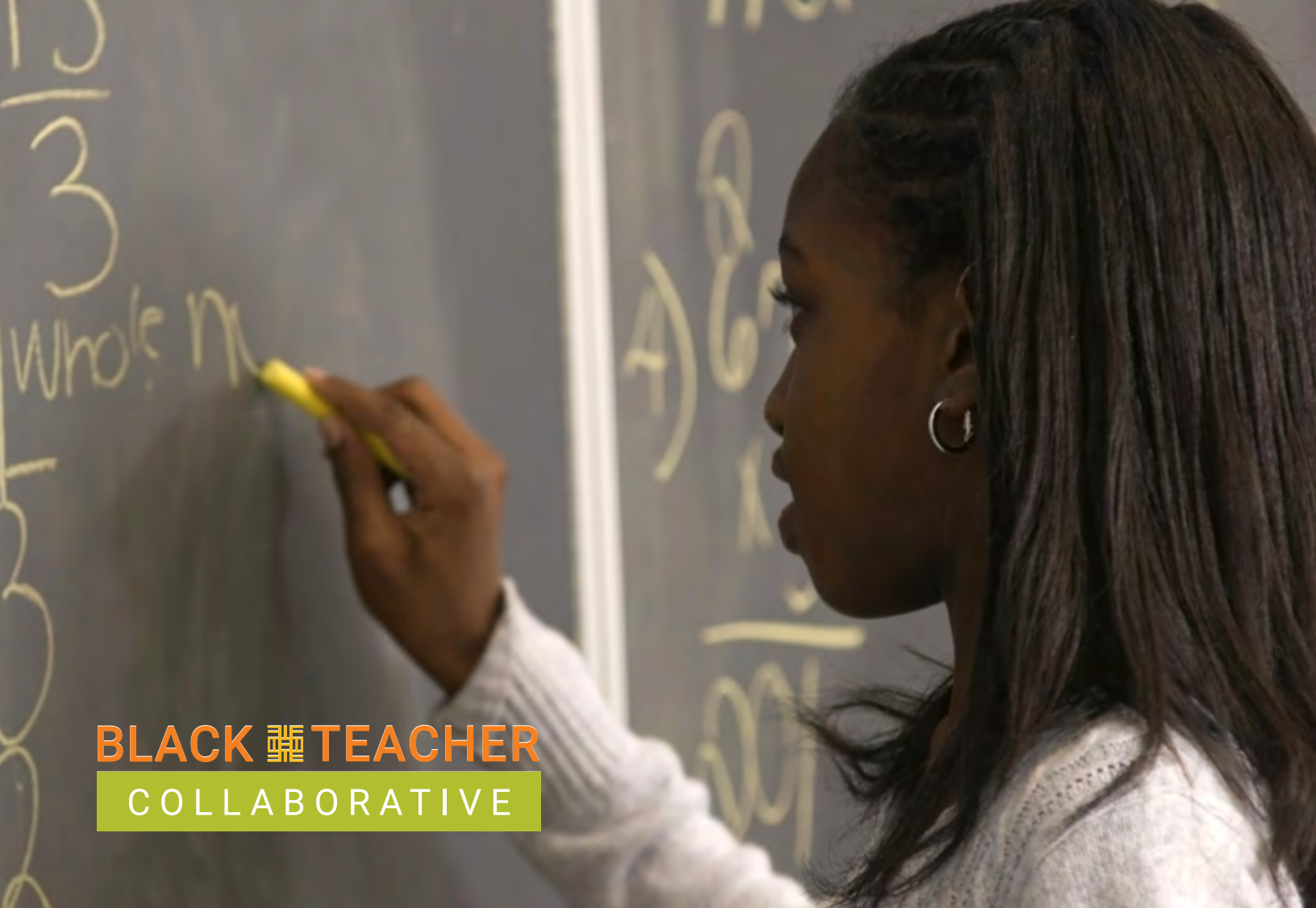




BLACK  **TEACHER**
COLLABORATIVE

A Critical Quantitative Exploration of the State of Black Education

R. Davis Dixon, PhD

Acknowledgements

This work would not be complete without thanking those who poured so much into the process. I am eternally grateful to my colleague, friend, and thought partner **Ashley R. Griffin**. There is no paper without her vision for the work in the first place. Her feedback, continuous revision, and thoughtful pushes make this paper what it is. I am also grateful for the work of our **Data Learning and Advisory Group** who served as sounding board during the early states of this process and throughout the analysis. Your work to ask the right questions and figure out the right data to include in this paper cannot go unnoticed.

Introduction

“African Americans need an educational system that is [as] reaffirming of them as the European American system reaffirms its people” (Akbar, 1998).

Black people’s relationship with America has been characterized largely by enslavement, state sanctioned violence, and disenfranchisement over the course of centuries. Even today, cities across the country are gripped by civil unrest in the wake of highly publicized killings of Black men and women at the hands of police. As such, there have been calls to overhaul and improve policing practices, especially those involving communities of color. These are necessary

conversations; the immediate threat of death due to excessive force is front of mind for Black people every day. And yet, there is a slower, “death of a thousand cuts” taking place daily for Black students in America’s schools, where systemic inequities often destroy opportunities for educational success. Thus, while Black people have America’s attention, addressing how our education system is serving, and failing, Black students is a necessary conversation too.

The discrimination and oppression that Black people have faced in this country manifest in schools primarily as a failure to prioritize Black people’s experiences and promote their identity, values, and beliefs. The American education system has historically educated all students with White norms in the forefront. This is illuminated by numerous components of education, including a near homogenous teaching force, a whitewashed or often anti-Black curriculum, and biased standardized tests (Hilliard, 1979). Moreover, the White norm is consistently used as the basis for a false performance standard, one that positions White students as the bar for success rather than excellence.

Fortunately, conversations positing solutions to improve educational outcomes for Black students are happening every day. Most recently, there have been calls to diversify the teaching workforce and to adopt culturally relevant/responsive curriculum and pedagogy. While these conversations are an important initial step forward, much more is needed for transformational change. Many solutions are aimed at improving outcomes for all

“students of color.” However, the common refrain that “a rising tide lifts all boats” will not do. Black students experience issues that cannot fit neatly into a box labeled “students of color experiences.” The American education system cannot consolidate the experiences of students of color and expect broad interventions to work for everybody. It must respect each group’s unique differences, cultural practices, and histories as it addresses improving Black students’ educational outcomes.

