Analyzing Education Policy and Reform with Attention to Race and Socio-Economic Status

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Focusing specifically on the education of African American students, the authors attempt to address two salient and central questions concerning policy and reform discussions in education: (1) Does equity and equality mean sameness? and (2) Is student learning synonymous with student achievement? Embedded throughout this discussion are issues of race and socio-economic status; That is, what role may race and socio-economic status play in policies and practices that contribute to the educational experiences and opportunities of African American students? The authors also consider the following recommendations for improving policy and educational reform efforts: (1) recruit and retain talented teachers from various racial and ethnic backgrounds; (2) implement sustained and meaningful professional development programs that address policy, reform, and equity; (3) make systemic changes in addition to increasing funding; and (4) develop stronger teacher education programs.

The nature, outcomes, and implications of educational policy and reform debates are central to the education of students in public school classrooms across the nation. The ways in which policies are designed; the motives and intentions behind policies; the students, teachers, schools, and districts for whom the policies are written; and the outcomes of policies may have the potential to enable or repress learning experiences and opportunities for students in P-12 classrooms and, consequently, in their adult lives.[1] Documents such as Randolph-McCree and Pristoop's *The Funding Gap 2005: Low-*

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[1] We are not attempting to generalize the points made throughout this article, which may be transferable only to some African-American students, policymakers, educators, and other readers. We realize and acknowledge that there is variance, in terms of needs, among people and that situations (i.e., policy decisions, reform efforts, educational policy) often depend on the context in which people find themselves.

Income and Minority Students Shortchanged by Most States (2005), Liu's *How the Federal Government Makes Rich States Richer* (2006), Wiener and Pristoop's *How States Shortchange the Districts that Need the Most Help* (2006), Roza's *How Districts Shortchange Low-income and Minority Students* (2006), and Peske and Haycock's *Teaching Inequality: How Poor and Minority Students are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality* (2006) provide important analyses that can shed light on the educational experiences and opportunities of African American students, particularly as we work to meet their and all students' needs.[2] In the reports above, much of the discussion and analyses focus on issues of funding. However, in this article, while we draw from a funding imperative, we pose related questions about equity, student learning, race, and socio-economic status (SES) because these topics are interrelated and important to what happens in P-12 schools.[3]

Although we are discussing macro-level policies, such as Title I and No Child Left Behind (NCLB), that have implications for funding and equity, we also discuss micro-level policies, such as special education policies, gifted education policies, and disciplinary/suspension policies, that have implications for classroom-level policy development and practice. To be clear, this discussion threads issues of race, racism, and socio-economic status throughout.

Where matters of funding are concerned, Peske and Haycock (2006) explained that "[i]nequalities in educational opportunities have always bedeviled public education. For more than 40 years, federal policy has tried to address the problem. Title I is the most significant component of this effort, providing billions of dollars to schools serving concentrations of poor children. The idea behind Title I is simple: Because poor children often enter school behind, they need extra educational services to *catch up*" [emphasis added] (11).

Ironically, what it means to "catch up" may be related to a norm that society has set where white, middle to upper class students are the measure by which students of color are compared. For instance, white students are often viewed as "the norm" by which others are compared and assessed on standardized tests (Foster 1999). In terms of practice, students of color (namely blacks and Latino/as) in schools are often placed in remedial courses to "catch up" or "live up" to a norm, for which the model is their white classmates. Students of color are also often placed in lower-tracked classes, which may make it more difficult for them to view themselves as part of the perceived "white norm." Ladson-Billings (2000) maintained that "the closer one is able to align oneself to whiteness, the more socially and culturally acceptable one is perceived to be" (207).

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[2] The terms *African American* and *black* are used interchangeably throughout this article. Also, we use *we* and *us* to refer to those interested in, concerned about, and who make decisions on behalf of students of lower socio-economic status, African American students, and/or other students of color.

