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INITIAL FINDINGS REPORT:

# **BLACK AND LATINO MEN IN THE CLASSROOM**

WINTER 2022

A QUALITATIVE STUDY FROM  
THE JACKSONVILLE PUBLIC  
EDUCATION FUND

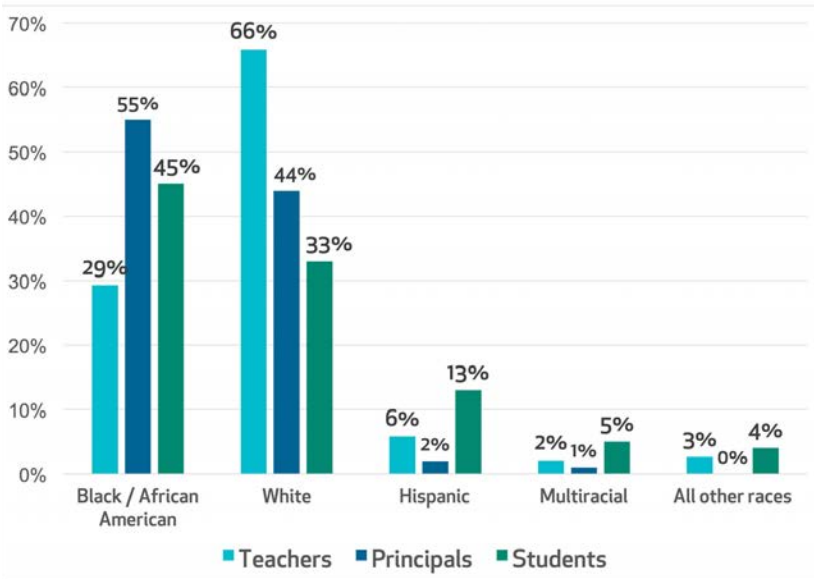


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Winter 2021, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund (JPEF) in collaboration with Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) and the University of North Florida (UNF) released a brief titled "Understanding Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Duval County" which revealed that the majority student population in DCPS are identified as Black and Latinx (60%) while only a third of the teachers share that identity. This is a trend that is mirrored nationally and affirms other research and observations from universities and organizations within the community since the time of Brown v. Board of Education and the desegregation of schools (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Stuart Wells, Fox, Cordova-Cobo, & Kahlenberg, 2016).

Figure 1 from the 2021 brief represents the up-to-date racial background of teachers, students, and principals revealing that the misalignment in student and educator representation have persisted.

**Figure 1. Racial make-up of teachers, principals, and students in Duval County**



Note: The total of these percentages may be slightly off, especially for Hispanic students and teachers, because of differences in the way this data is collected.

Further, JPEF found that for Black and Latino men in the classroom, the lack of representation is much more severe, with Black men representing only 6% of all teachers and Latino men representing less than 1%.

In October 2021, JPEF announced the start of a new initiative called "1,000 by 2025" with the purpose of recruiting and retaining 1,000 Black and Latino male educators by the year 2025.

Given that disproportionalities in student and teacher racial representation continue to persist despite the decades of research that has connected teacher diversity to benefits for all students and that DCPS is serving an increasingly racially diverse student population, more work needs to be done to understand the conditions that make it more or less likely for Black and Latino teachers to persist in DCPS (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017; Goldhaber, Theobald, & Tien, 2015; Nevarez, Jougantatos, & Luke Wood, 2019).

Therefore this qualitative study aimed to explore what barriers and motivations may exist for Black and Latino men in the classroom today; and what hopes and concerns they might have for this initiative.

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EDUCATOR PERSISTENCE

Educators report navigating daily stressors:

- Lack of support at multiple levels.
- Misaligned expectations and evaluations.
- An environment that constrains their ability to bring their full authentic selves and skillsets to the classrooms.

Educators report factors that encourage persistence:

- Seeing teachers as change agents.
- Educators are their own greatest support system.
- The chance to exercise love and patience.



## METHODOLOGY

The analyses presented in this report build on previous research JPEF conducted with Black and Latino male teachers, where they identified lack of representation and welcoming environment in their current schools as barriers to persisting. To effectively track progress on impacting the environment for these educators, the research team conducted individual interviews with Black and Latino men currently serving as educators in Duval County Public Schools to define more specifically:

- What factors contribute to their perceptions of the environment?
- What factors contribute to their decision to persist as educators?

The participants represented various grade levels, school locations, content areas, and tenure teaching in DCPS.

