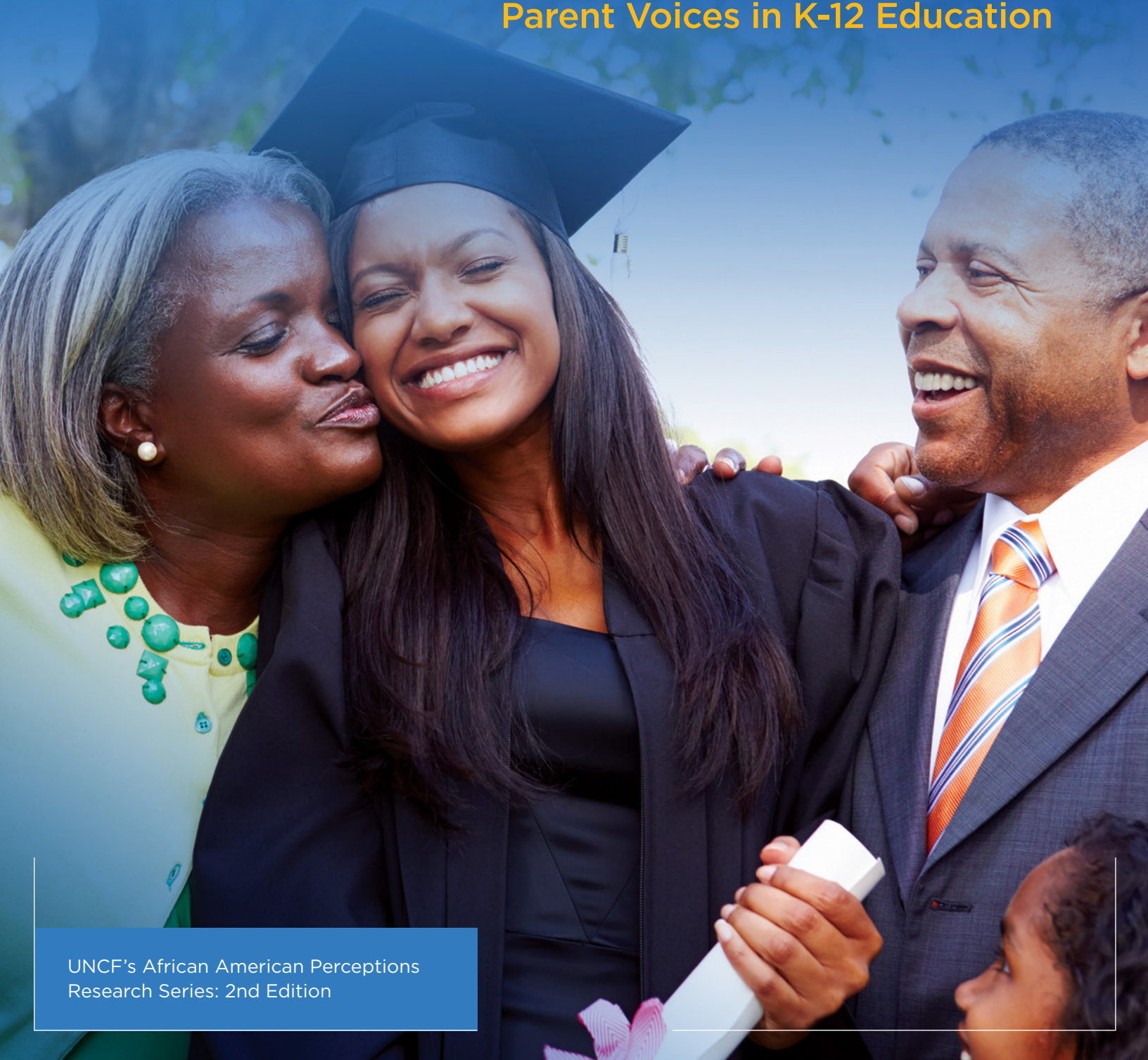# HEAR US, BELIEVE US:

Centering African American Parent Voices in K-12 Education

UNCF's African American Perceptions
Research Series: 2nd Edition

UNCF
A mind is a terrible thing to waste®

The UNCF's African American Perceptions Research Series: 2nd Edition uplifts the voices of African American parents, community leaders and youth because at UNCF we know that African American voices have and always will matter in education policy, practice and research. In totality, the findings in the series challenge assumptions about apathy and engagement among the African American community on important issues like education. To learn more visit: **UNCF.org/ perceptions** or **UNCF.org/parents** for UNCF parent tools.

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HEAR US, BELIEVE US:
Centering African American Parent Voices in K-12 Education

Introduction

For many, the past few years have been an awakening as the country simultaneously battled the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism and deep-seated inequities on full display from health care to criminal justice, housing and the educational system. However, for many Black families, these inequities were already apparent and palpable before the pandemic. Many educational disparities did not just appear during the pandemic. If we are to move forward in this "new normal" and to traverse the educational landscape with a renewed sense of educational equity and justice, we must be committed to hearing—and believing—what Black parents and caregivers have been saying throughout the years about their experience with the educational system.

What we have known at UNCF for decades is that Black parents are deeply engaged in the educational lives of their children, yet far too often they are denigrated and deemed disengaged about their children's learning environment. However, consider these few statistics regarding Black families during the pandemic.

- According to Census data, at the end of the 2020 school year Black families spent about 13.1 hours, on average, per week with their children on educational activities, which is more than many racial groups and on par with the national average. This was more than twice the amount of time students met with teachers virtually during the same period.[1]

- During some summer months of 2020, Black families spent more time, on average, with their children on educational activities than other racial groups.

- Another poll showed that higher proportions of non-White and low-income households reported all types of academic activities compared to White and high-income households in the summer of 2020.[2]

Our findings from the first edition of the Black parent research series and this current wave reify these statistics; Black parents are deeply engaged in their children's educational experiences, but they are concerned about opportunity gaps and want better resources for their children.

> "
> **What we have known at UNCF for decades is that Black parents are deeply engaged in the educational lives of their children, yet far too often they are denigrated and deemed disengaged about their children's learning environment.**

What We've Learned in the UNCF Perceptions Research Series

UNCF's Advocacy team began this work to hear from the Black community a decade ago with the inaugural African American parent perceptions report, *Done to Us, Not with Us: African American Parents' Perceptions of K-12 Education*. That report provided a national, comprehensive view of Black parents' and caregivers' perspectives on issues such as college readiness, school safety and school quality. The title is emblematic of their sentiments—they did not want policy and reform efforts being done to them. *Done to Us, Not with Us* also helped further dismantle deficit narratives about Black families as the findings showed they overwhelmingly wanted their children to attend college and were deeply engaged in their education.

A salient finding from the report was that 62% of Black parents said that education reform efforts would be more effective if more African American leaders were involved. To that end UNCF conducted interviews and surveyed influential African American community or grasstop leaders to gauge perspectives on education, with a particular focus on their community engagement efforts and concerns. In 2017, we released these findings in *Lift Every Voice and Lead: African American Leaders' Perceptions of K-12 Education*. These leaders told us they wanted tools to help them in their community engagement endeavors. As a supplement to the report, we released *The Lift Every Voice and Lead Toolkit* to provide tangible ways for leaders to become engaged in K-12 advocacy.

Finally, we closed the perceptions series with youth perspectives in *A Seat at the Table: African American Youth's Perceptions of K-12 Education*, because far too little research includes youth voices—especially youth voices of color—in a meaningful way. Despite common deficit narratives about African American youth achievement, our data revealed that they have high aspirations for college attainment and promising careers. Many felt they had caring adults in their schools, yet they also voiced the need for improvements in their learning environment and more information about the college process.

> ## Black parents have and always will be integral stakeholders in the education landscape. Their voice is imperative, their expertise is invaluable and their unwavering commitment to not only their children but those in their communities is why we must always provide space and place for Black parents.

Overall, the first wave of the perceptions research showed that: (1) race remains a salient factor in our education system, (2) Black parents, leaders and students overwhelmingly aspire to post-secondary education opportunities, (3) there is a real concern about safety for students and families and (4) all groups have an intrinsic desire in their ability to make change. More importantly, the perception series continues to underscore the fact that Black voices matter in education.

The second wave of the parent research illuminated both synergies and divergent views from *Done to Us, Not with Us*, but one thing remains clear—Black parents have and always will be integral stakeholders in the education landscape. Their voice is imperative, their expertise is invaluable and their unwavering commitment to not only their children but those in their communities is why we must always provide space and place for Black parents.

Throughout UNCF's 80-year existence, we have known one thing to be true—collective voice and action is consequential for enduring change in education. It is what spurred Dr. Frederick D. Patterson and Mary McLeod Bethune to create UNCF to collectively fundraise for HBCUs in 1944 and it is also the impetus for the K-12 advocacy work we have been leading for over a decade. African American parents do not just want a seat at the table, they want a voice at the table and the opportunity to decide what is on the agenda. Their voices matter. This report uplifts those voices, and we hope the findings can help center Black families as critical education stakeholders in our education system. We must be committed to hearing *and* believing our Black parents because we know in various sectors, from healthcare to criminal justice and education, the voices of Black parents may be heard, but their opinions are dismissed and devalued.

> ## Throughout UNCF's 80-year existence, we have known one thing to be true—collective voice and action is consequential for enduring change in education.

