BLACK EDUCATION
RESEARCH COLLECTIVE
Teachers College, Columbia University

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BLACK EDUCATION IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19 & SYSTEMIC RACISM

Toward a Theory of Change & Action

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https://www.tc.columbia.edu/black-education-research-collective/research/

The **Black Education Research Collective (BERC**) is a collaborative of scholars committed to improving the nature and quality of Black education through culturally sensitive research and evaluation, research-practice partnerships, and policy analysis.

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Executive Summary

Authorized under the American Rescue Plan ("ARP") Act of 2021, the ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund provides nearly $122 billion to States to support the nation's schools in safely reopening and sustaining school operations while meeting the social, emotional, academic, and mental health needs of students resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. As states and local school districts conduct community input and consultation sessions across the country solicit and receive input for their ESSER plans as required by ARP, it is important that the needs and interest of Black students, parents, families, and communities be among those prioritized given the resounding calls and commitments to advancing racial equity and social justice in our nation's schools and school systems.

This report presents findings from a research study the Black Education Research Collective (BERC) conducted to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism have impacted Black education from the perspectives of Black parents, teachers, students, education and community leaders. Two questions guided the study: (1) What is the impact of COVID-19 on the education of Black children and youth in the United States? (2) How should educators and community leaders respond to calls for change and action? Data was collected between January-May 2021 using a national online survey and virtual focus group interviews with Black high school students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders in Atlanta, GA, Washington, DC, Boston, MA, Detroit, MI, Las Vegas, NV, and New York, NY. Participants ranged from 14 to more than 70 years of age. The majority of survey and focus group respondents were college-educated women who identified as parents, educators, or both.

Findings underscored the historical and systemic nature of trauma in Black communities as a result of racism in U.S. institutions, including schools and school systems. Participants expressed concern over the fact that schools are ill-equipped to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of their children and that COVID-19 and increasing racial violence have revealed further their lack of capacity or willingness to meet the educational needs of Black students or expectations of Black parents.

Summary of Findings

Study findings revealed significant consensus across participant experiences and views on how COVID-19 and systemic racism have disproportionately impacted Black families and communities over the last year and the implications for education post-pandemic:

1. COVID-19 and systemic racism had a disproportionate and traumatic impact on Black students, families, and communities.
2. Increased racial trauma and mental health issues will have major implications for teaching and learning post-pandemic.
3. Schools are ill-equipped to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black students.
4. Failed responses to COVID-19, police brutality, and the insurrection at The Capitol have further reduced Black community trust in schools and public institutions.

5. Education leaders and policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels must be held accountable for meeting the educational needs of Black students.

Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are drawn from participant responses and are key to building the trust between educational systems and Black families and communities necessary to support student safety, learning, and success:

1. Protect and defend the rights of Black students to receive an appropriate and equitable education in a safe, welcoming, and affirming learning environment.
2. Invest in counseling, psychological, and mental health services and supports to address racial trauma and its impact on Black students and educators post-pandemic.
3. Provide professional development to teachers and school leaders on how to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black students.
4. Modernize curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to develop the academic ability of all students and prepare them for civic life by teaching the truth.
5. Invest in the preparation, cultivation, and mentoring of culturally relevant educators who are called to the profession and endorsed by the families they serve.
6. Restore and rebuild community trust by engaging Black students, families, educators, researchers, and leaders as experts and equal partners in education.

Future Research

As education leaders and policymakers grapple with difficult decisions concerning how schools reopen and ensure the education, health, and safety of their students; the voices and perspectives of Black students, parents, educators, researchers, policymakers, and community members provide a clear blueprint for advancing a new vision and strategy for education in school communities across the U.S. Such educational equity and justice efforts will only be strengthened when informed and guided by research generated with and for the individuals and communities they seek and claim to serve.

To access the full report and learn more about BERC, please visit our website at: https://www.tc.columbia.edu/black-education-research-collective.

Introduction

With approximately 7.7 million Black students enrolled in the nearly 100,000 public schools in the United States (U.S.), the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and systemic racism on Black communities holds significant implications for the educational lives of Black children and youth. Despite numerous calls to reimagine education, coupled with the devastating consequences the pandemic has had on the Black community, few studies have attempted to understand exactly how COVID-19 and systemic racism have impacted the social, economic, and educational lives of Black students and families across the country.

This report presents the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Black students, parents, educators, and community members on how COVID-19 and the racial violence of the last year have impacted their lives and more specifically, Black education. How have school closures in response to COVID-19 affected the educational experiences of children in Black communities in terms of access to technology, online learning, or instruction? What are Black teachers and leaders doing to stay connected to their Black students and their families? How are Black parents and families responding to this crisis? In what ways are Black students experiencing and making sense of this moment and how do they envision their educational lives going forward? What parts of school should we keep, and what might we leave behind?

Defining Black Education

In this report, we define Black education as the "systematic efforts to teach Black children" and "the quality of education the African American community has historically organized itself around while considering issues of cultural responsibility and community political empowerment" (Lee, 2005, p. 46). Participant responses echoed this definition when asked what "Black education" meant to them.

Whether referring to Black teachers teaching Black students, community elders imparting cultural knowledge and wisdom to parents and the younger generations, or the compulsory schooling experience of Black students no matter where they may live or attend school, Black education was understood to extend far beyond the schoolhouse doors. It was, as one participant explained it, "the whole experience" -- inclusive of teaching and learning, but also learning for liberation and education as the practice of freedom.

On Being Black in the Wake of COVID-19

In this report, we use the term "Black" to refer to people of African descent living in the United States (King, 1995; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014). Recognizing the diversity of the Black experience in the U.S. as well as the more exclusive and competing definitions of what renders a person (e.g., student, parent, teacher), place (e.g., school, church, neighborhood), or experience (e.g., segregation, racial profiling) "Black," this study is focused on the Black population in the U.S. as a racial and cultural group and community with a shared experience or set of experiences associated with racial discrimination and racism.

To contextualize the contemporary realities associated with being Black in the wake of COVID-19, police brutality, and the rise in white nationalist violence, we draw from historical trauma theory (Horsford, 2011; Sotero, 2006) to illuminate how how mass trauma experiences in the form of: (a) segregation and displacement, (b) physical and psychological violence, (c) economic destruction and exploitation, and (d) cultural dispossession has been exacerbated for Black Americans since the pandemic began and their implications for Black education now and post-pandemic. Historical trauma theory, also referred to collective trauma theory, provides a broader and more complex understanding of health disparities in the U.S., and is similarly useful in understanding educational inequities as a conceptual model for educational researchers and practitioners.

Figure 1: Participant Ethnic and Cultural Identity

Study participants spoke to the paradoxes and contradictions associated with being Black in America, using terms like beauty, joy, pain, exhaustion, and struggle to describe what it means to be "Black." Some described being Black as having a super-power or sense of purpose. Others viewed "being Black" as being knowledgeable about the history of Black struggle and passing that history on to the next generation as a fact of life.

