our VOICE

our VISION

STRATEGIES FOR **HONORING AND SUPPORTING BLACK EXCELLENCE** IN SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Seattle Public Schools

Our voice our vision

Strategies for honoring and supporting Black Excellence in Seattle Public Schools

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The Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) is proud share this report that explores how our Black boys, teens, and families experience our school system. Research findings and recommendations are products of their voices and insights. This report represents an ongoing conversation about rectifying inequities, building just schools, and leading from the insights of our students and families. “Our Voice, Our Vision” offers insights toward achieving the racial equity goals outlined in Seattle Excellence and lays the groundwork for AAMA’s multi-year plan to implement structural changes in Seattle Public Schools. The report uplifts four key themes, with each offering a specific set of recommendations:

- Create welcoming, joyous, and safe learning environments
- Develop instructional approaches grounded in identity affirmation
- Build strong relationships between educators and students
- Lead with insights from families and community members in the education of their children

About this report

Findings and recommendations in this report are from the Listen and Learn initiative by Seattle Public Schools' Office of African American Achievement (AAMA). AAMA's Listen and Learns aims to: 1) build relationships by listening deeply, connecting families to resources and growing a collective vision for change; 2) forge trust and accountability by analyzing qualitative data, engaging families and students in sensemaking and accountability; and 3) make a systemic impact through implementing student, family and community insights across AAMA efforts and multi-year plan. This series and findings are one of many engagement efforts.

Office of African American Male Achievement

The Office of African American Male Achievement was launched in 2019 to reconstruct Seattle Public Schools and cultivate the strengths of Black boys and teens. With outcomes of Black boys and teens embedded across Seattle Public Schools' strategies and goals, there is a strong need for coherence and community leadership. AAMA provides strategic alignment, community partnership, educator development and research; and approaches this work from a framework for systems change. By ensuring students furthest away from educational justice thrive, conditions in Seattle Public Schools will improve for all. Visit: **https://www.seattleschools.org/departments/aama/**.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to the students, families, school leaders, and educators who participated in and supported this effort! We would like to extend a special thanks to our community facilitators Emijah Smith and Khadijah Toms; AAMA focus group facilitators Kevin Loyal and Adam Haizlip; our qualitative analysis team: Will King, Naomi Byrdo and Savannah Bairs; and our wonderful UW partner reviewers Drs. Ann Ishimaru and Dana Nickson.

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A note from...

DR. MIA WILLIAMS,
Assistant Superintendent for the Office of African American Male Achievement,

&

DR. BRENT JONES,
Interim Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools

Our students, families, and communities know what they need to thrive. The report explores how our Black boys, teens and families experience our school system. Research findings and recommendations are products of their voices and insights. This effort represents an ongoing conversation about rectifying inequities, building just schools and leading from the insights of our students and families. It also fortifies our commitment to listen deeply, join in the movement and deliver on generations-long calls for action. As system leaders, educators, families and students reading this report, we hope this articulates some of our collective work and provides lessons for action. Progress can only move at the speed of trust, and as this student shares below, achieving just schools begins with strong relationships:

> The way it could happen is you got to get to know the family first. I had a teacher come to my house to tutor me, but she also got really close to my family. They talked a whole lot, they texted, they emailed [, and] my mom would come to the school. So, I feel like [you] have to get on a good relationship because that's beyond school. It's not in a school environment. That [could be] in someone's house, their living space. You got to respect that!"
>
> *Black male middle schooler*