Key Findings Summary

Overall, the findings indicate that Black parents and caregivers:

1 greatly value the importance of higher education, but say schools fall short in helping them understand the college process;

2 are deeply involved in the learning processes for their children (reading to their child daily, checking homework, etc.);

3 report higher college aspirations for their child and lower instances of child suspensions when there are more Black teachers at their child's school;

4 prioritize safety as the top factor in making educational decisions for their child and want more support services for their schools;

5 are deeply concerned about the racial inequities within their schools;

6 want to see more Black education leaders and organizations in education; and

7 want more opportunities to be involved and have their voices heard.

Study Scope and Methods

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the perspectives of African American parents and caregivers on pertinent education issues but also to compare perceptions to the previous parent study that was conducted in 2012. The study consists of a national sample of 500 low-to-moderate income African American parents and caregivers of school-aged children. In addition, a separate subset of parents was surveyed in the following six cities: Chicago, Indianapolis, Atlanta, Houston, Memphis and New Orleans.[3] Some city-specific findings will be illuminated throughout the report.

Surveys were administered via landlines and cellphones in 2017 by Hart Research Associates.[4] Two focus groups, consisting of Black parents, were also facilitated in Atlanta and New Orleans. Descriptive statistics were examined, and logistic regression models were fitted to critically examine relationships between Black teacher representation and key school outcomes. For additional information on the study details and methodology, please see the Appendix.

The following three areas are assessed in the study: Learning Environment, Attitudes About the Educational Landscape and Strategies to Improve Education.

- **Learning Environment**: What are Black parents' college aspirations for their child? How do parents feel about their child's school and personnel? How are parents engaged in shaping their child's education? Do schools with more Black teachers make a difference for educational outcomes and perceptions of parents? Does their child's school provide lesson plans that reflect issues of race and culture? Where do parents find information about college?

- **Attitudes about the Educational Landscape**: Do parents feel African American students are given equal opportunities to succeed in schools? What are the most important issues facing African American students? How do parents feel about leaders of color in education?

- **Strategies to Improve Education**: What tools are most helpful to parents as they navigate the educational landscape? What are parents' solutions to address educational disparities?

Key Findings

Child's Learning Environment

The following section highlights African American parents' and caregivers' thoughts on their children's learning environment.

Key Finding 1: Aspirations and Engagement

A significant majority (84%) of African American parents and caregivers believe it is important that their child attend and graduate from college. African American parents and caregivers are also deeply invested and engaged in their child's education.[5]

Figure 1 shows that 84% of Black parents agreed that it was extremely or quite important that their child attend college compared to 87% in the previous study in 2012. There are several competing priorities when considering postsecondary education, with costs often playing a key role in parents' decision calculus.

An important and related finding shows that Black parents rated their children's school higher and had greater aspirations for their children to go to college when many or most of the teachers were Black compared to schools where few or no teachers were Black. Specifically, in schools where many or most of the teachers were Black, 71% of Black parents indicated that college was extremely important. Contrarily, in schools with few or no Black teachers, only 53% of Black parents indicated that college was extremely important.[i]

A logistic regression model was used to further assess the relationship between parent perceptions of college and the presence of Black teachers.[ii] The model predicted that **the probability that a Black parent views college as important for their child was higher if their children attended schools where many or most teachers were Black compared to schools with fewer Black teachers.**

DIGGING DEEPER

Black parents and caregivers under the age of 35 place a higher value on their children receiving a postsecondary education than older parents. There were also a higher percentage of Black parents that said college was extremely important (77%) among parents that rated their child's school as excellent compared to those who rate their child's school as "not so good" (39%). Moreover, when assessing this variable among the six city samples, Houston, Texas had the highest percentage (93%) of Black parents agreeing that it is important or extremely important that their child attend college.

FIGURE 1: Percentage of Black Parents/Caregivers Who Believe It Is Important for Their Children to Attend College

- **Extremely Important**
- **Quite Important**
- **Somewhat Important**
- **Not That/Not at All Important**
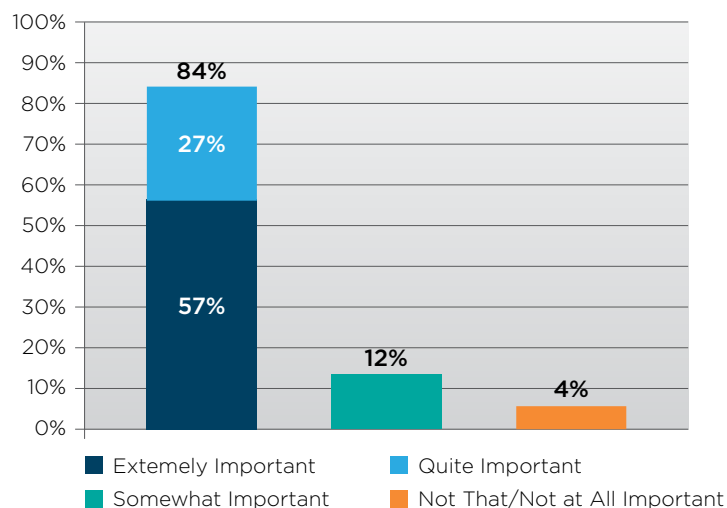
[i] Crosstab results statistically significant, <p.05

[ii] For more information on the model, see Appendix

> **...the probability that a Black parent views college as important for their child was higher if their children attended schools where many or most teachers were Black compared to schools with fewer Black teachers.**

Research abounds on the positive influence of Black teachers on students' lives and aspirations, yet we know little about how Black parents' aspirations of college are tempered by Black teacher representation.[6] Interactions with school and staff or potential school outreach could play a role in parents' evaluation of college for their child. Moreover, previous research shows that Black teachers have high expectations of Black children.[7] In fact, Black students who had just one Black teacher by third grade were 13% more likely to enroll in college than those who did not—and those who had two were 32% more likely.[8] **Thus, not only does increased Black teacher representation positively influence student aspirations for college, but it also influences Black parent aspirations for their child**. The implications are vast, as parents and family play a key role in motivating their child to attend college.

Overall, Black parents still overwhelmingly want their child to pursue a postsecondary education despite some rhetoric suggesting that parents do not see value in higher education. One parent in the focus group discussed their dreams and ambitions for their child explaining that,

"I want her to go to school debt-free, but I want her to have a serious intellectual experience. I want her to know what a Rhodes Scholar [is], which she does because we researched it...I want her to know what the potential of your experience can be. I want her to have a beautiful time and grow, but at the same time, I want her to understand this is your platform to hit the ground running and let the world see what you have to offer. And you can do that if you put the work in." —African American parent, focus group participant

A DEEPER LOOK AT HBCUs

In the focus groups, Black parents also discussed the salience of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and some parents mentioned they would encourage their children to attend. One parent discussed the intrusive and supportive advising that occurred at the HBCU they attended,[9] *"I must say it [the HBCU I attended] was really supportive…My professor would call me if I missed class, like, 'Hey, what's going on? Are you okay?' And I did appreciate that support."* When discussing college options, one parent even mentioned, *"I would only encourage my child to attend an HBCU."*

While family is a significant factor in college choice and enrollment, school dynamics have a significant influence as well. UNCF conducted focus groups with 100 HBCU students and the data revealed that sometimes their school counselors dissuaded them from attending an HBCU.[10] One student explained, *"They talked to us about college and gave us options for ACT…but definitely, going to [an] HBCU wasn't something ever talked about. They pushed the state schools, the public schools and even the state schools in surrounding states. HBCUs weren't something ever talked about."* Another student mentioned, *"They actually dissuaded us from going to HBCUs because they just felt like it couldn't do anything for us."*

Similarly, in a recent joint UNCF and Charter Schools Growth Fund study of HBCU students, many suggested that their high schools did not often include HBCUs in college fairs and while some staff were supportive, many intentionally did not showcase HBCUs for students.[11]

> **"**
>
> **I must say it [the HBCU I attended] was really supportive…My professor would call me if I missed class, like, "Hey, what's going on? Are you okay?" And I did appreciate that support.**
>
> —African American parent, focus group participant

> **Black parents are also doing the work to ensure that their children are on the educational trajectory to succeed.**
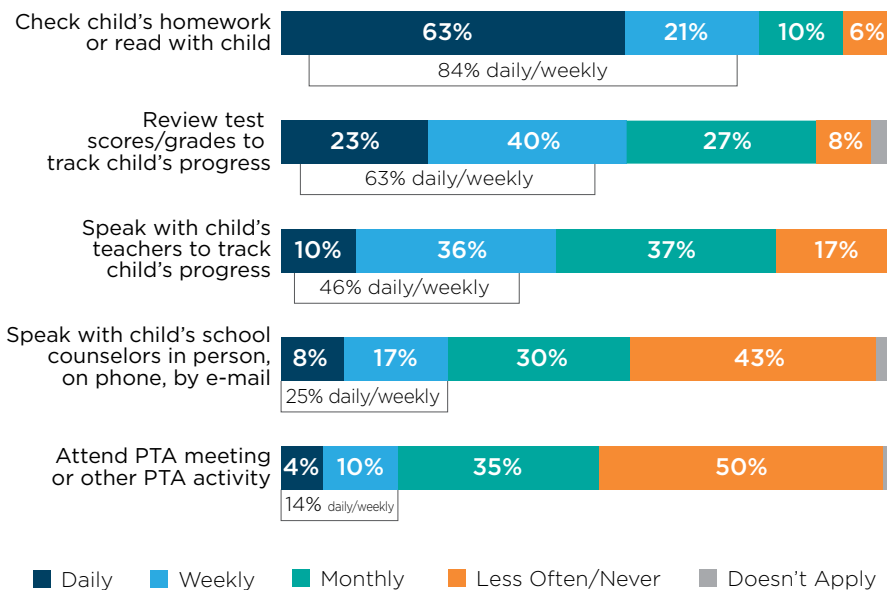
While parents overwhelmingly support their children going to college, 65% feel it is a serious problem that African American students in their communities are not enrolling in or completing college at adequate levels. Fifty-nine percent of recent Black high school graduates enrolled in college, compared to 62% for white students.[12] Nationwide, the 6-year graduation rate for African American college students is 40% compared to 60% for all students.[13] Unfortunately, African American students have the lowest 4-year graduation rate among all student groups.

