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Equity 911: Framing Educational Equity as a National Emergency

by Larissa Malone

Author Bio

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Abstract

This paper considers equity as a crisis faced in classrooms across America. As such, an emergency framework is utilized to propose an approach that is apropos to the intense urgency a crisis requires. Using the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Planning Frameworks and their guiding principles, a survey of equity topics is discussed. In doing so, it is concluded that the level of inequity currently allowed in the field of education must be honestly assessed and a comprehensive plan that engages multiple stake- holders must be put in place for justice to be fully realized.

Introduction

There have been several legal educational mandates that explicitly include race, gender, ability, socioeconomics and psychological well-being in an attempt to create equitable learning environments where all children can succeed (ESEA, 1965; NCLB, 2001; ESSA, 2015), and these documents have been educators' guideposts from coast to coast. Indeed, it is a pervasive belief that "education is the most powerful weapon to change the world" (Mandela, n.d.), and the U.S. has definitively realized that schooling envelops more than just academic prowess and requires creating a more just society. First Lady Michelle Obama (2015) reiterated the integration of equity into the promise of education when she declared:

I believe that education is the single most important civil rights issue that we face today. Because in the end, if we really want to solve issues like mass incarceration, poverty, racial profiling, voting rights...we simply cannot afford to lose out on the potential of even one young person (para. 19).

Yet, for all the attention given to education and equity, there has been little progress. Disparities remain stark and statistics are grim. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2019), 11% of White children live in poverty, while 32% of Black children, 32% of Native American/Alaska Native, and 26% of Hispanic children

live in poverty; 4th grade White student reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are +26 higher than Black students, +23 higher than Hispanic students, and +30 higher than Native American/Alaska Native students; 4th grade ELL student reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) are - 38 points lower than non-ELL students; Black, Hispanic, and Native American/Alaska Native students lag behind White students' 89% graduation rate, with 78%, 80% and 72% rates, respectively. Further, Black students are three times more likely to be suspended and expelled than White students (Brown Center on Education Policy, 2017).

These statistics are alarming. Even still, we tend to approach educational equity with kid gloves and without urgency. In some respects, we place a minefield in front of marginalized students and hope they are lucky enough to find their way through safely. Moreover, the recent pandemic has revealed how deeply public institutions are failing students in the clear and present. A three-month jolt to normative practices clearly displayed that day-to-day operations were just band-aids barely covering up the inequities. Vulnerable populations already identified were affected and new at-risk populations emerged. When the band-aids were removed, it revealed that the cuts of inequity were so much deeper than imagined (Fortuna et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2020; Laster Pirtle, 2020). It can be likened to President Barack Obama's declaration after Hurricane Katrina, "when disaster strikes, it tears the curtain away from the festering problems that we have beneath them" (Terra Daily, 2005). It is no wonder that protests took place in the aftermath of schools closing, led by the same youth that we serve in our schools. There is a clear demand for institutional equity on all fronts like no other time in recent history, and educational institutions are no exception.

An Equity Emergency Plan

The current event of the health pandemic was faced eyes wide open, through the declaration of a national emergency with all 50 states following suit with their own alerts. We must do the same regarding educational equity – *we must declare a state of emergency on equity* – to bring the necessary urgency and do what is required to address it. At this critical time, there can be no equivocation. The words of Nikole Harris Jones (2020) resonate in this context in that, "if we are truly at the precipice of a transformative moment, the most tragic of outcomes would be that the demand be too timid and the resolution too small...we must get to the root of it" (para. 19). We must be radical in our actions and this begins with fully recognizing the disastrous state of equity in schools.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA, 2020a), intervenes before, during, and after disasters and its purpose is to help the people such emergencies affect. FEMA's strategic plan is the same for both natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, and medical emergencies, and manmade disasters, such as terrorist attacks, oil spills, and nuclear explosions. I propose that we utilize this same operational model to declare a

state of emergency on equity. This is not to imply that equity should be managed, as I firmly believe that the goal should be to eradicate inequities. Rather, I posit that we must employ frameworks to tactically combat inequity at a level that is appropriate and necessary.

