



**BLACK EDUCATION
RESEARCH COLLECTIVE**
TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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

A Look at the Nation's Capital One Year After the Insurrection

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This metro report and the full report are available on the BERC website at:

www.blackedresearch.org

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.

The Black Education Research Collective (BERC) conducted a national study 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?

This policy report explores findings from BERC’s national study with a unique focus on Washington, D.C., informed by survey data collected in the spring of 2021 from 39 respondents located in the District as well as four virtual focus groups comprising District residents.

As in the national study, findings from Washington D.C. underscored the historical and systemic nature of trauma in Black communities as a result of racism in U.S. institutions. 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 the 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 states and localities begin to allocate Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds for K-12 schools, they must consider the needs of Black communities. With schools reopening for in-person learning, future research should reflect outcomes and well-being of Black students and teachers, using their experiences during COVID-19 as a comparison point. It will be important to address racial trauma from the pandemic era compounded with prior issues that have also persisted in a virtual learning environment. Such educational equity and justice efforts will only be strengthened when informed by 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>. An overview of the national study can be found on page 24 of this report.

Introduction

For Black Americans, 2020 was a particularly challenging year. While dealing with the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Black America confronted pervasive systemic racism after the murder of George Floyd whose death led to nationwide protests and a reckoning with historical, systemic, and institutional racism. The Black Education Research Collective’s (BERC) report, *Black Education in the Wake of COVID-19 & Systemic Racism: Toward a Theory of Change* (Horsford et al., 2021), reveals how the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism impacted Black education¹ from the perspective of the Black community. The study is the result of a national online survey and virtual focus groups with stakeholders in Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Detroit, MI; Las Vegas, NV; New York, NY; and Washington, D.C. This policy report explores findings from BERC’s national study with a unique focus on Washington, D.C.

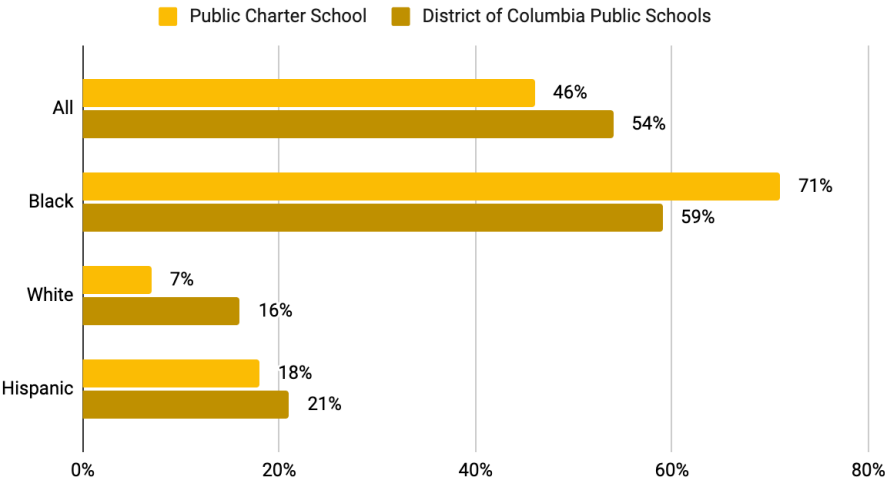
Gentrification, School Choice, and Washington, D.C.

Once nicknamed “Chocolate City,” Washington, D.C.’s population was once over 70% Black in 1970; however, the city now joins a growing list of states without one majority racial or ethnic group (Rusk, 2017). This demographic change is the result of intentional gentrification policies designed to attract more diverse residents and build an economy less reliant on a federal workforce by embracing a “Creative Economy” that “leverages creativity, innovation, and knowledge to drive growth” (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, 2014, p. 10). Black and native Washingtonians have made efforts to fight gentrification. For example, in 2018 a group of Black residents sued the city for changing its zoning regulations in industrial areas to allow for residential use and replacing low-income public subsidized housing with mixed-income housing, claiming the use of land policy to attract a “Creative Class” is discriminatory and that none of the existing residents will benefit from the developing projects because they could no longer afford to live in the communities (C.A.R.E. v. Bowser, 2018).

Gentrification’s impact can also be seen in Washington, D.C.’s school population and school choice policies.

