

# **AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT AND EDUCATOR EXPERIENCES IN DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS THROUGH THE VOICES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS**

A Qualitative Research Study  
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"The clever, sinister thing about institutional racism in education is that it operates relentlessly on its own, like a machine, even when people of good will want it to operate differently. Today, it has morphed from the old forms we're used to seeing in civil rights documentaries and taken on many new forms that are no less pernicious." (Racism Review, 2011)

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# AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT AND EDUCATOR EXPERIENCES IN DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS THROUGH THE VOICES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

*“We all bring multiple, unique vantage points to our work and we are hoping to draw in particular on your experience as African-American educators to provide feedback on what we can all do to better support our students, particularly African-American students. Further, we would like some feedback on your personal experiences as educators in DPS. Educators in DPS have divergent employment experiences. In the context of an organization that has had a history of institutional racism in a city and a country that is continuing to struggle with issues of race and class, we thought it was vitally important to understand your experiences and what we can do better to support you.” (Acting Superintendent, Susana Cordova, Letter of invitation to participate in study, April 2016)*

## **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF STUDY:**

African-American students, educators and community continue to struggle in the landscape of Denver Public Schools despite progress and improvements towards the goal of every child succeeding. Persistent disparities in achievement and opportunity for African-American students, an at-times hostile work environment for African-American educators and a perceived disconnect with Denver’s African-American community have all raised the level of concern. The school district has responded by requesting this qualitative study, believed to be the first of its kind in Denver and other Colorado districts. This study’s purpose is to provide feedback regarding what the district, and all of us, can do to better understand the experiences and challenges of African-American students and educators, and to strengthen partnerships with the African-American community.

In fulfilling the purpose of this study, the researcher gathered qualitative data through one-on-one interviews and focus groups regarding the perceptions of African-American teachers and administrators related to:

- Critical issues impacting achievement and opportunity gaps of African-American students
- Policies, practices and program that positively and negatively impact these gaps, and
- What African-American students need to do well academically

In addition, participants were asked to share perceptions of their lived experiences as teachers and administrators in the district related to:

- Policies, practices or programs that positively or negatively impacted them
- Organizational climate
- Whether they would recommend DPS to colleagues
- Supports they view as valuable
- Recommendations for recruiting and retaining African-Americans, and
- Finally, to rate the level of institutional racism they feel is present in the district.

It is this researcher's hope that the findings of this study will provide the Denver Public Schools Board of Education, administrative leadership, African-American community, and African-American teachers and leaders, with insight into both the challenges and opportunities related to race and education in the current landscape.

## **OVERVIEW OF STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:**

Through the thematic analysis of the qualitative narratives from 40 one-on-one interviews and three focus groups with African-American educators, multiple dominant themes were identified. The findings were selected based on their frequency and meaning to the purpose of the study. In order for an issue to be categorized as a dominant theme, it had to be mentioned by at least 10 participants and surface as a topic of discussion in at least one of the three focus groups. The multiple dominant themes that emerged through this study demonstrate the urgency, complexity and interrelatedness of the issues currently impacting the experiences of African-American educators and students in Denver Public Schools.

In the following sections, the three dominant themes having a **negative** impact on both African-American teachers and students are contextualized and discussed. Discussion and analysis have been limited to a select few dominant themes due to the significant number that emerged from the interview data. In the discussion and analysis of the selected dominant themes, the collective narrative that surfaced from the data is presented. The numerical summary of all dominant themes, including those with positive impact, can be found in the appendices of this report along with an overview of the research methodology and quotes extracted from the transcripts. The quotes are organized by dominant theme and shared as evidence of some of the underlying issues and root causes of participants' issues related to their own experiences and those of African-American students in the district.

# AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE STATUS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose school is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must ultimately depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.” (Edmonds, 1979)*

Through this qualitative study, the voices of African-American teachers and administrators have related their observations about the experiences of African-American students in the Denver Public Schools. Participants identified several issues and areas of policy and practice they perceive as having both negative and positive impacts on the persistent achievement and opportunity gaps. Each participant commented on their lived experience and shared observations regarding the status of African-American students from different vantage points (e.g. years of teaching, administrator / teacher, age, level of education, location of employment). Despite such differences, they provided similar answers to the interview questions. The data that emerged from the interviews and focus groups challenge the district’s stated commitments to valuing diversity, cultural competence, eliminating achievement and opportunity gaps, and fostering feelings of belonging. This feedback also reflects areas of missed opportunity which, if addressed, may provide a framework for enhancing the progress and futures of both African-American students and educators.

Before discussing what the data from interviews and focus groups reveal about the current status of African-American students in DPS, it is important to examine the educational landscape and provide some context. One of the most dramatic changes relative to African-American students in the district has been their declining percentage compared to other student populations. According to the *2015-16 Denver Public Schools Report of Student Membership by Ethnicity and Gender*, African-American students now comprise only 13.8% (12,538) of the total school population of 91,429, as of Oct. 1, 2015. The growing Anglo student population is currently 22.6% (20,671), while the Hispanic percentage is 55.1% (51,252). (Denver Public Schools, 2015-16) The decline in the African-American percentage of the student population has been attributed to a number of factors, including the gentrification of Denver’s neighborhoods, increased levels of poverty, the shortage of affordable housing and choice options allowing student enrollment in surrounding districts. The impact of the decline in enrollment of African-American students has led many in the African-American community to conclude that the attention to the needs of these students is no longer a priority, as was the case during the era of *Keyes* and school desegregation.

There are multiple challenges in the landscape creating an inertia that limits the progress for all students in Denver Public Schools. Colorado ranks as one of the stingiest states in the nation in how much it spends to educate its children: Colorado currently ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> of all states in education spending. Since the end of busing, Denver schools have become more segregated by race and poverty (though the trend line has flattened over the last 10 years), and quality schools are not distributed equally throughout the city. As a state, we struggle with the Colorado Paradox. Even though Colorado ranks in the top five nationally for per capita degree-holders, only one in five Colorado ninth-graders will graduate from college. Colorado is importing its workforce from out of state while failing to prepare our own students with the skills needed to succeed in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy. By 2018, nearly 70% of jobs in Colorado will require some level of postsecondary education, the highest rate of any state in the entire country. (CCHE, 2012) If we don't do a better job of educating our own students, businesses will continue to fill their needs with workers from out of state, crowding our own students out of economic opportunities in their own communities. The stakes are high for all of Colorado's students, but they are particularly high for African-American, other students of color and those students struggling with the constraints of poverty.

Despite the challenges present in the current landscape, and the perceived implications for African-American students, there are signs of hope and areas of improvement. The school district has articulated a vision of "Every Child Succeeds" in the Denver Plan 2020 through a systemic focus on:

**1. Great schools in every neighborhood**

Students and families thrive when they have high-quality education choices. DPS will dramatically increase the quality of schools available in *every* neighborhood to ensure that *every* student in *every* community throughout the district has access to great schools. *By 2020, 80% of DPS students will attend a high-performing school, measured by region using the district's school performance framework.*

**2. A foundation for success in school**

A focus on preparedness in early childhood education builds an essential foundation that sets the course for a student's entire academic experience. Students who read and write at grade level in third grade are likely to be at grade level or above in reading, writing and mathematics in 10th grade. Therefore, DPS will focus on preparedness from preschool through third grade, with strong instructional supports for students whose native language is not English. *By 2020, 80% of Denver's third-graders will be at or above grade level in reading and writing.*

**3. Ready for college and career**

By inspiring, challenging and empowering all students — including those with special learning needs and those already achieving at high levels — to forge their own future, we will instill the next generation of young professionals with confidence, competence and a healthy work ethic. DPS will dramatically

increase the number of successful college- and career-prepared graduates. *By 2020, the four-year graduation rate for students who start with DPS in ninth grade will increase to 90%. By 2020, we will double the number of students who graduate college and career ready, as measured by the increasing rigor of the state standard.*

#### **4. Support for the whole child**

DPS is committed to creating a setting that fosters the growth of the whole child. Our school environments will encourage students to pursue their passions and interests, support their physical health and strengthen the social/emotional skills they need to succeed, including managing emotions, establishing and maintaining positive relationships and making responsible decisions. *By 2015, a task force, including DPS staff, community partners and city agencies providing services to DPS students, will recommend to the Board of Education a plan to measure this goal and track progress.*

#### **5. Close the opportunity gap**

All of our students deserve access to educational opportunities that allow them to achieve at the highest levels. This means raising the bar for all students while acknowledging that there is a persistent gap between the performance of our white students and our African-American and Latino students. We believe it is critical to shine a light on the issue of race and the achievement gap that persists for our students of color, even when poverty is not a factor. For these reasons, we feel it critical to put in place a goal that focuses on the opportunity gap. *By 2020, the graduation rate for African-American and Latino students will increase by 25 percentage points. Reading and writing proficiency for third-grade African-American and Latino students will increase by 25 percentage points. (Denver Plan 2020, 2012)*

The Denver Plan 2020 is visionary and ambitious, and the district has reported promising results. In the past six years, DPS has dramatically expanded preschool and kindergarten opportunities, posted record enrollment increases, drove the highest rate of student progress of any major district in the state, increased the on-time graduation rate by 26 percentage points and cut its dropout rate by 60% (2,200 fewer dropouts in 2014 than in 2006). (2016 Report to Board) In measuring the district's progress relative to African-American students, there have indeed been incremental improvements. In examining key data indicators specific to African-American student success, the district reports the following:

#### **Graduation Rates and Rigorous High School Course Work**

- African-American student graduation rates have increased dramatically over time with a 20 percentage point gain, from 43% in 2007 to 63.4% in 2014.
- In 2015, African-American students passed 168 Advanced Placement exams – four times more than the 40 exams passed by African-American students in 2006.

## **Middle School Proficiency Rates and Dropout Rates**

- DPS middle school African-American student grade-level proficiency rates in math have increased from 15% in 2005 to 31% in 2014 (16 points); during the same time, their peers across the state improved only 5 points (from 29% to 34%).
- In reading, DPS middle school African-American student grade-level proficiency rates increased from 36% to 45% (9 points) over the same period while statewide rates rose only 3 points (49% to 52%).
- DPS middle school African-American students are closing the gap with their peers across the state: math (DPS 38%, state 37%), reading (DPS 44%, state 53%) and writing (DPS 39%, state 41%).

## **Suspensions and Expulsions**

- Since 2006-07, the suspension rate for African-American students has been reduced by a factor of 4, from 28 of 100 students facing suspension in 2006 to 7 out of 100 students facing suspension in 2015-16.
- In terms of suspensions, the district has suspended fewer African-American boys than eight years ago, yet African-American boys are still more likely to be suspended than white boys. This disproportionate trend also hold true in the expulsion of African-American boys. (DPS, African-American and Black Student Outcomes in the Denver Public Schools, 2015)

Despite these indicators of progress, African-American students remain at the bottom of the ladders of student achievement and opportunity in the district. Within the Denver Plan 2020, there are specific goals related to diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as closing achievement and opportunity gaps. However, without a strong and intentional focus on these elements of the plan, and targeted initiatives focused on African-American students, equity and progress will remain elusive.

In April 2016, A+ Colorado released its annual DPS Progress Report, which assessed the progress of the district towards its 2020 Plan goals. The independent, nonprofit group reports that there has been progress in DPS, particularly in comparison to other Colorado districts, but some student learning outcomes are stalled or are improving far too slowly for the district to be successful. A+ Colorado emphasized the slowness of progress and went on to recommend that the district needs to focus on significantly increasing student performance and creating strong schools, where most students perform at grade level or stand a realistic chance of getting to grade level, and eliminate the persistent opportunity gap. These are the challenges the group feels that DPS needs to be confronting every day.” (A+ Colorado, 2016)

In a series of employees-of-color focus groups conducted by the district during the winter of 2015-2016 (December – February), data was gathered about the perceptions of DPS educators of color regarding the experiences of African-American and other

students of color. In responses from African-American participants, along with themes / responses shared across racial and ethnic groups, it was observed that:

- The school district through bias, charter / specialty schools and testing was disconnected from the needs of students of color;
- The talent and potential displayed by these students are not accepted as intelligent and that their robust personalities and challenging of authority were viewed as negative dispositions by Anglo teachers;
- The content and programming of charters and other “focus” schools are not meeting the needs of diverse students, and
- More of the culture and heritage of these students needs to be included in the curriculum at every level. These students need to “know who they are.” (DPS, Employees-of-Color Focus Group Highlights, 2016)

The dominant themes that emerged from this study mirror findings of DPS Employees-of-Color Focus Group findings in 2016 regarding African-American and other students of color. The dominant themes African-American teachers and administrators in this study perceived as having a *negative* impact on the achievement and opportunity gaps of African-American students include:

- **Lack of qualified, diverse, culturally competent teachers, African-American role models**
- **Disproportionate discipline – suspension and expulsions**
- **Consent decree – English Language Learner (ELL) requirement – equity for African-American students**
- **Low expectations/deficit thinking regarding African-American students**
- **Lack of access to quality enrichment, academic and support programs, and**
- **Lack of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy**

All of these themes have implications for how the district is currently dealing with the dynamics of race and class, the Denver Plan strategic vision and goals, and particularly district beliefs surrounding equity as a shared core value.

## **LACK OF QUALIFIED, DIVERSE, CULTURALLY COMPETENT TEACHERS AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN ROLE MODELS**

The need for qualified, diverse and culturally competent teachers was a dominant theme recurring with greater frequency than any other in the analysis of interview and focus group transcripts. Study participants repeatedly commented on the negative impact of the demographic mismatch between the diverse student population and educator workforce. This has become problematic for DPS and urban districts throughout the nation. African-American students comprise 13.8% of DPS students and 83.3% of the DPS student population are students of color. However, 74.4% of the teaching workforce is Anglo, and majority female. Currently, DPS has 241 African-American teachers that comprise 4% of the total teacher workforce of 5,948. Only 3% of the applicant pool for teacher positions is African-American, demonstrating how challenging it is to recruit. (CELT Equity and Inclusion Report, 2016)

There is a strong need for male and female African-American teachers in every facet of education from classroom teachers to building administrators to district superintendents. Teacher diversity is seen as an educational civil right for students. The research finds that:

- Minority teachers can be more motivated to work with disadvantaged minority students in high-poverty, racially and ethnically segregated schools, a factor that may help to reduce rates of teacher attrition in hard-to-staff schools.
- Minority teachers tend to have higher academic expectations for minority students, which can result in increased academic and social growth among students.
- Minority students profit from having among their teachers individuals from their own racial and ethnic group who can serve as academically successful role models and who can have greater knowledge of their heritage culture.
- Positive exposure to individuals from a variety of races and ethnic groups, especially in childhood, can help to reduce stereotypes, attenuate unconscious implicit biases and help promote cross-cultural social bonding.
- All students benefit from being educated by teachers from a variety of different backgrounds, races and ethnic groups, as this experience better prepares them to succeed in an increasingly diverse society. (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015)

Research has also demonstrated that student-teacher demographic mismatches, like that in Denver Public Schools, negatively affects teachers' expectations for educational

attainment. (Gershenson, Holt and Papageorge, 2015) Low expectations for African-American students was identified as a dominant theme by participants as cause for increasing the numbers of these teachers in the district's workforce. In addressing these interrelated issues, it will be important to start a dialogue between educators, policymakers, parents, researchers and other stakeholders about the possible causes and consequences of systematic biases in teachers' expectations for student achievement and attainment. This study's findings and others highlight the need to better understand how teachers form expectations and what types of interventions can reduce or eliminate biases in teacher expectations.

Given the demographic mismatch between the student population and the educator workforce, building the capacity of the district at all levels to function more effectively through culturally responsive policies and practices was viewed by participants as key to addressing multiple themes identified in this study (i.e., hostile work and learning environments, culturally responsive pedagogy, disproportionality in discipline, high expectations for all kids, etc.). Some suggested that all new and current teachers, administrative staff and instructional superintendents should be required to receive a certification in culturally responsiveness similar to the English Language Learner (ELL) standards over a designated period, and that proficiency in this work be embedded in each job description.

