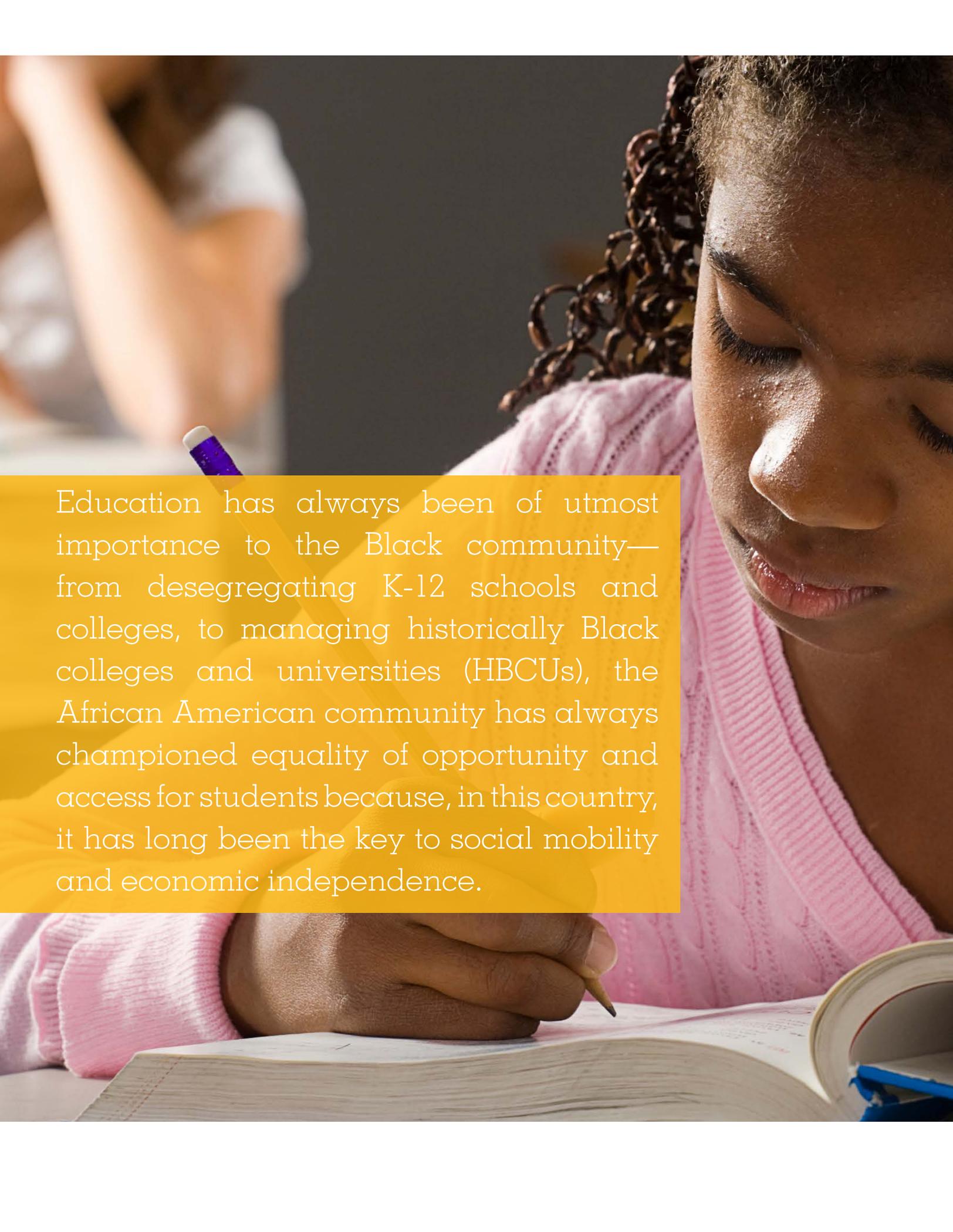




# Building Better Narratives in Black Education





Education has always been of utmost importance to the Black community—from desegregating K-12 schools and colleges, to managing historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the African American community has always championed equality of opportunity and access for students because, in this country, it has long been the key to social mobility and economic independence.

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# Contents

02	Executive Summary
04	Introduction
05	Study Scope
06	How to Build a Better Narrative
16	Call to Action
18	Conclusion
19	Appendix
21	Endnotes

## HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

This report is designed to provide tangible approaches to shift the narrative concerning Black educational reform in order to better engage communities around K-12 education and drive substantive policy changes for Black students. To do this, we build on the experiences of an array of Black voices on K-12 education. We hope individuals will be able to:

**Understand a diverse subset of the Black community's<sup>1</sup> perspective on key issues such as:**

- Standards
- Accountability
- Educational Options
- Educational Aspirations and Evaluations

**Assess best practices and promising strategies for Black students**

**Implement the recommendations to help close the achievement and opportunity gaps and change the narrative in Black education reform**

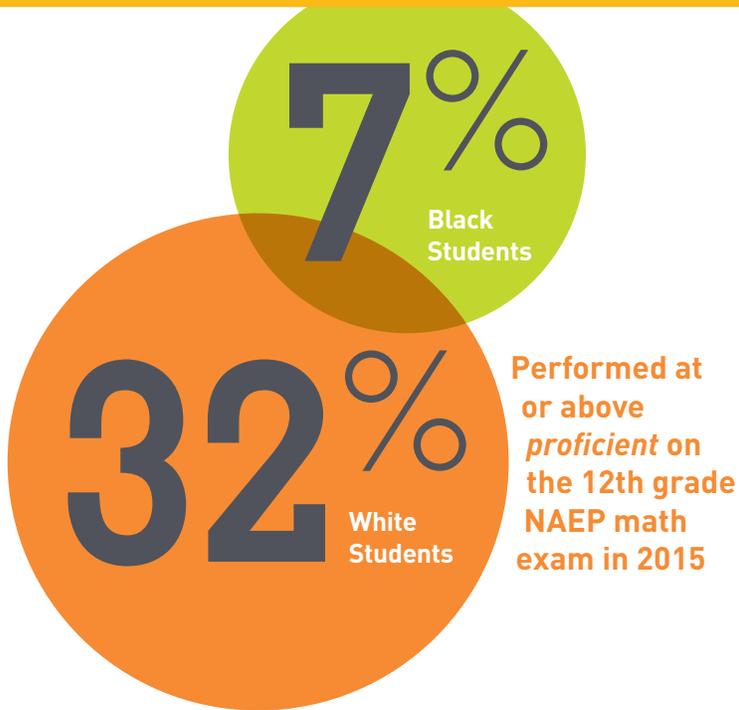
## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Hart Research Associates, Dr. Silas Lee and Associates, MEE Productions Inc., Douglas E. Schoen, LLC, and SKDKnickerbocker for collecting data that served as the foundation for this report; Dr. Brian K. Bridges of the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute and Dr. Hal Smith and his team at the National Urban League for providing valuable feedback on previous drafts; and Sekou Biddle, Naomi Shelton, Christopher Stewart and Peter Cunningham for continuing to drive this body of work within their organizations and setting the vision for how research changes perceptions of K-12 education for Black children.

**Suggested Citation:** Anderson, Meredith B.L. 2016. *Building Better Narratives in Black Education*. Washington, DC: UNCF.



# Executive Summary



*Building Better Narratives in Black Education* fundamentally changes the narrative and face of education reform to meaningfully include Black voices, leaders and initiatives that truly have equity and Black student success at the core. This is imperative as there is an education crisis for Black students in the United States. Recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results indicate that only seven percent of Black students performed at or above *proficient* on the 12th grade math exam in 2015, compared with 32 percent of White students. African American students are less likely to meet ACT college readiness benchmarks than any other racial group and often lag behind on various indicators on the primary and secondary levels. However, far too often the narrative has stopped there. While it is important to deconstruct and analyze inequities in the educational system, we have to move from solely deficit-based narratives to decisions to strengthen policies and conversations that fundamentally change the state of education for African American students. It's time to build a better, more actionable narrative that represents the promise of education to drive equity.

We have to move from solely deficit-based narratives to decisions to strengthen policies and conversations that fundamentally change the state of education for African American students.

