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WEBINAR

DEFINING A CULTURE OF CARE FOR BLACK BOYS

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. BUSETTE: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for joining us for this very, very exciting panel on defining a culture of care for Black boys. You might be asking yourself why are we doing a seminar on the culture of care for Black boys? And I first want to start off by saying that today at the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court justices are hearing arguments for and against affirmative action policies in college. And the reason they are in the process of looking at those kinds of policies is that affirmative action continues to be contested. And the idea that we may want to support people because of, you know, college applicants because of their race and the experiences that being a person of color mean in the United States continue to be highly, highly contested.

So, this, you know, the discussion we're having today is very current and very much part of the current policy debate. But I want to start by saying that Black boys in the United States are some of the least well served by our educational institutions and by a variety of different kinds of systems that normally support the health and wellbeing of children in general in the United States.

So, being a Black boy in the United States is very much, as a friend of mine who came from Eastern Europe said, very much like running an obstacle course. You set out with a lot of potential and a lot of aspirations as kids all over the world do. And then very early on, you're presented with the challenges that are part of a long history and long legacy of racism and racist behavior, systems, and beliefs. And that starts very, very early. It can start, you know, as early as infancy, and certainly starts to become much more apparent in preschool, and then throughout the course of a boy's education, educational experiences, and then, of course, outside of the educational space, particularly in communities that have high levels of discrimination and high levels of racism.

So, what we want to do today here is think about how we can support the success, and the aspirations, and the excellence of Black boys. This is a conversation that's been going on for about 50 years and we haven't made a lot of progress. But I do want to take a fresh look at some of the policies and solutions that we could be pursuing, particularly because this year Congress just initiated a new commission on the social status of Black men and Black boys.

And because in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and other very, very unfortunate murders, we as a nation, have started to really take a fresh look at what are the policies, the attitudes, and the systems, which for so long have prevented Black boys and then Black men from continuing to pursue excellence on a broad scale.

So, what I want to do today is be in conversation with two of the nation's leading experts in supporting the excellence of Black male achievement. And I'm going to first introduce them. We're going to have a -- they're going to talk a little bit about their work and their interests. We're going to have a conversation. And then from there, we're going to invite the audience, all of you, to participate in the conversation.

So, let me start off by saying that I am absolutely thrilled to be able to introduce Julius Davis, who has a doctorate in education. He is the University System of Maryland Wilson H. Elkins professor of Mathematics Education in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development in the College of Education at Bowie State University. He is also the founding director of the Center for Research and Mentoring of Black male students and teachers.

Dr. Davis has two main strands of research focused on Black students and teachers in education and mathematics education, especially in urban environments. He is the author of over 40 scholarly publications including two books. He is the lead editor of the book “Critical Race Theory in Mathematics Education” and coauthor of the book “Black Males Matter: A Blueprint for Creating School and Classroom Environments to Support their Academic and Social Development.”

We are also joined by Tyrone Howard, who is a professor of education in the School of Education Information Studies at UCLA. His research addresses issues tied to race, culture, access, and educational opportunity for minoritized student populations. Professor Howard is the author of several best-selling books including “Why Race and Culture Matters in Schools” and “All Students Must Thrive.” He is a native of Compton, California, where he also served as a classroom teacher. Professor Howard is a member of the National Academy of Education and is an AERA fellow.

I want to welcome both of you. Thank you for joining me. I'm going to start, Dr. Davis,

with you. I want you to talk a little bit about your research interests, what you're working on now, what really motivates you to do this work.

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Camille. And thank you to the team at Brookings that put together this webinar. One of the things that really intrigued me about this webinar was the asset and strength-based perspective of focusing on Black males, defining a culture of care, which I think is very important. So, for me, I spent a great deal of my time as the director for the Center for Research and Mentoring of Black Male Students and Teachers developing programs, working with Black boys, their families, communities, educators.

And to be quite honest, I love working with Black boys. I love the fact that I get to spend so much of my time doing so. And my work at Bowie State University at this current point in time involves a rites of passage program for Black boys in middle school. We have a Black male teacher's college program. And all of these are grounded in my research that's interdisciplinary.

While my main area is mathematics education, I'm currently doing work with colleagues in school counseling, school psychology, and just a host of other areas in education. Because the one thing that we see about Black males is that the issues that they are dealing with are interdisciplinary and they span the spectrum. And so, I take great honor in being able to work on behalf of Black boys, their families, and the community. Thank you for having me.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks very much, Dr. Davis. Dr. Howard.

MR. HOWARD: Yes, first of all, I want to echo what Dr. Davis said. Thank you, Camille for having us and thank you to the Brookings Institute for this important webinar. I think it's always important to put a spotlight on those populations that are among the most marginalized. And I can't think of a group that's more marginalized than Black boys.

For me, something I frequently tell my students that research is me-search. Much of what we do is tied to our own lived personal experiences. So, the reason why I study Black boys is because I'm a Black man who was once a Black boy. And I was able to witness firsthand growing up in a Black community so many of the challenges and obstacles that Black boys face on a day-in, day-out

basis.

And what I also recognized is that I thought many of those issues were tied to the fact that we grew up poor. And I thought that poverty was really the real factor that explained why Black boys face what we face. But then as I grew up and I had my own three sons who grew up in a very different environment than the one I did, I realized it was not strictly a poverty thing, that racism is real. Because some of the same challenges that my three sons face, Black males, are some of the same challenges that me and my brother faced when we were younger.

So, this is an obvious issue no matter what your socioeconomic status is. And we have to be clear and careful to not allow poverty to be the proxy for us not to discuss race and racism. So, I do this work in a real intentional and unapologetic way that comes with a lot of criticism and critique that folks say, well, you can't really study Black males because you're too close to it. And I make the statement that I am unapologetically close to it for that very reason. Because Black boys have been among the most scrutinized, analyzed, criticized, subjects in, and researched for centuries in this country.