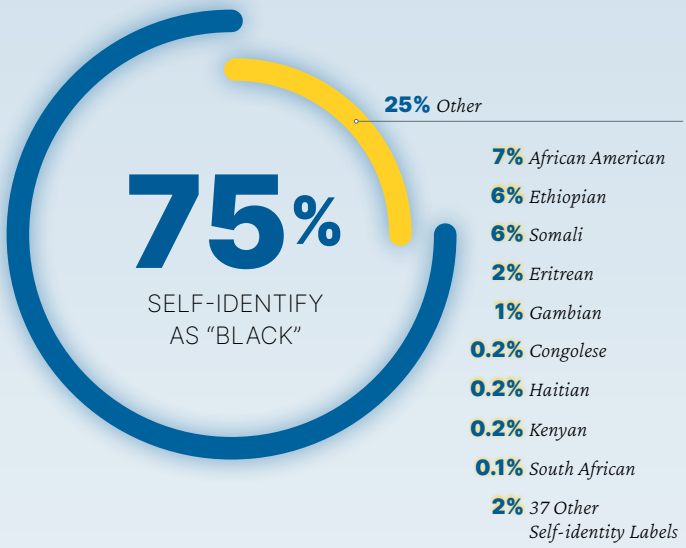
TABLE OF CONTENTS

OUR BLACK BOYS AND TEENS

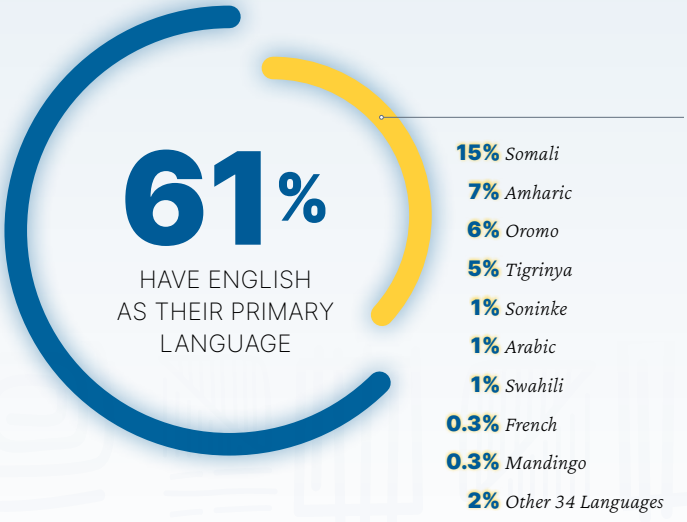
Our Black students, their families and Black communities represent all reaches of the African diaspora. “Black/ African American” is a federal racial category that does not capture the many ethnicities, cultures and backgrounds of our students. Understanding nuances within the Black experience is crucial. Decades of developmental and educational research show generational status and type of immigration (e.g., voluntary immigration vs. non-voluntary immigration by slavery or force) as important contexts to understand the educational barriers students face (Agyepong, 2017; Alex-Assensoh, 2009; Asante et al., 2016). In the 2021-22 academic year 3,763 K-12th grade Black boys and teens in Seattle Public Schools described themselves with 47 unique self-identities (with 75% self-identifying as “Black”, 7% as African American and 6% as Ethiopian). Our students also represent 44 different spoken languages (61% English, 15% Somali, and 7% Amharic). Twenty-six percent of our K-12th grade Black boys and teens received bilingual services.

A district-wide survey found 7% of the 2,870 participating Black 3rd -12th graders self-identify as non-binary or other diverse genders and 21% of Black secondary students identify as queer or non-cisgender (Source. May-June 2021 SPS Research and Evaluation Return to School Survey, N=22,576). While findings in this report focus on Black students who self-identified as male, we know these are just some of the voices of and experiences across a community that demands not only racial justice but gender, economic, ability, and queer justice.

Identities among K-12th grade SPS Black boys and teens



Languages spoken among K-12th grade SPS Black boys and teens



> For me, I inherited my culture, my Somali culture, from my parents. I also grew up in Kenya, and at the same time, had a lot of cultural embarking there. I’m here, and also trying to get some new things. This is an important thing.”
>
> *Somali middle school boy*

LISTENING TO AND LEADING FROM STUDENT VOICES

Findings in this report are from AAMA's "Listen and Learn" series, where 28 small, semi-structured focus groups were held with Black boys, teens and their families (from August 2020-April 2021). Family sessions were held virtually for each region of Seattle Public Schools and included community co-facilitators as well as an African home language session with interpreters. Recorded sessions produced many hours of conversation that were transcribed and qualitatively coded using a grounded theory approach (see Appendix for more information).

Inference sessions were held, and results were used to construct Seattle Public Schools' **Office of African American Male Achievement's multi-year plan strategies:**

1. Lead work from Black boys and teens;
2. Cultivate community power and district accountability
3. Implement asset-based measures
4. Expand culturally-relevant mentoring
5. Bridge-build an ecosystem for impact

Following the initial analysis, families and students were reconvened to discuss the resonance of findings with their experiences, and in follow-up meetings, to refine the following recommendations and priorities for district-wide impact. Included are also insights from a research-practice partnership that engaged CBOs and community leaders on the experiences of **Black families and justice-focused educators**. Findings included the intersectional experiences of Black boys with disabilities, living in poverty and learning English; the familial expertise and community resources that nurtured children's brilliance amidst profound challenges; and the absence of nondominant youth, family and community voices in district decision-making. The following recommendations represent a co-owned call to action:

Call to action **BY THEME**

01 LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Joyful, safe and dismantling anti-black racism

- Transform Unjust Discipline
- Equitable Distribution of Resources
- Culture of Transformation
- Justice in Service Placement

02 CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Black education and identity affirmation

- Integrate Black Studies
- Promote Career Awareness and Exploration
- Include Life-Relevant Skills in Core Courses
- Support Post-High School Planning

03 STRONG RELTIONSHIPS

High expectations, care and Black educator representation

- Diversify the Educator Workforce & Support Black Teachers
- Promote Meaningful Educator Relationships
- Increase Mentoring and Leadership

04 FAMILY + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Restorative practices, shared power, and community assets

- Welcome Families and Community
- Promote Classroom Partnership
- Share Power

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:

JOYFUL, SAFE AND DISMANTLING ANTI-BLACK RACISM

01

We deserve learning environments that are welcoming, joyful and safe; where structural and interpersonal racism is addressed through improving discipline policies and practices, acknowledging harm, and training educators to dismantle anti-Black racism.

