

Foot in the Door, Competent to Transfer, Free to Flee, and Passionate Persisters

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Abstract

History continues to show what happens when organizations, institutions, laws, programs, policies, and practices to reduce inequities and inequalities are ignored. Inequality by social, economic, racial, ethnic, and immigrant origins remains pervasive. Any attempts to address the structural roots of inequity and inequality will have limited societal impacts until the structures that created the inequity and inequality are transformed. This requires authentic, ongoing, supportive, collegial, and accountable policies and processes. As the nation continues to combat systemic racism and structural foundations of inequity and inequality, it is evident that equity and equality are less understood when it comes to urban environments. A drastic shift is needed. To improve student learning and teacher persistence and retention in urban educational settings, it will take an authentic, concerted effort to implement a conceptual framework focused on social justice and equity. Students, teachers, and schools are the elements that past research has treated as separate focus points. From my perspective, these are not three separate independent elements, but rather three sets of dynamic (not static, but continuously evolving) relationships. The final section of this paper asks, “Now that we know, where do we go from here?” Propositions for future practice are shared.

Keywords: urban education, social justice, teacher persistence, teacher retention, students, parents, community, leaders, disadvantaged, urban educational solutions, accountability

Introduction

Predominately Black schools in low-income communities continue to face generations of racial exclusion, discrimination, and inequality in the United States, causing Black families to shoulder unequal education, economic, and health burdens. The acknowledgment of the correlations and causes of systemic issues, such as instructional and institutional segregation, racism, social injustice, and policy and leadership failures, must be addressed rather than suppressed. These historical, devaluing dispositions remain detrimental to our students and our country. Former U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan called such situations a “man-made disaster” and “education malpractice” (Gartner et al., 2016, p. 2).

The systematic denial of educational opportunities to African Americans and other students of color has long subjected many students to an inferior education. Rooted in the history of slavery, followed by the “separate but equal” doctrine upheld in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and coupled with the unequal allocations of resources to segregated schools, unequal access to education is a longstanding fact of American life. (Darling-Hammond, 2019, p. 1).

Through research, observations, narratives, articles, and news reports, the educational inequalities in South St. Petersburg are clear. The historical, educational injustices and inequities that plague predominately Black schools in low-income, high-needs communities remain ubiquitous. After nearly 50 years of court-ordered desegregation, and despite the supportive research and advocacy for school integration, the “Pinellas County School Board abandoned integration in December of

2007” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015, p. 2). Their decisions sent schools into hyper-segregation. A review of the district’s data, practices, and policies showed minimal to no progress in the district’s attempt to remedy these issues. Guy Burns, Attorney for Concerned Organization for Quality Education of Black Students (COQEBS) stated, “We’ve given it a reasonable attempt at talking through problems, we’re going to be asking the court for the right to proceed with some court-imposed remedies” (LaForgia, 2015, p. 1A). The district promised that five schools in predominately low-income, Black neighborhoods would be provided more supports, funding, staff, before- and after-school programs, and other resources, but reneged. Over a half century after court-imposed remedies, one would hope racial and monetary disparities would no longer be a problem. However, this is not the case.

Inclusive Accountability

Every system has an impact on other systems. Educational, social, economic, and politically unjust systems remain for children living and learning in South St. Petersburg, located within Pinellas County, Florida. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019a), nearly 13% of Florida children live in poverty, and nearly 40% of children live in poverty in South St. Petersburg (prior to the coronavirus pandemic). These numbers are not new. In 2015, U.S. State Representative Kathy Castor stated, “Our federal and state laws—and our values—require that all children, no matter what neighborhood in which they live, receive an equal opportunity to a high-quality education” (Times Staff Writer, 2015, p. 1A). School boards are responsible and must be held publicly accountable for Black students’ quality of education. According to a Pinellas County School Board member, “we’re going to be held accountable by our constituents, the community, to follow through” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015, p. 10).