UNCF, Education Post and the National Urban League each collected data on African Americans' perspective on significant K-12 education issues, and this report synthesizes salient themes from these various data. Grounded in the lived experiences of the African American community, *Building Better Narratives in Black Education* provides tangible approaches to fundamentally shift the narrative concerning Black educational reform in order to better engage communities and reformers around an equitable K-12 education system.

# How exactly do we build a better narrative?

## Building a better narrative involves understanding what the community is saying.

While Black students' educational attainment is often the topic of various policy initiatives, the voices within their community are not often incorporated in a meaningful way. In fact, some may even align to the myth that the Black community is apathetic toward education—something we found to be unequivocally false. The findings reveal that Black parents and caregivers are tired of the negative tone in education, and the language and key messages around educational improvement matter to them in real ways. Despite the numerous challenges in education, it is still seen as an important tool for success among African Americans.

## Building a better narrative involves promoting and investing in high-quality reforms and initiatives.

Despite some misconceptions, the findings indicate that the African American community is very knowledgeable and informed about key aspects in education policy such as high-quality assessments, Common Core State Standards, teacher quality and accountability, and high-quality schools. Overall, the data reveal that the African American community wants an equity-centered, quality education for African American students that will prepare them for college and promising careers.

## Building a better narrative involves not only underscoring educational inequality, but truly celebrating success.

While there are considerable inequalities in education, there are successful approaches around the country that are striving toward academic success for all students. This report discusses several programs, systems and research initiatives led by African Americans that are making great strides for African American youth.

## Building a better narrative involves promoting the “urgency of now.”

While reforming education is a complex task, we should act swiftly to change the narrative in Black education. Children are impressionable—consistently hearing negative messages about their educational trajectory can have a detrimental influence on their self-efficacy and beliefs about education. Additionally, parents and leaders can become disillusioned and disengaged as well. The stakes are too dire and consequential to delay making fundamental change for Black students.

As states proceed to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), it is imperative that the voices of local communities are heard and incorporated in a meaningful way. In fact, the law requires this valuable input. Our efforts reveal that the African American community is well-informed about key education issues and wants to

have a sense of agency in this work. The report concludes with recommendations for various stakeholders and a call to action that can help shift common narratives and profoundly advance education reform and policy for African American students.



# Introduction

As a country, we have been grappling for decades with the harsh realities of systemic inequality, institutional racism and discrimination against African Americans. Recently, we have seen protests erupt over police brutality and injustice. We have also seen demands for fair policy reform and concerted efforts among multiple communities to make tangible changes in government. The fight for equality in education is similar to this movement in many ways. In fact, soon after the 2015 Baltimore protests ensued over the death of an unarmed young Black man, conversations in the media shifted to the city's educational inequalities and its linkage to the criminal justice system.

**The unwavering impetus for change in our nation's schools is still evident; the hunger to illuminate the crisis for Black students is ever-present.**

The Black education reform movement and the current civil rights moment are inextricably linked.<sup>2</sup> The tumultuous fight for equality in education is also rooted in a history of protests, disruption of the status quo, arguing of legal cases, strategic policy proposals and a firm stand against structures and practices that perpetuate inequality. Just as there is a crisis in the criminal justice system with rampant discrimination against African Americans, there are deep fractures in our educational system that often result in inadequate opportunities to learn for African American students. However, far too often the Black voice in the educational movement is not heard with much vigor. There is at times a belief in education policy, research and practice circles that Black parents and community members are apathetic toward education—something we know not to be true. Education has always been of utmost importance to the Black community—from desegregating K-12 schools and colleges to establishing and managing historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the African American community has always championed equality of opportunity and access for students because in this country, it has long been the key to social mobility and economic independence. The unwavering impetus for change in our nation's schools is still evident; the hunger to illuminate the crisis for Black students is ever-present.

However, the public narrative surrounding the education of Black children has concentrated on a discourse of under-achievement and failure, rather than excellence and equity. To be clear, a conversation about the struggles of Black students and the institutions that serve them is needed to understand specific strategies and investments that will make a difference. Unpacking inequality in our nation's schools has elevated conversations on the achievement and opportunity gaps. This report is not about discounting real, systemic inequalities that exist, but it proposes building a better, more impactful and actionable narrative that represents the promise of education to drive equity and is more expansive than current frames. Such a narrative is also more culturally resonant and representative of the social and intellectual capital of the African American community. A more thoughtful and comprehensive narrative demands that the contributions of communities of color be embedded within the discourse on education in a real and meaningful way. This report challenges us to move from deficit-based discussions to decisions to strengthen policies and conversations that fundamentally change the state of education for Black students.

## How do we accomplish this?

- Understand what the community is saying through thoughtful and sound research
- Celebrate successful approaches, programs and scholarship from communities of color
- Promote and invest in high-quality initiatives
- Promote the “urgency of now” in education reform

Building on empirical data of Black voices across the country, this report challenges the notion that the Black community does not care about education or is not informed and meaningfully engaged in solving the educational crisis facing too many Black students. The report begins with an explanation of the data and methods, followed by an extensive discussion of what we need to do to change the narrative. We conclude with a call to action based on the findings.

# Study Scope

This report takes a community-centered research approach—that is, it incorporates community voices in order to better inform advocacy, policy, scholarship and practice. Creating effective policy solutions is difficult without hearing from essential stakeholders in the education community. As such, this paper synthesizes a collection of Black voices from multiple sources across the country on K-12 education reform issues. In an era of “data-driven decision making,” it is imperative that reforms and policy solutions are substantiated by data on the lived experiences of the community and that the resultant reforms or strategies are reflective of those perspectives. Additionally, allowing communities to reflect on the educational conditions they face helps build more awareness and interest in education.

Data were provided by three equity-centered, non-profit organizations: UNCF, Education Post and the National Urban League.<sup>3</sup> This report is a groundbreaking collaborative effort in that three prominent social justice organizations forged an effort to highlight Black community voices around K-12 education. Each organization recognizes the crisis in education for the Black community and dedicated the time and resources to investigate these issues in an in-depth manner. This report is an analysis of key themes highlighted by the various data sources. It is important to note that this report does not provide an assessment of all educational issues facing Black students, but it does offer a holistic discussion of major themes in the education discourse, such as standards, assessments and accountability. A brief discussion of the data sources is listed below; additional details on each source are available in the appendix section.

**UNCF:** These data include both survey data and focus groups of low-income African American parents, caregivers and community leaders. Eight focus groups of Black parents were conducted in 2012 by MEE Productions, Inc., in Washington, DC, New Orleans, LA, Atlanta, GA, Detroit, MI, and Memphis, TN. Additionally, a total of 1,355 survey responses were collected by Hart Research Associates in 2012 with African American parents and caregivers from low-income households across the nation.

In the summer of 2013, UNCF also enlisted Hart Research Associates to conduct a survey on education issues in the Black community that resulted in 631 survey responses from community leaders who live in cities with populations of at least 250,000 and had high densities of African Americans. Respondents included non-profit leaders, clergy, business, higher education and political leaders—a group UNCF termed “grass-tops.” Additionally, Hart Research Associates conducted in-depth phone interviews with 36 African American leaders on the same topic across the country in 2014.

**Education Post:** These data consist of focus groups and polling data of individuals with children or grandchildren in the United States. Education Post enlisted Douglas E. Schoen, LLC, to conduct the national poll in 2014, which consisted of 1,200 randomly selected individuals with children or grandchildren between the ages of 3 and 18. For the purposes of this study, we focus on survey responses from African Americans—a total of 508. Four African American focus groups were conducted by SKDKnickerbocker in Indianapolis, IN, and New York City in 2014 to support the survey data.

**National Urban League:** Dr. Silas Lee & Associates conducted the National Urban League’s Common Core State Standards Communications Campaign survey in February 2014. A total of 1,200 adult respondents were interviewed in Pittsburgh, PA, Los Angeles, CA, Cleveland, OH, and Nashville, TN. A slight majority of respondents (612) were African American. For the purposes of this study, only the African American results are discussed.