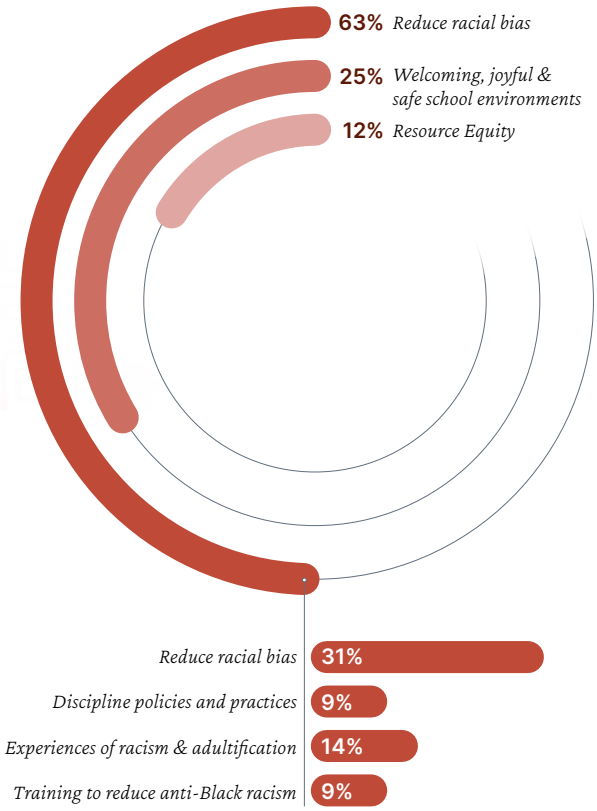
...a safe and supportive school environment matters...

29% of all coded excerpts referenced the importance of joy, how positive climates promote safety and juxtaposed were experiences with racism and bias. There were no differences in the frequency of this theme among students and families. Research also confirms what our families, youth, and educators have known for decades: a safe and supportive school environment —where students have positive social relationships, are respected and engaged in their work, and feel competent —matters (Amodio & Mendoza, 2010; Bottiani et al., 2016; Bradshaw et al., 2015). How children and youth experience the overall climate of their schools impacts their achievement and success. Therefore, it is critical to understand what we must reconstruct to achieve schools that are safe, welcoming and joyful.

Alongside conversation on school environment and hope for an anti-racist future in public education were experiences of schools as sources of bias and intergenerational racial trauma. Black students and students of color navigate a society in which racism is systemic and frequent, showing up in many forms from microaggressions to overt discrimination. Racism is not an abstract phenomenon with indirect impacts. Racism, and specifically racial bias (the attitudes that stem from believing racist ideologies), have tangible impacts on youth of color and Black youth who confront it daily (Bentley-Edwards et al., 2013; Howard et al., 2013; Simson, 2014). These conditions impact our children's engagement, learning, and life outcomes (e.g., Nadal et al., 2014).

> "An environment that just speaks that they're welcomed and that we're happy to see you. Assurance that my son is going to be okay in school here and he's going to be protected and feeling safe."
>
> *Black mother, central Seattle*

Frequency of learning environment by qualitative code (Overall use: 29%)



> Something that would make school more fun, or it would just basically raise the spirits from when you walk in the school to when you walk out. It would be just basically interacting more, having more relatable teachers, having more fun and less negativity."

Black middle school boy

While adaptiveness and resilience are key to the Black experience, eliminating institutional and interpersonal racism and bias is an imperative for schools to be welcoming, joyful and safe. Also discussed, were the nuances within and cultural intersections of racialized oppression. Black boys, teens and families called for systemic changes to address persistent experiences of adultification and the erasure of Black childhood. We also heard from multi-generation African American and first-generation East African students and families about the importance of increasing culturally responsive practices in Individual Education Program (IEP) processes and Special Education placement.

High priority, especially for Black boys and teens, was eliminating disparities in the allocation of resources. Another element of being in an environment that makes students feel valued was the physical space of schools being cared for and inviting. Students deserve better access to sufficient financial and community-based resources. Here, our students acknowledged the weight that various forms of capital have on outcomes within communities, and the importance of having equitable resources on belonging and connection.

Eliminating structural barriers to educational attainment is critical. Visible in these findings and the following recommendations is role of dismantling systemic racism to be able to construct welcoming and joyful schools.

> Yes, the expectation of a Black boy or Black child being more culpable for their actions than White children. I have found that to be true for sure that like, it was just seen that he should be able to control himself more than his age was because he is big and because he is Black. And if you add the bias to that, it makes it seem like he looks like he's seven or eight instead of actually five. They expect him to act like he's seven or eight instead of five! Does that make sense?!"

