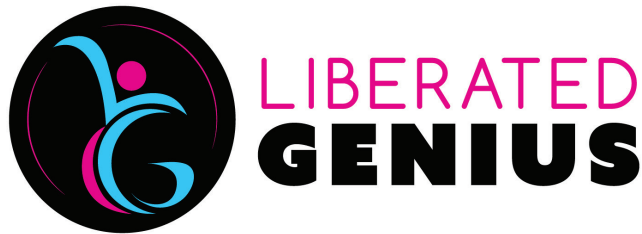Black
Teacher
Project

A SPACE TO BE WHOLE:

A Landscape Analysis of Education-
Based Racial Affinity Groups in the U.S.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report abides by the National Association of Black Journalists' 2020 recommendation that whenever a color is used to appropriately describe race then it should be capitalized, including Black, White, and Brown.

EVERY CHILD DESERVES A BLACK TEACHER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a national landscape analysis of racial affinity groups focused on supporting educators of color.

This report is intended to:
- Document national and state organizations;
- Highlight similarities and differences between groups;
- Explore potential collaborations between affinity space approaches; and
- Identify policy and activism implications of racial affinity work.

The goals of this report are:
- To support the inquiry of how and why Black teachers and other teachers of color participate in affinity spaces in order to gain and share a comprehensive awareness regarding educator-based racial affinity groups nationwide; and

- To inform a policy-advocacy platform that promotes racial affinity groups to support educator development and sustainability.

Report data was gathered in 2019 primarily through interviews with 101 program leaders of racial affinity spaces. Interviews focused on the following questions:

- How does the racial affinity group operate and what are some unique features?
- What has been the impact of the group?
- What are the needs of teachers you serve?
- What are the organizational needs?
- Do you know any other organizations that have racial affinity spaces for educators?

Additional information regarding methodology can be found at the close of this report.

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INTRODUCTION

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"Racial affinity professional development at its core is about designing spaces of support, learning and healthy career development that are culturally responsive to a specific racialized group (that) experiences the consequences of institutionalized racism in particular ways."

- Dr. Micia Mosely, Black Teacher Project
(Mosely, 2018)

The work of any educator in the 21st century must be to understand oppression and inequity in the education system and strive to transform that system. Transformation in education is a process that calls us to make meaning in three ways: alone, in affinity, and in alliance across difference (Peters, 2016). Affinity in schools is not new. We are structured to operate in affinity relative to grades and subject matter. Racial affinity can support all teachers and educators in understanding how they have been harmed by racial oppression, how to heal from that harm, how our systems are designed to perpetuate that oppression, and how their racial identity connects to what actions they can take to transform systems.

The lack of Black teachers and other teachers of color is a major equity issue for school districts across the United States. This report focuses on racial affinity groups that offer support to in-service educators of color, pre-service educators, and P-12 students interested in teaching. A major finding from the data showed that all of the racial affinity-based groups interviewed have a direct focus on practicing what we have termed **racial wellness support**, which includes inspiration and empowerment; fellowship and networking; and understanding, navigating, and negotiating racial and racist issues.

Findings also showed that as a result of participating in these groups, teachers are staying in the profession; choosing to return to work at the same schools; and developing pedagogical and leadership skills including presenting their expertise at local, regional, and national conferences and working with their schools and districts to change policies and lead change efforts.

Historical Context

While there has been a surge in racial affinity groups in education since 2000, and even more since 2010, they are not new. These safe spaces have been around since at least 1878 when Black educators in Georgia asked for salaries that were equal to their White counterparts (Siddle Walker, 2018). Most likely, these types of groups started even earlier as Black educators first began teaching in the African Free Schools of New York in 1832. These organizations were a result of segregation and not being allowed in White teacher organizations. As chronicled by Dr. Vanessa Siddle Walker's book, *The Lost Education of Horace Tate* (2018), these organizations were places for Black educators to strategize support for their students and families, their communities, and for each other in the segregated south (Siddle Walker, 2009a; Siddle Walker, 2018; Anderson, 1988).

The Black educators discussed in Walker's book focused on three main pillars—aspiration, advocacy, and access— which were commonly emphasized in segregated Black schools. During their meetings, which were held nationally, regionally, state-wide, and locally, they discussed their aspirations for full citizenship (Siddle Walker, 2009a). They believed

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all children could learn and their mission was to help them reach their "highest potential" (Siddle Walker, 1996). In addition, they wanted students to master the content, and use it to fight for equal rights (Siddle Walker, 2009a), similar to the third tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy's "sociopolitical consciousness," (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Advocacy took the form of fighting for and on behalf of students, families, communities, as well as for their own rights and wellbeing (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). Black teachers and educators championed for textbooks, fought for better school buildings, and even played an integral role in ending segregation. Until the work of Dr. Siddle Walker (2009b; 2018), historians most consistently credit the National Association for the Advancement of People (N.A.A.C.P.), parents, and ministers for ending de jure segregation via the Brown versus Board of Education (Brown v. Board) case in 1954; however, as uncovered by Siddle Walker, the secret activism of Black teachers and principals played a huge role in ushering in that historic legislation. Black educators discussed the needs and concerns of the students and schools, identified the students and families who would be willing to testify, and provided the money and data to generate the education cases. From there, the N.A.A.C.P. provided the structure for the legal cases. As Civil Rights attorney Oliver Hill stated, "it was the teachers," (Siddle Walker, 2018, p. 5) who undergirded these efforts. The pillars of aspiration and advocacy were the foundation of Black educators' teaching and life practices for over 100 years until the end of legal segregation when racial affinity-based organizations merged with all-White organizations.