Despite the shared experiences associated with "being Black in America," study participants reflected the rich diversity of ethnic and cultural heritage reflected in the U.S. among those who first identified as "Black." The word cloud presented in *Figure 1: Participant Ethnic and Cultural Identity* illustrates the terms that survey respondents used to indicate their ethnic or cultural identity after confirming they identified as "Black."

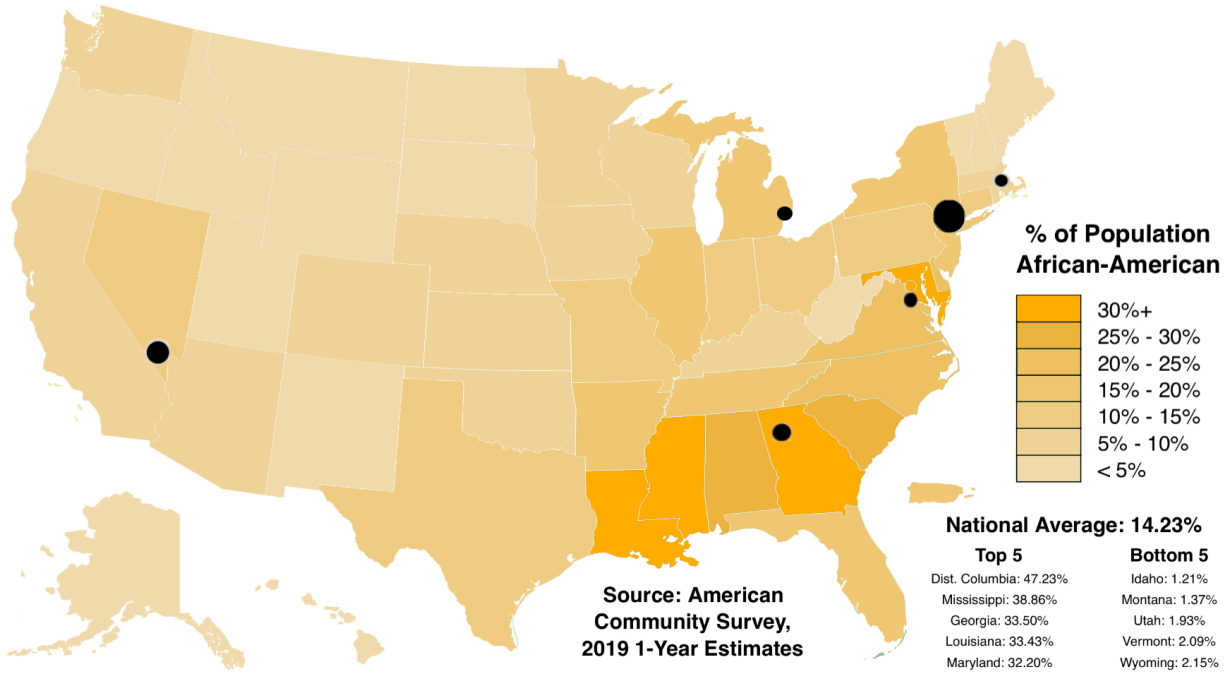
The Study

Two questions guided the study: (1) What is the impact of COVID-19 on the education of Black children and youth in the United States? (2) How should educators and community leaders respond to calls for change and action? Culturally sensitive research approaches informed survey and interview protocol development, data collection, analysis, and reporting (Tillman, 2002).

Data were collected January-May 2021 using a national online survey (n=440) and 19 focus group interviews conducted virtually involving 82 participants across six (6) metropolitan areas: **Atlanta, GA; Washington, D.C.; Boston, MA; Detroit, MI; Las Vegas, NV; and New York, NY**. Survey and focus group participants included high school students, parents, teachers, educational administrators, and community leaders. They ranged from age 14 to over 70 and all identified as Black.

The large majority of survey respondents were women (81%), had college degrees (83%), and were between the ages of 35-55 (55%). Nearly one-third were parents (31%) and another third were educators (34%). For more demographic information about study participants, see *Appendix A - Table 1: Survey Participants* and *Table 2: Focus Group Participants by Stakeholder Type and Metro*.

Figure 2. Study Metros and % of African Americans in the U.S.



Findings

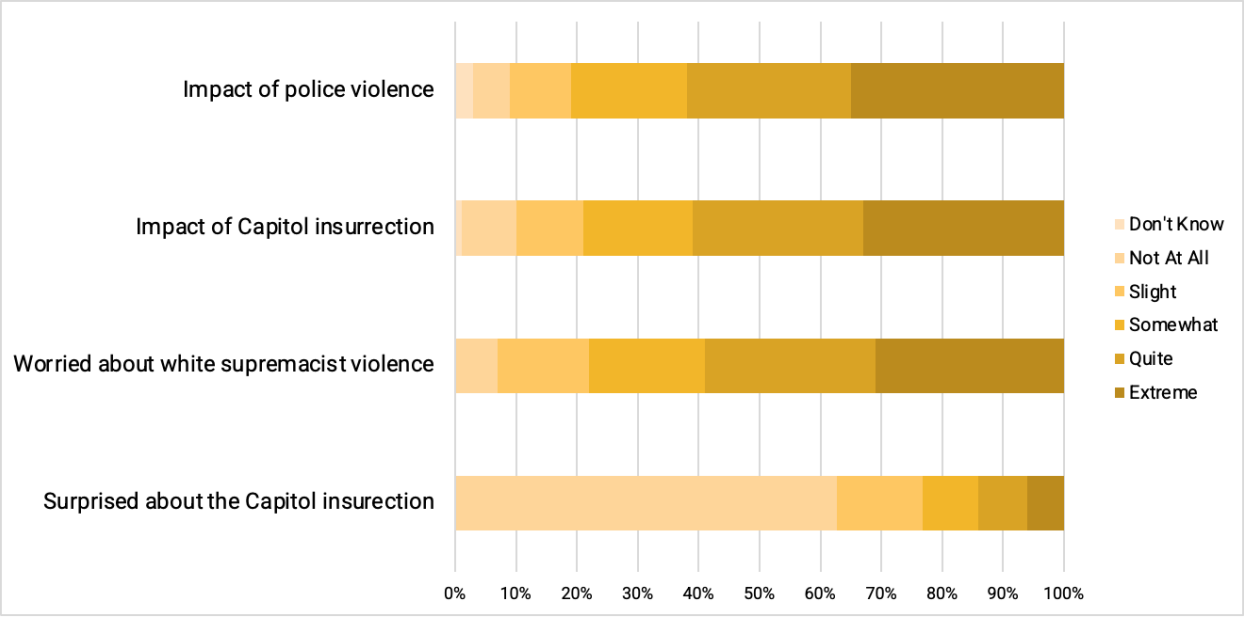
We found significant consensus among Black students, parents, educators, and community members across the U.S. concerning their views on the impact of COVID-19 and systemic racism on Black families and communities and their implications for PK-12 and postsecondary education.

COVID-19 and systemic racism have had a disproportionate and traumatic impact on Black students, families, and communities in the U.S.