Washington, D.C. only educates about 100,000 students but has 67 local education agencies including the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) System and 240 schools including 123

Figure 1: Student Population by School Type and Race/Ethnicity



¹ 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).

public charter schools (PCS) (District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2020). Every D.C. student is assigned a DCPS school based on their residence; however, almost half of D.C. students attend a PCS (District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2020) and, thanks to DCPS open enrollment, more than three-fourths of the city's students attend a school of choice whether it's a DCPS or a PCS (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, 2017). (See Figure 1 for a breakdown of Washington, D.C.'s student population by school type and race/ethnicity)

COVID-19, School Closures, and Trust

To slow the spread of COVID-19, Washington, D.C. schools closed their doors and went remote for much of 2020. The prolonged school closure sharply divided the city. One survey found that families living in mostly Black and low-income Wards 7 and 8 were far more likely to prefer remote learning than families in other wards (Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, 2020). This divide reflects the national debate over "school reopenings" which has been persistently split along racial/ethnic lines. For example, a February 2021 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 48% of white parents preferred physically reopening schools while 80% of Black parents preferred a virtual learning environment for their children (Horowitz, 2021).

So, why are Black families less eager to send their children back to school? This report explores the answer to this question by explaining factors that may contribute Black families' reasoning. Parents send their children to school trusting that teachers, administrators, and other school staff will keep them physically and emotionally safe and provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. When these expectations are not met, there is a breakdown in trust which results in weakened relationships or, even worse, a severing of ties (Byrk & Schneider, 2002).

The curiosity around Black parents' hesitancy to return their children to in-person instruction

suggests that mainstream narratives and discourses about U.S. education continue to view schooling as a singular experience for all children regardless of race, culture, or class status. This ignores both the historical and contemporary gaps and disparities that have long plagued the U.S. educational system. It assumes that schools have always, or ever, been safe places for Black families. This report explores issues of trust among Black parents, teachers, and students in education systems in Washington, D.C.



Summary of Metro Study Methods

The Washington, D.C. report findings were informed by survey data collected in the spring of 2021 from 39 respondents and four virtual focus groups. A total of 16 participants attended virtual focus groups conducted between February - April 2021. Virtual focus group participation was open to Washington, D.C. teachers, parents, and students who identified as Black. The word cloud presented as Figure 2 illustrates the terms that survey respondents in Washington, D.C. used to describe their ethnic or cultural identity after confirming they identified as “Black.” Some of the participants served in dual roles as educators and parents. All participants were middle-class. As such, socioeconomic class diversity was a limitation of the study. For more demographic information about study participants, see Appendix A: Survey Participants in D.C. Metro Area and Appendix B: Focus Group Participants in D.C. Metro Area by Stakeholder Type.



Figure 2: Participant Ethnic and Cultural Identity

Findings

COVID-19 and systemic racism had a disproportionate and traumatic impact on Black students, families, and communities.

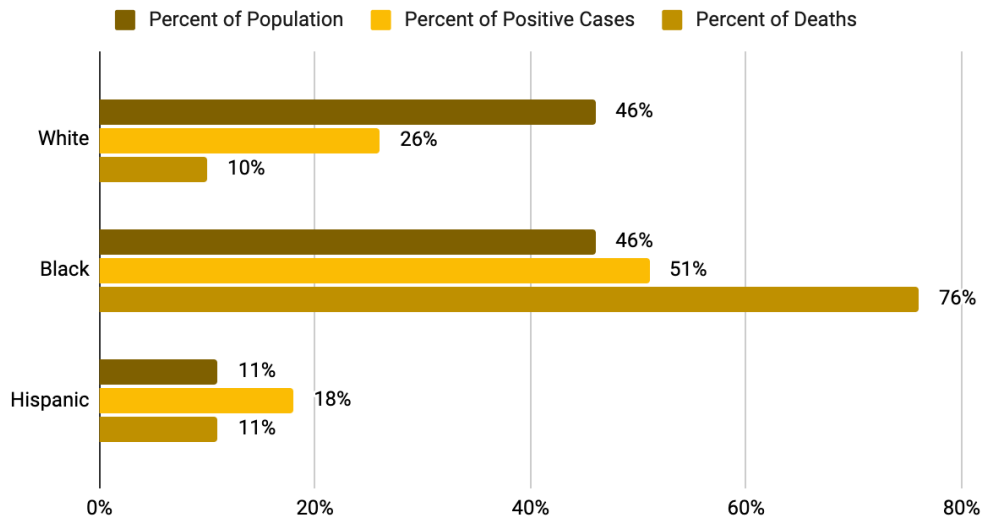
Black students, families, and educators all agreed that COVID-19 and systemic racism both had a disproportionate and traumatic impact on their communities. The most recently available data, depicted in Figure 3, show that while Black residents in Washington, D.C. represent just 46% of the population (United States Census Bureau, 2019), they made up 51% of COVID-19 cases and 76% of deaths.² COVID-19, subsequent high unemployment rate of 15% for Black D.C. residents (Economic Policy Institute, 2021), and racial unrest that followed only added to the trauma facing Black communities in the District.