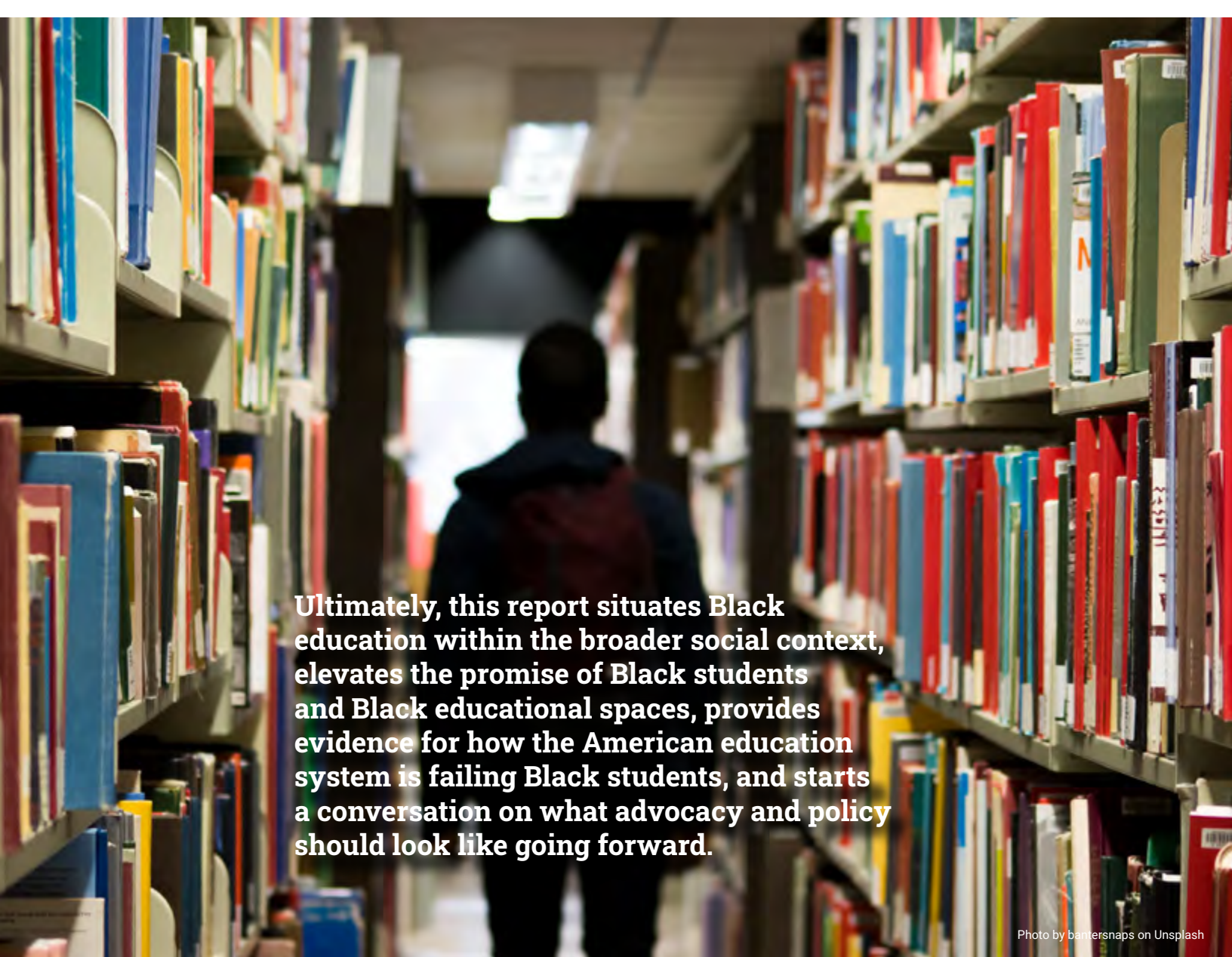
Today, it is especially important to consider these unique contexts, as the poison of racism in this country is ever prevalent. Black students are witnessing violence perpetrated on Black bodies, whether at the hands of police, vigilantes,



Photo by Gayatri Malhotra on Unsplash

or White supremacists. And as cell phones and social media increase the awareness of these incidents, the extent of the damage being done to Black students and their educational outcomes is a story that remains under emphasized. Without considering the whole of Black students' experiences and positioning in American schooling, Black students will continue to see stagnation in their performance. This report, therefore, discusses the state of education for Black students in the context of their unique position in this country, while ignoring unnecessary comparisons to false and faulty standards.

This report is written by Black people to represent Black children's experiences for district and state leaders, education advocates, and civil rights organizations who are interested in improving educational outcomes for Black students. It does not focus on how to fix Black children nor blame their cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds. Using publicly available data, secondary data analysis, and a review of empirical literature, we discuss the state of Black education by: 1) highlighting demographic data about Black students and teachers across the country; 2) dispelling myths surrounding the education of Black children; 3) examining Black student opportunities and performance/attainment outcomes; and 4) illuminating the context that underlies these opportunities and outcomes. Ultimately, this report situates Black education within the broader social context, elevates the promise of Black students and Black educational spaces, provides evidence for how the American education system is failing Black students, and starts a conversation on what advocacy and policy should look like going forward.

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera down a long aisle in a library. The aisle is lined with tall bookshelves filled with books of various colors. The person is wearing a dark jacket and a backpack. The lighting is soft, and the perspective is looking down the center of the aisle towards a bright light at the end.

Ultimately, this report situates Black education within the broader social context, elevates the promise of Black students and Black educational spaces, provides evidence for how the American education system is failing Black students, and starts a conversation on what advocacy and policy should look like going forward.

About Our Analysis and Review of Literature

This report lays out a strategy to uncovering and dispelling myths about the state of education for Black students. It is not exhaustive. There are countless datasets, reports, and empirical articles that we could discuss to detail the state of Black education. However, the information presented here provides a summary of an expansive conversation happening about the experiences of Black students and how our education system can serve them better.