[3] According to many scholars, race is socially, legally, politically, and historically constructed. Its meanings, messages, results, and consequences are developed by human beings. Genetically and biologically, individuals are more the same than they are different. According to Nakkula and Toshalis (2006), "…there is no biologically sustainable reason for establishing 'races' as distinct subgroups within the human species… Race is a concept created in the modern era as a way of drawing distinctions between people such that some might benefit at the expense of others" (123). Racism is about discrimination based on race. Inherent in racism are notions of power and privilege; it occurs both implicitly and explicitly (Sheurich and Young 1997).

Some research suggests, however, that people of color may experience a different type of "normal" life, and that excellence can and does emerge in multiple and varied forms (Morris 2004; Milner 2007a).

According to Liu (2006), the "purpose of Title I…is to level the educational playing field for poor children" (2). We agree with Ladson-Billings (2006) when she expressed that it is unfair and perhaps inconceivable to expect all students to perform identically on academic measure because all students do not have the same resources— the same school resources, the same curriculum, the same teachers, and the same economic status. This variance in students' social, economic, and educational opportunities, contrasts starkly to the "American dream"—which adopts and supports meritocracy as its creed. That is, as many believe, if students or people in general just worked hard or harder, then they would be rewarded for their hard work and could achieve and realize their full potential. If the meritocracy argument were completely accurate, as Henslin (2004) wrote, "…all positions would be awarded on the basis of merit. If so, ability should predict who goes to college. Instead, family income is the best predictor—the more a family earns, the more likely their children are to go to college…while some people do get ahead through ability and hard work, others simply inherit wealth and the opportunities that go with it…in short, factors far beyond merit give people their positions in society" (174). Thus, the meritocracy argument may actually be a myth because it maintains that anyone in the United States can reach the "American dream" as long as that person works hard, puts forth effort, follows the law, and makes good decisions. This philosophy often rejects institutionalized and systemic issues that permeate policies and practices, such as racism, sexism, classism, and discrimination. Moreover, the meritocracy argument does not take into consideration social/cultural advantages that wealthier students often inherit (materially, intellectually, physically, socially, and culturally) and that are reproduced—capital that has been and continues to be passed down to them from one generation to the next (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). In essence, as Macleod (1995) explained, "schools [and policies may] actually reinforce social inequality while pretending to do the opposite" (11).

Randolph-McCree and Pristoop (2005) noted that "[f]unding gaps undermine one of our most powerful and core beliefs that we as Americans cling to: that no matter what circumstances children are born into, all have the opportunity to become educated and, if they work hard, to pursue their dreams" (2). In addition to funding inequities, some have argued that racism and other forms of oppression and suppression still exist in society and, consequently, in education and educational policies (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Lewis 2001; Parker and Lynn 2002). Thus, it is important to engage in discussions that question matters of equity and reform, particularly as they relate to the educational experiences of African American students.

In this article, we attempt to address two salient, central, and related questions concerning policy and reform discussions and efforts, with attention to the implications of educational policy and reform for African American students: (1) Does equity and equality mean sameness? and (2) Is student learning synonymous with student achievement? In other words, are we measuring all the learning that has taken place in a classroom when we "standardize" education and test students on this standard knowledge?

Our point in raising these two questions is not necessarily to answer them fully. The questions are rhetorical in a sense. Indeed, it is far beyond the scope and space of this

article to sufficiently answer them in depth or breadth. However, these questions should remain on the minds of policymakers (and practitioners) as they develop policies and practices that attempt to meet the increasingly complex and diverse needs of P-12 students. These two questions are important because they focus on interrelated issues that are, to say the least, nebulous in current educational policy. Without questioning the very premise of equity, student learning, race and SES, it is difficult to determine the vitality and possibility of educational policy and reform in the interest of African American students. Before we shift the discussion to these questions, however, we provide a brief overview of the state of African American students in public school classrooms. In the subsequent sections, we attempt to address the questions and follow with recommendations and conclusions.

