Clark County
BLACK CAUCUS

Report & Recommendations
Nevada Legislative Interim Committee on Education
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Meeting the Needs of African American Students in Nevada

In October, 2008 the Clark County Black Caucus (CCBC) hosted their first annual education forum beginning their advocacy for education access and equity for all students in partnership with CCSD. To date the CCBC has served on each of the three previous Superintendents's Education Advisory Councils in Clark County analyzing data and making recommendations to improve student achievement, in particular for students of color where large disparities and education gaps exist.

Uniquely positioned as a grassroots community organization to speak about these areas and how they impact families of color, this will be the focus of this legislative report, recognizing the opportunity granted by the Legislative Interim Committee on Education to shed light on some of the disparities and obstacles facing African American students in Nevada. Our singular purpose is to motivate discussions within the committee resulting in effective and appropriate legislation that ensures all students in Nevada have access to equitable education, achieve their educational goals, and the opportunity to pursue a higher education or job readiness.

Currently, we have a system where African American students continue to fail at alarming numbers resulting in low graduation rates of approximately 48% in Nevada (49% in Clark County overall / 40% in Washoe County overall). Although we've seen a slight improvement from last year in Clark County for all ethnic groups, Washoe County has the widest gap (almost double) amongst Black students at approximately 40%, while White students graduated at approximately 78%, and Hispanic

students at approximately 55%. It is important to note that African American students were they ONLY ethnic group to actual increase in drop-out rates. See Comparison of Proficiency and Graduation Gaps, page 8 for data.

In fact, there is a growing concern amongst African American leaders and the community that the education gap is actually widening amongst African American students. Data reflects in areas such as Reading and Math, Black student proficiency dropped in 2010-2011, improved in 2011-2012, and remained the same in 2012-2013 at just over 50% in Clark County although dropping in Washoe County from approximately 65% in 2011-2012 to approximately 58% in 2012-2013. On the other hand all other ethnic groups consistently improved in reading in 4th grade proficiency currently at approximately 81% overall for White students and 61% overall for Hispanic students. As you can see African American students are underperforming overall compared to their peers.

Prior to President George Bush's "No Child Left Behind" the term "ELL" was described as English Language Learners and promoted English language acquisition for ALL students in the United States. Under the ELL umbrella English language acquisition was a priority for all students regardless of race, language, disability, birthplace, etc. With the current definition of "ELL" redefined to exclusively mean English as a Second Language (or ESL), students struggling with English language acquisition are left out of literacy programs and funding opportunities. There is a consensus amongst education stakeholders in Clark County that the Nevada Legislature should better define the term "ELL" as an umbrella term with ESL, high risk, FRL, disabled, special education, etc. under that umbrella.

Reports nationally indicate that when students achieve their behavior improves. Current school policies and practices disproportionately impact students of color in disciplinary actions. However, the high over representation of African American males in expulsions and behavioral schools seem to

reflect a racial inequity when administering punishment. Therefore, we support policies that keep kids in school.

For example at Peterson Behavior School we see the OVER Representation of African American students were the student population is:

Caucasian – 19.5% Hispanic – 26.8% Asian – 0% **Black – 41.5%** Native American – 4.9%

Recently, U.S. Attorney General Holden expressed his concerns on inequity on the behavioral issue and worked with the Department of Education to address this issue, while notifying each district of the concern and potential civil rights violations. This is a problem throughout Clark County School District where consistently African American boys are over represented by large numbers removed from the classroom. From Boulder High School to Palo Verde and Western High Schools we see the scenario playing out regardless of geography. At Western High School for example, student population for 2011-2012:

Hispanic – 67% **Black – 17%** Caucasian – 10%

Referrals for 2011-2012:

Hispanic – 39% **Black – 42%** Caucasian – 14%

This reflects a compositional ratio of 2.54 for African American students. Meaning an African American male is **2.54 times more likely** to be referred.

This system supports the “pipeline to prison” for students of color. A recent report by the Editorial Board at the New York Times titled *When Children Become Criminals* states “The consequences have been especially disastrous for Black and Latino young people, who are overrepresented among those arrested and disproportionately at risk of having their lives ruined by encounters with the criminal justice system.” Connecticut adopted a strategy based on rehabilitation

saving the state money by reducing arrests and allowing young people to make amends for minor misdeeds without going to court. Taking students out of the classroom escalates their risk.

When we look at disparities we also have to consider the UNDER REPRESENTATION of African American students in the Honor/AP/G.A.T.E. Programs and Magnet/Technical schools where students are exposed to an environment of achievement and establish a pathway to post secondary education and job readiness.