Through the success of Brown v. Board, Black children gained access to resources, equipment, and opportunities. However, with this access Black students and teachers also became disconnected from the grounding pillars of aspiration and advocacy in several ways:

- Black institutional schools and educational affinity groups were dismantled (Siddle Walker, 2018);

- Over 38,000 Black teachers and administrators were fired (Foster, 1997); and

- Black teachers lost their voice, power, and integrity in educating Black students (Siddle Walker, 2018).

Students were desegregated while the Black educators experienced "outer-gration" (Siddle Walker, 2009b, p. 271) along with loss of their ideas, organizations, and advocacy (Siddle Walker, 2018). Black students lost their Black teachers. With the "outer-gration" of Black educators, Black students' most effective advocacy organizations faltered and the number of champions they had cheering them on at school dwindled.

Current Context

Educators of color in 2020 are still dealing with the effects of the "outer-gration." There are still too few Black educators and other educators of color in schools. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (2020), 79% of America's public school teachers during the 2015-2016 school year were White, and 21% were teachers of color. Meanwhile, students of color make up 51% of the student population in public schools. As a result, educators of color often have to fight, navigate, and negotiate microaggressions that target both themselves (Lynn, 2002; Kohli 2016) and students and families of color (Warren-Grice & Parker, 2017). Consequently, schools are often hostile places for both students (Masko, 2014; Love, 2019) and educators of color (Bristol, 2020; Kohli, 2016). Educators of color often feel isolated (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008) and their ideas are undervalued (Dixon et al, 2019). They are also expected to take on additional roles and responsibilities (Dixon et al 2019; Warren-Grice, 2017), and they are judged more harshly (Drake et al, 2019).

For these reasons, racial affinity groups operate with the same mission as those prior to desegregation. They respond to racism and oppression experienced by educators of color in schools, such as but not limited to:

- Evaded-racism: avoiding specifically naming racism as a problem (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevarez, 2017);

- Microaggressions: direct and subtle forms of White racism and racial assumptions that lead to tension and mistrust (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009); and

- Racial battle fatigue: psychophysiological attrition for fighting daily racism (Smith, Yosso, & Solorzano, 2006; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018).

By focusing on the needs of educators of color, racial affinity groups generate positive results such as increased retention rates (Education Trust & Teach West, 2019). Racial affinity groups also affirm participants' goals, values, racial identity, and humanity. They provide informal and formal mentorship, create community and supportive relationships, and in some instances compensate educators financially for engaging in professional development (Bristol, 2016).

Furthermore, these groups prioritize the importance of teachers of color by seeking ways to attract, recruit, retain, develop and sustain them. Akin to their predecessors, these groups also provide students with greater access to adult champions of their own aspiration, advocacy, and access.

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FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Based on the experiences of participants in racial affinity-based organizations, what are the needs of teachers?

According to interview data, leaders of affinity spaces cite the following areas of support needed by teachers and/or pre-service teachers:

1.) Schools and districts that acknowledge their history; and are redesigned to be anti-racist, anti-biased, inclusive, and nurturing for people of color.

Similar to the findings in _If You Listen, We Will Stay: Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover_ (Education Trust & Teach West, 2019), organizational leaders stated that teachers need district and administrator support. Educators of color do not feel intrinsically supported in schools by their leaders or by the institution or system. Across the board, organizational leaders discussed the toxic and hostile nature of schools for educators of color.

> _"What we're finding—and this is not new, we're finding it all across the country— Black teachers and Black administrators are experiencing the same push-out effect that our students are experiencing: the dishonoring of our voice and the knowledge that we bring to the space, the gatekeeping of access to leadership opportunities, opportunities to expand our knowledge and teaching capacities and leadership capacities... and blatant White supremacy and experiencing the effects of that with our colleagues and peers and our leaders."_
>
> _- Dr. Tonya Walls,_ Equity Matters Initiative

Dr. Walls' statement summarizes how schools serve as hostile places for educators of color, and specifically Black educators. Similar to the _If You Listen_ report, leaders stated that teachers need to feel loved, valued, validated, supported, celebrated, and connected. Countering the common tendency for teachers to operate in silos, in racial affinity spaces educators of color can meet these needs for each other even in systems where they may not feel seen, supported or celebrated. Additionally, the authenticity and vulnerability fostered by racial affinity spaces enables educators of color to recognize that they are not alone in their professional challenges, and that they are often rooted in the same issue—institutional and systemic racism.

To address and combat this pervasive racism, many racial affinity group leaders suggest that schools and school systems must explicitly recognize and name that they were not initially designed to be anti-racist, anti-biased, inclusive, affirming and liberatory spaces.

In 1779, Thomas Jefferson proposed a two-track educational system, with different tracks in his words for "the laboring and the learned." He argued that scholarship would allow a few of the laboring class to advance by "raking a few geniuses from the rubbish" (Jefferson, 1832, p. 153). Public education in the United States was not designed to educate every citizen - not even every White citizen, much less a racially diverse populous. As professor Qiana Cutts, Assistant Professor of Education at Mississippi State University, stated,

> "...American schools were not designed to be [or] intended to be liberatory spaces. And they can't be that with which they don't align."
>
> - Q. Cutts (Personal communication, September 7, 2020)

In order for learning communities to be equitable and anti-racist spaces where all students thrive, schools and school systems must acknowledge their history, for whom and for what purpose they were (and were not) designed for, and commit to decolonizing while redesigning them with a liberatory framework. It is essential that this redesign process allows all impacted groups (educators, students, familites, community members, etc) to collectively dream and reimagine a new blueprint committed to liberation.

2.) Holistic space and time to meet for racial wellness support, community development, and capacity building.