FEMA (2020b) has five National Planning Frameworks: 1) Prevention, 2) Protection, 3) Mitigation, 4) Response, and 5) Recovery. In the following section, I provide definitions and then propose two possible ways that each framework might be enacted during an equity emergency. In doing so, I discuss various topics related to equity, all of which are essential for all students to achieve, regardless of their “race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or income” (America’s Promise Alliance, et al., 2018).

Prevention

The Prevention Framework is designed to prevent or stop possible disasters (FEMA, 2016a). Federal and state entities take on the bulk of the responsibility due to the broad scope and amount of resources needed. The Prevention Framework emphasizes threats must be taken seriously and the guiding principles are adaptability and readiness to act. What does this framework look like in an equity emergency? I have chosen to focus on Prioritizing Equity and Disrupting Normative Practices.

Prioritizing Equity. National education, economic, legal, housing, and social policies have reinforced this equity emergency by design (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Orfield et al., 2014; Rothstein, 2015). Because of this, prioritization must begin at the highest levels of government and start with equitable funding. Studies have found that increased funding leads to higher academic outcomes, competitive wages for teachers, and lower rates of poverty in adulthood (Baker, et al., 2016; LaFortune et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2014), although schools that have the most inequities rarely are the recipient of progressive distributions (Baker et al., 2018). Assumptions essential for financial prioritization include: 1) funding based on student need, 2) allocation determined by student poverty (as it serves as proxy for other marginalizing factors), and 3) an overall increase in the level of funding available (Baker et al., 2018). Equitable funding prioritizes equity and sends the message that the threat is being taken seriously.

Disrupting Normative Practices. Damage can be prevented in an equity emergency by disrupting our normative practices and looking outside our borders for solutions. Darling-Hammond (2010, 2015) observed other countries and found reform that deals with issues as they arise needs to be replaced with systemic changes that enable long-term academic success for all students. She also brought to the forefront the importance of universal early childhood education which seems like a natural key preemptive measure. Moreover, she pointed out that countries that have higher academic outcomes invest heavily in professional development and provide educators work days with enumerative opportunities for planning and collaboration. In a world where America falls in the

Middle of the pack in academic performance (PISA, 2012), we must learn from others in our efforts to create equitable learning environments.

Protection

The purpose of the Protection Framework is to “deter threats, reduce vulnerabilities, or minimize the consequences” associated with an emergency (FEMA, 2016b, p. 3). This includes securing the safety of individuals, both their physical bodies and the facilities in which they are located. It focuses on different institutions working together, each sharing their unique capabilities (Lixin et al., 2012). With an equity emergency in mind for this framework, I will discuss Rethinking Partnerships and Recruiting Teachers of Color.

Rethinking Partnerships. During this equity emergency there must be a network in place that secures the safety of all students. Darling-Hammond (2015) underscored that successful academic systems take care of the whole child, including meeting all the needs of children from healthcare to housing. This means that schools must have enough librarians, nurses, counselors, and social workers. While many schools across the nation partner regularly with outside agencies and credentialed professionals, there are other schools, particularly those in rural communities, that do not (Loeb, 2016). Further, in the age of defunding the police, the previous partnerships that schools formed must be thoughtfully reconsidered to assure that there is no perpetuation of the school-to-prison pipeline (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Bunts, 2020; Morris, 2016).

Recruiting Teachers of Color. Secretary of Education John King Jr. said, “we have strong evidence that students of color benefit from having teachers and leaders who look like them” and continued, “but, it is also important for our White students to see teachers of color in leadership roles in their classrooms and communities” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Yet, 80% of teachers are White (NCES, 2019). Recruiting teachers of color must be prioritized. At the same time, learning environments must be conducive to retention by challenging schools to go beyond the current ideals that make all marginalized people feel unwelcome, including teachers (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Burns Thomas, 2020). Moreover, there can be no onus on teachers of color to fix equity. Rather, it is the responsibility of everyone to deter the threat, as outlined in the Protection Framework.