In addition to supporting higher education, Black parents are also doing the work to ensure that their children are on the educational trajectory to succeed. Similar to our previous findings, parents and caregivers are deeply invested and engaged in their child's education. **Figure 2 shows that 84% of Black parents check their child's homework or read to their child daily or weekly, 63% review their child's test scores and other grades to track progress and 51% attend PTA meetings monthly or every few months**. Both before and during the pandemic, Black parents were deeply invested in their child's learning environment.

The findings also indicate that parents are engaged with their child's teachers. Eighty-three percent speak to their child's teachers on a monthly to daily basis. Black parents in the focus groups underscored this engagement. *"I was very active because you don't count on the school to teach your kids. I mean, there's certain things you expect them to teach, but overall, you have to teach as a parent. I was very active in PTA, especially in middle school. I was the president."* Another parent in the Atlanta focus group mentioned, *"The students know me. The teachers know me. The administration knows me, and I engage in a way that feels best for me and my family at this point."*

FIGURE 2: African American Parent and Caregiver Engagement in Children's Education

Check child's homework or read with child
| 63% | 21% | 10% | 6% |
84% daily/weekly

Review test scores/grades to track child's progress
| 23% | 40% | 27% | 8% |
63% daily/weekly

Speak with child's teachers to track child's progress
| 10% | 36% | 37% | 17% |
46% daily/weekly

Speak with child's school counselors in person, on phone, by e-mail
| 8% | 17% | 30% | 43% |
25% daily/weekly

Attend PTA meeting or other PTA activity
| 4% | 10% | 35% | 50% |
14% daily/weekly

■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Monthly ■ Less Often/Never ■ Doesn't Apply

> **The students know me. The teachers know me. The administration knows me, and I engage in a way that feels best for me and my family at this point.**
>
> —African American parent, focus group participant

Key Finding 2: Race and Teacher Representation

While Black parents rate their child's school and personnel favorably, racial inequities are apparent. However, parents report more favorable schooling experiences when there are more Black teachers at the school.

> **I would say what the schools are lacking is supporting African American kids.**
>
> —African American parent, focus group participant

Nearly half of Black parents felt as if schools did a very good job of making them feel welcomed at school and keeping them informed of their child's progress. These are two important issues that are necessary to keep parents engaged and part of the learning process for their child. Overall, parents had a fairly high assessment of their child's learning environment.

However, Figure 3 shows that when comparing parents' assessments of their child's school on various issues, topics related to race ranked among the bottom three issues in the "very good job" category. As one parent mentioned in the focus groups, *"I would say what the schools are lacking is supporting African American kids."* **Only 31% of African American parents felt schools were doing a very good job at treating students of all races fairly and providing lesson plans that address racial and social issues. In fact, among all learning environment topics assessed, Black parents felt schools fell the shortest on offering racial and social issue-related lesson plans.**

Parents want students to feel that their child is treated fairly and culturally affirmed and seen in their texts and lesson plans. Research shows that African American history is not adequately reflected in the texts, and the impact is far-reaching.[14] In fact, some textbooks reify racist notions in society and do not celebrate the extraordinary contributions of African Americans, while others dilute the institutions of slavery and systemic racism.[15]

When assessing the results in the city-level samples for Black parents, in both Atlanta and Indianapolis, logistic regression models predicted that the probability that their children's school does a good job with having culturally relevant lesson plans is significantly higher when their children attended schools with more African American teachers compared to those with fewer African American teachers. **In other words, the presence of Black teachers plays a key role in Black parents' evaluation of culturally relevant lesson plans at their child's school.** While studies have shown the benefits of Black teachers in the classroom, we know less about how parents' perceptions matter in this literature. This finding indicates that Black teachers play a critical role in ensuring students are exposed to lesson plans that are inclusive and linked to current social issues.

Figure 3 shows that **only 36% of parents say their child's school did a very good job dealing with discipline issues.** Year after year, the data reify these results related to discipline among Black students.[16] For example, recent Office for Civil Rights data show that Black students represented 15% of student enrollment but 38% of students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions. African American preschool students are expelled from school at a rate more than twice their population size as well.[17]

Digging a bit deeper in the data, logistic regression models predicted that the probability that a Black parents' child had been suspended from school was higher in schools that had few to no Black teachers compared to schools with more Black teachers.

In other words, for parents whose children attended schools where many or most teachers were Black, the probability that their child received exclusionary discipline (e.g., out-of-school suspensions) is almost three times lower than when their child attended schools with fewer Black teachers. This finding is significant because, while research has shown that Black teachers are associated with decreased discipline for Black students, we often do not hear the voices of Black parents in this literature.[18] Research shows how Black teachers display positive discipline techniques compared to exclusionary practices with Black children. Research by Dr. Franita Ware would describe this as a pedagogy of care and high expectations.

Similarly, Black teachers assist in building positive racial climates in schools. Logistic regression results substantiate these findings on the city level in Indianapolis and Atlanta. The models predicted that the probability that Black parents agreed that their school treated all students fairly was higher for parents whose children attended schools where many or most teachers were Black, compared to schools with fewer Black teachers.

FIGURE 3: Assessment of Black Parents and Caregivers Child's School Performance

	Very Good Job	Fairly Good Job	Falling Somewhat Short	Falling Very Short	Not Sure
Keeping me informed of child's progress/alerts of problems	51%	37%	7%	5%	
Making me feel respected and welcomed at school	50%	40%	6%	3%	1%
Clear info on what child needs to know/do to pass the grade	40%	46%	9%	4%	1%
Preparing my child to succeed in college*	37%	35%	16%	9%	3%
Dealing effectively with discipline problems	36%	42%	12%	7%	3%
Opportunities for students to take challenging/high-level courses	33%	42%	15%	4%	6%
Treating students of all races fairly/equally	31%	52%	12%	3%	2%
Lesson plans that address racial, cultural, social issues	31%	39%	19%	8%	3%
Info about applying to college, how to pay for it*	30%	35%	15%	11%	9%

*Among parents of students in 6th grade or higher

■ Very Good Job ■ Fairly Good Job ■ Falling Somewhat Short ■ Falling Very Short ■ Not Sure
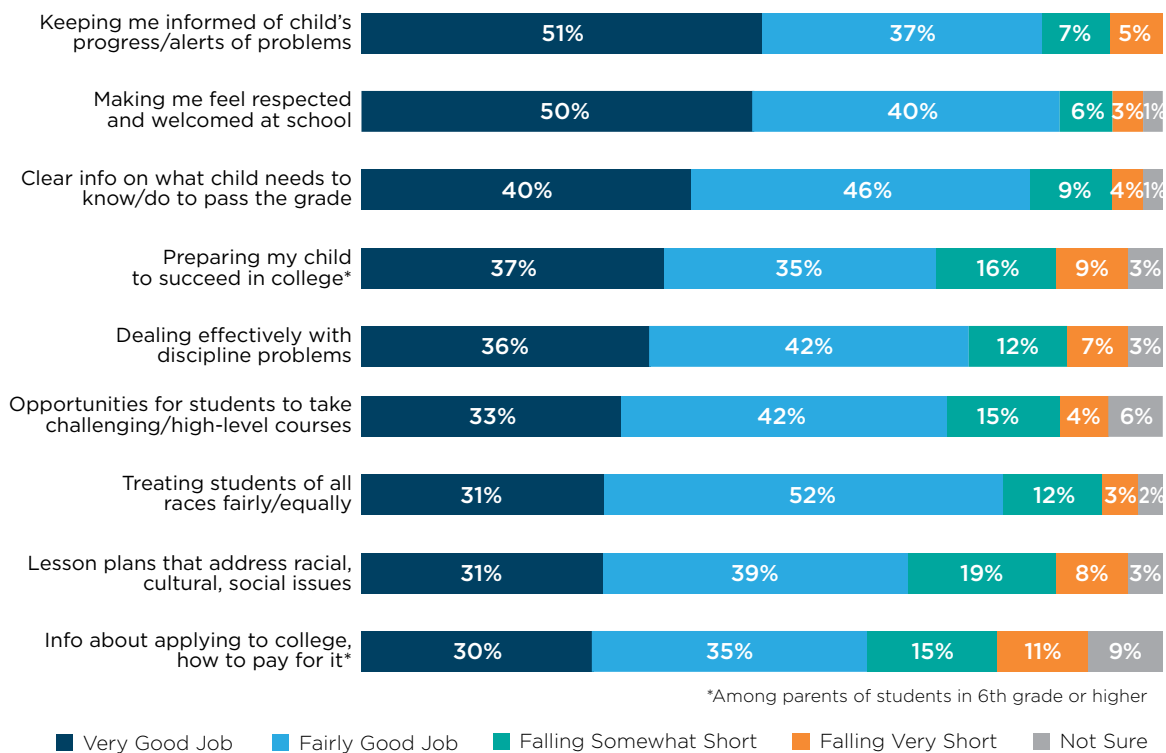
Figure 3 also shows that only 30% of parents (with children grade 6 or higher) felt schools did a very good job in providing information on how to apply and pay for college. One parent in the focus groups explained, *"…I do think that more of an effort needs to be made to meet students where they are, because many parents are not college educated and have never attended college, and they may not understand the rewards of attending college."* While parents agree that obtaining a college degree is important, they still want tools to help their child in this process.