A common thread for racial affinity groups is that they serve as places of healing from trauma and oppression and focus on racial wellness support through providing a communal space for
- Inspiration and empowerment;
- Fellowship and networking, and
- Developing a shared understanding and practices around navigating and negotiating racial and racist issues.

The opportunity to make connections and build community is a critical element of racial affinity spaces, as many educators of color express feelings of isolation at their school sites. This is especially true for men of color who are grossly underrepresented in the teaching force. Ayodele Harrison (of Black Male Educators Talk / BMEs Talk) states that Black male educators need

> "a space where we can emotionally, intellectually, and socially feel safe to begin to remove the mask, to begin to go inward and focus on ourselves." - Ayodele Harrison

As Harrison highlights, when educators come together to share their stories, reflect, and strategize ways of resistance, these practices invite radical self and collective care (Pour-Khorshid, 2016). Affinity groups are also places for educators to practice healing through joy. Harrison discussed how the BMEs Talk space serves as a place for community celebration. BMEs Talk currently has 8000+ followers on their social media platforms and people consistently show up for their live sessions on Tuesday nights - people want the racial affinity connection they provide. Individuals pay to participate in their live event spaces and some schools pay for their employees to attend. This group, like others in this report, is enabling networking, community building, and healing to support the development and sustainability of educators of color.

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During a virtual game night, one of the men received a call that he was hired for his first assistant principal position; suddenly, game night transformed into a place to lift up and honor this achievement. This moment sparked inspiration and pride in the new assistant principal and provided a source of encouragement for other community members who shared the same aspiration.

In addition to acting as places of healing, leaders of racial affinity spaces also state that teachers need an intergenerational collaborative space for working and networking. These groups serve as places where educators can offer cross-generational mentorship to explore problems of practice, and engage in thought partnership regarding strategy and next steps. Some areas of thought partnership named in interviews include curriculum development, student engagement, classroom management, and pursuit of leadership opportunities.

Lastly, racial affinity groups for educators support participants in learning how to navigate their workplaces as teachers of color, unpack racial and racist issues, and combat racial battle-fatigue. Supported by their local union, the Edmonds Educators of Color Network/EeoCN (Edmonds, WA) does this on both an interpersonal and institutional scale. They meet monthly to "unload" and share experiences. In reflecting on the importance of this affinity group, one teacher stated,

> *"I value this group... It has become like my second family, because I trust every one of these members with things that I tell them. It really has been a powerful experience just to have this warm supportive group of individuals."*

There is a general sense from this group that before its creation, these educators of color struggled to find someone to talk to when their White colleagues could not understand what was going on in their lives. At the institutional level, EeoCN meets with the superintendent and cabinet, human resources, the school board, and the state-wide union to discuss equity issues. They realized that in order to have a large lasting impact that will provide structural support for educators of color, they needed to talk with and build relationships with people in positions of power who can change policies. One example of working with human resources resulted in a change in the interview questions used for hiring educators. After two years of talking with human resources about having equitable questions that would attract teachers of color, the questions were changed, and that year, over 20% of the teachers hired were teachers of color.

Another example of EeoCN's large scale impact is their educator of color conference. As a result of the relationships and conversations with the union, superintendent, and cabinet, they were able to host the first two state-wide educator of color conferences in the Edmonds School District during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. The union provided grants to help alleviate the cost, the district provided the space and the janitorial staff, and EeoCN organized the event. The conference garnered so much support, that it is now a line item in the budget for the Washington Education Association. During 2019, the union also held a separate conference, a week after the one hosted by EeoCN, for educators of color in Eastern Washington. The transformative power of these conferences was expressed by Martin Louie, a male Asian American teacher who said,

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{ *"One of the things we did was hold caucus sessions for the different groups. For the very first time in my entire life, and I have been teaching for a very long time, in this one classroom, there were people who were just like me, who looked just like me, shared the same experiences. And I have never had that experience before. It almost brought me to tears talking with this group. And I am sure it was the same for all the other groups. Because we've never been able to bring all of these different groups of people together in the same room. So, I thought it was extraordinary."*

- Martin Louie, Edmonds Educators of Color Network

Overall, the work of the EeoCN echoes and reflects the work of the aforementioned historical Black educators of segregated schools. Their goals are to (a) recruit more educators of color to the district, (b) support in-service educators of color within the district, and (c) provide mentorship for educators of color in the district. All of these things are in service to students. A female Asian American teacher, Chieh Chang, summed it up, saying,

{ *"It's just really powerful to be with teachers who you don't have to explain everything to, and we all know [the influence of racism]. And if that's how we feel, we know it's so important to have teachers who are of color, because of our students...[W]e know what an impact a teacher of color can have on students of color, particularly because we know the student population is shifting and with everything that has been going on, we have to do something to make sure our students of color feel successful and have a role model to follow. They are already starting from a place that is not equal… [we must do] what we can to change the system, so that it does meet the needs of our students. This is part of why I am doing it. It's not for me so much, it's really for students and the young generation coming up... It takes a long time and we've waited long enough; our students have waited long enough."*

- Chieh Chang, Edmonds Educators of Color Network

Affinity groups provide respite; they allow teachers the much needed space to be whole, centering their lives and lived experiences.

3.) Exposure, access, and resources to liberatory pedagogical practices, content, and cultural experts; and professional development that confronts structural power.

Leaders of the affinity groups stated that teachers need access to resources and experts on such as (but not limited to)

1. Culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy;
2. Racial literacy;
3. Critical pedagogy;
4. Political education;
5. Anti-racism;
6. Abolitionist teaching; and
7. Trauma-informed and restorative justice.