African American Students in Public Schools
According to the literature, black students have been consistently underserved and mis-educated in P-12 schools and in higher education (Irvine 1990; Ladson-Billings 2006; Woodson 1933). Teachers often have low expectations for black students and "teach down" to them; they often water down the curriculum and do not plan adequately to meet their needs (Milner 2007a). Black students are grossly underrepresented in gifted education and overrepresented in special education (Artiles, Klingner, and Tate 2006; Blanchett 2006; O'Connor and Fernandez 2006). Teachers in public schools often do not see brilliance in African American students. They often see difference—that is, students' conceptions, beliefs, convictions, values, and behaviors that are inconsistent with those of teachers—as wrong. Based on her analyses of the data, Ford (2006) wrote, "Sadly, I have seen little progress relative to demographic changes—Black and Hispanic students continue to be as underrepresented in gifted programs today as they were 20 years ago" (2).

The situation for African American males is even more complexly severe. For instance, a report from the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2004) stressed, "In many school districts, up to 70 percent of black boys who enter 9th grade do not graduate four years later with their peers. In most districts, black boys are disproportionately assigned to special education and nearly absent from advanced placement classes" (Holzman 2004, 2).

The Schott Foundation placed the urgent nature of teaching black students at the top of its agenda in *Public Education and Black Male Students: A State Report Card* (Holzman 2004). The report card revealed that "in 2001/2002 59% of African American males did not receive diplomas with their cohort" (4). Moreover, where education is concerned, the report revealed that, "New York City and Chicago, for example, enrolling nearly 10% of the nation's Black male students between them, fail to graduate 70% of those with their peers" (4).

Again, this indicates a great need to focus on African American students in policies and practices. Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) analyzed the disciplinary records of 11,001 students in 19 middle schools in a large, urban Midwestern public school district during the 1994-1995 academic year. Skiba et al. reported a "differential pattern of treatment, originating at the classroom level, wherein African American students are referred to the office for infractions that are more subjective in interpretation" (317). Different behaviors are often equated with insubordination:

Teachers often see black students as deficits rather than as assets; black students are often considered troublemakers incapable of success. Teachers' practices often resemble those that are preparing these students for prison, rather than a world of success (Noguera 2003). Skiba et al. (2002) pointed out that students of color overwhelmingly received harsher punishments for "misbehavior" than did their white counterparts. As an example, the authors described a fistfight at a high school football game in Decatur, Illinois that resulted in the superintendent's recommendation that all seven of the African American students involved be expelled from school for two years. Apparently, in the same district, weapons were used in a fight involving white students and less severe punishment was imposed upon those students. Why are some groups of students, particularly black students, punished more severely and more frequently than others? Admittedly, the answers to questions about the needs and conditions of black students are enormously complex and cannot be solved with cookie-cutter principles. Ladson-Billings (2000) wrote, "As a group, African Americans have been told systematically and consistently that they are inferior, that they are incapable of high academic achievement. Their performance in school has replicated this low expectation for success" (208).

Figure 1 provides a more detailed picture of the high school graduation and dropout rates of white, black, and Hispanic students.

TABLE 1. High school dropout rates from the National Center for Education Statistics (2007).

Race	Black	White	Hispanic
% of high school dropouts (status dropouts) among persons 16-24 years old, 2005	**10.4**	**6.0**	**22.4**
% of average freshman graduation rate, 2005	**60.3**	**80.4**	**64.2**

According to these data, black and Hispanic students are expected to graduate high school at a lower rate than white students, and the percentage of high school dropouts within a given year is higher for black and Hispanic students. These results suggest that black and Hispanic students are completing school at alarmingly lower rates than their white counterparts, but the data do not tell us why these students are not completing school. Qualitative teacher, parent, and student data, in addition to quantitative data, may provide a more detailed picture and address why some black and Hispanic students are not completing high school. This scenario and the numbers of black students who receive expulsions/suspensions and assignments to special education lead us to a discussion on equality and equity in school districts and classrooms. The educational situations of African American students (and other students of color) are troubling, and policies and practices may influence these students' educational experiences and opportunities.

Central to addressing the needs of black students in policies and reform is the question of whether equity and equality mean sameness.