# How to Build a Better Narrative

The current narrative in education reform has failed in a few significant ways. First, it has failed to include the voices of communities of color in a sincere and meaningful way. Although there have been efforts to partner in education reform endeavors, at times this has been more symbolic than substantive. As a result, policies lack the deep understanding, expertise and ties to minority communities. Second, the narrative surrounding Black education has overwhelmingly centered on a deficit lens, yet we know there is a complexity and positivity within the African American educational experience. In the report, we offer a more thorough consideration of African Americans' success in education. Third, the narrative has at times been problem-oriented instead of concentrating on

**It's time to build a better narrative in Black education. We have to disrupt this discourse and chart a new path in educational reform.**

initiatives that truly have African American students' interest at the core. It's time to build a better narrative in Black education. We have to disrupt this discourse and chart a new path in educational reform. The following discussion offers several ways to build a better, more inclusive and equity-driven narrative.

## **BUILDING A BETTER NARRATIVE INVOLVES UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE COMMUNITY IS SAYING.**

Discussions about the achievement or opportunity gaps in this country usually refer to the inadequate education that students of color receive in relation to White students. Yet, far too often these communities of color do not have a seat at the table when education policy decisions are made, and as a result, their voice is rendered silent. An inclusive education reform movement allows for multiple, diverse perspectives in which the resultant policies seek to understand the assets of and truly meet the needs of all communities. We seek to build a better narrative that is informed by the lived experiences and perspectives of the

**An inclusive education reform movement allows for multiple, diverse perspectives in which the resultant policies seek to understand the assets of and truly meet the needs of all communities.**

Black community. UNCF, Education Post and the National Urban League were determined to listen to the Black community to inform advocacy and decision making. Our efforts and engagement reveal that the community is ready and willing to talk—it merely takes a concerted effort to listen. So what exactly did those voices tell us?

**1 | Parents are tired of the negative tone in education.** The findings show that destructive educational messages did not resonate well with Black parents in the focus groups conducted by Education Post. These parents did not appreciate the incessantly negative discourse surrounding their schools or teachers.<sup>4</sup> The teachers share a bond with parents—they often live in the same communities, so it is difficult to have a strong critical nature without also offering support. However, Black parents are not opposed to accountability. Nearly 90 percent of Black parents and grandparents surveyed in the Education Post poll agreed that if schools and teachers are not held accountable, disadvantaged students will suffer the most.

This finding regarding messages is illuminating because the case for policy change is often built on a narrative focusing on what is not going well in education, but the results reveal that a different strategy is needed—one that recognizes these failures, and also offers solutions that are beneficial to the community. For example, the solution to fire teachers or close a school because of underperformance on a metric developed without community input hurts the community as it undermines the trust and support the institution provides. While it is still important to underscore issues that are hampering student achievement, it is also essential to have balance because a skewed narrative may deter potential partners in education and hurt the populations that need help the most.

2

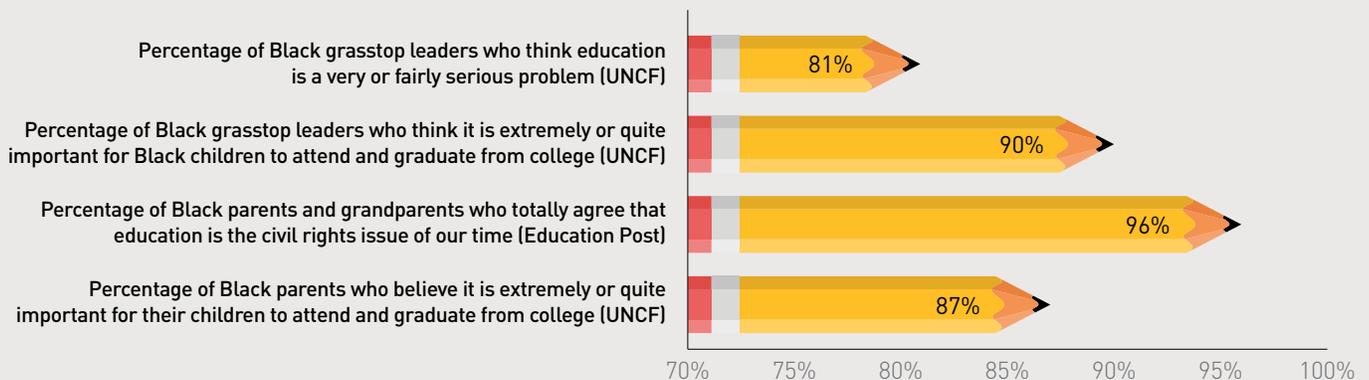
**The language and messages we use to talk about education matter.** We asked Black parents and caregivers what they thought of the word “reform” in describing educational improvements. In *Done to Us, Not With Us: African American Parent Perceptions of K-12 Education*, UNCF found there is no consensus on what the word means.<sup>5</sup> Survey respondents offered a variety of responses with very little uniformity for this term. One

3

**Despite the challenges, education is still seen as an important tool for social mobility and success.** There is often a belief that the Black community is indifferent to education; we found that this is absolutely not the case across multiple sources. Figure 1 reveals that 96 percent of Black parents and grandparents in the Education Post poll agreed that “education is the civil rights issue of our time; it is a springboard for confidence

Collectively, the data show that amid the harsh challenges facing Black students, the Black community has not given up on education.

**FIGURE 1 | Education is Viewed as an Important Issue to African Americans Across Multiple Sources**



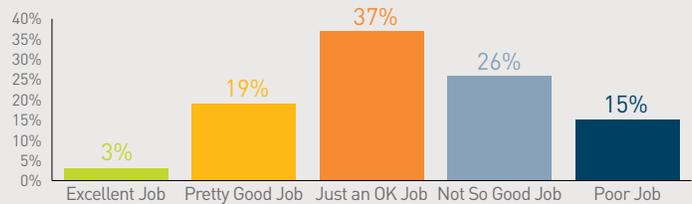
Note: Figure 1 reflects responses from three sources: UNCF Parent Survey, UNCF Grasstop Survey and Education Post Survey.

respondent replied, “More crap...in my experience it has not been a positive thing,” while another suggested, “It means more government bureaucracy...more of the government trying to tell us how we can do things here with our children but their kids are all in private school.” We found consistent findings with the survey results from Education Post—“reform” was not a very compelling term to use when talking with Black parents and grandparents about educational improvements. The words “improve” and “strengthen” elicited the most support, as did phrases like “improving our education system” and “making sure every child gets a quality education.” In addition, both focus group and survey data indicate that parents responded favorably to more positive messages regarding educational change. These data tell us that the language we use to mobilize Black parents and caregivers makes a difference for outcomes. As such, policymakers and community leaders should be thoughtful in their messaging around education.

and success, and we need to make sure that all families and all kids have access to the same opportunities regardless of race, background or income.” Similarly, 90 percent of respondents surveyed by the National Urban League agreed that education is important for social mobility. In addition, Black grasstops explained that behind only the economy and jobs, education is one of the best ways to improve problems in the Black community. The majority of grasstops also believed that education was a serious problem facing their community. Collectively, the data show that amid the harsh challenges facing Black students, the Black community has not given up on education. Black parents overwhelmingly want their children to succeed. In fact, the UNCF parent study and grasstops research revealed that 87 percent of Black parents and 90 percent of Black leaders want Black children to attend and graduate from college.

While there are different indicators to measure satisfaction with education across data sources, one thing is clear: there is a palpable feeling of disappointment in the educational system among Black parents and grandparents.

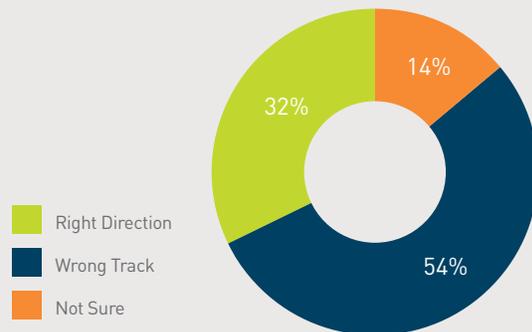
**FIGURE 2 | African American Grasstops' Evaluation of Public Schools Systems' Ability to Provide African Americans with an Education that Prepares Them to Graduate from School**



**4** | While the Black community views education as an important factor for success, a large majority agree that education is off track. Both leaders and parents expressed dissatisfaction with education. Only 22 percent of African American grasstops felt that public schools were doing an “excellent” or “pretty good” job preparing Black students for postsecondary education (Figure 2). Similarly, more than half of Black parents and grandparents in the Education Post poll believe that the education system is off track, though when

asked about their own school and state, there was less agreement (Figure 3). More than half of the Black respondents (55 percent) surveyed in the National Urban League study felt the quality of public education students in their community received was not equal to that of other communities. While there are different indicators to measure satisfaction with education across data sources, one thing is clear: there is a palpable feeling of disappointment in the educational system among Black parents and grandparents.