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When participants of racial affinity-based groups for educators experience professional development that is culturally relevant, sustaining, and liberatory, they are able to grow in their practice and approach to more effectively support students. Many of the leaders expressed that minoritized teachers often receive less mentorship and/or attention from supervisors, because they already have good relationships with their students. These teachers need a different kind of support, one that supports pedagogical practices instead of classroom management and relationship building.

Many teachers of color name a desire to learn how to focus their pedagogy around their students' needs and assets. These teachers want to support students with a human-centered and expanded notion of rigor, but often have trouble developing and/or implementing this type of pedagogy due to professional development limitations and curriculum restraints. This often leads to burnout and perpetuation of pedagogy that sustains inequity and oppression. Therefore, this area of support is critical for both our teachers and students.

In addition, teachers express a desire to further develop and explore their own racial identity. As a result of racist school environments, educators of color would benefit from opportunities to unpack appropriated racism (Banks & Stephens, 2018), commonly called internalized racism, to see how it manifests in their lives. This would begin and/or continue the process of psychological liberation (Banks & Stephens, 2018). By reflecting on their racial identity and/or appropriated racism, teachers can help students embark on journeys of self awareness and healing as well.

The Association of Raza Educators in California (A.R.E.) provides an example of how to afford educators a liberatory pedagogical framework. They offer the Praxis Institute, a yearly conference designed for pre-service and early career teachers. The conference focuses on curriculum and content that is less familiar, such as: ethnic studies,

organizing in schools to promote social justice, and community wellness to support educators' sustainability.

One highlight of their community organizing-focused professional development is illustrated through a campaign supporting street vendors. After some parents who were street vending were harassed, students asked, "How can we organize and fight?" Subsequently, A.R.E. helped teachers organize to answer the students' question by creating an entire curriculum for their classrooms around this issue. Through this critical and transformative approach to pedagogy, A.R.E. helps educators, students, and parents live the praxis of social justice for liberation.

The Black Teacher Collaborative (BTC), founded and led by Hiewet Senghor, provides another example of ways to meet participants' pedagogy development needs. BTC trains Black teachers in schools serving predominantly Black students. Through a professional development fellowship program, educators learn the standards-aligned pedagogical strategies of SRILE—Shared Racial Identity Learning Environment. Some of the elements of SRILE include, but are not limited to: (a) "critical care and love," where teachers view and support their students as though they were their own children; (b) racial identity development and support, provided through instruction, classroom culture, and in student-teacher relationships; and (c) sociopolitical consciousness, where teachers act as agents of change for the liberation of Black people as a classroom teacher.

During the fellowship, BTC offers a two-day summer intensive covering eight modules of SRILE, delivers monthly sessions devoted to different elements of the pedagogy, and provides one-on-one job-embedded coaching. Through these efforts, BTC helps educators reconnect with their own Blackness and increases their comfort to bringing it authentically in the classroom.

Similarly, the National Equity Project's Black Teacher Project (BTP) (Oakland, CA) is working to expose educators to liberatory approaches. BTP founder Dr. Micia Mosely recognizes,

{ *"Most of our teachers teach a number of non-Black students. We help teachers eliminate anti-Blackness in affinity as well as with the non-Black POC and white folks in their classrooms and systems."*
- Dr. Micia Mosely, Black Teacher Project

One of BTP's offerings is Black teacher-led communities of practice focused on inquiry. Questions BTP teachers focus on in their inquiry groups include:

- What impactful things are you doing as a leader to support the Black community?
- What are you doing inside your classroom to effect and support students?
- What about being a Black educator allows you to impact students differently?

The use of questions like these helps educators build on their own experiences and culture when thinking about ways their instruction and leadership can inform community building and student engagement. Helping educators own the power of their culture and use it in the classroom is an act of decentering Whiteness, an essential function in the movement towards liberation. As one BTP teacher describes,

{ *"It's not just about, 'feeling good [and saying], you're a Black teacher; you're amazing.' It's about, let's grow your pedagogical practices to engage students and families."*

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4.) Financial support for credentialing and professional development participation.

Many in-service educators have expressed the desire to receive compensation for their professional development work in affinity-based groups. Two organizations that fulfill this are the Compton Male Teachers of Color Network (CMTCN) and the Black Teacher Project; both organizations provide stipends to participants for time they spend engaging in professional development.

The CMTCN functions as a community of practice that breaks down silos as academics and practitioners come together to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Participation is completely voluntary, and teachers are compensated for their time. Founding members of the network receive stipends, while new recruits to the program are paid through their school site's professional development budget. CMTCN plans to expand its reach to other schools in the district and have teachers serve as co-creators and facilitators of session programming. (EdTrust West, Bright Spot From the Field, 2020)

Black teachers often report lack of compensation for their innovative ideas, and the invisible emotional and physical tax that comes from racialized labor as pushout factors. Some of this racialized labor includes but is not limited to:

- Being a liaison between the school and students and families of color (Mosely, 2018, Warren-Grice & Parker, 2017);
- Navigating institutional and interpersonal microaggressions rooted in racism (King, 2016, Warren-Grice, 2014); and
- Having to respond to frequent requests and inquiries about cultural relevance, anti-racism, and racial equity challenges (King, 2016, Warren-Grice, 2014).

As demonstrated in the historical context section of this report, Black educators have been doing this work without compensation for over a century. Racial affinity-based organizations that aim to pay their participants for engagement in professional development seek to change this pattern of free Black and POC labor. For pre-service teachers, the ability to successfully achieve degree completion is often a barrier. Pre-service teachers of color often need funding to allay the cost of continued education. Pre-service teachers also need supportive environments to help with credentialing: study groups, tutors, and support networks for passing state examinations and completing credential requirements. Lastly, just as PK-12 students benefit from teachers or color, pre-service teachers need supportive faculty of color in their university credentialing programs.

