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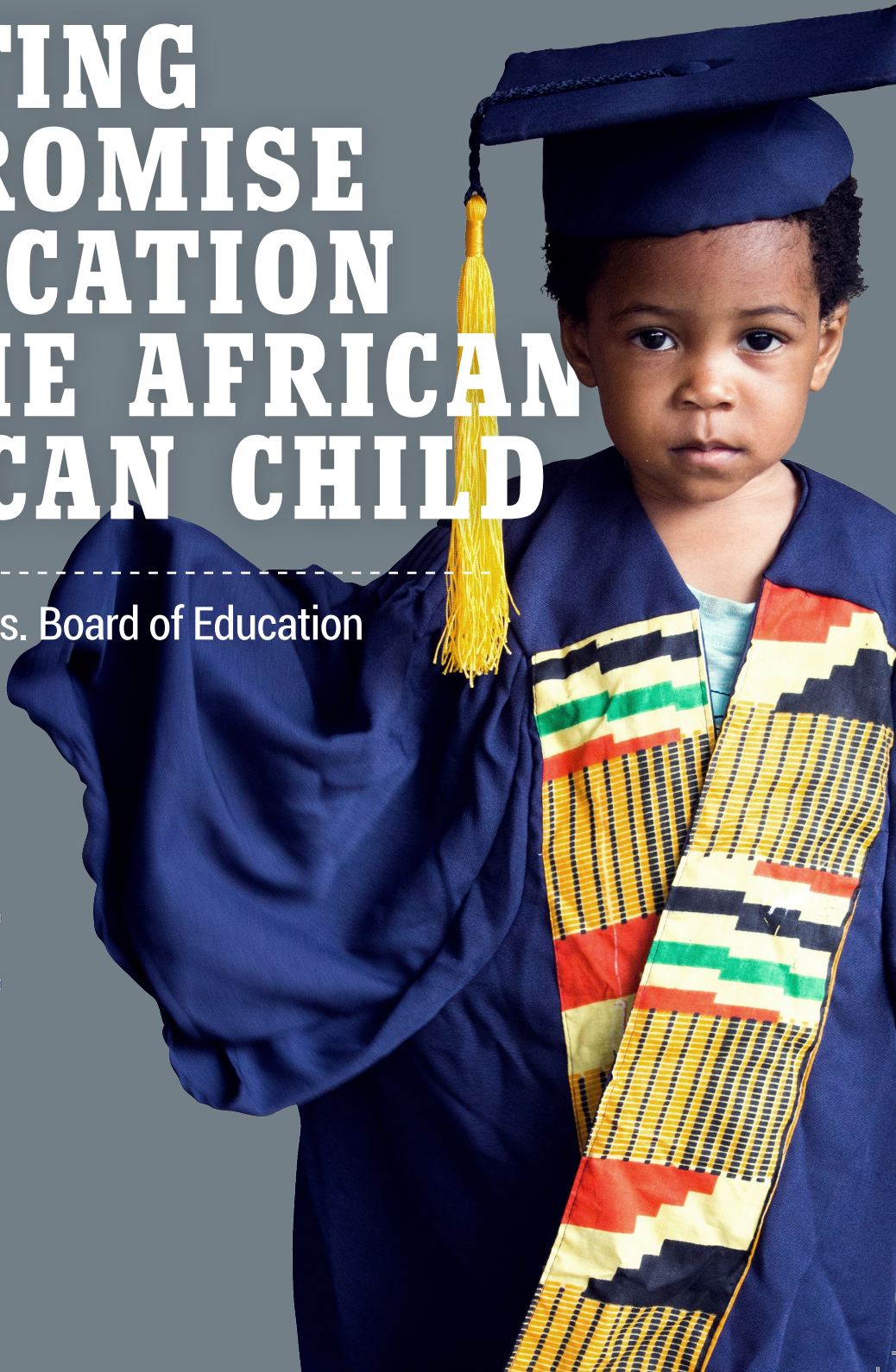# 2019

# REVISITING THE PROMISE OF EDUCATION FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILD

## 65 Years Post Brown vs. Board of Education

**TABSE**
Texas Alliance of Black School Educators

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As President of the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators (TABSE), it is with pride that I share a TABSE research publication that emphasizes empowering and uplifting the African-American child through education. The value of this publication is that it not only focuses on developing intellectually and academically capable learners, but it also seeks to remind readers of the resilient strength and potential of the African-American child by focusing on edifying a positive identity and awareness of the who they are culturally.

As president, we have set aside a portion of the TABSE budget to seed research grants. This publication is the evidence of that special moment when a vision becomes a reality. Inspired by the National Alliance of Black School Educator's (NABSE), *Saving the African American Child, TABSE is releasing Revisiting the Promise of Education for the African American Child- 65 Years Post Brown vs. Board of Education.*

We hope that his work written by TABSE's esteemed group of researchers through the TABSE Research Institute will inform, shape policy, motivate, give hope and courage for those that are fierce advocates for all children, especially those that are of African descent and those that teach and lead them.

TABSE carries the torch to light the path for any educator that teaches, leads or influences children of African descent. We bold and proudly do the work necessary to continue the unfinished legacy of our ancestors and founders.

As this publication represents the TABSE continued journey, this organization will continue to plant seeds that will produce life in the name of children of African descent.

Dr. Kimberly McLeod

President of the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators

The Texas Alliance of Black School Educators (TABSE) is the Texas' premier non-profit organization devoted to furthering the academic success for the state's children - particularly children of African descent. TABSE boasts an outreach to thousands of preeminent educators as well as corporate and institutional members. TABSE is dedicated to improving both the educational experiences and accomplishments of African American youth through the development and use of instructional and motivational methods that increase levels of inspiration, attendance and overall achievement.

## To that end, TABSE seeks to:

- Promote and facilitate the education of all students, with a particular focus on African American students;

- Establish a coalition directly and indirectly involved in the educational process;

- Create a forum for the exchange of ideas and strategies to improve opportunities for educators and students;

- Identify and develop professionals who will assume leadership positions in education and influence public policy concerning the education of African Americans.

## TABSE's primary areas of focus are

- Professional Development Programs that strengthen the skills of educators, school board members; parents, and others;

- Information Sharing around innovative instructional and learning strategies that have been proven successful in motivating African American youth and increasing academic performance in critical learning areas;

- Policy Advocacy to ensure high standards and quality in our public and private education systems; and,

- Research programs to produce projects that identify educational practices that demonstrate excellence in the school performance of African American students.
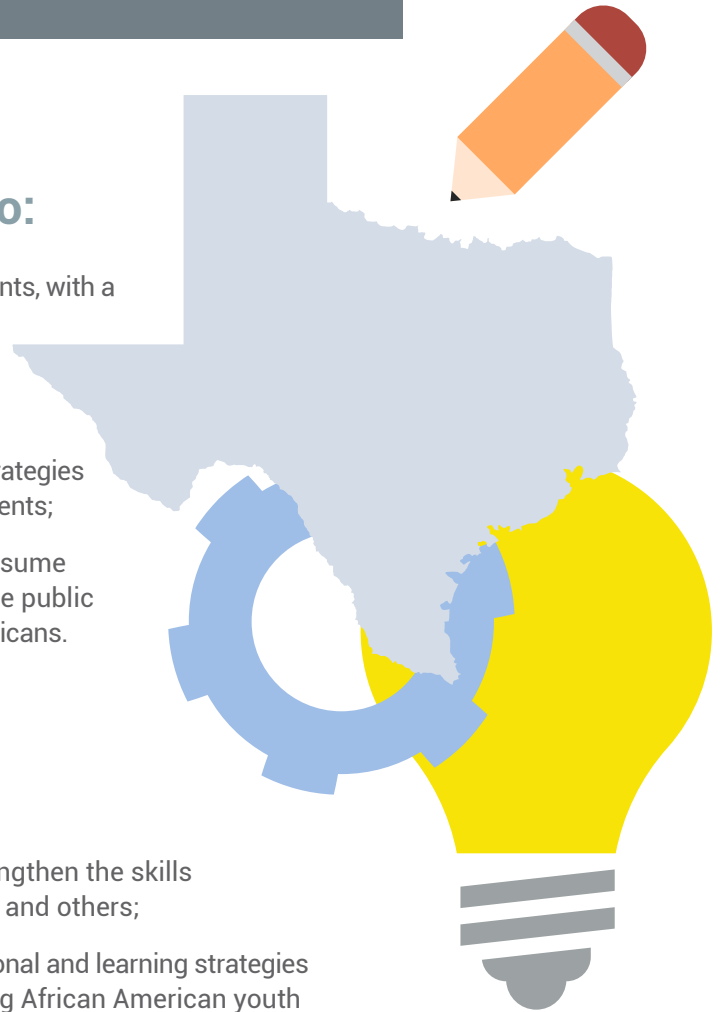
## TABSE's primary mission is

- to enhance the education of all students

- to exercise leadership in providing valuable professional services and strategies to institutions, agencies, and communities engaged in creating an environment in which students, particularly black students, can achieve academic excellence.