Our goal is to ensure the narrative surrounding Black students is represented correctly, both statistically and qualitatively. Also, the way we present data and literature in this report reflects our understanding that one cannot divorce student outcomes from racialized experiences in schooling that influence those outcomes (Garcia, López, & Vélez, 2018). As such, there are two key points to mention prior to detailing the process taken to engage in this work. First, our presentation is based heavily on our desire to tell an honest story about Black students as human beings and not just numbers. To do this most effectively, we report numbers rather than percentages (where possible) to ensure Black students' humanity is not lost in statistics. Second, the data presented here reject the notion of comparing Black student outcomes and opportunities to other groups—mainly White students. In doing this, we enter this conversation without placing the data surrounding Black students in a negative comparative state at the outset. This allows us to provide a narrative that is specific to Black students without the false dichotomy of White student performance.



Our efforts focus on secondary data analysis, as it provides a collection of education data across multiple domains and allows us to look across multiple years of data, when necessary. The data for teacher and student demographics comes from multiple sources. We pulled student data from the Elementary and Secondary Information system. This system allows the researcher to create a custom dataset from the Common Core of Data universe database. The student level was a national dataset that included every public school in the United States with enrollment broken down by race. After downloading this dataset, we cleaned the data to ensure there were no errors in the data pulling process.

For teacher level data, the data gathering process was more complicated. Currently there is no national dataset that details the universe of public schools with number of teachers broken down by race. In order to secure school or district level teacher race data, we started with referencing a report highlighting which states collect teacher diversity data and at what level (district or school) (Di Carlo & Cervantes, 2018). The report also indicated if the state made these data available to the public. Using this report as a starting point, we searched each state's department of education website to scan for publicly available data. When the data were not publicly available, we emailed data and research offices in the state and made official requests for the data. After receiving all data, we created a universe dataset that included each school, district, and/or state as well as the number of teachers for each race.

After collecting these data, we engaged in a data cleaning process to ensure each state had the exact same variables in order to merge it into the universe dataset. We then were able to detail the number of Black students and teachers in each state, percentage of students in majority Black schools, and the ratio of Black students to Black teachers in each state (where data were available). As previously stated, wherever possible in our reporting of data surrounding Black students, we utilized raw numbers because many times percentages and ratios do not adequately communicate the sheer number of Black children being underserved.

For all other data and literature, we searched for and reviewed numerous scholarly journals and reputable data reports to illuminate the experiences of Black students as they navigate the country's education system.



Findings

In this report, the data and the literature highlight the promise of Black students as well as the systemic issues that tend to place obstacles in their path to educational success. While many data points in this report may seem familiar to those who already have an interest in Black student educational outcomes, our aim is to provide a fresh perspective to push the conversation toward solidifying next steps for policy and advocacy surrounding Black child education. Our analysis of student and teacher demographics and empirical literature leads to four findings and subsequent recommendations to help solidify these next steps for district leaders, state policymakers, education advocates, and civil rights organizations.

Finding 1: Go Where Black Students and Teachers Are Located

Our findings start with the most foundational knowledge about Black students. Demographic data for Black teachers and students are key factors in understanding Black students' educational experiences. For our analysis, we break these data down by enrollment and locale where appropriate.

Black Students

Black students make up a little over 15% of all public school (traditional public school and public charter school) students—7.8 million students. Of the 7.8 million Black students in this country, 4.4 million of them reside in the South. For this report, we consider residences in the South to be those in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

In our analysis of the student data, we find that almost 2 million Black students attend a school that is overwhelmingly Black. Our indicator for being overwhelmingly Black is a school that has a population where 75% of the student body is Black. These 2 million students represent 32% of the population of Black public school students. This percentage does not strike one as a large share of Black students, but it's likely to grow over time as school resegregation becomes more prevalent. For instance, in an analysis by *The Atlantic* (Stancil, 2018), researchers found that between the years of 1996-2016, the percentage of Black students attending a school where less than 40% of the students were White rose from 59% to 71%.

In our review of the data on student demographics, we find that Black families increasingly have made decisions to leave the traditional public school space. For instance, Black students are 26.5% of those enrolled in public charter schools, making up about 800,000 students. In private schools and home schools, there are about 441,000 and 136,000 Black students respectively. However, while numbers are growing in these alternatives to traditional public schools, the level of enrollment is still a very small percentage of the Black student universe. Thus, while the nontraditional school spaces are attracting Black families, we must ensure that focus remains on traditional public schools where the overwhelming majority of Black students are attending currently.



Photo by Eye for Ebony on Unsplash

Black Teachers

Research has proven how important Black teachers are for Black students (Gershenson et al., 2018). Black students who have a Black teacher are less likely to drop out, more likely to be recommended for gifted classes, and more likely to perform better in their classes. While Black students have this added benefit, all students need access to Black teachers in the same way that all students need access to Black history. However, whereas students make up a representative share of the proportion of Black people in America (Black people are 14% of the American population), Black teachers are only about 7% of the teacher workforce. This 7% equates to 230,000 Black teachers across the country. And of the 230,000 Black teachers, almost 152,000 work in the South.

In order to receive the benefit of having Black teachers in front of their students, each state needs to be deliberate about employing more Black teachers. And though the South employs the majority of Black teachers, it is not immune to the Black teacher deficit. In Texas, over 40% of schools have no Black teachers. In Tennessee, according to Collins (2018) 40 school districts had no Black teachers. In North Carolina, based on an analysis by Hinchcliffe and Tillet (2019), there were 21 students for every Black teacher compared with six students for every White teacher. And in Maryland, 20% of schools have no Black teachers.