Interview participant demographics	
Percent identified as Black male educator	86%
Percent identified as Latino male educator	29%
Average years taught	8 years
Range of years teaching	3-17 years

The interviews were conducted individually either in person or virtually via Zoom. All participants are currently teaching in K-12 traditional public schools in Duval County.

Interviews were conducted narratively and asked about participants experiences as students themselves, their daily classroom experiences now, and perceptions of available supports and the 1000 by 2025 initiative.

Sample questions for the interview included, "What were your relationships like with adults at school growing up?" and "What support exists for you as a teacher? Or where do you turn to for support?"

The interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes long and were transcribed by the software Otter.ai. Interviews were later coded through the software Dedoose and analyzed thematically. Themes are reported if they are represented in over 60% of participant interviews.





## FINDINGS

Throughout each interview, participants shared the various challenges and successes they encountered while persisting as educators in a shifting sociopolitical climate. While each participant expressed perspectives that were unique to their position, many of the themes that emerged were consistent across interviews.

The educators described daily challenges with support, resources, and evaluation structures that span multiple levels from classroom to legislative which might hinder persistence. Despite these challenges, the educators also describe exercising many skills in a variety of roles beyond classroom teacher and motivations for entering and staying in the classroom.

While participants are not identified in this report, there was an equal distribution of representation from teachers at the elementary school level, middle school level, and high school level.

## MULTI-LEVEL STRESSORS BLACK AND LATINO MALE TEACHERS NAVIGATE DAILY IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

- Lack of support at multiple levels.
- Misaligned expectations and evaluations.
- An environment that constrains their ability to bring their full authentic selves and skillsets to the classrooms.

### Lack of Sufficient Support Structures

100%

OF PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED

"There is very little support getting through the first year, much less getting through the first three but typically the first year is very challenging because of the colossal lack [of support] and the support doesn't come when it's offered. Or it's not offered in a way you can receive."

*-Interview Participant*

# LACK OF SUPPORT

Across 100% of interviews, participants discussed the challenge of finding sufficient support structures both as a new and retained teacher.

One participant, a high school educator, adds to the complexity of accessing support by saying,

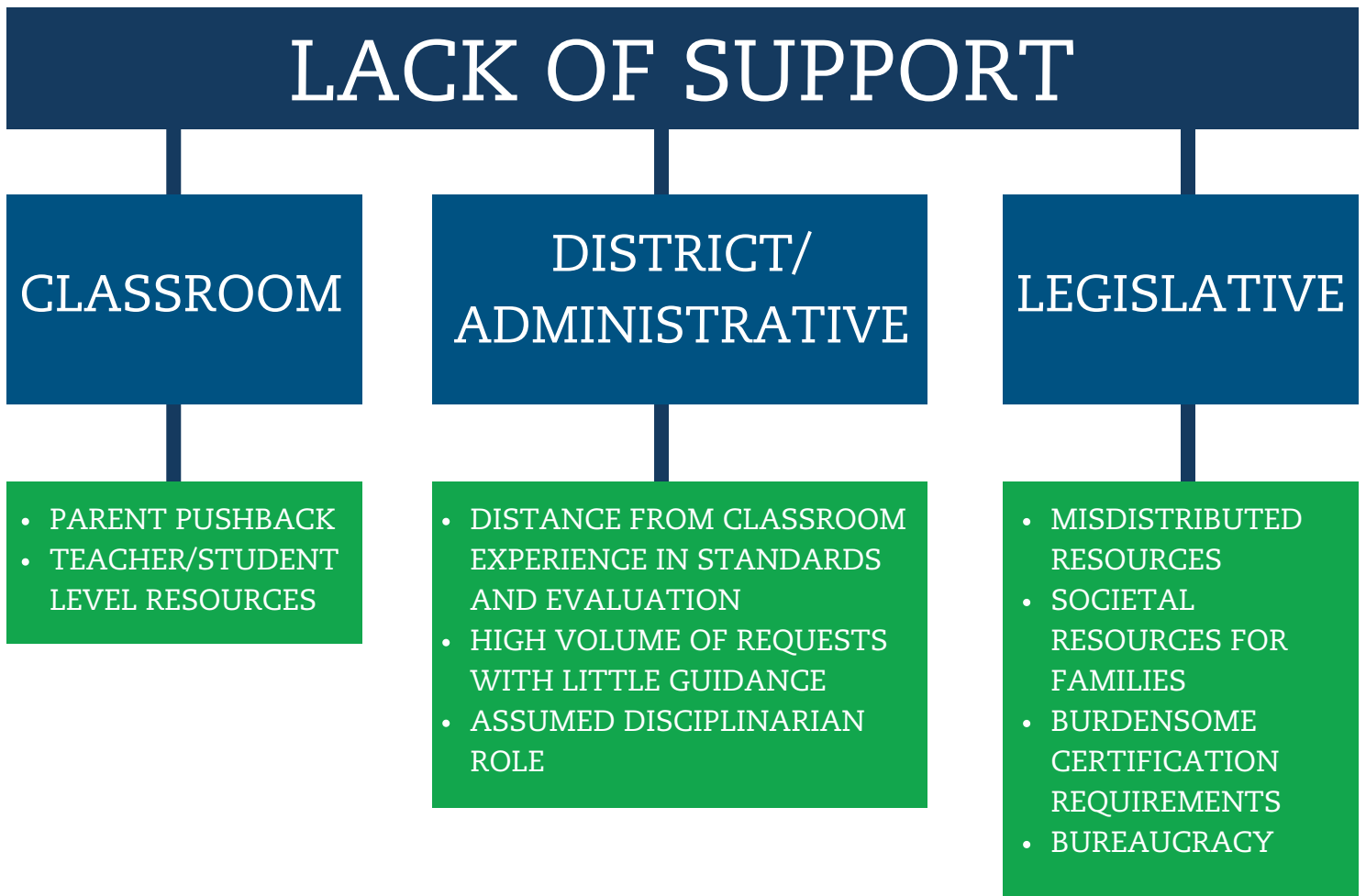
***"It's just the pushback, I guess. We get a lot of perspectives, and we don't get a lot of support. And one thing I really want to say is like I don't feel heard. Like aren't you listening to me? Do you hear what I'm saying to you? And I need to be clear. If I just had to walk out of education at two o'clock today, I promise you it won't be because of my kids."***