Again, it is important to note that overall, many Black parents said schools were doing a good to fair job compared to falling short.
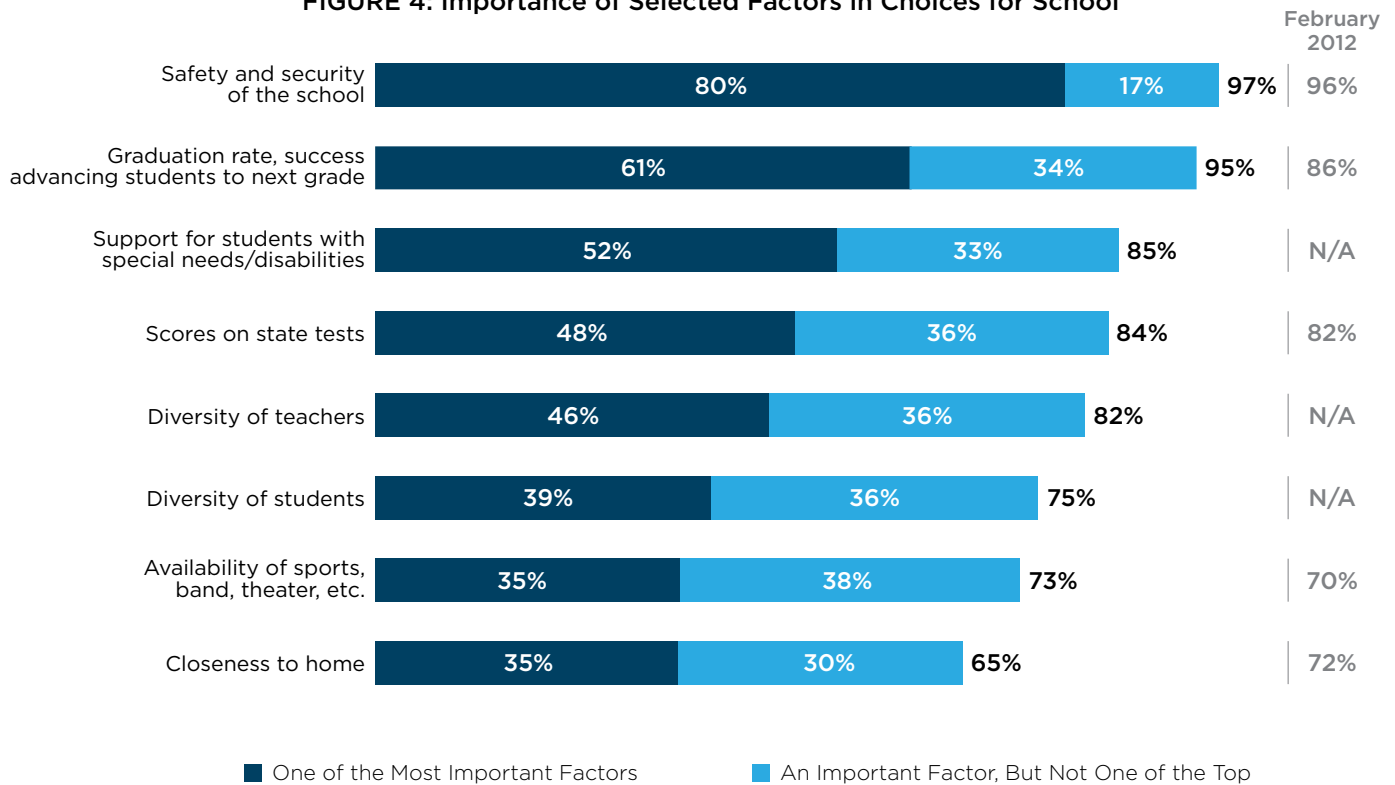
Key Finding 3: School Safety
80% of Black parents and caregivers ranked safety as one of the most important factors in choosing a school for their child.

The findings indicate that 80% of Black parents and caregivers ranked safety as one of the most important factors for school selection. This is down 7 percentage points from the previous survey. Moreover, when asked what are the most important issues facing African American students in their communities, 63% of parents cited violence and unsafe conditions in schools. From mass shootings in schools to violence and safe passage concerns, safety issues are palpable for parents.

In UNCF's report *A Seat at the Table: African American Youth's Perspectives of K-12 Education*, only 43% of African American youth felt their schools were safe. For African American students in schools predominantly with students of color, safety may take on different meanings, as they may be more likely to experience over-policing in schools, yet the research suggests that increased funding for school resource officers does not necessarily decrease discipline.[19] A joint UNCF and Howard University report, *School Safety and School Resource Officers: Framing a Legislative Agenda*, shows that students of color are often mechanically and physically restrained at rates that exceed their population size. In fact, Black students are mechanically restrained with devices at a rate nearly two times their population size.

Violence and safety are nuanced concepts in schools, and the culture and climate of the school matters as well in ensuring students feel safe. Office for Civil Rights data shows that Black students were 15% of the student population but represented 37% of students bullied or harassed based on race.[20]

FIGURE 4: Importance of Selected Factors in Choices for School

Factor	One of the Most Important Factors	An Important Factor, But Not One of the Top	Total	February 2012
Safety and security of the school	80%	17%	97%	96%
Graduation rate, success advancing students to next grade	61%	34%	95%	86%
Support for students with special needs/disabilities	52%	33%	85%	N/A
Scores on state tests	48%	36%	84%	82%
Diversity of teachers	46%	36%	82%	N/A
Diversity of students	39%	36%	75%	N/A
Availability of sports, band, theater, etc.	35%	38%	73%	70%
Closeness to home	35%	30%	65%	72%

■ One of the Most Important Factors   ■ An Important Factor, But Not One of the Top

The next two most important issues when choosing a school for their child was the graduation rate or passing students to next grade level (61%) followed by support for students with special needs (52%). The focus groups substantiated these issues as well. Parents were concerned about the lack of coordination efforts for children with special needs. One parent discussed the lack of high expectations for children with disabilities suggesting, *"They don't know how to manage these students [with disabilities], and these students just get left in this space where no one knows what to do with them."*

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The data shows that among Black parents of 9-12th graders, the main source for obtaining information for college was their child's school (45%), followed by websites (29%), other parents (13%), church (4%) and non-religious organizations in their community (3%). This finding is disheartening because though parents go to their child's school for information about college, only a little over a quarter feel that the school did a very good job in helping them understand the college process.

Attitudes About the Educational Landscape

The following findings capture parents' thoughts on the educational landscape for African American students overall, not just in their child's schools.

Key Finding 4: Opportunity Gaps

Slightly more than half of parents and caregivers believe that African American students in their community and surrounding areas are not given the same opportunities to learn and succeed as White students.

Given the deeply entrenched history of racial discrimination within schools, this finding is not surprising. African American students are more likely to attend schools with less funding, less qualified teachers and less access to rigorous programs. These are structural problems which create unequal opportunities to learn for Black students. While discussions mount about achievement gaps, opportunity gaps should be the central focus in addressing inequities.

DIGGING DEEPER

In assessing the city-level samples in New Orleans, Chicago and Indianapolis, most Black parents say that Black students are not given the same opportunities as White students compared to the other three cities (Houston, Atlanta and Memphis). New Orleans has the highest percentage (62%) of African American parents agreeing that African American students are not given the same opportunities as White students, which is 10 points above the national average for Black parents in this study. While there have been significant gains in achievement in New Orleans, parents still do not feel their children are valued. Parents in the New Orleans focus group discussed this as well, suggesting that Black kids are being pushed out and "falling by the wayside."

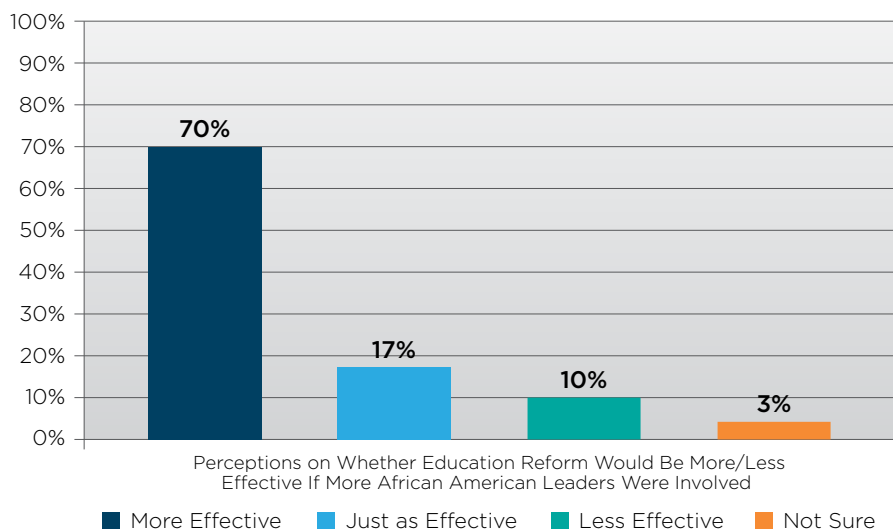## Key Finding 5: Increased African American Leadership

Seventy percent of parents and caregivers believe the involvement of African American leaders and organizations will make school improvement efforts more effective.