With the backdrop of COVID-19, the nation’s capital was uniquely challenged by issues of racism, protests, and political unrest, including several 2020 “Black Lives Matter” protests which elicited a violent response from federal law enforcement. In response, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser ordered the words “Black Lives Matter” painted on a downtown street located in front of the White House - a move that drew both praise for its perceived symbolism and criticism for its

² Data as of August 2021, retrieved from <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/data> on 8/17/2021.

perceived performative politics (Nirappil et al., 2020). Just months later, Washington, D.C. was the site of the attempted insurrection on January 6, 2021, when self-proclaimed white nationalists and supporters of former President Donald Trump stormed the United States Capitol Building to prevent Congress from certifying President-elect Joe Biden's election victory (Fernando & Nasir, 2021).

Figure 3: D.C. COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by Race/Ethnicity



Yet, for Black Americans, the majority of events of 2020 were not new. The Black community has a long and well documented history of protesting for civil rights and racial justice. While many outside of the community see progress, especially in the election of America's first Black president, participants in this study reflected on what seems to be a never ending cycle of generational trauma and protest. When asked to reflect on the current state of affairs - the rise of white nationalism, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic - one Black parent explained:

"We have made progress since the civil rights movements from the '60s. But in all actuality we're still dealing with the same thing our grandfathers and great-grandfathers and them was dealing with, which is White supremacy that America is ran by or that the world is ran through...I don't think nothing has changed since I was little... Well, the biggest change, I will say, is stuff is getting broadcast more. They're seeing the videos of it now...it's a camera on all of it. They're still getting away with it, though."

As Black Americans have experienced racialized trauma for generations, many have become desensitized to the incidents of police violence. The prevalence of video recordings showing Black death and trauma in real time has certainly contributed to this desensitization. Parents who participated in this study shared that they try to shield their children from the videos and prioritize protecting their children from becoming the next victims of police violence. As one Washington, D.C. parent explained:

It's like, 'Okay, the police have shot another person. The police have killed another Black man. It's just another day.' So, unfortunately, that's just how it is, especially over the summer we're seeing all the shootings and stuff...I have ingrained in [my kids]... If you ever get stopped by the police, if the police ever stop you other than saying hello, then don't answer their questions. Tell them they need to call your mother. Even if they're asking you a question about an incident, 'Did you see anything?' say nothing. And it's not that I don't want them to trust the police or see the police as being a community member, I want them to preserve their rights and don't want the police to badger my children in any way.

The stresses Black parents and children dealt with because of racism and police violence were in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic and everyday life circumstances. Participants spoke about knowing families who lost loved ones during the pandemic due to drug overdoses, or of students having to take care of younger siblings while parents still had to report to work. The Black teachers who participated in this study spoke of the deep personal connections they have with their students and the communities in which they work. These connections and the deep investments they have within the community allow them to see the impact of trauma first hand. One Black special education teacher recalled:

I've seen it personally from doing visits because I check-in with my students. I know where each of our students live. Even though I live in Virginia, I will drive into DC. Like the other day I had a student that was in crisis and needed support. And so I was available to just drive up into Southeast [D.C.] and we took care of that situation. But I know some of my students' parents have lost jobs, struggling to pay rent. I know the school has stepped up to provide resources like food. We have a food bank, but the last time we did the food bank...the lines just get longer and longer and longer. And the school had to partner up with different entities like my church and other churches to support some families who were really in crisis.

These experiences reflect the historical role that churches and schools have played in Black communities as sources of strength, community, and support for Black families (Billingsly & Caldwell, 1991). Churches have historically been places of refuge for Black Americans where they could not only worship, but receive social services and education opportunities - particularly at times when public institutions were intentionally or systemically failing these communities. Today, both churches and schools continue to play this role.

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

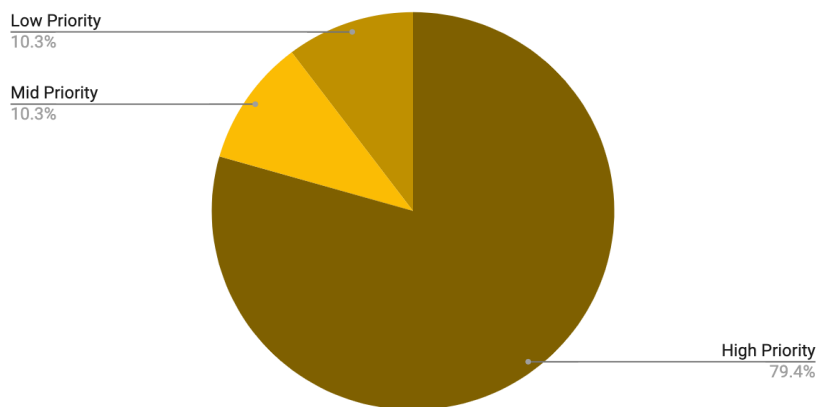
Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, student mental health was a concern across the country and in Washington, D.C. with nearly 20% of students exposed to an adverse childhood experience (Coffin and Meghjani, 2020). The problem was so pervasive and worsened by the pandemic that in April 2021, doctors reported increased suicide attempts for children in