This example highlights how feeling unheard is related to feeling unsupported and therefore motivates exiting the

profession. Another example from a middle school educator,

***"Okay, you have 1,000 by 2025. Okay, we're here, now what? What do you do? Because you know, you're going to face some pushback...we've lost good teachers because of lack of support...We need the support to be there. So we can ensure that we not just recruit and retain these teachers, but we also have to develop them to get them to the next level."***

Participants made clear that the lack of support experienced at multiple levels and perception of not being heard need to be resolved to truly retain more Black and Latino male educators.



## MISALIGNED EXPECTATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

Beyond support, educators who participated in this study described the contributing factors they felt diminished the perception of their or their student's worth in the classroom. Participants discussed how unwritten expectations of additional roles Black and Latino male educators will fill, such as disciplinarian, adds to their daily workload.

One participant, an elementary school educator illustrates,

***"You know, when you come into these things, you know, if you are a Black man expect to be the disciplinarian, whether you like it or not. So, you have to understand how to take that fine line of love and discipline, and constructive discipline and redirection."***

This can often interfere with traditional educator responsibilities, as one elementary school educator explains,

***"You have some days where the demand is for you to be a disciplinarian that day. As a man in education, any man will tell you this...you have to help lift little refrigerators out of cars, help with the microwaves, and it's okay with being a gentleman but you do find yourself being so stretched to where your class is now not together or you didn't make your copies because you were busy being a disciplinarian over here or had to move something over there. So, that's a tricky place for a man to be."***

There is a sociohistorical and sociocultural context that contributes to the assumption that Black and Latino men in schools are expected to act as disciplinarians.

Author, Rann Miller, describes the invisible tax he felt as the only Black male educator in his school. Despite his status as a first-year teacher he was assigned lunch duty, called on to break up hallway commotions, and consistently asked to

## Evaluations and Assessments Do Not Reflect Skills and Effort

100%

OF PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED

"A kid might not do good on pen and paper, but this kid may do good on a tablet... the freedom to assess like that is powerful, but state board tests won't allow that... I could say I made sure they [students] eat and take them on field trips but none of that matters unless I ask the [state assessment questions]."

*-Interview Participant*

serve as lead hall monitor. He further explains that Black male teachers are not the school's de facto disciplinarians and their success with students should not absolve others from doing their jobs (Miller, 2019).

