



HEAR US, BELIEVE US, **INVEST IN US:**

Helping Parents Advocate for Black Teachers

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



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**CENTER FOR
BLACK EDUCATOR
DEVELOPMENT**



HEAR US, BELIEVE US, INVEST IN US:

Helping Parents Advocate for Black Teachers

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Foreword

We are proud to share with you this toolkit providing all the necessary ingredients for parents to become greater advocates for their children's future by championing the cause of increasing the Black teacher pipeline.

A recent UNCF study, ***Hear Us, Believe Us: Centering African American Parent Voices in K-12 Education***, showed that African American parents feel more respected, hold higher college-going aspirations, and report fewer instances of exclusionary discipline when their children attend schools with more Black teachers. The presence of Black teachers is not just beneficial—it's transformational for *all* students.

The toolkit serves as a playbook to help Black parents engage with local schools, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and other institutions of higher education to promote teaching as a viable career path for their students. It includes strategies for partnering with initiatives and organizations, such as One Million Teachers of Color, and on celebrating Black teachers through social media campaigns such as the Center for Black Educator Development's #WeNeedBlackTeachers.

As Elaine Wells, a parent advocate featured in the toolkit, put it so beautifully, "When Black parents stand with teachers and school leaders, we create a village that nurtures our children academically, socially, and emotionally." This toolkit is designed to amplify such voices, ensuring that Black families are heard and empowered as key partners in the fight for educational equity.

Expanding the pipeline of Black teachers will require intentional partnerships with HBCUs, because these institutions are significant producers of Black teachers for America's public education system. A recent UNCF study, *The Heart Work of Hard Work*, examined the best practices of teacher preparation programs at HBCUs. The study found that HBCUs have extensive recruitment networks, cultivate intentional relationships with students,

employ culturally responsive curricula, and provide mentorship support. These efforts help ensure that future educators graduate ready to serve their communities with excellence. In fact, studies reveal that HBCU-educated teachers have a positive impact on all students' learning environment and outcomes.

Building the pipeline will also require parents to remain engaged and equipped to advocate for policies and initiatives that support recruitment and retention of Black teachers in schools.

The stakes are high for all students. Parent involvement in the work to bring more Black teachers into the service of our young people is needed now than ever. The path to educational equity is incomplete without the active participation of Black parents as advocates for change.

By equipping families with the tools to demand and drive greater representation of Black educators, the Parent Toolkit ignites a powerful force for transformation. The evidence is abundantly clear: Black teachers are essential to building thriving, inclusive schools where every student can succeed. When parents and communities join forces to push for real change, they ensure that this work is not just a movement but a sustained commitment to equity and excellence for generations to come. And with that, we can build the diverse, dynamic teacher workforce all our children deserve.



Michael L. Lomax, Ph.D.

President and Chief Executive Officer
UNCF



Sharif El-Mekki

Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Center for Black Educator Development



Overview

Black parents are essential, fundamental partners in the education system. Yet, they are often an overlooked and undervalued stakeholder group when creating education policy. However, we know that Black parents have historically had a positive impact and influence on school culture, student safety, advocacy, engagement, and student success.¹ We must unapologetically strive to provide space for Black parents' voices in their communities, schools, on their local school boards, and in policymaking because their voices are valuable and they demonstrate a commitment to not only their children but those in their communities overall. Black parents deserve not only a seat and voice at the table, but the opportunity to determine the agenda at the table as well.

We surveyed a national sample of Black parents in our report, *Hear Us, Believe Us: Centering African American Parent Voices in K-12 Education*, and found that a key theme was the importance of Black teachers to families and student outcomes. We also found that 93% of African American parents would like more opportunities to be involved in their child's education and more input into education laws, and parents were very engaged in the learning environment of their children. **Moreover, 90% of Black parents said it would be very helpful to have resources to help them in their advocacy efforts.** As a result of these findings, UNCF—in partnership with the Center for Black Educator Development—created this toolkit to help mobilize parents to advocate for more Black teachers, because after all, who best to advocate for high-quality teachers than parents who are partners with teachers in ensuring children receive the love, care, and academic support they need. **Building on the longstanding legacy of advocacy and activism from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, this toolkit encourages parents to lift their voices for change.**

We hope the toolkit can help build a stronger group of advocates lifting their voices for educational equity, justice, and representation in schools. As the Center for Black Educator Development emphasizes, "[we need Black teachers.](#)" Likewise, we need Black parents as advocates and partners in the advocacy efforts for Black teachers—your voice is important and necessary!



93% of African American parents would like more opportunities to be involved in their child's education and more input into education laws...