Connection to Policy

Overall when we think about the sheer number of Black students and teachers represented in the South, it's important to connect to the larger context surrounding education policy and from where policy typically derives. We find that discussions surrounding Black students and policy derives from Northern states or key cities. One example of this is the TUDA data, which explores urban education across the country. In 2002 TUDA began with six urban districts, and the South was only represented by Atlanta and Houston. Though more districts have been added, the emphasis on large key cities misses wide swaths of Black students who need representation. Especially in the South, communities have their own unique political, economic, and cultural values, which means that their experiences are not monolithic and likely not captured in the narrow focus of current education reform initiatives. Research on Black students should therefore be intentional about understanding these communities' histories, current contexts, and what their future may look like. If not, reform efforts will continue to lack relevance for Black people and fail to create more opportunities for success.

Finding 2: Disrupting Myths Surrounding Black Education

Two popular myths pervade narratives of Black students' academic outcomes. One is that Black people are apathetic, if not opposed, to education. The other is that Black educational spaces are inadequate. These two myths place an undue label on Black

students, their families, and Black institutions, even though the data prove that these assertions are truly just fabrications.

Myth 1: Black students and families don't care about education

One myth is that Black students and families are not invested in education and therefore lack the proper attitudes to produce success. The belief is that Black students lack positive connections to schooling, and their more negative outlook on the importance of school leads to poor performance. However, contrary to this popular narrative, Black students place great value on academic performance. According to Mickelson (1990), Black students “embrace the dominant ideology about the positive links between education and mobility.” More recently, Downey, Ainsworth, and Qian (2009) found the same across a secondary analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study. In the analysis, they found that Black students have more positive pro-school attitudes than their White counterparts, including attitudes about the importance of education, doing well in school, and seeing themselves as a good student. In the classroom, Black students are also found to be invested in their learning. For example, Shernoff and Schmidt (2008) found that Black students report higher levels of engagement, intrinsic motivation, and positive emotions in their classrooms than their White counterparts. Lastly, while Black students’ aspirations and connection to school are high, their expectations for educational success are actually higher than other groups of students (Harris, 2006).

Another common misconception is that Black families are not involved in their children’s educational lives, and they hold generally low expectations for their children’s performance in school. However, the research shows that this is simply not true. First, Black parents and Black community members overwhelmingly believe that “it is extremely or quite important for Black children to attend and graduate from college” (Anderson, 2016). They are also involved, have high expectations, and know what their students need to be successful (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). For example, Black parent attendance at a variety of school events has been increasing over the past two decades (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). Some of these events include



parent-teacher conferences, school or class events, general meetings, and/or volunteering or serving on committees. The attendance at school events has not only been increasing, but it has shown high percentages across these different events. For instance, in 2016, 87% of Black parents reported attending general meetings, 79% attended parent-teacher conferences, and 72% attended school or class events (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017).

The extent to which Black parents are involved in their students’ schooling translates to an understanding of the issues that Black students face in school. Though they are often portrayed as lacking information and awareness about their students’ schooling, Black families are keenly engaged and knowledgeable about what is happening in the school building and their district. For example, when asked about equity in funding, 9 in 10 Black parents believed that schools in their communities receive less funding than White communities (Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2017). They also believed that school funding was the most prevalent factor in creating inequities in education, with racism and racial bias following as the next most prevalent factor. Yet, regardless of the lack of funding and racist systems at play in Black students’ schools, Black parents still have high expectations for their children’s educational attainment. In a study from 2015, about 4 in 5 Black parents expected their children to obtain at least a bachelor’s degree after high school (America Achieves, 2015). Also, in another study of families of different races, Black participants were the most likely (90%) to insist that success today requires education beyond high school (Klineberg, Wu, & Douds, 2013).

Myth 2: Integration is the silver bullet

The second myth is that Black educational spaces are unable to prepare Black students to be successful in the “real world.” There is a large body of research that speaks to the impact of integration on the educational outcomes of Black students (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; Frankenberg & Orfield, 2007; Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016;). It is widely known that when schools are more diverse, on average, all students tend to benefit. Why this happens is still up for debate. However, as school districts make decisions to force integration or allow neighborhoods to secede in pursuit of their own system, it’s important to know there are Black educational spaces that thrive both on K-12 and postsecondary levels.

For example, Mary McLeod Bethune Elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana, showed improvement in sixth grade ELA across four years (2007-2010) and bested the state average in both subjects each of those years. At the time, 95% of Bethune’s students were Black. Bethune is among a number of elementary and secondary schools serving largely Black populations that The Education Trust recognized with its “Dispelling the Myth” award for exceeding expectations by producing students who performed at the top of their states across multiple subjects, grades, and school years. Another example is Urban Prep Academies, a network of public schools serving mostly Black

male students in Chicago. Researchers found that the schools have four guiding components highlighted by culturally relevant curricula geared toward educating the whole child. The schools also focus on college readiness, high expectations, and respect. These tenets have led them to being recognized for consistently having 100% college acceptance rates for all graduates.

The success of Black students who attend historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) debunks this myth at the postsecondary level. In 2018, there were 101 HBCUs located across 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USDOE-IPEDS, 2019). Enrollment at HBCUs increased significantly between 1976 and 2010 but has decreased since 2010. However, the overall share of Black students attending HBCUs has not changed significantly during the decrease. More recently however, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic a number of HBCUs have seen a rise in enrollment as indicated by large freshman classes (Quilantan, 2020). What’s important, though, is the productivity and outcomes for HBCU graduates. For example, though HBCUs only serve 11% of all Black students, Black HBCU graduates are overrepresented in a number of high profile professions. HBCU graduates are 40% of Black doctors, 50% of Black engineers, 50% of Black lawyers, and 80% of Black judges. Moreover, in 2013, 25% of bachelor’s degrees in the STEM fields earned by Black undergraduate students came from HBCUs (US Commission on Civil Rights, 2016).



In comparison with Black students at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), HBCUs are also preparing their Black students better. When controlling for key variables, like socioeconomic status (SES) and high school performance, Black students who attend HBCUs are between 6% and 16% more likely to graduate within six years than those who attend PWIs (Franke & DeAngelo, 2018). In other research, HBCUs outperformed PWIs on first-year retention and post-graduation salary after controlling for SES, and due to their service to students from low-income backgrounds, they were rated more favorably on social mobility indexes when compared to PWIs (Hardy, Kaganda, & Arguete, 2019).