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5. Leadership, career development, and advancement.

Leaders we interviewed expressed that one of the key components to educator retention is leadership and advancement opportunities that support growth and development goals. Educators want to work for an organization where they are valued, invested in, and supported to continually expand their skills and knowledge. When these needs are not met, schools run the risk of losing talented individuals to places where they see more opportunity and benefits. Educators want to develop and refine their skills and shine in their leadership by sharing expertise and using past experiences to address challenges and innovate.

The Boston Public Schools/BPS (Boston, MA) is a great example of a district offering leadership and career development and advancement. The Boston Public Schools Women Educators of Color (WEOC) Executive Coaching Leadership Program and the Male Educators of Color (MEOC) Executive Coaching Leadership Program, are 8-month accredited programs designed to increase engagement, retention and leadership rates for the staff of color within Boston Public Schools. These leadership programs are open to educators of color at every level in the district and are not limited to specific roles. WEOC and MEOC are designed to intentionally support educators of color to gain access to leadership, professional development, and opportunities. At the time of our interview, their programs demonstrated retention rates of 91% of women and 76% of men within the district. Out of all of these educators retained, 14% of them had moved into leadership positions lateral to or as high as assistant superintendent. These programs are open to educators of color at every level in the district and are not limited to specific roles.

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What are organizational needs of affinity-based organizations?

According to interview data, leaders of affinity spaces cite the following areas of support needed for their organizations:

1.) Philanthropic support with a racial equity and racial justice lens.

Continued philanthropic support is by far one of biggest contributors to many of the organizations listed in this document, especially nonprofits. If the philanthropic sector committed to using a racial equity and justice lens, they could better understand the complexities of structural racism and recognize the importance and necessity of long-term investments in this work. According to the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (2019),

{ *"A racial equity lens separates symptoms from causes, but a racial justice lens brings into view the confrontation of power, the redistribution of resources, and the systemic transformation necessary for real change."*

By using these lenses, foundations can recognize the need to support creative endeavors and experimentation when designing programs trying to combat racial and systemic inequities with a liberatory framework. Philanthropy must recognize that issues of racism, equity, and oppression are more than complicated - *they are complex* - so solutions must emerge through the dynamic interactions of diverse people and networks working together. In complex, oppressive systems there is often no clear and easy answer that will produce desired results in a designated time frame.

Approaches to these issues must be developed through ongoing cycles of experimentation and learning - a liberatory design process whereby stakeholders:

- Create designs that help interrupt inequity and increase opportunity for those most impacted by oppression;
- Transform power by shifting the relationships between those who hold power to design and those impacted by these designs;
- Generate critical learning and increased agency for those involved in the design work.

This kind of approach counters the deeply ingrained notions of many philanthropic organizations; the lenses and mindsets investors hold must shift in order to transform our society into one that is more equitable and liberatory.

We recommend that philanthropic organizations increase giving of unrestricted general operating funds that are not project or objective specific. This would enable affinity-based organizations to "build capacity... be more responsive to communities, and pivot for movement-building activities" (Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity). Unrestricted funds would allow organizations to focus on learning, growth and development instead of overly focusing on one project. In addition, this would help organizations build their infrastructure and create systems that sustainably support their work.

2.) Equity-centered business development

Leaders of affinity-based organizations are often so focused on providing programmatic support to their constituents that they neglect the ongoing learning, growth and development of the organization itself. It can be difficult for these organizations to focus on sustainable growth as many, especially the newer organizations, are funded by philanthropic organizations that expect deliverables, ambitious impact data, and a rigorous sustainability model for renewal of funding to be guaranteed.

We emphasize that racial affinity-based organizations need "equity-centered" business development because the leaders of these organizations want their own organizations to mirror the human-centered values they aspire to bring to their schools; where employees and members have their holistic needs met. For example, the National Equity Project is a nonprofit organization that is working internally to create an equitable and sustainable organizational structure, culture, and business model.

> *"We are trying to counter everything that's been incentivized about traditional leadership and successful organizations—it's an isolating, false hero myth. You cannot create an equitable organization alone. It takes time to build this culture within an organization—it's not a quick fix, it's a journey."*
> *- LaShawn Routé Chatmon, National Equity Project* (Bridgespan Group, 2019)

Leaders of racial affinity-based organizations for educators need time to:

- Develop and/or refine their mission, vision, and values;
- Narrow their focus to understand who they are, who they are not, and what they will and will not do;
- Strategize about their long-term goals and impact.

Time devoted to equity-centered business development enables organizations to create a theory of action and better communicate their vision and strategic plan for future funding support. We recommend that funders support organizations with planning grants to develop the following:

- Strategic plan;
- Sustainable funding model;
- Systems and infrastructure;
- Succession plan;
- Capacity development plan;
- Business leadership capacity and skills development; and
- Board development.

A strong infrastructure increases the longevity of organizations and holds people and the organization accountable. If there is no long-term strategic plan, infrastructure, and succession plan, programs will suffer. This includes a sustainable funding model which includes but is not limited to staffing, resources, technology, space, programming, marketing, emergency funds for participants, and program evaluation. Ideally, leaders want funding support without control, so that they can utilize the best socially just practices and not be hindered by outdated, misinformed, or racist ideologies.

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3.) Strategic connections, collaborations and partnerships

Leaders of racial-affinity based organizations want to connect and partner with other organizations whose goals and visions are in alignment with their own. These types of strategic connections and partnerships create growth opportunities for all organizations and participants, and have the potential to develop a robust ecosystem that supports their various needs. Through such an ecosystem, organizations would be better positioned to expand their impact and avoid creating unnecessary duplications of services.

