



DONE TO US, NOT WITH US:

African American Parent Perceptions of K-12 Education

UNCF
Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute





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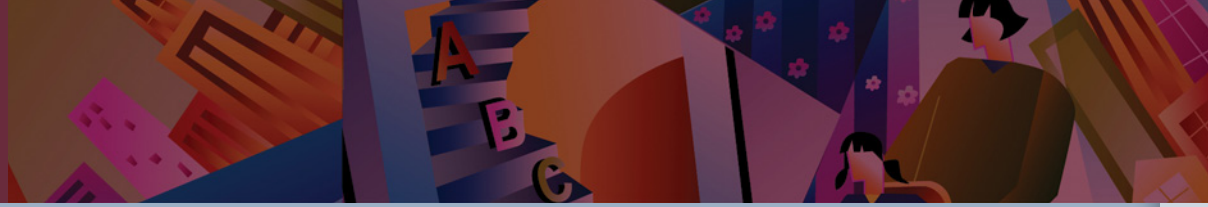


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Several parents reported that though they understand that being involved or visible at their children’s school was important, that sort of engagement was also more difficult than involvement at home due to time, transportation issues and work constraints.



Foreword

This report from UNCF's Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, *Done to Us, Not With Us: African American Parent Perceptions of K-12 Education*, offers a revealing glimpse of the American system of public education from the perspective of those with the biggest stake in better schools: the parents of the African American children who are least well served by the system. As the report says in its first paragraph,

Too many African American communities are plagued with low-quality, under-resourced K-12 public schools and educators who are less experienced than those in schools in high-income neighborhoods. These and other obstacles only exacerbate the widening educational attainment gap. This persistent gap and other educational disparities continue to threaten our country's short-term economic recovery and long-term growth.

It is an assessment few would dispute, and it has given rise to a vibrant education reform movement that predominantly targets the education received by African American children and other students of color. The movement has spawned reform-minded chancellors and superintendents and a thriving sector of public charter schools. But as currently configured, education reform's roots may be shallow, because it has been propelled too frequently not from the bottom but from the top, often leaving parents and community members with the feeling captured by this report's title, that education reform has been done not with them, but to them. And the history of social change, like the civil rights struggle, teaches us that no such movement can succeed without the support and active engagement of its intended beneficiaries.

What will it take to earn the engagement of parents and communities in the movement for better schools and better education? *Done to Us, Not With Us* addresses this question in detail. But two broad needs stand out. Parents and communities need leadership, not from outside, but from within the community itself. And they need information, from sources they trust, communicated in ways they understand and believe.

Leadership. When we asked African American parents whose judgment they most respected on matters relating to their children's education, they did not cite authorities or experts, but other, more knowledgeable, parents. They also cited community leaders and, overwhelmingly, faith leaders—groups often described as “grasstop” leaders. For African American children to get the education they need, and that their communities and country need them to have, these grasstop leaders will need to draw communities together in support of better schools.

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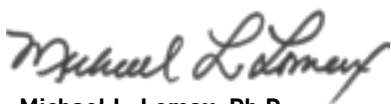


To take root and endure, however, the movement to give African American children the education they need will also require leadership to help channel community concern and build public will. That leadership will need to be able to convene diverse community interests and help mediate differences in perspective.

We believe that UNCF—a deeply rooted legacy organization that after nearly 70 years continues to make a difference in the educational lives of African Americans—can play this role. Its mission of sending African American children to and through college has resulted in more than 400,000 college degrees and hundreds of thousands of scholarships. Its 40 years of nationwide “A mind is a terrible thing to waste”® PSA campaigns has brought it almost universal recognition, respect and support, enabling it to raise more than \$3.5 billion to invest in the education of African Americans and other students of color. And its network of member colleges and universities and area offices has established its presence around the country.

Information. No facts are more revealing than these: Most low-income, African American parents do not believe that African American children are receiving the kind of education that prepares them for college, the goal to which their parents overwhelmingly aspire. Yet, just as overwhelmingly, they believe that the public schools their own children attend are “excellent” or “pretty good.” As the report observes, this “gap between parental aspirations for their children to attend a four-year college and the reality of their academic readiness is much more troubling than parents realize, often negatively affecting their sons’ and daughters’ ability to get into college.” Parents need information that gives them a realistic assessment of their public schools. They need information about possible alternatives to under-performing nearby public schools. And they need help knowing what specific steps they can take to get their children a good education.

By virtually every measure, public schools that serve African American students are sorely in need of transformative improvement. Students need and deserve it; the 21st-century economy demands it. But improvement cannot take place without the active engagement of the parents of the students served by the schools. This report demonstrates that African American parents see that schools are falling short. They are eager for community-based leadership that can bring about reform. And they are more than ready to be engaged.



Michael L. Lomax, Ph.D.

