulaiman, Terry Godwaldt (College Board Canada Rep) and Audley Salmon, Crystal Amondi at College Board.



Karen Murray (System Superintendent, TDSB), Jordan Hebete (Teacher, Peel District School Board), Dr. Carl James (Professor, York University), and Dr. Andrew Allen (Professor, University of Windsor) pictured during their breakout session.

Plenary Panel – Then, Now, and Next: Expanding Learning Pathways to Postsecondary

The forum opened on Thursday with a powerful youth-led plenary moderated by Dr. Carl James, Professor and Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community & Diaspora at York University. This opening session set the tone for the event by centering student voice and lived experience.

The panel featured Kahmahrah Joseph-Prince and Donielle Francis, both Grade 12 TDSB students enrolled in the AP Afro-Canadian Studies course, as well as Lois Obeng, a Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) alumna now studying at York University. They were joined by other youth panelists representing school boards and communities from across Canada.

Together, the panelists reflected on their personal educational journeys and imagined more inclusive, accessible futures for all students.

They spoke candidly about the systemic barriers they've encountered in pursuing postsecondary education and emphasized the urgent need for:

- Culturally responsive and identity-affirming programming
- Mentorship from educators who reflect their lived experiences
- Expanded pathways beyond the traditional university track

Panelists also shared the emotional weight of navigating institutions that were not built with their histories, identities, or brilliance in mind—and the transformative impact of finally feeling seen, supported, and valued within educational spaces.

“We belong—not because we fit the mold, but because we are reshaping it.”

— Youth Panelist

This opening plenary reminded all attendees that when young people are given space to lead and co-create, they generate bold, necessary visions that challenge inequity and inspire systemic change.

Breakout Session – The Value Proposition of Higher Education: Practical Guide and Best Practices

This interactive workshop provided educators and advisors with practical strategies to engage students in meaningful conversations about postsecondary pathways. Moderated by Keisha Gray of York University, the session featured panelists from both the university and K–12 sectors, including Meron Bayu, a former TDSB student and alumna of the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP) who is currently studying at the University of Toronto.

Panelists explored how to better support students in making informed, values-driven decisions about their futures. Key topics included reframing the benefits of higher education to reflect diverse student goals, addressing financial barriers through accessible resources, and highlighting the long-term personal and professional value of postsecondary learning. Participants left with actionable strategies and equity-informed tools to guide students more effectively and inclusively on their educational journeys.

Breakout Session – Addressing Intersectional Barriers to Postsecondary Access

Moderated by Kai Gordon, Graduation Coach for Black Students at the TDSB, this breakout session brought together leading voices committed to advancing educational equity: Dr. Wesley Crichlow (Ontario Tech University), Carolyn Tinglin (Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice), and Liza Arnason (ASE Community). The panel explored how intersecting identities—including race, class, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, and immigration status—shape students' access to and experiences within postsecondary education.

Panelists emphasized the urgent need for:

- Inclusive admissions policies and equitable financial aid reform
- Stronger collaboration between K–12 and postsecondary institutions
- Community-led models that reflect and respond to the lived realities of marginalized students

“Intersectionality is not just a theory—it’s a roadmap for justice.”

— Panelist



From left to right: Kai Gordon (Graduation Coach), Carolyn Tinglin (Executive Director, Youth Alliance for Intersectional Justice), Liza Arnason (Chair, Ase Community Foundation for Black Canadians with Disabilities), and Dr. Wesley Crichlow (Professor, Ontario Tech University) participating in a workshop session.

The session challenged institutions to move beyond symbolic commitments to diversity and take up the work of structural transformation, grounded in student voice, community knowledge, and shared accountability.

Breakout Session – Toward Continuity of Care: Mental Health Across K–12 and Postsecondary

Moderated by Dr. Wesley Crichlow, this timely session explored how mental health services can more effectively support students during critical transitions from high school to postsecondary education. Dr. Shameen Sandhu, System Leader for Mental Health and Professional Support Services at the TDSB, and Donielle Francis, a Grade 12 TDSB student and YPAR researcher, offered key insights alongside other panelists representing education and community sectors.

The discussion examined the emotional toll of fragmented care systems and the urgent need for identity-affirming, trauma-informed mental health supports that reflect the cultural, racial, and lived realities of students.

Panelists also emphasized the importance of centering student voice in the design and delivery of mental health programs and policy development. The session made clear that academic success is inseparable from emotional well-being—and that continuity of care must be treated as a foundational right, not a privilege.

“When mental health care doesn’t reflect who we are, it can feel like no one’s really listening.”

— Donielle Francis



Student researcher Aman Musa joins peers from various districts in the Student Research Spotlight panel, highlighting youth-led inquiry and critical perspectives on education.

Student Panel – Student Voice and Vision: Reflections from Capstone and YPAR Researchers

This engaging panel featured student researchers from across Ontario reflecting on how AP Capstone and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) have shaped their academic journeys and future aspirations. Among the panelists was Aman Musa, a current TDSB Grade 12 student and junior researcher with the Black Student Summer Leadership Program (BSSLP). Aman shared how his project on Black student underrepresentation in academic competitions was inspired by personal experience and a desire to drive systemic change.

Panelists spoke about how participating in Capstone/YPAR gave them confidence, helped them discover new interests, and influenced their postsecondary goals. They also highlighted ongoing barriers to access—such as limited outreach and school-level streaming—that prevent many capable students from joining such programs.

With education leaders in the room, students offered thoughtful feedback: center youth voice, create more identity-affirming learning opportunities, and ensure broader access to research-based programming. Their reflections served as a compelling reminder that when students lead, systems begin to shift.

“This research helped me realize that my story matters—and that I can use it to help others.”

— Aman Musa, Student Panelist

Student Reflections

“This was the first time I felt like research wasn’t just about numbers. It was about my life—and my community.”

— YPAR Researcher

“To speak my truth and be heard by educators, leaders, and scholars—this is what liberation looks like.”

— Youth Panelist

“The forum gave me hope. We’re not waiting for change. We are the change.”

— Student Participant

Thank You

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement extends our heartfelt gratitude to the students, alumni, educators, and partners who helped make the 2025 College Board Canada Forum a resounding success.

Your presence affirmed a vital truth: Black student leadership is not a distant aspiration—it is a present and powerful force, actively shaping the future of education.

We offer special thanks to Jason Kandankery, Superintendent of Education at the TDSB, for your support in securing the KPMG venue. To the KPMG team, thank you for your warm welcome and for engaging meaningfully in conversations with our students and staff throughout the event.

We also appreciate Roni Felsen, System Superintendent of Secondary Programs and eLearning, for showing up and being fully engaged with students during the forum—your presence did not go unnoticed.

To our organizing partners at the Peel District School Board, especially Superintendent of Education Rasulan Hoppie, thank you for co-leading this effort alongside us. Your collaboration helped bring this vision to life.

And to Terry Godwaldt, College Board Representative for Canada, and the entire College Board team—thank you for your leadership, presence, and unwavering commitment to Black student success. Your support was deeply felt, and your visibility offered both encouragement and affirmation to the students who participated.

Together, we created a space where Black student voices were not only heard—but uplifted, celebrated, and powerfully centered.

Thank you for walking alongside us in this important work.



From left to right: Student researchers Donielle Francis, Meron Bayu, Lois Obeng, Ebla Sulaiman, Crystal Amondi, and Aman Musa pictured at the College Board Canada Forum reception.