Washington, D.C., linking the pandemic to increased anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Stein, 2021). Racial trauma, the pandemic, and its ensuing crises have heightened emotions across the country and uniquely in the Black community. One Black parent spoke of trying to protect her children from the traumatic images:

We definitely restrict the news; the visuals. We talk about what's going on because a lot of it comes through their social media. I've definitely asked them not to watch those videos when they come through. We've talked about how that can be damaging to them mentally.

In addition to the racial trauma, Black parents also expressed concern that the COVID-19 pandemic was having on their children's mental health - particularly being out of school and away from friends for much of the year and "just dealing with the challenges of being in the pandemic as a kid, socially and what that means...just mental health, being

Figure 4: Programs to support the health and well-being of students and families



isolated, all that kind of stuff." One Black high school student indicated that COVID-19 and social distancing was impacting her mental health yet did not feel she had the support she needed: "I think a lot of my teachers are not really concerned with the mental health aspect

of school and the toll that being at home all day is taking on all of us."

According to survey data, as shown in Figure 4, D.C. community members overwhelmingly believe mental health supports should be priorities for education leaders post-pandemic. To be fair, this work was happening in some schools prior to the pandemic, but more can be done. Being intentional in providing supports and services to Black students and families as well as to educators will put schools on a path to greater learning and teaching outcomes, because it targets overall well-being. Several teachers spoke about the work happening in their schools. One teacher explained:

You have [to have] a social, emotional learning component, because if the students are not available to learn, you're not going to accomplish anything. So at the school where I've worked at, we do have a S.E.A.L. That's what we call it. A Social, Emotional, Academic Learning block first thing in the morning that has helped because yes, I work with students with trauma, but also I have parents that are willing to work with us.

Black D.C. community members responding to the survey offered several specific suggestions that education leaders could take to address the mental health of Black students and families, and dismantle systemic racism and its lingering effect of racial trauma, such as: targeting resource reallocation to historically marginalized populations; increasing funding for public education and free college; providing a culturally responsive curriculum; hiring more Black teachers in the classrooms; increasing salaries for educators; and assuring better overall conditions.

However, there is little faith that any of these suggestions will come to fruition. In the words of one community member: *"I don't think that real change will occur. Time will tell."*

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

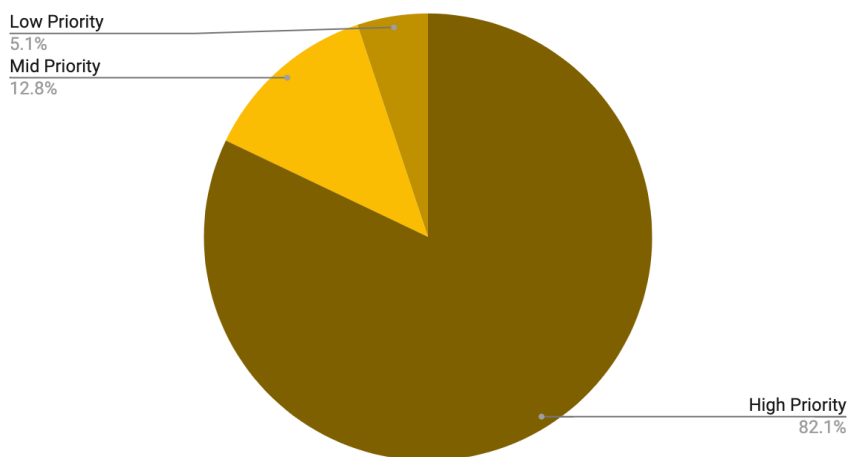
With little notice, students were told they could no longer attend school in-person and had to quickly transition to remote learning. They had to say goodbye to their friends, their social clubs, and their sports leagues. The school year they had planned with homecomings, proms, and high school graduations were suddenly cancelled. For Black students, these life changing events were multiplied by the racial justice movement and political unrest occurring throughout the country.

An overwhelming majority of Washington, D.C. survey respondents expressed that addressing the trauma and stress of students should be a high priority going forward, as shown in Figure 5.