President and CEO
UNCF

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Introduction

Despite the importance of postsecondary education to the economic and social vitality of the U.S. and the individuals who pursue this academic goal, the educational pipeline to and through college is broken for communities of color, the fastest-growing segment of the population. The kindergarten-to-college pipeline for African Americans is particularly damaged. According to recent data, more than 34 percent of white adults in the U.S. have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 20 percent of African American adults.¹ Perhaps most troubling is that the gap between these two groups has grown over the past 30 years. According to ACT,² only five percent of African American high school graduates meet college readiness benchmarks across four major subjects (English, reading, math and science).³ Further, too many African American communities are plagued with low-quality, under-resourced K-12 public schools and educators who are less experienced than those in schools in high-income neighborhoods.⁴ These and other obstacles only exacerbate the widening educational attainment gap. This persistent gap and other educational disparities continue to threaten our country's short-term economic recovery and long-term growth.

One of the most effective ways to address educational disparities is to ensure that more students receive rigorous academic preparation from kindergarten through 12th grade, so they graduate from high school college-ready. In addition to academic preparation, what is among the most important factors in facilitating students' educational attainment and success? Parental involvement.⁵ In fact, findings from several studies have linked parental involvement to positive educational outcomes including higher grade-point averages; increased achievement in reading, writing and math; lower dropout rates; and academic self-efficacy.⁶ Although all students benefit from parental involvement, research shows that parental involvement for students of color and those from low-income backgrounds significantly impacts their children's school performance.⁷

In addition to academic preparation, what is among the most important factors in facilitating students' educational attainment and success? Parental involvement. ... Although all students benefit from parental involvement, research shows that parental involvement for students of color and those from low-income backgrounds significantly impacts their children's school performance.

Given the important role that parents play in supporting students throughout their educational lives, UNCF wanted to better understand how low-income African American parents view the K-12 education system and their role in supporting their children. The authentic voice of parents and their unfiltered beliefs and perceptions are largely absent from the education reform dialogue, so UNCF wanted to hear and understand their concerns and aspirations directly from them. As a result, we conducted a research study in February and March 2012 consisting of focus group interviews and surveys. The following questions guided the investigation:

- Attitudes and beliefs: What expectations do parents have for their children's education? What are parents' perceptions of the education system overall, of their local schools, of the education reform movement, and of the leaders driving change?
- Behaviors and decision making: What actions do parents take relative to their children's education? What factors drive those actions?
- Sources of information and influencers: Where and from whom do parents get information related to their children's education, and the education system more broadly? How do parents view the role that UNCF could play in supporting the educational needs of their children?



Study Scope and Methods

This report is a meta-analysis of a two-part research program that involved both a quantitative survey and qualitative focus groups. The study was conducted in February and March 2012 in five target cities: Atlanta, Detroit, Memphis, New Orleans and Washington, D.C. These cities were chosen because they have large African American populations, robust education reform efforts are under way or are part of a planning process to address the cities’ challenges, and UNCF has a strong institutional presence there. These cities in particular face many of the educational challenges that prevent too many African American children from fulfilling their potential, and they therefore serve as excellent testing grounds.

Details about the qualitative and quantitative methods are located in the appendix.

Key Findings

The key findings from this study reinforce and add greater details to the body of knowledge about African American parents and their involvement in the education of their children. Most important, a substantial percentage of low-income African American parents and caregivers who participated in the study (87 percent) have high aspirations for their children and overwhelmingly want them to graduate from college (Figure 1).

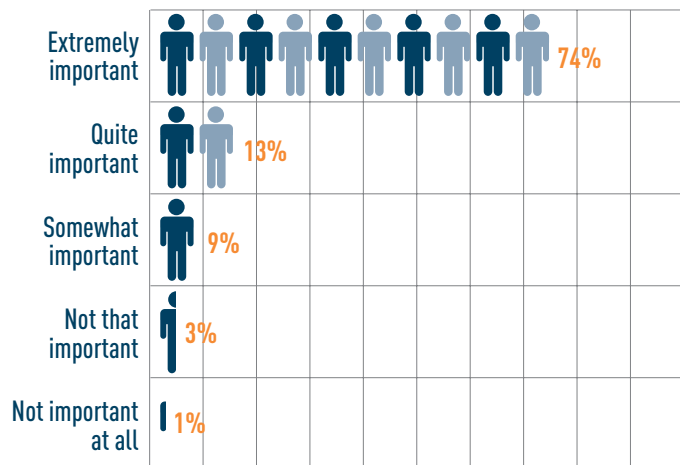
This finding is particularly significant because it indicates that these parents have the desire for their children to earn a four-year college degree. However, as subsequent findings will indicate, a host of other challenges, including poor academic preparedness, low-quality schools and a lack of knowledge about how to navigate the educational system, hinder these parents and students from realizing their educational goals.

While the wealth of data collected could provide a host of secondary conclusions, what follows are the key takeaways from the study.

Participants view engaged parents as the key to a child’s successful education and generally described themselves as very engaged with their children’s teachers and schools.