The performance of Black HBCU students might be attributed to the environment they find when they enroll. A 2015 Gallup poll showed that Black HBCU students were twice as likely to report experiencing high levels of support than those who attended non-HBCUs (Seymour & Ray, 2015). Compared to Black students at PWIs, Black HBCU students perceived higher levels of professor care, opportunities for mentorship, and excitement about learning. These Black spaces are serving Black students very well, and they are major contributors to Black professionals in the American workforce even as they face of chronic underfunding and attempts to eliminate them or merge them with majority White institutions (Bracey, 2017).

Finding 3: Black Students Can Perform Well, So What's Really Going On?

Context matters, and the circumstances behind the education system's failure of Black students are paramount. There are policies and practices that directly tie to the opportunities and outcomes for Black students. Some of them include low expectations, unfair disciplinary systems, and a lack of pluralism in the curricula and pedagogy presented to Black students. This section is devoted to exploring these issues.

Advanced Coursework

It is clear that the opportunities Black students are afforded add more context to the persistent issues with educational outcomes. Nowhere is the lack of op-

portunity more present than in Black students' access to advanced coursework. No matter the state, Black students are underrepresented in access to Advanced Placement testing (USDOE-NCES, 2016). In each state across the country, the population share of Black students taking AP tests is less than the population share of Black students in the state. For example, in Georgia, Black students are 38% of the student population, but they are only 21% of AP exam takers (USDOE-NCES, 2016). If there were equitable opportunities in AP test taking, Black students in Georgia would also be 38% of the test takers. Again, this is the situation in each state across this country. Lastly, only 28% of Black test takers passed an AP exam with a three or above. However, the national average is 56%.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Though there is a broad push for more culturally relevant teaching and content, there is much more work left to be done. For example, while all 50 states embed some combination of key culturally relevant/responsive teaching competencies in their standards, there is no uniformity as to which competencies they emphasize. In an analysis by New America (Muniz, 2019), the author found that all states place an emphasis on family and community engagement. Also, the vast majority of states emphasize high expectations for all students, respect for student diversity, and the linking of curriculum and instruction to culture. However, these are low bars compared to other standards that require educators do more complex work required in other competencies. For example, only 28 states required educators to reflect on their cultural lens and biases, and only three states required them to recognize and learn about institutional biases. Arguably, the more important competencies that could revolutionize education for Black students don't have the same buy in that other, less difficult competencies have.

There are also millions of students in states that lack policies around teaching Black history. One scholar found that only seven states have passed laws that require Black history to be taught in public schools (King, 2017). These states include Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Mississippi, and Rhode Island. Six other states have passed similar laws regarding the teaching of Black history but have no oversight committee to see the mandate through.

These states are California, Colorado, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington. The issue is that even with these 13 states making strides, 59% (4.5 million) of Black students—and countless students of other races—won't have access to this mandate. With this understanding, it's important that all states have standards that integrate Black history, culture, and contributions—and especially states with large numbers of Black students. Doing so would allow Black students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Further, the policies for these standards should make it clear that content implementation shouldn't simply center slavery and civil rights but should interrogate the complete and complex narrative of Black people in America. It is also important to note that states and districts must work together on these issues because school boards have a great deal of control over the implementation of curricula.



Disproportionate Disciplinary Practices

Black students also face environments that make their experiences in school less positive than the experiences of their counterparts. One major issue is disproportionate disciplinary practices that impact Black students. On average Black students experience harsher discipline practices than any other group of

students. They are overrepresented in the ranks of those experiencing exclusionary discipline such as in- and out-of-school suspension and expulsion (USGAO, 2018). They also are less likely to experience more lenient disciplinary practices such as being sent to the school counselor. Black girls, in particular, are suspended more than any other group of girls and most groups of boys. The common refrain is that Black boys and girls are disciplined more because they misbehave more often. However, they experience these harsher disciplinary practices while committing similar instances of major offenses (fighting, other forms of violence) as other groups of students. They also are disciplined more harshly for minor—or more subjective—offenses. These include instances of insubordination and other less severe infractions (Amemiya, Mortenson, & Wang, 2020). This increased interaction with exclusionary discipline leads to significant outcomes, often fueling the school-to-prison pipeline. Those who experience even just one suspension are twice as likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, and students who receive harsh discipline are four times as likely to report being arrested than those who do not experience such harsh discipline (Mowen & Brent, 2016).

Social, Emotional and Academic Development

On top of being subjected to disproportionate disciplinary practices, Black students lack access to pedagogy and policies that would 1) decrease the extent to which they are pushed out of school and 2) have positive effects on their academic, social, and life outcomes. In a nationwide analysis by CASEL (2018), only 14 states have articulated social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies/standards for their P-12 students. The states include Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. While these states show progress by recognizing the importance of integrating social, emotional, and academic development with general academic competencies, their efforts will not reach the majority of Black students, since these states don't serve a large share of Black students across the country. In the other 36 states and the District of Columbia, there are 5.8 million Black students who would not benefit from social, emotional, and academic development standards in their state



plans. Steps toward the integration of social, emotional, and academic development would open doors to ensuring that Black students are in environments that show them that they belong and help them to build a strong racial identity. However, if Black students don't have access to policies such as these that address the whole child, they will continue to be underserved.

Perceptions of School Climate

Black students don't see themselves in their teachers or the curriculum. They largely don't have access to standards that place an emphasis on educating the whole child, and they are more likely to be pushed out of their classrooms for offenses that their counterparts of other races would not be penalized for. It is no wonder then that they also perceive their school climate as less positive than what other students perceive. In a study from California, researchers found that White and Asian students reported higher levels of safety, support, and connectedness to school than their Black counterparts. The same was true in another study comparing Black students' perceptions with White students' perceptions of their school climate. In this case with a sample of 48,000 students, Black

students reported less positive perceptions of their school climate when compared with White students' perceptions. Moreover, as Black students move from middle school to high school, their perceptions of school climate worsened (Voight, Austin, & Hanson, 2013).