Figure 5 shows that 70% of Black parents agree that educational efforts would be more effective if there were more Black leaders and organizations involved. This is up 8 percentage points from the previous survey. **Black leaders matter**. Black civil rights organizations matter—for their expertise, deep involvement and engagement in the community and their trust among the Black community. **It is important to recognize that while the message certainly matters in community engagement and policy, the messenger plays a critical role as well**. The individuals, systems and practices in place are consequential to community relations and outcomes. Yet, a perusal of education non-profits, research centers and congressional committees reveals that they are overwhelmingly White.

DIGGING DEEPER

When assessing the importance of Black leaders across the oversample cities, Indianapolis had the highest percentage (76%) of Black parents who suggested that education reform would be better if more Black leaders and organizations were more involved.

FIGURE 5: Influence of African American Leaders and Organizations on Education

Perceptions on Whether Education Reform Would Be More/Less Effective If More African American Leaders Were Involved

- More Effective — 70%
- Just as Effective — 17%
- Less Effective — 10%
- Not Sure — 3%

Representation across the full spectrum of education is imperative, from the teacher to the principal, superintendent or CEO, to leaders of organizations. Black leaders not only amplify issues of inequities and help to dismantle systemic racism, they also serve as role models for Black students. Nationwide, only 10% of principals are Black,[21] yet principals and leaders of color are essential to schools and further contribute to diversifying the teacher workforce, where only 7% of teachers are Black. Research shows that schools with more Black principals have higher percentages of Black teachers,[22] increased student performance[23] and increased enrollment of Black students in gifted programs.[24]

> **Black leaders not only amplify issues of inequities and help to dismantle systemic racism, they also serve as role models for Black students.**

Strategies to Improve Education

Below are educational priorities that emerged from parents and caregivers.

Key Finding 6: Expanded Support Services and Teacher Pay

Expanding social services, supports to students and increasing teacher pay are the approaches most parents think will improve public education.

Black parents ranked various actions or activities that would be helpful in improving education. The social, emotional and physical well-being of their children is of utmost importance, as the top issue that resonated was expanding social services in the areas of counseling, nutrition and healthcare. Ninety-one percent of parents say that expanding support services for students would have a positive effect on students. Other research shows similar findings.[25] Though parents prioritize the importance of counselors and other support staff, these key personnel are often undervalued in schools. The student-to-counselor ratio is 430:1, but the recommended ratios are 250:1.[26] Research shows that 1.7 million students are in schools with a sworn law enforcement officer but no school counselor, and 10 million are in schools with no social workers.[27] Nationally, the psychologist-to-student ratio is 1,200:1, but the National Association of School Psychologists recommends a 500:1 ratio.[28] Prior to the pandemic, parents wanted more supports.

It is even more imperative now as students' mental health has suffered as they have navigated unchartered territories during the pandemic.

Moreover, school counselors are needed in this time to help students navigate the college process given changes during the pandemic. These counselors support students in their college readiness pursuits and in understanding the financial implications. Previous UNCF research[29] showed 57% of Black high school students in the study said the high cost of college was a barrier to college attendance and completion and almost 1 in 4 students did not know how to pay for college at all.

Finally, Black parents believe teachers should be paid more. Teacher pay has been an incessant policy topic for some time, yet teachers are often grossly underpaid and unappreciated in many districts and schools. According to a 2023 National Teacher Association report, the average educator pay has not kept up with inflation. They report that teachers are making $3,644 less, on average, than they did 10 years ago, when adjusted for inflation. The Economic Policy Institute also finds that teachers are paid less than non-teacher, college-educated counterparts, often referred to as the "teacher pay penalty."

Key Finding 7: Increased Parental Involvement
Black parents would like more opportunities to be involved in their child's education and more input into education laws.

Ninety-three percent of Black parents said that they wanted more opportunities to be more involved in their child's education and input into education laws. **Parents do not want to be passive bystanders in the learning process for their children. They don't want education being "done to them,"** as we discussed in the first African American parent perceptions series. One parent echoed this sentiment in the focus groups:

"I'm a parent advocate in {school system name omitted}, and when I came into the school system, I knew right away that I had to be an advocate. I couldn't allow a stranger to teach my children, and so I was {an} at-home mom all that time to make sure and help to navigate, and so the partnership started there, started with a teacher, as a teacher understands that we are a partnership, and that they are not necessarily the authority over my child. But neither am I, really, and that is a true partnership. It's a triangular partnership with my child, the school and our family."

Additionally, nearly 90% of parents said it would be very helpful to have resources that would help them in advocacy efforts.

> **...when I came into the school system, I knew right away that I had to be an advocate.**
>
> —African American parent, focus group participant

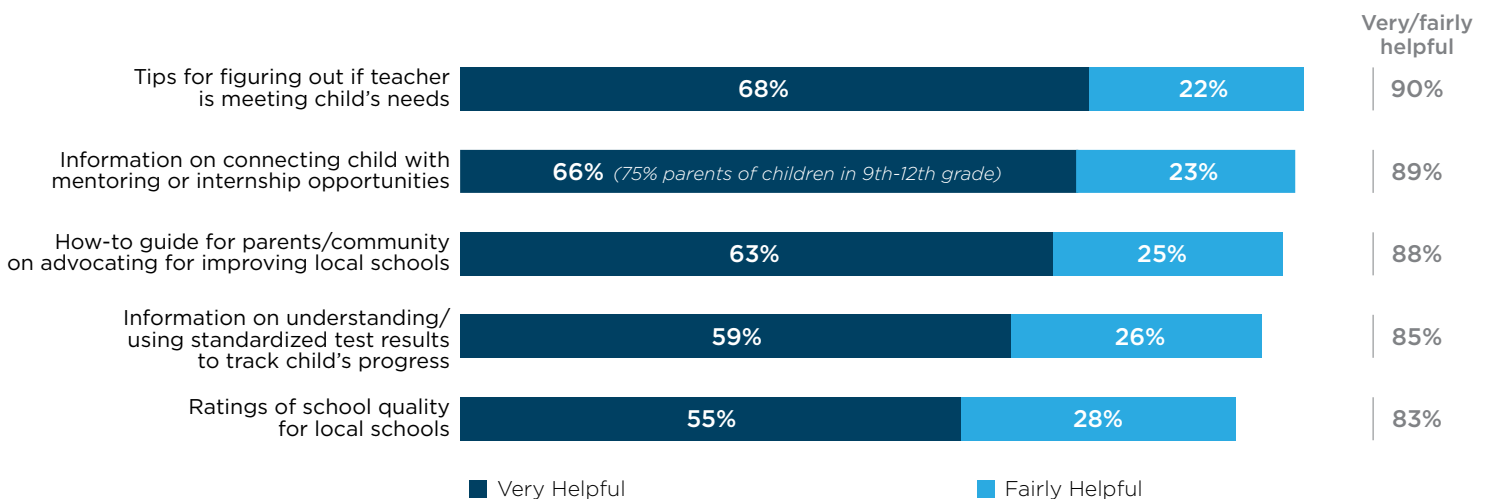## Key Finding 8: Tips and Tools

Parents prioritize tools such as tips to ensure teachers are meeting their child's needs and information on internships and mentorship opportunities to help make sure their child is receiving a high-quality education.

Parents are interested in ensuring their children have extracurricular activities in place that will allow their child to have a well-rounded academic experience. Internships, even at the high school level, can yield positive outcomes for students. One parent mentioned, *"One thing I would look for is schools that have opportunities for children, like they can stretch their mind outside of the normal educational setting as far as extracurricular activities."*

Figure 6 shows that Black parents also wanted mentors to support their child's learning. One parent in the focus group mentioned they wanted to see mentors from HBCUs, in particular, *"...more mentors, young black men, helping the students in schools, just trying to get with them and show them the way. I would like to see more of that."* Another parent stressed the importance of her son's mentorship program, stating, *"as a parent I absolutely got my son signed up with the 100 Black Men mentorship, and, of course, that helped guide him."*

FIGURE 6: Selected Resources to Help Ensure Children Are Receiving a High-Quality Education

Resource	Very Helpful	Fairly Helpful	Very/fairly helpful
Tips for figuring out if teacher is meeting child's needs	68%	22%	90%
Information on connecting child with mentoring or internship opportunities	66% (75% parents of children in 9th-12th grade)	23%	89%
How-to guide for parents/community on advocating for improving local schools	63%	25%	88%
Information on understanding/using standardized test results to track child's progress	59%	26%	85%
Ratings of school quality for local schools	55%	28%	83%

■ Very Helpful   ■ Fairly Helpful

Call to Action

The following recommendations are starting points for members of the education community to consider. While these suggestions are not the panacea to the deep educational fractures in this country, they can help various stakeholder groups be more intentional in their equity work. The recommendations are divided into two areas: K-12 and higher education recommendations because the pursuit of educational equity is not the responsibility of one sector; it is a collective endeavor.