Generally, low-income, African American parents are often viewed as being less engaged with their children’s academics than are middle- and high-income parents.⁸ However, parents in this study saw themselves as very engaged in multiple ways. In fact, 87 percent of parents said they regularly review their child’s test scores and grades, 75 percent regularly speak with their child’s teachers, 75 percent regularly read to their children and help with homework, 68 percent work to understand grade-level standards across subjects, and 51 percent research school options for their children (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Percentage of Low-Income Parents Who Believe It Is Important for Their Children to Attend and Graduate from College



Additionally, parents cited other ways in which they support their children, such as creating extra homework assignments to keep them challenged, volunteering at their children’s school, purchasing supplemental educational materials, and enrolling them in out-of-school enrichment programs. However, several parents reported that though they understand that being involved or visible at their children’s school was important, that sort of engagement was also more difficult than involvement at home due to time, transportation issues and work constraints.

Parents also expressed frustration about uninvolved parents. They specifically referenced younger parents, who they believe may not be as actively engaged in their children’s education due to lack of knowledge about how to navigate the educational system or prior negative experiences. One parent mentioned, “We have a lot of young parents that really don’t care ... parents used to be involved with everybody’s kids.” Yet another parent believed that a lack of information was the true driver, saying, “Some parents need somebody to walk them through it.” Despite these concerns about uninvolved parents, a few parents cautioned that all the blame should not be placed solely on them. “It’s not the parents, it’s the system.” The reality shared by many of these parents is that they are encountering considerable financial stress. They often have multiple jobs and want to support their children’s educational pursuits but have many other pressing needs that divert their energy and attention.

Parents often don’t know what they don’t know.

Parents expressed interest in gaining access to resources and information to support their children’s K-12 education as well as successfully navigating the college process. When asked to choose the top three content areas in which they need more information to help their children be successful, one parent stated, “It’s hard to select a top three because parents would kill to have information on all of these.” (See appendix for full list of choices.) However, while most parents believe that accessing information about school quality is at least somewhat easy (Figure 3), fewer engage in activities that require more effort, such as researching best school options for their children. Parents with children in the lowest quality schools need the most help locating reliable sources of information about school quality. Thirty-four percent of these parents noted challenges in getting reliable information about school quality in their neighborhoods.

Figure 2. Percentage of Low-Income Parents Who Support Their Children in the Following Ways on a Regular Basis

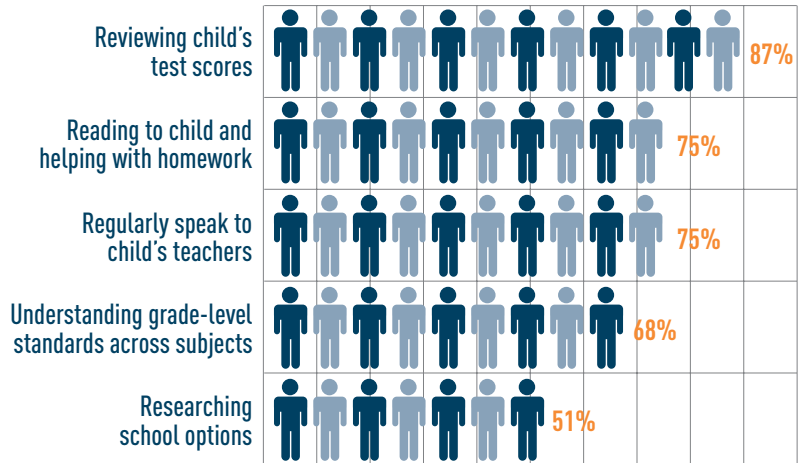
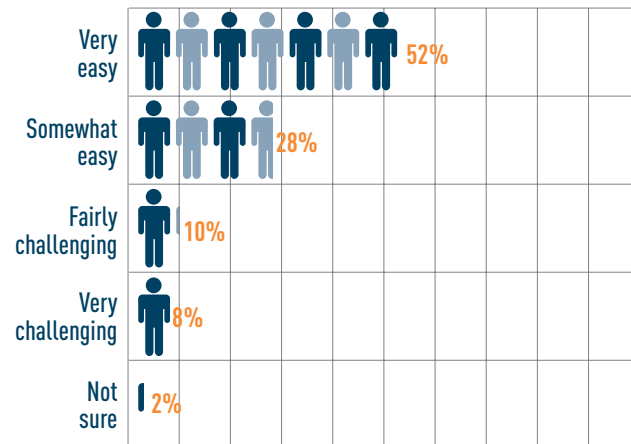


Figure 3. Accessibility of Reliable Information on School Quality in the Local Community





Parents also questioned the reliability of data used to assess school performance, notably the use of standardized tests as an outcome measure (Figure 4). While many parents used school standardized test scores as a proxy for quality, they did not feel that these tests were good indicators of how well children were learning. One mother said her daughter did not perform well on standardized tests but ended up being her class valedictorian. One father noted that standardized tests were not the most accurate demonstration of “*how brilliant a child can be.*” Another father simply said, “*I think the standardized test is a crock.*” Despite these significant misgivings, a small but vocal body of parents acknowledged that testing is a vital part of the educational experience that their children must learn to manage. “*If education is to help prepare our children for life, we cannot ignore results. Ultimately, we have to instill in our children that you will be measured in life by some result, by some outcome,*” declared one father.