Nevertheless, the Pinellas County School Board has yet to be held accountable for the educational injustices and inequities affecting children living within the 33701, 33705, 33711, and 33712 zip codes, all located within South St. Petersburg. The on-the-ground narratives of education, race, and inequities in these high-need zip codes (Frobisher et al., 2015) and communities remain a critical concern. The collection and sharing of on-the-ground narrative data remain essential to educational institutions, organizations, and communities. These narratives include the experiences and perceptions of students, parents, teachers, and community members/leaders. The awareness and understanding of personal dispositional attributes can create opportunities for collaborative conversations (Lang et al., 2019; Whitaker, 2020) and the co-construction of equitable laws, policies, and procedures. Dispositions affect data! State data sets are aligned with individual state agendas. Community data sets are aligned with individual community needs. Organizational and institutional data sets are aligned with individual operations, quality improvement, research, etc. Real reform cannot begin until the uses of different data sets are shared, understood, and aligned (Moore et al., 2018). A supportive network that focuses on data sharing and comparative analytics to identify and rapidly disseminate data and promising next steps is needed. However, this iterative data sharing process requires a commitment to communication, collaboration, and collegiately in a civil and caring environment with the desired outcome to co-construct. The co-constructing process starts with the dismantling of dispositions that devalue.

Through the Lens of Lived Experiences

In 2019, I interviewed Jaclyn Price, a valedictorian and graduate of Pinellas County Schools who was raised in “poverty” by her mother (predominately) and father. Neither of her parents attended college, and her father was a convicted felon (drug dealer and drug runner). Nonetheless, Jaclyn remained a focused student, community advocate, and is a current Yale University scholar. In this interview, Jaclyn shared her collaborative commitment of awareness, access, accountability and

the need to understand one's own dispositional attributes relating to White privilege and the inequalities that continue to plague urban Black students in high-need schools.

As a student, I did not understand the privileges I was afforded. Just like most parents, my parents cared about my education. Therefore, while riding down the road one day, I shared my concerns about the educational inequities I personally witnessed within the school system. What came next continues to resonate with me as a scholar. My mother's response blew me away: "Well, my kids are out of the system." (J. Price, personal communication, January 3, 2019)

These statements are not new nor are they isolated incidents. Ignoring parental and community disconnects continues to perpetuate the current disadvantages of urban schools and their need to engage in inclusive, diverse, and ongoing parental and community partnerships. Parents remain one of the most impactful adults in their children's lives (Rote et al., 2020). Information funneled through parents, schools, and communities highlights the need for and power of collaborative partnerships. Schools remain deeply segregated today, more so than they were decades ago, requiring a greater need for positive parent, school, and community relationships.

As a scholar, I am now able to see the discipline gap and how these practices are a direct link for students of color (specifically Black students in Pinellas County) to the prison pipeline.

Multiple opportunity gaps allowed me to live a life of privilege.

My family received privileges that (at the time) they did not qualify for; due to the color of our skin, the area we lived and the people we knew; opportunities (normally) unavailable to others.

As a current Yale scholar, I continue to wrestle with these and many other ethical dilemmas, personal dispositional disconnects, and unjust policies that perpetuate the opportunity gap in Pinellas County Southside schools.

The political stronghold is in the North [of Ulmerton Road in Pinellas County], it is clear the South [of Ulmerton Road in Pinellas County] has less capital. There needs to be a shift, a shift in the school board, superintendent, to ensure we have principals that are supported for success, teachers that are supported to become and remain successful in South county schools, if the end goal is for 100% student success.

Access and opportunities must be for ALL, just as it was for me as a White privileged female attending North County schools! (J. Price, personal communication, January 3, 2019)

National Not Novel News

In August 2015, the *Tampa Bay Times* published the first of a seven-part series on why Pinellas County was the worst place in Florida to be Black and attend a public school. In summary, the series documented that after abandoning integration, the Pinellas County School Board "Failed to send help to the five once decent schools in St. Petersburg which are now among the very worst in the state" (*Tampa Bay Times*, 2015, p. 9). It is no coincidence that these schools became "failure factories." The series won the *Tampa Bay Times* a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting (Sharockman, 2016).

Decades prior in 1954, the United States deemed "separate but equal" unconstitutional within public schools (DeBray, 2005; Townsend et al., 1996; Townsend Walker, 2014). Federal and state laws require all children to receive an equal opportunity to a high-quality education no matter what their zip code. However, Pinellas County Schools (PCS) continues to struggle to

meet these federal and state laws. Placing students in racially and economically homogenous schools further exacerbates the problem (Rothstein, 2014).