The word "unnecessary" should be thoughtfully considered as a lot of organizations are intentionally offering duplicated services to meet participants' needs. An example of an unnecessary duplication of services might be if two Black affinity-based organizations were trying to create a national convening for Black principals. There are only so many Black principals in the country and a big convening like this would require a lot of planning time and financial resources; thus it might be wiser for these two organizations to work together to collaborate on an event that is impactful and meaningful for the country's Black principals. Furthermore, partnerships and collaborations allow for different organizations to engage in learning conversations that benefit the progress and development of all parties. Continued and shared learning is a fundamental piece of an organization's success.

We heard many of the racial-affinity group leaders mention a desire for strategic partnerships. These types of partnerships can lead to coalition building for funding opportunities. Philanthropists may be more likely to give to a coalition focusing on an issue, as opposed to funding a singular organization or giving out small amounts to several organizations. Particularly for newer organizations, partnering with a more established organization early on can open up more access to philanthropic investment.

School-based leaders of racial affinity groups also expressed a want for partnerships within their districts. This would provide these organizations access to resources such as data to help with recruitment efforts, correspondence platforms to support outreach, and frequent contact with district members and leaders to share needs, ideas, wonderings, concerns, etc.

The Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture' (INPEACE) Ka Lama Education Academy program is a statewide non-profit organization located on the islands of Oahu, Hawai'i, Moloka'i and Kaua'i. INPEACE centers the culture and creates an ecosystem partnering with local schools, the state department of education, local community colleges, and universities. INPEACE is an example of a community-based non-profit that uses a partnership model to increase the number of Native Hawaiian educators. The INPEACE ecosystem centers the culture of Native Hawaiians; they are partnered with local schools, the state department of education, a local community college, and a 4-year college to enroll community members in college and help them work toward a degree in education. This program has lasted for 24 years and has served over 5,000 community members a year in the last 6 years, which serves as testimony to how partnerships and connections can enable affinity-based programs to be sustainable and effective.

It should be noted, collaborations and partnerships all require a significant amount of trust from each party. Although trust is generally not a barrier at the beginning of initiatives due to optimism and the excitement of the possibilities, it has the potential to become an issue after the "honeymoon stage" ends. Therefore, building and maintaining trust is essential throughout the collaboration. Organizations should consider establishing a Memorandum of Understanding or other contractual agreements to support their partnership efforts.

Here are two examples of promising collaborations:

Profound Gentlemen (PG), based in Charlotte, NC, is in partnership with He is Me Institute (HiM), located in Boston, MA. PG is a community of male educators of color with an online educator program and nine different cohorts. HiM is a teacher discovery program for Black men in college, called fellows, who are provided mentorship and teaching opportunities with middle school boys. In this partnership, HiM recruits from PG's aspiring educator membership to serve as some of those mentors. In addition, members of PG have also served as pen pals to third graders who were being mentored by HiM Fellows.

Aspire to Educate (A2E), in Philadelphia, PA is a government initiative collaborating with multiple organizations. A2E has a consortium of eight colleges and universities, Teach for America, two research entities, and the Center for Black Educator Development.

4.) Professional development for supporting teachers of color

For many school-based racial affinity programs, leaders want professional development opportunities and tools to build the knowledge and capacity of their internal staff so that they can better support the teachers of color they serve.. These leaders named a desire for a needs assessment tool for minority teachers, as well as access to data reflecting the population they serve, cultural experts, and content resources. With these assets, school-based racial affinity group leaders would feel more adequately equipped to provide the best professional development experiences for teachers of color. This need is related to two other needs in this section: philanthropic support and strategic connections and partnerships. With more extensive support from philanthropic funders, racial affinity-based groups would be able to invest more financial resources in professional development within their own internal organizations. Additionally, professional development for supporting teachers of color could be attained through partnerships between the different organizations on this list and other non-profit and community-based organizations.

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Policy and Activism Implications

In reviewing the data, we have found significant policy and activism implications for the work of racial affinity-based groups for educators. These policy and activism implications fall under two categories: **human resources** and **education policy advocacy**.

Human Resources

The most valuable resource of schools is human capital—the skills, knowledge, and experiences possessed by teachers, educators, and students. Therefore, it is essential that school human resource departments provide structures and guidelines that support the most effective use of human capital by increasing recruitment of skilled employees, retention, engagement, job satisfaction, and most importantly, student achievement.

For example, Dr. Rachelle Rogers-Ard, author of *Black Educational Leadership: From Silencing to Authenticity* (2020) notes the following elements of effective strategies for recruiting and retaining Black teachers:

- **Targeted recruitment:** Partnering with community-based organizations, local places of worship, unions, Greek organizations, etc. to reach targeted audience, as well as using social media, university outreach, bonuses and other incentives.

- **Ongoing professional development rooted in anti-racist pedagogy:** Monthly professional development throughout the teacher's career to dismantle institutionally racist polices, practices and procedures, in addition to coaching, 360-degree feedback loops, affinity groups, and consistent book clubs.

- **Targeted placement:** In partnership with school districts, ensure candidates are placed within cohorts at inclusive schools with systems in place to mitigate "cultural isolation", and school leaders committed to retaining Black teachers.

- **Ongoing support as an intentional retention strategy:** Removing barriers associated with matriculating at University systems; Providing reimbursement for classroom supplies, pre-placement teacher test fees, fingerprinting fees, etc.; Placement assistance; Classroom observation.

- **Commitment to growth, succession, planning and community based partnerships:** Creating partnerships with community-based organizations; Commitment to moving successful teachers into growth opportunities; Commitment to supporting teachers moving into leadership; outside professional development.