Overall, parents and caregivers want additional information that can help them support their children’s academic success. Beyond information about school quality, some of the resources and information parents cited included understanding what their children need to know across subjects at each grade level, supporting their children’s academic progress at home, and providing encouragement and support to their children beyond academics (Figure 5).

Parents may have issues with their local schools, but not their children’s school.

Parent perceptions of public schools in their immediate neighborhood and their satisfaction with the quality of their children’s education were misaligned, creating an unrealistic paradox around expectations of school performance. The majority of parents and caregivers (80 percent) rated their children’s school as excellent or pretty good (Figure 6). At the same time, many parents felt that the schools in their immediate neighborhood were not effectively educating children. Forty-one percent of parents believe that schools in their local

Figure 4. Percentage of Low-Income Parents with Favorable, Mixed and Unfavorable Impressions of Standardized Testing in Schools

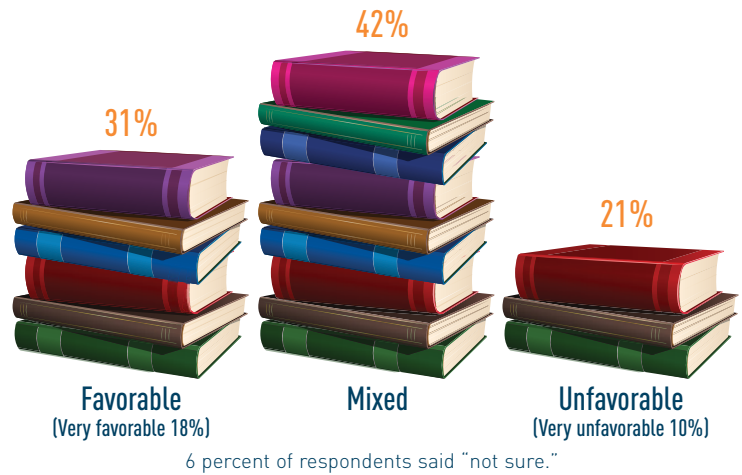


Figure 5. Percentage of Low-Income Parents Who Say Support in the Following Areas Would Be Very Helpful

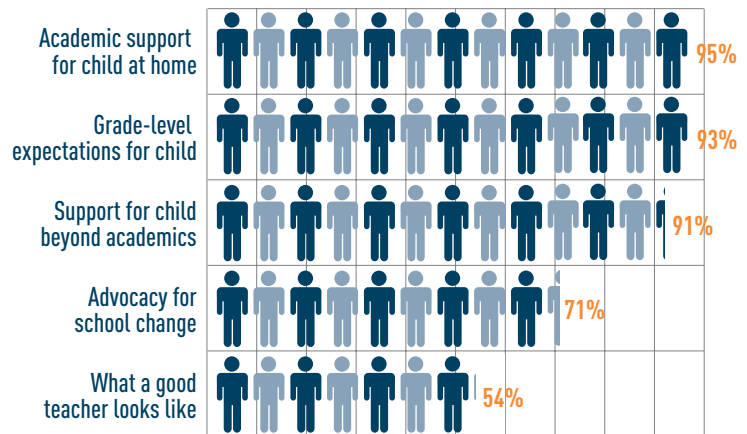
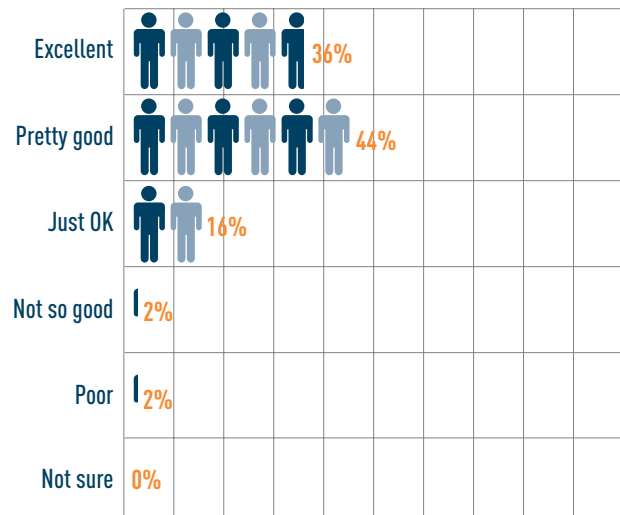


Figure 6. Parental Ratings of Their Children’s Schools



communities are not doing a good or excellent job of preparing students for college. Several parents said their children attended a neighborhood school and felt that the school was doing a good job of academically preparing them, providing an interesting contrast between how parents felt about the quality of local schools and their children’s school. While parents had confidence in their children’s schools, the actual performance of urban public schools in the five target cities in this study offers a stark contrast. The gap between parental aspirations for their children to attend a four-year college and the reality of their academic readiness is much more troubling than parents realize, often negatively affecting their sons’ and daughters’ ability to get into college.