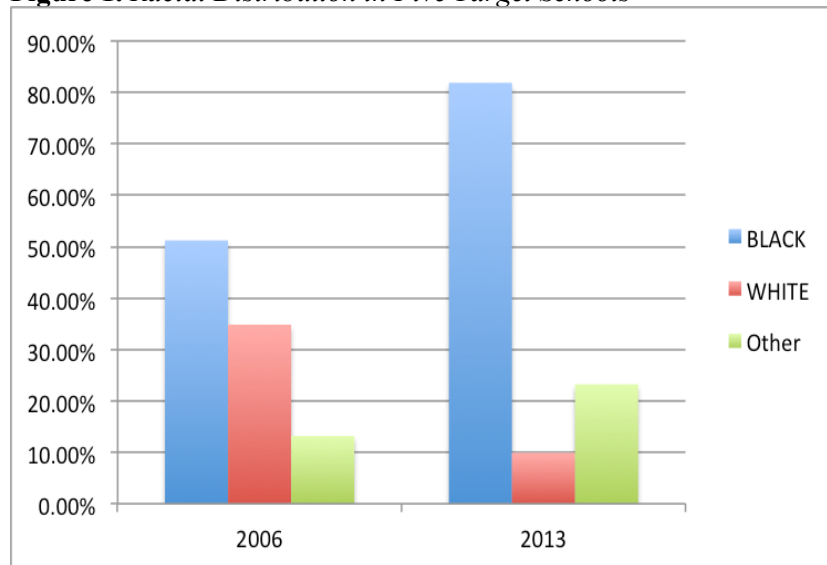
As a South St. Petersburg student product, PCS teacher, behavior specialist and administrator, and, more importantly, a parent and advocate of two African American young men within the PCS system, I observed these outcomes firsthand. In part, these observations drove me to enroll in the Ed.D. program at the University of Central Florida. For my dissertation (Moore, 2016), I studied the underlying dynamics from an academic perspective based on experience, observation, surveys, and interviews with urban teachers and community leaders.

I observed from inside the transition of schools in high poverty, marginalized, predominantly Black areas from racially integrated functional units into racially segregated units with an internally dysfunctional educational culture. My personal experiences and observations were consistent with the *Tampa Bay Times*' reporting and are documented by the official data reported semi-annually by the school system to the national Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) database specifically.

Data Dive

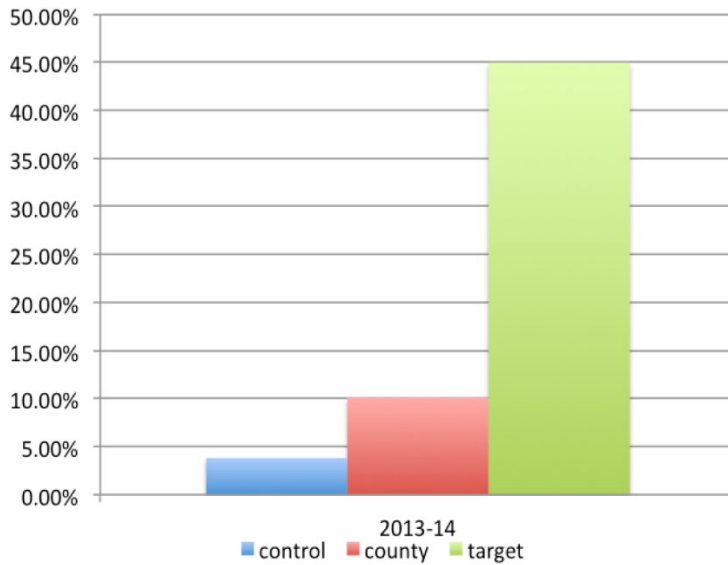
According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 931,680 people lived in Pinellas County in 2006, 927,882 in 2007, and 916,542 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018, 2019b). Pinellas is considered an urban county, with 100% of the residents living in urban conditions. Pinellas County comprises nearly 50 zip codes with 24 incorporated municipalities/cities, and St. Petersburg is the most extensive municipality/city within the county with a notable neighborhood racial divide. In the 2006–07 school year, the five public schools were relatively integrated; 51% percent of the students were Black, and 35% were White, although still not proportional to the district. Overall, in the county, 20% of the students were Black and 67% White. Preceding and during 2007, what are now some of the worst public elementary schools in the state of Florida were then highly functional schools (Florida Department of Education, 2006, 2007).