Mitigation

The Mitigation Framework centers on reducing “loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters” (FEMA, 2016c, p. 1). It requires a risk-conscious culture (FEMA, 2016c, p. 1) that considers the possibility of disaster when policies and structures are made. The Mitigation Framework puts people first (Lixin, et al. 2012), although there

is also great emphasis placed on the ability to withstand an incident as well. In relation to an equity emergency, I will discuss Risking Marginalized Students and Resisting Resilience.

Risking Marginalized Students. A risk-conscious culture recognizes that no student can be sacrificed. I sometimes wonder if the majority of average middle-class White students were failing, and not marginalized students, that the arc towards justice would not be quite as long. I shudder at this thought because I do not want to believe what I know to be true: we are in an equity emergency because we are willing to risk the “other.” What does it look like to put all students first using a Mitigation Framework? It calls for all educators to value the cultural wealth that marginalized students bring with them to school and not to look upon differences as a deficit, but as a strength (DeNicolo, 2014; Yosso, 2006).

Resisting Resilience. Grit, that is withstanding hardships during adversity, is a concept that has been mistakenly applied to equity (Goodman, 2018; Stokas, 2015). Praising the few marginalized students that have made it through the education system successfully, while ignoring the obstacles that prevent a much larger critical mass from experiencing positive outcomes, diverts attention from dealing with systemic issues of equity. Instead, Love (2019) encourages us to place attention on abolishing the current educational system, recognizing that, in many ways, educational institutions are so conditioned to view White middle-class practices as the norm that schools are beyond reform. In this equity emergency, even the slightest level of inequity constitutes loss of life and is unacceptable.

Response

After a disaster occurs, the immediate aftermath utilizes the Response Framework. This framework focuses on basic needs, such as food, water, shelter, and medical attention. The guiding principal during this phase is that institutions “have a fundamental responsibility to consider the needs of the whole community” (FEMA, 2019, p. 25). In consideration of an equity emergency, I will discuss this framework in respect to Eliminating the Digital Divide and Teaching Relevantly.

Eliminating the Digital Divide. There is a 20 percentage point gap in home high-speed internet access between students in the highest income category and those in the lowest income category (NCES, 2019). The pandemic brought to the forefront the fact that digital access is a basic need, and this equity emergency requires us to treat it as such. Those that do not have access to technology typically tend to be poor, immigrants, located in rural communities, students with disabilities, and students of color (EdTrust West, 2020). When basic needs are not met, inequities compound, as seen in the newest concern of the homework gap, the inability of students to complete assignments because of technology barriers (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). Using the Recovery Framework as a guide, there is a fundamental responsibility to meet the needs of all students in this equity emergency.

Teaching Relevantly. As we evaluate damage, we must be transparent in assessment and come to terms that our good efforts have not been good enough. Many are familiar with the term culturally relevant teaching and may even consider themselves culturally relevant/responsive teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995). But Ladson-Billings (2014, p. 82) contends that iterations of her culturally relevant teaching framework are “often a distortion and corruption of the central ideas,” reduced to supplementation at best. Similarly, Noguera (2019, para. 11) declares that most educators desire equity, yet “many don’t fully grasp how their school system’s practices and their own hidden biases and behaviors may be creating barriers to success for disadvantaged students.” The disconnect between theory and practice must be located and resolved in the aftermath of this equity emergency to fully realize a pedagogy that has relevancy to all students.

Recovery

The Recovery Framework focuses on rebuilding, with the goal of restoring operations back to pre-disaster status (FEMA, 2016d). In this, there is a slight divergence when considering equity because America has never gotten equity in schools right, so emphasis must be placed on the ideal. Hallmarks of this framework are individual, family, and community empowerment, as well as support of local leadership. There is also a focus on psychological and emotional recovery from the trauma experienced during the disaster. In light of an equity emergency, I will focus on the two aspects of Educating Teachers and Engaging Civically.

