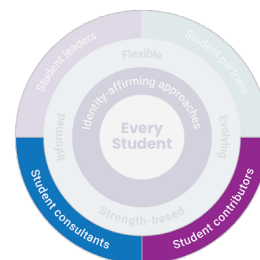


Basketball Club – École Secondaire ETBR



Students as consultants

Students as contributors

Students' grades	8-12
School board	Conseil scolaire Viamonde
Initiative period	Ongoing initiative
Caring adults involved	School program support coach, sports director, and English teacher

OVERVIEW

Note: This school board has two positions from the Black Student Graduation Coach Program grant.

The aim of the graduation coach program is to develop tailored programs and services that provide intensive, culturally sensitive support to enhance the academic success and overall well-being of Black students. The grant was inspired by the opportunity to significantly improve the performance and outcomes for Black students across various areas, including education, health, and employment; striving towards greater equity and success. Studies suggest that systemic racism and discrimination are factors that influence these inequitable outcomes. Past experiences demonstrate that implementing a graduation coach program yields positive impacts on student achievement and overall well-being, including increased graduation and enrollment rates among at-risk students.

The graduation coach at the school board initially identified attendance as a significant challenge, particularly in the mornings. Recognizing the students' enthusiasm for basketball, the graduation coach proactively engaged with students and the athletic director to establish a basketball program. This initiative targeted students who struggled with attendance or behaviour, needed volunteer opportunities, sought a conducive environment for homework, or simply desired a place to socialize. From its inception, the basketball club yielded remarkable results, notably reducing tardiness among 14 out of 15 participating students. Furthermore, staff observed that students outside the initial target group expressed interest in the program. Embracing inclusivity, the school expanded the program to welcome all students who shared a similar passion. As participation grew, so did the bonds formed among students, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. The program continues to thrive as more students join, strengthening relationships and enhancing the overall school experience.



In addition to this, the graduation coach has an office that students gravitate towards as a safe and supportive space within the school. His door is always open literally, or symbolically via text and email, for students to share their opinions and feedback. Through these informal conversations, feedback is gathered to enhance existing programs and services, including the basketball program. The graduation coach also runs a student panel which serves as a forum for students to share their thoughts and perspectives in a supportive space. This panel of students meets regularly to discuss and address challenges facing students. The basketball program was one such initiative brought to the panel to discuss and inform the program's future directions. These sessions were instrumental in shaping the program.

Through incorporating feedback from the student panel, the basketball program has undergone enhancements, now offering breakfast through collaboration with the school breakfast program and incorporating mentorship opportunities. On Friday mornings, time is set aside in the program for older students to come and discuss life lessons like teamwork, communication, and leadership. These students act as mentors for younger students, holding them accountable in attendance and schoolwork and celebrating successes together. Older students also coach younger students in basketball and other activities during the program.

Trial and error are important to the success of this program. Staff are willing to try new things based on student input and they gather students' feedback to see what works and what doesn't. For the most part, students are willing to try new activities and share their thoughts because of the open relationships they have with the graduation coach. For example, it was noticed that some students were not interested in basketball. Following collaborative brainstorming with the panel of students, the introduction of morning yoga sessions was established. This was accomplished by hiring a City of Toronto yoga instructor to lead the program. Despite initial hopes for greater student engagement, the program did not garner the anticipated interest and was subsequently discontinued after student feedback. Currently, the school is actively exploring new activities in collaboration with students. Overall, the students participating in this program reported numerous benefits from the program's engagement and mentorship opportunities, skill development, and support for mental health needs across physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional dimensions.

Students are encouraged to take on a variety of roles within the program that best suit them. In this program, students are consultants sharing their input and perspectives with the program. Students also are contributors, contributing in a limited role to the program (i.e., through planning or coaching) to influence the program.

PARENT PERSPECTIVE

"The graduation coach is dedicated and understanding, as he has helped us a great deal with our son. Parents know they have someone to talk to, who is non-judgmental and works for the best interest of our son and our youth within the school. To do this, we need more youth workers in our community to guide our young people towards their dreams and success." — Parent

STAFF PERSPECTIVE

"As the board's mental health lead, I can attest that this initiative is one of the most engaging. Indeed, through his role, the coach has developed a professional and respectful relationship with the students. This initiative gives hope to the young people in this community, and the special attention they need to succeed. The coach has a great approach to transferring leadership skills to these students. Through a simple basketball activity and committed teachers, we're able to work on leadership, student participation, and support for mental health needs, including the physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional dimensions.

One of the challenges remains to continue to diversify our activities with students in order to move from practices aimed at fostering leadership to teaching and reinforcing leadership skills. It's also important to overcome the challenge of opening up this kind of leadership initiative to all students." — Mental Health Lead