**FIGURE 3 | African American Parents' and Grandparents' Opinion on the Direction the Education System is Headed in the U.S.<sup>6</sup>**



Building a better narrative entails a focus on deliberate, equity-centered policy and practices.

## BUILDING A BETTER NARRATIVE INVOLVES PROMOTING AND INVESTING IN HIGH-QUALITY REFORMS AND INITIATIVES.

Building a better narrative entails a focus on deliberate, equity-centered policy and practices. At times, the current discourse can be problem-centered instead of solution-oriented. Promoting such a counter-narrative may help leaders and parents understand tangible ways to address the educational crisis facing Black students. The following discussion focuses on practical initiatives and policies.

**1 | Common Core State Standards.** To ensure that students are prepared for college and career demands, students should be held to high academic standards, but also be supported to meet and exceed such standards. Common Core State Standards establish clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade.<sup>7</sup> These standards emphasize critical thinking, analytical skills and problem solving—essential tools to succeed in school. Ensuring that students are held to rigorous standards is salient for all students; it is particularly important for African American students, as they are more likely to need remedial courses upon entering college.<sup>8</sup> Such courses, incidentally, do not offer college credit, yet students generally foot the bill themselves. Students may also become disengaged with college if they feel they lack the necessary skills to

The Urban League survey results show that **91 percent of African Americans agree** that the Common Core State Standards will better prepare their children for college or the workforce.

graduate. Because Black students are more likely to be concentrated in school systems with fewer resources than in affluent districts, they have less access to rigorous standards and curriculum.<sup>9</sup> As such, a high-quality and equitable implementation of the Common Core State Standards would drive improved educational outcomes for all students regardless of their zip code, race or income.

The survey results from various sources reveal strong support for the Common Core in the Black community. The Urban League survey results show that 91 percent of African Americans agree that the Common Core State Standards will better prepare their children for college or

Systemic discrimination is rampant in the educational system, and data allow us to deconstruct where these gaps lie and where interventions should be focused.

the workforce. However, fewer Black respondents (66 percent) agreed that the teachers in their communities would have the technology and training to effectively implement the Common Core State Standards. Moreover, when grassstops were primed with an explanation of the Common Core, nearly 90 percent supported the implementation of the standards. Overall, African Americans in the studies want students to be held to rigorous, high-quality standards so that Black students are not falling through the cracks or matriculating without having mastered the skills necessary to succeed in a competitive job market.

**2 | High-Quality Assessments.** Among some segments of the population, the mere mention of “standardized testing” or “assessments” brings a level of angst and distrust. However, at its core, high-quality assessments should be valid and reliable measures of student performance that help inform teachers, parents and students of academic progress and areas of improvement. Darling-Hammond [et al.] explain that quality assessments should: (1) evaluate higher order cognitive skills; (2) be high-fidelity assessments of critical abilities; (3) be internationally benchmarked; (4) utilize items that are instructionally sensitive and educationally valuable; and (5) be valid, reliable and fair.<sup>10</sup>

Such high-quality assessments are essential tools to understand student progress and empower parents to help their children succeed. However, standardized testing alone does not offer a complete evaluation of students’ academic capabilities. When used in conjunction with other assignments and metrics, these assessments can be an excellent mechanism for students, teachers and schools to measure progress on key goals. These data also help shed light on the racial inequalities within and among schools. Systemic discrimination is rampant in the educational system, and data allow us to deconstruct where these gaps lie and where interventions should be focused.

In *Done to Us, Not With Us*, Black parents held mixed views on standardized testing, although a plurality agreed that the scores were a way to measure their child’s academic progress (37 percent) rather than something that kept their child from reaching his or her full potential (13 percent). On a related matter, parents in the Education Post survey felt that while there are too many tests in some districts, students should take only those tests that determine if they are on track for success. In fact, that same survey revealed that 87 percent of Black parents agreed with

the message in the survey, “periodic standardized testing makes sure students are on track, improves student outcomes and academic achievement, and lets teachers and parents know what their child’s strengths and weaknesses are.” Additionally, 81 percent of Black parents found the following message as very or somewhat convincing: “It’s not about testing for the sake of testing. It’s about knowing if your kid is being challenged and inspired, and if they’re learning what they need to be successful.” Essentially, parents are asking for balance—they understand the necessity of tests; they just want less frequency and the right tests that help their children succeed.

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Testing for testing’s sake is not the answer, though high-quality assessments that help ensure that students leave high school prepared to enter college without the need for remediation are a step in the right direction. The opt-out activities, however, serve to undermine the progress on high-quality assessments by encouraging parents to exempt their children from state assessments. When parents opt their children out of tests, they are failing to receive crucial information about their child’s strengths and weaknesses and about the school system’s strategies and investments to improve education for all students. Opting out of testing may lead to the most disadvantaged students falling through the cracks and not receiving the best interventions they deserve.

### 3

**Education Models that Provide a High-Quality Education for All Students.** The systemic inequalities within the nation’s schools have been well documented for some time. Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress consistently reveal achievement gaps over time between students of color and White students.<sup>11</sup> The differences in resources, investments and allocations between affluent and low-income schools are vast, and assessment scores and course offerings are often lower in urban schools and schools that serve a majority of students of color. This in turn accelerates and exacerbates disadvantage.

What has essentially developed is the creation and ongoing maintenance of dual educational systems—one that often works well for those in zip codes with high-income families and communities, and one where students in low-income areas often languish in dilapidated schools with fewer resources.<sup>12</sup> Providing educational options helps ensure that Black families have the opportunity to gain access to a high-quality education, whatever their zip code. As policymakers and other groups seek to reform the educational landscape, some students are still languishing in failing schools. Waiting to address these needs means that certain students, namely low-income Black students, are falling behind in the midst of all the changes. In other words, while it is imperative to continue to work to improve all schools, it is also important that parents are educated on how to navigate the task of selecting a high-quality school for their child. In fact, in the UNCF study, parents with children in lowest-caliber schools needed the most help locating reliable sources of information on school quality compared with parents whose children were in excellent schools.

All neighborhood schools serving low-income Black students are not failing; however, some students learn better in different environments. There should not be a “one-size-fits-all” approach in education.<sup>13</sup> It is important to provide high-quality educational options for students, whatever that may encompass—be it traditional public schools, public charters, magnet schools, themed schools or private schools. The focus should be squarely on providing all students with high-quality education settings, supports, content and teachers and on eliminating the predictive power of zip code in historically under-served communities and in communities of color. While there is a proliferation of charter schools across the country, there is also a growing push for accountability for these schools. All schools that fail to produce the educational outcomes we seek should be held accountable for their actions.

While there are still some open questions about the efficacy and performance of all charter schools, the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) surveyed<sup>14</sup> Black voters in four states and found strong support for high-quality school options. Some 85 to 89 percent of Black voters in each state agreed that government should provide parents with as many options as possible to ensure that their child receives a good education.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, at least 50 percent of Black voters in each of the four states expressed support for charter schools. Similarly, over half of Black grassroots surveyed strongly support the idea of offering more school options to help improve educational opportunities for students.<sup>16</sup>

Black parents in the Education Post focus groups had differing perspectives about this approach to reform; some were open to increasing the number of charters, while others were skeptical. This sentiment is shared by some members of the African American community overall. Some suggest that educational options deter progress and success in traditional neighborhood schools. Teachers and schools have been part of the community for years, and some parents fear their stability is being disrupted with new schools and processes. Moreover, there has also been some dissatisfaction in the lack of diversity among charter authorizing bodies and dismal performance for students in some non-traditional schools. Nevertheless, parents in the Education Post focus groups felt that lessons from the successes in the charter sector should be shared to help make neighborhood schools better. While the debate ensues between various school types, the point is that parents across the country want a high-quality school for their children and want to feel empowered to make informed decisions regarding educational opportunity, equity and quality.