## TABSE's goals are

- to focus on students, i.e., literacy, academics and mentorships

- to increase legislative sensitivity of black educational issues

- to solicit funds and sponsorships for educational staff development

- to present a recognition program for educators,

- to provide student scholarships

- to improve significantly the ability of black educators to promote problem resolution

- to create a meaningful and effective network of strength, talent and professional support for students' education

- to network with agencies and institutions in presenting professional development workshops

- to provide information to students and parents relative to preparation for college

- to provide support to professional educators for career planning and development

# Do not do for others what they can do for themselves.

As an educator, it is important for us to understand that we have to give African American children the tools they need to uplift themselves. This is also a realization that we cannot depend on others to engage, empower or uplift African American children or our communities.  This is our urgent responsibility. This report is to highlight the teachings of Dr. James A. Johnson, Jr..  This report in dedicated to his legacy of work of ensuring cultural and educational excellence for the African American child.

We would also like to dedicate the spirit of this text and the following actions by committed educators to the African American children surviving and thriving in our schools.

Knowing, Doing, Being and Becoming as though Saving the African American child matters.
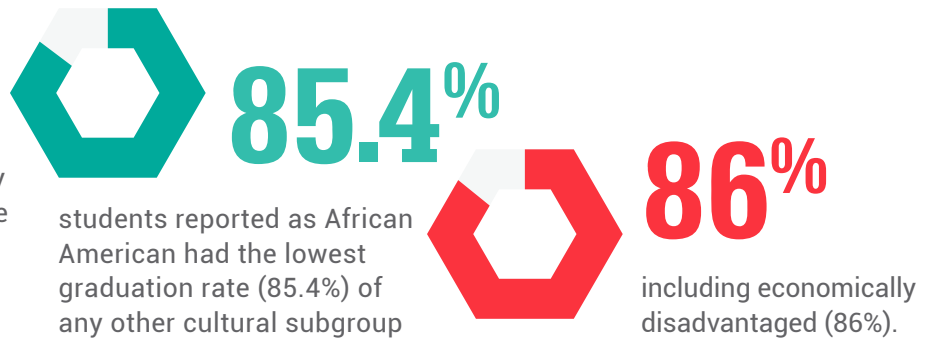
James A. Johnson, Jr.

# Contents

# Summary

**The Why.** In 2019, the entire racial and social justice community will be celebrating the Brown v. the Board of Education decision 65 years after the Supreme Court made its ruling. This is arguably one of the most historic moments in African American history, validating the notion that "in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place" (Documents, n.d.). With those words, the plight of African American children and their families changed as the community began to grapple with integrating young African American children into learning environments in which they were historically not welcomed. It is important for educators, leaders, and policy makers to continue to think and act in ways that will support excellence in education and equitable student outcomes regardless of race.

**Background.** In 1983, the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) commissioned a task force to address African American academic and cultural excellence. The result was a report titled, *Saving the African American Child*. The taskforce in charge of researching and drafting this report is credited with guiding the future direction of NABSE and creating a "philosophical statement of belief and expectation" (National Alliance of Black School Educators [NABSE], 1984).

Utilizing this document as a foundation, the Texas Alliance of Black School Educators (TABSE) under the direction of president, Dr. Kimberly McLeod, wanted to create a discourse about the state of the education for the African American child 35 years later. The TABSE task force was commissioned to address the current needs of African American children in the education system in Texas. To build on the foundation of the initial report, it is imperative for TABSE to confront systems and educators that allow African American children to continue to languish in schools.

**Current State.** In the 2015-2016 school year, children who identify as African American were still the highest among dropouts and the lowest performing academically amongst the cultural subgroups.
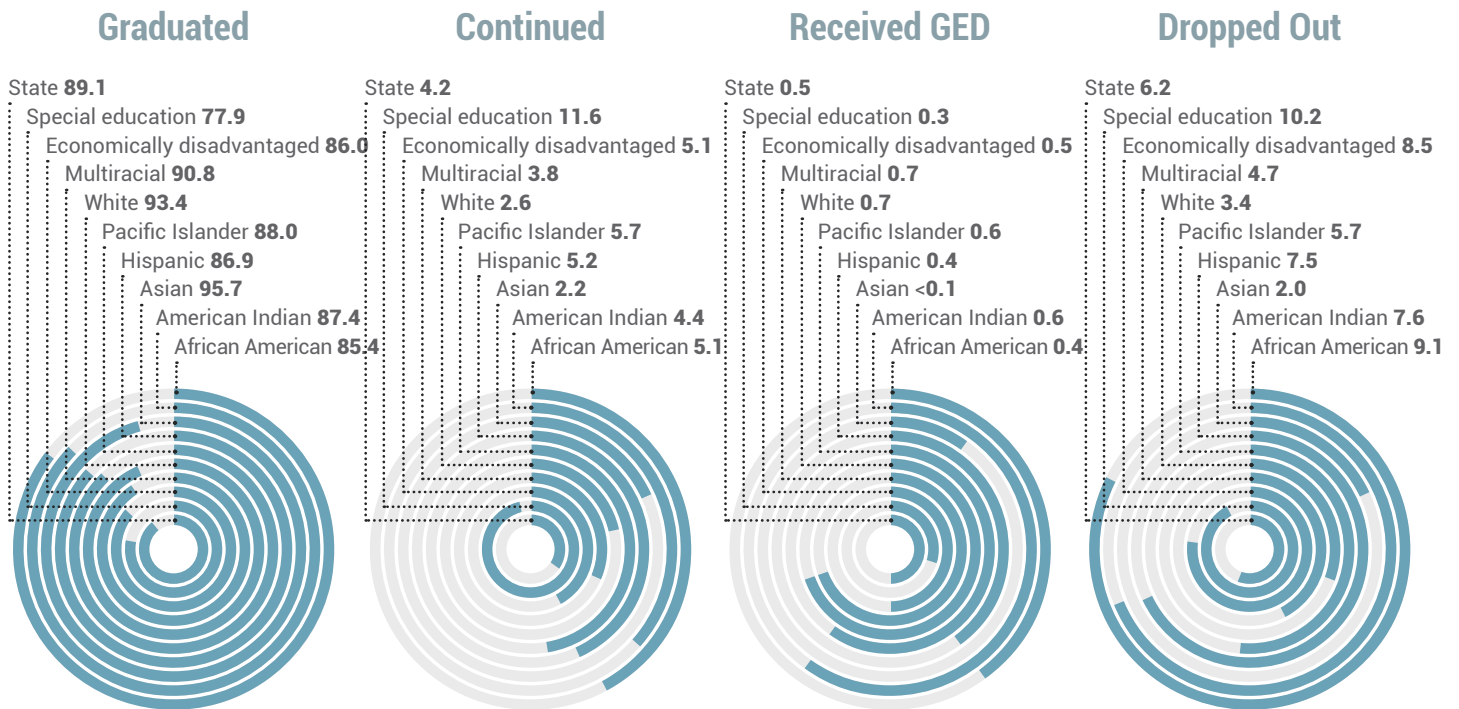
Referencing Table 1,

# 85.4%

students reported as African American had the lowest graduation rate (85.4%) of any other cultural subgroup

# 86%

including economically disadvantaged (86%).

This led the authors to conclude that while poverty may be an extenuating circumstance, race is the predominant indicator.

# 9.1%

The same conclusions can be drawn regarding the dropout rate, which is highest for African Americans at 9.1%.

**Table 1.**

**Grade 9 Four-Year Longitudinal Graduation and Dropout Rates (%), Texas Public Schools, Class of 2016**

## Graduated

State **89.1**
Special education **77.9**
Economically disadvantaged **86.0**
Multiracial **90.8**
White **93.4**
Pacific Islander **88.0**
Hispanic **86.9**
Asian **95.7**
American Indian **87.4**
African American **85.4**

## Continued

State **4.2**
Special education **11.6**
Economically disadvantaged **5.1**
Multiracial **3.8**
White **2.6**
Pacific Islander **5.7**
Hispanic **5.2**
Asian **2.2**
American Indian **4.4**
African American **5.1**

## Received GED

State **0.5**
Special education **0.3**
Economically disadvantaged **0.5**
Multiracial **0.7**
White **0.7**
Pacific Islander **0.6**
Hispanic **0.4**
Asian **<0.1**
American Indian **0.6**
African American **0.4**

## Dropped Out

State **6.2**
Special education **10.2**
Economically disadvantaged **8.5**
Multiracial **4.7**
White **3.4**
Pacific Islander **5.7**
Hispanic **7.5**
Asian **2.0**
American Indian **7.6**
African American **9.1**

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) data. The STAAR test is intended to measure the achievement of Texas students as it relates to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). While there are many arguments made that the test does not accurately measure what it is purposed to measure, it does shed light on how the school system in Texas educates and holds children accountable for learning outcomes. Sixty-five years after Brown v. Board of Education, it is imperative that educators look back at the struggle, examine the results, and plan for the future. The premise of this report is to address the mindset of the teachers, administrators, policy makers, and community members who play a collaborative role in the academic growth of the African American child.
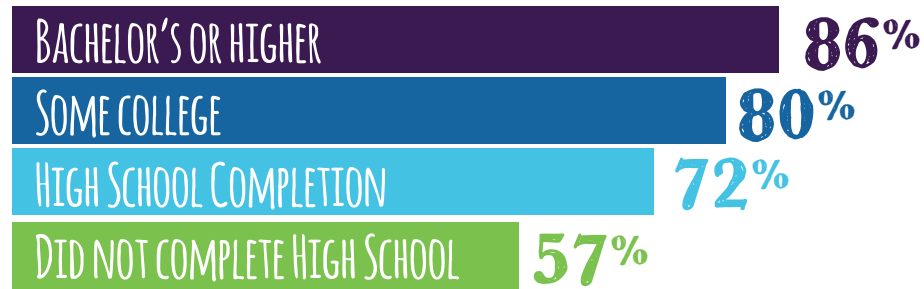
# Introduction

REFLECTING ON
**65** YEARS

"In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity, it is a pre-requisite."