When they needed support the most, Black students in Washington, D.C. who participated in this study felt a lack of responsiveness from the educators in their lives. With all that Black students were facing between the pandemic, systemic racism, and the normal pressures of living day-to-day life, the Black students in this study wished teachers made space to check-in on their mental and emotional health. A student remarked:

I also have a teacher that just doesn't ask us anything about what's going on. We never talk about things that are going on in the world or we never do check-ins. I have one teacher who does check-ins every two weeks or so. Just mental health check-ins, like how are we all doing. And I just have one

Figure 5: Address the stress and trauma of students



teacher that, even when we bring that stuff up, he's like, "Well no, we have an agenda already that we have to get through. So this will have to be saved for another time," but then never makes that time for us to actually talk about these things. So I haven't really had too many conversations about things that are going on, just because my teachers are not looking for that.

The lack of awareness or will to address the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black students by teachers who prioritize maintaining a “normal” academic routine despite these outside pressures reinforces skepticism and distrust by Black students and families in the school system’s ability to adequately care for Black children.

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

When asked on a survey whether their school or school district’s response to COVID-19, anti-Black violence and the resulting protests, and the insurrection at the Capitol in response to the presidential election strengthened or damaged their trust in their ability to serve Black students, most national and Washington, D.C. parents indicated that the responses damaged their trust. Some respondents provided additional thoughts:

- *No not at all. There is no justice, there's "just us".*
- *Succumbing to the pressure of white parents to get their kids back in school ASAP (using Black kids as their reason) when most Black families feel safer keeping kids at home.*
- *Haven't seen any response.*
- *Even though all of these traumatic events have occurred, schools (are) not speaking out and up about their continued role in racism and lack of equity for Black and brown children.*
- *I didn't trust in the first place.*

Trust in systems and institutions was a dominant theme across participant responses. Participants shared that distrust stems from a lack of transparency and poor communication. For Black families, returning to in-person schooling was the epitome of institutional distrust. For many, receiving messages about school reopening and the pandemic generally—vaccines, testing, transmission rates—from community members and trusted sources was vital in making decisions about returning to schools.

Washington, D.C.’s response to COVID-19 drew considerable criticism from Black parents and teachers alike. The city’s approach to reopening schools was criticized for not considering the concerns of Black communities who have been disproportionately impacted by the spread of COVID-19. As noted, a citywide survey found that parents living in wards 7 and 8, where the city’s Black and low-income population is concentrated, were far less likely to support their children’s return to in-person instruction. For some Black community members, there was little

trust in the city or school district's ability to keep children safe. One Black D.C. teacher and parent reflected:

I just felt there was nothing that they could have said for me to have sent my children back, nothing at all. And the school where I teach...our custodial staff is not great at all. They don't keep the building clean during the regular school year. So I wouldn't trust anybody's child's life depending upon their cleaning. I mean, of course, teachers, we'd clean our own spaces most of the time, just for whatever reason. But there was nothing that DC Public Schools could have told me to send my kids back into the building.

Though few Black parents are interested in sending their children back to in-person instruction, city leadership has pushed a return to schools. So, whose preferences are being prioritized? This question adds to the distrust of Black parents and teachers in the city's institutions. One Black teacher shared:

The mayor mentioned a lot that parents have interest in returning back to schools, and they made that optional. But at my school for fifth grade, we have three out of 26 kids that have come back in person. And for sixth grade we have six out of 27 students that have come back in person. Noting that I do work at a predominantly Black school, so I'm just very curious to know who these conversations were with and if it's really reflective of the entire district and every single ward where healthcare isn't as accessible to people.

There was a high-profile battle between the city and the Washington (D.C.) Teachers Union over whether, when, and how to begin a return to in-person instruction. The battle was so heated that the District's Attorney General filed a restraining order preventing the union from striking to protest over what they described as "serious safety concerns" (Mitchell, 2021). The Black teachers in this study expressed feeling unheard, uncared for, and disposable by being forced to return to classrooms even though they believed it wasn't yet safe to do so. One teacher recalled:

We lost some teachers who ended up filing for FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act) because they just were fearful of getting their kids sick. We also went back before all teachers were fully vaccinated, so I remember getting the first shot and then we were teaching a couple of weeks and then we got the second shot so we weren't even fully vaccinated when we went back, and I felt like the district really missed that hearing teachers say because there's definitely teachers that would have went back but I think that really upset a lot of educators that they put us in that type of position, so I don't think they were really caring about anyone's wellbeing when they did that.

Black education amid a gentrifying "Chocolate City" can yield troubling outcomes for Black students, families, and communities. White encroachment and engagement in city schools influencing the allocation of city resources, school culture, and climate, and who has access to

district influence are byproducts of gentrification (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Posey-Maddox, 2014), resulting in inequitable decision-making processes and imbalances in power, as evidenced in COVID-19 return to in-person school conversations. District of Columbia Public Schools' decision to increase in-person reopening by the spring of 2021 despite little interest from many Black families, add to distrust and show that their needs are not being adequately considered. For Black parents and teachers, this approach to the COVID-19 pandemic and issues of systemic racism have further eroded what little trust existed and deepened resistance to returning to in-person instruction.