Educating Teachers. We must put equity at the center in teacher education programs and in doing so we can empower the next generation of teacher leadership. Currently, pre-service teachers are indoctrinated to accept inequities as inevitable from the very beginning of our teacher education programs. For example, from teacher education professors to field placement coordinators, we categorize districts in terms of the percentage of children on free and reduced lunch, as if what a child can afford to eat has a direct bearing on whether they are worthy of high expectations. As rebuild, we must cease all dangerous rhetoric. The value of every child must be emphasized and the message must be clearly sent that teaching *is* equity work. We must lay bare that there is no equity neutrality, either one is working teaching towards equity or re-enforcing inequity (Kendi, 2019).

Engaging Civically. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014), emphasized a sociopolitical consciousness where the classroom becomes the place for students to discuss how their lives are impacted by public policies and practices. What does a sociopolitical consciousness look like after a pandemic that was followed by public outcries for justice? Principal Tiffany Anderson (2015), in the aftermath of Ferguson, gives a perfect illustration of how to engage civically. She prepared to guide students in making sense of current events because she saw this as part of her role as an educator. In the process, she

Introduced students to parts of history that were left out of traditional textbooks and participated alongside her students as they exercised their political voice. It is in this way that the Recovery Framework can be utilized to create a better tomorrow that far exceeds what as in place.

Discussion & Conclusion

Conceptualizing equity in U.S. schools in the context of an emergency, is an unorthodox, but necessary way to consider the current state of affairs. While the topics covered in the National Planning Frameworks were not new to discussions centered on equity, the frameworks elevate genuine assessment and amplify the level of response that is necessary to address injustice on multiple fronts. It also makes clear that it will take federal, state, and local government, teacher training programs, school leadership and classroom teachers, and community partnerships to assure that all students are equitably served in educational institutions.

Each of the topics of equity discussed in this paper purposely begin with a verb that is in a state of continuity into the future. This is to denote that equity is persistent, insistent, and repetitive. It also expresses that action is required for equity to be fully realized. The field of education can no longer tolerate equity initiatives as a task force for a select few or for those that have a passion for it and work in isolation. All educators must collaborate, conspire together as change agents, and pursue equity relentlessly to create schools that live up to the promise of education in a democratic society.

The challenge of tackling equity can be overwhelming, even as there are several other topics that could have been included in this equity emergency simulation that are just as important as those analyzed. We have seen improvements over the years, but too often we applaud incremental changes, not realizing that the slow pace towards equity actually reinforces continued oppressive practices. To make long-term shifts, we need a comprehensive plan; FEMA's plan for addressing an emergency allows for the consideration of an alternative model of action regarding the crisis in educational equity and underscores the intense engagement necessary for long term success.

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What do They Expect? African American and Latino Parents Regarding their Children's Educators

by Tracy Spesia

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Introduction

The diversity gap in education—students of color taught by a majority of White teachers—is the reality for the majority of students and teachers in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). While research demonstrates that students of color benefit from the positive effects of teacher-student demographic matches (Villegas & Irvine 2015), most students of color's exposure to same race/ethnicity teachers is limited at best. Rather, most students of color are taught by White teachers and it is commonly accepted that those teachers will make the most positive academic and social/emotional impact when they implement culturally responsive teaching frameworks such as “community cultural wealth” (Yosso, 2005), “funds of knowledge” (González et al., 2005), and “inquiry as stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Similarly, when educators better recognize and leverage culturally diverse students' strengths in the classroom (Kozleski & Siuty, 2015) and employ empathy (Warren, 2015) they provide adequate rigor and develop crucial relationships with their students, key drivers in student success. Just as essential as the culturally responsive frameworks within the classroom, parent-educator relationships are recognized as an important influence on the academic and social-emotional success of students-of-color, particularly in the context of the diversity gap in education (Warren 2015).