Several participants shared positive perceptions of the district's Culture and Equity Leadership Team and initiatives designed to raise the level of cultural competency of the workforce. The district reports that trainings like the Equity Boot Camp, Conversations on Race, Foundations on Bias courses and other offerings have reached 44 schools, 12 departments and a total of 5,793 academic and operations participants during the past two years. In addition, the reported results show that behaviors are changing in both departments and schools, resulting in deeper awareness and conversations about race and bias in relationships. (CELT Equity and Inclusion Report, 2016).

Many of the study participants applauded these efforts but also insisted that greater intentionality, effort and resources are required to have a significant impact on the organizational culture of the district and its schools. They observed that cultural competency training is rolled out differently in school buildings, and some have not participated at all in this important training.

"Districtwide, I see some schools embracing cultural competency training, other schools who refuse to have it at all. They think they don't need it. They have their own specialists or think they already know everything, and they don't. One of the schools I'm thinking of is one that speaks the loudest about being culturally competent and they are the least in my opinion and the most discriminatory and segregated of all, and blatantly just not addressing the needs of kids of color." (P38A)

“There is a lack of qualified teachers who are culturally responsive. There is a lack of culturally responsive professional development and the district struggles with making it mandatory. Typically, it is the same folks and one-and-done training is not enough. Support in the classroom is also limited.” (P2A)

One principal shared that he was advised that it would suffice if cultural competence, diversity and equity issues were noted solely as an asterisk in his school’s unified improvement plan. In expressing concerns about the lack of urgency around these issues, study participants noted that their colleagues have shared that they need to focus on testing and they don’t have the time to address issues related to diversity and cultural competence. Other participants shared the view that staff members with culturally responsive expertise have been pushed out of the equity planning process and have not been consulted with or included in equity and culturally responsive training. Some expressed the view that the districts’ efforts in this area are too little, too late, and disingenuous due to the hesitancy to make this training mandatory, pushback from school leaders, recent staff changes and budget cuts.

Understanding diversity and culture as tools that can be leveraged as opportunities to serve and educate cannot be over-emphasized in this landscape. This is a key challenge in educating African-American and all students of color. It is simply about having educators that can understand and love all kids and treat them and their families with respect.

## **DISPROPORTIONATE DISCIPLINE – SUSPENSION AND EXPULSIONS**

Despite policies and practices like restorative justice, the discipline matrix and reductions in the number of African-American students suspended or expelled, African-American students remain disproportionately impacted. Participants observed that staffs are still struggling with discipline and there’s not enough support for the effective implementation of restorative justice. The discipline matrix is viewed by some as too cumbersome. Study participants shared that many of the young female Anglo teachers and administrators, who comprise the disproportionate majority of the DPS workforce, fear African-American students.

“I think some of our teachers are afraid of African-American males. Because of this, these teachers just kick African-American males out of the classrooms. One day I counted six different African-American males just hanging out in the hallway because they were kicked out of class. I went to the principal about this. I think the principal wants to help but does not know how.” (P15T)

Participants observed that many teachers are unable to build effective relationships with African-American students because of fear and preconceived biases about these students. They report that these students are often labeled the moment they walk through the classroom door.

“African-American students are suffering a great deal. I don’t think the teachers of other races are interested in really helping our students so it becomes a situation where the acting-out behavior takes over to get the attention they so desperately want.” (P22T)

Participants have observed that schools vary widely in how discipline policies are implemented. Many of the study participants provided examples of Anglo students with similar offenses who are not disciplined as harshly as African-Americans. During one focus group session, two teachers discussed the different disciplinary outcomes for an Anglo male student and an African-American male student. The Anglo male’s behavior entailed tossing chairs, while the African-American male just stood and balled his fists in defiance. The African-American student was suspended from school and the Anglo male was moved to a higher level math class because his behavior was a sign that he was merely “bored.” Participants provided examples like this in stressing the need for additional training and accountability with disciplinary practices.

“A lot of kids get kicked out for no reason, or for reasons, if you look at the tier structure, they are low-tier incidents. But yet they’re pushed depending on how close the teacher is to administration. They’re pushed to become high-tier incidents and all of a sudden a kid is disenfranchised because the teacher doesn’t know the right steps to take in the first place.” (FG1)

Participants also shared instances where schools are playing political games with the numbers of suspensions and expulsions. There are no kids suspended at some schools when they meet their “quota.” African-American students can often be found in significant numbers in the in-school suspension or “refocus” rooms where no learning takes place. Participants expressed concern about the violation of these students’ rights when they are moved to suspension rooms with no instruction.

Participants expressed specific concerns regarding the lack of accountability for discipline practices of the district’s charter schools. A study released by the Civil Rights Project this past spring examined how charters throughout the nation are contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline for African-American students and other students of color. While it would seem self-evident that kids don’t learn if they’re not in school, extensive research has demonstrated that frequently suspending students, for even minor infractions, predicts lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates and too many kids being pushed onto a pathway to prison. Discipline data reported to the U.S. Department of Education by non-charter schools also has consistently shown that students of color and those with disabilities are suspended at much higher rates than white students. (Civil Rights Project, 2016) With the increasing number of charters being approved by the district, the need for greater oversight of charter schools was expressed. Participants feel African-American students are more “at risk” in these school

environments and that there should be no excuses or exemptions for lack of accountability for charter schools that fail to comply with civil rights laws.

Several interview participants, and one focus group, identified a sub-theme within disciplinary practices that is worth noting. The lack of accountability and training related to disciplinary practices and cultural competence, has led to what several identified as the “invisible workload.” Participants explained that if they happen to be the one or two of the only African-American educators in a building, they often become the default disciplinarian because they “know how to relate” to African-American students.

“I’m a special education teacher and I have kids who aren’t even in special education being sent to me just because they can’t deal with behavior...These kids act out and they just get rid of them. These adults hold on to these grudges and they just don’t let go. So the kids know who they don’t like and who doesn’t like them...They know who has given up on them.” (FG1)

“A teacher walked up to me and she was like — we’re going to send Sergio to your classroom because he needs tough love...I just flip it to my advantage and say that – you all don’t know how to talk to them, so I’ll do it for you.” (FG1)

Students don’t have the language to explain that ‘Something is wrong with the way I’m being educated or treated.’ Several participants pointed to the work of the district around the whole child as holding promise in modifying the way behavior issues are addressed, decreasing disciplinary disparities and ensuring that more African-American students have the opportunity to stay in school.

The Padres & Jovenes Unidos *Denver Community Accountability Report Card: 2014-2015 School Year* and other reports have been a helpful barometer for monitoring the overuse of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, police tickets and school-based arrests, particularly for students of color in Colorado school districts. The report finds that there is huge variability in the practices used statewide. And while students of color are benefitting from improvement, there continue to be racial inequities that will continue to demand heightened attention. (Padres & Jovenes Unidos, 2016) Although they report an encouraging downward trend in the use of harsh disciplinary practices in Denver Public Schools and a decrease in racial disparities, many challenges remain. In reporting racial disparities in discipline between white students and students of color, they find that students of color are three times as likely as white students to get in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. They also report that African-American students in Denver Public Schools are nearly seven times as likely to be suspended in-school, nearly seven times as likely to be suspended out-of-school and more than seven times as likely to be expelled as compared to their white counterparts. (Padres & Jovenes Unidos, 2016) Study participants expressed support for the practices, like restorative justice, that are incrementally decreasing disparities. They also stressed the need for allocating resources to focus on whole child initiatives with socio-emotional support for students and greater attention to the deeper systemic issues related to cultural competence and accountability for unfair treatment of African-

American students. In order for these efforts to be successful, they should incorporate culturally-responsive, evidence-based, socio-emotional programming along with teacher training and inclusion in the curriculum.

“What I’ve witnessed is that there is a lack of self-identity that includes those aspects of a whole human being. And it’s not always necessarily cool to want to be smart and drive yourself academically...They don’t have a lot of those positive voices giving them the right self-image and increasing their overall expectations.”  
(P29T)

## CONSENT DECREE – ELL REQUIREMENTS – EQUITY FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

The Congress of Hispanic Educators (CHE), the United States Department of Justice and Denver Public Schools in 2012-13 negotiated a revised plan for addressing the educational needs of students whose language is other than English (English Language Learners or ELLs). The revised plan replaced the English Language Acquisition Program approved in 1999 by the U.S District Court in the case of the *Congress of Hispanic Educators v. Denver School District No.1*. The revised plan: (a) clarifies how parents may choose program services for their ELL students, (b) provides a new approach to training teachers of ELL students, (c) ensures that parents from different language groups receive translations of important communications, (d) sets out processes governing placement of ELL students with disabilities, and (e) improves DPS’s self-evaluation of its ELA program to *help ensure that ELL students are succeeding in schools*. (Consent Decree (2012) U.S. District Court, English Language Acquisition)

The requirements for ensuring that ELL students are succeeding in schools emerged as a dominant theme among African-American interview and focus group participants. They expressed concerns regarding a new inequity in the current landscape relative to what has been done for English Language Learners and their families versus the programs and services provided to African-American students and their families. To be clear, these programs and services do not serve all Latino families. It is focused on serving a subset of Latino families with English language needs. Both communities have expressed that the intense focus on the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs), has overshadowed the needs of African-American and non-English Language Learner Latino students and their families since the end of the court-ordered busing and desegregation requirements of *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1* in 1995.

“I don’t know exactly how to say this without sounding biased I guess. I think there have been a lot of things put in place for Spanish-speaking families and refugee families like with the consent decree. All those things are really powerful, but are only powerful for the people they serve... I can see the division in schools

among Black and Latino families and these policies and practices are only deepening the divide. And then to hear that the Black students' achievement and opportunity gaps are still huge and the Latino gaps are closing is troubling to me." (P36A)

"The court mandate for ELA classes undermines the importance of the needs of African-American students, which are just as urgent." (P2A)

"I don't see any policy that's been established to help African-American students...that benefits them, that is unique to them, that is special to them. To continue to expect African-American students to be lumped in with students of color further marginalizes them. It is time to call things out and say this is for African-American students." (P7A)

Study participants clearly view this as an area of extreme disparity in the district. When one looks closer at the services and programs currently in place for ELLs and their families, the disparity in treatment becomes even more evident. In reviewing the current consent decree, one finds that the district is legally bound to provide:

- Annual requirements for teacher recruitment, retention and training
- Extra pay incentives for ELA teachers
- Multiple teacher certifications and training requirements
- Requirements for Spanish-speaking paraprofessionals
- Parental oversight through a Districtwide Advisory Committee (DAC)
- Efforts to increase parent involvement and annual training program for parents regarding their rights and responsibilities
- Requirements for parent communications and translations
- English Language Development (ELD) to support student vocabulary development, listening and comprehension development, and development of reading and writing skills in English
- A Summer Academy for ELL students
- Remediation opportunities to address academic deficiencies
- Instructional programming and curriculum with requirements for culturally responsive teaching
- Meaningful opportunities for these students to be considered for Gifted and Talented programs and other advanced classes, and more  
(Consent Decree (2012) U.S. District Court, English Language Acquisition)

At a recent Board of Education meeting, the district ELA Districtwide Accountability Committee received high praise for their accomplishments over the past year. Information on services and programs provided to these families included the Center for Family Opportunity, located in Southwest Denver, which conducts a number of free classes for adults in this community. They also shared the successes of community meetings and trainings for ELA parents, and the computer training and assistance these parents receive to more effectively navigate the district's School Choice process. On the district's Family and Community Engagement website, under Family Constituency

Services, it states that “Our team provides high quality **bilingual** services to staff, family and community members who need assistance accessing school and District resources, addressing pressing concerns and building skills to be strong advocates and partners in their students’ education.” (DPS, FACE website) An African-American parent seeking these types of services in Northeast or Far Northeast Denver would unfortunately feel like this is not a resource available to them.

The district has implemented major ELL services across the district in curriculum, instruction, teacher training, etc. However, these same systems, services and supports have not been implemented to support African-American children. Participants voiced that many perceived that African-American students are also English language learners, and their needs are just as urgent and require comparable supports.

Participants repeatedly voiced the opinion that African-American parents are not heard, and there is a lack of communication with and customer service for these families who need similar services and supports. They proposed that if African-American students and their families had even a portion of the services and programmatic supports provided to ELL students and their families, it would make a meaningful difference in closing achievement and opportunity gaps. Participants also noted that the budget for these services has strapped the district, further leading to the perception that African-American children have been disregarded or dismissed. Several participants also observed a growing hostility between the Black and Brown communities, and that this inequity in funding and scarcity of resources has pitted vulnerable and underrepresented groups against each other.

Participants suggested that lumping African-American students into the “students of color” label only further marginalizes them. African-American teachers and administrators also agreed with community members regarding the notion that it shouldn’t take another lawsuit for DPS to develop policies and programs that specifically benefit African-American students and their families.

Several participants shared a resentment of the required ELA training, extra pay for Spanish-speaking staff and the fact that there is no comparable training required for addressing cultural competencies that support the educational needs of African-American students.

“I never saw a posting for an African-American liaison. Do you get paid more if you know how to work with minority students? Are you getting a stipend? Speaking Spanish is a preferred qualification. I never saw a job posting with African-American preferred.” (P26A)

Participants also observed that even when attempts were made to initiate programs specifically designed to help African-American students, interest and follow-through by the district was noticeably weak. An example was given related to President Obama’s National Black Male Initiative. They shared that after some initial interest, they were not aware of any actions or resources dedicated to the implementation of this program that

could have had real benefits for African-American male students. The district has indicated that they did have resources dedicated to this, but didn't do a sufficient job of communicating to teachers regarding this.

District leadership has seldom named or labeled the specific issues in regard to African-American children as they have with ELLs. There has been a glaring neglect to specifically focus on the needs of African-American children (who are falling below ELLs in some areas of the city). There must be a willingness to name and label these challenges in partnership with a task force of African-American educators and the Superintendent's African-American Roundtable to help drive the process and shape indicators for measuring progress. This will require the Board and executive leaders to build and sustain relationships with key community stakeholders toward solutions and collaboration (the Black Child Development Institute, African-American sororities and fraternities, NAACP, the Urban League, Colorado Black Round Table, etc.)

# AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES IN DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*“African-Americans in DPS are invisible, silenced and dehumanized, especially if you are passionate, vocal and unapologetically black. We can’t even be advocates for our kids. It feels a lot like being on a plantation... there is a lot of fear and black folks are pitted against each other.” (P41A)*

Through this qualitative study, the voices of African-American teachers and administrators have related their observations about their own experiences in Denver Public Schools. Participants identified several issues and areas of policy and practice they perceive as having both negative and positive impacts on the degree to which they feel valued as professionals and experience job satisfaction. Each participant commented on their lived experience and shared observations regarding the status of African-American educators from different vantage points (e.g. years of teaching, administrator / teacher, age, location of employment). Despite such differences, they provided compatible answers to the interview questions. This section will highlight three of the most frequently recurring dominant themes participants perceived as having a **negative impact** on their experiences as professional educators.

In contextualizing the perceptions of African-American educators regarding their employment experiences, it is again important to note that African-American teachers comprise only 4% of the teaching workforce in Denver Public Schools. They are geographically dispersed throughout the district and are often the only one, or one of few, African-American educators in a school building or department. Despite their small numbers and geographic dispersion, the district reports that retention rates for African-American employees are higher than they are for white employees (87% vs 84%). (DPS, 2015)

Results from the district’s CollaboRATE survey, which solicits employee satisfaction data from all employees, shows that engagement among African-American educators in DPS is about the same or higher than for other groups. (Of the 1,303 African-American employees who participated in the survey, 80% indicated they felt engaged. But of the 7,178 white employees who participated, only 73% said they felt engaged with the district.) (DPS, 2015) However, employee survey data captures only a snapshot in time and they typically don’t provide specific feedback from employees who may not be experiencing a high level of satisfaction or engagement in their workplace.