Why Advocate for Black Teachers

In 2020-21, 80% of public school teachers were white, 9% were Hispanic, and only 6% were Black.² Yet a large body of research substantiates the importance of teacher representation for student outcomes. The connections Black teachers build with students are valuable to their learning and greatly benefit Black students' educational outcomes. Research shows that the mere presence of interacting with an education professional of the same race or background allows students to see those fields as possibilities.³ Black educators have also been described as “warm demanders” who hold all students to high expectations and build personal relationships to establish mutual respect in the classroom.⁴

In under-resourced schools, Black teachers have achieved the highest student retention rates and lowered out-of-school suspensions by three times the national average.⁵ Black teachers' impact also reaches far beyond the classroom through their active involvement in leading positive racial climate initiatives in their schools. These educators are going above and beyond their job requirements to amplify issues of inequities and dismantle systemic racism due to their commitment to creating a high-quality learning environment for Black students. Teachers who serve as role models, mentors, leaders, and advisers are essential to the success of all students.

The Black Teacher Difference

Similar to UNCF's [The HBCU Effect](#) demonstrating the tangible, positive outcomes from HBCUs, we know that “The Black Teacher Effect” is real and palpable. Consider a few key findings below:

- **Black Teachers—Better for All Students**—Research shows that having minority teachers benefits not just minority students, but all students.⁶ In fact, Black teachers positively impact test scores and decrease absences by more than 20% for all students—no matter their race or ethnicity.⁷
- **College Enrollment**—Black students who had just one Black teacher by third grade were 13% more likely to enroll in college. Those who had two Black teachers were 32% more likely to enroll in college.⁸
- **The HBCU Effect in K-12**—Students perform better in math when they have an HBCU-educated teacher. HBCU-educated Black male teachers spend more time with students outside their classroom (mentoring, tutoring, supporting) than Black teachers who did not attend an HBCU.⁹
- **High Expectations**—Black teachers' expectations for Black students are 30–40% higher than non-Black teachers.¹⁰
- **Black Teachers and Decreased Discipline**—Black teachers decrease the presence of Black students receiving exclusionary discipline.
 - More racial balance between teachers and students is related to the implementation of learning-oriented discipline policies rather than sanction-oriented discipline policies.¹¹
 - Black boys are less likely to be subjected to exclusionary discipline when taught by Black teachers.¹²

These findings can also be used as talking points for advocacy efforts. For additional talking points and data, visit the [One Million Teachers of Color Initiative](#) at [1mtoc.org](#).

How Parents Feel About Black Educators

Across a variety of indicators in *Hear Us Believe Us*, Black parents reported more positive outcomes and experiences when there were more Black teachers at their child's school. The findings and talking points below can also be used in advocacy efforts.

Black Teachers and College Aspirations

- 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.
- A regression model showed 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.

Black Teachers and Discipline

- Black parents and caregivers report lower instances of child suspensions when there are more Black teachers at their child's school compared to schools with few to no Black teachers.
- For Black 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.

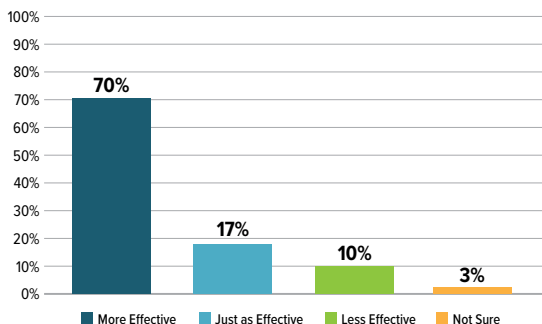
Black Teachers and School Environment

- Black teachers assist in building positive racial climates in schools. Black parents felt more respected and welcomed when many or most teachers were Black, compared to schools with fewer Black teachers.
 - While 51% of Black parents and caregivers said that their school does a very good job at making them feel respected at school, the percentage increased by nine percentage points for parents whose child attends a school with more Black teachers.

Black Leaders

- 70% of Black parents agree that educational efforts would be more effective if there were more Black leaders and organizations involved. Black leaders not only amplify issues of inequities and help to dismantle systemic racism; they also serve as role models for Black students.

FIGURE 1: Influence of African American Leaders and Organizations on Education





What Parents Are Saying



Scan QR code
to watch video

"It's extremely important for schools to have Black teachers and Black administration simply based off... understanding a society from a different lens of being Black in America..."

Ismael Jimenez— Black Parent, Administrator and Advocate

"They attended a boys Latin Philadelphia Charter school, which was cofounded by Mr. David Hardy who is a Black educator ... and that is the most access that my sons have had to Black educators is being in that school ... They're spending time with someone who looks like them, who may have the same shared experiences as them, who may have grown up where they've grown up."