Across region, district, community context, and participant type, survey respondents agreed overwhelmingly that COVID-19 and white racial violence have had a devastating and disproportionate impact on Black communities. Focus group participants highlighted the longstanding impact of racism on the everyday lives of Black people in America and how COVID-19 and the many documented accounts of police violence, including the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor only served to further worsen the racial trauma Black students, families, and communities have already been experiencing.

As illustrated in *Figure 3*, the majority of survey respondents reported that they were both impacted by and worried about ongoing white supremacist violence. In fact, 91% of respondents reported themselves being impacted negatively by the increased visibility of white nationalism and police violence, with over one-third of participants indicating they were "extremely impacted." Ninety-three percent reported that they were worried about the January 6 riots in the U.S. Capitol and increased visibility of white supremacy. Nearly one-third indicated they were "extremely worried" about their safety and the safety of loved ones.

Figure 3: Impact of White Supremacy & Racial Violence



Focus group participants also spoke about how a legacy of systemic racism has led to exacerbated and intersecting impacts in terms of disproportionate exposure to COVID-19, loss of loved ones, mental health issues, financial burdens, education challenges, and police violence. For example, one high school student from Detroit spoke about the compounding impact of these experiences, expressing:

> *I feel like I've lost a lot of people, of course, due to COVID. Parts of me feels like I lost a little piece of the sanity especially during COVID and having to grapple with people you know dying of a disease and then just the craziness of seeing other Black people being slaughtered down your Instagram timeline. I feel like I've become desensitized to people dying in my personal life, and then like there is now just, I think anger and sadness comes from those things. And I don't know how to describe that, but I just feel like I've lost.*

Another example is illustrated by one Atlanta pastor and parent who shared:

> *I haven't really been able to pastor traditionally for my own congregation. And it had been at that point like eight months, but then to be able to pastor for this family during this loss and then to be able to support people who lost someone so young, so close to the unexpected, it really highlighted in that one moment what so many pastors are feeling during this time, it's like I can't even pastor in a way that is very fundamental to pastoring and people don't have that spiritual, not even counsel, but just to be able to look at someone to say, can you speak a word that will help me in this season in an environment that is meaningful to me?*

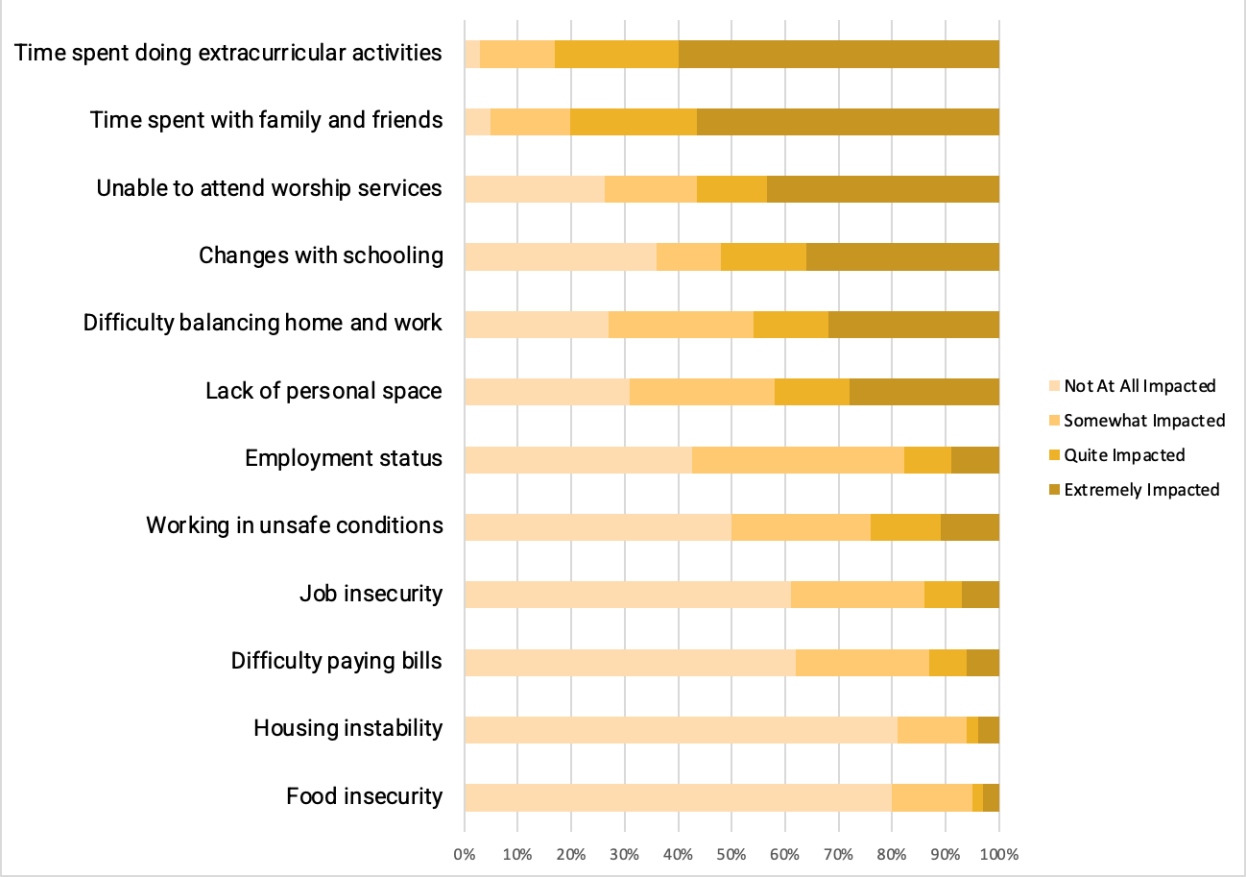
Study participants shared concerns about the economic impacts of the pandemic with more than half of survey respondents reporting a change in employment status as a result of the pandemic. About one-third of participants also reported job insecurity and difficulty paying bills. Notably, these employment and economic impacts did not just exist alone, but were piled on top of the many other stressors previously discussed. They also impact the lives of young people and the work of educators. As one high school educator in New York City explained:

> *There's a lot of social issues and social problems that this pandemic has caused, and before we can really effectively teach -- and again we know that as a community when it comes to the impact, we are the most severely impacted by any kind of negative occurrence -- with this pandemic again it has impacted everything. Our homes, our families, our economics, our ability to provide food for our family.*

Nearly 60% of survey participants had a member of their household who was an essential or frontline essential worker working in unsafe conditions, underscoring the disproportionate impact of the pandemic recession on Black employment, housing, food, and other necessities. Nearly one-third

of all survey respondents lost a family member (11%), or a friend or community member (20%), to COVID-19. Nearly one-third of participants also indicated that these experiences had negative impacts on their mental health, in addition to their social and economic well-being.