**— Barack Obama**

On March 10, 2009, President Obama released a fact sheet entitled: **Expanding the Promise of Education in America.** In the document, the president laid out his agenda and priorities to improve education for all. On the cusp of this renewed effort to address educational inequities, the president understood education can support upward movement between social classes. Specifically, for the African American learner, educators must vigilantly advocate for practices and systems supporting the upward mobility of marginalized populations. The data compiled by McFarland et al. (2018) regarding young adults (25-34-year-olds) bears this out. See Table 2.

**Table 2.**

Employment Rates of 25- to 34-Year-Olds, by Educational Attainment: 2017

| | |
|---|---|
| **Bachelor's or higher** | **86%** |
| **Some college** | **80%** |
| **High School Completion** | **72%** |
| **Did not complete High School** | **57%** |

**Source:** The Condition of Education (2018) — Chapter 3, Economic Outcomes Figure 1.

This report begins by addressing the urgent need for raising the awareness of equity in schools to mitigate the pervasive negative effects of inequity for African American children today and in the future. The case will be made for creating an equity-conscious workforce, ready to engage in courageous conversations around race, power, privilege, and identity.

# The Need for Racial Equity

Inevitably, there is a demographic and cultural shift occurring in our country (Craig and Richeson, 2014). A difficult concept to embrace may be shifting the power dynamic to one where a new and diverse set of constituents share power. All students should have an opportunity to both participate in and contribute to the opportunities a quality education has to offer. However, as it relates to African American learners, the quality they are receiving as reflective in data posits them in a marginalized situation.

According to the 2017 Nation's Report Card, African American students' performance on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in fourth- and eighth-grade math is lower than White and Hispanic students. African American students in fourth grade had an average scale score of 223, which is 25 points lower than the average scale score for White students. There is a 33-point gap in average scale scores for eighth-grade math performance. These outcomes are similar for student performance in reading (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017).

What's more, there has been no significant difference in African American students' performance on the NAEP since the 2005 administration of the assessment (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). The African American child has as much learning and success potential as any other learner in any demographic subset. However, according to achievement data, success has not been realized for African American children. The problem does not lie with the African American child but, rather, what and how teaching is delivered to the African American learner. If the teaching strategies are delivered appropriately then the result is manifested in learning outcomes. If learning is not the direct outcome of teaching, then it is not teaching; it is talking, and the African American child is not learning but tolerating.

Retention rates for African American learners also show cause for concern. African American learners account for 26% of students who are retained in first grade in U.S. public schools and 15.4% in Texas. This increases at an alarming rate to account for 38.6% of students retained is third in U.S. public schools and 19.4% in Texas (Civil Rights Data Collection [CRDC], 2018). Studies have shown, for years, that if students are held back even one year, their chances of graduating from high school are significantly reduced. One recent study determined that students in Texas held back during elementary school are almost three times more likely than their peers to drop out of high school (Green, 2018). Constructing a cradle to college pathway for the African American learner, must be addressed in the early years and sustained throughout their academic sojourn.

In the 2016 election, the percentage of White voters to African American voters was 69.3% to 59.6% respectively (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). This shows the African American participation rate is below the participation rate of Whites. While this may not be a direct result of the education, the education system plays a role in ensuring the electorate is informed to make decisions that support legislation aimed at positively reforming the school system. In addition, a reduced percentage of African American voters means the power of the African American vote is diminished when attempting to advocate for reform for the African American learner.
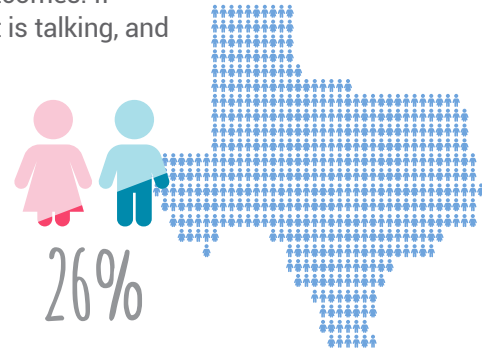
Therefore, it is important that teachers integrate real-life critical thinking and problem-solving skill sets in daily pedagogical practices. Additionally, educators should actively encourage African American learners to participate in constructive discourse with peers and adults in the school and greater learning community in academic contexts. The U.S. Census predicts that by 2060, 64% of children in the United States will be a part of a minority racial or ethnic group and the trend will continue through 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In order to prepare for trending demographic shifts, schools have an opportunity to create systems of access and engagement for all students, particularly the most marginalized populations, which include children of African descent. More specifically, addressing the African American child will be of continued significance as the population of African Americans will be expected to increase slightly from 13% to 14% of the total population by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

**Representative Numbers.** The population of African American students in the state of Texas is 673,291 or about 13% of the total population. While African American students attend Texas schools with a 95.4% attendance rate compared to a state average of 95.8% the achievement outcomes they produce as a result of their attendance rate are confounding. It's difficult to reconcile how African American students can attend school at near perfect rates, yet are not able to produce equitable achievement of outcomes when compared to their counterparts. African Americans are present in the learning environment; however, the question should be raised does their presence equate to authentic engagement in the learning environment?

Sixty-five years post Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark case that ruled that separate was inherently unequal, the experience of the African American learner in the public school can still be characterized as ill equipped in achieving academic equity. Most strikingly, African American and Latino students tend to be in schools with a substantial majority of poor children, but White and Asian students are typically in middle-class schools. Brown at 60: Great Progress, a Long Retreat and an Uncertain Future shows that if school populations are between 81-100% Black & Latino, then over three-quarters of those students are also concurrently enrolled in schools where more than 70% of the student population lives in poverty. "In fact, half of students in 91-100% Black & Latino schools are in schools that also have more than 90% low-income students. This means that these students face almost total isolation not only from White and Asian students but also from middle class peers as well (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kusera, 2014).

This paper will support the creation of solutions for schools to advance an equity mindset that contributes to advancing the academic and life prosperity of the African American learner. Using the Equity Mindset Framework developed by Dr. Deirdre Williams, and introduced through this publication, TABSE advocates five levels in developing an equity mindset including: (1) Equity Consciousness, (2) Socio-Emotional Understanding, (3) Nurturing Relationships, (4) Quality Teaching and Learning, and (5) Managing the Classroom. Once an educator has developed an equity consciousness, there is no specific order of development for the other components.

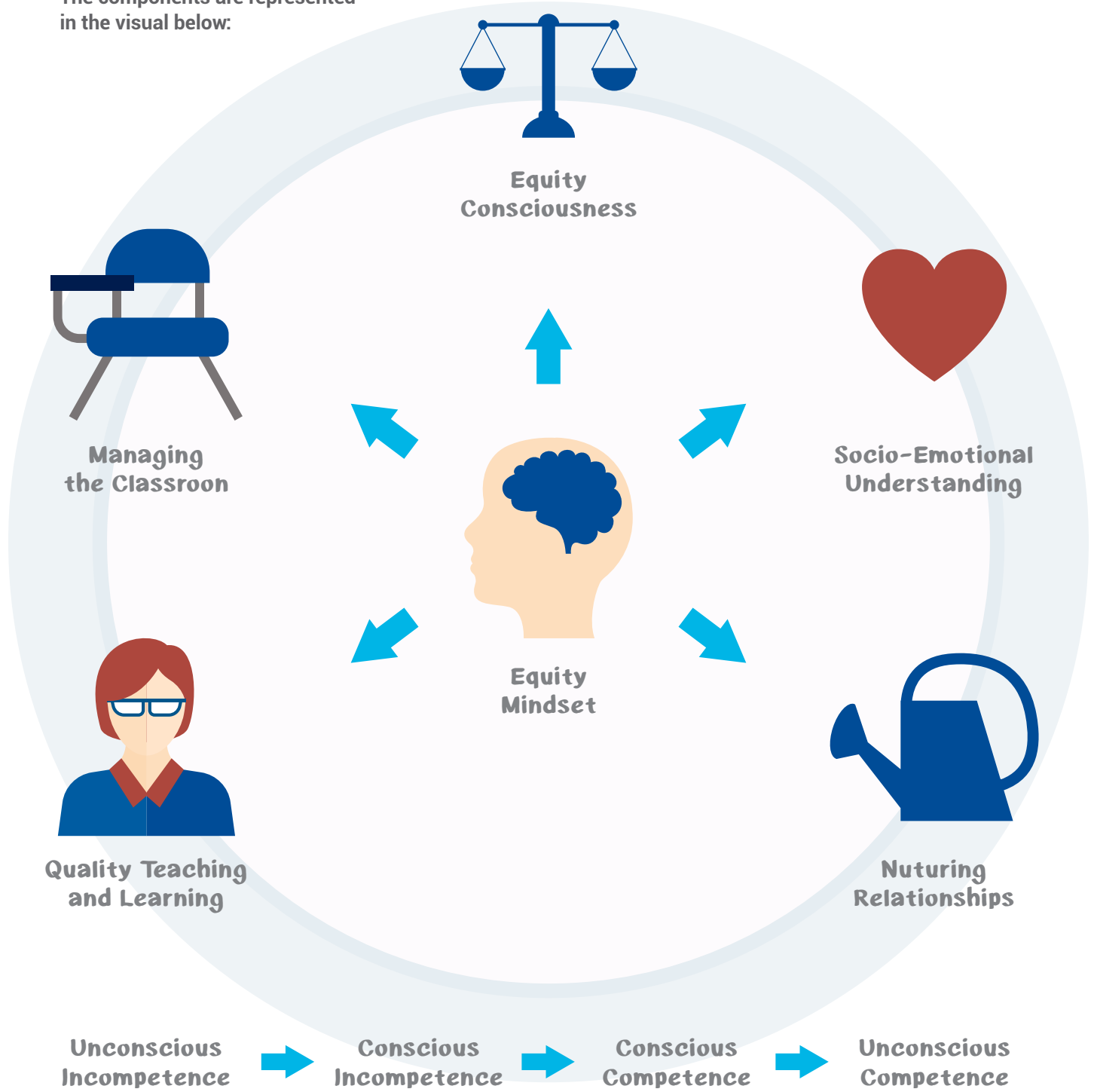**The components are represented in the visual below:**