So, it's important for folks like myself and Dr. Davis to do this work on Black men and Black boys because we've lived it. We're not theorizing about it. We're not trying to study it for the sake of what we think might happen. This is steeped in real life lived experiences that we see firsthand. And I think we are experts in this. And not only are we experts in it, but the sad reality is we grew up with other Black men who also are experienced in it.

And I oftentimes say so many of the young men, young boys that I grew up with who are no longer here, had just as much intellect, just as much talent, just as much sort of sheer passion for life, but the throes of racism was just so much that many of them are not here. And so, therefore, I, and I'm sure Dr. Davis would agree, see it as my professional duty and my moral obligation to do whatever I can to ensure that I'm trying to create pathways and possibilities for the brilliance that resides in every young Black boy in this country.

MR. DAVIS: Absolutely.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you for that. So, I wanted to ask you, you know, for our audience

to just sort of get everybody in the same place, each of you has devoted years of scholarship, advocacy, teaching, and thought to developing and championing educational approaches that lead to success for Black boys. And I would like each of you to provide us with your perspective on why we need an intentional approach to ensuring the success of Black boys in general and in school in particular. So, Tyrone, I'm going to start with you and then I'm going to ask Julius to provide his perspective.

MR. HOWARD: Sure. You know, I appreciate this question because I think one of the challenges is we oftentimes try to use a one size fits all approach and assume that it's going to work for everybody, and it doesn't. And oftentimes when we try this one size fits all approach, the group that's most marginalized typically gets the least of those resources, i.e., Black boys.

So, in this country we have lots of customized approaches. We have Title 1 programs for kids who grew up in poverty. We have bilingual programs in this country for largely for Latinx students. We have in the area of child welfare what's called ICWA, the Indian Child Welfare Act. That's for Indigenous populations. We have the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, for students with disabilities.

So, we have a history of seeing that specific subgroups require something very customized for their unique experiences, historically and contemporarily, in order to give them opportunities to be self-actualized. But the group that we don't do that for are Black students. Despite all the data that continues to come out that paints Black boys as being problematic, pathologized, underperforming, I think it's time for us to be intentional in saying what does it look like to create a specific type of intervention, a specific movement that's specifically targeted for Black boys.

Now, I recognize that Black boys are not a monolith. There's a lot of diversity that exists within Black boys. But when you look at the data that consistently tells us that not that there's wrong with Black boys, but that the systems and structures are not serving them well, I think we have to craft interventions that are specifically targeted for that group. However, we are fearful of doing that because in this country we have never wanted to fully humanize the Black experience. And we have never wanted to fully recognize and humanize the experience of Black boys and Black men.

So, I think if we're serious about trying to change this, and I believe this idea that when you help Black boys, everybody wins. Heather McGhee writes about this in her book, you know, "The Sum of All of Us," that this is not a zero-sum game. When you help Black boys, you're not taking away from anybody. You're not harming any other population. I believe firmly in this idea that rising tides lifts all boats. And if you help the boats that are amongst the least of us, Black boys in this country, everybody wins.

But the fundamental question we have to ask is are we truly concerned? Are we truly dedicated to doing something for the uplift of Black boys?

MR. DAVIS: If I could add on --

MS. BUSETTE: Yes, Dr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS: -- to Dr. Howard's --

MS. BUSETTE: Mm-hmm.

MR. DAVIS: -- so eloquent statements about Black boys. I mean, he just really laid out a great foundation for this conversation. I think that this work is grounded in our lived realities, both within our families and in our communities. And so, I think an intentional focus on Black boys is necessary because they have a unique set of experiences that Dr. Howard outlined in this country that is different geographically. Whether you're in the South, whether you're in Canada, whether you're in the U.K., the thing that we continuously see across the research span is that Black boys are marginalized in all of these contexts.

And there's something about Black boys that raises these things where we don't want to question racism. We want to blame them and their family. And so, I think as Dr. Howard also outlined, given that they are not the same, and given that what things that we might have that work in one place may not work in another, I think that we have to really commit ourselves intentionally to figuring out what it's going to take to achieve what's needed for Black boys.

I consider myself as one who has to look at who looks at Black boys to find their gifts and their talents to help them to see that they're already great and that all the things that they want to

accomplish in their life are already in them. But there are some challenges that we have to prepare them for as well.

And like Dr. Howard, I also have three sons. And so, given my family context, my community context, my children, and the boys that I work with that I consider my own children, I think that I'm always looking for ways to ensure that they are intentionally cared for in their school setting, in their families, and in their community.

MS. BUSETTE: Okay. Thank you very much, Dr. Davis. So, Julius, I want to continue with you for a second. You know, we know that in general there's a lot of opportunity to improving STEM education in the U.S. The U.S. continually places near the bottom of developed countries when, you know, surveys are done internationally. So, we don't really, as a country, don't do a very good job in STEM education.

And I think that's particularly true for the approaches to STEM education for Black boys. You've done a lot of work on this. What does an affirming and supportive approach to STEM education for Black boys look like? And how would we know when we're successful in achieving, you know, getting to a place where Black boys are really successful in STEM in particular?

MR. DAVIS: That's a great question. And I think there's this misnomer that Black boys are not successful in STEM education when in fact, they are. And actually, in some of the research that I have done around the country, Black boys are excelling at such high levels in programs that folks are having a hard time providing them with challenging material because they're taking advantage of it. Unfortunately, most of these experiences are happening outside of school. They're not happening in their classroom context. And in many cases what I've found in researching Black boys is that they're not given opportunities in their current school settings.