White mother, Northeast Seattle

"He's enjoying some subjects, but some subjects he's not. I have to speak for him sometimes because little kids, they sometimes –in my culture, we respect to authority a lot. So, if a teacher says something, he assumes she's correct. So, I have to sit with him a lot to make sure that he feels heard and he feels his IEP is being followed.

Somali mother

"Well, I will for sure have equal resources for every school. Equal resources, same amount of resources, same amount of money, because obviously we all know some schools have way more... Then, second, I would say the equity piece is a lot, having equity and giving parents and children what they need instead of equality. I mean, equality is great, but you need equity!"

Black middle school boy

"We want adults that aren't looking at our children through the lens of, they're not racist. We don't want more people that are going to push our kids further and further away from their education or overly disciplined, then target them, be next to them and make them feel insecure in a learning environment"

Black mother, Central Seattle

> I feel like a lot of [my challenges] stemmed from people having ideas of me before I even could have ideas for myself."
>
> *Black middle school boy*

recommendations:

Transform Unjust Discipline

Require sustained investments in restorative practices and training coupled with strong accountability systems. Implement policies to eliminate unjust discipline and establish processes for reconciliation and healing.

Equitable Distribution of Resources

Engage students and communities on the allocation of school resources, monitor school-by-school resource equity and clearly define the need and intention for resources.

Culture of Transformation

Establish district-wide culture of change that prioritizes accountability to students and families, dismantles racist policies, and communicates impacts of ongoing practice change.

Justice in Service Placement

Center families as advocates and partners in student learning, strengthen communication around appropriate student placement in Special education, and value success as both growth and quality of student learning experience.

CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION:

BLACK EDUCATION AND IDENTITY AFFIRMATION

We call for instruction grounded in Black education, identity affirmation that uses life-relevant lessons and critical pedagogy to **engage us and prepare us for next steps.**

Cultivating strong, Black identities serves as one element of change.

Identity matters and schools have a critical role to play in uplifting the histories and socio-political contexts that underlie students' perceptions of self, group and society.

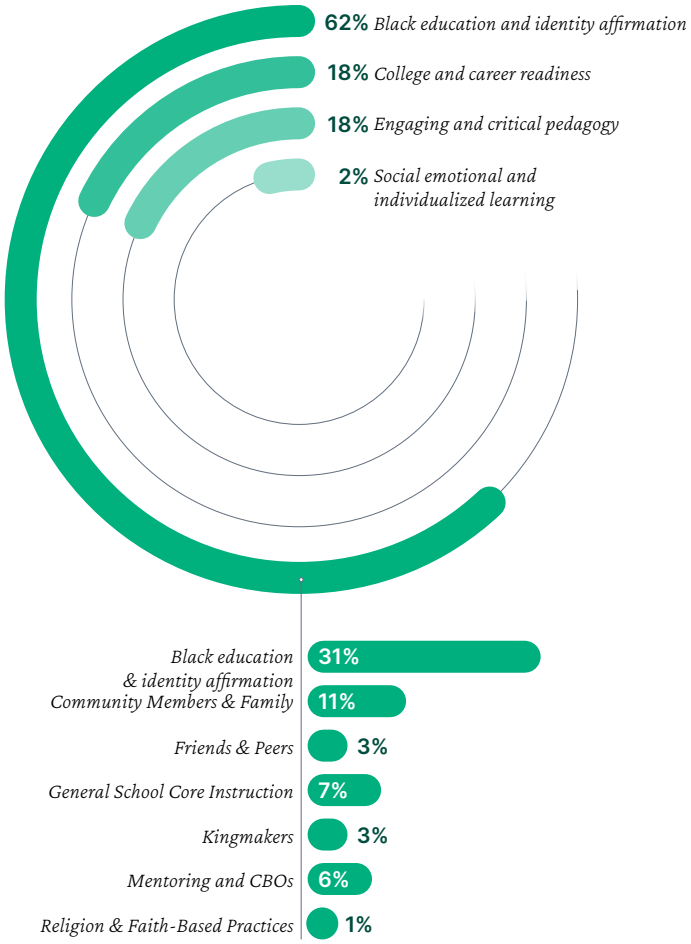
When schools take on their role as a source of cultural socialization —promoting students' ethnic and racial identities —they provide congruence between students' ethnic and racial identities and the school curriculum (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). This has been found to increase Black student academic self-confidence, have longitudinal, positive impacts on grades, as well as improve educators ability to connect with students' academic interests (Byrd, 2019; Del Toro & Wang, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). As our students and families remind us, the work of promoting racial identity must be concurrent with eradicating racism from our classrooms and hallways. Cultivating strong, Black identities —a crucial, psychological armor in students' daily navigation of racism —serves as one element of change. As referenced in the learning environment theme, eliminating racism is the systemic change essential for liberation.

> "I joined that class with not as much knowledge, not a lot of knowledge of my African heritage, and I just learned so much"
>
> *Black male high schooler*

WHAT IS
racial identity development?