Do Equality and Equity Mean Sameness?
Ladson-Billings (2000) provided an important discussion of notions about "equivalent" and "analogous" that are helpful for thinking through equity, equality, and sameness issues. Regarding some of her experiences in discussions with teachers, she wrote, "[D]iscussants want to talk in terms of who has suffered most. However, when we understand the ways in which oppression has worked against many groups of people based on their race, culture, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation, we must recognize that there may be analogous experiences that are not necessarily equivalent ones" (207). She further explained that "our understanding of the commonalities of oppression cannot wash out the particularities and specifics of each experience" (207). Essential to her points is whether equality and equity should actually mean sameness. Do equity and equality mean sameness? This is a question that should be addressed when policy is developed and examined with both African American and students from other ethnic backgrounds in mind. In some educational policy and other discussions, "equity" and "equality" are used interchangeably and point to sameness. When we define and practice equality and equity in education, we are often attempting to provide the same educational opportunities, experiences, curricula, and instruction for all students in different learning environments, regardless diverse needs of those in learning contexts. Understanding equity and equality as sameness potentially means that individuals aspire and work towards, and that policies, principles, and procedures are developed and geared to the same for all. However, in analyzing policy-related matters focusing on desegregation, Ladson-Billings (2000) maintained that the "rhetoric of equality mean[ing] sameness tended to ignore the distinctive qualities of African American culture and suggested that if schools were to make schooling experiences identical for African Americans, we somehow could achieve identical results" (208). Thus, equality, as she described, does not and should not necessarily mean sameness.

As we continue to discuss, in detail, the notions of equality and equity, we acknowledge the work of Secada (1989). In his mathematics research, Secada pointed to a major difference between equality and equity. He wrote, "There is a history of using terms like equity and equality of education interchangeably. Though these constructs are related, equality is group-based and quantitative. Equity can be applied to groups or to individuals; it is qualitative in that equity is tied to notions of justice" (23).

Equity, according to Secada (1989), is defined as judgments about whether or not a given state of affairs is just. For instance, equity in education may mean that we are attempting to provide students, regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, or SES backgrounds, with what they need to succeed—not necessarily the exact same goals and visions for all. Equity in educational practices can take on complex meanings; thus, practitioners and policymakers must determine if the decisions they make in educating students, particularly African American students, are just. Secada further explained that "[t]he essence of equity lies in our ability to acknowledge that even though our actions are in accord with a set of rules, the results of those actions may still be unjust. Equity goes beyond following the rules…equity gauges the results of actions directly against standards of justice" (23). In this sense, equity and equality do not necessarily mean

sameness, but that what is necessary for success in one school or district, or with one student or reform or policy effort, may be quite different from another.

Traditional conceptions of equality and equity may be easier to conceptualize in educational policy and reform. In theory and rhetoric, it is not a very complex endeavor to provide schools, districts, and states across the board with the same funding, for example. However, it is quite complex and multifaceted to outline and carry out equality and equity in educational policies with heightened attention on matters of the particular and not necessarily wide distribution of resources without considering the distinctive needs of students and contexts.

We agree with Wiener and Pristoop's observation that "[s]tates need to take a greater share of education funding and target more money to the districts with the biggest challenges" and the greatest needs (2006, 9). Moreover, as Roza (2006) declared, "if public school systems are serious about closing achievement gaps, they must begin to allocate more resources to the students with the greatest needs" (12). Such positions— which promote policies that allow for and allocate funds across states, districts, and schools on a "need" basis—may seem antithetical to the very essence of what equity or equality actually means or *should* mean. Critics of such an approach suggest that it is inequitable, in fact, to provide certain communities and certain groups of students with more support than others. Critics may ask, "How is it equitable to provide one district with something different or more than what another receives?" At the core of such a question is the equity and equality debate. Critics may believe that funding should be distributed uniformly across contexts, regardless of the nuances, situations, and circumstances of particular districts or schools.