Figure 4: Impact of COVID-19 on Social and Economic Well-Being

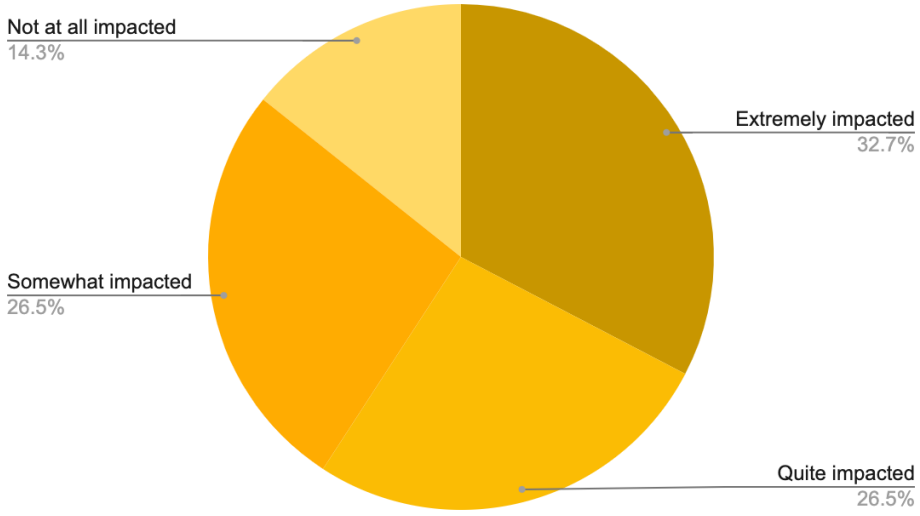


Overall, findings illustrate how participants continue to be worried and in many cases traumatized by the illness and loss of life caused by COVID-19 and the perpetuation of systemic racism. The impacts of these pandemics are only worsened the lack of accountability for such continued acts of discrimination and violence targeted at Black Americans.

Increased racial trauma and mental health issues will have major implications for teaching and learning post-pandemic.

Black communities experienced widespread loss and devastation resulting from COVID-19 in the form of disproportionate hospitalizations, dangerous working conditions, joblessness, housing and food insecurity, and the loss of family, friends, and community members. All this, coupled with the many documented accounts of police violence, including the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the Black Lives Matter Movement, would not only reveal longstanding legacies of systemic racism in the form of white supremacy and racial violence. They would also reflect yet another wave in the wake of mass trauma events shaping and informing the Black experience in the U.S. and more specifically, Black education in a racially divided and politically polarized society.

Figure 5: Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health and Wellness



Focus group participants consistently spoke of racial inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased visibility of state-sanctioned violence against Black people as familiar. The word “trauma” emerged frequently to describe the ongoing dehumanization and oppression of Black people across time and space, underscoring the historical nature and cumulative impacts of systemic racism. As one Boston parent who is also a nonprofit professional explained, “I think we're trying to figure out how to make the change and manage the trauma of the present and the past all at the same time and raise children.”

Participants also acknowledged how being asked to remember and retell their stories and experiences is difficult because it forces them to remember and relive their trauma, whether the loss of a beloved family member to COVID-19 or the video recording of the brutal murder of George Floyd. At the same time, participants discussed the importance of sharing these experiences and how the paradox of suffering is coupled with resilience and survival. A community leader from Atlanta explained how his Blackness is tied to this trauma. He shared, “I think it's a beautiful experience that

also comes with burdens, because of past social traumas and experiences...having to carry them and yet remain resilient at the same time."

Racial trauma and racism prior to COVID-19 were tied to their understanding of systemic racism as foundational to the history and institutions of this country. As one higher education professional in New York City explained, "But as we know, the educational system was designed by people who essentially oppressed Black people, right? And it still perpetuates the same ideal." One Boston parent who is an education nonprofit professional observed,

> *These things are clearly not set up with the health and well being of the Black community in the forefront like they're clearly set up for our demise which is really heartbreaking to continually watch these systems fail us over and over again, and not fail us by accident, but fail us by design.*

Parents, in particular, emphasized the fear and constant worry they feel in response to racial violence and white terrorism. Several parents explained how they worry every time their child leaves the house. One mother from Las Vegas explained,

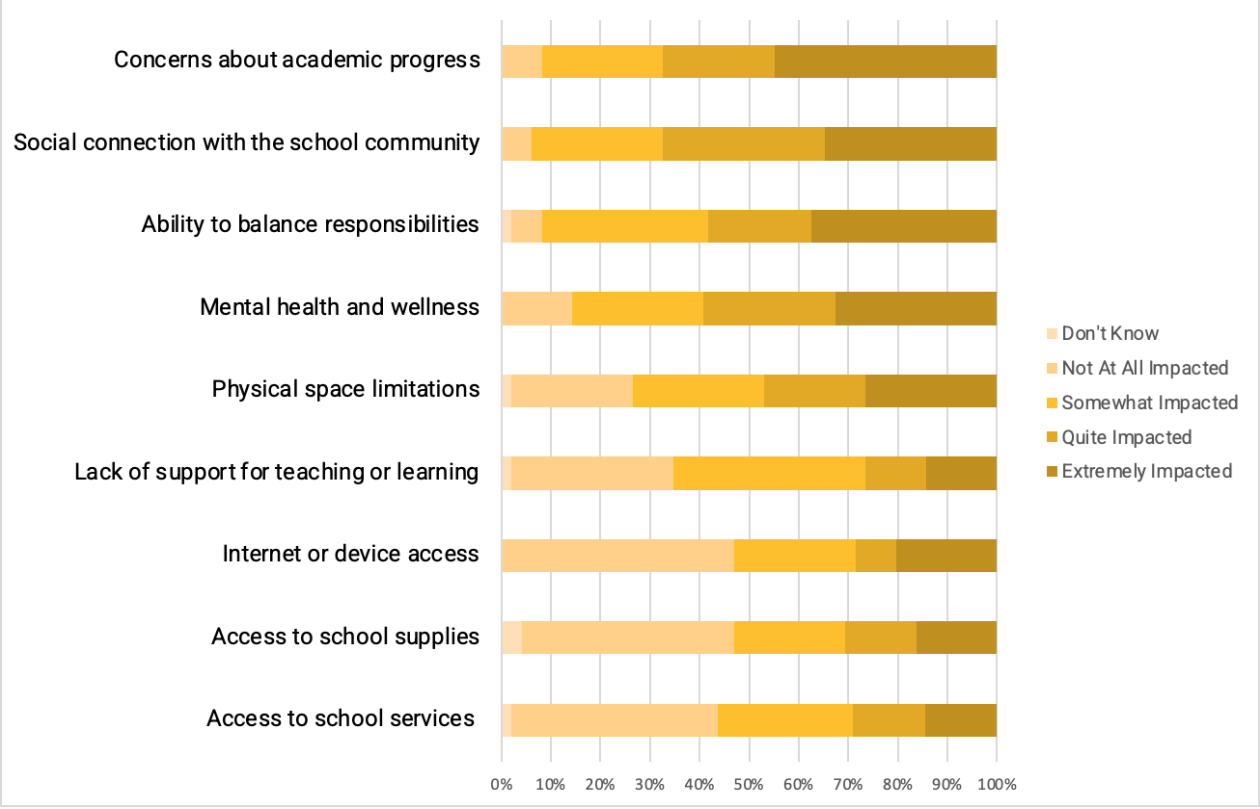
> *I have to remind my son all the time that he's Black. I mean, it's reminding him that if you decide to go to the store, you have to make sure you take your hoodie off, make sure you keep your hands out of your pocket and make sure you don't look suspicious, right? And he's like nine and a giddy kid. He's like, what do you mean don't look suspicious? What's suspicious, Mom? And it's hard to try to shape and mold our children to fit this society. So it is challenging.*

Schools are ill-equipped to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black students.