However, by 2013–14, the percentage of Black students at the five target schools had increased to 82%. White students decreased to 10%, while the overall rate of White and Black students in the county declined slightly as the number of Hispanic students increased (Florida Department of Education, 2013, 2014). I also experienced this firsthand as a parent. I was adamant not to enroll either of my sons into a racially segregated school. Given the lack of appropriate resources and teachers without the proper professional development to become and remain highly effective educators in a high-needs school, I chose to relocate my family and encouraged my extended family to do the same. The below demographic data shows the increased percentage of Black students in the district's top-five failing schools (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Racial Distribution in Five Target Schools*

Note. ChiSq = 621, $p < .00001$, $n = 6,587$, $df = 3$

What accompanied these five schools' re-segregation was a breakdown of the collegial educational culture that existed until 2007. By the 2013–14 school year, a new pattern had been established. New, inexperienced teachers coming into the system to fill open positions were placed in the five target schools, with ineffective, minimal, or no form of targeted professional development or continuous collegial “support,” and no established community or classroom traditions. At the end of the year, the most competent of those new teachers would transfer to other openings within the system. Teachers who could not transfer remained, leaving a handful of remaining residuals and a few effective, passionate persisters to join a group of new novice teachers with no history of educational collaboration or experience in the system. In contrast, a control set of five successful schools in largely White areas had few new, inexperienced teachers, and neither did the rest of the district. The data in Figure 2 show the percentage of inexperienced teachers entering the five segregated schools in relation to five schools in predominately White neighborhoods with characteristics (e.g., grade levels, age, free and reduced-price lunch population) similar to the district as a whole.

Figure 2. *Percent of Inexperienced Teachers*

Note. ChiSq = 87, $p < .00001$, $n = 393$, $df = 1$

The Sad Truth

From the perspective of students, this staffing practice is a civil rights issue. From a teacher's perspective, this is a betrayal of the profession's very soul, sacrificing new teachers who abandon the opportunity to persist in their passion due to lack of targeted systemic support, ongoing professional development (Moore, 2016), and broken promises (Times Staff Writer, 2015b). Not taking a critical view of these issues is detrimental. As an assistant principal in the system, with the belief of teaching and leading from my feet and not from my seat, I felt it was my duty to do something. I had beginning teachers crying in my office because they could not manage their classroom, with what they deemed as "no administrative support" and "no collegial continuity" from year to year. The "best" of these teachers transferred out at the end of the year, and those who had other options quit (Moore, 2016).

I learned from my dissertation research, interviewing teachers and administrators, that this does not need to be the case. There are experienced, highly effective teachers within the system who, under individual- and team-supportive circumstances, would choose to teach in one of the five, now failing schools, from a place of passion and persistence to make it right. Regardless of the passionate persisters' positive approach, many cannot remain due to systemically unjust placements, policies, programs, and procedures. These disconnects are not new; the history of these socially oppressive structures can be heard in the stories of our parents, teachers, leaders, students, and community members. These are narratives I have listened to and experienced far too many times. Unable to see hope for an equitable educational democracy in such high-need schools, many are forced to flee the field that desperately needs them.

Shifting the Narrative

As a professor in a College of Education, my research is co-constructed and people-led; thus, the community shapes my research. As a researcher for marginalized urban communities, the community shapes my research. Qualitative questioning of parents, teachers, leaders, and community members remains the foundation for my research. My research is not just for the elites, but a co-construction for and of the critical needs of urban high-need communities and the

educators with whom I serve in the community. My research and writing are from the inside to inform the outside; leading and learning from the “trenches.” I have bright, energetic young scholars with a gleam in their eyes about becoming teachers. Nevertheless, what I know from the front line, having watched that gleam glaze over with disappointment and disillusionment, is that they are likely to be placed in a school where they have neither the needed experience, support, nor urban training to be successful. No student-scholar who desires to be a teacher should have to choose between either fleeing the profession, becoming a reluctant residual, or painfully persisting after getting their foot in the door.