The majority of the parents attributed the poor performance of their local schools to negative neighborhood and school environments, lack of resources, and a lack of quality teachers. When asked about this topic, one parent noted, *“Some of our kids don’t want to go to school because of what’s happening in their communities.”* Another parent commented, *“I think sometimes in our communities, we don’t get the cream of the crop. We get the teachers nobody else wants.”* Eighty-seven percent of participating parents and caregivers cite a safe, secure, violence-free environment as one of the most important factors when choosing a school for their children, indicating that African American parents are prioritizing the basic need for a safe school over other measures of school quality more strongly correlated with college readiness (Figure 7). This also speaks to the real concerns that parents and children face on a daily basis related to crime and other environmental factors that affect a child’s education.

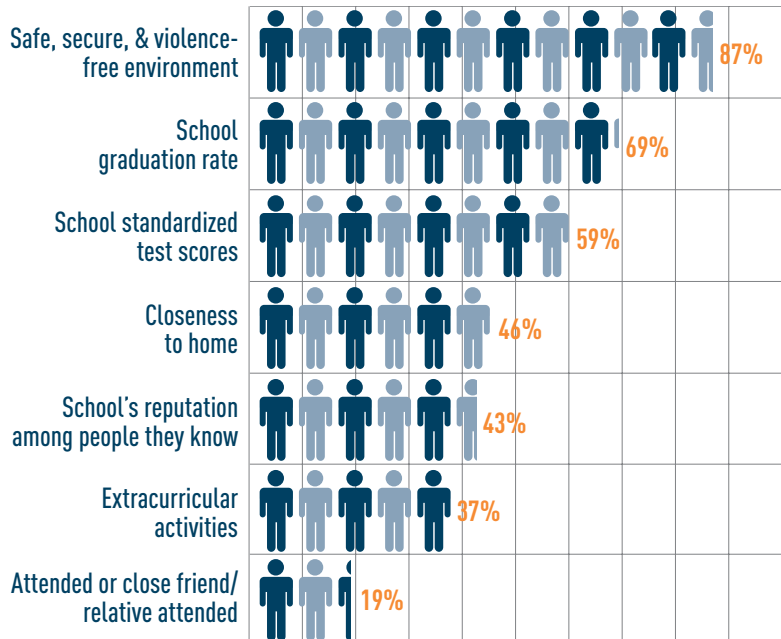
Several low-income parents in the study shared that they and some of their peers sent their children to schools outside of their neighborhood for a better education. *“I can’t tell [if my neighborhood schools are doing a good job] because no one in my community goes to school in my community,”* one father said. The result of parents sending their kids to schools outside of their neighborhood is even more compelling when the next finding is considered.

Parents appreciated the option of having school choice; however, sending kids to schools outside their communities posed several challenges to the families and the communities.

Those who supported school choice believed that it would raise the performance of all schools, making them more competitive. This increased competition would, in theory, push all schools to make a more concerted effort to better educate students, ensuring they met a college- and career-ready standard.

Parents felt that the choices for high-quality schools were limited, as the quality schools were not located in their immediate neighborhoods. One father stated, *“If you have the transportation and the time to take your kids to school, you have plenty of options, but if you don’t have that available to you, your options are limited.”* Another parent said, *“I drive my son 35 miles to school every day because I see the good his school has [done].”* Attending those schools

Figure 7. Percentage of Low-Income Parents Who Cite the Most Important Factors When Choosing a School for Their Child





requires extra efforts that not all families are able to make. One mother said, *“If you don’t have a car, you actually have less choice.”* The notion of less choice is due to the fact that in many neighborhoods of the cities we surveyed, districts have shuttered underperforming or under-enrolled schools, reducing the number of local options.

Parents noted that as more students attend schools outside of their community, there could be an adverse impact on neighborhood schools by depleting them of necessary resources. This negative impact could be financial—when students attend schools outside of their district, funds are typically transferred to the new district, further diminishing much-needed resources. As one parent declared, *“Once the money leaves, it’s over. They don’t want to give it back.”* The negative impact could also be social, in that weakened schools do not provide a foundation around which to build the communal fabric. *“It was ‘separate but unequal’ back in the day. Now it’s ‘choice’ and unequal,”* asserted one mother.

The concept of “education reform” did not generate positive reactions from parents, and there was no consensus on the meaning of the term.

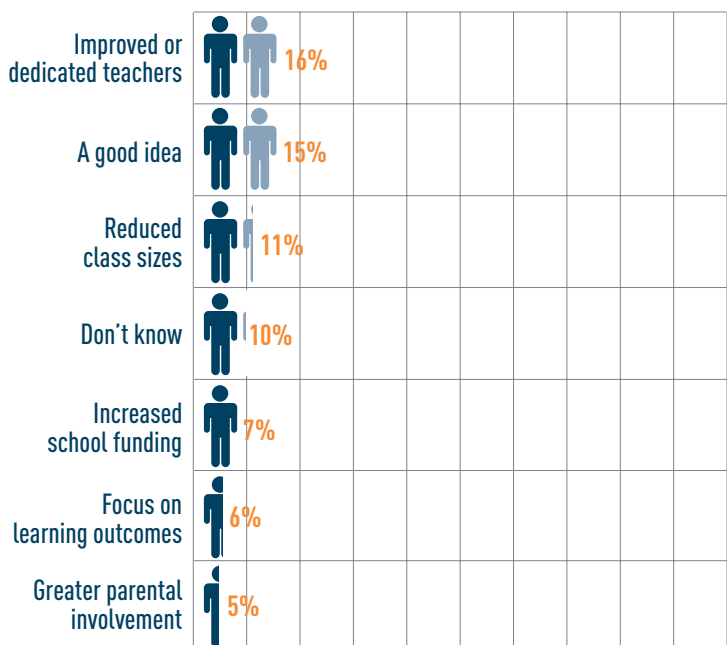
Although the primary purpose of education reform is to improve public education for all children, participants varied in their understanding of the term. Survey participants offered a number of responses (e.g., teacher quality, increasing school funding, reducing class sizes), indicating a lack of consensus on what the term means (Figure 8).