Racial identity development is the complex and lifelong process that begins early in life where children learn about themselves and their membership within their group (or groups) first from parents and caregivers (Harding et al., 2016; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2006). For Black families, this means helping children understand their identity as an individual and how it fits within a larger group identity—whether they are African-American with multi-generational roots in the U.S. or second-generation U.S.-born children of Eritrean immigrants. A necessity to these lessons, unfortunately, is preparing their children for a world filled with racism and bias (Hughes, 2003; Neblett et al., 2012). Having a strong sense of self and group identity protects and promotes Black youth; it can help youth identify covert instances of racism and equips them with the skills to cope against some of the psychologically harmful effects of interpersonal racial bias (Jones & Neblett, 2016; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Seaton et al., 2012).

Frequency of instruction by qualitative codes
(Overall use: 34%)



Black boys, teens and families discussed the positive impact of Black education on racial identity, yet few students reported receiving these lessons as part of their core classes. Instead, students discussed community members and family as their primary sources of influence.

In addition to the inextricable link among strong, culturally responsive instruction and identity affirmation, students and families called for engaging instructional models, critical pedagogy and for classrooms to be designed and resourced for individual learning needs preparing students' for their next steps.

"I know that so much damage has been done that in our culture that we've kind of passed down, historically, that trauma down to our, from my great grandparents, it's been passed down to me. And I have the cognition, like I'm very self-aware and I'm very careful in how I interact with my son so that I don't pass that thing down to him that I can't even articulate what it is, but well you guys know it's something, it's a way of life that we've lived."

Black mother, Southeast Seattle

"What they used in the Spring to talk about various inventors and different sources of black excellence. But then also historically, where is the diaspora, which area are we going to feature today? What are some of their cultures?

I think that you're on track for a lot of that stuff already, but I like that idea of a balance of, yes, we have this history and we have to acknowledge it and the way that it makes our lives today and the community that it's made today, but also this is a real asset and value and makes you this amazing person and part of something."

Parent of African American male middle schooler

> Teach us stuff that we actually need to know. Things that we need to go through when we leave school. I mean, I understand that the different subjects that they already have in school are for a reason, but there are definitely a lot of things that we see our parents have to go through in terms of just living life, that we don't even learn about at school. That stuff, we want to learn."
>
> *Black male high schooler*

These findings and the recommendations uplift a need for community-connected learning, continuity in home and school messages and a deeper valuing of identity as an asset. Student- and family-uplifted recommendations in instruction require deep relational work as well. For instance, access to and integration of Black and ethnic studies requires deeper comfort engaging in dialogue about race and the relationships (described in the next section) critical to making learning relevant to students' interests and next steps.

Provide students with the information and opportunities to explore their post-high school options and navigate the many steps to enrolling, such as financial aid, applying, and successfully transitioning.

> High school, middle school, we're learning more. We're writing and stuff. I had two good Language Arts teachers in middle school who taught me how to write well, so when I got to high school, I wasn't interested, because the teachers just didn't even interact with us as much. It was kind of just out of the book more. But basically, once I left [my old school] and transferred to an alternative school, I just started learning. After that, it just took off... I'll say as soon as I got to the alternative school, it was easier, because there were fewer people, students, and it was a better teacher to student ratio.
>
> *Black male high schooler*

recommendations:

Integrate Black Studies

Integrate Black and ethnic studies courses and increase access to these courses. Adopt curricula that highlight the rich histories and contributions of people of African descent across disciplines (i.e., in history, English, math etc.).

Promote Career Awareness and Exploration

Support students' career readiness skills such as connecting interests to course content and opportunities to explore career options through hands-on activities like worksite tours and internships.

Include Life-Relevant Skills in Core Courses

Provide opportunities for students to develop life skills and strategies—such as time management, financial literacy, organization, and problem-solving—that will prepare them for academic success, and help them persist and grow.

Support Post-High School Planning

Provide students with the information and opportunities to explore their post-high school options and navigate the many steps to enrolling, such as financial aid, applying, and successfully transitioning.

Remote Learning

During remote learning, many Black families built upon what they were already doing at home to foster and expand teaching and learning experiences for their children. In particular, they supported their children in learning driven by their child's unique interests and strengths. Somali families shared that remote learning gave them the opportunity to spend more time engaging in activities with their children. Homes were also dual language learning environments. Somali children were speaking their language at home more, and for some parents this was an increased opportunity to learning English.

The virtual window in to the classroom came with many challenges, yet many families and students focused on how they were able to advocate and provide critical supports for their children.

"There hasn't been a best part of remote learning for our son or our family. It has been really disappointing to see limited planning leading up to the start of school and missed opportunities to innovate. I wish a delayed start to the year could have been in place to provide time and professional development for teachers to be ready. Teachers and administration must agree on a path. This will take common goals and recognition that there will never be a perfect path back to in-person teaching [...and] we will scramble to make it work with the options we have. Our family is fortunate to have options that others do not."