New Education Majority: Attitudes and Aspirations of Parents and Families of Color (The Leadership Conference, 2016) acknowledged this primary relationship between educators and parents. In this study, although parents of color indicated they valued “quality teachers as the most important element of a great school” (The Leadership Conference, 2016, p. 7), overall they were not satisfied; they expected their children's educators to set a higher performance bar for their children. “Nine-out-of-ten African Americans and 84 percent of Latinos disagree that students today work hard enough and instead believe that students should be challenged more to help ensure they are successful later in life” (The Leadership Conference, 2016, p. 7). Furthermore, African American and Latino study participants recognized their ability to leverage positive change when they perceived their children were not receiving equitable educational experiences. The report stated, “Strong majorities of both African American (55 percent) and Latino (56 percent) parents and family members believe parents have ‘a lot of power’ to bring

change to schools in the U.S.” (The Leadership Conference, 2016, p. 8). These African American and Latino parents wanted more from their children’s educators and believed they could affect the changes they wanted to see.

Present Study

Although caution must be taken to avoid making assumptions regarding all African American and Latino parents’ expectations, the findings in this qualitative study documented the expectations and implications of one community’s African American and Latino parents related to their children’s educators, which were notably out of alignment with the larger quantitative Leadership Conference study (The Leadership Conference, 2016). Specifically, the African American and Latino parents in this study were generally quite satisfied with their children’s education and their educators. Overall, they did not believe that their children required greater academic challenge and they did not indicate a need or desire to advocate for change even at the district level, never mind at the state and federal levels. This discrepancy leads to some larger questions related to the diversity gap, student achievement, and parent expectations. Namely, how do relationships with educators drive parents’ educational expectations for their children? Do parents recognize when their children’s educators are engaging in culturally responsive practices and when they are not? What prompts parents to situate their expectations for their children’s education in the larger context of the academic gap and equitable access to educational opportunities?

Keywords: diversity gap, culturally responsive teaching, parent engagement

Procedures

This study took place in an urban community school district with 19 elementary/junior high schools. The students’ race/ethnicity demographics were approximately 57% Hispanic, 26% Black, and 13% White. The teachers were approximately 75% White, 9% African American, and 13% Hispanic. The researcher collaborated with the leaders of two local community organizations that serve predominantly African American and Latino families, respectively. These community leaders had the trust of the potential study participants and were in regular communication with them. These community leaders provided a letter of invitation and explanation of the study—written by the researcher and available in English and Spanish—to African American and Latino school parents to be interviewed in the familiar surroundings of their respective local community centers. There were 15 total participants: seven African American participants and eight Latino participants who met with the researcher—and a Spanish interpreter for six out of the seven Latino parent interviews—to answer open-ended and related follow-up questions.

Interpretative analysis was used to analyze data gathered from the interviews. This began with the application of a coding process on the interview transcripts, the researcher’s memos, and the researcher’s notes taken during and immediately after the interviews. The researcher analyzed the coded data to identify major themes in the data. In the final analysis, the data revealed five themes in response to each of the research questions:

parent engagement with educators, communication with educators, relationships with educators, district-level interactions, and fair treatment from educators.

Results

The results reflected some distinct differences, aside from their shared educational commitment to parent-teacher conferences, between African American and Latino parents' experiences and expectations related to their children's educators. Analyses of data showed the African American parents had more communication and stronger relationships with their children's educators than the Latino parents and Latino parents were more engaged in the whole school community than the African American parents. Overall, the African American parents expected more from their children's educators, particularly in regards to communication, than the Latino parents did. Neither the African American nor the Latino parents believed their children's education was compromised— or even influenced—by the diversity gap, that is, the fact that the majority of their children's teachers were White, while the majority of the students were African American or Latino. Overall, the parents were not engaged in advocacy on behalf of their children's education at the district level or beyond.

All of the African American parents' experiences with their children's educators were driven by relationships. While they demonstrated different levels of engagement with their children's educators, the focus of their engagement was consistently on their children's personal experiences and not on the classroom or school as a whole. In contrast, if they had built any relationships with their children's educators, the Latino parents were likely to have done so with a Spanish-speaking school secretary (The only Latino parent who spoke fluent English was the only Latino parent who expected to develop relationships with her children's educators). These parents typically found ways to engage with the larger school community and not necessarily their children's classroom teachers.

