

September 27, 2019

Dear Governor Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Unified School District Leaders,

In recent weeks, tens of thousands of kindergarteners entered our schools as the class of 2032. The vast majority of these students -- like the majority of all of California's K-12 students -- are Black, Latinx, and come from low-income and historically under-resourced communities. We believe every one of these scholars can graduate high school and go on to pursue their college and life dreams. However, like California's recent college admissions scandals demonstrate, privilege and power afford some students the ability to enter a "side door" to access opportunities while many of our state's Black, Latinx, and low-income students remain unfairly locked out of the front entrance.

We represent organizations committed to these students and their families -- civil rights groups, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, educators, parents, and student leaders. Like you, most of us grew up in California, and we are passionate about the future of Los Angeles and our state. We are focusing our attention on Black, Latinx, English Learner and low-income students because they are the vast majority of our students and the equity gaps are so severe. But we recognize the need to also address equity gaps for other undeserved student populations, like Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Southeast Asian students, as well as homeless and foster youth.

What we need is a much clearer focus on ensuring a path to and through college for scholars from our highest-need communities. We've seen how, year after year, racial equity gaps in opportunity, access, and achievement have been disturbingly persistent, maintaining systemic injustices in our schools.

Consider the following state of affairs:

- Only 23% of LA Unified graduates go on to complete college within six years;
- In 8th grade, a pivotal turning point for college completion, less than a quarter of LA Unified's Latinx and Black students, and only 3% of its English Learner students, are meeting math standards;
- California ranks close to the very bottom for Latinx students meeting the critical measure of 4th-grade reading standards when compared to other states; and
- Gaps in access to courses including computer science and music are widening in California for underrepresented students of color and low-income students.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti encourages us to "build a city that throws open every door ever shut on a hope or a dream." To realize that vision, Los Angeles must move swiftly to advance our K-12 education system. And as Governor Newsom calls us to be a "California for All," we can't fully realize that goal while we're near the bottom in per-pupil spending, with many of our black and brown students failing to meet standards in reading and math.

The majority of us have witnessed state and city leaders working to protect undocumented families, to increase access to paid family leave, health care, and transportation -- and we applaud these efforts. We have seen the attention and investment given to early learning -- and we commend it. We have seen the focus and energy placed on improving higher education success rates -- and we appreciate it. And we are closely following the development of a new education data system and new programs to help recruit and retain educators. These efforts are excellent first steps, but they do not constitute a K-12 agenda.

We ask that our leaders put forth the same energy and effort to work alongside us in Los Angeles and beyond to prioritize equity in our K-12 school system. The six million students in California's K-12 public school system deserve the attention and innovation that we see prioritized with preschoolers and college students. There is no better place to begin in earnest than Los Angeles, where one out of 10 California students attend school, and equity gaps persist. We feel a sense of extreme urgency and we want our leaders to feel the same.

Collectively, the undersigned agree we need the following to strengthen classrooms and communities now, not decades from now:

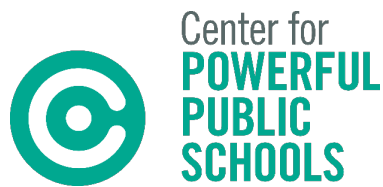
- We need an urgent and sustained focus of creating more pathways to and through college for Black, Latinx, English Learner and low-income students in our highest-need communities.
- We need relevant and rigorous curriculum in every classroom so that all of our students stay engaged and eager to learn about their history and communities.
- We need to ensure schools implement restorative practices and culturally-relevant positive behavior interventions and supports to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline forever.
- We need a well-supported, qualified, and diverse (racially and linguistically) educator workforce.
- We need capacity building for our K-12 staff and teachers that can enhance and expand family-school partnerships.
- We must elevate students by supporting policies, practices, and programs that embed student voice in decision-making structures.
- We need to view and treat as an asset to California, the languages, cultures, and identities of English Learner students whose home languages should be valued, respected, and developed.
- We need equitable funding that is allocated within districts to the schools with the greatest need, building on the foundation laid by the Student Equity Need Index in Los Angeles.
- We need real-time local data that can help identify and fix issues of college preparatory course access, college readiness, and college completion.
- We need university systems that work collaboratively with K-12 schools and communities to eradicate access issues, not exacerbate them.
- We must ensure that initiatives that impact college access, like the California State University's recent proposal to require a fourth year of math or quantitative reasoning course for freshman admissions, don't exacerbate barriers to college.
- We must stop perverse incentives for our colleges and universities to prioritize our wealthiest students and instead provide even more resources and supports to our lowest-income and first-generation scholars, who are often shut out of our state's higher education systems.