Black mother, Northeast Seattle

I have some positives about virtual. I think that it's been really great to watch instruction, to watch what's being taught and how it's being taught and seeing... I saw for instance that my son really hated handwriting. Right. And because he hated handwriting, he began to hate math because. I saw the connection between one small problem and how it cascaded into like all these other things. So, I was able to intervene in a way where if he wasn't with me, I don't know if I would have been able to identify it that quickly."

Black mother, Southeast Seattle

Basically I was struggling a lot, and especially I feel like when COVID started, my teachers didn't care. They would just post what the school district would tell them to do. They'd just send it to us, and they would have the help [check-in] calls, but it wasn't helpful at all, because there would be 20 kids. So, if you have a personal problem, then you can't address it."

Black male high schooler

They expected us to adapt so quickly to a pandemic that randomly happened, just kind of hit us like a brick and messed up everything [...] so once we adapt to this, we've got to adapt back to real school, and it's just so much adapting. It's getting hard, and it's still hard."

Black middle school boy

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS:

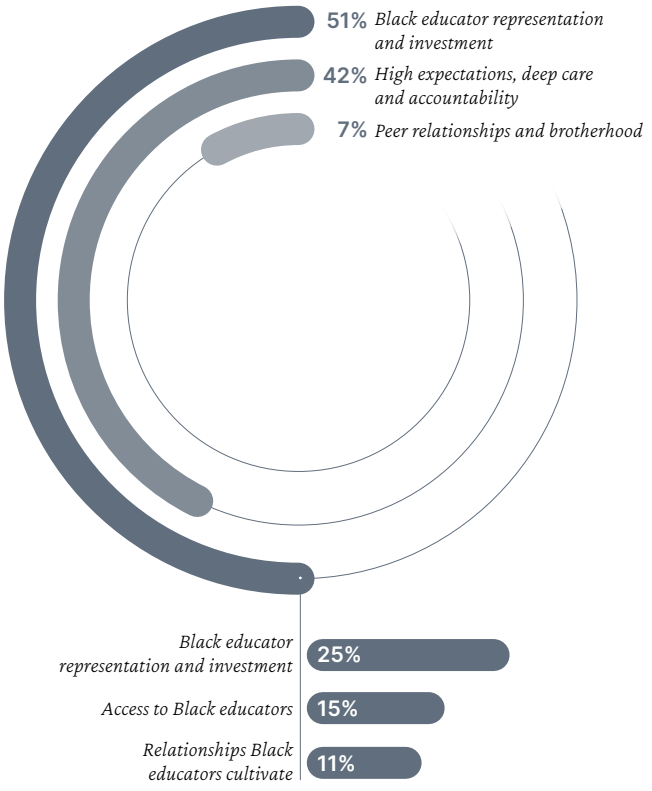
HIGH EXPECTATIONS, CARE AND BLACK EDUCATOR REPRESENTATION

We thrive with relationships that hold high expectations, deep care and accountability and that promote peer friendships and brotherhood. We must also elevate and invest in Black educators and honor the unique relationships they cultivate with our Black boys and teens.

We need people who look like our children to be mentors, to be an advocate for them, to run interference for them, to just love on them during the school day.

The relationships held between educators of any race and their students and families is known to significantly impact students' academic outcomes and increase trust between families and education systems (McKinney de Royston, et. al., 2020). Strong relationships can improve instruction, engagement and educators' ability to leverage details like students' values, interests, and cultural traditions in the classroom (McBride, 2016). Twenty-eight percent of coded excerpts from Black students and families expressed the need for deeper connections to be made with teachers who prioritize authentic and engaging relationships and acknowledge the critical role that relationships have on learning.

Frequency of strong relationships by qualitative codes (Overall use: 34%)



"She was a special education homeroom teacher... She was pushing him, even though he got so comfortable doing like, 'no, I don't want to go'. She was like, 'Nope, you're going.' So I loved the fact that she'll push in him where a lot of teachers don't do that.

She knew I was a single mom in a home with two kids, a new baby at that time and couldn't come to school every day. So, me and her would email texts and everything. Some of the class was very hard for him, but I love the fact that he didn't give up and she didn't give up on him."

Somali mother

The Presence of Black Educators

Studies have shown the importance of having Black educators on outcomes for all students (Sun, 2018) and the ways in which Black educators defend the humanity and can protect Black students from racialized harm, providing unique teacher-student relationships that are linked to improved overall well-being and academic and life success (McKinney de Royston, et. al., 2020; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

Consistent with the literature, Black boys, teens and their families express a need for increased recruitment and retention of Black educators. Students and families discussed the unique assets that Black educators bring to students' lives and academic success, and spoke broadly about educators as both certified teachers, instructional assistants, and community mentors. Uniquely, Black educators see their job as extensions to their lived experiences in society, realizing the risks and consequences of not wholly teaching Black students and choosing instead to practice empathy, centering students' feelings and social needs while maintaining high expectations and dissolving the concept of "permission to fail" often experienced by non-Black educators (Milner, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2002; Siddle-Walker, 1996; McAllister & Irvine, 2002). These are realized by our students and families, and educators in our system who emphasized the need to first partner with families to understand individual needs and foster strong relationships (Ishimaru et al., 2021).