Enough of the blame game. As our county populations continue to change, so must our ways of thinking and actions. We can and must do better. Our teachers have become an endangered species. The current system is upside down. Our teachers need and students deserve more than just a semantic shift. They deserve devaluing disconnects to be dismantled, changes that make sense, and systemic ongoing support (Moore, 2016). To start all new, placement of inexperienced teachers in highly ineffective and dysfunctional schools where they have limited layers of support is unethical. These teachers are not monolithic; they deserve support and affirmation (Moore, 2016). They deserve a school where the principal is not resolving one crisis after another but has time to be authentic and attentive to new teachers’ needs. Experienced teachers with a sense of social justice and equity desire and require these supports and opportunities to become one of the passionate persisters, of which I include myself. The persistence of our teachers, our students’ success, the commitment of our community, and the prosperity of Pinellas County will rely on passionate persisters, leaders, and the community to dismantle unjust educational, social, and economic inequities that continue to plague Pinellas.

The Power in People: Lessons from the Field

In my dissertation research, I found a small number of these passionate persisters teaching in each school among the remaining teachers. They were a remarkable group that can be the cornerstone of successful, high-needs, urban, predominantly schools of color. However, their commitment goes unacknowledged, and from this untenable position, they are under administrative pressure to raise their students’ test scores, regardless of the circumstances. Dismantling these unjust systems will require school boards to dig deep, identify, and implement what will be difficult, and at times controversial, intervention practices. These complex system issues will require multifocal and multimodal approaches centered on a progressive plan, placing people, policy, power, perspectives, and persistence at the forefront (Gardner et al., 2020; Moore, 2016; Townsend et al., 1996). Allowing the individual voices to be heard in a manner allows others to communicate their needs and wants. These narrative voices give agency and power to the educators who have felt voiceless, and provide a way to express their beliefs. Many of these voices differ from the norm, and are thus often silenced, but must be embraced to move complex educational systems forward.

Real, unvarnished opinions of teachers are rare. Teachers are expected to ask their students to use inquiry, develop higher-order questions, and to think critically and outside of the box. However, such research-based best practices are rarely extended to teachers in professional learning communities (Gardner et al., 2020; Moore, 2016). Teachers who step outside the conversational box do so with a great deal of risk. Honest, authentic, and open conversations are far and few; some might say candor causes career casualties. Educator careerists are fully aware of the professional price for expressing critical concerns within and outside of the organization; such shared voices have caused teachers’ careers to plateau and for some have been career ending (Moore, 2016). Everyday teachers face the fear-factor, a reality that continues to perpetuate the social status quo. The following quote from a Pinellas County school professional, who chose to remain anonymous due to possible professional consequences and ramifications within the

district, describes how teachers have conquered and continue to conquer the educational world and war. Their victorious voices deserve to be heard, sooner rather than later, without retribution (such as demotions, transfers, classroom changes, non-renewal, subject changes, grade-level changes, and additional duties, to name a few).

As a beginning teacher I felt as if could only say and teach what the district allowed me to say and teach. There were pacing guides, matrices, outcomes assessments, compliance checklists, planning notes, data sheets and benchmarks, personal evaluation, peer evaluations, culture and climate surveys, ‘community comments’, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) expectations, the list of teacher accountability goes on and on. Never was there an assessment on the amount of community service work hours urban teachers in high-need schools have to put in compared to their colleagues in affluent North County schools, As a South County educator the district focus was far from what our students and families truly needed, far from what our teachers and leaders needed; thus requiring those that did stay to build ‘our own system’, a social networking system within a disconnected system; if we desired to become and remain a successful school/society. A semi ‘secret society’ developed due to district fear, but implemented due to care, concern and love for the community and the profession.