Elaine Wells—Black Parent and Advocate



Talk to children who have Black educators, and I'm sure you'll find that they can give you the most honest testimony as to the effect and impact that Black educators have on them.

—Elaine Wells, Black Parent and Advocate

"He [Elaine' son] didn't really feel like college was a thing for him until he got in the school and got poured into, you know, from teachers who looked like him ... It's important because they need to be able to see what they can be. They need to be able to see what's possible."

Elaine Wells—Black Parent and Advocate

"It matters that they're seen, it matters that they are heard. It matters that they feel connected to those who are practically raising them for a third of a day ... Talk to children who have Black educators, and I'm sure you'll find that they can give you the most honest testimony as to the effect and impact that Black educators have on them." Elaine Wells—Black Parent and Advocate

"When moving to this school, this all-boys Black lead charter school for my sons, I found that partnering and supporting the teachers who are supporting my kids was ... the catalyst for my kids getting a quality education."

Elaine Wells—Black Parent and Advocate



“[Three of his children] had the experience at a very young age of having Black educators, having Black administrators, even being in an educational environment that emphasizes Blackness in a way which is affirming and also works and helps them to identify, develop their identity.”

Ismael Jimenez—Black Parent, Education Administrator and Advocate

“Had it not been for us parents standing with teachers, standing with the school leader ... my children would not be where they are today academically. And all of those educators that we’ve talked about in this entire journey ... they are all a part of my children’s village and understanding that we co-parent with educators every year.”

Ashley Thomas—Black Indianapolis Parent Advocate

“It is very important for organizations to exist that are pouring into families, pouring into community members and empowering them.”

Ashley Thomas—Black Indianapolis Parent Advocate

“When it comes to parent engagement and the process, many parents are just not aware and the information is not always accessible ... what we find is that the more parents are aware, the more information they have, the more empowered they feel.”

Ashley Thomas—Black Indianapolis Parent Advocate

“Black teachers ... play just as much an important role (as parents) in helping to foster and nurture the education and cultivation of the character and the being for the children as they grow and get older and move on to the next level.”

DaSean Jones—Parents Amplifying Voices in Education Parent Leader

“I fell in love with art...I wanted to be an art designer because of that Black male role model that I did have because he showed us just the different aspects that weren’t in the curriculum and about our own history.”

Sharnetta Boone-Ruffin—Parents Amplifying Voices in Education Parent Leader



Black teachers ... play just as much an important role (as parents) in helping to foster and nurture the education and cultivation of the character and the being for the children as they grow and get older and move on to the next level.

**—DaSean Jones,
Parents Amplifying
Voices in Education
Parent Leader**



What You Can Do

1

Testify at local school board meetings and write local officials about the importance of Black teachers and leaders.



TIPS

- See [our drafted template](#) as a guide to engage with local officials and district leaders. Consider opportunities for in-person, virtual, or written testimony.
- Explore your community connections to help with escalating the importance of teacher representation. See our community connections tool to help with your advocacy efforts.
- Review [National PTA's Testimony Guide](#)
- Engage with your elected officials at usa.gov/elected-officials
- Use talking points in this toolkit for letters, testimony, and other advocacy efforts.

2

Build stronger community connections with local community-based organizations, HBCUs, parent organizations, and schools.



TIPS

- Advocate for support [and collaboration with HBCUs](#), which have a longstanding history of supporting and establishing K-12 schools and providing schools with high-quality [Black educators](#). Research shows that HBCU-educated teachers are having [tremendous impacts on students](#).
- Advocate for more teacher pipeline fellowships that help recruit, support, and train Black teachers. Share information about the Center for Black Educator Development and UNCF's [Future Teachers of Excellence Fellowship](#).
- Connect with local schools or organizations to help with advocacy efforts (i.e., Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE), Black Alabamians for Education, Oakland Reach, etc.). If you are unfamiliar with the parent organizations in your local area, please reach out to UNCF for assistance.



Advocate for support and collaboration with HBCUs, which have a longstanding history of supporting and establishing K-12 schools and providing schools with high-quality Black educators.

- 
- Consider local community-based institutions like churches, barber shops, beauty salons, or community centers to help spread the word and garner support for your advocacy causes among other parents. UNCF's first report with Black parents, *Done to Us Not With Us*, showed that churches and parents themselves were the most influential and trustworthy sources for supporting parents in their child's educational journey.

3

Advocate for better data transparency related to teacher race data, retention, and hiring practices in your school or district.