P-12 Policy and Practice Implications

- Racial wellness support: Human resource policies and practices should incorporate racial wellness support for minoritized affinity groups, such as (but not limited to) staff of color and racially specific groups, as well as intersectional identities e.g. Black women and/or LGBTQIA, etc.

- Recruitment and selection: Schools benefit from having employment specialists who understand anti-racist and anti-biased leadership and practice fair hiring. The recruitment and selection process is fundamental in demonstrating a school's commitment to equity.

- New hire affinity spaces: Schools benefit when there is a structure in place that allows minoritized groups to give and receive assistance to one another regarding the navigation of a new school/ system. Providing affinity spaces for new hires of color provides opportunities for new hires to connect and learn from one another, share expertise and experiences, best practices, and plan for career advancement, ultimately promoting the retention of minoritized groups. For example, the Boston Public Schools ALANA (African, Latino, Asian, and Native American) educators program (Boston, MA).

- Retention and engagement: Schools benefit from having intentional anti-racist and anti-biased spaces, support systems, and resources to retain and sustain Black educators and other educators of color.

- Networking opportunities: Schools and members of minoritized groups benefit from having opportunities to meet, share personal and professional experiences, ideas, perspectives, and best educational practices. For example, the Boston Public Schools School Leaders of Color Network (Boston, MA).

- Training and development: Training and development policies are important when demonstrating a school's commitment to anti-racism and an anti-biased school culture. Support for minoritized groups may include:

  ▶ Leadership and career development and advancement opportunities. One example is partnering with organizations like Black Teacher Project who focus on leadership development. Another example is with The Boston Public Schools School Women Educators of Color (MEOC) Executive Coaching Leadership Program, located in Boston, MA, which is an 8-month accredited program designed to increase engagement, retention and leadership rates for the female staff of color within Boston Public Schools. They also have a similar program for men of color.
  ▶ Professional development for instructional strategies on topics such as culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy and leadership.
  ▶ Professional development on anti-racism and anti-bias.

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- Workplace safety: Schools benefit from having spaces and resources that support racial wellness. Support may include:

  ▶ Racial affinity spaces that are recognized and supported by the school or district. For example, the Kirkwood School District in St. Louis, MO. The district provides release time to the Kirkwood Teachers of Color Group during the school day to meet and they provide financial support to coordinate group activities.

  ▶ Racial affinity representation (similar to union representation). In the Kirkwood Teachers of Color Group there is a racial affinity representative from the district that serves as an advocate for teachers of color. This person sits in on meetings with teachers of color if there has been a grievance or an issue expressed by them.

  ▶ Understanding, navigating, and negotiating racial and racist issues. Schools will benefit from ongoing professional development for all staff that highlights the impact and influence of race and racism in schools and how they are linked to physical, social, and emotional problems that students and colleagues may be experiencing.

  ▶ Ongoing anti-racist and anti-bias professional development. One of the reasons many teachers of color struggle in and/or leave the profession is exhaustion from microaggressions in the workplace that create a toxic environment.

Collegiate and University Policy and Practice Implications

- Understanding, navigating, and negotiating racial and racist issues. Ongoing professional development for all staff on the impact and influence of race and racism in schools and how it is linked to health problems and disease.

- Required anti-racist and anti-bias training for all education instructors. One of the reasons many leave the profession or do not do as well is because of microaggressions in schools creating a toxic environment. This would help instructors use an anti-biased lens in teaching.

- Required anti-racist and anti-bias training for all education students. One of the reasons many students do not go into the profession is because of microaggressions in schools creating a toxic environment. This would help soon-be educators use an anti-racist and anti-biased lens as educators and not add to the racial trauma in schools.

- Anti-racist and anti-biased programs of preparation for teachers, administrators and other licensed educational personnel.

- Affinity-centered programs to recruit, select and retain students of color interested in teaching. For example, the Aspiring to Educate program (Philadelphia, PA) is geared to attract, recruit, train, and retain Black high school juniors and seniors to become teachers. Students are mentored throughout their school career by leaders in a partnering organization, The Center for Black Education Development. Once students enroll in the program, they receive financial assistance for their postsecondary education through a combination of free or reduced tuition offered by a partnering institution.

- Provide tutoring and financial support for mandatory exams for affinity-based students.

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District, State, and National Policy and Advocacy Implications

- A general fund for racial wellness support would benefit P-12 schools diversity shortage. Many organizations are restricted to the work that they can do because of lack of funding.

- A planning fund for racial wellness support will benefit P-12 schools diversity shortage. Many smaller nonprofit organizations lack a funding sustainability plan. Supporting smaller organizations in this way, specifically those created and led by people of color who center culturally sustaining practices and pedagogical practices, will have a positive impact on increasing teachers of color.

- Fund anti-racist and anti-biased programs for P-12 schools. One of the reasons many teachers of color either leave the profession or do not thrive is because of microaggressions in the workplace creating a toxic environment.

- Support or create a coalition for organizations supporting educator racial affinity groups and other equity issues. This coalition could take up issues and strategize for collective action.

- Support racial affinity-centered programs toward recruiting, selecting and retaining effective teachers and principals.

- Fund districs or communities to benchmark through equity audits e.g. Beloved Community's Equity Audit. The equity audit serves as a benchmarking tool to identify organizational progress and related technical assistance needs across a district or network of schools. Beloved Community's Equity Audit provides over 180 customized indicators to assess governance, operations, program/pedagogy, adult culture and, where applicable, student culture linked to specific stakeholder groups: students, parents/family, community partners, vendors/subcontractors, faculty/staff, leadership, and Board.