Equity Consciousness

Socio-Emotional Understanding

Managing the Classroon

Equity Mindset

Quality Teaching and Learning

Nuturing Relationships

Unconscious Incompetence → Conscious Incompetence → Conscious Competence → Unconscious Competence

**Figure 1.** Equity Mindset Framework (Williams, 2018).

# The Equity Mindset Framework

In supporting African American learners for academic success, school systems can begin by equipping educators with basic competency tools that support in evaluating and engaging in learning environments through critical reflection, effective preparation programs,

| | |
|---|---|
| **1** | **Equity Consciousness** |
| **2** | **Socio-Emotional Understanding** |
| **3** | **Nurturing Relationships** |
| **4** | **Quality Teaching and Learning** |
| **5** | **Managing the Classroom** |

and/or professional development that create equity mindsets with intentionality.

African American students' experiences are riddled with inequities in the school system. While the African American child has high attendance rates, the opportunity for learning is compromised by some of the highest in-school and out-of-school suspension rates. Approximately 402,373 students of the total school population were counted out-of-school suspension data sets during the 2016-2017 school year. Of those, 32% (131,474) were African

American compared to 14% White (57,765). There were 1,060,147 students who were reflected in data sets for in-school suspension. Of those, 25% (265,165) were African American compared to 21% White. Simply, African American learners may be attending school at high rates; however, they may not be authentically engaged in the teaching and learning process but are intimately embraced and engaged in the disciplinary culture of most schools across the state.

The attendance data clearly shows African American children attend school at high rates. However, this data can be misleading because they are often not included in the educational process. Many of the youth are, instead, in special education classes or in-school suspension. Unfortunately, too many African American students are not engaged fully in the educational process due to reasons outside of academics. For example, African American students' presence in special education remains disproportionately high. Similar to the national data that reflects a18.5% special education participation rate, the number of African American children in special education in Texas is 16.2%. This is disproportionately high when African Americans only represent 13% of the total school population. Equally disturbing is the low participation rates of the African American child in gifted and talented education. The African American child represents 9.9% of all students in Gifted and Talented nationally and an even more disappointing 6.5% in the state of Texas. The African American learner has the same learning potential as any other human and/or student in the learning system. However, even 65 years post Brown v. Board of

Education, the potential, development, and contribution of the African American learner is ineffectively developed in modern teaching and learning systems.

The Equity Mindset Framework moves the educational leader through stages of competence and understanding, beginning at unconscious incompetence, whereby the individual isn't aware of the knowledge needed to positively impact outcomes of students they are charged with educating (Adams, n.d.). In other words, you can have great teachers who are unaware of how their unconscious actions introduce inequitable practices in the learning environment. Implementing an equity mindset framework supports in building capacity in the educator, in essence, moving them from a stage of unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence. Unconscious competence, the opposite end of the continuum, means teachers will be able to exhibit a level of competence naturally without having to think about it. This simply means that they inherently behave and practice in a way that provides equitable services to all students.

**1** UNDERSTAND
**2** CONFRONT
**3** ADDRESS

IDENTITY    BIAS    PRIVILEGE
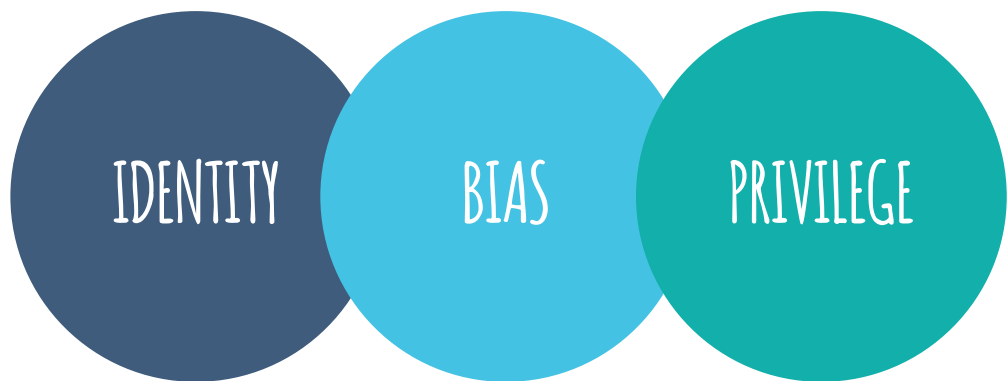
# Components of Equity Consciousness

Building an awareness or equity consciousness amongst teachers, campus leaders, and district leaders is the initial step in advancing an Equity Mindset Framework. The three important components of building a culture of equity consciousness in schools are to understand, confront, and address: 1. Identity, 2. Biases, and 3. Power/Privilege.

## Identity

Developing a positive ethnic-racial identity will support the African American learner to better navigate explicit and implicit forms of bias and racism later in life (Staats, et. al. 2017). Identity formation is a normal developmental process through which a young person understands their place

in the world. Beginning in schools, development of a positive ethnic-racial identity must be supported with positive race-based experiences (Loyd & Williams, 2017). Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous (1998) defined racial identity as the significance and meaning of race to an individual. Therefore, in their search to acquire an optimal racial identity, people attempt to successfully integrate the values of their culture and the values of the larger society (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). The difficulty for the African American learner is when the values of the school system may contradict the values of their natural world. They find that they must constantly reconcile worlds in order to be accepted. In classrooms with a teacher that is unconscious and incompetent, a sense of superiority may emerge. Where one value system is attributed with a positive regard and the other a negative. However, in a system where power, privilege, access, and acceptance are shared, there is a sense that one value system is not better than the other, but rather, they can be accessed interchangeably based on which value skill set produces effective outcomes vs. ineffective outcomes. ¬

For the African American learner, value differences may be inappropriately attached to race and may seem inescapable to marginalized learners. When, in fact, differences in adaptability may not be based on race but on exposure, environment, and the learning culture. Creating a space where positive racial identity may not be developed independent of attributing race to potential academic outcomes creates cultures in which the African American learner can experience academic success while also embracing their racial identity in the same space at the same time. It has been proven in numerous studies that an optimal, positive racial identity provides an additional safeguard against discriminatory and negative racial encounters (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Sellers et al., 2006).