In a series of employees-of-color focus groups conducted by the district during the winter of 2015-2016 (December – February), data was gathered about the perceptions and experiences of DPS educators of color. The focus groups also obtained feedback related to the recruitment and retention of teachers of color. It was reported that:

- African-American teachers have difficulty securing positions and advancement;
- Too few minority teachers, and the feeling of isolation, was an additional stressor for them;
- They don't feel that their ideas are valued, especially in struggling schools;
- School climates were less than desirable and seasoned teachers of color are "pushed out";
- There is a need for more time and space for discussions about diversity and inclusion and that there needs to be a commitment by the district to provide spaces for these dialogues without fear of retaliation;
- African-Americans teachers feel under attack on a daily basis, and their voices are not heard, and
- Despite the talk of hiring more educators of color, not much has changed.  
(*Employees-of-Color Focus Group Highlights, Denver Public Schools, April 2016*)

In reviewing the research in the national landscape, there are themes and issues that mirror the needs, perspectives and voices of African-American teachers and teachers of color in Denver Public Schools. From March 2015-2016, the Education Trust conducted a year-long project collecting data from 37 homogeneous focus groups in eight states and DC. They collected data from 150 Black and 70 Hispanic educators. Colorado was included in their sample but only Latino focus groups were hosted. The national findings reported that educators of color throughout the nation share similar perspectives related to the professional and personal challenges expressed by African-American educators in Denver Public Schools. They concluded that many of the challenges teachers of color listed are symptoms of the same disease -- racial prejudice and discrimination. The Education Trust focus group participants expressed the following professional and personal challenges:

- Being stereotyped as bad or incompetent teachers
- Being required to doing more work and being seen as a disciplinarian before being viewed as an educator
- Being denied professional opportunities – passed over for leadership positions or other advancement opportunities
- Having to be twice as good
- Implementing culturally relevant pedagogy
- The lack of respect
- Code switching – regulating one's behavior based on what is deemed appropriate
- Having their voices go unheard with administrators and colleague not valuing their opinions
- Alienation and isolation in their school buildings (Ed. Trust, 2016)

As part of the district's strategic priorities, it has committed to enhancing efforts to recruit, develop and retain African-American and other teachers of color. Some activities the district is engaging in to enhance inclusion and retention of African-American and other educators of color include:

- Employee Resource Groups

- Leaders of Color Mentoring Program
- Foundational Bias Training
- Inclusion Training and team development sessions

Equity-focused efforts:

- Equity Boot Camps, where several hundred educators are brought together
- Foundational Bias Training
- Culturally Responsive Teaching professional development (via site-based work and professional development units or PDUs)
- Embedded into new educator, residency and teacher leader PDUs

Much of what has been provided in the findings from the district's own research, and from a national perspective, is reflected in the dominant themes that emerged in this study. The dominant themes that emerged from this study African-American teachers and administrators perceived as having a *negative* impact on their experiences as professional educators in DPS include:

- **Institutional racism / race, age, sex discrimination**
- **Human Resource issues / unfair LEAP evaluations, unclear and inconsistent practices**
- **Hostile work environment/ fear of retaliation**
- **Lack of representation of African-Americans in top leadership**
- **Lack of vehicle to build collegiality and support among African-American educators**
- **Lack of cultural competency - Perceived need to "fit in" / assimilate**
- **African-American teachers and leaders do not feel valued as professionals**
- **Practices do not reflect organizational core values**
- **Feelings of isolation / marginalization**
- **African-American women –"angry Black woman" label**

The following discussion will focus on the findings related to participant perceptions of the presence of institutional racism, Human Resource practices, and challenges and opportunities related to the recruitment and retention of African-American educators.

## INSTUTIONAL RACISM/RACE, AGE AND DISCRIMINATION

In examining the multiple themes identified by participants regarding their experiences as African-American professionals in Denver Public Schools, it is critical to address issues embedded in the dynamics between race and the educational landscape. Participants suggested that issues surrounding race and racism are reflected in the other identified dominant themes. This includes the creation of hostile working environments, feelings of isolation and marginalization, not being valued as professionals, the lack of representation in the district’s top administration, lack of cultural competencies and stereotypical labeling, like that of the “angry Black woman.”

“I want them to talk to those of us who are living it and hear our stories, our struggles...and all of us can’t be crazy. You can’t possibly have this level of a common theme...What is the common denominator? All of us can’t be making this up. It’s like we’re living mirror stories...all of us...something must be wrong...But a drastic change needs to happen, especially with our Black women. I would say it is borderline criminal what is happening.” (P39A)

All 70 participants in one-one-one interviews and focus groups were asked to respond to the following question. The table below summarizes their responses.

**On a scale of 1-10, how would you rank the level of institutional racism in DPS?**

**(1=low and 10=high level of institutional racism)**

**N=70**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10+	N/A
		1		1	4	11	22	15	12	2	2

Fifty-one of the total 70 interview and focus group participants rated the level of institutional racism at eight or above. Seventeen rated the level of institutional racism at seven or below, and there were two no answers. In further probing about reasons for participant ratings, the responses varied based on perceptions of how African-American students and educators are treated, location of employment, and the types of interpersonal interactions they have experienced with their supervisors and colleagues. Some of the perspectives of the participants regarding the level of institutional racism they have experienced include the following:

“Because institutional racism is the idea that a group of American folks have grown up and have gotten so used to having things done their way that they don’t even see that there could be a problem with it.” (P34T)

“I’m wondering why the district has treated African-Americans this way. I think part of it is the evaluation system, racism and politics.” (P16T)

“Abuse and disrespect for Black educators and Black children must cease immediately, with a district statement that consequences will be forthcoming if this is heard in any building or setting.”(P40A)

“If you are too black, you’re not accepted in DPS.” (P26A)

Systemic racism is still one of the most urgent issues facing our nation, and Denver Public Schools does not operate in a vacuum. Racism starts early in education and it still pervades K-12 public schools in the U.S. Institutional forms of racism are of major importance in education because they are built into the system and operate largely automatically. Not surprisingly, it does have a negative impact on children’s educational success as well as the experiences of African-American educators.

While some people think that racism in U.S. schools ended nearly 60 years ago with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, which held that “separate” schools for black and white children were inherently unequal, there’s a large body of research that demonstrates that racism persists in K-12 schools. The notions of color-blindness or the fanciful notion that we are living in a “post-racial” environment must be challenged.

“Post-racial’ is just one of several terms that only pervert and distort the discussion of race and give people who wish to disrupt the conversation a place to park their ideas. Others include ‘race card’ and ‘reverse racism’ and ‘race baiter.’ The naïve term ‘race card’ always refers to a black person racializing a situation that the person using the term thinks doesn’t need to be racialized. It’s as if race was not part of the situation, and no one was being black or white, and everybody was being color-blind, and whistling sweetly, until a black person came along and ruined everything by pointing out race. But race is like weather — we only talk about it when it’s extreme but it’s always there.” (Toure, NYT, 2014)

Institutional racism can appear in all major functions and operation of schools, including textbooks and other materials; the content of the curriculum; knowledge, attitude and behaviors of students and staffs; personnel selection and promotion procedures; and organizational and instructional procedures (e.g. tracking, testing, etc.).

The primary mechanisms of racism in public schools are institutional and interpersonal. In an insightful article, *Behind School Doors: The Impact of Hostile Racial Climates on Urban Teacher of Color*, Rita Kohli (2016) observed through her research that:

“Urban schools, despite serving minority students of color, operate as hostile racial climates...Schools are fundamentally structured through Eurocentric hierarchies that inadequately frame people of color through deficits. Therefore, unless school leaders oppose institutional norms and practices of whiteness, schools will continue to function as hostile climates not only to students of color but also teachers of color, particularly those who try to disrupt the racial status quo...The racism teachers of color are exposed to takes a toll on their well-being, growth and retention.”

Several participants noted that the current focus and initiatives related to teacher diversity, equity and inclusion are helping to shift the cultures of schools and the district to one that acknowledges the history, strengths and struggles of all.

“I like the cultural competency work that is being done. That’s very positive and there are a lot of districts that don’t even touch on it...The majority of people will be uncomfortable. The majority of people who are going to be uncomfortable are going to be white people because they are in positions of privilege and dominance and they don’t want to lose that or own it.” (P18A)

Unfortunately, the pushback on cultural competency, ignorance of the value-added elements of diversity, limited accountability for unfair treatment and the appearance that the district is not allocating the appropriate level of resources and personnel to these efforts makes the district appear disingenuous.

“Equity is one of our core values and I don’t see that played out as often as it should be. It should be a consistent culture across every department and every school, but I don’t see that.” (P13A)

## **HUMAN RESOURCE ISSUES/UNFAIR LEAP EVALUATIONS, UNCLEAR AND INCONSISTENT PRACTICES**

Issues related to human resources, unfair LEAP evaluations and unclear and inconsistent personnel policies was a major recurring theme identified by participants. Challenges mentioned related to human resources are not necessarily specific to a department. Generally, participants find the system difficult to navigate and to know where to turn to get answers to questions. Several participants complained of the lack of support, especially for new teachers. Frustration over hiring and onboarding has tainted many of their employment experiences.

“Finalizing contracts takes many weeks and months. This has been particularly frustrating for teachers who may have been recruited from elsewhere and they come to the city to work but have to wait for a paycheck. There is no financial safety net or family for these recruits so they wind up sharing rent and delivering pizzas just to get by waiting for their first check from DPS. This type of oversight gives the district a bad reputation.”

“Our Human Resources department has some challenges to overcome just from a systemic perspective of when you’re hired, onboarded into the system and when you’re paid your first time. I think it’s very different when you’re in the classroom with limited resources and probably relocating...And the challenges that exist when you’re bringing in younger educators of color who may not have the family ties to actually support them and a float for two months while they’re waiting on pay... I think those are things from a cultural perspective that are nuanced but we don’t think about.” (P11A)

In personnel decisions and hiring practices, participants perceive that there is a lack of due process and transparency. Several discrepancies and inconsistencies in hiring practices were noted by participants who suggested that African-Americans seem to be intentionally screened out, find it difficult to obtain mutual consent once laid off, receive no follow-up on promised second interviews and are passed over for other applicants who may be Anglo and have fewer credentials and experience. They complained that the fairness of personnel actions regarding African-American educators seems to never be questioned, and that there is a lack of accountability. They suggested that it is just assumed that something is wrong with the African-American educator. When these educators are moved, they perceive that shame has been attached to their name and it becomes common knowledge that they were a “problem” and they are then blackballed. One participant shared that there were certain schools in the district that have gained a reputation for not hiring African-American educators and pushing out African-American leaders.

“Recruit the African-American administrators first and don’t let their staffs lynch them. I’ve heard horror stories. We know what happens to a lot of Black principals in white schools. So give them the power to make those staff members accountable so they just can’t drive our brothers and sisters out.” (P25T)

Many participants indicated that they don’t feel valued by the district as professionals. There was recurring reference to the district’s pattern of seeking candidates from outside of the district while overlooking the many talented African-American educators who have demonstrated their knowledge, skills and commitment to the district.

“One of the things I’m curious about, and I don’t have an issue with the district hiring from outside of the state. But I’m concerned in terms of our leadership--- why is it that they prefer going outside of the state when we have very qualified young African-American administrators right here...why is that?” **(FG2)**

They also questioned the commitments to diversity, equity and cultural competencies of area Human Resource Partners, school leaders and their supervisors. There is also a perception that African-American teachers and leaders are reprimanded, dismissed, removed from buildings and leadership disproportionately, and it was suggested that someone should look more closely at this data.

“I don’t know what’s going on but African-American women are systematically being removed, looked over, passed up and stepped on. Systematically moved out of the field, looked over for promotions and positions and having promotions taken back. They say we’re actually going to give this job to a young white woman who is out of district. But you can go with her as her support to show here the ropes. And by the way, after you’ve been there awhile to show her the ropes, you no longer have a job. Those are the kinds of things that are happening.” (P38A)

While there was a general belief in the importance of evaluation, concerns regarding the fairness and cultural competence elements of LEAP evaluations was also a recurring concern of participants, particularly related to the effectiveness and fairness of peer observers.

“LEAP evaluations do our teachers a disservice. Peer observers have biases and cultural differences negatively impact African-American educators and their evaluation scores. A more effective and fair way of evaluating teachers is with the practice of differentiated roles where teachers are evaluated by a teacher leader within the schools...This takes power away from principals who have long been out of the classroom.” (P2A)

“I hear that the LEAP system is having a negative impact on African-American teachers with so much focus on data and growth, with not enough support from the district or parents to make the kind of progress that the community is hoping

for...It is also very subjective...evaluators' preconceived ideas about black educators makes this an unfair system." (P33A)

"It's just this disconnect with teachers of color. They think we're not good enough to get good evaluations. So they give us subpar evaluations and I'm just not very happy about that." (P10T)

Participants expressed specific concerns regarding the experiences of African-American women and their inability to secure positions or advancement. They cited several instances of conflicts with white females in particular.

"I have had the worst experiences under white female leadership. White female leadership in DPS...there's something going on with that because every single time I have a white female leader...I don't know if it's intimidation, I don't know what's going on. When you express your expertise in an area you have gone to school for and you know what's going on, it's that you know --- you're aggressive, you're intimidating, you're accusatory, that type of thing... So I don't know what's going on with white female leadership when they have people of color working for them, but something's going on there." (FG2)

Participants' reactions to their experiences with personnel practices contributes to their perceptions that they are not valued as professionals, that they lack opportunities for advancement and there is minimal support for them. Some argue that the district's effort to recruit African-American educators is undermined by the perceptions of unfair treatment.

In the process of conducting interviews and focus groups, it was interesting to find out that DPS has just begun to conduct exit interviews with teachers this past year. This practice can provide a barometer of organizational health and the fairness and effectiveness of personnel practices. Exit interviews are an extremely important and useful tool for managers. Proper exit interviews are an excellent opportunity to learn about both the strengths and weaknesses of the managers and the organization, and to help understand how best to satisfy and retain employees.

# RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS

There is an urgent need to diversify the teaching workforce and narrow the demographic gap between who teaches and who populates U.S. classrooms. A significant amount of attention has been paid to the multiple reasons for the shortage of African-American and other teachers of color. The Education Trust (2016) finds the following are contributing factors to this leaky pipeline:

- Academic preparation – K-16 pipeline
- Increased opportunities to pursue other careers
- Testing requirements / low exam pass rates
- Inadequate pre-service programs
- Experiences of racism / silencing and marginalization
- Lack of relevant support and mentorship

Study participants frequently commented on the benefits to African-American students of having high-achieving teachers with cultural backgrounds similar to their own. They observe that these teachers provide real-life role models of career success and academic engagement. Studies have found that students who have a teacher with whom they can relate become more engaged, which engenders effort, interest and confidence – benefits that can enhance student performance. (Ahmad and Boser, 2014)

“Our African-American students need caring, qualified teachers with a willingness to learn about other cultures. They also need to have high expectations for our students. Our students are communal and need the interactions...I haven’t seen this.” (P2A)

The dominant themes representing participant recommendations for recruiting and retaining African-American teachers and administrators were the following:

## **Recruiting:**

- **Establish / expand the district’s “grow your own” initiatives**
- **Ensure recruitment teams are representative of those the district is trying to recruit**
- **Provide orientation, support and connections that are culturally relevant**

## **Retention:**

- **Develop more African-American administrators / school leaders, instructional superintendents, etc.**
- **Support the establishment of a professional network for African-American educators**

- **Make cultural competency training mandatory / tie to LEAP evaluations**

When asked about recruitment and retention of African-American teachers in DPS, participants raised questions surrounding how the district has conducted its recruitment efforts. Participants stressed that recruitment teams should be more reflective of those the district is trying to recruit, and that often, these teams are not as representative as they should be. Another shortcoming of the district's recruitment efforts repeatedly expressed was the lack of attention to providing newly recruited African-American teachers with orientation, support and connections that are culturally relevant. Participants agreed that cultural competence should also be applied to shaping and enhancing these efforts.