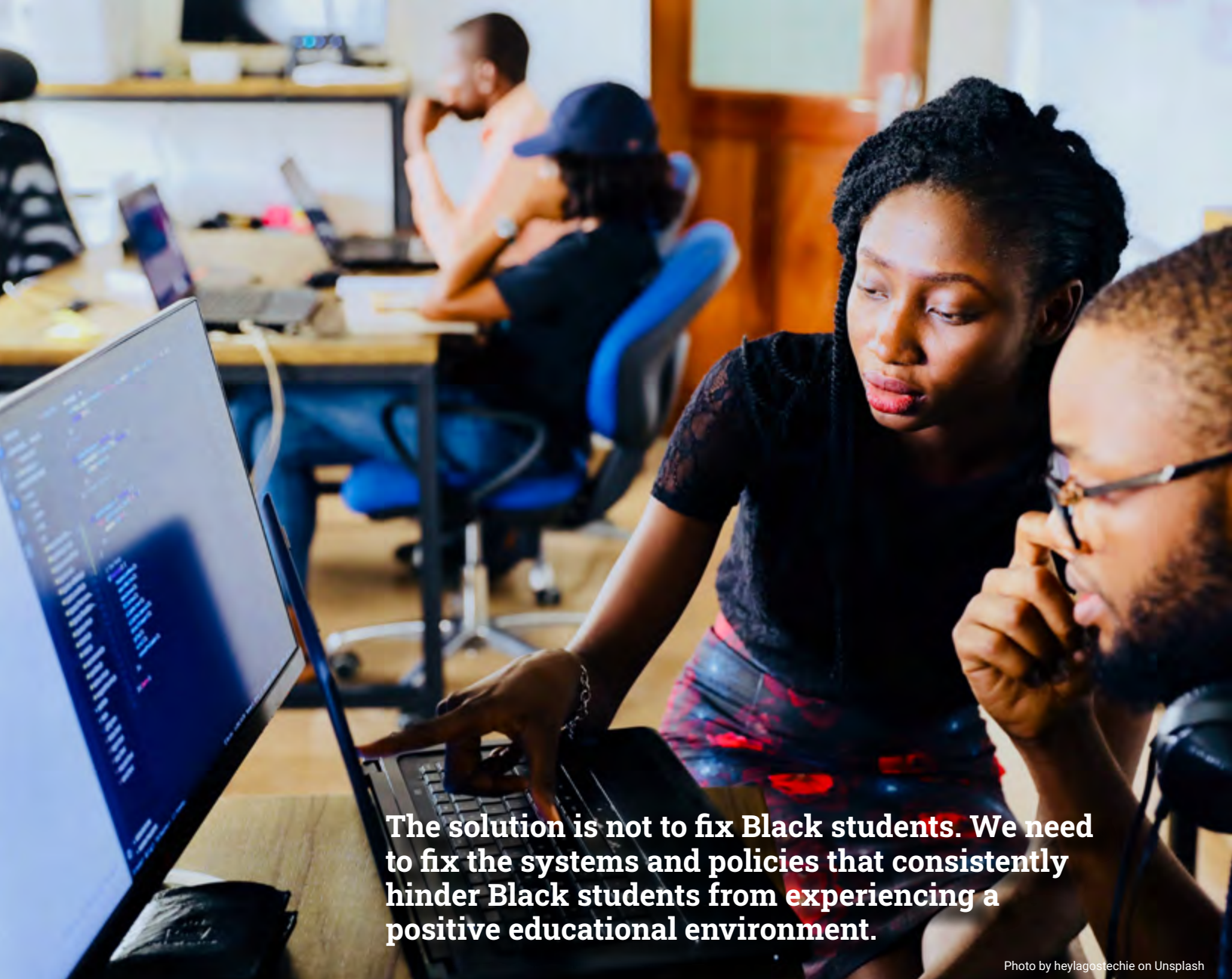
Undoubtedly contributing to this lack of positive school climate for Black students is the prevalence of racism happening at schools and on college campuses across the country. In the wake of highly publicized killings of Black citizens at the hands of police, we are seeing educational institutions paying much more attention to racism and racist events such as students and faculty making racist comments online and through social media platforms (Coleburn, 2020). On college campuses in particular, hate crimes have been part of the fabric of the Black student experience for decades (Stage & Downey, 1999; Van Dyke & Tester, 2014). For example, according to a report for the U.S. Department of Education, race is the most frequent motivation for hate crimes on college campuses. Of the 860 reported hate crimes, race was the most (39%) reported motivating factor.

Finding 4: A Failing System

All of the systemic inadequacies in place for Black students lead to disadvantages when it is time for them to perform academically. Put simply, Black students are not given the same chances to succeed that other students receive again and again. Thus, when we look at performance and attainment data, the persistent finding is that the American education system consistently fails Black students in large numbers (USDOE-NAEP, 2019; USDOE-IPEDS, 2017; de Brey et al., 2019). For example, fourth grade Black students' proficiency in reading has not changed significantly in over a decade. Additionally, in 2019, only 18% of Black students reached proficiency or above on the fourth grade reading assessment for the National Assessment for Educational Progress, or NAEP. The percentage alone does not adequately convey just how many students failed to reach proficiency. If we extrapolate the percentage of fourth grade Black students proficient in reading to the population of Black fourth graders across the country, we would estimate that almost 477,000 Black students failed to reach proficiency across the country (USDOE-NAEP, 2019 & USDOE-CCD, 2019). Similar to fourth grade reading rates, eighth grade proficiency rates have been stagnant for over a decade as well. Most recently, in 2019 only 14% of Black eighth graders reached proficiency. If we do the same extrapolation to Black eighth grade enrollment, this percentage translates to almost 480,000 Black students failing to reach proficiency in eighth grade math (USDOE-NAEP, 2019 & USDOE-CCD, 2019).

Achievement is not the only way Black students have been failed by America's education system. Black students are also not attaining at a level that is acceptable. For example, while 76% of Black high school students graduate on-time, the national rate is 84% (USDOE-NCES, 2016). Moreover, the story for those Black students who make it to college is even more worrisome. Only 39% of Black students enrolled at four-year colleges and universities graduate within six years (USDOE-IPEDS, 2019).