## 4

**Teacher Quality and Accountability.** Teachers are often at the center of the education reform debate. This is primarily the case because students spend considerable amounts of time in the classroom, and teachers play such a large role in student development. In fact, teacher quality and accountability was a central concern to Black parents and grassroots. Among Black grassroots, teacher quality was ranked as the second-highest factor behind parental involvement when it comes to contributing to the quality of education that African Americans receive. Similarly, “improved or dedicated teachers” was listed as the top response to what “education reform” means among low-income Black parents in *Done to Us, Not With Us*. In other words, the Black community recognizes the need for high-quality educators in the classroom. The Education Post poll and focus groups substantiate these findings—Black parents want better teachers, though they do not appreciate “teacher bashing.” Instead, they wanted accountability, coupled with support. Eighty-nine percent of Black parents agreed that “if we do not hold schools and teachers accountable for the job they are doing educating children, disadvantaged students will lose out the most.”

Investing in teacher quality means holding teachers accountable by implementing thoughtful evaluation systems that include multiple measures for performance. Districts must also include adequate supports and meaningful

professional development (for both pre- and in-service teachers) to improve their skills. Additionally, teachers should demonstrate cultural competency in the classroom. The 2014–2015 school year marked the first time students of color constituted the majority in U.S. public schools. As such, these schools and teacher preparation programs must train educators and staff on creating inclusive educational environments and curricula that value diversity.

In addition, teachers must have demonstrated content mastery with an ability to translate complex concepts. This is especially salient in schools with high proportions of students of color as they are often concentrated in schools with less qualified teachers.<sup>17</sup> Teachers must also hold high expectations for all students. While this should be commonplace, recent research has shown evidence of systemic bias in teacher expectations for African American students. Non-Black teachers were found to have lower expectations of Black students than Black teachers.<sup>18</sup> Students should feel as if their teacher genuinely believes in them and is concerned about their success. A meaningful system of teacher accountability and support, investment in cultural competency, content mastery, and engaging teachers who hold high expectations for students will help ensure that all students—even the most disadvantaged—have a quality teacher in their classroom.

Overall, these initiatives and practices are not the only tools necessary to achieve an excellent education, nor is any one tool a panacea. Taken holistically, these initiatives encompass a path to a high-quality education. We have to construct a foundation that is built on high-quality initiatives and ensures that the most disadvantaged students are not locked into an education devoid of its promise. We must instead ask, “How can we set children up for success?” Building this narrative, a better narrative, will help move the needle on educational change. Members of the African American community offered valuable commentary on their educational interests and concerns, and the bottom line is that they want a high-quality education for Black students: one that is equity-driven and ensures that Black students are prepared for a 21st-century global marketplace.

Members of the African American community offered valuable commentary on their educational interests and concerns, and the bottom line is that they want a high-quality education for Black students: one that is equity-driven and ensures that Black students are prepared for a 21st-century global marketplace.

## **BUILDING A BETTER NARRATIVE INVOLVES NOT ONLY UNDERSCORING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY, BUT TRULY CELEBRATING SUCCESS.**

Far too often, a deficit narrative regarding Black education permeates the discussion in education reform. While it is necessary to unpack inequalities and structures that perpetuate failure among groups, it is equally important to shed light on the successful reforms and practices that yield promising results for African American students. Unfortunately, these stories often take a back seat to narratives highlighting deleterious outcomes and programs.

Changing the narrative means disrupting the conversations to highlight flourishing programs and schools for Black youth; and to be clear, these educational settings do exist. There are places and systems throughout the country that are getting it right. They are focusing on teaching and learning, cultural competency, mentoring, parent partnerships, college readiness and rigorous curriculum development. They are treating their students like “scholars,” setting high yet attainable expectations, and promoting a college-readiness culture. These programs should become models for lifting achievement levels for students. Given that parents were tired of the negative tone in education, six promising programs and innovative approaches are briefly discussed below.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that to contribute to building a better narrative, we specifically highlight schools and systems with African American leaders who are committed to equity and excellence for Black students. Diversifying education with these types of leaders is significant for a variety of reasons. First, it is important for Black students to see this representation in authority positions within education, especially since Black representation in leadership positions is dismal compared with White representation. A large corpus of work substantiates the academic benefits of having a more representative educational environment.<sup>20</sup> Second, too often, education reform organizations have largely minimized the perspectives and contributions of educators and communities of color in their framing of educational excellence and innovation. Third, diverse leadership may encourage minority communities to become more engaged as there is a racial congruence and potential familiarity.<sup>21</sup> The bottom line is that innovation and reform efforts that do not meaningfully engage the community are less relevant, less legitimate and less powerful. Therefore, having authentic, culturally resonant representation in education is paramount if we are going to change the narrative and close the achievement and opportunity gaps.

## **DEMONSTRATING COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE**

The contributors to this report have identified a number of approaches that show great promise for producing better education outcomes and better serving students of color. The following list is far from exhaustive, but does provide examples of reform and innovation that are deserving of deeper examination and attention.

### **1 | Achievement Prep**

Achievement Prep was founded by Shantelle Wright, Esq., in 2007 in an effort to close the achievement gap and address the educational necessities of low-income students in Washington, DC. Achievement Prep is a network of two college preparatory schools located east of the Anacostia River in Ward 8 and serves a large majority of low-income, African American students. These schools are tuition-free, with open enrollment. They operate under an extended learning environment: the school days are longer than at other schools, and the academic year has 10 to 15 more days. The mission of Achievement Prep is to “prepare students to excel as high-achieving scholars and leaders in high school, college and beyond.” The network achieves this mission by: (1) maximizing time through creating a sense of urgency and providing instruction in a rigorous and fast-paced manner; (2) promoting strong character building and a school culture of reading that is emphasized throughout the school day; (3) providing ongoing and frequent assessment; (4) forming partnerships with parents; (5) teaching double instructional blocks for English and mathematics; and (6) allowing students the opportunity to take algebra and read complex novels in their eighth grade English class. As a result of this approach, Achievement Prep has outperformed other schools in its area on state assessments and has consistently earned a spot on the highest performance category (Tier I) among DC charter schools.



## 2 | Urban Prep Academies

Urban Prep Academies was founded in 2002 by Tim King and a group of African American education, business and civic leaders. Urban Prep includes a network of all-male public schools, serving mostly African American and economically disadvantaged students in Chicago, IL. Urban Prep's mission is "to provide a high-quality and comprehensive college-preparatory educational experience to young men that results in our graduates succeeding in college." The schools are guided by four arcs—a culturally relevant curriculum dedicated to building well-rounded students. The four arcs are academic, service, professional/college and activity. The students also abide by an Urban Prep creed that underscores college readiness, hard work, high expectations, respect and perseverance. Students internalize this creed by reciting it every day at school. Urban Prep has received much recognition for consistently achieving a 100 percent college acceptance rate for all graduates. The schools promote a college-going culture through a "College Signing Day" where the students publicly declare their college choices. King, the CEO, suggest that individuals speak "new words to our children" and "change the narrative." These principles, coupled with a sincere investment in students' lives, have resulted in excellent achievement for young Black students.

## 3 | Project Ready

Project Ready has been designed and refined over time by the National Urban League to help the nation reach the organization's Education Empowerment goal: that every American child is ready for college, work and life by 2025. Project Ready develops an individual student's knowledge and attitude toward, and capacity for, post-secondary success via strong local partnerships, an emphasis on academic support, the innovative use of learning time, exposure to enhanced content, positive youth development and out-of-school time (OST). To acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to grow into healthy, responsible adults, young people needed a range of developmentally appropriate supports, services and opportunities offered by community-based organizations outside of the traditional school day. Via robust partnerships with districts, schools and institutions of higher education, the Urban League's model brings together research and promising practices in youth development, adolescent literacy, OST learning and readiness, within the tradition and legacy of the Urban League Movement. Across sev-

eral models, including those that focus on STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and math), service learning, cultural and historical literacy and mentoring, almost 10,000 middle and high school students have participated in Project Ready in over 25 cities.