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

The educational needs of Black students are not being met. Whether it is their mental, social, and emotional health, or adequately responding to the needs and preferences of Black families in the wake of COVID-19, members of the Black community participating in this study believe more needs to be done. Among the issues discussed were disproportionate access to AP classes, a lack of extracurricular activities, overcrowded classrooms, and inequitable funding and infrastructure investments. One student observed that in Washington, D.C., education quality is dependent on the school's location:

Here in the city the schools that typically have lesser graduation rates and students attending schools are in areas where they're in predominantly Black neighborhoods or low income neighborhoods, while the "better" schools in our city that have higher...graduation rates, and get more funding and have access to more opportunity are in wards and areas where more White people live, where people that make more money and things like that.

Inequitable education funding is a persistent issue in Washington, D.C. Recent reports explain how money used to supplement the budgets of schools serving at-risk students is actually being used to pay for core staff that should be funded by the city's comprehensive staffing model (North, 2019; Roth & Perkins, 2019). One educator lamented the funding issue, saying:

DC public schools, they come up with their budget and you'll see, they say schools east of the river, their budgets have been increased. Yeah, maybe they have, but then you supplant the money. You take money from one thing and put it someplace else, instead of just giving us all of the money that we need. And then there are schools always looking at an equity lens. Okay, we need more money, there are certain schools because of the populations that need more money, you need more staff on hand, you need to truly have smaller class sizes instead of saying, "Well, class sizes don't matter. What matters is a caring, loving, certified teaching." Yeah. But she could teach a whole lot better if she had less kids in her class.

Black parents, teachers, and students in Washington, D.C. spoke to racial bias in the curriculum as an added source of distrust in the school system to meet the educational needs of Black students. American history taught in schools is riddled with historical inaccuracies at best and outright falsehoods at worst. The participants in this study not only wanted an accurate version of history taught, they also wanted a culturally relevant pedagogy, referring to an approach to curriculum and instruction that addresses student achievement while simultaneously teaching students how to accept and affirm their cultural identity and how to critically challenge schools and other institutions that perpetuate inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The concerns among parents, teachers, and students in this study reflect the national conversation to correct inaccurate and whitewashed versions of American history through efforts like the award-winning New York Times *1619 Project*, which reframes American history by centering the true contributions of Black Americans dating back to their arrival on the first slave ships. This has drawn significant pushback primarily led by White conservatives who have misrepresented these efforts. Despite tending to be a politically liberal city, Washington, D.C. parents, teachers, and students still strongly expressed the need for a more representative and culturally relevant pedagogy. Black teachers in this study explained how they have to go beyond what is in the curriculum to give their students a well-rounded culturally relevant education. As one teacher explained:

This year I tried to make a conscious effort to include Blackness in all of our classes and in our curriculum...because how are you at a predominantly Black school with predominantly Black staff and not teaching about our culture and who we are?

Another Black Washington, D.C. teacher pointed out the robust Black history in the city that students are not aware of. He explained how he raised donations to take his children on field trips throughout the city so they can learn first hand:

I think it was once Frederick Douglass learned how to read, the sky was the limit. And so I guess for me, I worked a lot to take my kids on field trips. Listen, before the pandemic, we was out the building. I would ask for donations. I was taking them everywhere to build their background knowledge because a lot of my students don't even have the background knowledge. They didn't even know that Frederick Douglass' house is in D.C. in Anacostia. I'm like, "What? Oh, we going there." And the kids told me I was lying. I said, "Bet." Took them there. They was like, "Oh." I said, "This is where he lived. Booyah!"

These reflections from Black parents, educators, and students suggest that education leaders have much work to do to earn their trust and meet the educational needs of Black students. Critically important is the recognition that education is primarily a local and state issue and that it is truly incumbent on city leaders to prioritize the needs of Black students to make change.

Recommendations

The findings and recommendations from the national BERC study dovetail with this report. Most of the focus groups in Washington, D.C. included parents and educators or those who held dual roles, eliciting multiple perspectives and a clear and bold vision for Black education that values the lives of Black children and youth. The recommendations that follow are specific suggestions for the Washington education community garnered from the survey responses by Black D.C. community members including teachers, parents, and students.