Most well-respected contemporary scholars agree that, as educators, it is imperative that teachers support a positive racial self-identity to help students succeed academically and to become citizens with a healthy national identity as well (Gay, 2000; Banks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995). "Positive ethnic identification for most American racial minorities does not happen automatically; nor does it happen for all individuals. When it does happen, it is learned and is, therefore, susceptible to instructional intervention in schools" (Gay, 1985, p. 49). Gay (2000) further asserts the dynamic of supporting a positive identity should be central to addressing how we educate students of African descent.
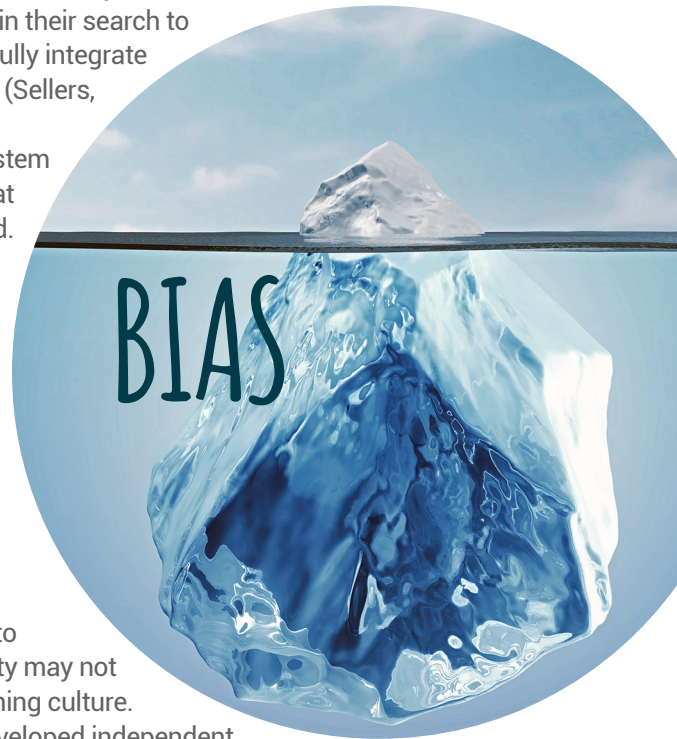
# Implicit Bias

According to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University (2015), implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection (para. 1).

The ability to understand, confront, and eradicate any internal biases held against another group of people will inherently alter relationships with that person or group of persons Most teachers aren't seeking to discriminate against their students, and most aren't intentionally targeting students for suspension based on race (Staats, 2016). However, many teachers unfortunately still have underlying racial biases that they might not even be aware of. These implicit biases are often hard to identify and harder to correct (Staats, 2016). This is why it is imperative for educators to engage in discussions that elucidate internal biases. In each of these processes, a positive, respectful, and valued two-way relationship enhances the students' ability to learn and thrive. When authentic relationships between teachers, students, school, families, and community are not fostered, the ability for students to realize their potential is hindered.

Beverly Daniel Tatum, former president of Spelman College, said, regarding the innate danger of bias, "We absorb bias in the same way we breathe in smog—involuntarily and usually without any awareness of it" (as cited in Fiarman, 2016, p. 10). The analogy highlights the fact that certain unconscious biases are not intentional and may not reflect on the teacher's intention to do good work. However, the job of the leader is to bring any biases from the unconscious to the conscious level. Fiarman (2016) continues:

First, we need to build awareness of unconscious bias and recognize its negative effects. Then we can begin to address it in our practice. Specifically, we can name it, develop systems to reduce biased decisions, build empathy for different perspectives, and hold ourselves accountable (p. 12).

Pinpointing how to effectively address staff's negative unconscious biases is a difficult process because they are unaware of them and can't conceptualize the impact they have on learners. After all, as Ford (2016) points out,

institutional racism doesn't require any individual culprits with malicious intent. Instead, it reflects prevailing attitudes that tell us who is intelligent and who is simple-minded, who is up to no good and who is well-intentioned, who deserves a break and who deserves to be made an example of (p. 44).

Institutional racism is advanced by well-meaning adults who are unaware of their unconscious bias and the irreparable harm it causes. Because they are well-intentioned and unaware of unconscious bias, they have a difficult time understanding and accepting their contribution to institutional racism. The goal of creating spaces of courageous conversations, embedded in ongoing professional development, and colleague accountability is to dismantle biases that do not support equitable outcomes for African American students.

## Power/Privilege

If we adopt this premise, then we have to use our educational system to offer each student equitable opportunities, ultimately leading them to success and the power to determine a course of life that actualizes their innate potential. This is even more important for children of African descent, as the school plays an important role in helping them define their potential and their future impact. The African American community has been fervently fighting for opportunity and access to education as a civil right predating Brown v. the Board of Education.

"Opportunity leads to success and success often leads to power" (Brisport, 2013, p. 18)

Many federal, state, and local policies have been influential in how education institutions provide equitable and accessible learning opportunities for the development of African American children. Education can be the key to social mobility. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy, held schools accountable for students who experienced failure. However, an opportunity was missed to "encourage the culture and collaborative environment for learning and growth which precedes success and power" (Brisport, 2013, p. 20).

It is difficult to effectively understand where opportunities exist without understanding why and how the current state has come to be. Education has the power to uplift as much as it has the power to destroy. Therefore, ignoring the impact institutional racism has in schools will exacerbate the issue, rather than eradicate it.
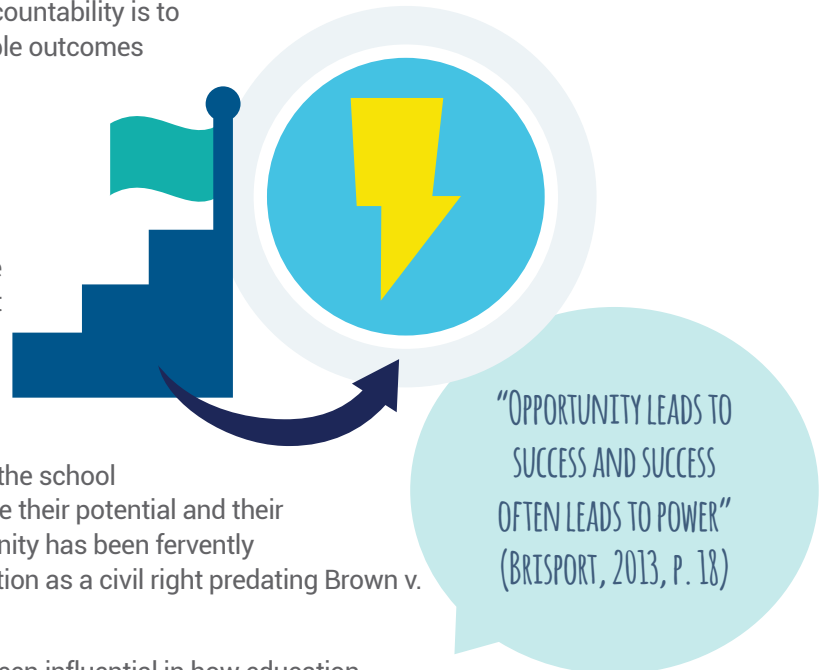
# Social-Emotional Understanding for the African American Learner

> "If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves."
>
> **— Carl Jung**

The cultural funds of knowledge that African American students and their families bring to schools can provide benefit to everyone in the learning community. Yet, despite their assets, African American children are the most adversely affected in schools in every measure, academically, socially, emotionally, economically, and physically, thus, impacting their readiness to learn and future quality of life (Aspen Institute, 2018). The power of creating responsive classrooms for the African American child rests with educators' emotional intelligence, social competence, and well-being. Emotional intelligence is the capacity to be aware of, comprehend, and manage emotions in self and others (Harvey, Evans, Hill, Henricksen, & Bimier, 2016). Teachers demonstrate emotional competence when they combine this skill with social abilities such as emotional expression, empathy, relationships, and self-efficacy (Harvey et al., 2016). Without question, teachers must prioritize developing and using emotional intelligence and social abilities with an equity mindset for the African American child in order to reap the intended benefits. As the literature suggests, teachers often carry implicit biases related to race and ethnicity, which can impact their capacity to empathize and develop relationships with African American students and their families (Suttie, 2016). Consequently, it is critical for teachers to attend to their beliefs about race, ethnicity, and culture in general, about their own race and culture, and about others (Gunn & King, 2015). When teachers have a genuine willingness to engage in reflecting on and understanding their beliefs, they can begin to develop the empathetic capacity to understand the classroom from their students' perspective.
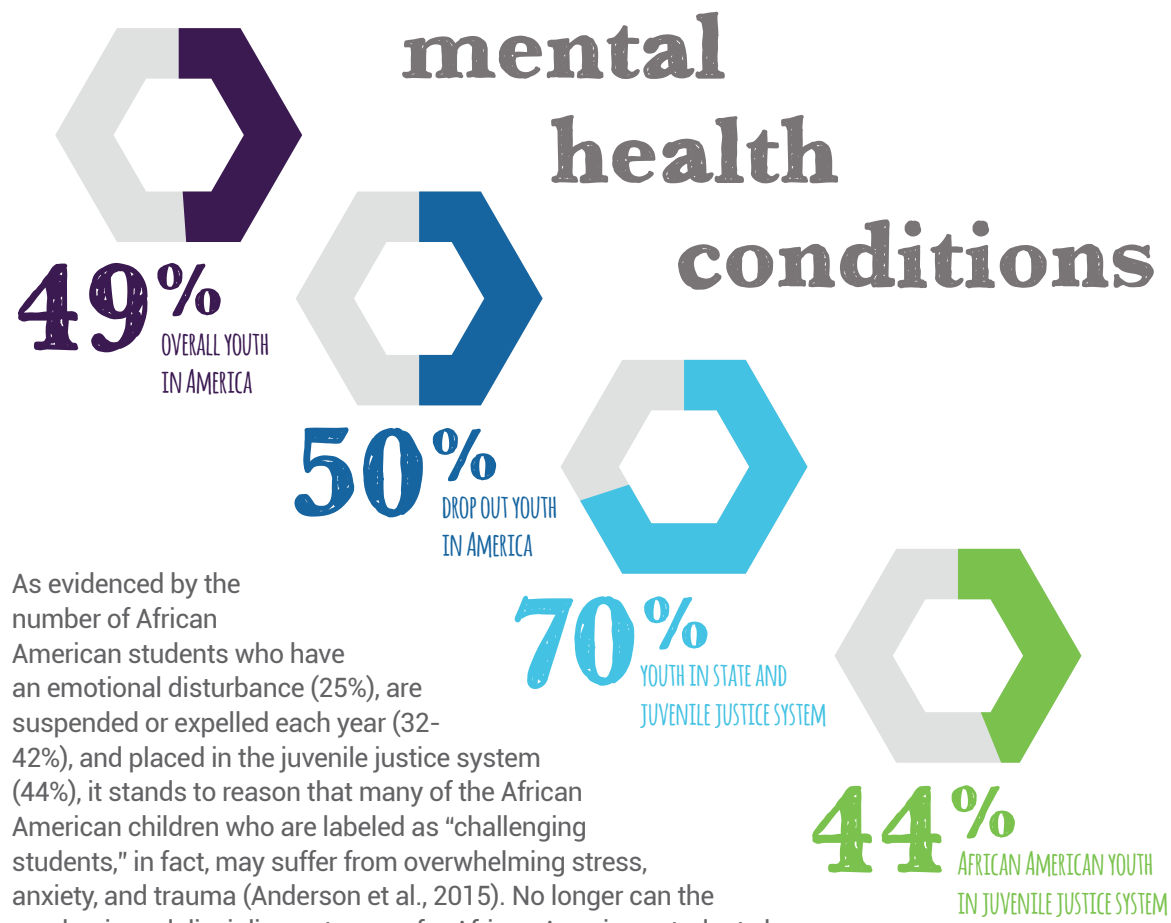
The need for emotional intelligence during the era of Brown v. Board of Education was imperative because children were experiencing multilayered emotional shifts and trauma as a result of the impact of institutionalized racism in segregated schools, in addition to the compounded trauma experienced with forced integration. Although, separate was proven to be inherently unequal, African American students in segregated schools had developed a sense of safety and security learning and engaging with a community that was familiar to them. It must be said that with forced integration, not all African American students were included in the integration process. The teachers and students who were forced to integrate into the all-White schools were chosen for their social, emotional, and intellectual ability to integrate with mainstream White America seamlessly. Consequently, most African American students and their community schools were still segregated, and their condition remained financially inequitable, and that reality exists and impacts the progress of the African American learner and community school today.