Liu (2006) wrote, "Wealthier, high-spending states receive a disproportionate share of Title I funds, thereby exacerbating the profound differences in education spending from state to state. Title I makes rich states richer and leaves poor states behind" (2). In essence, there are instances in which richer states receive more funding than states with students of lower SES. To explain, Liu (2006) stressed that "high-spending states get more Title I money per poor child than low-spending states. The net effect is that Title I does not reduce, but rather reinforces, inequality among states…Maryland, for example, had fewer poor children than Arkansas but received 51 percent more Title I aid per poor child. Massachusetts had fewer low-income children than Oklahoma but received more than twice as much Title I aid per poor child. Similarly, Minnesota had fewer poor children than New Mexico but received 27 percent more Title I aid per poor child" (2). Additionally, wealthier states do not exert more energy in providing educational support but have "higher per-pupil spending and thus receive higher Title I aid per poor child" (Liu 2006, 2).

Studies such as this suggest that equity and equality should not necessarily mean sameness, and that these issues may need to be placed front and center when funding policies, practices, and reform are considered. "Standardized" policies that do not take into account the multiple layers of needs and issues in particular contexts often result in inequities and inequalities that are difficult to control. One problem is that "district budget documents report how money is spent by *category* and *program* rather than by *school*" [emphasis added] (Roza 2006, 9). The categories and programs are uniform, so it is difficult to determine which areas need additional funding. As evidenced in Liu's analysis (2006), the reverse should be true. Richer states should not receive more funding because they spend more per student. Poorer states should receive additional funding to

support more students in need. Districts attempt to provide sameness, a "one formula/policy paradigm fits all" approach across the board, and students in states, districts, and schools who may really need the extra support do not receive it. Roza wrote, "More often, the patterns are created in response to pressures to equalize services across all schools. Where earmarked categorical funds such as federal Title I money pay for such extra services as full-day kindergarten or reading specialists in high-need schools, more flexible state and local money is often used to fund the same services in the low-need schools" (11). Again, the ideal or philosophy imbedded in the policy is that all states should receive the same services based on formulas that clearly undermine the needs of the most disadvantaged students.

For instance, Roza (2006) explained that "districts put equally funded programs into schools regardless of how many students need them. A district might allocate $100,000 to each school with English-language learners, even though one school might have 200 students with limited English proficiency and another—often a more affluent school—might have only 20 [students]" (11). These policies often cannot meet the needs of the students whom they were designed to assist because they are grounded in sameness ideology; policymakers assert that they are exercising equality and equity when actually they may be hurting the students most in need, such as African American students of lower SES. In addition to addressing equity in educational policy with a heightened focus on African American students, scholars and policymakers should also give serious attention to learning and achievement.

Is Student Learning Synonymous with Student Achievement?
Student learning and student achievement are not binary or dichotomous; they are interrelated. Still, student achievement, as we have come to understand the term, is highly connected to students' outcomes on standardized (high stakes) tests. Researchers and theorists concerned about the education of students, especially the education of marginalized students such as African Americans, often use the terms *achievement* and *learning* to mean the same thing. To be clear, test scores can likely tell us something about what students have been learning and experiencing in the classroom, especially because teachers are often forced, in a sense, to "teach to a test." However, the achievement argument may fall short of actually demonstrating how much a student has learned because test developers have decided what that learning is or should be. On the one hand, examining test score data can tell us whether students have mastered a certain set or dimension of information. And of course, students' test performances demonstrate they have acquired and mastered *some* information. However, it is difficult for standardized tests to tell us whether students have acquired and mastered *other* forms of knowledge and information, and whether or to what extent they have actually learned something in a particular classroom beyond what is examined on the test.