- 1. Protect and defend the rights of Black students to receive an appropriate and equitable education in a safe, welcoming, and affirming learning environment.**
 - Adequately fund DCPS schools and ensure that at-risk funding supplement, not supplant, per pupil funding through the comprehensive staffing model.
 - Commit to a funding equity audit to ensure each student, no matter which school sector they attend, is receiving an adequately funded education.
 - Provide alternative schooling options that families can opt-in to, beyond in-person instruction.
- 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.**
 - Commit the resources necessary for DCPS and PCS schools to meet the American School Counselor Association's recommendation that every school has a minimum student to mental health professional ratio of 250:1 (MacFarlane et al., 2021).
 - Intentionally recruit mental health professionals who identify as Black, particularly for DCPS and PCS schools serving predominantly Black students.
- 3. Provide professional development to teachers and school leaders on how to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black students.**
 - Collaborate with mental health professionals knowledgeable about the social, emotional, and academic needs of Black students to deliver professional development that trains educators on how to teach Black students and students facing adverse childhood experiences. Such professional development should include a critical analysis of the institutions, policies, and practices that uphold white supremacy and cause social and emotional harm to Black children and their families.
- 4. Modernize curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to develop the academic ability of all students and prepare them for civic life by teaching the truth.**

Since 2020, the Washington D.C. State Board of Education (SBOE) has undertaken the process of reevaluating its social studies curriculum with plans to make it "culturally responsive" and "anti-racist" (District of Columbia State Board of Education, 2020). Additional steps that should be taken include:

- Revise all K-12 disciplines adopting an interdisciplinary approach that provides students with the critical knowledge and skills to implement their bold vision for their communities and schools.
- Develop a culturally relevant teacher pedagogy in collaboration with community and educational leaders, families, students, the SBOE, the DCPS and PCS operators, traditional teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities including the District's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) - Howard University and the University of the District of Columbia - alternative teacher preparation programs, and appropriate organizational allies. The new culturally relevant teacher pedagogy should prepare educators to teach students history from the perspective of marginalized communities and teaches students to notice, question, and challenge exclusionary and oppressive systems and patterns of inequitable opportunities and outcomes.

D.C. parents, students, and teachers were concerned about learning loss and how schools will support children when they ultimately transition back to in-person instruction. To support this transition, it is recommended that the District:

- Provide additional resources and services to support students as they transition to in-person instruction.
- Adopt a "learning acceleration" strategy which teaches grade-level material to returning students, stopping to fill in missing, underlying skills as necessary. This strategy has been found to be more effective than traditional remediation in helping students regain pre-pandemic skills and picking up where they left off. This is especially true for students of color and students from low-income families (TNTP, 2021).

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.

- Bring together organizational allies to develop a recruitment strategy targeting prospective teachers of color to enroll in teacher preparation programs or for already certified teachers to apply for open positions in local school districts.
- Develop a culturally relevant teacher preparation initiative to support the curricular changes described in recommendation four. This work can take place in collaboration with the same community, state, and institutional actors. The culturally relevant teacher preparation initiative must include a critical reflection

on teachers' histories, biases, and assumptions regarding race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class (Dantley, 2010). It must also include specific professional development on family engagement and how to share power with Black families and communities in the interest of Black students.

- Require (or incentivize) school districts to complete equity audits that assess their hiring practices and organizational culture and its impact on teacher diversity. School districts should use the results of these equity audits to create a strategy that would remedy any problems that are identified.

6. Restore and rebuild community trust by engaging Black students, families, educators, researchers, and leaders as experts and equal partners in education.

The voices and needs of Black communities should be reflected in decision-making to shape school policy. One approach is:

- Create education councils consisting of elected officials and policymakers as well as parents, community leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders. The group would bring their perspectives and collective insight to decision-makers in an attempt to have greater transparency and communication.

Conclusion and implications for future research

As states and localities begin to implement the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for K-12 schools, they must consider the needs of Black communities. With schools reopening for in-person learning, future research should reflect outcomes and well-being of Black students and teachers, using their experiences during COVID-19 as a comparison point. It will be important to address racial trauma from the pandemic era compounded with prior issues that have also persisted in a virtual learning environment.

In future research, collecting more experiences from students, from a wider socio-economic background, and from greater language diversity (those who speak multiple languages, whose second language is English, etc.) and those from various Black identities such as Afro-Latino and East African communities will also enrich our findings. The participants in this study graciously shared their expansive vision for Black education. These additional questions may deepen our understanding of the Black community's vision for Black education in Washington D.C.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Survey Participants in D.C. Metro Area

Table 1. Survey Participants in D.C. Metro Area (n=42)	
	Percentage
Self Identify as Black ³	100
Relationship to Education	
K-12 Professional	23.8
Parent	66.6
Higher Education	14.3
Community Member	7.1
Grandparent	0
Student	4.8
Policymaker	0
Other	7.1
Type of School	
Traditional Public School	26.2
Charter School	52.4
Private School	11.9
Parochial School	2.4
Homeschool	0
Other	2.4
No Answer	4.8
Age	
14-18 years	2.4
19-24 years	0
25-34 years	21.4
35-44 years	23.8
45-55 years	50
56-70 years	2.4
70 and above	0
Education	
Some High School	0
High School	2.4
GED	0
Some College	12
Bachelor's Degree	9.5
Master's Degree	54.8
Doctorate Degree	21.4
Trade School	0
Prefer Not to Say	0

³ Black Americans, Black people, Black communities, and Black people living in the United States are used interchangeably to describe people of African descent living within the United States.