## Trauma-Informed Approach

Social-emotional competence influences the nature of the relationships teachers develop with African American students. All students need socially and emotionally competent teachers. However, teachers with a high social and emotional intelligence are positioned to have a profound impact on African American learners from communities of high poverty who are often exposed to family and environmental stressors or trauma (Anderson et al., 2015). Therefore, schools should have, as a major priority mental health supports for African American learners and their families.

Approximately 49% of adolescent youth live with a mental health condition in this country (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2017, fig. 5). This includes the number of children served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) who have been identified as having an emotional disturbance. Over 50% of this population of children drop out of high school (National Alliance on Mental Illness [NAMI], n.d., para. 1) Without a high school diploma sustaining a living wage becomes a challenge. In as much, 70% of youth in state and local juvenile justice systems have a mental illness (NAMI, n.d., para. 1). If children can get access to services early, perhaps the pipeline to prison can be interrupted. Unfortunately, an intervention on the pipeline to prison for the African American child has not been interrupted or disturbed enough. An estimated 44% of youth in the juvenile justice system are African American. And, over 25% of youth identified as having an emotional disturbance are African American (NCES, 2018, fig. 204.50). Again, the African American child only represents 13% of the U.S. population.

## mental health conditions

**49%**
OVERALL YOUTH
IN AMERICA

**50%**
DROP OUT YOUTH
IN AMERICA

**70%**
YOUTH IN STATE AND
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

**44%**
AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH
IN JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

As evidenced by the number of African American students who have an emotional disturbance (25%), are suspended or expelled each year (32-42%), and placed in the juvenile justice system (44%), it stands to reason that many of the African American children who are labeled as "challenging students," in fact, may suffer from overwhelming stress, anxiety, and trauma (Anderson et al., 2015). No longer can the academic and discipline outcomes for African American students be dismissed as gaps due to their own deficits. This is a wake-up call for all educators who serve African American children to recognize the opportunity gaps in our actions to become socially and emotionally competent to meet their needs (Anderson et al., 2015).

## Promising Practices
## for Socio-Emotional Understanding

TABSE believes that ensuring emotional support for students means that teachers and administrators must first be emotionally healthy themselves. Schools with goals to implement socio-emotional supports for students should begin with ensuring that teachers feel connected to their values, have equity mindsets, and have demonstrated resilience through the capacity to respond productively in challenging situations (Aspen Institute, 2018). Equally important, socio-emotional support with an equity mindset engages families in the process through frequent and open communication so that mutual trust is established, and families see that their voice and culture are valued as it relates to educating their children. No amount of grit or resilience will allow African American students to be successful when adults in the school community discount, ignore, or stigmatize their lived experiences, race, or social contexts. The pathway to realizing schools that are socially and emotionally supportive for African American learners necessitates careful examination of their structural systems to remove the barriers in schools where racism, privilege, and power influence daily decisions that negatively impact them. Simply, African American learners don't need more grit, they need school cultures that are free from institutionalized racism and oppression.

# Quality Teaching and Learning for the African American Learner

> "Educational equity for all America's children remains one of the last unresolved Civil Rights issues."

For the past few decades, researchers have documented the academic deficits of African American students. The causes of these deficits have been attributed to the students, their parents, communities, and their culture (Osei-Kofi, 2005; Kunjufu, 2006). Unfortunately, to blame students, their parents, communities, or culture for these deficits is misplacing responsibility and accountability. The deficits experienced by the African American learner is the direct outcome of the inequitable system in which they are learning. Alexander Den Heijer a well-known Dutch inspirational speaker asserts, "When a flower doesn't bloom you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower'. - There is no simple solution to overcome the educational discrepancies in the environment of the African American learner. However, included in the Equity Mindset Framework are factors that support the idea that quality teachers are the vehicles that will deliver positive educational experiences for the African American learner, in essence, creating a shift that stops blaming the learner and empowers the teacher who is delivering the learning culture.

The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, brought a great deal of attention to the academic status of America's students. This report led to the criticism of teachers for the educational outcomes of students. TABSE contends that teachers are a critical asset to educational outcomes of African American learners. Equity-based training and practices can address the perceived academic gaps by creating a system that supports the learning experiences of African American children. High quality

teachers can have a significant influence on student learning. Identifying, training, and hiring high-quality teachers in schools with large numbers of African American students is vital in creating environments where both teaching and learning success are experienced. Traditionally, teacher preparation programs and school districts have not adequately prepared teachers to contribute to the African American learning experience in culturally responsive ways. African American students have been expected to assimilate into school cultures that do not reflect their background or experiences. Similarly, traditional school cultures are based on the shared values, beliefs, and biases of a middle class, conservative idealism. Likewise, when schools were forced to integrate as a result of the Brown v. Board of Education decision, integration efforts were executed, but preparing and training educators and a school system to adopt a bicultural identity and acceptance was not implemented. The role of the teacher cannot be understated. A teacher's beliefs, expectations, understanding of culture, and preparation all influence the learning environment.



## Teacher Beliefs and Expectations

It is important to understand and address how teachers beliefs and perceptions about their African American students influences the learning experiences of these students. Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968) provided evidence to support that a person's expectations of another's behavior may serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, when a teacher has great expectations for a student's intellectual development, those children will demonstrate great intellectual ability. Studies demonstrate that teachers maintain different expectations for different students and these changing expectations impact students' academic performance (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, Townsend, & Hamilton, 2007). For decades, African American learners have been systematically and consistently told they are inferior and incapable of high academic achievement, resulting in the current poor academic status for many African American learners. Expectations rest on what the teacher knows about the student and is tied to the relationship they may have with the

student (Brophy & Good, 1974). Based on expectations, teachers may make erroneous assumptions about student performance (Missett, Azano, Callahan, & Landrum, 2016). Teachers' expectations are likely to be self-sustaining since expectations may influence perception (Good & Nichols, 2001). Consequently, students will sink to the low expectations of the teacher. Brown v. Board of Education opened the door for equality in education for African American learners. It was believed that if African American students were to have equivalent or the same facilities and resources as their White counterparts, they would achieve at the same rate. This ideology did not consider the distinct qualities of African American culture or the socioeconomic status of the African American learners (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The importance of culture cannot be overlooked. The difference in values between the African American culture and schools may actually increase educational disparities for the African American learner (Boykin & Tom 1985).

## Understanding Dimensions of Black Culture

When African American children engage in settings that heavily cater to and are created for children from the mainstream culture, they are often culturally misunderstood (Ford, 2013; Hill, 2009). Educators may mistakenly view culturally specific behavior as problem behavior or proof of inferiority, thus, resulting in negative experiences for African American students (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Frazier Trotman, 2002). Teachers with predetermined negative attitudes or deficit thought processes overlook the strength of African American culture and how it can be utilized to enhance the education experience of all students.