> We need people who look like our children to be mentors, to be an advocate for them, to run interference for them, to just love on them during the school day. It blocks you from learning when people don't understand you... The kids get no empathy when people don't understand who they are as humans or who their parents are as humans. That's my biggest fear."
>
> *Black mother, Central Seattle*

Mentoring and Leadership within the Community

Sourcing the strength and resilience within the Black community as cultural capital, our students and families uplifted the need for mentoring and leadership opportunities, especially in North-end schools and from families with elementary students. Partnerships with Black community-based organizations are essential and can further uplift the strengths of Black youth. Our community is critical social capital and community connected learning and partnerships serve to enrich schools by cultivating students' racial identities, raising expectations and spreading culturally-grounded instruction (Williams & Bryan, 2013; Ginwright, 2007; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010).

We also know strong relationships with nonparental adults are essential to cultivating the brilliance, resiliency and long-term well-being of Black boys and teens (Hurd & Sellers, 2013; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Jones & Neblett, 2017; Neblett et al., 2008; Seaton et al., 2011). Black middle and high schoolers with strong, long-term mentoring relationships (e.g., Grossman et al., 2012) are found to be more academically engaged, have greater psychological well-being, autonomy, stronger racial identities, and greater self-efficacy than their peers without strong, mentor relationships or without mentors at all (DuBois et al., 2006; Hurd & Sellers, 2013; Tolan et al., 2020). To realize the potential of strong relationships in our schools, students and families called for the following:

"[My teacher] was great. She was a strict teacher, but she wanted to see you succeed. She wanted to help you. She went through all that, and I liked that about her. And she was Black, she was my color, so she knew where we were coming from. She understood things. She knew when you're going through something. She'll try to help you. All that good stuff, bro. And it's just the difference between that teacher and the other teacher... felt like she made me feel like I could be something. She made me feel like that she wanted me to be something."

Black male high schooler

"I needed to work with each student's family on what was best for them and what they needed for their child to learn. I started one family at a time by calling them to ask what they needed."

SPS Educators in Culturally Responsive Leadership Cadre

> Having one on one conversations with students of color and having a chance to validate them specifically for their work has been a positive experience."

SPS Educators in Culturally Responsive Leadership Cadre

recommendations:

Diversify the Educator Workforce & Support Black Teachers

Increase access to Black educators and improve retention by providing mentorship for (and by) Black staff and other staff of color.

Promote Meaningful Educator Relationships

Provide professional development and training on anti-Black racism, and adultification alongside tangible practices, that build opportunities for teacher-student dialogue, problem solving, and relationship building.

Increase Mentoring and Leadership

Support students' leadership development through access to Black mentors in the community, and providing culturally embedded education, learning spaces, and innovative practices in instruction.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES, SHARED POWER, AND COMMUNITY ASSETS

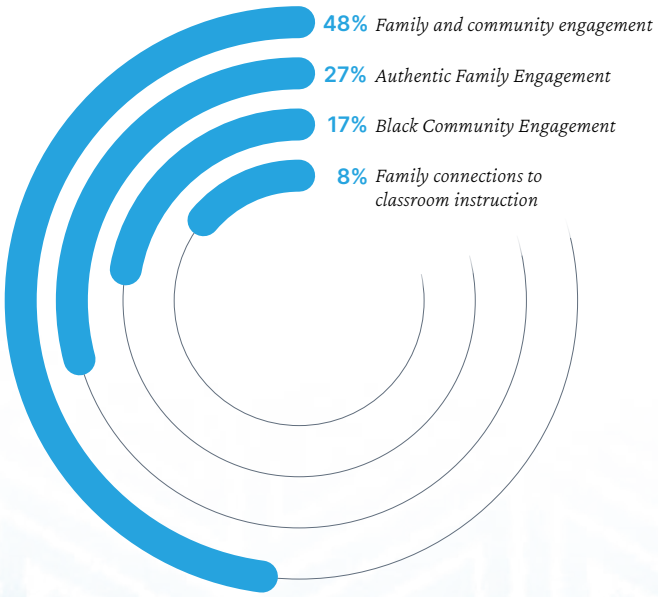
We call for family and community engagement that is restorative, builds trust and leverages Black community assets.

04

> Throughout the whole closure, my math teacher ended up calling my mom just to check on me, and that was a surprise to me. I knew he cared, but I just wasn't expecting a call from any of my teachers, like that. That was kind of helpful."
>
> *African American male middle schooler*

Family and community engagement included three areas and this theme was discussed in 9% of coded excerpts (14% among families and 3% among Black boys and teens). Our families, especially, expressed a strong desire for authentic, restorative family and community engagement throughout the district, within individual schools with special regard to regional differences, and between families themselves. Organizing and building collective power was an important element of these conversations.