While some parents believed the term connoted change, others felt that little ever changes in the education system. A small sampling of comments from focus group participants defining the term “education reform” indicates how empty the phrase is to African American parents and caregivers.

- *“More crap ... in my experience it has not been a positive thing.”*
- *“Here we go again.”*
- *“The debate rages on and no one understands the impact on kids.”*
- *“It means more government bureaucracy ... more of the government trying to tell us how we can do things here with our children but their kids are all in private school.”*

Further, many in the focus groups believed that the current educational programs and policies are not working either on the broader scale or in their local communities. One mother expressed her frustration about outside organizations coming in to provide services without paying attention to the local culture. Many parents agreed that decision makers who create education policies are out of touch and cannot relate to the daily challenges of single parenthood, unemployment or working multiple jobs to make ends meet.

Figure 8. Parental Response to What “Education Reform” Means



“It was ‘separate but unequal’ back in the day. Now it’s ‘choice’ and unequal,” asserted one mother.

Most parents felt they had a degree of personal power and influence at their children’s school, but acknowledged that they sometimes face obstacles in exerting it.

Parents discussed the various ways in which they engaged their children’s schools, including actively staying in contact with their children’s teachers through e-mail and personal visits to the school. Parents also mentioned that engaging their children’s school comes with obstacles. Many spoke about not feeling welcome at their children’s school, feeling intimidated by “nasty” administrators, and being made to feel that they do not have a right to ask questions. Some parents worried about blatant retaliation. One mother stated, *“If you do voice your opinion, they take it out on your child.”* Another parent reflected on this culture of discomfort at her children’s school, sharing, *“You’re embarrassed to be bold and speak up to someone who’s educated [when you are not].”* Young parents in particular felt that these obstacles hindered their school engagement.

These findings reinforce some of the pre-existing knowledge about African American parents, who tend to be very concerned about the state of public education in general and are particularly concerned with the output of their local schools. African American parents often hold parents and families responsible for their children’s academic performance more so than schools, as reflected in one participant’s comment, *“From the front door to the school door, you have to be involved.”*

In contrast, hardly any parents felt they had personal power or influence to address issues in the school system as a whole.

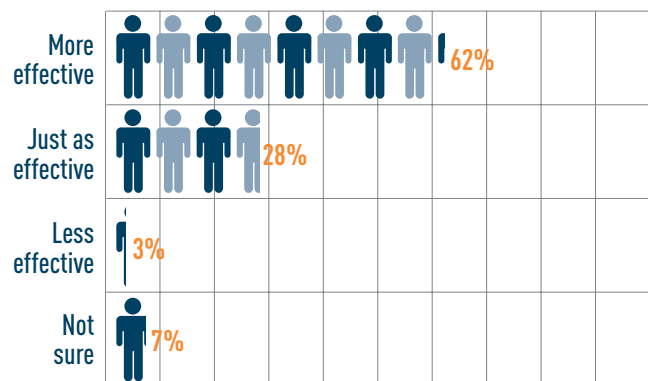
While most parents were skeptical about their ability to change the school system as a whole, many felt that parents as a group could exert power and advocate for changes that could improve education for all children. When asked whether parents like them could make a real difference in the public school system in their community, 74 percent said it was “pretty likely” or “very likely.” As the age of parents increased, so did the percentage who selected “very likely.” This indicates that parents feel a sense of empowerment that many might not expect of low-income African Americans.

One mother described the ideal situation, saying, *“When I see there’s a whole bunch of people somewhere that have the same issues I have, we can all sit down and talk about it and come up with something that we can do as a community. ... It takes a whole village to raise these children.”*

Parents would like to see strong African American leadership driving change.

Building on the theme of cultivating greater involvement, parents believe that more African American parents, community leaders and organizations need to be actively involved to significantly improve schools (Figure 9).