Despite school districts preparing to open their physical school buildings safely in the fall, they remain unprepared to educate Black students effectively while ensuring their safety and well-being. Anti-racism and equity professional development, like masks and the COVID-19 vaccine, are being refused, rejected, and politicized by extremists to the detriment of students, families, and school communities.

As illustrated in *Figure 6: Impact of COVID-10 on School Life*, survey respondents had great concerns about the pandemic's impact on the academic progress of their children, as well as their social connection with their school community, balancing responsibilities, and their mental health and wellness. Most participants agreed that the quality of education provided to Black children was inadequate and inequitable overall, as were the educational options available to Black families and children living in predominantly Black neighborhoods and communities.

Figure 6: Impact of COVID-19 on School Life



Focus group participants emphasized how the educational system was and continues to be separate and unequal as a function of its design. As one New York City community member explained,

> *Our educational system has been used as a tool to maintain and uplift white supremacy, to detrimentally impact the growth and stunt the growth of our Black community and use that as yet another tool that we need to be able to influence if we want to see a greater societal change for our own experiences as Black folks in America.*

In terms of systemic racism, the disinvestment in Black schools and communities and the lack of equitable and appropriate funding and resources was a major concern. Participants connected inequitable funding to poor school building infrastructure, overcrowding, the challenge of retaining high quality and experienced teachers, disproportionate access to Advanced Placement (AP) classes and lack of extracurricular activities. Students, parents and teachers also highlighted how these inequities have clear implications for returning safely to in-person schooling during a pandemic.

Participants also spoke to racial bias in curricula, as well as teachers' low expectations and racially motivated mistreatment of Black students. Many parents spoke to the responsibility they have to correct racist curricula and supplement their child's schooling so they are accurately learning about the history of the U.S., Black history, and the Black experience in America. Students shared the frustration they felt with rarely learning about Black people or history in schools except through expressions of tokenism during Black History Month. As a student in Boston explained,

> *When it's Black History Month, they teach you about Martin Luther King, and that's it. I've only heard one African that they've ever said probably, Nelson Mandela. So they really don't teach you a lot about your own people. As a kid, nobody really can get mad at you for not knowing your own people because the place that's supposed to teach you about the stuff, they don't teach you anything about it. So it's really a false education.*

Policing in schools and the school-to-prison-pipeline arose as another major expression of racism in schools. Several participants cited the disproportionate funding allocated to surveilling and punishing Black students instead of investing in counselors and other support services. One community elder and grandparent from Atlanta reflected:

> *When I think of Black education, I first think of the kids that are in school and the police presence that they have in school and that we need to take a look at. You know, more efforts for social and emotional learning and trying to understand what the kids are going through in school versus having, you know, police officers there … Instead of resource officers, just bring in more counselors and try to understand what's going on with the kids and help them through all of that, so that they can get a good quality education and not just relegate them to suspensions, you know? I mean, the school to prison pipeline -- because there's such an intolerance in schools.*

Finally, parents whose children attended predominantly white schools spoke to the immense pressure put on their children to work harder and perform higher than their white peers. Overall, participants expressed concern that public schools are ill-equipped to meet the social, emotional, academic, or intellectual needs of their children, and that in fact, the state of Black education is only getting worse.

Failed responses to COVID-19, police brutality, and the insurrection at The Capitol have further reduced trust in schools and public institutions.

School and district responses to COVID-19 and increasing acts of racial violence further weakened Black parent trust of schools and their ability to keep them safe whether from COVID-19 or racial violence or discrimination. This inability to trust schools and public institutions left several participants indicating that it is "up to us" to take control and hold schools accountable for the effective education of Black students. As a parent in New York City explained,

You haven't made decisions that move the needle on schools that serve Black children ever. So why would I think you're going to do it now? Why should I trust that you know to do it?

A majority of survey respondents felt that the school or district level responses of recent events including the pandemic, antiblack violence and resulting uprisings, and the insurrection at The Capitol damaged, rather than strengthened their trust. This finding on how these recent events have, for the most part, even further damaged the Black community's trust in the education system and government also aligns with what participants shared in focus group conversations. In fact, mistrust was a theme that arose in many focus groups. As one parent in Boston shared,

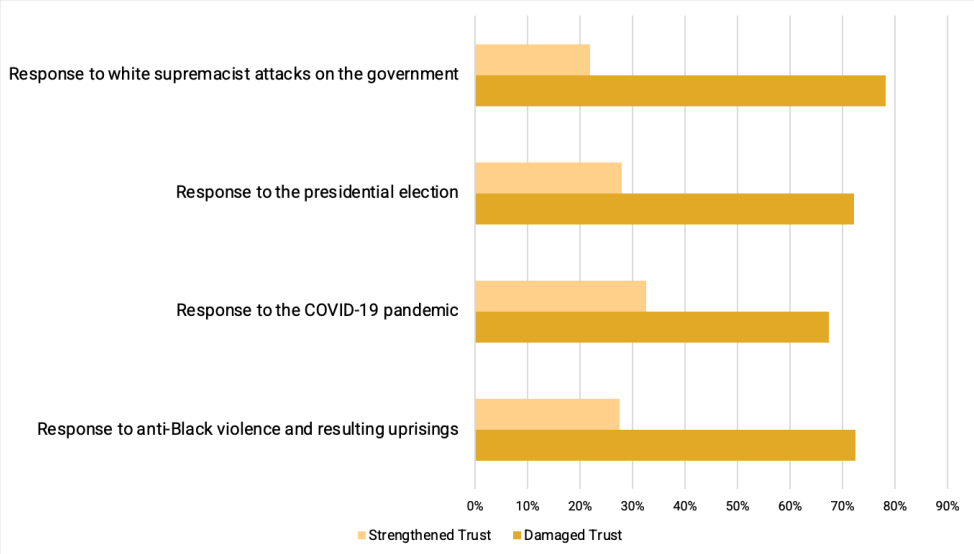
> *I don't necessarily have a sense of hope right this moment about the change in leadership. It felt nice on Inauguration Day and everybody has their nice clothes and their leather gloves and that sort of thing. But it all feels so urgent, and it was urgent before COVID, it was urgent before Trump, so the urgency just continues to build on top of each other. This system hasn't served the well being [of] Black and Brown folks for centuries. It just continues to be a compounding issue, and in Boston, it really just angers me at my core.*