## 4 | Washington, DC, Public Schools

Large, urban school districts often face insurmountable challenges in achieving success, especially among disadvantaged students. Yet, Chancellor Kaya Henderson of Washington, DC, Public Schools (DCPS) addressed these challenges head-on with new strategies and methods aimed at lifting student achievement. First, DCPS is working to raise the level of rigor in schools by an Advanced Placement (AP) expansion plan aimed at increasing AP offerings across all wards in the district, since a disproportionate number of schools in lower-income neighborhoods did not have many AP courses. All high schools must now offer at least six Advanced Placement courses. Second, Henderson announced a \$20 million "Empowering Males of Color" initiative to help increase academic success of boys and men of color. The initiative will focus on (1) engaging the community through mentorships, partnerships and career training; (2) research-based strategies with a concentration on equity; and (3) innovation through creation of a high school for young men of color and investments in early education. Moreover, the district launched career academies in seven high schools, where students had an opportunity to receive mentorship, participate in coursework and attend site visits to learn more about engineering, information technology and hospitality. In addition, the district has made a distinct effort to increase teacher salaries and reward excellence in order to both recruit and retain teachers. The district has seen both gains and stagnation in achievement for students;<sup>22</sup> however, the new initiatives and reforms offer promising steps toward academic excellence for Black students.

Education has always been a strong pillar in the Black community. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., promoted the "fierce urgency of now" to help embolden the civil rights movement. In a like manner, we must champion for a better narrative to help push education reform for Black students forward as well.

## 5 | Eagle Academy for Young Men

Eagle Academy for Young Men started in 2004 as a single public school due to the efforts of a group of educators, parents, community leaders and corporate partners, led by One Hundred Black Men, Inc., and David Banks. Eagle Academy is now a network of six schools across the New York City metropolitan area. The mission of the Eagle Academy for Young Men is to develop young men of color in urban areas who are committed to the pursuit of academic excellence, strong character and responsible leadership. At the center of their approach are core values represented by the acronym CLEAR, which stands for Confidence, Leadership, Effort, Academic Excellence and Resilience. In Eagle Academy and in its model of opportunity, support and intervention, academic rigor and high expectations flow beyond the traditional school hours to the mandatory extended day (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and Saturday Institute programs. The institute includes workshops for parents, life-skills training and remedial and acceleration services for over 1,600 plus Eagle Academy students as needed. In the 2014-2015 school year, the network-wide graduation rate was 88 percent, with 100 percent of eligible seniors accepted to college.

## 6 | InspireNOLA

InspireNOLA is a charter management organization that comprises three schools: Alice Harte, Edna Karr and Andrew Wilson. More than 90 percent of their students are African American and over 80 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Under the leadership of Jamar McKneely, the New Orleans schools strive “to transform and inspire an educational movement where students can develop academic and personal skills in order to be prepared for college, their community and the world.” The InspireNOLA pillars are culture, academic framework, accountability and continuous growth. The schools focus on foundational skills and critical thinking, as well as development of students who want to make a difference in their communities. The schools also focus on offering rigorous curriculum—Karr students are required to take four years of math, science, English and social studies, in addition to SAT/ACT prep. InspireNOLA has achieved much success in recent years. Alice Harte recently outperformed Louisiana and New Orleans on the 2015 PARCC exam. Additionally, more than 80 percent of Karr graduates attend college.

It is important to mention that the six promising examples provided are not the only entities that have made great strides for African American students. Additionally, they are not panaceas to the fractures in our educational system, but rather they are models and initiatives that have played a role in increasing quality educational opportunities for Black students.

In addition to programmatic innovations, building a better narrative means privileging African American voices and perspectives as central drivers of successful urban school reform. Systemic investments, innovations and reforms will be necessary to drive education success at scale, and reformers must widen the scope of their search for good work and promising practices if we are to better serve the nation’s children. African American education leaders and scholars have been developing and leading innovation efforts in education for decades, from developing culturally relevant teaching methods, to establishing journals that highlight excellent scholarship (such as the *Journal of Negro Education*), to creating programs like the Fellowship for Race, Equity and Education to create spaces to discuss race and equity in our schools.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, these scholars and innovators have created spaces and centers, such as the Institute for Urban and Minority Education



at Teachers College, Columbia University; the Capstone Institute at Howard University in Washington, DC; the Urban Education Collaborative at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; the Comer School Development Program at Yale University; the Wei Lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; and other similar places where rigorous, Black education research thrives.<sup>24</sup> Spaces such as these help ensure that there is a strong linkage of scholarship to practice within minority communities.

While there has been an abundance of rigorous, theory-driven work from scholars of color, the celebration of their scholarship has been largely devalued in mainstream education for years. A perusal of a few of the leading education journals underscores this fact, with far less attention being paid to scholarship on critical issues in Black education, particularly those issues that contribute to building a better, more thoughtful narrative about education reform and innovation. Black scholars and innovators have tackled such critical issues in Black education such as grouping and tracking, intersectionality, discipline and various other pertinent topics.<sup>25</sup> They have also supported shifting the narrative so that the commonly held discourse on African American students is not always centered on failure and apathy.<sup>26</sup> Far too often the mainstream educational scholarship attempts to pathologize the educational experiences of Black youth. Though the Black voice in education is underrepresented in both academia and non-profit organizations, these scholars ensure that it is not ignored. We must continue to change the narrative and champion the success within this body of work as it has been influential in shaping policies and priorities for Black educational success around the country.



### **BUILDING A BETTER NARRATIVE INVOLVES PROMOTING THE “URGENCY OF NOW.”**

The narrative on Black education must be grounded in continuous improvement and focused on tangible solutions. It is time to build this narrative and to deviate, in part, from conversations that are centered only on failure. We cannot wait; the stakes are too dire. Forging the difficult terrain in the education reform movement can be an arduous task, yet it is important to move swiftly in this endeavor. Children are impressionable, and various messages may have an influence on their self-efficacy and beliefs about education.<sup>27</sup> Constantly hearing negative discourse about their educational outlooks may stymie ambition for some students. Moreover, research shows that Black students would benefit from a more achievement-oriented narrative.<sup>28</sup>

We cannot wait; the stakes are too dire. Forging the difficult terrain in the education reform movement can be an arduous task, yet it is important to move swiftly in this endeavor.

Additionally, when urgency is not paramount, complacency can abound. We have seen this in multiple areas of education—schools and districts become complacent with merely meeting the status quo and not setting high expectations for Black students. Decision-making can also be stagnated when policymakers fail to realize the crises in education. Granted, some policy proposals must be carefully and thoughtfully analyzed (which can take time), yet the work must be considered with students’ educational achievement in mind.

Education has always been a strong pillar in the Black community. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., promoted the “fierce urgency of now” to help embolden the civil rights movement. In a like manner, we must champion for a better narrative to help push education reform for Black students forward as well.

# Call to Action

Community-centered research entails not only capturing the perspective of members in a particular environment, but also acting on that information in a meaningful way. The intent of all three organizations was to hear from communities in order to advocate for changes that better represent the perspectives of the community. There is, in fact, a crisis in education for Black students, and the data substantiate this sentiment. Helping to alleviate this crisis will involve a concerted effort to utilize the knowledge gained from this report to drastically change the face of education reform in Black education. The following call to action can be used as a steppingstone for various groups to help change the narrative around education reform for Black children.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GRASSSTOP AND CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS

**Endorse and support policy solutions that are sincerely aimed at high expectations, supports, opportunities and outcomes for Black children.** Both policymakers and leaders should work to ensure that the policies and practices that are put in place truly have Black student success in mind, and not just as a cursory consideration. The strategies and initiatives highlighted in this report, along with other equity-centered approaches, should be championed at the local, state and national levels as tools to help offer better educational opportunities for students. This may entail drafting policy proposals and amendments or holding events to rally support around issues.

**Ask the tough questions.** It is important to use an analytical lens when assessing education policies and initiatives. Ask questions such as, “*Are the communities these policy decisions are affecting part of the policy-making process prior to decisions being made? What are the unintended consequences of this reform? Will the outcomes of this policy raise the achievement level of all students or only a certain segment? How will we monitor the policy outcomes to ensure that students of color are not falling through the cracks of the system and that the policy is achieving its goals? Are the data systems in place disaggregated by race and transparent enough to make informed, equitable decisions? Are these reforms setting up Black students for success, and if not, what is the strategy to change directions?*” Addressing the difficult questions will help better evaluate both existing practices and future proposals.