Though these men are exercising additional skills and filling multiple roles, 100% of participants described how current evaluation structures did not reflect or measure their skills or effort as a classroom teacher nor did it reflect an accurate portrayal of their students and their abilities. One participant, an elementary educator describes,

***"A lot of times administrators only get to see 15 minutes of children.... our children display a lot of skills. They're very interpersonal, very good at coordinating and project planning.... I want children to be awarded for more than just behavior, but more so on skills that they develop that they can take throughout life. They're going to need to know how to work and cooperate with people or respect for authority.... I feel if a child is displaying those, which they do, we just pay no attention to it."***

This participant highlights that current evaluation structures do not award or account for the development of skills identified in research as essential for student success in future careers.

Another educator participant connects state standards to their daily practices and well-being,

***"My day ends at three, but the bureaucracy and all the changes and all the curriculum expectations and all that part is really daunting and really hard to get through...and it does guide your instruction but at the same time, it's become one of those things where it's just a shadow in the room, where you have to get this done. It's objective and you know you're dealing with 18 individuals, they're not numbers...and seeing a child being referred to as a number or a score bothers me."***

The participants suggested that there is much more information about their students and themselves they can offer if evaluations, standards, and assessments include the actual skills they exercise. One participant, a middle school educator describes,

***"There's a lot more to me than just the classroom teacher or someone that can run a technical kingdom towards staying compliant, I have a lot more to offer. If they will just give me that, that opportunity."***

The participants identified a gap in the relevance and accuracy of evaluations and assessments of their own and student's performance. Some participants highlighted how compensation and school grades can be impacted by evaluations and assessment as to why it is an issue.

Additionally, over half of the participants discussed compensation, in general, as a barrier to entering and staying in the classroom. One participant, a high school educator explains,

***"Duval County has by far the worst salary structure of any of the public-school districts of its size or larger. And I say this analytically because I'm the guy who takes out an Excel sheet and crunches numbers, and I understand the cost of living is lower in Jacksonville data than many other locations...I ran a progression based off the cost-of-living index...Duval County prior to the recent starting wage salary increase was dead last of all cities."***

Currently, Florida ranks 46th in starting teacher pay by state and Duval County ranks 40th by county. The sociocultural factors that contribute to men often feeling responsibility for supporting a household limits access for more men to enter the classroom based on the inadequate compensation.

## CONSTRAINED PRACTICES

Finally, nearly all of the participants interviewed (70%) reported feeling constrained when discussing freedom of expression or bringing their full authentic selves to the classroom. A high school educator and an elementary school educator describe how this weighs on them,

***"I would say sometimes my authenticity might seem unprofessional."***

***"I am so much greater and bigger than the role you put. I say that to say, sometimes in education they can put you in a box and you're just not able to expand. It's like a caged bird, I can't fly in here. I also can't spread my wings in here. I'm not able to speak my grace of life and my beauty."***

Education as a practice of freedom is most often connected to the way students receive instruction and information in the classroom. Most widely known, is the theory of problem posing education versus the theory of banking education where students either develop critical consciousness of their place in the world or simply access information deposited to them through rote memorization of facts (Freire, 1968).

However, the idea of liberatory education applies to teachers as well in the way they approach pedagogy and cultivate classroom community. There is an opportunity to question what is seen as “professional” and what is not; and recognize who those arbitrary rules may apply to when recruiting new Black and Latino males.

Overall, the barriers for Black and Latino men to enter and remain in the classroom span legislative, administrative, classroom, and sociocultural spaces. This points to the need for a multi-tiered, well-resourced approach to addressing the conditions surrounding education in order to increase access and reduce barriers for those seeking transformational opportunities as classroom teachers.

## CHANGE AGENTS

When asked about what drew them to education, participants described being an educator as a highly skilled position that is worthy and honorable as a chosen profession. Teachers describe wearing many hats trying to understand and connect with each of their students while also connecting with parents and responding to the changing standards and demands from administration.

Despite all the barriers described above, these teachers persist because of how they view the role of educators, their colleagues, and the love of their students.

In fact, 100% of participants expressed that seeing teachers as agents of change contributed to their decision to join the field and sense of satisfaction with their career. Interviewed educators also suggested seeing change in their students increased their likelihood to remain in the profession.

***“What drew me to education was honestly giving back to the community that gave me so much...my passion is community driven education.”***

This motivation, to be a community-engaged change agent, could be intentionally leveraged in the recruitment and retainment of future Black and Latino male educators.

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EDUCATOR PERSISTENCE

- Seeing teachers as change agents.
- Educators are their own greatest support system.
- The chance to exercise love and patience.