In particular, this mistrust is deeply connected to how public institutions have failed Black communities by design. Beyond the schools, much of the feelings of mistrust are rooted in the ongoing trauma and racial violence experienced by Black people on a regular basis. A community member in Atlanta reflected on the moment that became the tipping point amid the continued killings of innocent Americans who are Black as a constant reminder of the historic and collective trauma experiences that continue to haunt the Black community:

> *I think it was Walter Scott, for me. It was just like, okay, we are now at the gratuitous level. And then you have . . . the historical piece that we do share with our kids. You'd be surprised how many people don't share much of nothing with their kids about our history. And then, when the modern things come up, they have nothing to balance it against. And so then they run away from it, or they act like it didn't happen. Especially now, with my kids. You don't need to watch another Black person being gunned down for you to know that it happens. It does create a PTSD effect on us.*

Across the study metropolitan areas (i.e., metros), focus group participants described the lack of transparency on the part of school district and local government officials, which was poor throughout the pandemic, but also a problem prior to it, further undermining community trust. This phenomenon of cultural mistrust (Cokley & Awad, 2020) is worsened by what community members understand to be a lack of care, concern, or support for Black communities before, during, and most likely after the pandemic. For many focus group parents, the absence of physical and psychological safety in schools and classrooms contributed to their reluctance to send their children back to physical buildings and preference for remote learning.

Figure 7: Impact of COVID-19 and Racism on Community Trust



Findings reinforce how little has changed regarding both the systemic efforts to teach Black children and the quality of that education as articulated by Black parents, educators, and community members, which include a curriculum, teacher workforce, and learning experiences that reflect and meet the needs of their children (Walker, 2021). Several participants wanted to see an increase in the recruitment, hiring and retention of Black teachers and administrators; mental health services for students and families; and training for teachers focused on “self-work” and changing racist attitudes and deficit mindsets. An educator in New York City reported “removing teachers that demonstrate cultural and racial bias.” A survey response from an educator in Texas summarized the overwhelming scope and nature of the educational issues facing the Black community indicating, “Too many to name. Where do I start?”

Education leaders and policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels must be held accountable for meeting the educational needs of Black students.

In order to learn more about the changes our participants wanted to see, we presented them with the 10 education priorities that compose the Learning Policy Institute's (2020) *Framework for Restarting and Reinventing School* (See Figure 8). We then asked participants via surveys and focus groups which components they believed to be the highest education priorities for improving Black education, making slight adjustments to the priority descriptions represented in Figure 8. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance for each priority as it relates to Black education.

Figure 8. Learning Policy Institute (2020) Framework for Restarting and Reinventing School

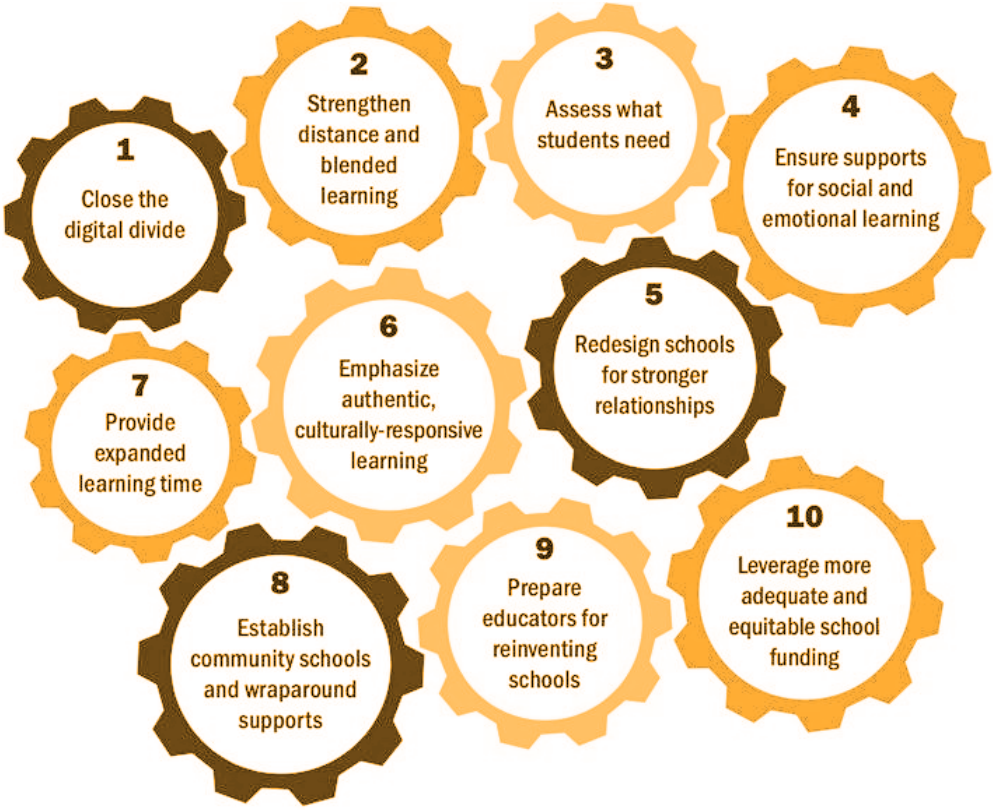
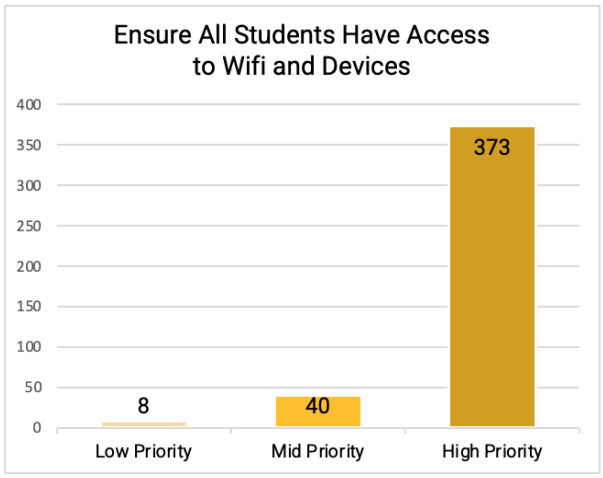
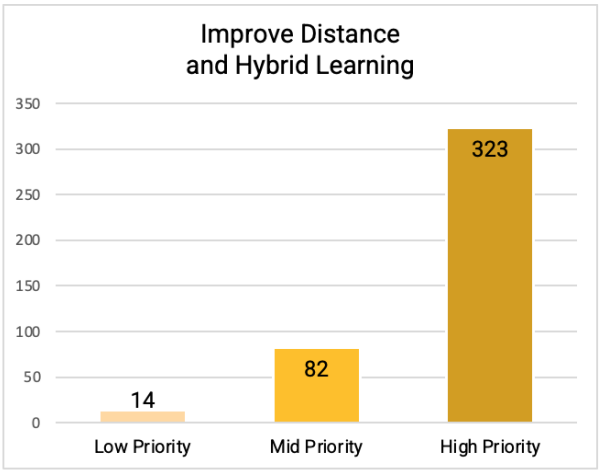
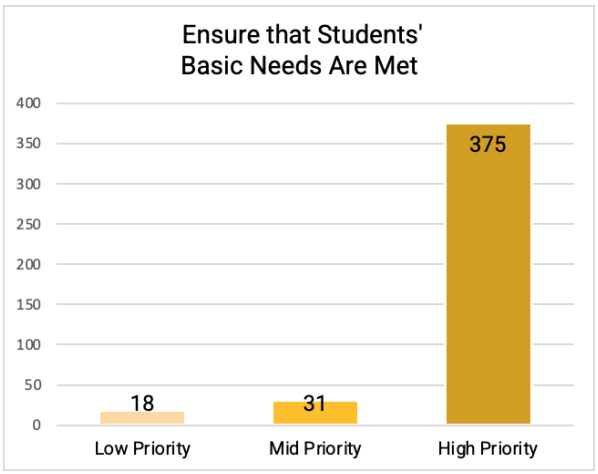