And oftentimes, they are ostracized by their teachers in their spaces when they seek help, and they don't get the help that they need to excel. But if you look at the work Black boys who receive the kind of support, and many of the Black boys who are supported, they are who are successful in STEM areas, are successful because of their family's advocacy. That's not often talked about. We

often talk about the blaming of the families, but we don't talk about like when Black boys are doing well in these spaces, it's because their families are advocating for them to gain access. Even when we know that they have the test scores, the grades, the academic achievement, whatever is needed to gain in those spaces, they're still not gaining in those spaces.

And so, I think STEM, one of the things that we know that Black boys don't often see is themselves in the STEM curriculum. And that's really any K through 12 curriculum and even higher ed curriculum, Black boys don't often see themselves unless the courses are specialized. And I think that's important for a STEM area. Black boys need to see mirrors of themselves in STEM excellence.

It wasn't until I got to college when my mentor, Dr. Abdulalim Shabazz, told me that Black people did something significant in STEM. No Black boy, or no Black student, or no student period should have to wait that long before they know the great accomplishments that Black people have made to STEM areas and other areas of study. And I think that's where we'll know that we're successful when we're not talking that Black boys aren't in gifted. When Black boys aren't in advanced. That were aren't underrepresented in STEM majors. But that's really when we open up these spaces to them, and make them feel welcome in those spaces, I think that we'll start to see a difference and a change, and we'll know that we're achieving success.

MS. BUSETTE: Are there particular ways that we can open up those spaces?

MR. DAVIS: Some people have done some of the work. So, like some folks have intentionally placed Black boys in advanced placement courses, provided them with the supports, given them the peer communities, created cohorts. One of my good colleagues, Dr. Christopher Jett, just shared what Morehouse does to create their community, their culture at the institution. There is a culture of excellence expected for Black students at Morehouse. But I think that there's a number of other places that do that.

But we don't oftentimes have the high expectations for Black boys in STEM that produces the excellence. I think we focus a lot on remedial, remedializations, and lower-level courses, and we don't think that Black boys can handle the challenge. But really the problem is that they haven't gotten

the challenge and they haven't been shown or believed in that they have -- that they can achieve in these areas. And I think once we give them the opportunity that they perform well for us.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thanks very much for that, Dr. Davis. So, Dr. Howard, you know, I know both of you are in the education field. That's really, you know, where you start all of your work, but certainly, your work is much broader than that. And we know Black boys, like all children, probably spend most of their time outside of school, not just within school. And so, I'm wondering what do you think a culture of care for Black boys looks like more generally that's comprehensive of both what's happening outside of school and, of course, what's happening in school?

And then, you know, in your view, what are the steps we need to take, the approaches, the policies, that we need to have in order to ensure that we are creating that culture in a much more systematic and consistent way?

MR. HOWARD: You know, I appreciate that question, Camille. I think Dr. Davis really started to hit the nail on the head earlier when he talked about Morehouse College as an example. I've seen that firsthand. My son is a graduate of Morehouse College. And what happens at Morehouse College is the very thing Dr. Davis mentioned. There is a set of expectations. There is a set of beliefs. There is a system, an ecosystem that says that you will succeed. There is a ecosystem that says that you are great. There is an ecosystem where you see people who look like you and who affirm you in all the ways you can imagine.

I think you can take a model at Morehouse College and begin to say what does that look like in K-12 schools? I think what the model around cultures of care would entail first of all is the belief system. We have to ask a very difficult question. What is it that the adults who teach Black boys truly think about them? Do you see their promise and potential or do you only see them as problems? Do you see their genius and intellect, or do you see them as someone who has to be constantly surveilled and watched? Do you see their full humanity in the ways in which they're going to make mistakes? They're going to make missteps. Which is what everybody should be allowed to do.

A culture of care is one that says, you know what, we're not going to demonize you, or

criminalize you, or apologize to you because your family structure may not look the way that mine as a teacher looks. We're going to create a culture of care that says a) we believe in you. We're going to hold you accountable. We're going to give you supports so you can become the best person that you were set out to be.

I also think that that culture of care has to be rooted in a deep sense of cultural competence. Culture is so complex and so multifaceted. You have to understand the kinds of ways in which Black boys show up. Black boys show all kinds of ability and genius every single day. But schools suck the life out of them, suck the creativity out of them. And let me be clear, it's not always White teachers who are the culprits. Because there have been cases where folks who look like Black boys do just as much damage to Black boys as White teachers do.

And it's hard for me to say that, Camille. But Dr. Davis knows what I'm talking about. I always have to say that not all skin folks are kin folks. And this about a consciousness, not sometimes, not a skin color. But you have to be able to see the best and brightest of young Black boys. And I always say, and this the research that we find, we go to Black boys we say tell us who the good teachers are. And they can tell you just like that who are the teachers who care about them. Who are the teachers who hold high expectations for them. Who are the teachers who are going to hold the accountable. Who are the teachers who provide supports. And it's very clear that Black boys are aware of that.

But what the research also tells us, and this is what is important to note about a culture of care, is that Black boys are more likely to be adultified. They're assumed to be older than they are. They're assumed to be bigger than they are. They're assumed to be more aggressive than they are. We've seen all types of data when Black boys at racially mixed schools, their White peers engage in some of the same behavior, sometime even egregious behaviors than Black boys do, but they're met with more punishment. They're met with more exclusion.