Lastly, even though the data exemplify both the promise of Black students and the failure of the education system to support them, there is another failure happening in how data reporting decisions misrepresent Black students' academic experiences. When discussing opportunities and outcomes for Black students, many key data points are referenced with White students as the standard of success. This constant comparing of Black student outcomes to White student outcomes leads to Black students being viewed from a deficit lens. It also leads to a tendency to endorse the educational practices that have worked for White students and to ignore the proven practices and pedagogies that support Black students' performance. Moreover, even when there is a shift away from comparing student groups toward meeting a certain proficiency standard, Black students are still reported as underperforming, without any consideration or accounting for the existing structures that offer or deny opportunities.



The solution is not to fix Black students. We need to fix the systems and policies that consistently hinder Black students from experiencing a positive educational environment.

Photo by heylagostechie on Unsplash

Finding a Solution

The issues discussed in this report are not the only factors that play a role in building the context surrounding outcomes and opportunities for Black students. We readily admit that there are other obstacles that affect educational achievement and attainment for Black students, e.g., inadequate school funding, sociological risks (community violence, child neglect, parental employment, etc.), and psychological risks (trauma, mental health, etc.). We also admit that these issues don't impact all students uniformly. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the topics discussed

in this paper are issues that can be directly addressed in schools and on college campuses. Oftentimes, solutions start with trying to change where Black students come from, or what they experience in the home, or how their parents show support. But this is not the answer. The solution is not to fix Black students. We need to fix the systems and policies that consistently hinder Black students from experiencing a positive educational environment. In the next section, we outline a new agenda for Black education and steps for effective policy and advocacy.

They need a system that honors the integrity of their experiences both racially and culturally. They need pedagogy that is pluralistic and based on research steeped in what's best for Black children.

Steps Toward Advocacy/Recommendations

What does an agenda for Black education look like? To date, the data conversations surrounding Black students paint a bleak picture. However, when we look at the totality of Black students' experiences, we see examples of success and of Black students thriving. The data are clear and suggest a shift in the way the educational system approaches Black students. They need a system that honors the integrity of their experiences both racially and culturally. They need pedagogy that is pluralistic and based on research steeped in what's best for Black children. But in order to do this we must build a policy and advocacy agenda with requirements that are clear and actionable. Here are three things to include in a policy agenda for Black students.

1). Consider the data and the research

There are a number of toxic and repressive systems in place that need to be eliminated and replaced to truly welcome, support, and empower Black students. However, to dismantle these systems, you have to know where they exist. Many policy conversations start with a plea about needing data and evidence to make sound decisions. As such, states and districts are collecting more meaningful data to guide their thinking. Still, as we detailed earlier, a lot of the data that has a particular lens on Black students come from large urban centers or cities in Northern states, when there are millions of students in the South and in smaller locales. Advocates must demand data that detail their students' unique situations. There is no way for district and state leaders to make change with

other locations' data. But if local data are continuously made available, they can reveal schools and districts where Black students thrive and inform discussions about improving locations where Black students are being underserved. States should also be very specific in the data they are collecting and disaggregating. If they are serious about better serving Black students they will monitor and make available data surrounding achievement, advanced coursework, school climate, and disciplinary practices.

2). Support policies that prioritize teacher diversity and meaningful culturally relevant pedagogy

In both findings about disrupting myths and explaining Black student experiences, we reviewed data and literature on the importance of culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy and Black teachers. There can be no agenda for Black education without more Black teachers and curricula and pedagogy that is more inclusive of Black experiences, history, and culture. Black teachers improve the quality of Black student experiences in school and produce tangible positive educational outcomes for Black students. Moreover, making the content and pedagogy more inclusive will create higher levels of engagement and investment among Black students as they see themselves in the content. Specific recommendations include: 1) states being explicit in their goals for teacher diversity by creating a bar to hit for Black teacher representation; 2) states creating a committee that will revise the curriculum to be inclusive of content that is representative of Black people and experiences; 3) states mandating training and professional development for racially and culturally conscious teaching practices.

3). Implement policies that improve school climate and eliminate disproportionate discipline practices

Black students need to be assured that they are welcome in a school building. This is perhaps more important for Black students than other group of students because of this country's history of racism and White supremacy. Currently, Black students are learning that they are not welcome, as they are suspended and expelled from school at disproportionate rates and denied access to an education that integrates their social, emotional, and academic development. To change this, an advocacy agenda should push for the adoption and implementation of SEL policies that include the voices of families and communities as vital partners, that change systems not children, and that set high expectations for Black children while also supporting them (Duchesneau, 2020). States should also eliminate discriminatory disciplinary practices that lead to pushing Black students out of the classroom. Therefore, in addition to being deliberate about monitoring data regarding racism and discrimination

in disciplinary policies and practices, states must stop exclusionary discipline for subjective/minor offenses and train teachers to eliminate racial bias in their teaching. Focusing on better social, emotional, and academic development practices and keeping Black students in the school building will serve to bolster Black students' perceptions of their school climate.

America has a lot of work to do when it comes to the treatment of Black people. The American education system is no different. Every decision that leaders make for all students will impact the outcomes and opportunities even more for Black students. As the old adage goes, "when White people catch a cold, Black people catch pneumonia". With systemic racism rearing its head across numerous institutions, we must be intentional about building a system that explicitly seeks to improve the prospects of Black students. As we continue to think more deeply about next steps for policy and advocacy to improve the educational lives of Black children, we hope to bring light to an agenda for Black children that will spark improved outcomes and success for all Black students.

There can be no agenda for Black education without more Black teachers and curricula and pedagogy that is more inclusive of Black experiences, history, and culture.