Frequency of family and community engagement by qualitative code (Overall use: 4%)



"That's up to us. That has been traditional and that's where a lot of the money comes from into the school and a lot of times our children might not be benefiting from resources. If we're not part of an organization. If we don't have a voice."

Black parent, West Seattle

Expressing the importance of trust first being built, our Black parents' experiences are not unique. Lack of trust because of previous negative experiences, either direct or indirect, can cause parents to be hesitant even if invitations are extended via the schools themselves (Marchand, Vassar, Diemer, & Rowley, 2019; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Finders & Lewis, 1994; Cooper, 2005, 2007; Rowley, Helaire, & Banerjee, 2010). For this, accountability must be held within the district to both welcome and seek engagement with Black families in order to establish and build upon institutional trust that leverages the strengths of our Black families and students.

With the goal of building the social and cultural capital of students, examples uplifted by our Black families and students involved establishing Black family advocacy support groups, intentional connections with families beyond the student, wellness phone calls, and more. Research underscores the interpersonal and systemic value of strong family engagement. Speaking to this emphasizes the importance of families' voice and presence being viewed as strength. This offers families and students opportunities to express thinking and understanding of their educational experiences in formal and more personal, informal spaces that may even be created by families themselves (McKenna & Millen, 2013; Carreón et al., 2005).

"So just making sure that you have a genuine, like, relationship and understanding [with] your student and the also whatever core values you want to see in your student and in your child, you got to make sure that you instill those in yourself as well."

Black father, West Seattle

> Trust can be built over time but lost quickly. This is especially true when actions feel like yet another example of being left behind or left out. Our family remains willing to trust and hopeful that 1st grade and beyond will be better."
>
> *Black parent, Northeast Seattle*

recommendations:

Welcome Families and Community

Leverage assets within the Black community through deeper partnerships, convening and creating opportunities for families and community leaders to be partners in students' educational experiences.

Promote Classroom Partnership

Foster educator development about the power of parents in student learning and transformation and improve teacher-parent communication and opportunities for dialogue and understanding.

Share Power

Support new structures of parent leadership, engaging with families of Black students and centering their voices in change at all levels.

APPENDIX: A brief guide to listening to and learning from our students and families

The Office of African American Male Achievement's Listen and Learn series aimed to understand how students and families experience learning environments across Seattle Public Schools to: 1) build relationships by listening deeply, connecting families to resources and growing a collective vision for change; 2) forge trust and accountability by analyzing qualitative data, engaging families and students in sensemaking and accountability; and 3) make a systemic impact through implementing student, family and community insights across AAMA efforts and strategies. These goals and principles underscore our collective need to build a wholistic understanding of our students, families and cultivate learning environments that uplift their brilliance. We hope resources from this series also serve to support and deepen the many efforts in our schools to center student voices.

Listen deeply and cultivate relationships. From August 2020 to April 2021, the Office of African American Male Achievement held twenty-eight, small, **semi-structured focus groups** with Black boys and teens in grades 6 – 12, as well as families of Black students in grades K – 12. Family sessions (February 2021) were held for **each region** of SPS with an additional African **home language** session with interpreters and Black, community co-facilitators Emijah Smith and Khadijah Toms. All sessions were conducted virtually, over Microsoft Teams.

Analyze intentionally and build collective inference. Recorded sessions (each about 90-minutes) produced many hours of conversation that were **transcribed** and manually, **qualitatively coded** in Dedoose using a grounded theory approach. **Inference sessions** were held with families and students in July 2021 about the resonance of initial findings, to further distill the set of recommendations and results were used to develop AAMA's multi-year plan.

Implement solutions from students and families. Since the conversations began, AAMA has been implementing strategies, sharing learnings, and uplifting student leaders. The work of centering students is a collective effort that involves students, families, educators, leaders and community-based organizations. Visit **AAMA's department multi-year plan** and department page for updates on our work and partnerships.

Listen and Learn Question Topics by AAMA Values

Office of African American Male Achievement's Key Values	Question topics across Listen and Learn series	
	Family Sessions	*Black Boys and Teen Sessions*
Culture. Rituals, routines, and practices that honor students' strengths.	· Rituals and routines · Celebrating identity	· Cultural identities · Learning about identity
Conditions. Policies, structures, & systems that support welcoming and safe learning spaces.	· Policies and safety · Nurturing environment · Family engagement	· Policies and safety · Areas for improvement · Equitable treatment
Competencies. Skills & knowledge that educators need to reach and teach Black boys & teens.	· Educator skills · Ready to learn	· Educator skills · Educator strategies · Experience at school
Community Connection. Direct supports & networking opportunities for students to thrive.	· Program and impact · Remote learning	· Current supports

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