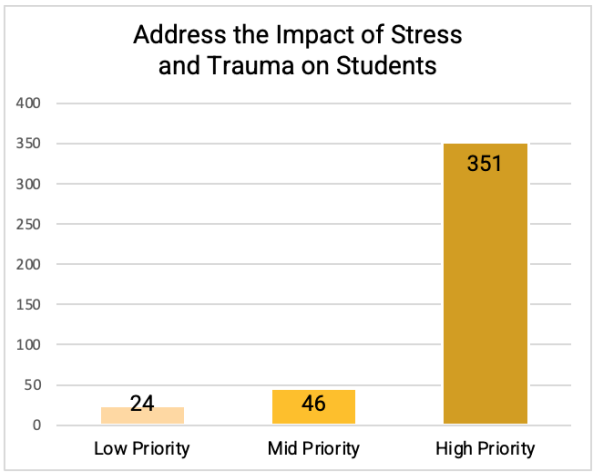
Figure 9: Educational Priorities for Black Students, Families, and Communities displays the number of survey respondents (n=440) who ranked each of the educational priorities as either high, mid, or, ow. A large majority believed each of the priorities should be seen as "high priority" by policymakers and educators. When asked if these priorities could sufficiently address issues within education for Black students, almost two-thirds (~65%) responded "Yes," while about 35% responded "No."

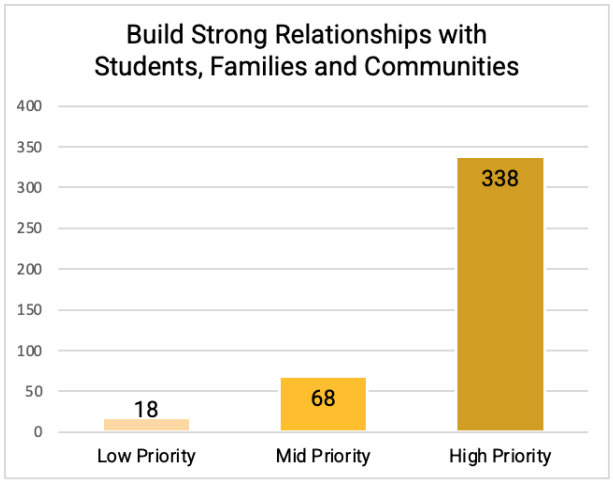
Figure 9: Educational Priorities for Black Students, Families, & Communities