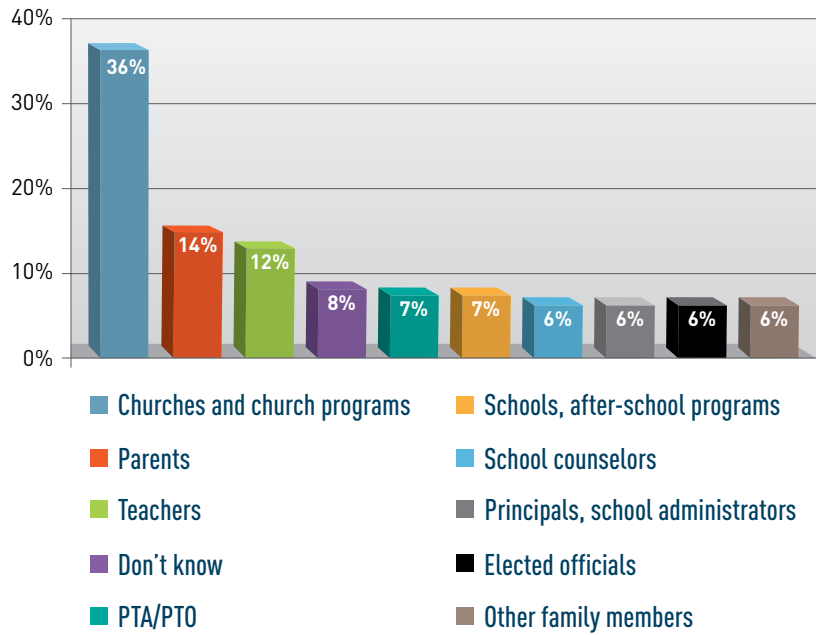
Figure 9. Percentage of Low-Income Parents Who Believe that Public School Reform Efforts Would Be More, Less, or Just as Effective if African American Leaders Were More Involved





Churches, by far, and parents themselves were identified as the most influential and trustworthy sources for supporting parents in their child’s educational journey (Figure 10). This reinforces the earlier finding that engaged parents are key to a child’s successful education and further confirms that parents trust in their power and that of other parents. The longstanding influence of African American clergy as leaders in these communities continues to resonate with parents and caregivers as evidenced by these data.

Figure 10. Percentage of Low-Income Parents Who Cite the Following Organizations or Individuals as Most Influential, Trustworthy and Effective at Supporting Low-Income Parents in Helping Their Children Do Well in School and Get Prepared for College



Recommendations

The insights from the research suggest promising strategies to further educate, engage and mobilize African American parents and communities in the educational lives of their children. Our objective in this report is not to be overly prescriptive on tactics, but to highlight four broad approaches to African American parental engagement:

1. Connect the aspirations of parents to a roadmap on how to get there

Parents have high aspirations for their children and recognize the importance of attending college to achieve their dreams. However, they struggle to translate these ambitions into the specific steps they need to take to prepare their children for educational success. Most of the necessary information exists somewhere in some form, but even system-savvy parents struggle to keep up with it all. A “checklist for college” that helps parents navigate the journey from kindergarten to high school graduation could change all that. It would provide parents and their children with the information they need to identify early childhood programs, select high-quality schools, evaluate teachers, choose college-track classes by grade, and navigate the college application process. This roadmap would help parents create an important college-going culture at home, highlight what is required to get students on a college track and outline the key decisions parents have to make to get there.

2. Meet parents where they are with appropriate messaging and support

To further engage low-income African American parents in the educational lives of their children requires a recognition of where the targeted audience is now—experiencing financial, emotional and environmental stresses on a daily basis. The messages and support provided to parents should acknowledge the barriers they face as well as their high aspirations for their children. African American parents want to send their children to high-performing schools and seek information to help guide their selection process. However, any messages targeted to these parents must acknowledge their desire for their children to be in a safe, violence-free environment. To ensure that their children attend a safe and high-quality school, African American parents often confront the daunting task of sending their children to schools outside of their community. Parents want school choice for their children and some have the capacity to navigate available choices, but what parents deeply want are high-performing, safe schools in their community. Their “choice” will not be authentic until options are available for quality education in their neighborhoods.

In addition, African American parents in this study were not interested in messages rooted in education reform, governance models or teacher tenure policies. Instead, the conversation with parents should be framed in ways that further the interests of their children and are aligned with their priorities. Parents want to support their children’s education journey but may not have the time or resources to be as involved as they would like to be. As a result, information should be made available to parents through a variety of channels such as parent-led information sessions, online resources and community forums at local schools or churches, which focus group participants cited as the top three methods for receiving education-related information.

3. Engage parents using new voices that resonate with them

The message and the messenger matters. With an understanding of the information and messages that should be targeted to African American parents, it is critical that new messengers are leveraged in the education and engagement process. Parents repeatedly stated that they are most influenced by other “experienced” parents, faith leaders and community leaders, or African American “grasstop” leaders. African American “grasstop” leaders, such as members of the clergy, politicians and community leaders, among others, hold a prominent position in the community and often provide direction on social, spiritual, political, economic and educational issues for their communities. Therefore, efforts to reinforce the college-going culture and provide support to parents should be delivered by these key influencers. While these parents are used to hearing from “grasstop” leaders about various social issues, having them consistently and strategically address the importance of educational success in fresh, contemporary ways can convey the urgency of college readiness. Connecting parents and African American leaders can activate entire communities to become more involved, which could translate into advocating for better schools and educational changes in their community so all children can benefit.