So, a culture of care is one that has from a policy standpoint, a very different way of how it looks at punishment. There is no punishment. There is no suspensions and expulsions. We're looking at models now that are rooted in restorative practices because a culture of care says that, guess what,

young people deserve to be young people. And they're going to make missteps. But we don't push them out and punish them and demonize them. We kind of pull them in and help them to understand the behaviors that they have engaged in and how it might have impacted our community. And we give them a path of redemption to still be a part of those communities.

That's what cultures of care looks like. And we have to begin to take those models. We have a report coming out just in two weeks, ironically, where we looked at five different sites across LA County that sort of embody what you are calling these cultures of care. And it's about this belief that we allow young Black boys to be humanized. We allow them to be loved upon. We sort of lifted up this thing called Black boy joy. Black boys deserve the right to laugh, and to scream, and to shout, and to dance, and to play.

When the question gets asked to me what is it that we need to do for Black boys? How do we create a culture of care? I say we do it for White children all the time. They get to be able to be children. They get to make mistakes. They get to fall down and get up. They get to holler, scream, shout. They get to do all the things that come with childhood. We ask why can't Black boys have those same kinds of opportunities?

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Tyrone. Dr. Davis, so same question.

MR. DAVIS: If I --

MS. BUSETTE: Sorry, go ahead.

MR. DAVIS: If I could build on that.

MS. BUSETTE: Mm-hmm.

MR. DAVIS: And I want to take an example of one of my partners that we work with, Statesmen Academy for Boys. And one of the things that I would highlight in a practical sense in an actual school setting for boys is what the culture of care looks like. In that school, when you first walk in you see pictures that look like the boys all throughout. That's one thing that Black boys rarely get to see in school settings.

You see positive affirming words all on the walls, throughout the ceiling. You see

educators who look like them who care about them. And when these boys have tough times, you see educators loving on them even when they are not at their best that day. And this is in one of the poorest areas in Washington, D.C. that this school exists. And I take my students there often all the time because I want them to see how they've developed a culture in the pedagogy around Black boys and actually listening to them to find out what do they want in a school. And what does it take for their environment to help produce the best out of them? You see Black boys walking around with books in their hands reading all the time, learning about their history and culture. And to me, I think that those are all elements of a culture of care.

Now, on the area of Black policy for me, I have served on several policy areas in the state. And one of the more recent ones has been a task force focused on Black boys on achieving equity in academic excellence. And to be quite honest, I initially didn't want to be a part of the task force because there were several task force reports, work group reports that came before that work. And the thing that disturbed me the most is that I feel like none of that -- none of the good recommendations that were in those reports were implemented.

There was no accountability towards Black boys for it. We knew that they were being mistreated, not served well. But we created these policy reports, and nothing happened. In my area, I oftentimes want to just keep producing work. I don't want to be a part of efforts that are not going to produce real change for Black boys. And sometimes what happens in the policy space is that we create these things, but no one does anything about it.

There's usually no funding to support around it afterwards to really carry it out. And there's no accountability to the people who should be making sure that these things happen. And so, I think that in a policy space, if we're going to create a culture of care, when we actually produce these documents, we have to actually execute them and put them forward and hold meaningful accountability structures and reports to let people know how these things are evolving.

MS. BUSETTE: Dr. Davis, let me ask you a little bit about that State of Maryland task force report. And so, you were part of that effort. You did serve in an advisory capacity. So, is there

anything from that experience or that report that you think is worth highlighting here?

MR. DAVIS: Thank you for that. Well, first off, I want to thank Dr. Vermelle Greene for putting that task force together, advocating at the Maryland Board of Education to do that work. It's really important. Really, she was one of the main reasons why I decided to be a part of that task force.

And I think that throughout that task force, some of what Dr. Howard and I are talking about here are embedded in that report. Like humanizing Black boys, providing support structures for Black boys, putting people in place that look like them. And making sure that they are represented in the curriculum and the experiences that they have and that we move away from deficit approaches to Black boys to more asset and strength-based approaches to Black boys.

Because oftentimes, that's what most educators are known or know about are the deficit perspectives of Black boys. But they don't know about the assets, the strengths, the gifts, and the talents that they bring. And I think that that's something that that task force report, like many others before it, did that I think that we should utilize.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you for that. I want to just ask you both a question and then I'm going to remind the audience about how to submit questions here. But, you know, Tyrone in particular, you have been in the classroom. What does an asset-based approach for engaging Black boys actually look like when you're in the classroom?

MR. HOWARD: Yeah, I always ask educators that I work with what's the lens you look at to see Black boys, right? I mean, what are the preconceived notions you have? And we all have them. What are the biases that you have about Black boys, right? Have you ever seen Black boys succeed? I think we have to begin to get to the attitudes, beliefs, and values that educators have about Black boys. Because we live in a society that has been full of images, of characterizing Black boys and men as violent, as hypersexual, as lazy, as immoral.

And for us to think that people don't walk in schools that they don't work in schools where they still hold on to the residual sort of beliefs around Black men would be naive. Because they have those beliefs. You look at the work from Walter Gilliam. He's looked at the kind of bias that educators

have as early as preschool towards Black boys. That many of the teachers that he studied said it's not a matter of if these Black boys will mess up, it's when they will mess up. And they locked in on Black boys and they were not allowed to be three and four-year-olds.

We have data now in this country that shows that we suspend children as early as preschool. And oh, by the way, Black boys who make up about close to 8 percent of all preschoolers make about 1/3 of all -- I'm not going to even call them students -- they're not students. They're still babies who are suspended from preschool. Preschool, right? So, these are babies who have already been labeled as problems, treated as problems, and seen as problems.

So, I always say that for us to think about this from the context of sort of what it needs to look like in terms of teaching. We need to put better emphasis on our teacher preparation programs to see who we allow in our programs. What they think about people who look like me and Dr. Davis, right? And what experience you have working with Black boys. We need to do a much better job of screening who we let in this profession.