As a critical first step, we ask that the California Department of Education (CDE) and LA Unified fully fund and fully staff equity offices. We believe strong equity offices can catalyze efforts to prioritize equity practices and accountability systems across all education programs and initiatives. We also ask that both the CDE and LA Unified focus more resources on programs and policies that directly target equity gaps and can move the needle quickly for Black, Latinx, English Learner, and other marginalized student communities.

Let's not leave an entire generation of California's K-12 students lingering on the sidelines. We can't sidestep our responsibility to these students. Instead, we must seize the opportunity for California leaders to come together and be a beacon of progress and hope in the fight for educational equity. We hope you will take up the charge to prioritize K-12 educational equity and lead in significant, bold ways for California's students and families.

Sincerely,





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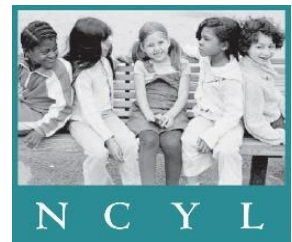
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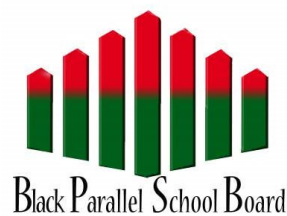
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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
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UCLA Undergraduate Education Academic Advancement Program

After-School All-Stars
 Alliance for a Better Community (ABC)
 Arts for LA
 Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles (AAAJ)
 Asian and Pacific Islander Women Lead (AAPI)
 Black Parallel School Board
 Black Women for Wellness - Los Angeles
 Boys to Gentlemen (B2G)
 Brotherhood Crusade
 Brothers, Sons, Selves
 California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance (CIYJA)
 California League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
 Californians Together (CalTog)
 Campaign for College Opportunity
 Center for Powerful Public Schools
 Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)
 Children Now
 Children's Institute, Inc. (CII)
 City Year - Los Angeles
 College Track - Los Angeles
 Communities In Schools
 Community Asset Development Re Defining Education (CADRE)

Community Coalition
 Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE)
 Education Trust-West
 Educators 4 Excellence (E4E) - Los Angeles
 Families in Schools
 Gangsters for Christ
 Great Public Schools Now
 Inner City Arts
 InnerCity Struggle
 Innovate Public Schools
 LA Voice
 Linked Learning Alliance
 Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation
 Los Angeles Urban League
 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - Pomona Valley (NAACP)
 National Center for Youth Law
 Para Los Niños
 Parent Organization Network (PON)
 Partnership for Los Angeles Schools
 Promesa Boyle Heights
 Public Counsel
 Social Action Partners
 Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI)

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
 Southern California College Access Network (SoCal CAN)
 Students for Education Reform
 The Reverence Project
 Umoja Community Education Foundation
 United Way of Greater Los Angeles
 United Way of Greater Los Angeles's Young Civic Leaders
 University of California, Los Angeles, Center for School Transformation (UCLA)
 University of California, Los Angeles, Academic Advancement Program, Vice Provost Initiative for Pre-College Scholars Program (UCLA AAP VIP Scholars)
 Urban Peace Institute
 Watts Century Latino Organization
 Watts Gang Task Force
 We Care Ministries
 West Angeles Church of God in Christ
 Youth Policy Institute (YPI)
 Youth Together