**Challenge the misconception of apathy among Black parents.** Our research reveals that Black parents care—they do want to see their children succeed and to attend and graduate from college. They are informed and deeply concerned about various educational issues. Negative portrayals left unchecked can in time have a harmful effect on policy decisions and priorities. Research shows that community and congressional leaders have considerable influence on perceptions of groups; it is therefore important to use that platform to highlight this narrative.<sup>29</sup>



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND EDUCATION REFORMERS

**Provide resources and tools to help communities advocate for Black students.** The findings indicate that leaders are optimistic they can make a difference in improving the quality of education for African American students; however, respondents indicated that they would like to have resources. Some of the resources listed and others include:

- How-to guides for community engagement
- Talking points on educational reform issues
- Advocacy tool kits
- Data briefs on the educational landscape in their city

The contributors to this report and other social justice organizations are well-suited to help mobilize action around these key efforts as they have developed innovative programs to support academic success, engaged multiple stakeholders around conversations and action on K-12 issues for African Americans, created summits to drive innovation and discourse on the crisis in education, and developed cutting-edge research on communities of color. While we have seen successes in key areas, more engagement and support are needed to help sustain this movement.

**Partner with parents and other grassroots organizations to host informative sessions on education reform.** The findings reveal that some Black parents would like to see events taking place at the schools for themselves and their children. Some useful resources are already available to empower parents to advocate on behalf of their children and become empowered advocates for educational equity and excellence; it merely takes cap-

italizing on what is available and providing parents with that information.<sup>30</sup> For example, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans prepared a tool kit for communities to help respond to the urgent needs of African American students and communities by hosting teach-ins.<sup>31</sup> This report can be used in conjunction with the teach-in to highlight tangible policy solutions and diverse voices in education and to gain parent input on possible solutions.

**Conduct equity-centered research.** Non-profit organizations produce various materials on education, yet there is often less attention paid to the unequal educational opportunities Black students face and sincere engagement with Black communities. Research organizations, non-profits and think tanks should make a concerted effort to study and assess the educational landscape for communities of color, including best practices and interventions. This work should be rigorous, data-driven and have realistic, yet ambitious strategies and recommendations.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

**Be intentional about reaching out to diverse education reformers who have championed educational equity and community engagement.** While organizations and reformers research funders for potential partnerships, it is also incumbent upon funders to reach out to the community. When reaching out to these reformers and organizations, funders should also ensure that they are working to dismantle inequality in a real and meaningful way. Culturally resonant Black leadership in education matters, and as scholar and education activist Dr. Andre Perry asserts, “A non-inclusive reform movement is not a healthy one.”<sup>32</sup> Not only is it not healthy, it is not smart—the Black community has the expertise and has demonstrated success in various arenas in education for decades, from engaging the community to address ongoing challenges, to establishing schools and systems that make demonstrable growth for Black students, to producing scholarship that help drive the work on culturally relevant practices in schools. African American leaders have developed and driven reform in ways that not only show success and growth for Black students, but that have also engaged communities of color to inform the work along the way. The data indicate that there is an appetite for African American leadership in education from African American parents, thus, reaching out to create partnerships will help drive fundamental change in education reform.

African American leaders have developed and driven reform in ways that not only show success and growth for Black students, but that have also engaged communities of color to inform the work along the way. The data indicate that there is an appetite for African American leadership in education from African American parents, thus, reaching out to create partnerships will help drive fundamental change in education reform.

**Ensure that funded initiatives include parents’ voices in a significant way.** It is important that the financial resources have a direct and meaningful impact on communities on the ground. These individuals often have a firsthand perspective on educational practices in schools. An intentional effort should also be made to include the voices of marginalized and low-income parent groups. These individuals should not only have a voice, but also be able to help lead and drive reform.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS

**Parents are among the best advocates in education reform.** They should use their voices to advocate for equitable policies and practices in the following ways:

- Hold districts, school boards and schools accountable for progress among all students
- Monitor and engage their children’s progress in school to ensure they are on track
- Become involved with local grassroots organizations that advocate for students
- Write to their members of Congress about key educational issues, such as the ones highlighted in this report
- Use tools, such as the U.S. Department of Education’s Parent Checklist, to help ask the tough questions that ensure their child is getting the best education possible

Overall, it is important to substantively engage the African American community in education reform work. The findings reveal that members of the African American community are knowledgeable about education issues, are willing to invest the time to share their perspective, and most importantly, are already working to solve some of the most stubborn and complex challenges the nation faces. African American students, families and stakeholders do not want education decisions and policies that are “done to them”; they would like to feel empowered to participate as a partner in this work. They want to have a sense of agency in advocating for their children. They would also like to see strong African American leadership driving change in education. Policies and initiatives can have a greater impact if they are informed by the lived experiences of the community.

# Conclusion

We have to create a seismic shift in the education reform narrative—one that is grounded in the experiences of the Black community. This report summarizes findings from both focus group and survey data from the African American community on K-12 issues in education. The findings reveal that Black parents were tired of the negative tone in education. While the data suggest the Black community has a dismal view of the state of education for Black children, it is optimistic that substantial improvements can be made in the future. In fact, many want to be better engaged in this work. Endorsing a more action-oriented approach that is focused on substantial policy solutions resonated better with the community, rather than a negative discourse. When the narrative is centered on high-quality reforms and initiatives, stakeholders can work together to figure out what is best for students, instead of merely focusing on what is not working. While it is important to continue to challenge structures that perpetuate inequality, we must also champion successful programs for Black students. As we pursue educational excellence and equity at scale and as we work to ensure that the promise of education is realized, we must all remain unapologetic about our advocacy for Black students and families. We all have a part to play in this endeavor, and it is our hope that the findings and recommendations from this report will help spur action by increasing our understanding of the African American community's perspectives on education, help mobilize communities around K-12 education reform and help shift the narrative to better improve outcomes for African American students.

While it is important to continue to challenge structures that perpetuate inequality, we must also champion successful programs for Black students. As we pursue educational excellence and equity at scale, and as we work to ensure that the promise of education is realized, we must all remain unapologetic about our advocacy for Black students and families. We all have a part to play in this endeavor.



## Appendix

## CONTRIBUTORS

**UNCF**

UNCF (United Negro College Fund) is the nation's largest and most effective minority education organization. To serve youth, the community and the nation, UNCF supports students' education and development through scholarships and other programs, strengthens its 37 member colleges and universities, and advocates for the importance of minority education and college readiness. UNCF institutions and other historically Black colleges and universities are highly effective, awarding nearly 20 percent of African American bachelor's degrees. UNCF administers more than 400 programs, including scholarship, internship and fellowship, mentoring, summer enrichment, and curriculum and faculty development programs. Today, UNCF supports more than 60,000 students each year at more than 1,100 colleges and universities. UNCF's K-12 Advocacy Division seeks to give rise to a college-going culture where African American parents are knowledgeable about the college-going process and more African American students are academically prepared for college. The division engages and partners with national Black grassroots and HBCUs to help them understand the crisis in Black education, disseminates research to raise awareness of educational issues facing Black students and partners with and supports on-the-ground grassroots organizations.

Learn more at [unconf.org](http://unconf.org).

**Education Post**

Education Post is a non-partisan communications organization dedicated to building support for student-focused improvements in public education from preschool to high school graduation. The organization advocates world-class schools that support children to love learning, to be challenged and supported in the classroom, to have access to a range of enrichment activities, to be socially and emotionally strong and healthy, and to graduate from high school with everything they need to pursue the future they see for themselves.

Learn more at [educationpost.org](http://educationpost.org).

**The National Urban League**

The National Urban League is a historic civil rights and advocacy organization dedicated to economic empowerment in African American and other underserved urban communities. Founded in 1910 and headquartered in New York City, the National Urban League impacts and improves the lives of more than 2 million young people and adults annually through direct service programs, which are implemented locally by 94 Urban League affiliates, serving 300 communities in 36 states and the District of Columbia.

Learn more at [nul.iamempowered.com](http://nul.iamempowered.com).

## Appendix

### METHODOLOGY

Descriptive statistics and focus group summaries for each data source were reviewed to identify trends. A description of each source is provided below. It is also important to note that the discussion and sentiments of the “African American community” or “Black community” refer only to individuals in these particular samples.