Students are not the same. Teachers are not the same. Districts/contexts are not the same. To expect students to learn the same information requires us to revisit the equity/equality argument. Clearly, having high expectations for all students is very important in classrooms across the country. All students should be taught and empowered to reach their full capacity to learn (Siddle-Walker 1996). Proponents of policies and reform efforts that have at their core achievement outcomes, such as Title I and NCLB, may need to reevaluate whether attempts to standardize education can actually reveal the

type of learning that can and should take place in school classrooms. Ladson-Billings (2000) wrote, "[B]ecause African American learners do not begin at the same place as middle-class White students either economically or socially, and because what may be valued in African American culture differs from what may be valued in schools, applying the same "remedy" may actually increase the educational disparities" (208). We do not believe that Ladson-Billings' point is to suggest that African American students should not be taught on the same level as their white counterparts in terms of rigor and content. However, how students' knowledge and learning process are measured and assessed may need attention. Again, white students are often used as the measure for what and how excellence looks.

The point in elucidating the learning and achievement complication and complexity here is to problematize what we conceive of, accept, and validate as knowledge and what it means to know (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Further, the ways in which students' (and teachers') learning and growth are determined and assessed may be problematic. What about the kinds of classroom learning that do not show up on an examination? Is that knowledge or learning not central or important to students based on their particular situation? Who decides what that knowledge is and ought to be, and why? Inherent in these questions are moral and philosophical matters of relativism and absolutism. Of course there are multiple arguments about the nature of "truth," knowing, and coming to know. Supporters of relativism may argue that truth is socially constructed or that there are multiple answers to questions and problems, or multiple truths, depending on the situation. Such supporters may reject the standardized tests that do not allow students to locate and support a range of answers to problems, to critique reality, or to analyze power structures. On the other hand, supporters of absolutism may believe and argue that there is *a* truth that can be discovered and thus suggest that that truth be measured. They may argue that there is a correct answer to any and all questions or problems.

Table 2 presents some of the points in this article, specifically, policy problems in relation to African American students. To recap, we are concerned about macro- and micro-level policies that have a bearing on African American student learning opportunities in classrooms. The table's first column shows problems that have emerged, in part, due to policies that hinder or stifle success for African American students. The second column includes possible causes of the problems outlined in the first column. The third column indicates the counter-productive policy implications of the problems and their possible causes.

TABLE 2. African American students and policy problems.

Problem	Possible Cause	(Counter-Productive) Policy Implication
Overrepresentation of African American students in special education	Teachers and administrators' lack of cultural knowledge about African American students, their behaviors, and their cognitive potential and abilities	Schools develop policies that create more special education programs and classes, rather than addressing the cause of the overrepresentation of these students in special education
Underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education	Myopic and culturally insensitive conceptions of giftedness	Development of curriculum policies and instruction that are not challenging
Inadequate distribution of funding (Title I) in schools with the highest needs	The distribution of the same resources in different contexts rather than based on needs	Policies that promote sameness and that do not meet the monetary needs of students and teachers who need the resources most
Disproportionate number of African American students suspended and expelled	Teachers and administrators giving up on students and not recognizing their potential; a refusal to keep students in school because of a lack of care and concern for their academic and social success; some teachers and administrators fear students who "act out" and do not comply	Development of tougher policies for "noncompliant" student behavior
African American students not performing well on standardized tests	An assumption that African American students only know the knowledge being "measured" on these exams; comparing African American students to their white counterparts	African American students being placed in remedial courses to "catch up" with their white counterparts

Recommendations and Conclusions
Like Ladson-Billings (2006), we believe that "the meaning of our [researchers'] work" should benefit "the larger public…real students, teachers, administrators, parents, policymakers, and communities in real school settings" (3). The following recommendations may help the rethinking of decisions and issues around policy and

reform in the interest of black students that can have serious implications for *real* people in *real* communities with *real* needs: (1) recruit and retain talented teachers; (2) implement sustained and meaningful professional development; (3) make systemic changes in addition to increasing funding; and (4) develop stronger teacher education programs.