We oftentimes talk about people who need to be counseled out of the profession. I think we need to be much more stringent on who is allowed in the profession. Because some of the people we let in this profession who do the damage that they do to Black boys should have never been allowed in the first place. And oh, by the way, some of them who become teachers subsequently go on to become school leaders and principals with the same kind of deficit beliefs, meaning that they are looking to hire more people who share the same beliefs that they have, which, oh, by the way, tends to mean that Black boys are seen as a problem. So, we have to just be much more thoughtful and intentional about who we allow in this profession.

I would also add too, I want to pick up on something that Dr. Davis said earlier because I think it was so important. He talked about that we have these task forces. And I'm one here in California, Task Force for Educating Black Folks. And they sound good in theory, but at the end of the day, they fall short on the delivery part of it. And I so appreciate you lifting that up, brother, because we have to stop doing all the talking and start doing the work. That's why I appreciate the work you do with your rights of

passage program and mentorship because that's the work that is so vital.

But I've been pushing for three different areas for us to think about here in California for Black boys. One, is ensuring that all Black boys have access to high quality pre-K schools. Because the data has been clear that universal pre-K can work when it is high quality. Here in California and many other states across the country, we see Black boys don't get access to high quality preschool.

The second thing we also put a focus on is ensuring that Black boys are getting every opportunity to be able to master reading by third grade. I say that because the data has been abundantly clear, students who are not reading at grade level by grade three have a very difficult time ever getting on grade level. And we know that Black boys, especially those who grew up in urban and rural communities, are more likely to have underqualified teachers, underprepared teachers, long-term substitute teachers, which means the literacy foundation that they need to be successful is not in place by third grade.

And then the third piece that we've been pushing for from a policy standpoint and I mentioned earlier, is the issue around school discipline. We issued a report, myself, Frank Harris, and Luke Wood a couple years ago looking at just the discipline rates across the State of California and they were outright dismal for Black boys. There needs to be a complete and total ending to our current discipline policies.

We need to get rid of this amorphous term called willful defiance. Black boys were suspended more for willful defiance than for any other offense. And I raise willful defiance because it is highly subjective. What one teacher might consider defiant is something that another teacher sees as quite curious and inquisitive. And Black boys are more likely to be seen as defiant than any other group of students.

So, we need to rethink our policies around discipline and begin to say we're going to take different approaches to seeing how we see Black boys that result in these crazy levels of school disciple.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you.

MR. DAVIS: Can I build on?

MS. BUSETTE: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. DAVIS: So, I taught in Baltimore City. I actually taught in the schools that I attended as a student because I wanted to give back. And like Dr. Howard said earlier, like I lost a lot of great friends in my community that were, I think, smarter than me. I think could have done just as well I could have, that I have done in my life. But they weren't provided the opportunities and the space to do so. So, I wanted to give back.

And I think what a culture of care looks like is having those high expectations, pushing our students to achieve. Letting them know that they are great all the time. And I think that's one of the things that I have found in doing programing for Black boys. Many of them have never heard a good complement, received an award, been celebrated for anything in a school setting before. And I think that that should not be the case.

I want to also build on what Dr. Howard was saying about even the preschool piece. So, those who we know are successful, a lot of times they have early experiences being successful and academically challenged, academically engaged, that leads to them continuously being successful throughout their academic career. And I think that if we're going to really create this culture of success, I think that people really have to commit themselves and evaluate their beliefs and their thought structures about Black boys like Dr. Howard suggested.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you very much for that, both of you. Excellent. I'm going to just remind the audience that if you want to submit questions, you have two ways of doing that. One is by emailing events@brookings.edu or via Twitter at @BrookingsGov, G-O-V, BrookingsGov, by using the #SuccessforBlackBoys. So, those are your two ways. We look forward to your questions.

I'm going to move on in our conversation here. I want to talk a little bit about Black boys in families and communities, right? I mean, obviously, you know, they don't take this by themselves. They're in families and communities. You've talked about that a little bit. I want to think about how do we ensure that we continue to affirm the importance of the communities and the families that support them as we create -- as we think about creating a culture of care. How do we do that? And either of you can go.

MR. HOWARD: I'll jump in real quick then defer to Dr. Davis. I think number one, we

have to debunk this notion that Black families and communities are not involved in the education of Black young people. That's just not true.

It's just like this long held misnomer that Black fathers were not present and not involved in the lives of their children. There's been study after study that shows that not only are Black fathers as involved with their children, but they're more involved than any other ethnic groups in terms of reading to their children, playing with their children, monitoring their school activities. And so, there's this believe that Black families are not involved.

The question becomes schools oftentimes want to dictate the terms on how parents can be involved. And that's a problem. So, that's why we make this distinction between engagement and involvement. Involvement says come on our time, stay as long as we tell you to say, and then leave when we tell you to go. Whereas, engagement says, we see partners -- we see parents as equal partners. And we want your presence, and we want your input, and we want your ways in which you bring lots of, you know, talents that you know your children best than us. So, then we can sort of work with you to help maximize your students' outcomes.

We have to see communities in the same way and parents and caregivers in the same way that we see Black boys, through this asset-based lens that Dr. Davis has been talking about, right? We have to also recognize the diversity that exists within Black families. Don't always expect mom and dad to show up because we have Black boys who are being raised by grandparents. And that doesn't mean that it's a broken household. If I get one more teacher who says these kids come from a broken household. Wait a minute. What's a broken household? Because broken household in some people's mind says it's a single parent. I grew up in a single parent household and it was highly functional. And let me be clear, you can have a two-parent household that can be highly dysfunctional.