The implications for this research extend the work of advocacy to make public the work of racial affinity groups in education. Dr. Siddle Walker discusses the lessons that in-service educators might carry forward from past educators. Siddle Walker states,

{ *"A main component is to understand the value of quiet collaboration and careful organizing. Until we get back to the sort of strategic work and networking practiced by groups like the GT&EA [Georgia Teachers & Educators Association], it will be very hard to move forward with an agenda for equity in the schools."*

- Dr. Vanessa Siddle Walker (Heller, 2019)

Dr. Siddle Walker highlights the biggest potential policy and activism implications for racial affinity groups today—to mobilize Black educators around issues that matter to them. When these organizations mobilized around issues, they were able to accomplish a great deal for Black students and themselves. They had a vision, assembled and inspired the community, and worked with and leveraged the influence of the N.A.A.C.P. As a result, they were able to win the monumental Brown case creating new legislation. Through their network, collaboration and partnerships they achieved legislation. This was the game plan.

In policy advocacy today, the game plan is the same, just with different players to create a coalition and craft the mission for collective action to influence the construction and development of public policy. Racial affinity groups in education could run the same play to create change for educational equity. Similar to the groups during segregation, the organizations listed in this document have powerful networks, and there are more that are yet listed. If these organizations united around an issue, they too could be a very powerful group with some political weight.

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Conclusion

This report highlights the uncomfortable truth that the organizations presented in this document understand—racism continues to negatively impact educators of color, and consequently, schools, students, and families in major ways. Affinity groups in education have been "life savers" for many educators of color, and the organizations listed in this document demonstrate why and how. From newly formed organizations where educators have found safety and comfort in unsafe schools, to more established organizations advocating for policy change at various levels, these groups are setting out to better serve all of our students. They are creating spaces for themselves, so that they can hold space for their students. They are envisioning a future that does not exist, one where educators, students, and families are all reaching their highest potential.

The work that these leaders and organizations are doing now echoes the work of Black educators during segregation, and if we look back, we can find a blueprint for racial affinity group work. Black educators of the past created an ecosystem of support to make leaps and bounds for educating and advocating for Black students. They worked with educators at every level, civil rights lawyers, families, and community members. While they were unsure about what it meant for Black Americans to have full citizenship, and what path to take, they persisted and always kept sight of their North Star—aspiration, advocacy, and access.

This legacy and spirit of advocacy remains in the hearts and minds of Black educators and other educators of color; hence, there are over 200 organizations listed in our accompanying Racial Affinity Groups for Educators of Color Directory. These organizations are committed to attracting, recruiting, retaining and sustaining educators of color; however, one organization cannot do the work of the entire nation. Similar to the work prior to Brown, it will require collaboration—institutions at the highest levels of government to the state and local levels—and dedication to remedy the teacher of color shortage.

This is the call: an invitation to build with likeminded people and organizations to increase, retain, and sustain educators of color who teach using culturally relevant and sustaining practices, who help students learn about civic engagement and democratic ideals, who see Black students and other students of color as brilliant, and who have the will and skill to help all students reach their highest potential. The time is now to build together by looking back at the strategies of Black educators during and after segregation, in conjunction with what racial affinity groups are doing and suggesting today.

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Methods

Research for this report was conducted by Dr. April Warren-Grice of Liberated Genius from February 2020 through August 2020. This report was commissioned by the Black Teacher Project, a project of the National Equity Project, and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Research
- Conducted the following keyword searches for every state, "Black teachers," "Black educators," "teachers of color," "educators of color," "diversity, equity, and inclusion," and "social justice." Went through five pages for each search looking for organizations with racial affinity groups.
- For the keywords, "diversity, equity, and inclusion," and "social justice," contacted organizations focused on providing professional development services and asked if they could connect me with any organizations with racial affinity spaces for educators. Once connected, asked participants for a 45-minute interview via Zoom or phone. When possible, interviews were recorded for accuracy and notes were taken during the interviews. The interview notes were then coded thematically. Interviews took place between February 2020 and August 2020.
- Through the use of internet searches, personal networks, and phone calls to program leaders of racial affinity spaces, participants were identified, contacted, and interviewed.

Interviews: Asked the following questions of all participants:

- What is the name of the organization with the racial affinity group?
- How does the racial affinity group operate and what are some unique features?
- What has been the impact of the group?
- What are the teacher needs?
- What are the organizational needs?
- What are other organizations that have racial affinity spaces for educators?

Interviews: Asked the following questions of all participants:

- Conducted one 45-90 minute interview with 101 program leaders
- Analyzed interview notes
- Coded interview data thematically.

Data Sample Summary

Affinity Based Organizational Structures and Demographics

Organizational Structures

There are six types of organizational structures used to increase teacher diversity: Community-based, Government-based, Limited Liability Corporation, Non-profit, P-12 School-based, and University-based. The chart below breaks down the numbers by different structural types.

Structural Type of Affinity Based Groups	Number
Community-based	17
Government-based	2
LLC	3
Non-profit	41
School-based	11
University-based	12
Total	86

Demographics

Each organization focuses on a specific demographic: Black educators, Black female educators, Black male educators, People of color, men of color, women of color, Native American or Latinx. Spaces for people of color are the largest group, while spaces specifically for Black educators are the second largest groups. It should be noted that while there are eight Black male affinity spaces and 15 men of color spaces devoted specifically to the needs of men of color, there is only one group devoted to Black females and one group for women of color.

Demographics	Number
Black educators	28
Black female educators	1
Black male educators	8
Latinx educators	2
Males of color educators	15
Native American educators	1
People of color educators	30
Women of color educators	1
Total	86

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