Onward and Upward

In August 2017, under pressure from the Black community, in part as a result of the *Tampa Bay Times* series, the Pinellas County School Board reached an agreement with community leaders to initiate a 10-year plan, named Bridging the Gap, to close the racial achievement gap. Bridging the Gap is a district-developed plan. A large-scale initiative approved by the School Board in May 2017, the plan focuses on six broad goals: graduation rate, student achievement, advanced course work, student discipline, exceptional student education identification, and minority hiring (Fitzpatrick & Wright, 2017). The 2020–2021 school year is the third year under the terms of the new agreement. It remains to be seen whether the system can be self-correcting rather than continue to hold teachers accountable for failures and difficulties that are systemic in nature. The coronavirus pandemic has impacted health, student learning, and the overall economy. The pandemic, much like our educational systems, did not start as a pandemic but as an infectious condition reaching out across the globe. Likewise, as infectious systems continue to permeate the educational structure and organizations as a whole, there will continue to be an absence of authentic, effective leadership (Moore et al., 2018). These issues are not black and white; they are grounded in (on-the-ground) colorful narratives, narratives we know and knew, yet fail to acknowledge. We need multimodal work to address these issues and influence policy and practice through empirical evidence (Moore et al., 2018).

There remains a “good news/bad news” dilemma in teacher education. The good news is the increased national and international attention on schools (Jimerson et al., 2003), teachers, leaders, and parent/community engagement resulting in the need for significant educational reforms. Multi-level reforms are critical links if schools are to positively progress. Reforming systems that support teachers is vital if organizations and school districts are to prepare teachers in an urban workforce that understands the complexities of teaching students that are culturally different from oneself (Moore, 2016). At a time when schools are seeking support and asking how to deal with issues surrounding race, social justice, equality, and equity, we must begin to look deeply at teacher, leader, and educator dispositions. Because teachers bring to schools their previous experiences and current cultural situations that influence their work, it is not surprising that their beliefs, dispositions, behaviors, and experiences (Talbert-Johnson, 2006) may be disconnected from their current student population (Gardner et al., 2020; Lang et al., 2019; Moore, 2020; Wilkerson et al., 2020). Teacher dispositions are critical.

Urban teacher retention has been long examined, yet, surprisingly, the problem of teacher persistence remains, thus the need to focus on teacher persistence (Buchanan et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2020; Moore, 2016). This substantial obstacle is not a recent phenomenon; teacher persistence is a chronic problem, causing the most vulnerable students to cycle through dozens of teachers in an academic school year. Fitzpatrick (2015) stated that, in 2014, more than half of the teachers in these schools requested to transfer out, and at least three walked off the job without notice; thus, an obstacle to equal educational opportunity remains (Exec. Order No. 13,621, 2012). Students cannot afford to lose effective educators at such numbers. We have to let go of what has been historically perceived as the “gold standard” of retaining effective urban educators. In a world where everyone and everything must be labeled and defined, it’s no surprise, nor is it a new development, that teachers are labeled “good” or “bad.” “Gold standards” are based on high-stakes student assessments developed in biased boardrooms and via situationally subjective observations. This form of exclusive labeling remains the norm. Researchers have attempted to untangle these labels. As a Generation X (Kyle, 2006) educator and researcher, who grew up in the “colored zone” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015 p. 6) of an urban city, it is clear to me that educators need much more than context competencies and skills. Students deserve educators committed to understanding their students, families, and community environment in which they serve. Strained relationships with students (Blake et al., 2016; Gardner et al., 2020) and/or teachers create dysfunctional classroom environments. If the school/teacher relationship remains dysfunctional, students will not learn. If the school/student relationship remains dysfunctional, teachers cannot teach. If the teacher/student relationship remains dysfunctional, the school will fail. This interactive dynamic relationship largely contributes to the failing of urban schools. The five failure factories of South St. Petersburg provided the basis for this perspective; the basic elements remain with three sets of relationships, not individual teachers, students, or schools.