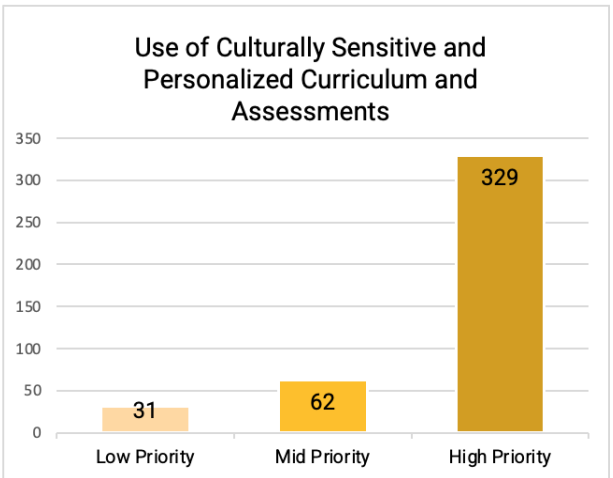


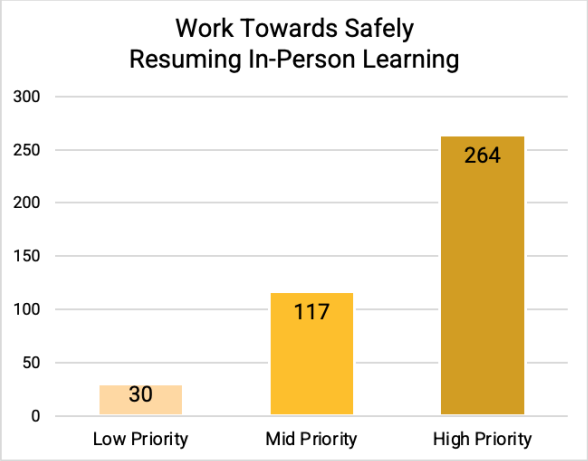


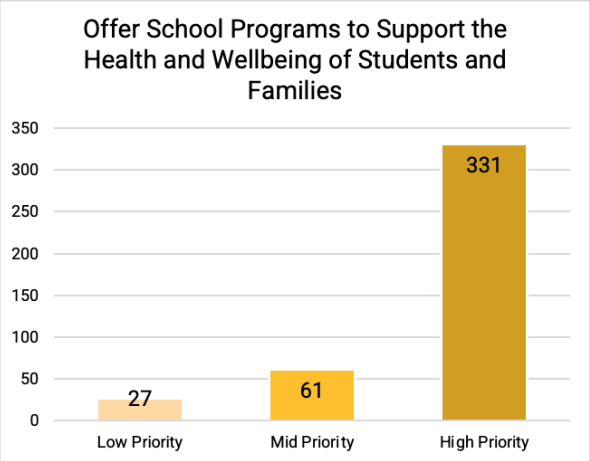


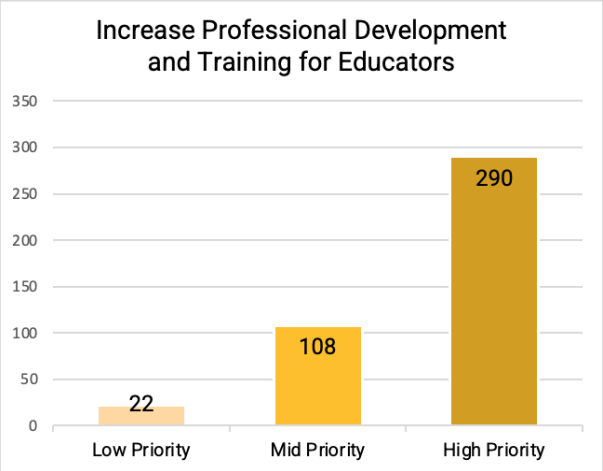


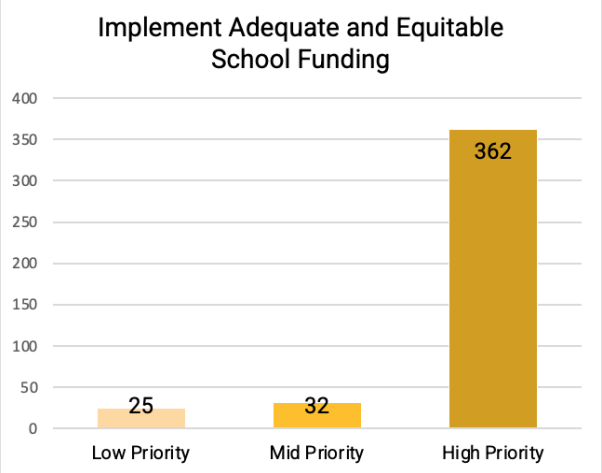












Amid the lack of trust in public schools and institutions and daily anxiety associated with COVID-19 and racial trauma, Black communities have continued the practice of coming together to take care of its members. In Las Vegas, this included the community banding together to offer support and resources that ideally would have been made available through government agencies. One Las Vegas parent, who also served as a state policymaker, described how her community came together to ensure each other's basic needs were met and the sense of empowerment they gave her:

> *I kind of feel like it has definitely pushed us back up to where we need to depend on one another to survive. ...The resources that are put on websites or 211 or all of these different programs, the resource guides, they don't work. However, I found it was social media that was saving a lot of us because you could see somebody might post "there's a food pantry,...they have rentals, toilet paper," whatever. It was more so the community circling the wagon around us to be able to make sure that we were good. So for me, I felt like that was empowering to see. That it wasn't just about my household. We were all in it together.*

In addition to expressing great appreciation for the love and support of community members rallying to each other's aid during a time of loss and suffering, participants still held clear visions and hopes for the future. When asked to share those hopes and dreams, a principal in Detroit described an

educational system that actually reflected the kids, including the curriculum, and the school being "a place the kids want to come to." He continued "a school within itself needs to be a place that students feel a part of." This vision of an inclusive learning environment was articulated also by an Atlanta community member who explained, "School should look like or would definitely be like a family. It would feel just family, I guess, I don't want to say like a family reunion, but just togetherness, because that is a large part of our culture."

There was an overwhelming number of responses to the survey questions asking participants what they would prioritize to better serve Black students, families, and communities. Figure 10 is a word cloud created to illustrate the open-ended responses received and some sense of their frequency in relations to other suggestions. The word cloud in Figure 11 displays responses to questions about their hopes, if any, for the future under a Biden-Harris Administration.

Figure 10. Which priorities would you add in order to better serve Black students, families and communities?

Figure 11. Thinking about the incoming Biden-Harris Administration and the changes that could take place regarding education and policy, what are your hopes for the future?

As the Biden-Harris Administration works to "build back better" in the months and years ahead, most agreed it will take incredible work and massive changes over an extended period of time to improve the nature and quality of the educational experiences provided to Black children and youth. Participants agreed that although it will require systems-level change to improve Black education, it is not an impossible task. In fact, across the survey and focus group data, there was significant consensus concerning the educational priorities for Black education, and just as importantly, the fact that education has and continues to be a valued priority of the Black community.

Recommendations

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) requires Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds be used to address the academic impact of lost instructional time by supporting the implementation of evidence-based interventions. These include summer learning or enrichment, extended day, comprehensive after-school, or extended school year programs and ensuring that such interventions respond to students' academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs. Furthermore, the ARP and ESSR allocations to States and local school districts were based on the population of Title I schools and students served. The legislation includes provisions which require each ESSER plan to explain how it will address equity for students of color, students with disabilities, and those who have disproportionately been impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This historic infusion of funds presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rethink the vision and purpose of education in the U.S. in service of an equal, inclusive, and just democratic society. For these reasons, this report serves as a mechanism for articulating the call to action made by study participants. By centering the voices, interests, and recommendations of Black students, parents, educators and community leaders, there is a unique opportunity to create a more equitable education, which will in turn, improve the nature and quality of education provided to all children in the U.S.

We offer the following recommendations to local, state, and federal education leaders and policymakers committed to centering and advancing educational equity and social change:

1. Protect and defend the rights of Black students to receive an appropriate and equitable education in a safe, welcoming, and affirming learning environment.
2. Invest in counseling, psychological, and mental health services and supports to address racial trauma and its impact on Black students and educators post-pandemic.
3. Provide professional development to teachers and school leaders on how to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black students.
4. Modernize curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to develop the academic ability of all students and prepare them for civic life by teaching the truth.
5. Invest in the preparation, cultivation, and mentoring of culturally relevant educators who are called to the profession and endorsed by the families they serve.
6. Restore and rebuild community trust by engaging Black students, families, educators, researchers, and leaders as experts and equal partners in education.

Conclusion

As the saying goes, *when America gets a cold, Black Americans get the flu*. Unfortunately, the realities of Black life in the wake of COVID-19 and systemic racism have only underscored the disproportionate impact of this public health crisis and pandemic recession on Black children, families, and communities. Despite the complexity associated with school improvement and issues of racial equity and social justice in education, Black students, parents, and educators yet articulated a sense of hope and possibility for the future. This includes the building of a new and inclusive civic infrastructure that ensures our schools are equipped both physically and professionally to meet the needs of our racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students, families, and communities.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Survey Participants

Table 1. Survey Participants (n=440)

	Percentage
Self Identify as Black	100
Relationship to Education	
K-12 Professional	34
Parent	31
Higher Education	19
Community Member	15
Grandparent	7
Student	5
Policymaker	2
Other	12
Type of School	
Traditional Public School	59
Charter School	19
Private School	10
Parochial School	1
Homeschool	2
Other	9
Region	
Northeast	43
Midwest	9
South	32
West	16
Age	
14-18 years	5
19-24 years	1
25-34 years	18
35-44 years	26
45-55 years	29
56-70 years	15
70 and above	6
Education	
Some High School	3
High School	3
GED	0
Some College	9
Bachelor's Degree	20
Master's Degree	44
Doctorate Degree	19
Trade School	0
Prefer Not to Say	1
Gender	
Female	81
Male	18
Genderfluid/Non-Binary	1

Appendix B

Table 2: Focus Group Participants by Stakeholder Type & Metro

	Atlanta	Boston	D.C.	Detroit	Las Vegas	NYC	Total
Students (9-12)	0	5	4	5	0	0	14
Parents	0	1	5	0	3	8	17
Teachers	6	1	5	5	2	9	28
School Leaders	0	0	1	1	5	5	12
Community leaders	6	1	0	0	1	3	11
Total Participants	12	8	15	11	11	25	**82**

*19 focus groups
*82 total participants

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