I always say it's not the parental composition that matters, it's parental disposition. My mother had structures and systems of how we were supposed to do what we do. So, you got to change the entire approach to how you see caregiving. We have kids who are also being raised by foster parents, right? Black boys come from a variety of different household settings. But at the end of the day,

we have to see those caregivers as committed, and caring, and who deeply love their children and want nothing but the best for them.

And what schools tend to do sometimes is that because you neglect, you neglect, you ignore, then you get the angry parent who shows up and you say, well, why is this parent angry? Well, because you've done wrong by their son. And when you try not to work with parents, you allow this kind of this simmering to bubble up to cause what it causes.

So, I always say this, is at the end of the day, we have to recognize that our parents are doing the absolute best they can with their sons, right? And when it's all said and done, we have to recognize this. So much of how parents feel about schools is also deeply rooted in their own experiences in schools. So, if couldn't stand school when I was younger, if I disliked school when I was younger, best believe that some of those parents are going bring that same sort of emotions and feelings to the school for their sons. So, we've got to work with parents and caregivers as partners and not see them as adversaries.

MS. BUSETTE: Okay. Thank you, Dr. Howard. Dr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS: I agree 100 percent with that. And I would also add that parents of Black boys also need to be celebrated. One of the things that I often do with the programs that we have for Black boys is to give honor and thanks to their caregivers, grandmas. And I also make it a point to connect with them every time I see them. And I don't see our relationship as transactional. I see our relationship as both being committed to producing excellence for our sons.

And I call them most oftentimes my sons because I do believe that. And I am willing to do whatever is necessary to advocate for our sons. And we oftentimes when things are going wrong, we connect with each other and figure out what are we going to do for our sons. And then I think that partnership exists.

And I also think that while schools often say that they want parents involved, they don't really believe that by the way how they treat parents or how they engage with them when they get involved. And I've seen that for parents who are well educated parents, who have less than education

parents, who are poor parents, who have money. Like schools don't really want to see Black families involved as much as they say they do. But one of the things that they are very comfortable doing is blaming them when they don't see them in the school building. But then also complaining about them when they're too much in the school building.

So, I don't know that we really want to see Black families really involved in the lives of Black boys or Black children period. I just think that that's just an excuse to justify the certain treatment of Black boys and Black families.

MS. BUSETTE: Great. Thank you both very much. You know, we are, believe it or not, we are at the point of entertaining audience questions. So, I'm going to start with one which has to do with this thorny issue of how we define success. And whether our current ways of looking at academic success are really serving Black boys well. And whether or not we need to have a different kind of framework around what entails success. So, I'm going to ask both of you to kind of think about that a little bit and then provide me with your perspectives on that.

MR. DAVIS: So, your question is around success for Black boys, is that?

MS. BUSETTE: Yeah, so how do we define that? So, normally when we -- particularly when we think about, you know, kids and we think about, you know, how we define success. So, there are, obviously, ways about thinking about wellbeing and health and everything. But there are also ways about thinking about academic success, right? Which is test scores, which can be kind of the more formal kind of definitions around success. And then there are also definitions of success which entail behavioral definitions, right?

So, I'm asking you to comment on sort of our current thinking around how children are perceived as either successful or not successful. Whether or not that is something that is supportive of Black boys currently. And if not, do we need to reframe? How do we reframe? Kind of a big question.

MR. DAVIS: It is a big question. And one that I have been sort of challenging myself around when it comes to Black boys and particularly the Black community. And for me, I would probably take a book out of Carter G. Woodson's work and say that I think that the education of Black boys should

be centered around improving the Black community. And when I think about success in our traditional sense like grades, test scores, and behavior, I think that that's one avenue of it that they have to do. That's the current structure that we lived in.

But I also think like as M. K. Asante says, they have to take two sets of notes. Yes, they have to ace the tests. Yes, they have to do well on the achievement tests. But then they also have to figure out like what is it that I need to do to improve my community? We come from a legacy of people who have made it such that we are here today.

And that work isn't done. I know some of us believe that that work is done. But Black boys, just like we do, like Dr. Howard and I do, we still have work to do to contribute to that legacy that we all build on. And so, I think about their success in school as one, doing well through our traditional measures, but also doing well by what they contribute to their community.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you for that. Dr. Howard, did you --

MR. HOWARD: Can I --

MS. BUSETTE: -- want to --

MR. HOWARD: Yeah, can I? I think Dr. Davis is spot on. I think that, look, traditional metrics of success have not oftentimes been developed with Black boys in mind. Hence, they are set up in ways that are almost -- not almost but are created for ways to say that they are inadequate.

You know, we, again, I keep mentioning these reports we did, but we had a report some seven years ago where we looked at what we call high-achieving Black boys. And we found that the definitions of success need to be rethought. Black boys show tremendous amounts of leadership. They are very much engaged in their communities. They play a supportive role at home with their mothers and grandmothers and grandfathers. They are involved in extracurricular activities. Why aren't those metrics just as much a part of how we define success as test scores and grades?

I think that test scores and grades matter, but they shouldn't be the end all be all that they are in school. Because if you allow that to be the only metric or the primary metrics by which we define success, Black boys are going to always fall short. I just think there are far too many other areas that

Black boys are excelling in so many ways. You know, oratory skills, sort of critical thinking skills. The ability to kind of, you know, persuade folks to do things that they want them to do.

Why don't we tap into that genius that they manifest and kind of broaden our notions of how we define success? I think that's what has to happen. And, again, I appreciate what Dr. Davis said earlier. I'm oftentimes deeply troubled when I look at states across the country. School districts who have gifted and talented programs in schools where you may have Black students are say 40, 50, 60 percent of the population, but you walk into those gifted and talented programs, and you see hardly any Black boys. So, you tell me a school that's 40 percent Black, 50 percent Black, but you don't see a single Black boy in that gifted and talented program. That's a problem.