## Seeing Teachers as Change Agents

**100%**  
OF PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSED

“There is no more powerful role, no more game changing role than you will have if you are a classroom teacher”

*-Interview Participant*



## EDUCATORS ARE THEIR OWN GREATEST SUPPORT SYSTEM

Despite describing not perceiving formal support at multiple levels, 86% of participants expressed that positive colleague relationships contributed to an increased sense of support within the school building or district. One participant, an elementary school educator also shares how colleagues are a key source of informational and social support,

***“So academic support...My peers are veterans, teachers are the ones that are hands on. They know the tricks of the trade and will give you all kinds of stuff...Moral support, I go to my immediate peers and the people that are right next door to my classroom. Across the hall. Your teacher friends at work, they’re the ones that on those bad days want to tell you why you should keep doing this job or point out that one kid that you had five years ago, that’s why I come to work today.”***

This highlights how teachers view one another as the most trustworthy sources of support due to their proximity to the classroom and daily challenges they navigate. It further highlights how sharing successes and best practices with one another encourages teacher retention.

## THE CHANCE TO EXERCISE LOVE AND PATIENCE

Participants described a range of skills such as organization, social skills, time management, problem solving, and conflict resolution. However, the most reported skills exercised daily were patience and love for their students. A high school educator explained,

***“Patience, love, nurture... The textbook is easy, it’s everything else that goes along with it. You know, being a nurse, being a psychologist, a therapist...I’ve been a firefighter, because that was the day we were in...like if I can’t get you into a mindset when you’re ready to learn, then we can ball out.... sometimes you don’t know how these kids sleep at night...”***

71% of participants expressed that love is a key skill in the teaching profession. The skill of loving your students and loving yourself is not measured in any way nor is it often

## Positive Colleague Relationships



“Every school I’ve worked at I’ve always had a teacher friend. And we’ve always been so, you know, fortunate to have one another to kind of lean on but it’s a blessing and a curse at times because you can’t lean on someone who’s also overwhelmed”

-Interview Participant

quantifiable but the participants in this report felt it was necessary for their students to learn. One participant, a middle school educator states,

***“To know your students is to love your students. And once they know they are loved by you, they will perform for you.”***

In a culture that does not often leave room for men to express caring and loving feelings, Black and Latino male educators who step into roles not only of structure or cultural relevance but of love and respect is a transformative approach to the classroom with the possibility of radically shaping young people’s hearts and minds in positive ways. In "The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love", bell hooks (2004) summates it best,

“To create loving men, we must love males. Loving maleness is different from praising and rewarding males for living up to sexist-defined notions of male identity. Caring about men because of what they do for us is not the same as loving males for simply being...in patriarchal culture males are not allowed to simply be who they are and to glory in their unique identity. Their value is always determined by what they do. In an anti-patriarchal culture males do not have to prove their value and worth. They know from birth that simply being gives them value, the right to be cherished and loved.”

## THOUGHTS ON 1,000 BY 2025 INITIATIVE

### Concerns

Some of the concerns for the 1,000 by 2025 initiative expressed by participants included tokenization and lack of existing support structures.

Participants reported concern and empathy for Black and Latino men who would be entering the career as a result of the 1,000 by 2025 initiative. One participant, an elementary school educator shares,

***“I just want to make sure that the next 1,000 Black males don’t have the experience of what the current Black males are experiencing...I just want us to be able to be put in a position so that we’re mentoring, and we are actually the teacher development specialists for those Black males...I just don’t want those 1,000 Black males to come in and experience what I experienced.”***

In some instances, particularly when the teacher demographics of a school may be more homogenous, a Black or Latino man might find himself confronted with recurring themes of tokenization that places him in a position of visibility. This phenomenon can be framed as leadership opportunities but if there is not sufficient support or compensation structures in place, ultimately it is just additional duties placed on men of color in the classroom. One participant, a high school educator expresses,

***“I just don’t want it to be like token Black man, token Latino guy, you know...I hear this everywhere I go. You’re going to be great; you know, they’re going to be love you because you’re a Black man and you’re a teacher like...can I just be your teacher? Can we talk about how knowledgeable I am? Let’s talk about my data. Let’s talk about how kids can leave my classroom learning how to read and comprehend.”***

Participants reflected on their own entryways to the classroom and the feelings of unpreparedness they experienced when starting their career. One participant, a middle school educator, thought back to how he entered the classroom and how he does not wish the same conditions for future male teachers of color,

***“I’ll say of the diverse male teachers, like how are they doing it? Are they bringing them in and then setting them up to basically fail? Are they just like putting them in classrooms and not accurately preparing them to teach or giving them the curriculum they need? ... because that’s what happened to me...I just wish they brought me in in a more gentle way.”***

Participants demonstrated similar levels of care and empathy for future educators as they did for their own students. It is clear that early experiences in the classroom were challenging yet these participants persisted in their profession; yet it is additionally plain to see that given the opportunity, they would remove the barriers and challenges they initially faced in their positions.