When culturally diverse individuals are placed in circumstances different from what they are accustomed to (i.e., monocultural school settings and expectations), they may struggle in making the necessary social and cultural adjustments to be successful (Boykin, 1994; Boykin & Noguera, 2011). School is an example where these cultural styles may be misunderstood and, in some occurrences, contribute to higher referrals to special education and subsequent overrepresentation (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2008).

## Promising Practices for Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning strategies that move educators from an unconscious incompetence mindset to an unconscious competent mindset includes pedagogical practices that support the learning styles and cultural norms of the African American learner. According to Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008), "To be effective, urban education reform movements must begin to develop partnerships with communities that provide young people with the opportunity to be successful while maintaining their identities as urban youth" (p. 7). A critical component of moving toward educational equity is for teachers to have a deep understanding of the dimensions of the culture of African American students.

One way to understand the dimensions of student culture is for educators to use a funds-of-knowledge approach. This approach recognizes that students and their families come to the table with social and cultural experiences that contribute and stimulate the learning environments. This challenges a culturally unresponsive mindset that may perceive that students do not have a treasure trove of experiences to introduce into the learning environment. Instead of recommending remediation or intervention, emphasis should be placed on assets and resources (or funds of knowledge) of African American students' "defining pedagogical characteristic" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. x). Essentially, a funds-of-knowledge approach reframes African American families as owning, rather than lacking, rich and varied assets. Reframing from a deficit to a resiliency mindset can open doors to a more equitable educational experience for African American students.

# Nurturing Relationships With the African American Learner

The brand bestowed on a given learner is bestowed by design and is a creature of the coexistence of the vision held for the learner by those who have the power and authority to make a decision about the education of the learner.

**– Broussard, Johnson, and Levi, 2003**

Nurturing relationships with the African American learner is an essential element in improving the academic success and the cultural competence of the teacher. The Equity Mindset Framework assert that a teacher's ability to develop nurturing relationships can provide needed support for African American students. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) stated in her seminal work, *Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,* that "the dilemma for African American students becomes one of negotiating the academic demands of a school while demonstrating cultural competence" (p. 476). Moreover, culturally relevant teachers are able to also help students develop a critical consciousness. A critical consciousness is

important for African American students because it helps them to "recognize and analyze systems of inequality" and can "be a gateway to academic motivation and achievement for marginalized students" (El-Amin et al., 2017, p. 18). Critical consciousness describes the concept of awareness of one's placement in society and the implications of being placed (Swartz, 2004).

Fairclough (2004) pointed out that, in the environment of the segregated school, teachers enjoyed close relationships with their pupils based on empathy with the individual child and an intimate knowledge of the black community, enabling them to motivate their charges. Integration destroyed that relationship by undermining the position of the teacher as a mentor, role model, and disciplinarian. It caused a loss of interest in learning on the part of black pupils (p. 44).

National data addressed earlier reveals that African American students are not showing equitable academic gains, especially in environments where the relationship with the student and teacher is nurtured. Simply, the African American learner in today's schools are not being taught with academic rigor or delivery through culturally competent mindsets that are working to close the achievement gap. Integration should have happened, it's just that when it happened physically, it should have happened culturally as well. African American students were integrated, but their cultural community and norms were not allowed to come with them. Teachers who are critically aware of the importance of their relationship with the students, family, and community are "keenly aware of crucial elements generally disregarded in most high-needs schools. Equally important to students' success is a sense of resilience, self-efficacy, positive self-identity, critical awareness and social capital" (Erikson, 2012, pp. 8-9).

## Mining the Data

In 1970, African Americans accounted for 12% of the teaching profession. In 1991, according to the NEA, the number had dropped to 8% (King 1993, p. 125). More recently, it was found the number of Black teachers increased by 25%, but their percentage in the overall teaching force declined, from 7.5% to 6.5% (Strauss, 2017). The reduction in African American teachers is troubling because it means the workforce is ready to invest in and support a public education system in which many African American children are not experiencing a culture that is familiar to them. However, simply having African American teachers does not mean there will always be a cultural match. Regardless of the race or ethnicity of a teacher, intentional effort still needs to be placed on authentically connecting with students. Even African American teachers need as much professional development as non-Black teachers in ensuring the academic and cultural success of the African American child.

## Relationships after Brown v. Board of Education

Before Brown v. Board of Education, cultural conflict was minimized, as most African American children were educated in communities where teachers

matched the cultural dynamics of the students they served (Graybill, 1997). Researchers found that while African American children are twice as likely to experience cultural conflict with teachers at the beginning of school, the teacher-student relationship conflicts do not improve over time. Because of this pervasive trend in declining relationships, students were seriously underachieving years later as they transitioned into middle school (Spilt & Hughes, 2015; Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012). Because of this pervasive trend in declining relationships, students were seriously underachieving years later as they transitioned into middle school (Spilt & Hughes, 2015; Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012). Teachers will often underestimate the achievement capabilities of African American children, and cultural misunderstanding and group biases may all contribute to this dangerous decline (Thijs, Westhof, & Koomen, 2012) These results can be exacerbated by poor parent and community relations (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005) and perceived discrimination (Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009). Unfortunately, the decline in relationships beginning in elementary and perpetuated through middle school is undoubtedly hindering the success of African American students in the classroom. Moving through the continuum in the Equity Mindset Framework, leaders must support teachers' capacity to establish positive relationships to support African American learners in a way that will ensure their success. There have been too many reasons to not engage, but for leaders to make space for teachers to engage in critical conversations that support racial equity and then hold teachers accountable for their learning, we may finally see the promises of Brown be fulfilled.

## Parental and Community Engagement

Student- teacher relationships have a significant impact on student's social and emotional experience in school, primarily because such relationships influence a student's perception of connection and belonging at school (Cooper & Miness, 2014; Osterman, 2000). In many cases where our African American students feel a greater connection and understanding in the streets than in the classrooms, educators need to be devoted to bridging those two worlds and that begins with understanding through nurturing relationships. This may be easy to say, but how do educators widen their own perspective to begin to incorporate the alternative views of reality their students face daily?

Teachers should actively participate in creating connections through parental and community engagement. Often, African American students suffer a discontinuity with their schools as "the students' Afrocentric language, behavior, and learning styles are in conflict with the school's systems which are Eurocentric (Graybill, 1997; & Irvine, 1990). Educators should be keenly aware of their positionality in this regard and make efforts to understand the community by reaching out, communicating, and participating in parental and community engagement. This process should begin in teacher preparation programs and continue under the direction of educational leaders. If teachers are culturally out of sync with the students they serve, there is the tendency to view behaviors negatively (Graybill, 1997; Irvine, 1990).

# Managing the Classroom for the African American Learner

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.

— **Frederick Douglass, 1855**

As articulated in "Saving the African American Child," schools must have a set of explicit standards by which the relations among and between students and educators are governed (NABSE, 1984). The school community of students, teachers, leaders, and families need structures that allow for teaching and learning to happen in ways that are fair, peaceful, supportive, and benefit all. Specifically, structures must be put in place that support empowering a shared power structure between the student and teacher to successfully educate all children in schools. In

this report, discipline is defined as the act of creating an environment that supports the "student's ability and will to do what needs doing for as long as it needs doing" so that the student learns from the outcomes (Wayson & Pinnell, 1982). While TABSE supports the goal of creating schools that are organized in nature, disciplinary structures that are repressive, negative, and do not promote a shared power structure, taking into account the basic rights of students, is not encouraged.
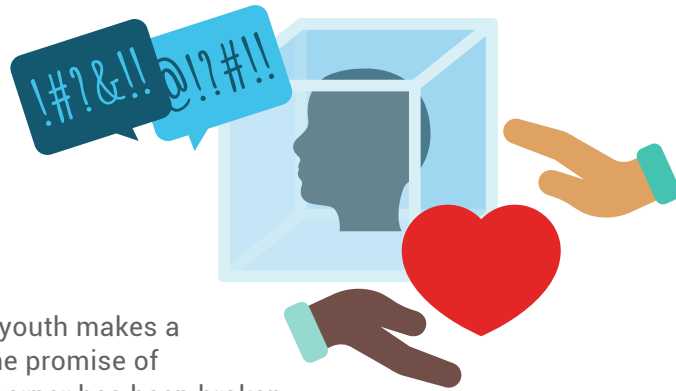
## The Discipline Gap.

Zero-tolerance policies mandate predetermined consequences or punishments for specific behaviors in public schools. Typically, the punishments are enforced regardless of the context in which the behavior occurred or extenuating circumstances. According to the Civil Rights Data Collection Report, during the 2015-2016 school year, African American students represented approximately 15% of the total student enrollment in U.S. public schools (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016), and 31% of students who were referred to law enforcement or arrested (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2018). In Texas, African American students represent approximately 12.7% of student enrollment, and 20% of students who were referred to law enforcement or arrested. Unfortunately, these practices have ushered the criminal justice system into the school system, causing the distinction between "African American child" and "African American criminal" to become blurred (Wilson, 2014). This data sheds light on the discipline gap and underscores how zero-tolerance policies set the tone for the criminalization of African American students.