"I recommended having African-American principals on the recruitment team when going to these places where we have African-American people living. For example, let's say you go to Atlanta and a potential recruit asks questions. She wants to know about the churches and are there Black organizations, sororities and fraternities in Denver. And people have a stereotype about Denver, so taking Black leaders helps." (P38A)

"I've seen DPS go out and recruit principals from out of state, but they don't last here very long...What do we give them? Do we offer them any knowledge of what's available in Denver for them to connect to get connected to culture...to the services they need. Let's create something that says – hey, this is what Denver has to offer...This is where you can go hear jazz, this is where you can get your hair done, here are the local churches...We don't help them make any connections." (P12T)

Most agreed that the district is making an intentional effort to recruit more African-American educators, and stronger partnerships with the African-American community might also enhance these efforts. One focus group discussion centered on the missed opportunity for recruiting African-American males from the ranks of coaches in the area. It was pointed out that the talents of football, basketball, track and baseball coaches, both in schools and community, are an untapped resource. These African-American males are positive role models and have proven skills in leading and developing youth. Along with this approach, it was suggested that the district develop in partnership with schools, foundations and community organizations cohorts of African-American students from high school who receive stipends to support their teacher preparation along with the commitment to teach in Denver Public Schools for a specified number of years. They felt it is important to offer incentives, like moving stipends, that they have seen practiced by other districts in attracting diverse talent.

Despite the multiple concerns expressed by participants, when asked if they would recommend working at DPS to their colleagues, particularly other African-Americans, there was a positive note. Out of the 70 total participants in one-on-one interviews and focus groups, 41% (33 participants) indicated that they would recommend working at

DPS to colleagues. As a point of comparison, 1,303 African-American representing all employee groups surveyed in CollaboRATE, 73% said they would recommend DPS as a good place to work. The primary reasons for their willingness to recommend the district as a place of employment were the urgent need to increase the diversity of the workforce to benefit African-American students and to lessen feelings of isolation and marginalization African educators. On the other hand, 59% (37 participants) indicated that they would not recommend working at DPS and cited the unfair treatment of African-American students and educators, hostile work environments, compensation and lack of advancement opportunities as their reasons. Some argued that recruitment efforts of the district are futile if there aren't more intentional efforts to support the African-American educators who are currently in the system.

"They've got to clean up DPS before they go out and recruit anybody else. You can't mistreat who you have and keep going to look for new people." (P7A)

In regard to retention, participants expressed that developing more African-American leaders, increasing requirements for cultural competency and assisting in the development of a support network would improve the overall climate, image and reputation of the district. They insisted that African-American leadership must be more visible, particularly at the top of the organization.

"The other piece I've been grappling with is African-American leadership at the senior leadership level. Who on the senior leadership is reflective of the community? If you look around at any district in the metro area, they are run by white men or women, and it's not reflective...There's really no connection for folks in Northeast Denver. I can't say that I have someone at the senior leadership level who I know will respond to me, who I know will get to my issues and concerns." (FG3)

Enhancing the level of cultural competence throughout the district would strengthen retention efforts by shaping an organizational climate in which African-American educators could feel a greater sense of belonging and commitment.

"What do we do as a district to think about how we support our educators in the same way we want our educators to wrap their arms around our students...where they feel valued and respected in their career? How do we offer opportunities to mentor, coach and develop that are genuine and authentic in a space where educators feel like it's an effort being made because we believe deeply in it from an equity perspective and not because we want it to be a bullet point on a slide." (P11A)

To further support African-American educators in the district, several participants stressed the need for the creation of a group in which collegiality, professional networks and support can be built. This is particularly important for strengthening retention efforts as these educators have expressed how isolation and marginalization impacts their experiences as employees.

"We need a professional society or network. We are a communal people and often we don't feel this sense of community in the school building. We need a place of our own where we can learn how to deal with the racial challenges of the district...We need to feel like we have a voice...that the group has a voice and that there will be follow up to our concerns and issues." (P2A)

"Black Educators United (BEU) was kind of a spring board or talking board. If I had an issue, I knew I could call and someone would listen and have an understanding. The networking is vital to the survival of the African-American teacher...Invite some of the retired folks back to the table. Let's have a come to Jesus meeting saying we can save our African-American students by working together." (P22T)

## **THE CHALLENGE OF ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN THE POST-KEYES LANDSCAPE**

### ***A Personal Reflection***

*"It's not enough to just shine a light on the problems. We have to fix them."*

The personal experience of this researcher intersects with the historical struggle for equity and equal educational opportunity in Denver Public Schools. As a product of the system, as a parent of students who matriculated and as a policymaker who served as an elected member of the Denver Board of Education (1989-95), I have gained a unique perspective. Below, I have briefly framed the issues emerging in the current landscape through this historical lens.

The story of Denver desegregation began in 1969 when the district court agreed with a group of Denver parents that deliberate racial segregation had been carried out by the School Board through several mechanisms. They included the construction of a new elementary school in the middle of the Black community west of Park Hill, gerrymandering of student attendance zones, the use of so-called "optional zones" and the excessive use of mobile classroom units.

The first African-American Board of Education member, Dr. Rachel Noel, and many courageous community leaders, shined the light on Denver Public Schools' intentional separate and unequal policies and practices. *Keyes vs. School District No. 1* marked the first time that the Supreme Court identified discrimination in a non-southern state that had imposed racial segregation by statute.

As the first Northern desegregation case, it shed light on unequal educational opportunity in Denver. It also was the first to include Latino students as plaintiffs subject to similar segregation and unequal opportunity. The struggle for desegregation did not arise because anyone believed that there was something magical about sitting next to white students in a classroom. It was, however, based on a belief that the dominant group would keep control of the most successful schools and that the only way to get full a full range of opportunities for minority children was to get access to those schools. Unfortunately, court-ordered busing, and other requirements of court oversight, did not produce the types of results that many had hoped. There was a mix of legal, political and managerial challenges, along with demographic shifts, that hampered successful desegregation. As a member of the Board of Education during this critical time, I recognized that the political will to further pursue desegregation through busing had diminished. The phenomena of white flight and politicians vowing to their publics to get Denver “off the bus” applied pressure on the district to seek relief from court-ordered desegregation. There was a sense, as the late Dr. Rachel Noel has expressed, that “people just didn’t have their hearts in it.”

In 1995, Judge Richard P. Matsch, who had presided over court supervision of Denver’s desegregation plan, declared that “the vestiges of past discrimination by the defendants had been eliminated to the extent practicable.” (“Court Oversight,” 1995) With this decree, court-mandated desegregation in the Denver Public Schools came to an end. As a member of the Board at the time, my primary concern was that once the district was released from the Court’s oversight, future Boards of Education would lose sight of the need to ensure policies and practices would maintain a focus on creating educational equity for all students. I truly grappled with whether the district had indeed removed all vestiges “to the extent practicable” and the judge’s declaration did not match what I was still seeing in the schools. To address this concern, I worked with the district’s legal team to shape Board Resolution No. 2529. (*The Resolution can be found in Appendix D.*) The Resolution passed unanimously over 30 years ago. However, in reflecting on the context and content of the resolution, there were numerous issues contained within it that remain challenges in today’s landscape. For example, the need to recruitment more minority teachers, ensure fairness in the administration of discipline, develop housing to help promote integration, provide access to opportunities like gifted and talented programs, and the appreciation and understanding of diverse cultures and ethnicities were all addressed.

The *Keyes* case continues in its importance as a matter of constitutional law, social science, educational policy, pedagogy and history. In a series of documentaries that examined the current state of educational equity, Rocky Mountain PBS took an in-depth look at the state of race and education 30 years after the end of federally mandated busing. They reported on the impact of gentrification in the city, the re-segregation of Denver Public Schools and the persistent educational achievement and opportunity gaps that exist between white students and students of color. This public reflection reinforced the importance of educators, administrators and the broader community understanding the historical context of the struggle for equality and equity in Denver Public Schools. As part of initial onboarding and ongoing professional development, all staff should be introduced to this history and the series on race and education produced

by Rocky Mountain PBS. It is important that all employees of the district have a shared historical context regarding the issues impacting African-American and Latino communities. This will give all a better sense of why the persistent achievement and opportunity gaps should be addressed with intentionality.

Thirty years after the end of District Court supervision, many in Denver's African-American community feel as though the district has lost sight of the goals set out for African-American students, in particular. As former Denver Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Evie Dennis has observed, "It's a new century and Johnny still can't read." Concerns about the current state of educational opportunity for African-American students in Denver and through the state was further highlighted in 2013, when Rocky Mountain PBS released the report on disparities in Colorado titled *Losing Ground*. Findings were based on 18 months of investigative reporting and analysis of six decades of data from the U.S. Census. The data revealed that Colorado went from a state that was by most measures more equitable than the national average, to one that is less so now. The report concluded that:

"When it comes to some of the most important measures of social progress – income, poverty, education and home ownership – the gaps between minorities and whites in Colorado are worse now than they were before the civil rights movement." (RMPBS, 2013)

In response to the dismal scenario reflected in the Rocky Mountain PBS report, the Colorado Black Round Table engaged in a series of community summits and monthly meetings to address the multiple areas of disparity challenging Colorado's African-American communities. As part of this ongoing effort to educate and engage community around these disparities, this researcher produced a document titled *Gaining Ground*, which summarizes the recommendations that emerged from the input of a broad spectrum of community organizations and leadership. There were many issues and recommendations specific to the status of African-Americans in Denver Public Schools and throughout the state. The document addressed what individuals, community organizations, churches and policymakers can do to meet these challenges in today's educational landscape. (*These issues and recommendations are provided in Appendix D for your information*).

More recently, in a letter dated June 14, 2016, the Denver Chapter of the NAACP, along with the Metro Denver Urban League and other African-American community organizations, submitted a number of concerns to the Board of Education. The letter addressed concerns about the treatment and systemic inequities impacting Black students, parents and guardians, families and Black employees. During the presentation to the Board, they insisted that, "Many of the solutions underway fall short of addressing root causes and real issues of race in the district that impact the Black community and Black children. Many of the solutions also lack sufficient resources, and are without appropriate resources; the solutions won't lead to sustainable change. We are concerned that Black employees are not getting appropriate voice." They also

provided an overview of community expectations for the district to address the following issues:

- Discipline, suspension (in and out of school), expulsion,
- Special Education over-identification of Black students by gender, grade, behavior and need,
- Hiring, discipline and termination of Black educators, administrators and staff,
- Salaries and promotion of Black educators, administrators and staff,
- Resource distribution in district budget for need of Black families and educators, and
- An equity lens in the school quality framework and call for quality schools.

The letter and presentation to the Board also included additional expectations and next steps to manage and reduce inequity and racial disparity in Denver Public Schools.

In the current landscape, demographic shifts, the lack of affordable housing, gentrification, increases in poverty levels, lack of adequate funding for Colorado's public schools and severe shortages of African-American educators have made addressing these issues even more problematic. In her book, *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity will Determine Our Future*, Linda Darling-Hammond (2010), provides a powerful critique of current policy to explain why we are still leaving so many children behind, and the persistent problems that continue to drag down the quality and equity of our educational systems. She writes that:

“Although many U.S. educators and civil rights advocates have fought for higher-quality and more equitable education over many years --- in battles for desegregation, school finance reform, and equitable treatment of students within schools --- progress has been stymied over the last two decades as segregation has worsened and disparities have grown. While students in the highest-achieving states and districts in the United States do as well as those in high-achieving nations elsewhere, it is our continuing comfort with profound inequality that is the Achilles heel of American education.” (See Appendix D for Darling's Anatomy of Inequality and summary of how opportunity gaps are constructed, as well as the complexity and interrelatedness of the issues impacting African-American students.)

Just as certain policies and practices contribute to the concentration of African-American and Latino students at the bottom rungs of educational performance, other policies and practices work to insure that high-achieving, upper-middle-class Anglo students retain their academic advantages. There are major disagreements about central issues: the role of poverty and economic distress in inhibiting academic achievement, and whether and how to address such out-of-school factors; the value of standardized testing; how to encourage and reward diverse teachers; the multicultural content of the curriculum; the role of career and technical education and the utility of a “college for all” approach.

On one hand, it appears as if we are repeating history, and that “progress and hope have indeed been stymied.” On the other hand, there is hope and promise for progress embedded in the district’s Denver Plan 2020 and the commitments to every child succeeding, closing opportunity gaps, focus on equity and inclusion, focus on early literacy, and providing access to quality schools in every neighborhood.

The qualitative narratives of the African-American educators participating in this study paint a picture that will require all of us to take a closer look at the obstacles that may be hampering the district’s ability to realize its stated goals and the shared values that support them.

The findings of this study point to the need to address a number of policies, practices and programs that impact African-American educators and students. In addition, this researcher has observed a growing chasm or disconnect between the African-American community and the school district since the end of the *Keyes* case. Part of this disconnect is related to the district’s lack of outreach and engagement with the African-American community. The district could also improve how it relates the good news, indicators of progress and information regarding policies and programs that specifically address the needs of African-American students. And unfortunately, the African-American community has not, until recently, raised their collective voices to express concern around the issues that would provide more support for both African-American students and educators.

Underlying many of the dominant themes that emerged in this study are those issues reflected in the historical dynamics between race and educational opportunity in Denver. This researcher is convinced that it will not be enough to just continue to shine a light on the problems related to how institutional racism, lack of cultural competency and disproportionate discipline practices, etc., continue to impact African-American students and teachers --- we have to fix them. Fixing the issues will require intentional and courageous conversations around race and education. In this political moment, there are those who would line up to say only race matters and those who line up to eschew the significance of race. Neither of these groups are being entirely accurate. However, if we fail to recognize that race matters, poverty matters and neither busing nor school choice will fully rectify our schooling issues, then we fall short and gain little traction in the fight for education justice.

Dealing honestly with issues around race and racism in our nation has become even more difficult in today’s landscape. In several recent national polls, it has been reported that race relations in the U.S are at the lowest point in recent history. In a New York Times/CBS News survey conducted in July 2016, 69% of poll respondents said race relations are generally bad. And six in 10 Americans said race relations are growing worse, according to the poll, up from 38% just a year ago. (NYT, 2016) However, President Obama recently reminded us that, “We know that centuries of racial discrimination — of slavery, and subjugation, and Jim Crow did not vanish with the end of lawful segregation. It didn’t just stop when Dr. King made a speech, or the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts were signed.” He went on to insist, “That by not recognizing

race relations have improved in our lifetime, is to dishonor the struggles that helped us achieve that progress. We can address unequal treatment and achieve justice for all Americans, if we can open our hearts, stand in each other's shoes, and look at the world through each other's eyes." (ABC News, 2016)

These are choppy, sometimes treacherous waters, and the easy answers are only platitudes. In the pursuit of both equity and excellence, we have to understand that there is no silver bullet, no magic feather, no panacea and no patented potent pill that will miraculously transform a system we have been struggling with for decades. However, James Banks reminds us of the growing urgency to deal with these challenges as a nation.

"The country's educational destiny will become more tightly connected to the academic status and achievement of these students, most of whom are structurally excluded and marginalized within our society and schools. Students of color in the United States are the canaries in the coal mine. Their status and destiny are a harbinger of the future of the country." (James Banks in Darling-Hammond, 2010)

The path to our mutual well-being will be built on our capacity to provide educational excellence and equity for all students. In this rapidly changing environment, it will be important for district leadership, African-American educators and community to look in the mirror – at the good, the bad and the ugly – and figure out what's going on. And it's not so much about where we are at, it's more about what we do next. It is this researcher's hope that the feedback provided through this study will provide a foundation for the district and African-American community to work collaboratively to better support educational outcomes for African-American students and the employment experiences of African-American educators. The time for action, positive change and healing is now. We have to put our hearts in it, as Dr. Rachel Noel wished over 50 years ago. The district's attention to these issues is an encouraging first step, but the magnitude and complexity of these issues will require more transparent, intentional, substantial and sustainable efforts in the months and years ahead.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW**

There are several features that distinguish qualitative research from other forms of social science research. Qualitative research most of all involves studying the meaning of people's lives, as experienced under real-world conditions. Second, qualitative research differs because of its priority devoted to representing the views and perspectives of a study's participants. Third, qualitative research explicitly embraces the contextual conditions—that is the social, institutional, cultural, and environmental – within which people's lives take place...These contextual conditions may strongly influence all human affairs. Fourth, qualitative research is driven by a desire to explain social behavior and thinking, through existing or emerging concepts. Finally qualitative research acknowledges the value of collecting, integrating and presenting data from a variety of sources of evidence as part of any given study.