And then even when you do have Black boys who are in those gifted and talented programs, they oftentimes feel like they've got to give up a sense of who they are to fit into these largely Eurocentric programs. The work of Donna Ford has been happening for the last three decades where she has talked about the underachievement of gifted Black students because the way we structure success tells Black kids you have to talk a certain way. You have to think a certain way. You have to act a certain way. You have to process a certain way. And Black kids in their infinite wisdom and genius say, well, if that's what's required for me to be "successful, smart", I good doing what I'm doing over here because that cultural capital has cache in my neighborhood, in my home, and with my peers.

So, what does it look like when we start to allow Black boys to bring their own cultural knowledge, they own cultural norms, their own cultural ways of knowing and communicating into the schoolhouse where they get to experience schools like middle class White kids do where my ways of being are constantly affirmed and validated every single day.

MR. DAVIS: And can I --

MS. BUSETTE: How do we do that?

MR. HOWARD: I think we do that by having hard conversations at the district level around how do we define success. Look, schools have a lot of autonomy in terms of how we structure how schools work. Look, I served as a classroom teacher for eight years. I don't buy this idea that we

can't do anything, that our hands are tied.

I watched affluent parents show up at schools and demand on certain things being done for their children. We have to do the same thing in our schools. We have to say wait a minute. Who's doing the recommending for gifted and talented programs in the first place, right? Oftentimes that starts with teacher recommendations.

We have to ask questions about why aren't there more Black counselors who are here counseling Black students? We have to ask the question, why aren't there more Black teachers in these schools? And I don't buy this argument that, well, not enough apply. If you want Black teachers, you go out and find them because they are in places at historically Black colleges and universities all across this country. We have to be intentional in our efforts to say we want to begin to redefine the metrics of how we think about success to do so in a culturally competent manner that affirms the realities of Black boys and Black students generally.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you. Dr. Davis, it seems like you wanted to get in there.

MR. DAVIS: I just wanted to add another perspective to what Dr. Howard shared about Black boys in gifted. One of my doc students did research on school administrators' preparation for professional development around identifying Black boys in gifted. And found that most of them never had a course or any preparation in their school leadership preparation programs, nor did they have any real professional development as a school administrator to identify the unique gifts and talents that Black boys bring to gifted spaces.

And so, when we're talking about them being underrepresented, not only are their teachers inadequate, but also their school leaders are inadequate in terms of identifying their gifts and talents, the assets and strengths that they bring to gifted spaces that should be recognized in those spaces.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you very much.

MR. HOWARD: Can I add one more --

MS. BUSETTE: Yeah, go ahead.

MR. HOWARD: Real quick story I'd like to add. Because the gifted piece is so important to me because we track young people all the time. Quick story. Years ago, my oldest son was in preschool. I remember picking him up from preschool and his -- and I would watch my son come home every day with these little pictures and paintings that he had done in school. Whereas, the other kids were coming home with letters of the day, word of the day, numbers of the day.

So, I asked his teacher, who was White, why wasn't my son, Jabari, coming home with some of the letters and pictures and numbers like other kids were? She told me he wasn't quite ready to do that yet. And I was really taken aback. My son was four at the time. He was counting and doing words and reading at home just fine. Why did the teacher think he was not ready?

And she proceeded to tell me that, well, you know, every time we sit down to our number of the day, I ask Jabari if he would like to join us and he would say, no I don't want to join. She said I always invite him over to our circle time when we read our stories. He says he doesn't want to join. He didn't want to sit down. So, she went on to tell me all these times that they had done activities and she would ask him, she would invite him, and she would encourage him to do things.

And so, that's when I had to step up and say, time out. There's a cultural nuance that you're not taking notice of. I said my son was enjoying preschool because he had this thing called options. So, what he was doing was the following. His teacher would ask him would you like to join us on the circle time to work on the letter of the day? And he would sit and think no, I don't. And she would not let him join. She would say, I want to encourage you to come over. He would say, hmm, he's encouraging me, but she's not demanding.

So, I told her I said you need to recognize in our household that we don't ask him if he would like to go to bed. We don't encourage him to sit down at the dinner table. We communicate with him in a very direct term. It's not a democracy. It's a dictator. I'm one half and my wife is the other half, right? I said instead of asking him and inviting him and encouraging him, tell him come over to the table and sit down while we work on our letter of the day. Tell him right now I need you to come over, so we work on our number of the day.

The very ways in which culture plays out is so powerful. Now, I used that example. The next day she did it and she was surprised at how much he knew. She was surprised at how well he could read. And I shudder to think, what happens if I don't intervene on my son's behalf? At some point in time there's a high likelihood that that teacher says, well, you know what, maybe he has ADHD. Maybe he needs to be medicated. All the labels that get placed on so many Black boys. And not because there's something cognitively not right, it's the cultural disconnect between teachers and students who sometimes don't know how to do something as simple as tell Black boys I need you to come sit down here and work on this letter of the day. It sounds benign, but it has disastrous consequences for too many Black boys.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you for that. I'm going to move on to some other audience questions here. So, there's a question about how do you define quality universal pre-K? So, Dr. Howard, I think you were talking about that. And certainly, Dr. Davis, if you want to weigh in on that as well.

MR. HOWARD: Sure. I'll just go real quickly. To me, quality universal pre-K is steeped in something that goes beyond high profile babysitting. I think quality preschool has teachers who have met some threshold to be credentialed to work with young people. High quality pre-K has numeracy and literacy as foundational blocks in what young people are exposed to every single day.