Recruit and Retain Talented Teachers
To provide the most promising educational experiences and opportunities for African American students, districts and schools with large populations of these students should consider developing policies that support the recruitment and retention of talented teachers from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds. We agree with Peske and Haycock's argument that policymakers need to "take a cue from professional sports and start using a 'draft strategy.' That is, put high-poverty, struggling schools at the head of the hiring line, allowing them to have the first pick of teaching talent" (2006, 13). Since Coleman's seminal study (1966), researchers and policymakers (e.g., Darling-Hammon 1987; Dreeben and Gamoran 1986; Haycock 1998; Ingersoll 2008; Oakes 1990; Rosenbaum 1976) have asserted that the neediest students in the nation—especially those in schools serving lower socio-economic and urban communities—are taught by the least qualified teachers. The vexing question about how to address the recruitment and retention of talented teachers, or what NCLB and Peske and Haycock called "highly qualified" teachers lies in how we define and really know what it means to be "talented" or to be "highly qualified." Generally, NCLB defines a "highly qualified" teacher as one who holds a bachelor's degree, has a regular or full state-approved teaching certificate or license, and is competent in each of the core academic subjects he or she teaches. Fundamentally, it seems that "talented" and "highly qualified" teachers should know their subject matter, understand race, culture, gender, diversity, and equity, and have the desire to teach all students.

In addition, policymakers and reformers need to pay special attention to the recruitment and the retention of black teachers, although, as Gay (2000) asserted, "Similar ethnicity between students and teachers may be potentially beneficial, but it is not a guarantee of pedagogical effectiveness" (205). In other words, teachers from any ethnic, cultural, or racial background can be successful educators of black students (see, for instance, Ladson-Billings 1994), or of any group of students, when they possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary to meet the needs of all students. Still, black teachers are leaving the teaching force at alarming rates; this trend needs to be reversed because, as Foster (1997) suggested, black teachers bring a wealth of knowledge to schools and classrooms that not only benefits culturally diverse students but all students. Thus, educational policies need to address the recruitment and retention of African American teachers and teachers from other ethnic backgrounds who possess the knowledge and skill necessary to be successful teachers of all students: Such recruitment could have a positive influence on African American learning experiences and opportunities.

Implement Sustained and Meaningful Professional Development
Where applicable, some of Title I funding may need to be earmarked for professional development of teachers—professional development that has a direct focus on the nexus between culture and teaching. Specifically, this professional development should assist

teachers in more deeply understanding students of color and/or students of lower SES. Although we have argued for the recruitment and retention of talented teachers, we are optimistic that professional development can actually make a difference and help teachers enhance their talents and become better qualified to meet the needs of their students. The research literature suggests that it takes new teachers about five to seven years to develop into "effective" educators. Throwing teachers into schools—any P-12 learning context—without sustained and meaningful professional development is unfair not only to the teachers but also to the students they will serve. Teachers need consistent support as they are learning to teach and building their teaching repertoire; therefore, professional development may be a vehicle to help them develop into the kinds of teachers who can best serve any student.

Following the work of Talbert and McLauglin (2008), we argue that teacher learning communities may be a useful professional development tool to enhance teacher effectiveness. Talbert and McLaughlin suggested that professional learning communities allow colleagues to support each other's learning and together create new knowledge of instructional practices that are effective with their students. Teacher learning communities may enhance students' outcomes because they provide teachers opportunities to organize instruction and to nurture and sustain a professional service ethic and mutual accountability for all students' success (Talbert and McLaughlin 2008).

Professional development may also need to emphasize the specific matters discussed in this article—policies over which teachers have some control, such as special education and gifted education referral procedure, equity/equality/sameness issues, and achievement/learning issues. Focusing on these areas may effect the social-normative changes schools need to better serve students of color and students of lower SES.