4. Strengthen the relationships between parents and schools

Strong relationships are a two-way street, and parents and schools will need to work together for the mutual benefit of the students. Parental involvement is a critical component of promoting student success and should be a goal for every school. Participants expressed concern over the fact that school administrators and educators often made them feel unwelcomed when they visited the school and during interactions with school personnel. To strengthen the relationship between families and educators, schools can work to positively engage parents to ensure that they feel welcomed, that their concerns are addressed and that their voices matter. Schools must facilitate opportunities for parents to become more active in their children's education. However, it is important to note that involvement is viewed in a variety of ways by African American parents and educators must provide them with multiple opportunities to engage, accommodating parents' work schedules and the various demands of their complex modern lives.¹⁰

Conclusion

This monograph encapsulates the findings from surveys and focus groups of low-income African American parents and caregivers. While these parents felt a sense of agency in their ability to impact the educational experience of their children, they believe numerous obstacles exist that prevent them from pushing for all the change needed. Most telling in the results is that low-income African American parents want what is best educationally for their children and that their circumstances, often beyond their perceived control, limit educational options. However, these parents persist in trying to provide the most optimal education and support they can for their children.

Given the need for more African Americans to earn a college degree and graduate from high school college-ready, we believe that UNCF must insert itself as a trusted voice next to faith leaders and other parents to educate and engage the black community. Not only do we have to support parents as they navigate the college-going process, but we also have to highlight the larger educational crisis that exists within the African American community. We need to let parents know that they can make a difference and that their children can achieve higher outcomes than what some might expect for them. In our almost 70-year history of supporting African American college completion, UNCF is well positioned to help parents and communities navigate what is for all children a very daunting journey. Persisting all the way through the education pipeline has historically not been easy for African Americans under the best of circumstances. The adage "it takes a village to raise a child" remains as true today as ever, and UNCF can actively engage with other faith and community leaders as a "village elder." We want to radically change the story of what is possible not just for African American students but for the African American community as a whole. UNCF is passionately invested in transforming dreams of college into reality, and we will continue to push until all students who want to go to college are afforded that opportunity.

The results of this study will significantly enhance our knowledge of low-income African American communities, improve our understanding of how to reach parents in those communities, and may eventually shift education actors' perspectives on how to effectively engage African American parents.

Not only do we have to support parents as they navigate the college-going process, but we also have to highlight the larger educational crisis that exists within the African American community. We need to let parents know that they can make a difference and that their children can achieve higher outcomes than what some might expect for them. In our almost 70-year history of supporting African American college completion, UNCF is well positioned to help parents and communities navigate what is for all children a very daunting journey.

Appendix

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative methodology

Across the five target cities, eight focus groups were conducted involving African American parents and caregivers of children (ages 5-18) who attended public school—traditional or charter—or received a voucher to attend a private or parochial school. A total of 52 individuals participated in the focus groups, which consisted of parents between the ages of 25 and 60. Participants also completed demographic surveys.

Focus groups were videotaped and recorded using traditional qualitative data collection procedures. As the first step in analysis, the research team met internally to review the tapes in their entirety and to identify recurring themes and patterns, which produced coding schemes for deeper analysis. Relevant clips from each focus group were combined to create separate videotapes for each identified sub-theme, which allowed the researchers to make more reliable inter-group comparisons. The final interpretive analysis involved examining the edited sub-theme videotapes and referring to the original master tapes when necessary to gain a fuller sense of the context of statements.

Quantitative methodology

A total of 1,355 surveys were conducted with African American parents and caregivers from low-income households across the country, and oversampling was done to collect 753 surveys in the five target cities. All parents and caregivers had children attending a traditional public school, public magnet or public charter school, or a private school through the use of a voucher. All interviews were conducted by telephone, except 64 in Atlanta and 63 in New Orleans, which were conducted in person at local malls.

The data were weighted in accordance with U.S. Census Bureau figures. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were conducted for each item to discern prominent findings.

Topics on Which Low-Income Parents Would Like More Information to Support Their Child’s Academic Progress

Options	Rating	Top 3 Selections	% of Top 3 Selections
Supporting your children’s academic progress at home	9.8	33	66%
Providing encouragement and support to your child beyond academics	9.8	26	52%
Understanding what your child needs to know across subjects at each grade level	9.4	17	34%
Selecting a high-quality school for your child	9.3	14	28%
Supporting your child if s/he is behind a grade level	9.5	10	20%
Accessing local resources to get one-on-one support for your child	9.4	10	20%
Understanding what a good teacher looks like	8.9	7	14%
Exploring extracurricular opportunities for your child (e.g., music, sports)	8.7	7	14%
Finding the best college fit for your child	9.2	7	14%
Advocating for school or school-system change	9.4	7	14%
Getting into college	9.5	5	10%
Understanding what a good school looks like	8.5	4	8%
Saving for college and applying for scholarships	9.3	1	2%

Calculations based on 50 respondents



Endnotes

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The Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute (FDPRI) was established in 1996 and bears the namesake of the founder of UNCF. FDPRI is dedicated to conducting and disseminating research that informs policymakers, educators, philanthropists and the general public on how to best improve educational opportunities and outcomes for African Americans and other underrepresented minorities from preschool to and through college. For more information on the institute and its work, visit www.uncf.org/fdpri.