TIPS

- If you cannot locate teacher diversity data in your local area, contact your state agency or local education agency regarding data transparency on teacher demographics and hiring initiatives. Parents should be able to make decisions on schools having adequate knowledge of the teacher diversity in schools.
- Helpful tools:
 - [Data Quality Campaign Toolkit](#)
 - [The New Teacher Project Teacher Demographic Dashboard](#)



Consider local community-based institutions like churches, barber shops, beauty salons, or community centers to help spread the word and garner support for your advocacy causes among other parents.

**4**

Support Black teachers in your community, school, and home.

TIPS

- Support and share Donor's Choose "[Quad to Classroom](#)" initiative that specifically aims to fund initiatives for HBCU alumni educators.
- Celebrating teachers goes beyond Teacher Appreciation Day. Think of ways to celebrate Black teachers throughout the year, from promoting [more pay](#) for teachers to advocating on their behalf to school leadership. Listen to teachers; ask about their needs and ways you can support them.
- One effective way to support Black teachers is to inspire future generations at home. Across the country there are places where Black educators are thriving while also making a difference in their communities. Encourage your children to explore a career in education. [Learn more](#) about how The Center for Black Educator Development is actively working to attract high school students to become transformational education professionals. UNCF also has a K-12 Fellowship for HBCU juniors aimed at building a robust pipeline of high-achieving African Americans engaged in education.



One effective way to support Black teachers is to inspire future generations at home. Across the country there are places where Black educators are thriving while also making a difference in their communities.

5

Join or implement a social media campaign to support and uplift Black teachers.

TIPS

- Digital advocacy is a great way to garner support for and bring attention to advocacy causes. Join our [#ParentsforBlackteachers](#) campaign and record a video to share your story and the importance of Black teachers for your family. See our social media toolkit here: [UNCF.org/Parent_Toolkit](https://www.uncf.org/Parent_Toolkit)
- Join Black teacher campaigns like the Center for Black Educator Development's [#WeNeedBlackTeachers](#) (CBED) [Campaign](#) and the [One Million Teachers of Color Initiative](#).
- Use our [Social Share](#) page to elevate Black parent voices.

Resources



Center for Black Educator Development is committed to rebuilding the national Black Teacher Pipeline, so Black and other disenfranchised students benefit from a full quality public education. Learn more at: thecenterblacked.org



Education Trust has developed the 50 State Data and Policy Teacher Diversity Tool with each state's efforts to increase the number of teachers of color in their workforce. Learn more at: edtrust.org/rti/educator-diversity



Learning Heroes helps inform and equip parents to best support their children's educational and developmental success. Learn more at: bealearninghero.org



Memphis Lift is an organization that empowers and uplifts parents, grandparents, and community members in their pursuit of policy reform and a world-class education system for every child. Learn more at: memphislift.org



National Council on Teacher Quality Teacher Diversity Dashboard highlights how the diversity of the teacher workforce compares to the diversity of adults nationwide and within individual states. Learn more at: teacherdiversity.nctq.org/dashboard



National PTA is a child advocacy association devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement. Learn more at: pta.org



National Parents Union is a parent-led organization that works to advocate for policies and initiatives that support families and promote educational equity. Learn more at: nationalparentsunion.org



Oakland Reach is a parent-powered organization that commits itself to listening and building direct-service solutions that build agencies and liberate communities to shape their own lives. Learn more at: oaklandreach.org



One Million Teachers of Color Campaign is a national call to action with the goal of rallying the nation to add one million teachers of color and thirty thousand leaders of color to the education workforce by 2030. Learn more at: 1mtoc.org



Parents Amplifying Voices in Education is dedicated to creating an environment where the vision for education in Washington D.C. is created with children and families, not for them. Learn more at: dcpave.org



The New Teacher Project's National K-12 Teacher and Student Demographic Dashboard enables policymakers, educators, researchers, journalists, and the general public to stay informed and understand student-teacher racial diversity trends in their district or state. Learn more at: tntp.org/k-12-demo-data



Additional UNCF College Readiness Supports for Parents

UNCF has a long-standing history of supporting students in their pursuit of higher education. Since its inception, UNCF has assisted more than 500,000 students in earning their college degrees. As the nation's largest private scholarship provider for minority group members, UNCF awards approximately \$65 million annually in scholarships to students attending more than 1,100 colleges and universities across the country, including its network of 37 HBCUs.



