

INNOVATE

UNCF K-12 Advocacy, working
to ensure *A Seat at the Table*



THE UNCF K-12 ADVOCACY DEPARTMENT RELAYED THE FINDINGS OF “A SEAT AT THE TABLE” THROUGH A TWO-PANEL DISCUSSION IN APRIL 2018 IN WASHINGTON, DC. PANEL ONE WAS MADE UP OF (L TO R) TANZI WEST BARBOAR, MODERATOR; ERIKA MCCONDUIT, ESQ., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, URBAN LEAGUE OF LOUISIANA; ERIKA HARRELL, PAVE & ERN, DC; KHALIA MURRAY, FORMER UNCF-WALTON K-12 FELLOW AND DC PREP PRE-K TEACHER; AND JAMAR MCKNEELY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND CO-FOUNDER, INSPIRENOLA.



PANEL TWO PARTICIPANTS WERE (L TO R) DR. WIL DE PILAR, VICE PRESIDENT, HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE, THE EDUCATION TRUST; DR. MEREDITH ANDERSON, SENIOR RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, UNCF; DR. JOSEPH DAVIS, SUPERINTENDENT, FERGUSON-FLOISSANT SCHOOL DISTRICT; DR. MICHAEL LOMAX, PRESIDENT AND CEO, UNCF, MODERATOR; AND DR. RODERICK L. SMOTHERS, SR., PRESIDENT, PHILANDER SMITH COLLEGE (NOT PICTURED).

Getting students to and through college is the primary mission of UNCF. Often times, the focus is on the “through college,” as preparation for and access to college is often not the first thing that comes to mind when it comes to earning a degree. Increasingly UNCF has found it vital to ensure that students of color are prepared before they reach high school to succeed and “get to college.” As one of the leading voices in K-12 education reform, UNCF’s K-12 Advocacy department released a new report, *A Seat at the Table: African American Youth’s Perceptions of K-12 Education*[®], that examines changes needed to improve K-12 education for African American students—to ensure they are college- and, eventually, career-ready.

The report, authored by the UNCF Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, is the latest in a research report series that studies the current state of K-12 education. We’ve all heard the saying “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu”—suggesting that if you’re not represented during the decision-making process, you’re in a vulnerable position and are at great risk of being left out of critical decisions and long-term outcomes. Because little research includes minority youth voices about education reform, this study examines the perspectives of low-income African American youth from select cities throughout the nation. Key findings in *A Seat at the Table* include:

- Slightly more than one-third of African American youth felt race may limit their opportunities in life.
- Nearly half of youth reported being placed in detention at some point in their education.
- 35% of African American youth indicated that having more engaging teachers would improve their high schools.

The report also outlines key recommendations for policymakers and school administrators which include reducing barriers to college attendance; address widespread student discipline issues that create unequal opportunities to learn; challenge the deficit narrative about educational aspirations of low-income African American youth; and improve school-based practices and partnerships to increase African American student achievement.

Parallel to the report's release, the, K-12 Advocacy team also hosted an UNCF Education Summit. The event served as a face-to-face discussion point for the student perspective on education, a call to action on P-16 issues and a platform for engagement and exploration of the role of African American voices—specifically HBCUs—in education reform efforts. The summit brought together a distinct group of African American leaders, advocates and K-12 education reformers, including Jamar McNeeley of Inspire NOLA, Mendell Gringer of Campaign for School Equity, Erika Harrell, parent advocate, and Khalia Murray, current elementary classroom teacher—all with the mission to make the “getting to” part of the college journey all that much more possible.