Aside from timely communication when their children were having any difficulty in school, they expected their children's educators to determine how and when they would engage and communicate with them. Although the majority of the Latino parents had limited English proficiency, they did not expect the educators to make accommodations related to this language barrier.

In stark contrast to the findings in *New Education Majority: Attitudes and Aspirations of Parents and Families of Color* (The Leadership Conference, 2016), the African American and Latino parents interviewed were almost unanimous that their children were treated fairly, and that race/ethnicity did not influence their children's experience with educators. One African American parent stated:

To be perfectly honest with you, I think that they get a little more extra treatment, and the reason I say that is because I think that I'm more involved with them in school. So, I think that the teachers tend to look out for them a little bit more.

Another African American parent, who thought her children were sometimes inappropriately singled out for their behavior, was certain this had no connection to their race. When she was directly asked if she thought her children's race had any influence over how they were treated at school, she said: "No, I just think it's their behavior. I would never say that it was... They're treated fairly." Likewise, five of the other African American parents interviewed did not believe their children's race had any influence on the way they were treated in school. When the researcher asked one parent, "Have you ever felt like your children being African American has had any influence on their experience in school?" she answered:

No, I haven't. And you're right, every last one of their teachers are White. But I think with the teachers, my kids have made an impact on that teacher to the point to where teachers want to get to know more about my kids. So, I don't know if the other kids feel the same way, but every last teacher that my kids have come across, they've all built personal relationships with these teachers.

All of the Latino parents agreed that their children's ethnicity had no bearing on their experience with educators and that they received consistently fair treatment. In one poignant example, a mother explained her son's dismissal from his magnet school program due to "...an exam...where he missed the cut off by one point." When asked for more details about this experience, she said:

They make it very clear that students are expected to do the work... and do all the studying required so that they're successful. And so, on that test, if they don't meet the cutoff... I feel that if he would have studied harder, he could have got a 100. But he had just the one point off.

When she was asked how she felt about him having to leave this program, she replied, "He could have scored much better, but he didn't." Although it is possible that this parent misunderstood the performance criteria to maintain eligibility in the program, it was clear she believed her son was dismissed due to one missed point on one exam. When asked if she was upset with the school, she replied "No." Although she was disappointed in the outcome, this parent believed her son was treated fairly in this situation.

Unlike the parents surveyed in the *New Education Majority: Attitudes and Aspirations of Parents and Families of Color* (The Leadership Conference, 2016), these African American and Latino parents believed their students of color were well served by their White educators. There was little to no concern of lower expectations or inadequate supports for their children. Rather, they were grateful for the relationships they had with their children's teachers and/or believed their children were solely responsible for their academic outcomes. Only one Latino parent expressed a different point of view. This parent explained he had a brother who was a teacher in Mexico where teachers had to pass assessments on an ongoing basis to be allowed to continue in the profession. He went on to explain his brother's efforts to impact student learning:

My brother always makes sure to spend time with students who don't seem to capture the content, the first time. He'll give them that extra time, to make sure that they learn the concept. And that's one way I feel teachers can provide more opportunities for their students, by making sure to spend enough time, making sure they've learned the content.

When asked if he felt that his children's teachers did the same, he answered:

I can't say one way or the other that, maybe because the students are Hispanic or African American or not Hispanic or African American, but I have a sense that there doesn't seem to be an effort beyond what's the basic effort that a teacher should give to kids.

Although there were isolated examples of parent dissatisfaction with either teachers or building principals, almost all of the African American and Latino parents were overall satisfied with the quality of their children's education and appreciative of their educators.

It follows that these generally satisfied parents were not inclined to advocate for changes in their children's education at the district, state, or federal level, unlike the parents in the Leadership Conference study (The Leadership Conference, 2016). In this qualitative study, the African American and Latino parents, for the most part, had very little or no interaction with the district office. In fact, not one of the parents could identify the current or previous superintendent. Overall, the African American and Latino parents did not identify any expectations of the district administration beyond processing their late annual registrations, if necessary.