Scan the QR Code to access the following college readiness resources:

- **UNCF K-12 LinkTree**—One-stop shop to UNCF college readiness resources.
- **UNCF.org/Parents**—As a parent, you want what's best for your child. But sometimes it's hard to know how to support your child's learning. These tips and website can help.
- **UNCF Email List**—To learn more and stay up to date on UNCF's resources, visit: [UNCF.org/Updates](https://www.uncf.org/Updates)
- **I Have a Question: What Parents and Caregivers Can Ask and Do to Help Children Thrive at School**—This tool provides parents with a set of questions to ask and important issues to consider when approaching their child's teachers, principals, and counselors about their development. As a parent or caregiver, it can be hard to know how to support your child's learning, but asking your child's educators the right questions is a good place to start. [UNCF.org/parentchecklist](https://www.uncf.org/parentchecklist)
- **The HBCU Resource Guide**—UNCF's HBCU Resource Guide is designed to assist families, students, and school administrators in learning more about historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). This document provides information on scholarships, college-planning databases, and key facts about HBCUs. [UNCF.org/hbcuresourceguide](https://www.uncf.org/hbcuresourceguide)
- **Getting into College: A Readiness Guide**—UNCF's college readiness guide provides families and students with a comprehensive college readiness checklist, outlines the pivotal steps in preparing for college, and shares additional websites and resources that are useful to students as they prepare for their post-secondary journey. [UNCF.org/collegechecklist](https://www.uncf.org/collegechecklist)
- **UNCF Webinar Series**—The UNCF Community Webinar Series is a vital resource for students aiming to minimize student debt and maximize their educational opportunities. Join and take the first step towards a brighter, debt-free future. The monthly webinars discuss scholarship opportunities, internship and career exploration, and success strategies. To ensure you don't miss out on these informative sessions, please RSVP at [UNCF.org/collegewebinars](https://www.uncf.org/collegewebinars)

Contact UNCF

Questions about UNCF scholarships or other opportunities? Need assistance with setting up your UNCF account? Please contact UNCF at: p: **202-810-0258**
e: **Scholarships@uncf.org**

Contact Your Local Officials Template

[Your Name]
[Your Address]
[City, State, Zip Code]
[Email Address]
[Phone Number]
[Date]

Dear [Recipient 's Title] [Recipient Name],

I am writing to alert you as a parent and community advocate about a matter of deep concern that affects our community. And we need your help.

Here's the concern. While 55% students of color attend U.S. public schools, only 22% of U.S. teachers are of color and only 6% are Black teachers. Several studies show the positive benefits that Black teachers have on students, including decreases in suspensions, deeper student engagement, and greater access to rigorous courses. Research shows that Black teachers benefit not only Black students, especially Black male students, but all students. In fact, Black teachers positively impact test scores and decrease absences by more than 20% for all students—no matter their race or ethnicity. Additionally, Black students who have just one Black teacher in K-3 are 13% more likely to graduate from high school and 19% more likely to go to college.

As a concerned parent, I believe our community would benefit from investing in Black teachers. Your advocacy is needed in these areas:

- (1.) Expanding recruitment networks and creating partnerships with historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) which have a longstanding history of producing high-quality Black educators.
- (2.) Partnering with colleges to create teacher residency programs.
- (3.) Partnering with non-profit organizations that support educator diversity work.
- (4.) Investing in teacher pathway programs that help motivate local high school students to pursue careers in education.

While recruitment efforts of Black teachers are important, retention of existing teachers is critical as well. Our local school system should consider providing or strengthening teacher coaching or mentorship programs with financial incentives; creating space for community building for educators; supporting teacher growth and leadership opportunities, and increasing teacher pay, as a recent study shows that Black teachers earned lower salaries than other teachers.

With continued parental support, I believe we can be more effective as we work together to support our nation's K-12 educators as they prepare the next generation of college and career ready students. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Your Title]

Advocacy Community Connections

The graphic below indicates a few places to start advocacy efforts in your community. Use the form on the following page to help organize your engagement.





OFFICE/ORGANIZATION	CONTACT INFORMATION		TASK
EXAMPLE: Local School Board Representative	John Doe	John.Doe@schoolboard.org	Look up next school board meeting and opportunities to provide written, online or in-person testimony
District's Family Engagement Office			
School Parent Teacher Association/Organization (PTA/PTO)			
Assistant Superintendent			
District Superintendent			
Community/Advocacy Organization(s)			
Local School Board Representative			
Student-led Organizations			

Tell Us Your Story

We want to hear from you! Has a Black teacher impacted your life in a positive way? Tell us! How should we recruit and retain more Black teachers? Let us know! Have a promising program that is working to support and recruit Black teachers? Uplift it! We want to hear from Black parents. Your voice is important! Scan the QR code to record a brief video.



Note: Videos may be used to further teacher recruitment and retention initiatives and may also be featured on UNCF.org or its social media channels.



Endnotes

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