



September 26, 2018

Joy Schaefer, Chair of Work Group 4  
Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education  
Room 121, House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: Recommendations for Analysis, Strategies, and the Integration of Racial Equity into all Levels of Education Services**

*Via Electronic Mail*

Dear Chairwoman Schaefer and Work Group 4 Members,

I am writing to follow up on the Work Group's September 21, 2018 discussion pertaining to additional recommendations on race equity. **As the committee charged with studying the "At-Risk" Students, we urge you to create specific recommendations to address racial disparities for African American students in the learning environment related to academic achievement, school discipline, and access to advanced courses, as well as any other issues that show clear racial disparities.**

There are distinct and unique barriers in the education system as it relates to educational services for students of color, especially African American students<sup>1</sup>, as evidenced by state data indicating wide gaps in achievement along racial lines. The schism is often fueled by opportunity gaps<sup>2</sup> that emerge in every district, but are especially pronounced within our largest districts serving higher populations of students of color. There is no doubt that the long-standing gaps in each of these categories impact students in high poverty, but we are very concerned about the lack of deep conversation around the impact of race on students of color regardless of their socio-economic status. It is true that some students will be addressed by many of the recommendations outlined thus far; however, many of the broad strategies are likely to overlook the unique needs of African American students if we do not infuse targeted strategies for racial equity into every level of educational services.

It is for these reasons that the ACLU continues to ask that the committee consider explicit policies, strategies and staffing to address racial inequities (you will find examples below). While poverty is an important proxy for reaching the needs of underserved children, by no

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara T. Bowman, et al., *Addressing the African American Achievement Gap: Three Leading Educators Issue a Call to Action*, The National Association for the Education of Young Children, (2018), <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2018/achievement-gap>.

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Strauss, *The Real Problem in Education: the "Opportunity Gap,"* April 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/04/26/the-real-problem-in-education-the-opportunity-gap/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.cf7ccfdd6cd3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/04/26/the-real-problem-in-education-the-opportunity-gap/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cf7ccfdd6cd3), clarifying that "achievement gaps arise out of our opportunity gaps . . . [which] are cumulative and involve much more than formal schooling."

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means should it be the sole determining factor for determining and targeting resources.<sup>3</sup> It is well-documented that many societal factors have a harmful impact on the physical and biological well-being of students of color.<sup>4</sup> As a result, educational services should include strategies that respond to those unique realities. This is what equity looks like – providing students with what they need and moving away from a one-size fits all approach that has failed in the past.

Per your request, please see below a snapshot of widely-supported strategies pulled from the Oregon Department of Education’s “African American/Black Student Success Plan.”<sup>5</sup> This plan can be used to target programs and create structures to improve the success of Black students in Maryland. In addition to these, we are confident that this workgroup will be intentional about incorporating the expertise of Dr. Ivory Toldson.<sup>6</sup> Please note that these strategies can be adjusted to support the needs of other ethnic/racial groups experiencing challenges.

### RACE EQUITY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Early childhood to kindergarten - Increase access to high quality early learning and include the following strategies to prepare African American/Black students:<sup>7</sup>

- Identify and implement culturally specific pedagogy, curriculum investments and assessments.
- Increase the number of families receiving home visiting supports.
- Increase the amount of culturally specific information, supports and services available for newly-arrived African/Black immigrants, and increase partnerships with community-based programs to promote and encourage parent engagement.

### Elementary, Middle and High School<sup>8</sup>

- Provide explicit training on racial, linguistic and cultural responsive pedagogy and practice, and social justice for teachers and administrators.
- Collaborate with culturally specific community-based organizations to provide wraparound services, youth mentoring, and other supports to assist in reducing absenteeism or discipline incidents.
- Increase the amount of culturally specific information, supports, and services for newly-arrived African/Black immigrants.
- Collaborate with resettlement agencies, Local Health Departments, school districts and community-based organizations to support literacy and education for families and children prior to their placement in mainstream schools.

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<sup>3</sup> R. L’Heureux Lewis-McCoy, *Suburban Black Lives Matter*, 53 *Urban Education* 145-161 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917747116>, noting the diversity of experiences within the Black community.

<sup>4</sup> Dorianne J Levy et al., *Psychological and Biological Responses to Race-Based Social Stress as Pathways to Disparities in Educational Outcomes*, 71 *American Psychological Association* 455-473 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0040322>.

<sup>5</sup> House Bill 2016: *African American/Black Student Success Plan*, (2016), <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/equity/AfricanAmericanBlackStudentEducation/Documents/aabsSuccessPlan.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Ivory Toldson, professor at Howard University and president and CEO of QEM Network, was announced as a consultant to the Kirwan Commission at the September 5, 2018 meeting.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 33 – 34.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 38.

### High School<sup>9</sup>

- Provide culturally responsive counseling and career services to increase graduation rates for African American students.
- Create access to culturally specific community-based wrap-around supports to guide students and families towards the path to graduation.

### Governance

- Make the needs of African-American students a priority in the Local Education Administration Master (accountability) Plans—the document updated annually to state how districts will improve achievement for high-needs students.
- Identify the specific accountability partners for each of the above strategies (e.g. State Department of Education; LEAs, other State agencies).

Thank you for your consideration of the information herein. Again, this is not an exhaustive list of strategies and we would also like to acknowledge the work of the Early Childhood Education and High Quality Teachers and Leaders Work Groups to tackle aspects of racial equity. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 39.