Recommendations for the K-12 Sector

|	
Invest unapologetically in Black teachers	Black teachers not only matter, but they are also integral to the success of schools across the country. While the research has consistently shown their impact on student outcomes in schools, this report shows that for several outcomes, Black teachers matter in parent perceptions and outcomes as well. The findings show that in many instances, schools with more Black teachers have favorable outcomes for children of Black parents. Countless bodies of work show that Black teachers fundamentally help transform schools. As such, schools should make more intentional efforts to recruit and retain Black teachers. This may look like the following: 1. Expanding recruitment networks and creating partnerships with HBCUs and non-profit organizations such as UNCF, the Center for Black Educator Development, the Black Teacher Collaborative or Diversity in Leadership Institute, which emphasizes the role of leaders of color. 2. Focusing on retention (not just recruitment) of teachers of color by examining invisible taxes on Black teachers (i.e., disciplinarian roles, diversity committee leads), providing mentoring programs with financial incentives, and supporting teacher growth and opportunities. 3. Partner with universities to establish Grow Your Own Programs with a focus on diverse talent. 4. Ensuring human resources and talent development staff are also diverse and have the intentionality and financial incentives necessary to increase diversity. 5. Mobilizing Black parents and caregivers to advocate for greater teacher diversity, in conjunction with other non-profit advocacy groups.
Create more intentional opportunities for parent involvement	The data suggested that parents wanted to be more active participants in the learning process for their child. This may look like the following: 1. Establishing parent advisory boards for schools and districts that provide continual feedback into education decisions. 2. Conducting 360-degree feedback surveys and focus groups that take parent feedback into account. 3. Partnering with non-profit organizations, like Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) or Stand for Children that support families in their advocacy efforts.
Value and prioritize support staff in school budgets	Across many schools and districts, mental and behavioral support staff are not valued; yet we know they matter, especially given the current climate and the effects of the pandemic. Schools and districts may consider the following: 1. Engaging in an equitable assessment of the budget (especially on the district and charter network level) to ensure that districts and schools that serve large percentages of students from low-income backgrounds receive a larger share of supports for school counselors, as research often shows they lack access. 2. Providing additional college counseling training for school counselors, as standards for college counseling are not often required. Riverside County of Education, New School Counselor Academy, is a great example of a district that prioritizes college counseling training for school counselors.
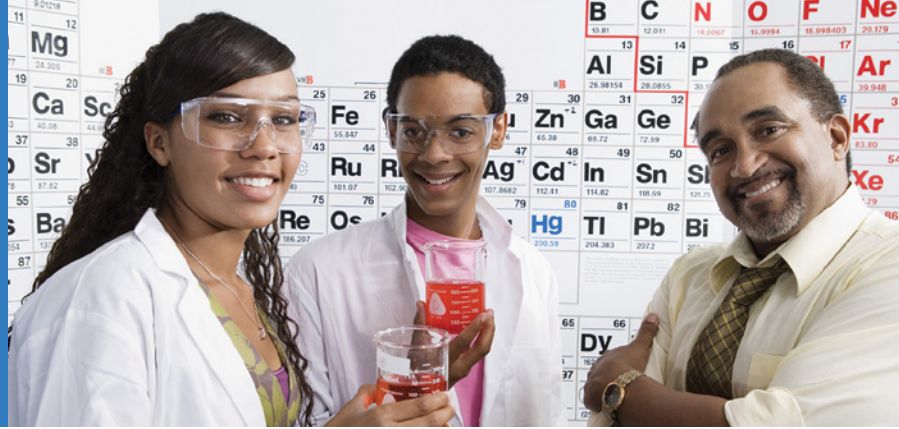
Recommendations for the K-12 Sector

Create a learning environment that reflects African American history and culture	Racism and systematic inequality are embedded in the social fabric of this country. Schools need teachers and administrators to approach their work from an anti-racist framework. While this may look like curriculum restructuring, meaningful professional development or intentional hiring, the training that teachers receive before they get into the classroom is paramount as well. It is important to mention that while these suggestions are important for schools, some states are grappling with legislatures that aim to dismantle substantive curriculum related to race. These harmful tactics not only deprive students of learning an accurate account of history and preparing them to be anti-racist adults, but they also can deter teachers from entering (or remaining) in the profession as their autonomy in the classroom is stifled. Schools, districts and CMOs may consider the following: 1. Reviewing the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights document, "Race and School Programming," which "guides schools on lawful programs to promote racially inclusive school communities." The document "clarifies the circumstances under which schools can—consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations—develop curricula and programs or engage in activities that promote racially inclusive school communities." The document also provides 13 hypothetical examples for districts to consider in evaluating their Title VI legal obligations and protections concerning school-sponsored curricula and programming.[30] 2. Re-evaluating the curriculum to support an anti-racist framework across disciplines.[31] 3. Providing meaningful, actionable professional development that focuses on anti-racism and culturally relevant pedagogy. 4. Ensuring the books and imagery throughout the schools are reflective of all students. Images, quotes and visuals in a school are not mere periphery items; they matter to students.
Partner with local organizations to provide resources and services for families	Nearly 50% of Black parents could not name, unaided, organizations that could support their children. Parents also prioritized the importance of internships for their students. Schools, districts and CMOs may consider the following when possible: 1. Establishing partnerships with local organizations that allow for hands-on internship experiences for students. Such experiences could also be imbedded in the curriculum to make the learning process more engaging and applicable to their futures. 2. Connecting parents with organizations that can provide college preparation resources and can help increase graduation and college enrollment rates. Given the high student-to-counselor ratios and the data showing that parents felt schools did not adequately help them in understanding how to pay for college, partnering with outside organizations can help fill the gap. Organizations like UNCF, the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund or FormYourFuture.org can offer significant amounts of scholarships and/or college supports for students.
Prioritize student safety	Safety was a significant priority for parents in the study.[32] While there are many facets of safety—such as physical, mental or health, one thing remains the same—even above academic rigor, parents want to ensure their children are cared for and protected. Schools should consider the following: 1. Performing equity audits that address discipline, arrests and restraints by race at local school districts and schools. 2. Reviewing and addressing school support staff ratios to understand how schools are investing in policing compared to support services. Increased policing and understaffed support staff could yield deep inequities in schools. 3. Disciplining students that perpetuate violence against students of color, given that Office for Civil Rights data show that nationally, Black students are overrepresented in bullying based on race.[33] Schools must swiftly address these issues and not sweep such issues under the rug, which further alienates and harms Black students.

Recommendations for the Higher Education Sector

Make intentional efforts to expose students and families to college opportunities	Though most Black parents want to see their children attend college, many parents want assistance in this endeavor. Colleges may consider the following: 1. Offering virtual informational sessions with local schools on the admissions process and financial aid. Schools must think creatively on meeting students and families where they are. 2. Establishing virtual and in-person college tours for groups of students that may not have access to in-person opportunities. 3. Ensuring counseling educator programs on college campuses have standards and stand-alone coursework on college and career readiness. 4. Creating structured student ambassador or mentorship programs to help K-12 students glean insight from current college students in various student leadership programs. UNCF research with high school students showed they would like to hear from current college students. 5. Creating intentional partnerships to expose more students to HBCU opportunities. Knowledge and promotion of HBCUs is often waning in K-12 schools. Some HBCUs have created partnerships with schools and districts to increase awareness of HBCUs. Moreover, several states hold HBCU fairs and some are also virtual.
Create intentional pipelines with districts and charter management organizations for increasing educator diversity	HBCUs play a key role in diversifying the teacher and education leader workforce, which makes a difference for student outcomes. Schools and districts must be intentional in recruitment efforts with HBCUs. This may look like the following: 1. Establish partnerships with K-12 stakeholders and communities to create interventions, programs and HBCU-K-12 schools, like Howard Middle School of Math and Science, Florida A&M Developmental Research Schools, Wake Young Women's Leadership Academy (Saint Augustine University), The STEM Early College at North Carolina A&T and others. UNCF is embarking on new HBCU-K-12 partnership initiatives to help create and deepen partnerships with HBCUs to transform communities through K-12 education. This work will entail school creation, teacher pipelines and other interventions.[34] 2. Establishing HBCU-K-12 local partnership programs like the Norman C. Francis Teacher Residency Program at Xavier University, Claflin University's Call Me MISTER Program or Tennessee State's Grow Your Own program to increase representation of Black educators. 3. Partnering with local donors to create scholarship opportunities for potential educators in local area schools.

