

RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘Service First’ in the Mission of Ensuring Accountability in Academic Access and Success for Learners of Color in today’s Economy

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Abstract

This article explored the concept of, ‘Service First in the Mission of Ensuring Accountability in Academic Access and Success for Learners of Color in today’s Economy’. The landmark Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* did not provide the racial justice and equality many believed would ensue. Educators, community leaders, and students must continue take responsibility in ensuring greater accountability and civic engagement in higher education. Our leaders must continue to play a strong role towards ongoing efforts to prepare and to ensure a more sustainable future for all adult leaders, especially Learners of Color in the United States of America.

Keywords: *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), School Accountability, and Student Performance Data.*

Introduction

The Trump Administration is bringing many changes to academic access and success for learners of color. During the Obama Administration, the U.S. Department of Education’s mission was “to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. Integral to furthering that mission was supporting efforts to create diverse and welcoming campus communities for all students” [1].

In efforts to ensure the aforementioned goal, the Obama Administration worked to encourage institutions not only ‘to attract and admit students from various backgrounds and experiences, but to support and retain these students once on campus’ [1]. However, today in 2018, it appears we are regressing in our service mission for academic justice and equality for all students.

American Education System

Academic inequities have been built in our American educational structure and system. “Communities were allowed to educate minority students in schools that were separate from and unequal to the campuses in which white students enrolled” [2]. Many

believed after the Supreme Court struck down the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* that skin color would no longer be the determinant in academic opportunities in the USA. “Studies have documented the impacts associated with racial and **economic** isolation in schools and neighborhoods, such as greater stress that interferes with **learning** and less familiarity with information and skills that are necessary for future **success**. **Students of color** also, on average, have less **access** to advanced higher education” [1].

Studies have shown, shortly after the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, “the search for justice gave birth to another big idea: Not only would racial walls come down on campuses, no longer would it be right to have major gaps between the academic achievement of white and minority students.

This muscular notion led to the Elementary and Secondary School Act of [3], which later became known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act” [2]. The built-in notion of the ESEA of 1965 was that much needed programs and services would be granted to economically disadvantaged communities would to better prepare poor performing schools and districts in the USA.

It was believed, the USA's academic progress of all students; its white and higher income students, as well as its learners of color and lower income students. According to author William McKenzie and Sandy Kress, following the Elementary and Secondary School Act of [3] "school districts and campuses would be held responsible by policymakers and taxpayers if they did not provide a decent education for every student.

This idea came to be known as school accountability, and it was built around three principles: Creating rigorous academic standards, measuring student progress against those standards, and attaching some consequence to the results" It is imperative that educators, policy makers and institutions of higher education play central, vital roles in supporting these strategies and expanding access to an affordable, high-quality education, including for low-income students and students of color.

Student Performance

In 2015, the 'Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, replaced the 2001 No Child Left behind Act, NCLB', as the USA's key educational law for public education in K-12. Down through the years, ESSA has required each State to report on its measured and improved school performances and outcomes. "ESSA requires the collection of key student performance data to inform public reporting, the identification of low-performing schools, and school improvement efforts". According to the Center for American Program, "the new law's vision for accountability recognizes that states need to build a systemic approach to prepare all students for college and careers—and they must do so quickly".

The chief problem with the current school accountability for ESSA compliance inform states, districts, schools and the public of 'what outcomes students met without explaining why they met them' and how they were met. Education laws, such as ESSA, acts as a 'broad framework for college 'and career readiness that states can further define through their implementation of the law'. Findings revealed each state defines 'college and career readiness in its own way; however, the

References

¹ US Dept of Education (2016) Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education, Washington, D.C.

Commonality in State Definitions Were as Follows

- Mastery of core academic content knowledge, including math, reading, writing, science, social studies, and history
- Attainment of skills related to critical thinking and problem-solving
- Skills related to social emotional learning, collaboration, and communication
- Civic and community engagement skills.

According to research by the College and Career Readiness and Success Center the aforementioned definitions are very useful 'drivers of state-level policy' making opportunities.

Today's Challenges

Learners of color have many challenges today. African American students are graduating at lower rates in both K-12 and higher education than their white counterparts. Latino students are concerned about their future. "Many dreamers remain unable to access DACA today, and many DACA recipients still may lose or experience lapses in protection in the months ahead, making them vulnerable to detention and deportation". Those learners of color's dreams are being deferred. Educators and community learners must remain engagement in the community.

Conclusion

Studies have documented the impacts associated with racial and **economic** isolation in schools and neighborhoods, such as greater stress that interferes with **learning** and less familiarity with information and skills that are necessary for future **success**. **Students of color** also, on average, have less **access** to advanced higher education. I concur with the findings of the Obama Administration report, that "the path forward will require a thoughtful discourse and a range of strategies. Policy makers and institutions of higher education play central, vital roles in supporting these strategies and expanding access to an affordable, high-quality education, including for low-income students and students of color".

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