The sources of data and sources of evidence for this study are the audio recordings / transcriptions from both semi- structured one-on-one interviews and focus groups. In semi-structured interviews and focus groups, the researcher has a specific topic to learn about, prepares a limited number of questions in advance, and plans to ask follow up questions. Semi-structured interviewing techniques allow the interviewer to maintain a degree of control by focusing more narrowly on planned items that speak to the research questions. (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, p.31)

### **INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS – PROCESS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- Prior to conducting the interviews and focus groups, the researcher participated in a series of meetings with the chief of staff William Lee Ashley, Debbie Hearty (Chief of Human Resources), Patricia Hurrieta (Executive Director of the Culture, Equity and Leadership Team) and Tracy Diel (Manager of Research and Evaluation). They provided feedback on the proposed interview / focus group questions and the conduct of the study.
- The next step in the process was to identify a neutral location for conducting one-on-one interviews and focus groups. Thank Nate Easley and the Denver Scholarship Foundation for opening their doors and providing a neutral space to conduct interviews. Focus groups were convened in Emily Griffith conference room downstairs, DCIS at the Montbello campus, and Hope Center at 34<sup>th</sup> and Elizabeth.
- Letter of invitation was sent via email to current African-American teachers and administrators. A matrix of interview dates and times accompanied the email and participants were able to select a time and date that best suited their availability.

- **Informed Consent – Ethical Considerations** – Prior to conducting one-on-one interviews participant were asked to read and sign an *Informed Consent Form* which explained the purpose and methods of the study, the intent to audio record interviews, risks and benefits, the right to refuse or withdraw, and assurances around confidentiality. The same procedure was followed for all focus group participants.
- From April 7<sup>th</sup> through May 13<sup>th</sup> 40 one-on-one interviews and three focus groups were conducted. Duration of one-on- one interviews was 1 hour. The duration of each focus group was approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours.
- As interviews were recorded and transcribed and each participant was given an identifier code to ensure confidentiality in reporting the findings of the study.
- Coding instruments are provided in the appendix to this document with theme frequencies and quotations from participant transcripts.

## **PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

- 50 female / 20 male = **70 participants (self-selected)**
- Work throughout the district and in central administration
- The majority were current teachers and administrators with a couple of former employees who have returned to substitute teach and community members of the Superintendent’s African-American Roundtable who participated
  - Teachers = **35 participants**
  - Administrators = **26 participants**
  - Community = **9 participants**
- Ages of participants ranged from 26 years to 74 – lots of variation in age with about 30 percent in their 40-s and 50s – 26/70
- Years of service ranged from 1 year to 38 years
- Majority – have completed master’s degree

## **CODING AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

(Braun, V., & Clarke, V., 2013).

**Stage 1 - Transcription** Turning audio data into written text (or transcripts) by writing down what was said and how it was said so the data can be systematically coded and analyzed.

**Stage 2 - Reading & Familiarization** Reading and re-reading the data to become intimately familiar with the content (i.e., immersion); analysis begins by noticing things of interest that might be relevant to the research questions.

**Stage 3 - Coding (Structural)** Structural coding applies a content-base or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of

data that relates to a specific research question(s) that frame the interview. Structural coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those with multiple participants, standardized or semi-structured data –gathering protocols to gather major themes or categories. (Saldana, p.98)

**Stage 4 - Searching for Themes**

Identifying salient features that capture something important about the data in relation to the research question; may represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the dataset.

**Stage 5 - Reviewing Themes**

Determining whether candidate themes fit well with the coded data; themes should tell a story (not necessarily *the story*) that “rings true” with the data; essentially represents quality control in relation to the analysis.

**Stage 6 - Defining & Naming Themes**

Defining themes by stating what is unique and specific about each one; useful because it forces researchers to define the focus and boundaries of the themes by distilling to a few short sentences what each theme is about.

**Stage 7 – Writing the Report**

Writing the report by collecting compelling, vivid examples of data extracts and relating them back to the research questions and literature.

# APPENDIX B

## DOMINANT THEMES LIST AND ANALYSIS

<b>AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS</b> <b>Negative Impact</b>	<b>AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATORS</b> <b>Negative Impact</b>
<p>Lack of qualified / culturally competent teachers</p> <p>Disproportionate discipline, suspension / refocus rooms, programs</p> <p>Lack of culturally relevant curriculum /white middle class model</p> <p>Low expectations / deficit thinking</p> <p>Consent decree - ELL requirements and equity for AA students</p> <p>Lack of access to quality enrichment and academic programs</p>	<p>Practices do not reflect organizational core values</p> <p>Hostile environment / fear of retaliation</p> <p>Institutional racism / discrimination</p> <p>Lack of representation of African-Americans in top leadership</p> <p>African-American teachers and leaders do not feel valued as professionals</p> <p>Perceived need to “fit in” / assimilate</p> <p>Lack of cultural competency</p> <p>HR processes and screening out teachers and leaders of color</p> <p>African-American women –“angry Black woman” label</p> <p>LEAP evaluations / unfair evaluations</p>
<b>AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS</b> <b>Positive Impact</b>	<b>AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATORS</b> <b>Positive Impact</b>
<p>Culturally competent teachers</p> <p>More African-American teachers, administrators, role models</p> <p>Socio-emotional support, whole child focus, wrap around services</p> <p>Culturally relevant curriculum</p> <p>High expectations, eliminate deficit thinking</p> <p>Comparable supports that ELL students receive</p>	<p>Equity and cultural competence initiatives</p> <p>The research around the issues impacting African-American teachers and administrators</p> <p>Affinity / support groups for African-American teachers</p> <p>Mentors, coaches and sponsors</p>

# **AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS**

**Interview questions 1-3 / African-American Teacher Perceptions of Critical Factors Impacting African-American Students / Policies and Practices with Positive or Negative Impact / Student Needs**

## **Most Frequently Recurring Themes**

### **1. What have you seen in your experience as a teacher / administrator in DPS as the most critical issues contributing to achievement and opportunity gaps for African-American students?**

- Lack of qualified / culturally competent teachers
- Disproportionate discipline, suspension / refocus rooms, programs
- Lack of culturally relevant curriculum /white middle class model
- Low expectations / deficit thinking
- Consent decree - ELL requirements and equity for African-American students
- Lack of access to quality enrichment and academic programs

### **2. From your experience as a teacher/administrator in DPS are there policies or practices that you feel have positively impacted African-American students in the district? From your experience are there policies or practices that you feel have negatively impacted African-American students in the District?**

#### **Positive Impact:**

- Work focusing on the whole child and socio-emotional needs of students
- Parental engagement, home visits

#### **Negative Impact:**

- Lack of accountability and consistency with discipline practices, labeling African-American students
- Lack of culturally relevant and inclusive curriculum
- Consent decree -policies, practices and programs with focus on ELL – Spanish speaking students / Need similar focus for African-American students
- Lack of teacher diversity, hiring young Anglo teachers who are not culturally competent

### **3. Based on your knowledge and experience as a teacher / administrator in DPS what do you feel urban African-American children and adolescents, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, need in order to do well academically?**

- Culturally competent teachers
- More African-American teachers, administrators, role models

- Socio-emotional support, whole child focus, wrap around services
- Culturally relevant curriculum
- High expectations, eliminate deficit thinking
- Comparable supports that ELL students receive

Across all questions related to African-American teacher perceptions of the experiences of African-American students in DPS the following themes emerged with the highest frequency from the interview data.

**DOMINANT THEMES – EXPERIENCES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES  
POSITIVE IMPACT - AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS**

<b>Work focused on the whole child and socio-emotional need of students</b>	<b>Parent engagement, education, home visits</b>
13 /40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 2	16 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3

Table 1

**DOMINANT THEMES – CRITICAL ISSUES, POLICIES / PRACTICES  
NEGATIVE IMPACT – AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS**

<b>Lack of qualified, diverse, culturally competent teachers, African-American role models</b>	<b>Disproportionate discipline – suspension and expulsions</b>	<b>Consent decree – ELL requirements – equity for African-American students</b>	<b>Low expectations/ deficit thinking</b>	<b>Lack of access to quality enrichment, academic and support programs</b>	<b>Lack of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy</b>
31 /40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	26 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	22 /40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	19 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	19 /40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 2	16 /40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3

FG= Focus Group

Table 2

When asked about policies and practices that may currently **positively** impact the experiences of African-American students in the Denver Public Schools interview and focus group members most frequently mentioned socio-emotional (whole child) initiatives. There were no additional mention of policies and practices with positive impact with a recurrence of more than ten (10).

# **AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS**

## **Interview questions 4-6 / African-American Teacher / Administrator Perceptions of Factors Impacting Their Lived Experiences, Organizational Climate, Policies and Practices with Positive or Negative Impact**

### **Most Frequently Recurring Themes**

#### **4. Please describe your experience(s) as an African-American teacher / administrator in the Denver Public Schools.**

- Hostile work environment
- HR processes and screening out teachers and leaders of color
- Race and age discrimination
- Isolation / marginalization
- African-American women –“angry Black woman” label

#### **5. How would you describe the organizational (workplace) climate of DPS? How would you describe the organizational (workplace) climate of the specific DPS school(s) (or department) in which you work/have worked?**

- Practices do not reflect organizational core values
- Hostile environment / fear of retaliation
- Institutional racism / discrimination
- Lack of representation of African-Americans in top leadership
- African-American teachers and leaders do not feel valued as professionals
- Perceived need to “fit in” / assimilate
- Lack of cultural competency

#### **6. From your experience are there policies, approaches, cultures or practices at the district or school level that you feel have positively African-American teachers/administrators in the district? From your experience are there policies, approaches, cultures or practices that have negatively impacted African-American teacher/administrators in the District?**

##### **Positive Impact:**

- Equity and cultural competence initiatives
- The research around the issues impacting African-American teachers and administrators
- 

##### **Negative Impact:**

- LEAP evaluations / unfair evaluations (principals and students)
- Human Resource issues / unfair, unclear and inconsistent practices
- Lack of vehicle to build collegiality and support among African-American educators
- Lack of diversity / mandatory cultural competence training

Across all questions related to African-American teacher perceptions of their own lived experiences in DPS the following themes emerged with the highest frequency from the interview data.

**DOMINANT THEMES – AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATOR EXPERIENCES, POLICIES/PRACTICES POSITIVE IMPACT**

<b>Equity and cultural competence initiatives</b>	<b>The research around the issues impacting African-American teachers and administrators</b>
14 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	13 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 2

Table 3

**DOMINANT THEMES – AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHER ADMINISTRATOR EXPERIENCES, POLICIES PRACTICES - NEGATIVE IMPACT**

<b>Institutional racism / race, age, sex discrimination</b>	<b>HR issues / unfair LEAP evaluations, unclear and inconsistent practices</b>	<b>Hostile work environment/ fear of retaliation</b>	<b>Lack of representation of African-Americans in top leadership</b>	<b>Lack of vehicle to build collegiality and support among African-American educators</b>	<b>Lack of cultural competency - Perceived need to “fit in” / assimilate</b>
29 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	25 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	20 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 2	17 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	16 / 40 Interview respondents + FG2 and 3	16 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3

<b>African-American teachers and leaders do not feel valued as professionals</b>	<b>Practices do not reflect organizational core values</b>	<b>Feelings of Isolation / marginalization</b>	<b>African-American women – “angry Black woman” label</b>
15 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	15 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 2	14 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 2	12 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 2

FG= Focus Group

Table 4

Interview and focus group participants were asked in question #10 to rate their perception of the level of institutional racism reflected in their experience and observations. Their numerical responses to the following question are tabulated in Table 1. A sample of reasons for ratings are also listed.

**On a scale of 1-10 how would you rank the level of institutional racism in DPS?  
(1=low and 10=high level of institutional racism)  
N=70**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10+	N/A
		1		1	4	11	22	15	12	2	2
<p>10+ --- "Because institutional racism is the idea that a group of American folks have grown up and have gotten so used to having things done their way that they don't even see that there could be a problem with it." (P34T)</p> <p>10 --- "It is blatant in some areas, and political in others...That tells the story." (P13A)</p> <p>10 --- "The decline in the number of African-American teachers. I'm wondering why the district has treated African-Americans this way. I think part of it is the evaluation system, racism and politics." (P16T)</p>							<p>9 --- "Because of the high suspension rates of African-American students." (P15T)</p> <p>8 --- "When I look at our data, we are not sufficiently educating our kids." (P17A)</p> <p>8 --- "You have to find the islands." (P25T)</p> <p>6 --- "The reason is primarily based on things like the discipline policy. It is overwhelmingly Black kids that fall into it." (P27T)</p> <p>3 --- "It's pretty low. I don't see it as a whole." (P23T)</p>				

Table 5

## Interview questions 7-9

### Responses to Recommending DPS to Colleagues Essential Supports/Teacher and Administrator Recommendations Regarding Recruitment and Retention

#### Most Frequently Recurring Themes

#### 7. Would you recommend working at DPS to a colleague? Why or why not? Would your answer change for an African-American colleague? Why or why not?

(In response to question 7 – 33 / 70 interview and focus group respondents answered in the affirmative to the above question. 37/ 70 interview and focus group respondents indicated they would not recommend working in DPS to a colleague.)

**N=70**

YES 33 = 41%	NO 37 = 59%
<i>"Yes, with reservations." (P4A)</i>	<i>"No, they've got to clean up DPS before they go out and recruit anybody else. You can't mistreat who you have and keep going to look for new people." (P7A)</i>
<i>"Yes, I recommend and I also offer caveats. It depends on the context of who I'm recommending it to...So I often say—that this would be a great place to work and then there are the conditions." (P11A)</i>	<i>"No...Because DPS treats teachers like dirt under their feet, especially teachers of color. We are taken for granted. The only reason I still have a job is by the grace of God." (P10T)</i>
<i>"Yes, because I feel we need more African-Americans working here. The students need African-Americans here at DPS, but not because I like to work here or think it's a good place to work." (P16T)</i>	<i>"No, absolutely not. I would never recommend, not even to someone I didn't like." (P6T)</i>
<i>"Yes, maybe...it depends on the school. I know some really nightmare schools that I would say stay away from because you will be lynched verbally and emotionally as a Black person." (P25T)</i>	<i>"No, it's not worth the toll it takes on a person. There's no support, too much stress." (P5T)</i>
<i>"Yes, because there's such a huge need." (P23T)</i>	<i>"No, because it is far more likely that a Black educator will experience isolation and discrimination and be forced out...And I feel you have to give up part of yourself to work in DPS." (P28A)</i>
<i>"Yes, I would because we need more minorities in DPS. I would explain to them that they are going to see some things that they are not going to agree with." (P26A)</i>	<i>"No, not if you want to ever advance in your career." (P32A)</i>
	<i>"No, I think there is no support. It's too much work and not enough money" (P34T)</i>

Table 6

**8. What supports have been most essential to you as a teacher/administrator in DPS? What roles, if any, can the District, colleagues, school leaders and associations play in building a support network for African-American school teachers?**

- Affinity / support groups for African-American teachers
- Mentors, coaches and sponsors
- No supports

**DOMINANT THEMES – ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS**

<b>Mentors, coaches and sponsors</b>	<b>No supports</b>
<b>16 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3</b>	<b>11 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 2</b>

Table 7

**What recommendations would like to share that may assist the District in recruiting African-American teachers? What recommendations would you like to share that may assist the District in retaining African-American teachers?**

**Recruiting:**

- Establish / expand the district’s “grow your own” initiatives
- Ensure recruitment teams are representative of those the district is trying to recruit
- Provide orientation, support and connections that are culturally relevant

**Retention:**

- Develop more African-American administrators / school leaders, instructional superintendents, etc.
- Support the establishment of a professional network for African-American educators
- Make cultural competency training mandatory / tie to LEAP evaluations

**DOMINANT THEMES – AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING RECRUITMENT**

<b>Provide orientation, support and connections that are culturally relevant</b>	<b>Ensure recruitment teams are representative of those the district is trying to recruit</b>	<b>Establish / expand the district’s “grow your own” initiatives</b>
15 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3	13 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1	12 / 40 Interview respondents + FG3

Table 8

**DOMINANT THEMES – AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING RETENTION**

<b>More Diversity / Make cultural competency training mandatory / tie to LEAP evaluations</b>	<b>Develop more African-American administrators / school leaders, instructional superintendents, etc.</b>	<b>Support the establishment of a professional network for African-American educators</b>
18 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 3	16 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1 and 3	15 / 40 Interview respondents + FG1, 2 and 3

Table 9

## **APPENDIX C**

### **PARTICIPANT QUOTES**

#### **AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS CRITICAL ISSUES/POLICIES/PRACTICES/NEEDS POSITIVE IMPACT**

##### **Work focusing on the whole child and socio-emotional needs of students**

(Across student related questions 1-3---- 13 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1 and 2 identified this theme as having a positive impact on African-American students.)