Appendix B

Table 2: Focus Group Participants in D.C. Metro Area by Stakeholder Type

	D.C. Metro Area	National Total
Students (Grades 9-12)	4	14
Parents	5	17
Teachers	5	28
School Leaders	1	12
Community Leaders	0	11
Total Participants	15	82

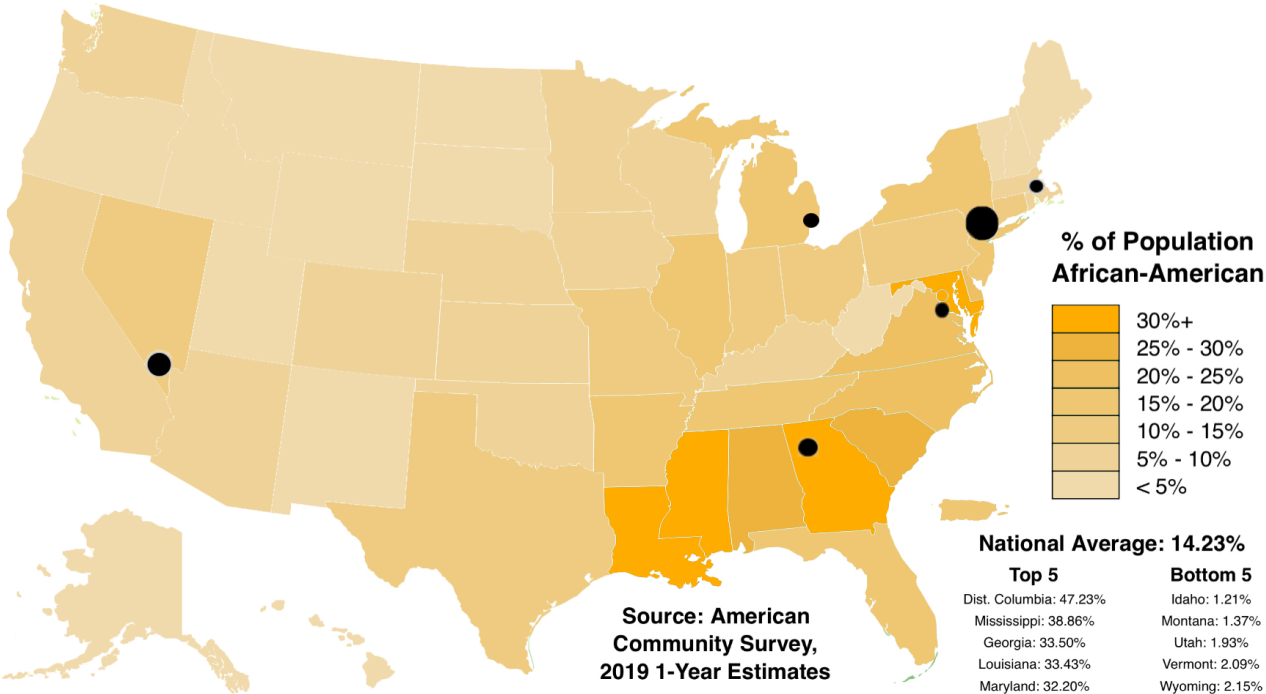
*19 focus groups

*82 total participants

Full Project Overview

This report is based on data drawn from a national study conducted by the Black Education Research Collective (BERC), *Black Education in the Wake of COVID-19 & Systemic Racism: Toward a Theory of Change* (Horsford et al., 2021), revealing how the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism 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?

Culturally sensitive research approaches informed survey and interview protocol development, data collection, analysis and reporting (Tillman, 2020). Data were collected between January-May 2021 using a national online survey (n=440) and 19 virtual focus group interviews involving 82 participants across six metropolitan areas: Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Detroit, MI; Las Vegas, NV; New York, NY; and Washington, DC. Survey and focus group participants included high school students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders. Participants ranged from 14 to more than 70 years of age and identified as Black. The 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%).



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 past year and the implications for education post-pandemic. 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. Amid lack of trust in public schools and institutions, participants offered recommendations to leaders and policymakers at all levels to modernize curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher preparation and to create safe and welcoming learning environments so that schools are more equitable and just.

The full report and metro reports focused on the metro areas can be found at:
<https://www.tc.columbia.edu/black-education-research-collective/research/>



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