Make Systemic Changes in Addition to Increasing Funding
Until policies reflect systemic changes—changes to the very fabric and core of our educational system—schools will likely not improve very much. In other words, throwing more money at a problem will not necessarily ensure that African American student learning opportunities increase or improve. The very structure of schools, the ways in which the curriculum and instruction are organized and developed, how and why students are assessed, and the kinds of support students and teachers receive, are systemic issues that need continuous attention. Spending more money and maintaining the same or a very similar educational system will result in the same outcomes. Indeed, as Wiener and Pristoop (2006) reminded us, "There are, of course, examples where increased education funding has not translated into commensurate improvements in teaching ad learning" (8). Moreover, as Randolph-McCree and Pristoop (2005) insisted, "… simply throwing more money at schools is not enough. The money needs to be spent on the kinds of things that we know improve student achievement—a rich curriculum, taught by expert teachers who are well supported professionally and have access to the materials they need, and a system of identifying and providing extra help to students who are behind" (8).

In short, the educational system needs funding and systemic changes to improve the learning opportunities of black students; these systemic changes must get at the core of problems in schools and should go beyond the "throwing money at a situation" approach without addressing deeply-rooted, institutionalized matters.

Develop Stronger Teacher Education Programs

Very few policies exist in teacher education programs that ensure teachers possess the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes necessary to meet the needs of a range of culturally diverse students. It is not enough to have one, standalone course on race, SES, equity and equality in teacher education. These issues need to be sewn into the very fabric of policies and reform in teacher education. Cockrell, Placier, Cockrell, and Middleton (1999) wrote, "As instructors of one class in a large, complex program, we realize we can go only so far on our own. Our foundations course is marginalized from the curriculum and methods courses that students consider most important. If pre-service teachers are to become more efficacious in teaching culturally diverse students and preparing all students to live in a democratic, multicultural society, we must work together as a program toward these ends" (363).

Teacher education and professional development programs need courses that provide teachers with access to readings and other experiences that can serve as counter-narratives (Solorzano and Yosso 2001) to the pervasive, negative discourses they have encountered and internalized about African American and other marginalized students. Teacher education programs should develop and implement curricular policies that better prepare teachers to teach black students. How can we expect to improve learning opportunities among students of color and of lower SES in P-12 classrooms if programs do not also exist that educate teachers to meet these students' complex needs? Reversing classroom-level policies regarding discipline, for instance, means more fully preparing teachers to recognize the core reasons students disengage in a learning environment and why students may "misbehave."

Peske and Haycock (2006) wrote, "[P]oor and minority children don't underachieve in school just because they often enter behind; but, also because the schools that are supposed to serve them actually shortchange them in the one resource they most need to reach their potential—high quality teachers" (1). Further, Peske and Haycock (2006) maintained that, "unfortunately, rather than organizing our educational system to pair these children with our most expert teachers, who can help 'catch them up' with their more advantaged peers, we actually do just the opposite. The very children who most need strong teachers are assigned, on average, to teachers with less experience, less education, and less skill than those who teach other children" (2). Teachers can make a difference, and the kind of education they receive about race and SES are critical to their classroom success with all students.

Looking Forward

Ladson-Billings (2006) wrote, "[E]ducation research has devoted a significant amount of its enterprise toward the investigation of poor, African American, Latina/o, American Indian, and Asian immigrant students who represent an increasing number of the students in major metropolitan school districts. We seem to study them but rarely provide the kind of remedies that help them to solve their problems" (3). Accordingly, our research and policies should be used as tools to help others improve their situations and solve their dilemmas.

Finally, we have observed epistemological and research approach concerns where policies do not draw from smaller scale research in their decisions to develop and implement policy and reform. Educational policies need to be more broadly inclusive of conceptions of research and evidence, particularly where issues of race and SES are

concerned. Research studies that are qualitative, we believe, can provide important information for policymakers and reformers.

All the experiences and needs of students are not quantifiable. Qualitative research has been used to study the nature of black people (see Collins 2000; Dillard 2000; Gordon 1990; Milner 2007b; Tillman 2002), and policymakers should consider including qualitative studies and analyzing them as data points when writing policies and considering reform. At the same time, however, as Randolph-McCree and Pristoop (2005) explained, "No matter how the data are analyzed, it is clear that impoverished children and children of color are ill served by the way we fund schools in this country" (4). What are we as researchers, policymakers, reformers, and educators prepared to do, then, to change this and similar trends as we look to the future and move forward?

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