"Some of the after school programs have been very beneficial for our kids. We did academics through the arts which was multi-intelligence, multi-sensory, multi-cognitive. It would work, but we don't have money for that anymore or the interest. People have become very ignorant about the arts and their role in higher cognitive and brain based learning. People don't know that there's a huge connection here." (P25T)

"There's work that is happening in the socio-emotional space I think is important, especially because it gets to a sense of how we are modifying and treat the way we talk about behavior and lowering the number of suspensions that are happening with our black and brown kids, and ensuring that they have opportunities to stay in school...in class and be part of the learning environment." (P11A)

"What I've witnessed is that there is a lack of self-identity that includes those aspects of a whole human being. And it's not always necessarily cool to want to be smart and drive yourself academically...They don't have a lot of those positive voices giving them the right self-image and increasing their overall expectations." (P29T)

##### **Parental engagement, home visits**

(Across student related questions 1-3---- 16 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2, and 3 identified this theme as having a positive impact on African-American students.)

"I know that especially with our culture parents are very skeptical of home visits. I'm a parent and I'm also a teacher who conducts them. I have found that connection with the students and I have also found my colleagues who are not African-American have also found a connection with their students through doing those. For me I think that it is something that is beneficial to getting a little more background about who they are." (P23T)

## **AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS – CRITICAL ISSUES POLICIES/PRACTICES/NEEDS NEGATIVE IMPACT**

### **Lack of qualified, diverse and culturally competent teachers**

(Across student related questions 1-3---- 31 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American students.)

“There is a lack of qualified teachers who are culturally responsive. There is a lack of culturally responsive professional development and the district struggles with making it mandatory. Typically, it is the same folks and one and done training is not enough. Support in the classroom is also limited.” (P2A)

“The majority of teachers think they are doing the right thing, but they don’t have the same experience. Some of the negative approaches to our children are intentional, some are non-intentional...They don’t know what they don’t know.” (P8A)

“...You have these new, fresh white teachers who are here to make a difference and save the world. They have never been introduced to African-American culture or understand the struggles of post-traumatic stress or the other stuff our kids go through and they’re supposed to educate them. And what happens is these kids run them straight out, and they get another teacher, and they get another teacher and so on. So these kids are losing two to three years of education because these teachers aren’t able to provide the services they need.” (P26A)

“I know we need to hire educators that are qualified. What ends up happening I feel the kids feel like it’s a lab and they are lab rats and these people are coming in experimenting with their education, futures and their lives...It’s unfair and unfair to these teachers because they are completely unprepared.” (P15T)

“I think that having real conversations about race in our classrooms is beneficial to African-American students even though some folks are uncomfortable with them. Teachers and all staff members should do more of this.” (P33A)

“Districtwide, I see some schools embracing cultural competency training, other schools who refuse to have it at all. They think they don’t need it. They have their own specialists or think they already know everything, and they don’t. One of the schools I’m thinking of is one that speaks the loudest about being culturally competent and they are the least in my opinion and the most discriminatory and segregated of all, and blatantly just not addressing the needs of kids of color.” (P38A)

## **Disproportionate discipline, suspension / refocus rooms, programs**

(Across student related questions 1-3----26 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American students)

"I think some of our teachers are afraid of African-American males. Because of this these teachers just kick African-American males out of the classrooms. One day I counted six different African-American males just hanging out in the hallway because they were kicked out of class. I went to the principal about this. I think the principal wants to help but does not know how." (P15T)

"There is nothing in place for African-American students. It is so systemic that African-American students, teachers and administrators are all discriminated against with equal veracity. There is no support for them. And anyone who comes in and tried to say we're going to do something with these kids, they're shuffled and moved...They're stopped. So it's not benign neglect, its and intentional mistreatment." (P7A)

"I've seen African-American boys who behave in that manner out of frustration, but if there's a Latino child that does it they do not get the same consequences. They are not sent out at the same rate. They are not seen as aggressive." (FG1)

"I think the African-American students are at a disadvantage because they don't have good role models. They don't have the nurturing they need to let them know they can be successful...African-American students are suffering a great deal. I don't think the teachers of other races are interested in really helping our students so it becomes a situation where the acting out behavior takes over to get the attention they so desperately want." (P22T)

"A teacher walked up to me and she was like—we're going to send Sergio to your classroom because he needs tough love...I just flip it to my advantage and say that – you all don't know how to talk to them, so I'll do it for you." (FG1)

## **Consent decree - ELL requirements and equity for AA students**

(Across student related questions 1-3---- 22 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American students.)

"I don't know exactly how to say this without sounding biased I guess. I think there have been a lot of things put in place for Spanish speaking families and refugee families like with the consent decree. All those things are really powerful, but are only powerful for the people they serve... I can see the division in schools among Black and Latino families and these policies and practices are only deepening the divide. And then to hear that the Black student's achievement and opportunity gaps are still huge and the Latino gaps are closing is troubling to me." (P36A)

“The court mandate for ELA classes undermines the importance of the needs of African-American students which are just as urgent.” (P2A)

“I don’t see any policy that’s been established to help African-American students...that benefits them, that is unique to them, that is special to them. To continue to expect African-American students to be lumped in with students of color further marginalizes them. It is time to call things out and say this is for African-American students...And all respect for the people who attained the consent decree, it shouldn’t take a lawsuit for DPS to develop policies that specifically benefit African-American students. But with systemic racism, I believe if they did there would be so much push back that they would drop it.”(P7A)

“I see the success of those things related to the consent decree...and I know those things weren’t brought about by the district. I think those things clearly work. And if it’s okay for non-English speakers to have that type of support, we should continue duplicating that.” (P36A)

“I really hate to say this because I know Hispanic children are having some of the same struggles, but it seems like they’re so focused in ELL and making sure they don’t get sued again...and then the black kids are just falling to the wayside.” (FG1)

“The focus is on Latino kids...Don’t forget about the black kids. We are part of this community. We also have an obligation to them. We need to find ways to keep the black students in the forefront...You just can’t push them in a corner.” (P27T)

### **Low expectations / deficit thinking**

(Across student related questions 1-3---- 19 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American students.)

“I have heard a white teacher say that – the day we can teach Black boys to read is the day we take this show on the road...If this were a better neighborhood we would treat them better.”(P41A)

“Our African-American students need caring, qualified teachers with a willingness to learn about other cultures. They also need to have high expectations for our students. Our students are communal and need the interactions...I haven’t seen this.” (P2A)

“They’ve set the bar thirty percent lower for kids of color than they have for Caucasians for reading and literacy...If you’re saying to teachers and leadership that you are going to set the bar lower so we can meet it, what is that saying about our kids? Are you saying they are not capable?...For me it is about the teachers and your leadership saying that we’re not going to settle.” (P38A)

## **Lack of access to quality enrichment, academic and support programs**

(Across student related questions 1-3---- 19 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1 and 2 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American students.)

"We have so many children who are gifted but because of behaviors no one is looking at them. In that light, the other thing is when my K-8 schools have these end of year trips, many times they set the requirements, and they kind of change as the year goes on depending on whether or not they want a student to go...So our students are not getting the opportunity to go on those field trips out of state to explore things in science, math and so forth." (FG2)

"Stability, they need to develop the value of what education will bring them. They need support to develop that value. We have such language barriers and gaps. African-American students have not learned how to "play school". Our neediest kids have the teachers with the least amount of experience." (P6T)

"This is a sensitive issue...It related to the use of counselors who are the backbone to get you and your family equipped to apply for colleges and scholarships and so forth. So as it related to opportunity gaps, if we have some ineffective counselors in our high school buildings, they are not necessarily initiating movement or encouragement to our children of color. Or in many cases not many kids at all. So there's a big gap when it comes to which of these kids would have the opportunity to go to college and more important receive some support to do so." (FG2)

"I think the opportunities for enrichment like world languages...play out from school to school. It depends on the leadership and the programming structure as to whether kids have the same opportunities...And so certain kids just don't get a more holistic experience, especially if they are behind grade level and they come into a school that doesn't know how to figure that out." (P39A)

"A lot of it deals with tracking...schools are tracking kids in different directions, and there's not a willingness to deal with it. There's a willingness to deal with it but at a pace that the white folks in the city can handle. Like Dr. King said –there's always a time to do what's right. And when there's kids on the line they only have right now...But now people feel entitled and that it's supposed to be that way." (P39A)

"I think our students our students are often overlooked when it comes to accelerated or advanced placement. The assumption is that they are not able to do it without giving them the opportunity to try...therefore they don't. (P22T)

## **Lack of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy /white middle class model**

(Across student related questions 1-3---- 16 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American students.)

"...There's been a lot of talk about kids of color but not specifically about African-American students. With everything that's going on it appears that issues and challenges of African-American students and teachers are just not important." (P8A)

"There should be African-American studies in every school. There's Latino American studies...there's Caucasian history. We limit it to Black History Month, and we don't even do a good job at that...Where's that curriculum?...We're not teaching our kids the importance of their heritage within DPS, and I think something needs to be done about that...All you have to do is poll the kids, they will tell you." (P13A)

"Our teachers should be required to have professional development related to cultural competency. They are required to take five three hour courses for ELL professional development...why not for other cultural competencies?"(P2A)"

"We have a rich history of ancestors who gave this world civilization. And most of our kids don't even understand that world science, astronomy and medicine are things we should be proud of. We live in a culture that worships their ancestors. We should be very comfortable in reasserting our right to worship and honor our ancestors." (P30T)

"A review of school-based curriculum is essential for all leaders, instructional superintendents, and teacher leaders as well as instructional coaches, principals, and teachers to address micro-aggressions in existing literature. The curriculum must be aligned with culturally responsive teaching." (P40T)

# **AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS EXPERIENCES/POLICIES/PRACTICES/ ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE POSITIVE IMPACT**

## **Equity and cultural competence initiatives**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6---- 14 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1 and 2 identified this theme as having a positive impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"The great thing the district does is they are open to acknowledging our diversity and open to hear strategies."(P4A)

"I like the cultural competency work that is being done. That's very positive and there are a lot of districts that don't even touch on it."(P14T)

"I like the cultural competency work that is being done. That's very positive and there are a lot of districts that don't even touch on it...The majority of people will be uncomfortable. The majority of people who are going to be uncomfortable are going to be white people because they are in positions of privilege and dominance and they don't want to lose that or own it." (P18A)

## **The research around the issues impacting African-American teachers and administrators**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6---- 13 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"What you are doing today is a right step. I get a chance to express my feelings and be validated. A survey has gone out but I feel as though nothing comes of it...You never see the impact of your voice."(P15T)

"This is great we are having this interview and you are listening...but is the district?"(P6T)

"It starts with treating educators of color with respect and dignity. I am feeling encouraged that the district is doing this." (P10T)

# **AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS EXPERIENCES/POLICIES/PRACTICES/ ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE NEGATIVE IMPACT**

## **Institutional racism / race, age, sex discrimination**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----29 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"African-Americans in DPS are invisible, silenced and dehumanized, especially if you are passionate, vocal and unapologetically black. We can't even be advocates for our kids. It feels a lot like being on a plantation...there is a lot of fear and black folks are pitted against each other." (P41A)

"...I know how to navigate within this space, however, it doesn't make it any less challenging. And I think in a system like DPS where you serve the majority of brown and black kids, you inherently believe that the culture be different than it is. But the same systemic and institutional challenges that exist in corporate America exist within the DPS landscape."(P11A)

"Well, it's biased toward European American culture and very cliquish and excluding toward black folks." (P25T)

"I want them to talk to those of us who are living it and hear our stories, our struggles...and all of us can't be crazy. You can't possibly have this level of a common theme...What is the common denominator? All of us can't be making this up. It's like we're living mirror stories...all of us...something must be wrong...But a drastic change needs to happen, especially with our Black women. I would say it is borderline criminal what is happening." (P39A)

## **HR issues / unfair LEAP evaluations, unclear and inconsistent practices**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----25 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"It's just this disconnect with teachers of color. They think we're not good enough to get good evaluations. So they give us subpar evaluations and I'm just not very happy about that." (P10T)

"I have had the worst experiences under white female leadership. White female leadership in DPS...there's something going on with that because every single time I have a white female leader...I don't know if it's intimidation, I don't know what's going on. When you express your expertise in an area you have gone to school for and you know what's going on, it's that you know---you're aggressive, you're intimidating, you're accusatory, that type of thing... So I don't know what's going on with white female leadership when they have people of color working for them, but something's going on there." (FG2)

"Our HR department has some challenges to overcome just from a systemic perspective of when you're hired, on boarded and into the system and when you're paid your first time. I think it's very different when you're in the classroom with limited resources and probably relocating...And the challenges that exist when you're bringing in younger educators of color who may not have the family ties to actually support them and a float for two months while they're waiting on pay... I think those are things from a cultural perspective that are nuanced but we don't think about." (P11A)

"LEAP evaluations do our teachers a disservice. Peer observers have biases and cultural differences negatively impact African-American educators and their evaluation scores. A more effective and fair way of evaluating teachers is with the practice of differentiated roles where teachers are evaluated by a teacher leader within the schools...This takes power away from principals who have long been out of the classroom." (P2A)

"The reduction in force process based on a decline in enrollments usually has a negative impact on minority teachers. The district has a one year obligation to help these teachers find another position, but there must be mutual consent between the teacher and school leadership. Many African America teachers feel that there is a lack of fairness in this process." (P8A)

"When I got out here there was no support from DPS. I got here in June. I didn't see my first paycheck until September, and I worked the entire summer. And the only reason they got me that check that fast was because my principal called...And I'm still having trouble getting my certification...CDE changes their rules depending on who answers the phone, and it's aggravating. I've been on stand still for six months...CDE doesn't talk to the district. The Colorado Department of Education has their standards and DPS has their standards and they never communicate. They don't even take the same fingerprints for CDE and DPS." (FG1)

"I hear that the LEAP system is having a negative impact on African-American teachers with so much focus on data and growth with not enough support from the district or parents to make the kind of progress that the community is hoping for...It is also very subjective...evaluators' preconceived ideas about black educators makes this an unfair system." (P33A)