### Hopes

Some of the hopes for the 1,000 by 2025 initiative expressed by participants included the anticipation for increased representation and the desire to see a change in volume of resources at every level including legislative.

Black and Latino male educators will not only be fulfilling a role for young people to see increased representation and shared identities in the classroom, but will also be stepping into a role that they may not have had themselves. Many educators can reflect on their own school experiences and recognize the lack of identification they may have felt with their teachers; and now carrying out that position for other young people can contribute to a sense of healing and responsibility. A middle school educator describes the significance of even one Black male teacher,

***“I hope that it is successful. I hope that it can bring in more diverse male teachers and that more Black boys and girls can see themselves represented in the classroom....I cannot stress how much it hits home to have that because I really only had like one Black male teacher throughout my whole career in public school, and I will never forget him. I even remember Black substitute teachers.”***

Additionally, with an increase in Black and Latino men in the classroom, participants are hopeful this will resource with an influx of resources for teachers to access in their classrooms. One participant, a high school educator states,

***“Realistically, that policymakers will receive enough pressure. If the story is told the right way to put the appropriate resources to, at the very least, address the concern that they’re tasking you with. They can’t solve everything, I get that, but legislation can change a lot.”***

The participants in this study understood and expressed the gravity of impact that would result in such a drastic increase of diverse representation in the classroom. Despite valid concerns, the overwhelming hope was that this initiative is poised to create powerful and positive outcomes for students and teachers across Duval County.

## REFLECTIONS

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### Increase comprehensive support structures for teachers

- Define support and track access: The needs for support expressed by participants were multi-faceted and spanned tiers of decision-making authority. They also described how just the presence, offerings, or expectations of supports does not mean Black or Latino educators access them or feel heard through them. More intentional tracking of who is able to access supports, if educators find them useful, and improvement based on specific educator feedback can impact this barrier.
- Mentorship: One potential approach to increasing structures of support that surfaced for participants was to have mentors who both identified in positionality but were also poised to support early-career educators in their development.
- Certification: Another possible approach that was expressed by participants to address the feelings of insufficient support is to identify more accessible paths forward with certification for teachers with temporary certifications. The current structure puts the burden on teachers through either completing courses during the school year and balancing with work responsibilities or by having to pay for the certification classes out of pocket.

### Demonstrate respect for teachers as professionals in their field

- Fair and competitive compensation: Black and Latino male educators are deserving of and desire respect for their chosen vocations and professions. They are keenly aware of the impact they are having on students who share similar identities and backgrounds and should be provided with more than tokenization in turn. As stated in this brief earlier, education is an honorable and worthwhile profession and those who undertake the great responsibility should be compensated accordingly.
- Evaluation structures to reflect value in the classroom: The value of Black and Latino male educators as well as their students extends far beyond the scope of what is assessed through state exams and classroom observations. There should be, at the minimum, school-based approaches to intentionality around setting the standards of evaluation for educators that include metrics including but not limited to belongingness in the classroom or culturally inclusive pedagogy.



## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the findings clearly point to the unmistakable value and power that Black and Latino men bring to the classroom. However, at the same time, the findings also reveal significant barriers and challenges for Black and Latino men to persist in the classroom. Some of this can be further understood through a sociohistorical lens specifically regarding the aftermath of Brown vs. Board where landmark rulings ushered in school integration, yet simultaneously undermined effective and strong Black leadership in public schools. The results are still felt today by Black and Latino male educators who have unwritten expectations placed on

them and at the same time feel many of the skills, authenticity, and value they bring to their schools and see in their students are unmeasured and not rewarded. Despite these factors, all the participants report their motivations for staying in the field are because of the difference they can make for each of their students. This report provides important baseline information about how Black and Latino male educators currently perceive their school experiences daily and what contributes to their decisions to persist, which are essential to tracking progress and success in recruiting, supporting, and retaining 1,000 Black and Latino male educators by 2025.

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40 E. Adams Street, Suite 110  
Jacksonville, FL., 32202