Recommendations for the Higher Education Sector

Ensure teacher training programs include anti-racist, culturally relevant teaching practices	Teacher preparation programs that do not teach future educators how to navigate the classroom setting for diverse learners do students and future educators a grave disservice. A teacher education program can be both academically rigorous and socially conscious at the same time—the two concepts are not mutually exclusive but are, in fact, inextricably linked. Such programs may engage in the following: 1. Establishing course and programmatic audits to ensure the program has an equity framework.[35] 2. Creating courses that specifically address anti-racism, but also embedding these topics in regular courses of study. 3. Intentional hiring and promotion of faculty of color to ensure that students are taught by diverse and competent scholars.
Partner with K-12 schools and districts to provide financial aid literacy to students and families	The report and previous research have shown that the high cost of college is a key barrier to enrollment, and oftentimes students and parents have difficulties understanding the financial aid process. Higher education institutions may consider the following: 1. Administering online financial literacy webinars. 2. Offering workshops with local schools. 3. Ensuring that university websites are transparent and provide key details and deadlines on financial aid. Outside of the child's school, parents ranked websites as the second most-used source for finding out information on college for their children. 4. Developing interventions for parents and students to avoid the "summer melt" with financial aid information and housing requirements. Interventions such as social media, website updates and summer events may help families stay on top of key requirements for enrollment for the academic school year.

Conclusion

This report provides insight into the perspectives of Black parents on several important issues in education. As UNCF's K-12 Advocacy Initiatives celebrate over a decade of work in the K-12 sector, we wanted to reflect back on a key impetus for this work—uplifting African American parent voices. We hope the findings illuminate the valuable contributions of Black families but also the integral role that Black teachers play in students' lives. At UNCF, we know that Black parents matter and can help inform policy solutions and priorities across the country. But it is not enough to just hear Black parents and caregivers, but to wholeheartedly believe them and, more importantly, act in ways that center their voices as key stakeholders in their child's education.

Appendix

Logistic Regression Models

While the models below represent Black parents' perceptions of teacher representation, suspensions, aspects of fairness and racial lesson plans at their child's school, it is important to mention a key underlying argument and assumption of this paper: believe Black parents. Parents' perceptions of the learning environment not only make a difference in outcomes, but their perceptions matter greatly in the education of their children. Moreover, as previously mentioned, Black parents are engaged and have a keen understanding of the learning environment of their children. Eighty-three percent of Black parents have interactions with their child's teachers either daily, weekly or monthly, 63% review their child's test scores and other grades to track progress and 51% attend PTA meetings monthly or every few months. Black parents are keenly aware of the educational environments of their children.

Dependent Variables	
VARIABLE	**DESCRIPTION**
Model 1: Black Parents' Ratings of College Importance for Their Child	This is a dichotomous variable coded as follows: 1= college attendance is extremely, quite, or somewhat important; 0= not that important, not important at all
Model 2: Black Parents' Ratings of Child Discipline	This is a dichotomous variable coded as follows: 1-child was suspended in last year, the year before, two or more years ago; 0= no suspensions
Model 3: Atlanta Black Parents' Ratings of Schools' Racial/Social/Cultural Lesson Plans	This is a dichotomous variable coded as follows: Atlanta Black parents' assessment of child's school providing lesson plans that address racial, cultural and social issues 1= school does a very/fairly good job; 0= falling somewhat short, falling very short
Model 4: Indianapolis Black Parents' Ratings of Schools' Racial/Social/Cultural Lesson Plans	This is a dichotomous variable coded as follows: Indianapolis Black parents' assessment of child's school providing lesson plans that address racial, cultural and social issues 1= school does a very/fairly good job; 0= falling somewhat short, falling very short
Model 5: Indianapolis Black Parents' Ratings of School Treating All Races Fairly	This is a dichotomous variable coded as follows: Black parents in Indianapolis assessment of their child's school treating all students fairly 1= school does a very/fairly good job; 0= falling somewhat short, falling very short

The following independent variables are included in all of the five models.

Key Independent Variables	
VARIABLE	**DESCRIPTION**
Black Teacher Representation	This is a dichotomous variable coded as follows: 1= most, many, about half African American teachers at child's school; 0= just a few African American teachers, hardly any or no African American teachers at child's school

Control/Contextual Variables	
VARIABLE	**DESCRIPTION**
Parent Age	This variable is coded as follows: 1= 18-24, 2= 25-29, 3= 30-34, 4= 35-39, 5= 40-44, 6= 45-49, 7= 50-54, 8= 55-59, 9= 60-64, 10= 65-69, 11= 70-74, 12= 75 and over
Parent Income	This variable is coded as follows: 1= Less Than $20k, 2= $20,000-$29,999, 3= $30,000-$39,999, 4= $40,000-$49,999, 5= $50,000-$59,999
Parent Education Level	This variable is coded as follows: 1= grade school, 2= some high school, 3= high school graduate, 4= some college, no degree, 5= vocational training/2-year college, 6= 4-year college/bachelor's degree, 7= some postgraduate work, no degree, 8= 2 or 3 years postgraduate work/master's degree, 9= doctoral/law degree
School Type	This variable is coded as follows: 1= most, many/about half Black students at child's school, 0= just a few Black students, hardly any or no Black students
Black Student Representation	This variable is coded as follows: 1= most, many/about half Black students at child's school, 0= just a few Black students, hardly any or no Black students

TABLE 1. Logistic Regression—Influence of Black Teacher Representation on Black Parents' Ratings of College Importance (Model 1)
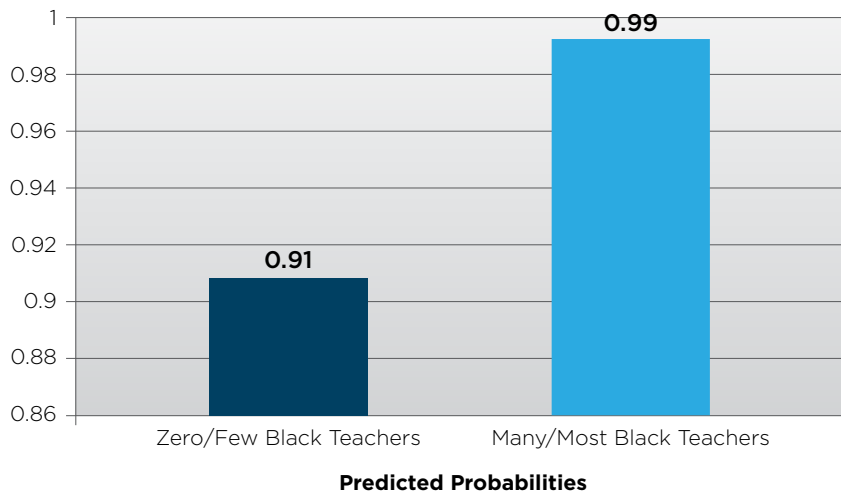
Dependent Variable: Black Parents' Rating of College Importance	COEFFICIENT	ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS
Black Teacher Representation	2.12*	.74
Parent Age	-.06	.13
Parent Income	.20	.28
Parent Education Level	.08	.17
Child's School Type	-.30	.89
Black Student Representation	-.41	1.06
Constant	2.45	2.00

*Statistically Significant, *P*<.05   N= 473

FIGURE 1A: Influence of Black Teacher Representation on College Aspirations for Child, National

The Probability That Black Parents View College as Important for Their Child Is Higher if Their Child Attends Schools with More Black Teachers vs. Fewer Black Teachers

Predicted Probabilities

TABLE 2. Logistic Regression—Influence of Black Teacher Representation on Suspensions of Black Parents' Children, National (Model 2)

Dependent Variable: Black Parents' Rating of Child Discipline	COEFFICIENT	ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS
Black Teacher Representation	-1.25*	.40
Parent Age	.18*	.08
Parent Income	-.23	.15
Parent Education Level	-.19	.12
Child's School Type	.03	.45
Black Student Representation	.61	.60
Constant	1.38*	.97

*Statistically Significant, $P<.05$ N= 469

FIGURE 2A: Impact of Black Teacher Representation on Child Suspensions, National

The Probability That Black Parents' Children Receive an Out-of-School Suspension Is Lower for Children Attending Schools with More Black Teachers

Predicted Probabilities
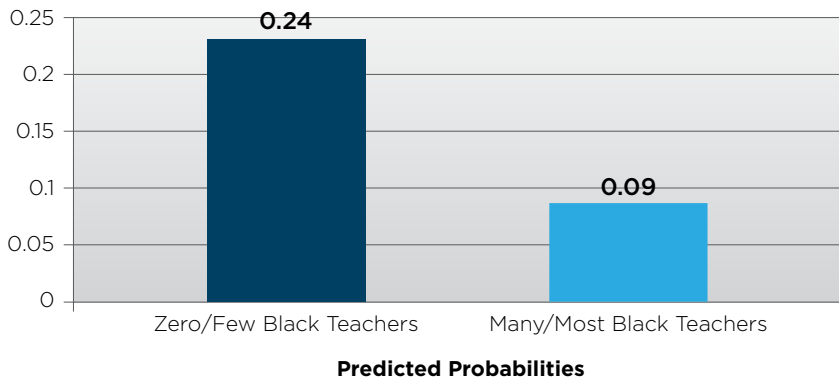
TABLE 3. Logistic Regression—Influence of Black Teacher Representation on Ratings of School Offerings of Racial, Cultural, Social Lesson Plans, Atlanta (Model 3)

Dependent Variable: Black Parents' Ratings of Schools' Racial/Social/Cultural Lesson Plans	COEFFICIENT	ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS
Black Teacher Representation	2.03*	.57
Parent Age	.15	.10
Parent Income	-.23	.24
Parent Education Level	.46*	.14
Child's School Type	-.22	.59
Black Student Representation	-.29	.69
Constant	-1.35	1.09