While teachers’ knowledge and skills remain compelling, there remains an under-examined paradox (Buchanan et al., 2013; Gardner et al., 2020; Moore, 2016) as it relates to the sophisticated inquiry and application of said knowledge and skills. While there remains “substantial research on assessing teacher knowledge and skills, there is little on assessing teacher dispositions” (Lang et al., 2018, p. 2; see also Aly et al., 2019), a component vital for educators in urban educational settings. Teachers who possess the predispositions and requisite set of skills to meet the needs of individual school remain scarce (Aly et al., 2019). Our schools are becoming more and more diverse. “In one of the largest school districts in the nation, the student population represents over 200 countries or regions and over 160 languages. The demographics of this large school district mirror those of our nation” (Moore et al., 2020, p. 6). Thus, there remains a sense of urgency for teachers to understand their individual dispositions when “determining teaching strategies that can influence” (Lang et al., 2018, p. 20) or impact their students’ and families’ dispositions, beliefs, and attitudes (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

In education our bottom line is to educate (Nieto, 2003); this cannot be done without a commitment to dispositional awareness and development, focusing on disrupting dispositional disconnects and beginning to build bonds that bind (Dupriez et al., 2016; Nutta & Moore, 2019). Teachers must have a solid foundation of their own history and values to understand their roles as urban teachers and how to strengthen glaring dispositional disconnects (Buchanan et al., 2013; Williams, 2018). As we dismantle disconnects, districts must continue to become aware, accept accountability (“accepting the district’s role in creating problems”; Fitzpatrick et al., 2015, p. 2), and ensure equitable accountable steps are taken when teachers and students are not being successful. Meeting the needs of *all* students is job one. As stated by the PCS superintendent, “I’m going on record saying we’re going to fix this. And we’re going to educate our students as if each one of them was our own kid” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015, p. 2). Simple additive statements result in simple additive models. However, our students have experienced simple for far too long. Our students need dynamic systems. Systems in which each element is dependent upon the other

to be effective (i.e., if one fails, all fails) are insufficient. Our students need more: a multiplicative model. A corollary is that when all are good, they make each other even better. All parts are interactive, with internal accountability. “Urban schools serving Black students, teachers, and teacher-educators must deeply interrogate how enactments of care or lack thereof, and constituent memories, influence instructional practices and educational praxis” (Gardner et al., 2020, p. 5).

Implications for the Future: Problem-Based, Solution-Focused Suggestions

Addressing educational inequities is not a matter of fixing broken teachers; it is a matter of fixing the systems that break teachers. We must change the system!

As the United States becomes increasingly ethnically, racially, socially, economically diverse (Townsend et al., 1996), so must our teachers, leaders, educational settings, and communities. Content knowledge and skills are no longer the only critical competencies required for pre-service and in-service teachers and leaders to teach, lead, and build authentic relationships with communities (Aly et al., 2019; Moore et al., 2020). Teachers, leaders, parents, and students all experience burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and decreased perception of personal accomplishment; Contreras et al., 2020; Maslach & Leiter, 2016) at some point in their lives. Burnout is a frequent problem in urban educational settings, even more so in Exceptional Student Education (ESE) classrooms (Moore, 2016). As an instructional leader and researcher, I have a desire to challenge and change the social injustices and inequities affecting urban students and teachers.

Urban educators need professional development that is laser focused. As group, individual, societal, and situational systems are changing, so must the structures, policies, and practices within educational organizations and communities. Research has consistently shown that teachers in high-need urban schools are supported when using a multidimensional, strength-based approach to teaching, learning, mentoring, and collaborating. Not only must districts become researchers of content, but researchers of their students, families, and the communities they serve, if their duty is to make a difference. “African Americans lack equal access to highly effective teachers and principals, safe schools, and college-preparatory classes” (Exec. Order No. 13,621, 2012). Therefore, I end with suggestions for developing a 360-degree social justice framework focused on students, teachers, parents/guardians, community member/leaders, and organizations/institutions (Blake et al., 2016; Townsend et al., 1996). Students, teachers, and schools are the elements that past research has treated as separate focus points. My perspective is these are not three separate independent elements, but rather three sets of dynamic (not static, but continuously evolving) relationships: school/teacher, school/student, and teacher/student (see Figure 3). When we begin to bridge the barriers, we will begin to bridge brilliance.