**UNCF:** These data comprise survey data and focus groups of low-income African American parents and caregivers and grassroots or community leaders. MEE Productions, Inc., conducted eight focus groups of Black parents in Washington, DC, New Orleans, LA, Atlanta, GA, Detroit, MI, and Memphis, TN, in January-February 2012. The focus groups consisted of parents and guardians of youth ages 5-18 who attend public, charter and/or private/parochial schools on a voucher program. A total of 52 individuals ages 25-60 participated in the focus groups. Hart Research Associates collected a total of 1,355 survey responses from African American parents and caregivers from low-income households across the country, and oversampling was done to collect 753 surveys in the five target cities. All interviews were conducted by telephone, except 64 in Atlanta and 63 in New Orleans, which were conducted in person at local malls. Data were collected from February to March 2012.

*Done to Us, Not With Us: African American Parent Perceptions of K-12 Education* can be accessed online at the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute website: [www.uncf.org/donetous](http://www.uncf.org/donetous)

Hart Research Associates collected a total of 631 surveys in the summer of 2013 from Black grassroots who lived in cities with populations of at least 250,000 and high densities of African Americans. The data were collected via telephone and online. Community members had to be least somewhat involved in their communities. Additionally, UNCF enlisted Hart Research Associates to conduct in-depth phone interviews with 36 African American leaders across the country from January to March 2014. Respondents included non-profit leaders, clergy and business, higher education and political leaders.

**Education Post:** These data consist of focus groups and polling data of individuals with children or grandchildren. Douglas E. Schoen, LLC, conducted two national polls that resulted in 1,200 randomly selected individuals with children or grandchildren between the ages of 3 and 18. Additionally, Education Post interviewed oversamples of African Americans (400 in total).<sup>33</sup> The total number of Black survey responses was 508. Message testing was also conducted in order to hone in on a change message. The broad messages tested were the result of a collaborative effort from research conducted by Douglas E. Schoen, LLC, PIE Network and Frank Luntz, in addition to findings from focus groups conducted by SKDKnickerbocker, and pro-reform proof points provided by Peter Cunningham, the executive director of Education Post. For the purposes of this study, we discuss only African American survey results.

SKDKnickerbocker conducted four African American focus groups in 2014 in Indianapolis, IN, and New York City. The Indianapolis focus groups consisted of two groups. The first focus group included higher-income African American females (\$65,000 or more) with elementary and middle school children in public schools. The second group consisted of African American females with incomes below \$65,000 with children in the same category. The first New York focus group consisted of both male and female African American grandparents with middle school and elementary-aged grandchildren in public schools. The second focus group consisted of African American parents with middle school children in public schools.

**National Urban League:** Dr. Silas Lee & Associates conducted the National Urban League’s Common Core State Standards Communications Campaign survey Feb. 15-20, 2014. A total of 1,200 adult respondents were interviewed in Pittsburgh, PA, Los Angeles, CA, Cleveland, OH, and Nashville, TN. To ensure that the respondents reflected the racial demographics, potential respondents for this poll were selected from census tracts with 75 percent or more African American, Latino or White residents. A maximum of five attempts were made to contact respondents. A total of 612 African American survey responses were collected. Forty-six percent of all respondents had incomes less than \$46,000, 19 percent had incomes of \$51,000 to \$75,000, 22 percent had incomes higher than \$76,000, and 13 percent refused to provide income information. Thirty-four percent of respondents had completed some high school or had a high school diploma, 20 percent had some college experience, and 46 percent had either finished college or had a graduate or professional degree.

#### Educational Exemplar Information:

- Achievement Prep, Washington, DC: <http://achievementprep.org/>
- Eagle Academy for Young Men, NY & NJ: <http://www.eafny.org/>
- InspireNOLA, New Orleans, LA: <http://www.inspirenolacharterschools.org>
- Project Ready: <http://iamempowered.com/programs/project-ready>
- Urban Prep Academies, Chicago, IL: <http://www.urbanprep.org/>
- Washington, DC, Public Schools: <http://dcps.dc.gov/>

## Endnotes

1. The discussion of the perspectives of the "Black" or "African American" community throughout this report refers only to those individuals included in the data sources discussed.
2. "African American" and "Black" are used interchangeably throughout this report.
3. See the appendix section for description of each organization.
4. This finding is similar to work by Reddick et al. (2011), which found that Black and Latino students were disheartened about the negative discourse and stereotypes surrounding their schools and academic environment. Some students felt tired of constantly having to defend their experiences due to the negative rhetoric. See Reddick, Richard J., Arjalé D. Welton, Danielle J. Alsanor, Jodi L. Denyszyn, & C. Spencer Platt. (2011.) "Stories of Success: High Minority, High Poverty Public School Graduate Narratives on Accessing Higher Education." *Journal of Advanced Academics* 22(4), 594-618.
5. Bridges, Brian K., Janet Awokoya, & Frances Messano. (2012.) *Done to Us, Not With Us: African American Parent Perceptions of K-12 Education*. Washington, DC: Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, UNCF.
6. Education Post poll.
7. "What Parents Should Know." Common Core State Standards Initiative. <http://www.corestandards.org/what-parents-should-know/>.
8. Sparks, Dinah & Nat Malkus. (2013.) "First-Year Undergraduate Remedial Course-taking: 1999-2000, 2003-04, 2007-08." (NCES 2013-13) Statistics in Brief. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.
9. Research demonstrates that African American students are less likely than White students to have access to college-ready courses. See Bryant, Rhonda T. (2015.), *College Preparation for African American Students: Gaps in the High School Educational Experience*. Washington, DC: CLASP. <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/College-readiness2-2.pdf>
10. Darling-Hammond, Linda, Joan Herman, & James Pellegrino, et al. (2013.) "Criteria for High-Quality Assessment." Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education.
11. Vanneman, Alan, Linda Hamilton, Janet Baldwin Anderson, & Taslima Rahman. (2009.) "Achievement Gaps: How Black and White Students in Public Schools Perform in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress" (NCES 2009-455). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. The Nation's Report Card. 2015 Mathematics and Reading Results. [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_math\\_2015/#?grade=4](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#?grade=4)
12. Darling-Hammond, Linda. (2010.) "Structured for Failure: Race, Resources, and Student Achievement." In Moya, Paula M. and Hazel Rose Markus (Eds.), *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*. New York: W.W. Norton, 295-321.
13. The national polling from Education Post revealed that almost nine in 10 Black parents agreed with the following statement: "One size does not fit all when it comes to education—every child learns differently—and this means that all parents should have a right to choose the school that best meets the needs of their child. Charters mean choice for all families, and that's why they are so important."
14. BAE0 enlisted Magellan Strategies, LLC, to conduct polls of 1,700 Black voters in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Kentucky in March 2013.
15. "A Survey Report on Education Reform, Charter Schools, and the Desire for Parental Choice in the Community." (2013.) Washington, DC: Black Alliance for Educational Options. [http://scotter.baeo.org/news\\_multi\\_media/20130723-Survey%20Report-NEW%5B9%5D.pdf](http://scotter.baeo.org/news_multi_media/20130723-Survey%20Report-NEW%5B9%5D.pdf)
16. The findings from the UNCF parent study also reveal that low-income Black parents and caregivers who had school options had more positive views of their child's school.
17. U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. (2014.) "Civil Rights Data Collection—Data Snapshot: Teacher Quality." Issue Brief No. 4. March 2014. DeMonte, Jenny and Robert Hanna. (2014.) "Looking at the Best Teachers and Who They Teach: Poor Students and Students of Color are Less Likely to Get Highly Effective Teaching." Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Partee, Glenda. (2014.) "Attaining Equitable Distribution of Effective Teachers in Public Schools." Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
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The National Council on Educating Black Children created the Blueprint for Action to help drive educational change for students of color. <http://ncbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Blueprint-All.pdf>  
The National Urban League of Greater New Orleans created a Parent Information Center with resources and tools for parents to help improve education outcomes for all children. <http://ulngo.com/>  
STAND for Children created the STAND Up (Stand University for Parents), which is a research-based family engagement program for parents of elementary school children. <http://stand.org/national/action/stand-up/about>  
Black Alliance for Educational Options empowers parents to advocate for their students through symposia and other tools. <http://www.baeo.org/>  
Be a Learning Hero offers parents tools and information on standards and assessments. <http://bealearninghero.org/>  
The National PTA created the Parents' Guide to Student Success to provide expectations for what students should be learning at each grade. <http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?itemNumber=2583>
31. For more information on hosting a teach-in, visit: <http://sites.ed.gov/whieea/files/2013/03/WHIEEA-toolkit.pdf>
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# Building Better Narratives in Black Education