## **Hostile work environment**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----20 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"Can I speak to my experience? It's been horrible...I was sold the dream...We decided to move westward to be closer to family. As I dig into my experience it is important to share the degree of sacrifice we made on the dream we were sold. During my time in DPS I would say it has been the worst professional experience in my career in education. I has been micro aggression after micro aggression...It is very clear that I am being marginalized. I think it's clear that I would have to compromise on my identity in order to assimilate into the culture that exists at DPS." (P18A)

"African-Americans in DPS are invisible, silenced and dehumanized, especially if you are passionate, vocal and unapologetically Black. We can't even be advocates for our kids. It feels a lot like being on a plantation...there is a lot of fear and Black folks are pitted against each other." (P41A)

"Stop the hostility, and stop the misperceptions. I have yet to work for a white person that gets it." (P16T)

## **Lack of representation of African-Americans in top leadership**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----17 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"I would say pretty hostile. And many of us don't see that changing because there are no African-Americans on the district's leadership team. How do you expect to make strides in certain areas when you don't have representation?...I don't mean someone just there. There needs to be someone who represents us who is able to come up with creative ideas and push some of these initiatives forward. So when you don't see it at the top quite naturally you're not going to see it at middle or lower levels." (P13A)

"The other piece I've been grappling with folks is African-American leadership at the senior leadership level. Who on the senior leadership is reflective of the community? If you look around at any district in the metro area, they are run by white men or women, and it's not reflective...There's really no connection for folks on Northeast Denver. I can't say that I have someone at the senior leadership level who I know will respond to me, who I know will get to my issues and concerns." (FG3)

"There's something to be said about not having senior leadership to push for all these accountability things as well as the community piece...Just open your eyes and look who's running, leading or opening schools, it is white men...in the blackest and brownest parts of the city." (FG3)

## **Lack of vehicle to build collegiality and support among African American educators**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----16 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"There's a fear among black teachers that if they speak out they are going to be eliminated, penalized or moved out of the system. I don't know how to address that fear simply because there are too many examples where it's happened...Part of that fear is even around the district developing an affinity group for black teacher and if they join it they will then be black listed if they want to have a voice" (P3C)

"They started these employee resource groups, but it was for all teachers of color. But then I also saw something in the communications email where it's now like a Hispanic employee resource group. And so the question I have is there and African-American specific group. And if so, how do you network through that? That would be helpful." (P21T)

## **Lack of cultural competency - Perceived need to "fit in" / assimilate**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----16 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"You have to adapt to the workplace. You feel that you have to assimilate into the white culture of DPS or you won't be accepted and that your job security is threatened." (P33A)

"There are people at my school who will not go to culturally responsive professional development because they don't like how it makes them feel." (P14T)

"Doing well is about fitting in...The most important thing is to seem as white as possible...Whom you know really helps advancement." (P28A)

"Constant code-switching...You have to be careful how you present yourself so that it's not interpreted in a negative way."(FG2)

## **African-American teachers and leaders do not feel valued as professionals**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----15 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"...My experience has been horrible and degrading. I am bi-racial and I have been told that I'm not black. Most supervisors treat me like I'm incapable or stupid. I have watch

non-black teachers get recognized and I have not. These are less experienced teachers.” (P16T)

“One of the things I’m curious about, and I don’t have an issue with the district hiring from outside of the state. But I’m concerned in terms of our leadership---why is it that they prefer going outside of the state when we have very qualified young African-American administrators right here...why is that?” (FG2)

“What happens with African-American teachers and leaders is like once they are moved or whatever they have shame attached to their name...So they are blackballed, and it becomes an acceptable practice to continue to discriminate, because it becomes common knowledge that they were a “problem”...So it becomes part of the narrative. And people accept and believe the narrative and no one stops to say hold on, what are we doing here? ...Why is it that Black leaders can’t lead? Why is it that Black teachers are a problem? Why is it that Black leaders can’t get promoted?” (P7A)

“The thing that is very sad is that I don’t think these people really realize what they are doing because it’s ingrained in them. They just assume if you are a person of color, you are not good enough.” (P10T)

“I have worked in the district for 10 years and there seems to be no consideration of who is being promoted. There are many qualified African-Americans in the district who don’t seem to get promoted in the system the way other folks of other races are.” (P13A)

“I never saw a posting for an African-American liaison. Do you get paid more if you know how to work with minority students? Are you getting a stipend? Speaking Spanish is a preferred qualification. I never saw a job posting with African-American preferred.” (P26A)

“Sometimes I’ve felt like my intelligence has been questioned by my colleagues. The time I’m thinking of was a group setting. It was a content meeting. We’re all teaching the same subject, but ideas I would bring to the table they would say –that’s not going to work. And then five minutes later someone would say the exact same thing, and then it would be the greatest idea in the world. This has happened on more than one occasion...What’s up with that?” (P21T)

“The last two and a half-three years is when I started to hear the rumblings. I’m hearing that my girlfriends are being let go. I’m hearing about people who are Black females especially, who went to Ritchie and Learn to Lead and still can’t secure positions.” (P38A)

“I was promoted to this director position. Upon receiving the opportunity, the conversation was that I didn’t earn the job but I got the job because I am a Black male. They completely dismissed my leadership ability and my ability to contribute my skill

set. I would say out of all the comments I've heard, this one stung the most because it reduced my success to an issue of race." (P18A)

### **Practices do not reflect organizational core values**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----15 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"People don't trust what DPS says because of the reputation we have established. There's a real disconnect, and the district does not understand the reputation they have." (P4A)

"I think in a system like DPS where you serve a majority of black and brown kids, you inherently perceive or believe that the culture be different than it is. But the same systemic and institutional challenges that exist in corporate America exist within the DPS landscape...I do spend time thinking about what are my values and how does the system I operate in either drive into those values or deviate from those. And I think we have values I deeply believe in as our core values...I don't think that we as an organization live them out consistently, and I struggle with that." (P11A)

"Equity is one of our core values and I don't see that played out as often as it should be. It should be a consistent culture across every department and every school, but I don't see that." (P13A)

"I think about my experience with compensation, there was a clear culture breach. Why are these individuals not being held accountable?...If we are saying we want a culture and environment that is more diverse and inclusive if there are culture breaches we need to have conversations to hold people accountable." (P18A)

"We have a core value around equity but no school or teacher is required to engage in this work. This doesn't seem like a district priority." (P28A)

"The district requires us to have equity teams, but schools are not really being held accountable for those. There are some strong one and there are some that don't even exist...I know charters aren't required and innovation schools probably aren't required. But in each school that is under the traditional DPS umbrella was directed to put these equity committees in place." (P38A)

### **Feelings of isolation/marginalization**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----14 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1 and 2 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"We need more African-American teachers. They feel isolated and afraid to speak out. This makes for a hostile work environment." (P4A)

"It's always nice to have someone to commensurate with and I don't think Black teachers have anyone to talk to about issues. And I think while it might be low on the totem pole it is very telling because if I am isolated, if I don't think I can share with anyone else, I'm apt to want to transfer or quit." (P22T)

"It is very clear that I am being marginalized. I think it is very clear that I would have to compromise on my identity in order to assimilate into the culture that exists in DPS." (P18A)

"Some African-American teachers choose to be disconnected. I think they feel like there is anything for them. They are feeling unwanted. The African-American teachers are so spread out, there's just no support." (P24T)

### **African-American women –“angry Black woman” label**

(Across teacher related questions 4-6----12 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1 and 2 identified this theme as having a negative impact on African-American teachers and administrators.)

"I think I have had an issue where people have perceived me as the bossy angry Black woman. I have had a few experiences where I almost feel the need to temper my opinion and not express my thoughts...I think that sometimes I am walking on egg shells." (P19A)

"I was told recently that I was the new "angry black woman" in the building. I came to the principal and told him – you know I'm passionate about this. I grew up in foster care and put myself through school, and I see myself in these kids. You want to be there for them but it seems like in the building everyone's given up and I'm the crazy one who keeps going to bar for them." (FG1)

"I don't know what's going on but African-American women are systematically being removed, looked over, passed up and stepped on. Systematically moved out of the field, looked over for promotions and positions and having promotions taken back. They say we're actually going to give this job to a young white woman who is out of district. But you can go with her as her support to show here the ropes. And by the way, after you've been there a while to show her the ropes, you no longer have a job. Those are the kinds of things that are happening." (P38A)

"Black women get those labels. And whether they were just verbal and shared at water fountain conversations or whatever, they get those labels. It then follows them and affect their ability to move within the system." (FG1)

"An experience I had that was negative relates to the macro and micro aggressions that you have to deal with on a daily basis. And you feel like you're on a battle field and you're constantly fighting and there's no support. I think the way I got through it is we have what we call the "sister girl meeting"...And it just helped alleviate all the stress we

had to go through...Something was said and I raised my hand and made a comment...not rude. But it was taken as if I was the “angry black woman”. So I had to have the discussion about why I wasn’t an angry black woman but that I was passionate about our kids and that I was going to fight for them” (FG2)

## **AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS**

### **Mentors, coaches and sponsors**

(Total mention teacher question 8----15 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1 and 2 identified this theme as being essential in supporting African-American teachers and administrators.)

“Having a sponsor that has championed my work and provided a cover for me to lead and have access to leadership opportunities. That has been key.”(P11A)

“Setting new teachers up with a mentor teacher to start off, or just to be there for venting. Sometimes you just want to know – is it me or something else? What’s expected?...Often times when you’re new and coming into a building where you might be one of two or three other African-American educators, and then depending on those personalities you may or may not have support there. And then, it gets to feeling like you’re on an island.” (P21T)

“There was a point when they had new principal mentors who provided supports to all leaders, but especially our leaders of color.” (P38A)

### **No supports**

(Total mention teacher question 8----11 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1 and 2 identified this theme related to essential supports for African-American teachers and administrators.)

“The supports are there if you know where to go. Teachers don’t know the supports available for African-American teachers.” (P2A)

“There have really been none, even with the 2020 Plan. There is really no equity for African-American students or teachers...Something is still not working.” (P13A)

“I need another person of color in administration. I’ve been in education for twenty-two years and I have my principal’s license. I don’t think I could be considered for an administrative job because no one is there to support or cheer me on.” (P16T)

# AFRICAN-AMERICAN TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS RECOMMENDATIONS: RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

## **RECRUITMENT:**

### **Provide orientation, support and connections that are culturally relevant**

(Total mention teacher question 9----15 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as a recommendation for recruiting African-American teachers and administrators.)

"I've seen DPS go out and recruit principals from out of state, but they don't last here very long...What do we give them? Do we offer them any knowledge of what's available in Denver for them to connect to get connected to culture...to the services they need. Let's create something that says – hey this is what Denver has to offer...This is where you can go hear jazz, this is where you can get your hair done, here are the local churches...We don't help them make any connections." (P12T)

"They need to be committed to who they have and how they can create equity...sincerely equitable situations for everybody who is here." (P7A)

"Often time the recruitment teams that go out are not representative of the folks they are trying to recruit in...If you're really intentional about getting folks to feel welcome when they come here they need to be exposed to those who are here and understand and can answer questions the recruiting team can't answer...If I were recruited I would want to know – where are the barbershops? Where's my neighborhood church? Those are often things that are important enough and overlooked, so how do we do that?" (P11A)

"I think we need to give incentives for people of color just like we give incentives to our Spanish speaking teachers." (P38A)

"We need ambassadors for new teachers, especially African-American teachers to help them become socialized...Of course they would need to roll out more dollars for this, but I do think it would make a difference in retaining them." (P33A)

"What do we do as a district to think about how we support our educators in the same way we want our educators to wrap their arms around our students...where they feel valued and respected in their career. How do we offer opportunities to mentor, coach and develop that are genuine and authentic in a space where educators feel like it's an effort being made because we believe deeply in it from an equity perspective and not because we want it to be a bullet point on a slide." (P11A)

### **Ensure recruitment teams are representative of those the district is trying to recruit**

(Total mention teacher question 9----13 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Group 1 and 3 identified this theme as a recommendation for recruiting African-American teachers and administrators.)

"I recommended having African-American principals on the recruitment team when going to these places where we have African-American people living. For example, let's say you go to Atlanta and a Black being so country teacher comes up. She wants to know about the churches and are there Black organizations, sororities and fraternities in Denver. And people have a stereotype about Denver, so taking Black leaders helps." (P38A)

"I think who you put in front of new recruits says a lot about your organization." (P35T)

### **Establish / expand the district's "grow your own" initiatives**

(Total mention teacher question 9----12 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Group 3 identified this theme as a recommendation for recruiting African-American teachers and administrators.)

"We need to hold an annual conference on the recruitment of teachers of color with all stakeholders and develop a report that is published. And the partners should meet quarterly to assess who is doing what to change this...That would help build momentum for this effort." (P3C)

"We need to hire more African-American teachers and intentionally seek out African-American male teachers. We need to also grow our own by offering tuition support in exchange for years of service. We have to sell the profession by explaining some of the benefits like the paid time off."(P2A)

"Things are just now moving in the right direction where the people in the central administration office are really developing programs, the foundation community's investing a lot of money and trying to set up pipelines for African-Americans...That's the only thing I see and I really can't give it a thumbs up until I can see more African-Americans in interviews and more actually being hired." (P30T)

"The pipeline doesn't have a lot to offer. You have white women coming in who aren't getting along with Black women and the Black women are the ones getting tossed out. I think you could have DPS build a pipeline from their schools. You just need to have Black kids feel better about their experience...I think a lot of the work in DPS is good. I think the work related to African-Americans is just inconsistent." (P39A)

## **RETENTION:**

### **More Diversity / Make cultural competency training mandatory / tie to LEAP evaluation**

(Total mention teacher question 9----18 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as a recommendation for recruiting African-American teachers and administrators.)

“Things are just now moving in the right direction where the people in the central administration office are really developing programs, the foundation community’s investing a lot of money and trying to set up pipelines for African-Americans...That’s the only thing I see and I really can’t give it a thumbs up until I can see more African-Americans in interviews and more actually being hired.” (P30T)

“We need ambassadors for new teachers, especially African-American teachers to help them become socialized...Of course they would need to roll out more dollars for this, but I do think it would make a difference in retaining them.” (P33A)

“They need to be committed to who they have and how they can create equitable...sincerely equitable situations for everybody who is here.” (P7A)

### **Develop more African-American administrators / school leaders, instructional superintendents, etc.**

(Total mention teacher question 9----16 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1 and 3 identified this theme as a recommendation for recruiting African-American teachers and administrators.)

“There is no visible Black leadership. I don’t mean Black window dressing but leadership with enough authority and agency to say—this is what we’re going to do for Black people. The fact that the district doesn’t have anyone who’s doing authentic training to support the school administration...So if there is not internal change everyone replicates the policies that are comfortable for them...and Black people are not seen as comfortable.” (P7A)

We need African-American instructional superintendents. As principals’ direct supervisors, they can make a great difference.” (P2A)

“They’ve got to clean up DPS before they go out and recruit anybody else. You can’t mistreat who you have and keep going to look for new people.” (P7A)

“I tried out for the LEAD program but didn’t make it. They said I didn’t make it because I didn’t have enough experience but I am 55 and have over thirty years of experience as an administrator...I’m not sure if it was because I’m African-American.” (P15T)

“There is no visible black leadership. I don’t mean black window dressing but leadership with enough authority and agency to say—this is what we’re going to do for black

people. The fact that the district doesn't have anyone who's doing authentic training to support the school administration...So if there is not internal change everyone replicates the policies that are comfortable for them...and black people are not seen as comfortable." (P7A)

"Recruit the African-American administrators first and don't let their staffs lynch them. I've heard horror stories. We know what happens to a lot of Black principals in white schools. So give them the power to make those staff members accountable so they just can't drive our brothers and sisters out." (P25T)

### **Support the establishment of a professional network for African-American educators**

(Total mention teacher question 9----15 / 40 interview respondents and Focus Groups 1, 2 and 3 identified this theme as a recommendation for recruiting African-American teachers and administrators.)