*Statistically Significant, $P<.05$ N= 184

FIGURE 3A: Impact of Black Teachers on Quality of Racial/Cultural/Social Lesson Plans Offered, Atlanta

The Probability That Black Parents Agree That Their Childs' School Does a Good Job Offering Lesson Plans that Reflect Racial, Cultural, Social Issues Is Higher for Schools with More Black Teachers

Predicted Probabilities
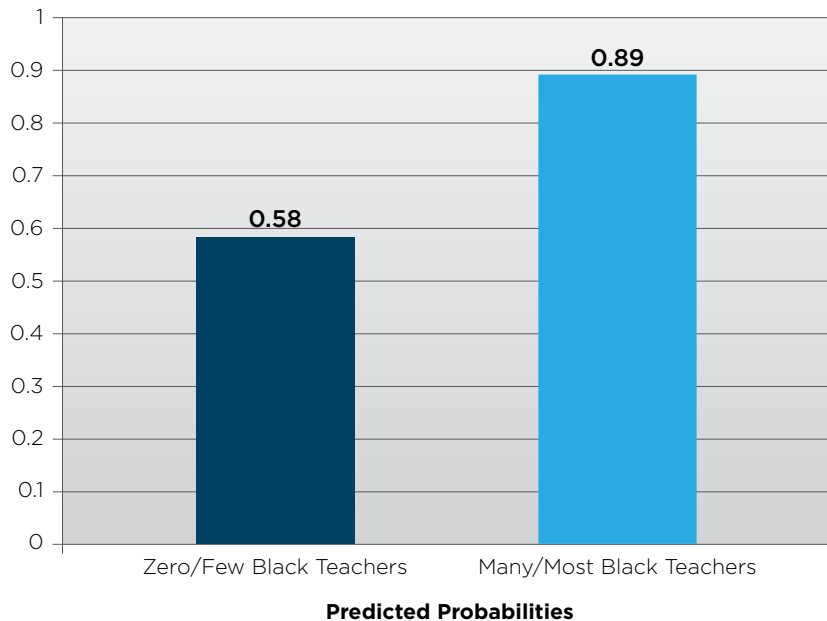
TABLE 4. Logistic Regression—Influence of Black Teachers on Ratings of School Offerings of Racial and Cultural Lesson Plans, Indianapolis (Model 4)
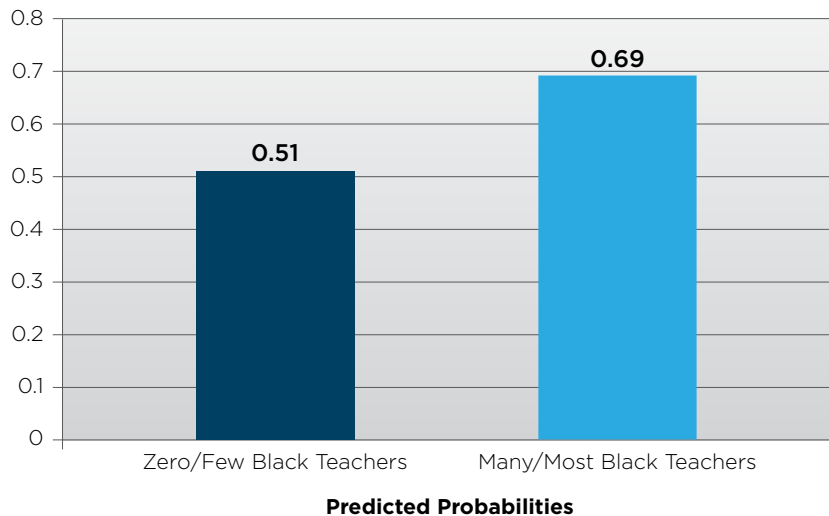
Dependent Variable: Black Parents' Ratings of Schools' Racial/Social/Cultural Lesson Plans	COEFFICIENT	ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS
Black Teacher Representation	.79*	.42
Parent Age	-.18	.11
Parent Income	.18	.18
Parent Education Level	.01	.14
Child's School Type	-.33	.47
Black Student Representation	-.23	.55
Constant	.73	1.9

*Statistically Significant, $P<.05$ N= 178

FIGURE 4A: Impact of Black Teachers on Quality of Racial/ Cultural/Social Lesson Plans Offered, Indianapolis

The Probability That a School Does a Good Job Offering Lessons Plans That Reflect Racial, Cultural, Social Issues Is Higher for Schools with More Black Teachers

Zero/Few Black Teachers: 0.51
Many/Most Black Teachers: 0.69

Predicted Probabilities

TABLE 5. Logistic Regression—Influence of Black Teachers on Rating of School Treating All Races Fairly, Indianapolis (Model 5)

Dependent Variable: Black Parents' Ratings of School Treating All Races Fairly	COEFFICIENT	ROBUST STANDARD ERRORS
Black Teacher Representation	1.99*	.60
Parent Age	-.65*	.16
Parent Income	.24	.24
Parent Education Level	-.04	.21
Child's School Type	-1.5*	.68
Black Student Representation	-.93	.91
Constant	5.72	1.43

*Statistically Significant, $P<.05$ N= 185

FIGURE 5A: Impact of Black Teachers on Perceptions of Fairness in Child's School, Indianapolis

Probability That Black Parents Agree That School Treats All Races Fairly Is Higher for Parents Whose Children Attend Schools with More Black Teachers

Predicted Probabilities

- Zero/Few Black Teachers: 0.73
- Many/Most Black Teachers: 0.93
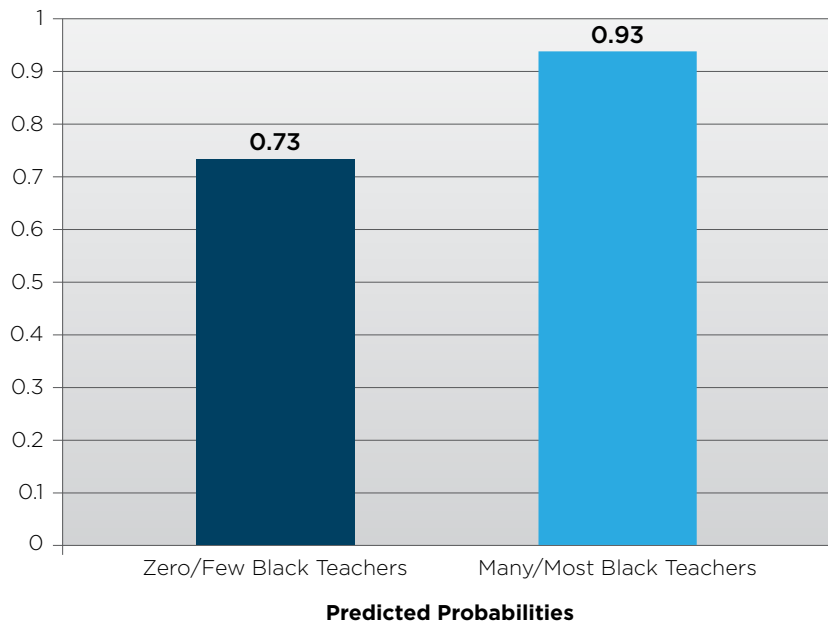
Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted with Black parents of school-aged children in Atlanta and New Orleans in 2018. The focus group in Atlanta consisted of eight parents between the ages of 35 and 64. The focus group in New Orleans consisted of four Black parents between the ages of 30 and 64.

City Samples

In addition to the 500 parents in the national sample, we surveyed 1,200 low- to moderate- income Black parents in six different cities across the country. Cities were chosen based upon UNCF engagement and/or cities with high populations of African Americans. 200 Black parents in each of the following cities were surveyed: Chicago, Indianapolis, Atlanta, Houston, Memphis and New Orleans.

TABLE 6. African American Parent and Caregiver Demographics

Age	23%- 18-34 36%- 35-44 41%- 45 and older
Education	44%- High school or less 35%- Some college 21%- 4-year college +
Gender	27%- Male 73%- Female
Number of School-Aged Kids	43%- One child 35%- Two children 22%- Three or more children
Area Type	72%- City 17%- Suburb 11%- Small town/rural
Income	43%- $30k or less 21%- $30k-39K 36%- $40-59K
Marital Status	34%- Single 50%- Married/Living with partners 5%- Separated 6%- Widowed 5%- Divorced
Relationship to Child	73%- Mother/father 19%- Grandparent/blood relative 8%- Step or foster parent/legal guardian

Endnotes

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[30] Department of Education Press Release. "U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Issues Resource on Race and School Programming." August 2023. Retrieved from: Retrieved from: https://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/us-department-educations-office-civil-rightsissues-resource-race-and-school-programming

[31] Note, while this suggestion is important, schools in some states must unfortunately navigate the current climate regarding mandates against certain race-based content.

[32] Subsequent research will delve more into what parents mean when they say safety is important.

[33] Office for Civil Rights. Civil Rights Data Collection. (2017-2019). State and National Estimates. https://ocrdata.ed.gov/estimations/2017-2018

[34] Learn more at UNCF.org/HBCUK12

[35] For more information, please see UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson report, *The Heart Work of Hard Work: Black Teacher Pipeline Best Practices at HBCU Teacher Education Programs* by Dr. Keeley Webb Copridge, LaTasha Mosley, and Dr. Raeshan Davis

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