References

- Akbar, N. I. (1998). *Know Thy Self*. Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions and Associates.
- Amemiya, J., Mortenson, E., & Wang, M. (2020). Minor infractions are not minor: School infractions for minor misconduct may increase adolescents' defiant behavior and contribute to racial disparities in school discipline. *American Psychologist*, 75(1), 23–36.
- America Achieves. (2015). Expectations and reality: Good and bad news about how well US students are prepared for success in our changing world. Retrieved December 1, 2020. From <http://americaachieves.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Expectations-and-Reality-2015.pdf>
- Anderson, M.B.L. (2016). Building Better Narratives in Black Education. Washington, DC: UNCF. Retrieved from https://uncf.org/wp-content/uploads/reports/2016_Advocacy-Better_Narratives_Report_FINAL_digital.pdf
- Benner, A. D., & Crosnoe, R. (2011). The racial/ethnic composition of elementary schools and young children's academic and socio-emotional functioning. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(3), 621–646.
- Brace, E. N. (2017). The Significance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the 21st Century: Will Such Institutions of Higher Learning Survive?. *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 76(3), 670–696.
- CASEL. (2018). 2018 State scorecard scan. Report indicating an analysis of state standards and the inclusion of social emotional learning.
- Coleburn, C. (2020, November 10). SC student's racist social media post upsets school community. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from <https://www.live5news.com/2020/11/10/sc-students-racist-social-media-post-upsets-school-community/>
- Collins, E. (2018). Teacher and Administrator Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Tennessee. *Tennessee Department of Education*.
- de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., Branstetter, C., and Wang, X. (2019). Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018 (NCES 2019-038). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
- Di Carlo, M., & Cervantes, K. (2018). The Collection and Availability of Teacher Diversity Data: A Survey of 51 State Education Agencies. Research Brief. *Albert Shanker Institute*.
- Downey, D. B., Ainsworth, J. W., & Qian, Z. (2009). Rethinking the attitude-achievement paradox among blacks. *Sociology of Education*, 82(1), 1–19.
- Duchesneau, N. (2020). Social, Emotional, and Academic Development Through an Equity Lens. *The Education Trust*.
- Franke, R., & DeAngelo, L. (2018, April). Degree attainment for black students at HBCUs and PWIs: A propensity score matching approach. *In Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*.
- Frankenberg, E., & Orfield, G. (Eds.). (2007). *Lessons in integration: Realizing the promise of racial diversity in American schools*. University of Virginia Press.
- Garcia, N., López, N. & Vélez, V. N. (2018) QuantCrit: rectifying quantitative methods through critical race theory, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 21(2), 149–157.
- Gershenson, S., Hart, C., Hyman, J., Lindsay, C., & Papageorge, N. W. (2018). The long-run impacts of same-race teachers (No. w25254). *National Bureau of Economic Research*.
- Harris, A. L. (2006). I (don't) hate school: Revisiting oppositional culture theory of Blacks'; resistance to schooling. *Social Forces*, 85(2), 797-834.
- Hardy, P. M., Kaganda, E. J., & Aruguete, M. S. (2019). Below the Surface: HBCU Performance, Social Mobility, and College Ranking. *Journal of Black Studies*, 50(5), 468–483. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934719847910>
- Hilliard III, A. G. (1979). Standardization and Cultural Bias Impediments to the Scientific Study and Validation of "Intelligence." *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 12(2), 47–58.
- Hinchcliffe, K., & Tillett, L. (2019, January 24). North Carolina's teacher diversity gap – WRAL exclusive. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from <https://www.wral.com/nc-s-teacher-diversity-gap-where-are-the-black-and-brown-teachers/18129132/>
- King, L. J. (2017). The status of black history in US schools and society. *Social Education*, 81(1), 14–18.
- Klineberg, S. L., Wu, J., & Douds, K. (2013). The 2012 Houston education survey: Public perceptions in a critical time.
- Leadership Conference Education Fund. (2017). The 2 nd annual new education majority poll: Black and Latino parents and families on education and their children's future. Retrieved from <http://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/new-education-majority/New-Education-Majority-Summary-FINAL.pdf>
- McQuiggan, M., & Megra, M. (2017). Parent and Family Involvement in Education: Results from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2016. First Look. NCES 2017-102. *National Center for Education Statistics*.
- Mickelson, R. A. (1990). The attitude-achievement paradox among Black adolescents. *Sociology of education*, 44–61.
- Muniz J. (2019). Culturally responsive teaching: A 50-state survey of teaching standards. *New America*.
- Mowen, T., & Brent, J. (2016). School discipline as a turning point: The cumulative effect of suspension on arrest. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 53(5), 628–653.

- Noel, A., Stark, P., & Redford, J. (2013). Parent and family involvement in education, from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012 (NCES 2013-028) [Table 2]. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013028rev.pdf>. Data for 2016
- Quilantan, B. (2020, November 16). The HBCU imperative to reopen during the pandemic. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/weekly-education-coronavirus-special-edition/2020/11/16/the-hbcu-imperative-to-reopen-during-the-pandemic-791648>
- Seymour, S. & Ray, J. (2015, October 27). Grads of historically black colleges have well-being edge. Retrieved November 23, 2020 from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/186362/grads-historically-black-colleges-edge.aspx>
- Sherhoff, D. J., & Schmidt, J. A. (2008). Further evidence of an engagement–achievement paradox among US high school students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37(5), 564–580.
- Stage, F. K., & Downey, J. P. (1999). Hate crimes and violence on college and university campuses. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(1), 3–9.
- Stancil, W. (2018, March 14). School segregation is not a myth. Retrieved September 11, 2020, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/03/school-segregation-is-not-a-myth/555614/>
- United States Government Accountability Office (2018). Discipline disparities for Black students, boys, and students with disabilities. Report to Congressional Requesters. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/690828.pdf>
- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2016). The educational effectiveness of historically Black colleges and universities: A briefing before the United States Commission on Civil rights held in Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/docs/HBCU_webversion2.pdf
- U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Common Core of Data: Public Education Agency Universe, 2019.
- U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2019.
- U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2017.
- U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). National Assessment of Educational Progress: An overview of NAEP. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Dept. of Education.
- U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Dept. of Education.
- Van Dyke, N., & Tester, G. (2014). Dangerous climates: Factors associated with variation in racist hate crimes on college campuses. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 30(3), 290–309.
- Voight, A., Austin, G., & Hanson, T. (2013). A Climate for Academic Success: How School Climate Distinguishes Schools That Are Beating the Achievement Odds. Full Report. *California Comprehensive Center at WestEd*.
- Wells, A. S., Fox, L., & Cordova-Cobo, D. (2016). How racially diverse schools and classrooms can benefit all students. *The Education Digest*, 82(1),