Access to quality education with rigorous academic programs, such as Magnet/Technical schools is often limited due to high academic standards required to attend the premier schools. On average African American students represent less than 50% of their total Black student population. No other race of students except the African American experiences such a huge disparity throughout CCSD. In fact, we have found that Caucasian and Asian students are consistently over represented by as high as almost double the student population. Advanced Technologies (Magnet & Blue Ribbon School) for example has the following student population:

Caucasian – 331 Hispanic – 354 Asian – 223 **Black – 82** Native American - 4

District Wide Student Enrollment:

Caucasian – 90,042 Hispanic – 139,710 Asian – 25,392 **Black – 39,047** Native American – 1,470

We do not have the current data to analyze specific numbers for Honor/AP programs, but we do know that the current G.A.T.E. (Gifted and Talented Education) enrollment is significantly lower for Black students than their peers. We have work ongoing with CCSD over the past five years in hopes of implementing changes to their current procedures as to increase the number of Black students being tested in second grade for G.A.T.E., as well as misdiagnosing them as “learning disabled” or having “behavioral issues by staff.”

Transportation to choice schools is a problem for many low income families who often ride the bus, work two or three part time jobs and have difficulty getting their student to a bus stop in the morning or visiting the school site when necessary. Another problem is the inability to qualify to magnet programs due to lack of proficiency. Students underperforming should have an individual assessment and implementation plan immediately so that this opportunity is available.

Additionally, early childhood education and full day kindergarten would help eliminate the disparity and allow more African American students to participate in these opportunities that set them on the pathway with their peers for college. Unlike the Washington study of 1969, the Head Start synthesis project did evaluate the health and nutrition components, and found that " **Head Start children more often avoided serious school problems, were less frequently retained in grade from kindergarten through sixth grade, had better attendance rates and lower attrition than non-Head Start children. Head Start children performed slightly (but non-significantly) better on achievement tests than their non-Head Start peers up to third grade, but there was no difference on achievement test scores from third to sixth grade" (Copple, Cline, & Smith, 1987).**

Any successful organization values a diverse culture where diversity is not only embraced by each team member, but celebrates diverse cultures, geographic and educational backgrounds, and a variety of work experiences and lifestyles. This can be achieved by developing a sustainable organization that is reflective of the community it serves, promotes diversity of thought, values cultural competency, fosters communication and engagement, and encourages creative innovation for individual student success through cultural sensitivity and understanding.

Culturally rich students cannot identify with the current curriculum and often classroom instruction does not embrace diversity and inclusion. By introducing a culturally rich curriculum that integrates multicultural benchmarks students become engaged through association. For example, one

of Nevada's 4th grade benchmarks is the introduction of "electricity" and knowledge of "Thomas Edison" and understands its science. The "integration" expands that learning to include "Lewis Latimer" that invented the filament technology allowing the light bulb to last over time and used in homes. Mr. Latimer made many other contributions in science and invention.

In our research we found that Clark County School District makes available a multicultural curriculum on a voluntary basis. Based on national studies students actually perform better when engaged and able to relate to their education. Therefore, we support legislation that integrates multicultural education wherever applicable, i.e. science, history, social studies, arts, etc. into the Nevada benchmarks for education.

In closing, the Nation's Reading Report Card 2013 State Snapshot Report indicates that Black students had an average score that was 26 points lower than White students. They further indicate that this performance gap was not significantly different from that in 1998 (30 points). The Nation's Mathematics Report Card 2013 State Snapshot Report indicates that Black students had an average score that was 26 points lower than White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from that in 2000 (29 points).

There are hosts of variables that impact the achievement of Black students from access to effective pre-school education and full day kindergarten programs, teachers' establishing high expectations for students, equitable funding, access to a rigorous curriculum, teachers' who demonstrate cultural competency as it relates to students, poverty, parenting practices, to the disproportionate higher number of Black students being suspended and expelled from school. As a result, it is critical that educators are provided the tools to not only understand the data as it relates to the achievement of Black students, but how to successfully relate to students as well as strategies to close the achievement gap for Black students who are underachieving

Therefore, we must acknowledge the plight of Black students, identify coordinated strategies to raise the achievement bar for these students, and allocate targeted resources to support best practices in educating Black students. We can stop the prison to pipeline now.

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Lewis Latimer. Inventor, Engineer, Draftsman, http://www.blackinventor.com/pages/lewis-latimer.html

NY Times Editorial Board. When Children Become Criminals. January 19, 2014

Key Links

www.CCBlackCaucus.com	Clark County Black Caucus – Education Committee (to view full reports and data referred to in this document)
http://ccsd.net/internal/documents	Source documents used by SEOAC in making recommendations
http://www.school-justicesummit.org/presentations/presentations.cfm	National Leadership on School Justice
http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/reports/headstar.htm	U.S. Dept Health and Human Services, "What Do We Know About What Works". March 1990