African American learners are gravely impacted by unforgiving legal systems. All student subgroups are subject to harsh disciplinary measures, however, African American youth are far more likely than other students to be suspended and expelled. (Losen & Martinez, 2013). While African American male students represent 8% of the students enrolled in public schools nationally, they overwhelmingly represent 25% of students who were suspended (CRDC, 2018). Additionally, they represent 6% of students enrolled in Texas public schools and 30% of those who were suspended (CRDC, 2018). This is compared to White male students who represent 25% and 14% of students enrolled in U.S. and Texas public schools respectively, and 24% and 16% of students who were suspended (CRDC, 2018). This statistical portrait shows the disproportionate representation of African American students who are excluded from the instructional learning environment and placed in alternative environments that do not support cultural competence or academic excellence. The racial disparities in suspensions and expulsions are documented at both the elementary and secondary levels (Losen & Martinez, 2013).

Unfortunately, the younger the African American learner, the more grim the school experience is for them. In the United States, African American children represent 18% of preschool student enrollment, yet they represent 48% of children in this age group who received more than one out-of-school suspension (CRDC, 2018). In Texas, African American children represent 14.9% of the total preschool student enrollment, and account for 37.8% of students who received more than one out-of-school suspension (CRDC, 2018). These data points should not only create an awareness of concern but an alarm stimulating a call to action. At this rate, there will be more African American students introduced to the pipeline to prison, than progress from cradle to college. The

patterns of racial disparity in discipline and achievement predict the percentages of African American learners who are incarcerated versus those enrolled in universities (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). The condition of the African American student will not improve by reviewing data, but by understanding the origin, impact, and message the data reveals in crafting a plan to action. Punishments like removal, exclusion, and isolation do not get to the root causes of behavior and, therefore, provide the predictable and unsuccessful outcomes that are continuously realized in school discipline reform (American Psychological Association [APA], 2006). This epidemic of removal, exclusion, and criminalization of African American youth makes a strong case for the argument that the promise of education to the African American learner has been broken.

## Change Discourse and Practice

With these perspectives in mind, how can the discipline discourse and practices in schools become equity conscious and focus on breaking the school-to-prison cycle for African American learners? From the African American child's perspective, schools are social communities where they belong, and where their behavioral challenges can be addressed through socially and emotionally supportive interventions (Meyer & Evans, 2012; McCluskey et al., 2008). Gregory and Weinstein (2008) found that the most common reported reason for suspension of African American students was defiance of authority. The behavior of the African American child in a culturally unresponsive classroom can easily be seen as defiant. The case can be made that the student may not be willing to assimilate into cultural norms and practices that are foreign, unknown, or uncomfortable for them. African American students are not always defiant; rather, the cultural identity as compared to expected cultural norms may be at odds. Teachers reported students were argumentative and refused to comply with adult requests. This defiant behavior, when repeated, has been labeled as an oppositional defiant disorder within the child (Hinshaw & Lee, 2003). In many school cultures, the student is viewed as resistant instead of the learning environment being the resistant force for the African American child. Instead of asking African American students to abandon familiar customs and assimilate into the culturally unconscious reality of the educator, it would be more beneficial to introduce a cultural competence that creates a bicultural identity so that the African American child is able to seamlessly transition from one culture to another without sacrificing their identity, yet able to adopt a new one.

# Promising Practices for Managing the Classroom

Schools that are equipped to provide the best learning environment for African American students consist of educators who capitalize on students' strengths and reject explanations that negatively characterize them as being at-risk or as having unwarranted behavioral disorders. They develop clear, reasonable behavior expectations that are agreed upon and shared by students, teachers, and parents. Taken together, educators' equity consciousness, socioemotional capacity, relational ability, and instructional practice have profound influence on the nature of discipline in the classroom. When educators possess these characteristics, they develop a safe-to-learn culture for the African American child. Teachers are able to constantly adjust classroom strategies to meet the academic and socioemotional needs of the African American child.

> Restorative discipline shifts the focus from punishment and exclusion to accountability and belonging.

Given the disproportionality of retributive disciplinary practices that mandate removing African American students from the learning environment, TABSE advocates for more equitable approaches that are person-centered and care-based to build a powerful community of learners that supports academic excellence for African American children (Normore, 2017). These practices do not emphasize detachment and control as means for modifying student behavior in the classroom (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). Instead, they have interpersonal relationships, personal dignity, mutual respect and understanding, and positive communication as their core essentials.

## Restorative Practices

The restorative approach to discipline shows promise as a realistic alternative to punitive practices. Studies indicate that a restorative paradigm of addressing behaviors can purposefully impact African American student achievement and provide healing and reform for students who have traditionally been underserved (Ryan & Ruddy, 2015). The restorative approach allows educators to implement discipline with an equity mindset because, with this approach, teachers must have in-depth, facilitated conversations when behavioral issues arise. Many behavioral issues stem from issues of past emotional injury and trauma, but with a restorative approach, the goal is not changing the behavior but restoring socioemotional health. Additionally, it encourages students to practice empathy and take responsibility for the way their actions affect others. Restorative discipline seeks to shift the focus from punishment and exclusion to accountability and belonging for the African American child. Restorative practices also address some of the socioemotional issues around trauma that often create cultural collisions and behavioral shifts.
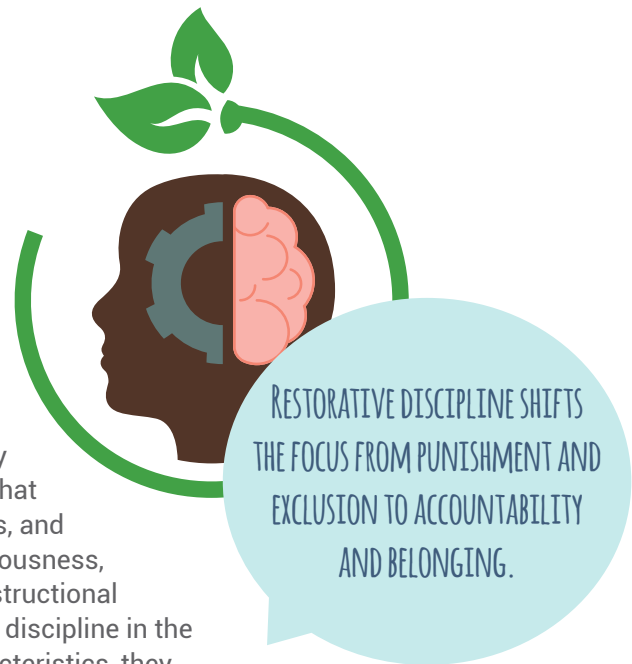
## Care-Based Approaches

The restorative model is one example of a care-based approach to discipline that can be implemented at the school and classroom levels for African American students. Other promising behavior-support practices that equity-conscious educators can implement in the classroom should actively teach contextually appropriate social behaviors (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012). With a care-based approach, teachers are not asking students to abandon what is known to them but to adopt additional schemas that will support them navigating through diverse life and learning encounters. To do this, teachers must be willing to embrace and understand the African American child as an individual and a member of their community culture. When teachers use a shared vocabulary that consists of students' cultural communication patterns and dialect, classroom

expectations become relevant and tangible for students to take ownership of them (Milner & Tenore, 2010). Teachers should emphasize shared norms and power for the classroom and revisit them consistently through regular opportunities for students to discuss their feelings and reflect on how one's behavior impacts others (Ullucci, 2009). These practices build empathy and develop everyone's capacity to care for each other, making all responsible to one another to do what is expected (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012).

Taken together, these practices are offered not as a panacea to inappropriate behaviors in the classroom but as tools for creating an all-inclusive classroom that are alternatives to counterproductive retributive practices. The success of schools as effective learning environments for African American students rests on educators developing a conscious equity mindset so that they create socially and emotionally competent contexts that promote and support students' academic and positive behavioral engagement (Sugai & Horner, 2008).

# A Call to Action

In the 65 years post Brown, America has faced many political, economic, social, and cultural shifts. The discourse around our educational system has revolved around a mantra of excellence, rigor, and relevance. The academic achievement data indicates that the African American child has not been the beneficiary of changed educational practices but, instead, continues to struggle to reap the benefits of the promises of Brown.

The original report, *Saving the African American Child,* was birthed out of the realization that "we as a people are far from our ideal of excellence. We have far greater capacity than opportunities have permitted us to exercise" (NABSE, 1984, p. 40). In order for African American children to become responsible adults, they will have to be properly educated in public schools today.

This earnest and sincere call to action is for every educator to advocate for and demand the equitable education of the African American child. The Equity Mindset Framework, are a call to action and not a suggestion. TABSE believes that if educators become competent in each of the areas discussed in this paper, then the teachers' mindset and, ultimately, practices will begin to change. Similar to a ripple effect, if one teacher is able to change, inevitably they will impact their circle of influence and begin to establish effective systems focused on the pursuit of equity. It is incumbent on the reader to decisively move from unconscious incompetence to competent action if the broken promises for the African American child are to be mended.

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