Figure 3. Propositions for Future Practice

Propositions for Future Practice	Policy makers	School districts			Communities			
		School boards	Superintendents	School-based leaders	Teachers	Students and families	Community leaders and orgs	Higher education institutions
Allocate specific resources (human and monetary) that support school districts in developing a 360-degree framework that supports students, families, teachers, and communities.	x	x						
Create personal, professional, and collaborative learning opportunities for teachers, students, families, and community leaders to become aware of information, exploration, and opportunities to engage in extraordinary and exceptional moments while developing individual professional dispositions and developing new narratives.		x	x	x				
Create and/or retune programs and services with greater efficiency, which will not only maximize limited funding but add visible value to the educational and quality of life for all.		x	x	x				
Develop and implement authentic inclusive and diverse incentive programs that meet the needs of teachers and leaders based on teacher and leader narratives.		x	x	x				
Create a culture resilient and resistant to the “blame game.” In this process, consider both the dispositional attributes of educators and leaders as well as what enables urban special education teachers to remain in the classroom, what I term “teacher persistence.”		x	x	x				
Develop integration efforts that flood schools with parental, community, and political engagement and support.		x	x	x				
Form social justice teams that implement and provide longitudinal supports focused on “real world” access, opportunities, and actions that engage students, parents and teachers’ opportunities to persist, grow and support their schools and community.		x	x	x				
Create real-time (accountable) tracking supports for student progress.				x	x			

Figure 3. *Propositions for Future Practice (continued)*

Propositions for Future Practice	Policy makers	School districts				Communities		
		School boards	Superintendents	School-based leaders	Teachers	Students and families	Community leaders and orgs	Higher education institutions
Create and commit to collegial, collaborative, communities with supportive, effective goals, and documented outcomes.				X	X			
Create opportunities and where all stakeholders feel open to acknowledge and address internal and external biases and behaviors.		X	X	X	X			
Categorize crucial cultural, classroom and citizen concerns associated with academic achievement and personal success to preserve and protect relationships.					X			
Implement practices that require, root cause analysis at the teacher retention and persistence level.		X	X	X	X			
Create safe spaces that promote and develop dispositional discussions honoring cultural heritages and sharing cultural knowledge					X		X	
Co-construct educational policies and practices that transform traditional views related to low-income students and students of color from deficit points of view to growth-minded views								X
Share cultural connections that demonstrate the importance of care and concern through authentic advocacy and actions.						X		
Promote programs and policies based on inclusive, diverse research focused on the neediest individuals and high need populations		X	X	X				X
Create opportunities for low-income students to attend affluent schools.		X						
Create authentic data sharing discussion in laymen terms for parents, students, and community members to explore/expose the socio-economic-status differences in Advanced Placement courses, student assignments, and school supports.				X	X			
Create inclusive interdisciplinary teams focusing on the common ground of social justice, equity issues, and the infinite worth of all members.		X	X	X	X	X	X	

Figure 3. Propositions for Future Practice (continued)

Propositions for Future Practice	Policy makers	School districts				Communities		
		School boards	Superintendents	School-based leaders	Teachers	Students and families	Community leaders and orgs	Higher education institutions
Develop protective burnout benefits, proactive personal programs focused on personnel and parental persistence (developing personal resources).		X	X					
Form parochial partnership (many urban students and parents spend a great deal of time in Sunday school).				X	X		X	
Create venues that provide opportunities for all teachers, parents, students and community members that may feel voiceless to have a voice and viewed as valuable.		X	X	X	X		X	X
Create caring, civil conversational opportunities that bridges knowledge between and among students, parents/guardians, teachers, community members, leaders, organizations, and institutions.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Create alliances/partnerships between schools, families, and communities to foster personal, educational and environmental resilience.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Create school, family, and community-based programs, activities and opportunities that are accessible as social assets focused on existing community strength while cultivating a positive educational environment with contextual community factors.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

All experts play an important role in society (Weinstein, 1993). My goal with this article is to bring about awareness to some and a reminder to others. More important than the ongoing/systemic problems are the needed solutions. This article serves to support solutions, with the understanding that there are no “one size fits all” solutions. The work is hard, and the road is long, but well worth the journey. Communication, collaboration, and collegiality via civil conversations will allow all stakeholders to come to a consensus in an effort to co-construct policies, programs, and procedures that are equitable and socially just. As students we lived and learned; as adults, it’s time we understand (Brooks, 2010).

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