"We need a professional society or network. We are a communal people and often we don't feel this sense of community in the school building. We need a place of our own where we can learn how to deal with the racial challenges of the district...We need to feel like we have a voice...that the group has a voice and that there will be follow up to our concerns and issues." (P2A)

"They started these employee resource groups, but it was for all teachers of color. But then I also saw something in the communications email where it's now like a Hispanic employee resource group. And so the question I have is there and African-American specific group. And if so, how do you network through that? That would be helpful." (P21T)

"Black Educators United (BEU) was kind of a spring board or talking board. If I had an issue I knew I could call and someone would listen and have an understanding. The networking is vital to the survival of the African-American teacher...Invite some of the retire folks back to the table. Let's have a come to Jesus meeting saying we can save our African-American students by working together." (P22T)

"They need a network program that meets at least once a month. To have African-American teachers come together to support each other, to have a resource...This is number one." (P24T)

## **APPENDIX D**

### **SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS**

#### **BOARD RESOLUTION No. 2529** (Bailey Resolution, 1995)

WHEREAS, the Keyes litigation has been terminated and full authority has been restored to the Board for governance of Denver's schools under the applicable laws of the United States and the State of Colorado; and

WHEREAS, the District Court in its Order terminating jurisdiction noted that the Board would necessarily modify some provisions in its Resolutions 2233 and 2314 in dealing with future changes in the pupil assignment plan and that requirements if existing federal and state laws will materially and significantly affect the directions of the Denver Public Schools; and

WHEREAS, the Board desires to reiterate its commitments to the objectives of Resolutions 2233, 2314 and 2505, and to policies and procedures that will both (1) clearly manifest its intention that the Denver Public Schools shall continue permanently to be operated as a unitary school district with policies that will promote equal educational opportunity for all students regardless of race or ethnic background, and (2) provide guidelines for future decision-making that will safeguard against resegregative actions by the Board' and

WHEREAS, the Board believes it desirable to adopt a restatement of policy that reflects the new circumstances, resulting from the Court's Order;

#### **NOW THERE BE IT RESOLVED:**

1. The Denver Public Schools shall be operated at all times in conformity with the United States Constitution, the Colorado Constitution, and all applicable federal and state laws;
2. The Board, the District, and officers and employees of the District shall not adopt any policy or program, institute any practice or procedure, or make or carry out any decision for the purpose of discriminating against any person by reason of race, color, or ethnic identification.
3. The primary goal, objective and policy of this Board, the District, and the officers and employees thereof is and shall continue to be to provide the maximum educational opportunity that can be made available to all students in the school system.
4. It shall be the policy of the Board to continue to operate the Denver Public Schools as a unitary school system. This does not mean that the system is

intended to achieve or maintain any given degree of racial balance as measure by racial ratios in individual schools. Rather, it means that the Board will pursue the following goals, among others:

- a. All students, without regard to racial or ethnic background, are given access to all educational opportunities provided by the District.
  - b. The resource if the District, both human and material, are allocated with the aim of providing each student the opportunity to achieve the essentials of an education according to the educational goals of the community as defined by the Board.
  - c. One of the important educational goals of the school system is the provision of an integrated educational experience wherein student of different racial and ethnic backgrounds may learn together and thereby acquire an understanding and appreciation of their cultural differences, the values of diversity, and of the historical and linguistic contributions of all segments of society.
  - d. School building and other facilities are of such quality that no school may be identified as providing inferior or superior facilities for the education of pupils of any race or ethnic background.
5. The District believes parental and community support and involvement within the schools is critical to the success of students in the District and the delivery of educational program, and increased parental and community support is fostered and enhanced by parents having the opportunity for their children to attend school close to home as well as the ability to select from among the numerous educational offerings of the District and to participate in site-based governance.
  6. The District shall monitor its progress in enhancing the achievement of all students and will take all reasonable practicable measures to ensure that students of all racial and ethnic groups are given equal opportunity and encouragement to participate in educational opportunities such as gifted and talented programs, magnet school programs, theme schools and other similar offerings.
  7. The District shall continue to pursue measures to promote integration by voluntary choice through magnet schools and special programs.
  8. The District shall continue with its emphasis on ling-range planning to assure the professional staff resources and policy support for the continued exploration of emerging technology and methodology to accommodate the changing and

diverse need of staff, students and the community, throughout the entire District at every level.

9. Recognizing that the number of minority applicants for teaching positions in the Denver Public Schools has been in decline, the Board desires to increase the District's efforts to identify and recruit minority applicants. Accordingly, the Superintendent is directed to implement additional measures, consistent with the legal requirements of non-discrimination, as may be necessary to reach this goal.
10. The policies as state in the Resolution shall govern all decisions concerning changes in the pupil assignment plan, construction of new schools, enlargement of existing school facilities, and closing of schools. In all such decisions, the Board shall require that specific data as to the effects of any such actions on the unitary status of the district are presented to the Board prior to any decision thereon. In all such decisions the Board shall, to the extent practicable, in light of the availability of sites, fiscal resources, and educational needs choose from the available alternative those most likely to preserve and promote the unitary character of the school system.
11. The Board of Education will continue to cooperate with governmental entities and private developers whose decisions or proposals concerning housing and other matters may affect the demographics of the District. It shall be the Board's policy to support and encourage efforts in the public and private sectors to preserve and promote the unitary character of the District.
12. The District will endeavor to promote at all school facilities that are diverse in their racial and ethnic composition and comparable in education, experience and skill.
13. The District shall monitor its discipline policies and procedures, and take all practicable measures to ensure that discipline is administered without racial discrimination or bias.
14. The District shall continue to implement provisions of the program for Limited English Proficiency students hereto fore approved by the District Court as the same may be modified or amended from time to time.
15. This resolutions shall supersede Resolutions 2233, 2314, and 2505, and shall constitute the commitment of the Board to the implementation of policies and procedures for the continuous operation of the Denver Public Schools as a unitary school district with policies that will promote equal educational opportunity for all students regardless of race or educational background.

# THE ANATOMY OF INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

## **How the Opportunity Gap is constructed:**

- Poverty and Lack of Social Supports
- Limited Early Learning opportunities
- Resegregation and Unequal Schooling
- Unequal Access to Qualified Teachers
- Lack of Access to High-Quality Curriculum
- Dysfunctional Learning Environments

## **The ineffective education of African-American children is evidenced by:**

- Continued academic achievement gap
- Disproportionate low academic achievement
- Under-involvement in school activities other than sports
- Under-representation in programs for the gifted
- Overrepresentation in special education programs
- Disproportionate discipline referrals, resulting in suspension and expulsion
- Over-representation in the juvenile justice system.
- Digital divide
- Low graduation rates
- Low entry to higher education
- Under-representation in programs that prepare African-American students for the world of work
- Under-representation in gateway courses to college

## **Other conditions of the system also contribute to this ineffectiveness:**

- Lack of cultural competency among most educators and administrators
- Staff members who communicate low expectations for behavior, and academic achievement of African-American children
- Staff members who fear African-American children and their parents, guardians, and colleagues and subsequently avoid interacting with them
- Staff members who destroy the hopes and generate feelings that adult opportunities for success are limited
- A belief system that perpetuates inferiority created by bias reports, publications, materials, and media portrayal
- Institutional racism
- Eurocentric paradigm that leaves little room to engage educational materials and pedagogy that use various worldviews, languages, cultural norms, learning styles, and multiple intelligences
- Educators who deal with African-American students from a deficit model

*Source: Darling-Hammond, Linda, (2010), The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future, (Teachers College Press).*

# CLOSING ACHIEVEMENT AND OPPORTUNITY GAPS

**SOURCE: GAINING GROUND: A Report by and for African-American Citizens and Organizations on Strengthening Colorado and Building Capacity in Our Communities (On behalf of CBRT / Authored by: Dr. Sharon R. Bailey, April 2014)**

“I’ve been involved in K-12 education for forty years K-12. Protecting kids from a system that didn’t support them...The systems we have in place are causing the outcomes that we get... We get what we intend to from the systems we set up. If the system is failing students of color it is because we set it up to fail them.... We also have to pass the changes in school finance. Underfunding results in lack of attention to the needs of students of color.”(Colorado State Representative John Buckner-2013 Losing Ground Summit)

“We talked about the impacts of institutional racism, institutional discrimination and institutional lack of opportunity. And one of the places we have seen that more powerfully than any place is in our school funding formula. It is in the way this state has historically funded kids and schools. We have built a system that actually puts more and more resources into kids that already have all the resources, and puts few and fewer resources into kids that need it the most. It’s time for our school finance system to match our values.” (Colorado State Senator Michael Johnston-2013 Losing Ground Summit)

“When I think about equity...I don’t think about the fact that equity needs to be won...equity needs to be done. I am less concerned about the winning than the doing. Making sure that every day we are doing the things, that we are treating students, that we are treating families in a way that makes sure we achieve equity by practicing equity across our classrooms. I think that will have significant impact.” (Rico Munn, Superintendent, Aurora Public Schools)

“We can’t forget about those out of high school for which life has happened. These are folks for whom life has happened, have kids, jobs, but more importantly they have a wealth of experience that they can bring into higher education when they begin to seek their degrees. Higher education has to do a better job of gearing programs to build these students up...It comes back to policy, what are those access points that we can use to get folks into higher education.”(Dr. Eugene Wilkerson, Assistant Professor of Non-Profit Management, Global Non-Profit Leadership Dept. – Regis University – 2013 Losing Ground Summit)

## **LOSING GROUND**

### **EDUCATIONAL ACCESS, ACHIEVEMENT, OPPORTUNITY AND ATTAINMENT DISPARITIES**

#### **The 2013 Losing Ground report observed that in Colorado:**

- The gaps among adults with college degrees have steadily widened since 1960, with the percent of whites with college degrees three times higher than the Latino rate and double the black rate. *Those disparities are the nation's worst for both Latinos and blacks.*
- Between 1992 and 2010, according to Census data, Colorado plunged from 24th to 40th on overall state spending per student for K-12 education. When compared to per capita personal income, Colorado ranked 45th among the states on K-12 spending.

The **Colorado Department of Higher Education** reports that:

- The African-American graduation rate from two-year colleges in Colorado is 13% compared to 28.7% for whites, African-American graduation rate from four-year institutions is 39.1 percent compared to 60 percent for whites.
- Remediation rates for African-American students in Colorado's two – year institutions is 89% while that of white is 57%. Remediation rates for African-American students at the state's four-year institutions, is 55.2% compared to remediation rates for whites of 18.5%. *(Colorado Department of Higher Education – Stats presented at CBRT meeting February 16, 2014).*

## **GAINING GROUND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **ELIMINATING RACIAL DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION**

#### **What individuals can do now:**

- Read to your children or grandchildren every day.
- Remind our children of their rich heritage of commitment to education by their ancestors who risked their lives to read and write.
- Balance the time your children spend learning vs. playing videos games and watching TV.
- Create clean, quiet spaces for your children to do homework.
- Get library cards for each member of your family.

- Arrange enriching family and neighborhood activities for children of all ages: *(For example, take advantage of recreation centers, museums, libraries, educational games, and science fairs.)*
- Become involved in your child’s school—PTA, school committees. Learn more about effectively navigating the K-20 pipeline. Our schools cannot be improved if African-American parents and communities continue to sit on the sidelines with hopes that things will get better. We all know that families are children’s first teachers. Families must do their part to get children ready for school. Families implant basic attitude and values about learning, as well as self-discipline and good manners necessary for learning in a group. Families must remain involved with their children.
- Hold all leaders and elected officials responsible and demand changes in current policies and practices.

### **What community organizations and churches can do:**

- Make literacy, math, and science skills a community priority with a sense of urgency.
- Continue to broaden the scope and depth of conversations in the community regarding the education of black children in our cities and state.
- Work in partnership with state and school district officials to increase the numbers of African-American teachers, professors, and staff at all levels of education.
- Expose our students to role models in a variety of careers and occupations.
- There is a need to change the culture in our community to one that supports academic achievement. We must combat the perverse view among many black youth that serious scholarship is "a white thing." Reward academic excellence.
- There is a need to monitor closely reforms related to teacher effectiveness and staffing patterns in schools. Parents and community should visit and observe classrooms. Take every opportunity for discourse with the teachers, guidance counselors, principals, etc.
- Create and support community-based institutions that monitor policies that impact achievement of African-American students in Pre-K through 20 education. There is a pressing need to develop the capacity of the African-American community to decipher state and local education legislation, policies, and reform efforts and to share this information with community. There is a need for a centralized clearinghouse –parent resource center in our community that can

share information on site and through a database on Pre-K- 12 educational options and choices, scholarships and post high school opportunities.

- Expand the spectrum of community-based programs for black boys and girls. Duplicate and bring to scale those programs that inspire our students to achieve more. Identify and coordinate resources to strengthen educational outcomes for African-Americans of all ages. (Examples: Joint Effort Better Boys Project (Stedman), Bro. Jeff's Black Men in Schools, and the Barber Shop Project)
- Engage the philanthropic, business, non-profit and educational communities in a dialogue on African-American student achievement and attainment and work to establish partnerships with stakeholders from these sectors.
- There is a need to increase resources for community-based academic and career counseling for African-American students and their families.
- Partner with educational institutions and private funding programs to increase our student's exposure to hands-on science and math activities through the development of STEM after school and summer programs.
- Demand that the DPS Board of Education and administration, other school districts, Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) engage in a rigorous and transparent audit of which programs, initiatives, school models, and supports actually produce gains—and which do not. (Recommendation from, A+ Denver (2013) that makes sense for the entire state.)
- In higher education, engage African-American faculty, staff and students in Colorado's public and private institutions in a critical dialogue regarding issues impacting African-American students' access and success. Bring this wealth of talent, knowledge and resources to strengthen the educational pipeline by providing better communication and a network of professionals to create stronger pathways and support.
- Encourage community members/ leaders, organizations, and college students to become more actively engaged in the school policy conversations –Show up at Board of Education meetings, monitoring local education news, participate in local policy discussions, engage elected officials through letters, emails and personal contact and hold them accountable.
- Develop, educate, motivate and mobilize a critical mass of individuals and organizations who can serve as advocates for improving educational outcomes for African-American students at all levels.

## **What leaders and elected officials can do:**

- Restore adequate funding to Colorado’s K-12 and higher education systems. Guarantee that all children have access to appropriate and sufficient facilities, curriculum resources and materials.
- Invest in child and parental development. Expand access to high-quality, affordable early childhood education. (Example: Denver Pre-School Program)
- Develop a universal, well-rounded, and comprehensive curriculum. Ensure that all areas and all levels of curriculum reflect the rich history and culture of people of African descent. Ensure an education in which students truly amass knowledge and preparedness for the next level of school and life.
- Adequately train and compensate professional staff. Our teachers must be trustworthy, competent, diverse, culturally-sensitive and hold high expectations for all children. Hold the state’s teacher preparation programs to a higher standard for increasing the pool of African-American teachers.
- Develop effective policies and programs to address the crisis in the recruitment and retention of African-American teachers.
- Expand and fund community-based programs that increase exposure to hands-on science and math activities through the development of STEM after school and summer programs. (Examples: SEEK –Summer Engineering Experience for Kids, Colorado Assoc. of Black Engineers and Professional Scientist’s (CABPES) programs)
- Support policies and programs to address college affordability issues for African-American students.
- There is a critical need for more effective and targeted outreach regarding programs and resources to assist students and families in navigating the educational pipeline from Pre-K – graduate school. Provide information and training for parents to assist them in knowing their rights, understanding the data related to testing, and how to monitor the academic progress of their students.
- Provide more information to students and families about programs to support students in making the transition from high school to college. (Examples: pre-collegiate programs throughout the state at various higher education institutions)
- Ensure that African-American communities statewide are included in these efforts.

- Keep youth in school and reduce risks for involvement in juvenile justice and criminal justice systems by reducing school expulsions and suspensions, and offering alternatives to incarceration including school-based teen courts, peer mediation programming, and restorative justice programming.

## EDUCATION AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

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