One African American parent, frustrated with educators' responses to her son's behavior issues, reached out to the district administration to request a change in school placement. She wrote a letter to the district administration requesting a meeting on this topic. They did not respond directly to her letter but, instead, directed her concerns back to the school principal. In her estimation, the district "did not care." This perceived lack of support did not galvanize the parent to take the matter further. She simply maintained a general level of dissatisfaction with her son's education experience. However, she was perfectly content with the experience her daughter was having at the same school with the same educators.

The only parent in the entire study engaged at the district level was the Latino parent who spoke fluent English. She had participated in district level planning meetings and attended multiple school board meetings over the years. Her recommendations for improvement at the district level included conducting regular forums to hear directly from parents. She stated:

...even if they did like a monthly meeting at every school and actually got to hear a lot of these concerns, but I don't know if it's more they're afraid of what kind of response they're going to hear and what kind of outcome it's going to have.

This parent saw a link between her children’s education experiences and the district administration. Unlike most of the other study participants, Latino or African American, she believed the district administrators should be present to parents and available to hear their concerns. This parent’s responses more accurately reflected the sentiments of the surveyed parents in the Leadership Conference study, (The Leadership Conference, 2016).

Conclusion

The participants in this qualitative study did not indicate that the diversity gap—a majority of White educators with a majority of students of color—created a deficit experience for their children. This despite the fact that the district’s diversity gap was pointed out to each of them at the start of their respective interviews. In fact, the parents in this study did not tend to see race or ethnicity as an obstacle, or even a factor, in their children’s educations. This could be because they were unaware of the positive impact increased teacher diversity could have on their children’s academic progress.

New Education Majority: Attitudes and Aspirations of Parents and Families of Color (The Leadership Conference, 2016) reported an overall negative parent perception of their children’s educational experiences, particularly about “a racial disparity in school funding” (p. 6). However, the majority of the parents in this smaller qualitative study were generally pleased with their children’s educational experiences. One African American parent reflected the general sentiment, “I know parents that have their kid in schools that have a ton of money, but if the parent isn’t putting into their kid, they’re not going to get anything out of it.” Overall, the parents in this study did not indicate that a lack of funding was impacting their children’s educations.

Wade Henderson, President & CEO of The Leadership Conference Education Fund concluded:

By nearly every measure, students of color attend schools that are substantially deficient compared to the schools their White, higher-income peers attend. As a result, too many are falling behind with very little chance of making up ground in a system that is woefully unfair.

The goal of the Leadership Conference survey was “...to capture the beliefs of new majority parents and families so that decision makers can make better choices about the education our children receive (The Leadership Conference, 2016, p. 5). However, the African American and Latino parents interviewed for this qualitative study were generally content, and even grateful, for their children’s education experience. There was no overriding sense of injustice or call to advocacy to improve their children’s education experience, hold them to higher academic expectations, or provide more targeted supports to close the district’s achievement gap between students of color and their White peers.

How to explain the discrepancy? The researcher did not ask the African American or Latino participants for their children's academic records. However, for the most part, the parents were more preoccupied with their children's experiences than with their achievements. They were engaged by the positive relationships they had with their children's educators, or their Spanish-speaking secretaries as proxies. They were more likely to intercede if their child was not behaving according to expectations (theirs or the educators') than if there was a negative academic report. Aside from the one Latino father who mused, "I have a sense that there doesn't seem to be an effort beyond what's the basic effort that a teacher should give to kids," these parents seemed content with the status quo.

If these parents' expectations for their children's achievement are more driven by the cues from their children's educators, perhaps it is incumbent on the educators to point out the great discrepancies in achievement between public school White students and students of color in the United States. Perhaps educational leaders need to highlight this data for parents, to engage them in the "woefully unfair" system to become advocates for equity. In turn, then perhaps these parents will expect to share a sense of urgency regarding their children's futures and the futures of all African American and Latino children. Indeed, this shared priority between African American and Latino parents and their children's White educators might be the most powerful culturally responsive relationship they could cultivate, one that will provide a real catalyst for a different future for public education in the United States.

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