Nowadays, look, if you look at kindergarten standards in most states in this country, kids are almost expected to show up in kindergarten on day one already knowing how to read. Already knowing how to identify letters, numbers, colors, sequence. That was what kindergarten used to be used for to teach how to do. So, now preschools have to make sure that they're exposing young people, in this case, our babies, to early numeracy, early literacy. We got small class sizes. We have trained teachers. Those are some of the building blocks that have to be in place to ensure that when those young babies leave pre-K to go into kindergarten, they have a foundational set of skills that will give them the ingredients for success.

MS. BUSETTE: Great, thank you. Dr. Davis, did you want to add anything to that?

MR. DAVIS: I'm sorry, I was on mute. I agree with what Dr. Howard shared. And I think

I would just tout the work of Dr. Janice Hale, who has done a lot of work on Black children as one of those pinnacle pieces to think about. Like those unique cultural pieces that we bring to the school setting, I think a quality pre-K program would include those cultural elements that Dr. Howard and I have been kind of sharing throughout our conversation today.

MS. BUSETTE: Great, thank you very much. I want to, Dr. Davis, I want to stay with you. We had a fair amount of questions around how do we engage with racism in a pretty overt way when we're thinking about creating a culture of care for Black boys? Both, you know, in the school setting and outside. I mean, you both have tackled that directly and I think it's worth hearing from each of you about how do you do that in an intentional way throughout the school system, throughout the school experience? So, Dr. Davis, I'm going to start with you on that.

MR. DAVIS: Wow, I would get the racism question first. That's something that I think about. Interestingly, both Dr. Howard and I both do work in critical race theory. I think that critical race theory has provided the framework for us to look at racism. And a way to have these kinds of conversations I think one is to understand that racism is constantly changing and evolving.

Like what we thought about racism historically and what we think about racism today, while it looks different, it operates in a very systematic way and it's always functioning to disrupt the lives of Black children. Whether you see an actor or not, I think that racism is always there. I think it's institutionalized in the policies and the practices that we do.

And that was one thing you heard me say earlier like we're constantly right now talking about issues that, I think, you framed earlier that are 50 years old in education. We know that the curriculum has not changed from being predominately White and male. We know that these issues around Black students gaining access to higher level courses and things of that nature haven’t changed. So, I think that when we talk about racism, when we start talking about inequity, to me, that's where racism lies. It lies within the inequities that we continuously see within school systems and structures. And I'll stop there in terms of like that's what we see.

But how we advocate for that is what Black families have been doing continuously. They

continuously push to get their kids access to the spaces that they need for their future. They consistently stay on top of teachers to ensure that they're serving their children well, as Dr. Howard just gave us a great example of. We are consistently given opportunities -- when given the opportunities to have great educators, Black children take advantage of those and then they excel in those environments. So, I'll pause there and allow Dr. Howard to add on to it.

MS. BUSETTE: Thanks, Dr. Davis. Dr. Howard?

MR. HOWARD: Sure. I think that we need to listen to Black boys as one way to begin to address and unpack racism. But not just listen to Black boys, believe Black boys when they give us these accounts of what they're going through. We have to ensure that we're not engaging in what Luke Wood and Frank Harris call race-lighting. Meaning that when people talk about their experiences with racism, we try to explain it away or we try to tell them that it didn't really happen. We try to say that they're overreacting.

Look, many Black parents talk to their children about what racism is, what it looks like. And so, when Black boys come to us, in some of our data we collected from Black boys, we were blown away by some of the things that Black boys said that the adults said to them and about them in front of their peers. So, my thing is listen to them, right? Believe them.

And I would also say this because racial microaggressions are real. And we frequently get asked the question, how do we help our Black boys navigate racial microaggressions? Where really there's oftentimes very few good options. If I say nothing in the face of microaggression, then I've got to basically kind of take on the whole harm. If I try to take time to try to enlighten you, then I'm looked at as being sort of, you know, overly opinionated from a Black boy's standpoint. Or if I go off and I'm on 10, then I'm aggressive and hostile as a Black boy.

We have to just give Black boys some tools and strategies to deal with microaggressions. But at some point in time, our Black boys should not have to be the ones who have to invest the labor to address racism. The adults have to fight to end it in the first place. I would always tell my sons, listen, when you deal with those issues, come to me and your mom. Let us fight the adults. Let us tackle these

issues, right? And I just want to make sure you give me all the details because don't have me show up at this school and you left out a core piece of what happened in these stories.

But we have to talk to our kids about racism because it's real. It happens. They see it. They know it. And they need to know they have advocates. And we have to be individuals as parents and caregivers who will show up at schools, who will have conversations with principals, who go to school board meetings, who go to superintendents, who write letters, who send emails.

And the thing that we as Black folks have always done, we mobilize, and we organize to ensure that our voices are being heard. Those are the things that we have to do. We can't put all the labor on our babies to fight schools and injustice and racism. We have to be at the forefront.

MS. BUSETTE: Great.

MR. DAVIS: And I don't know how Dr. Howard feels about this, but I believe the critical race theory thesis that racism is omnipresent and that it won't stop existing. And I think that the unfortunate thing as we talk about how do we help Black boys navigate it, I think that we have to vigilant and always ready to advocate for them. And I think that it's just a natural part of the fabric of American society and really internationally that they going to have to deal that we just have to keep fighting against.

And I don't know if there's one set way because I think the issues keep showing up and constantly. And they continuously impact the lives of Black boys in very significant ways. I just think that we just have to keep fighting against it.

MS. BUSETTE: Well, I have a question for you two, which is -- both -- about this particular issue of racism and how we address that directly, particularly in classrooms. So, it seems to me, and I'm just going to summarize, you know, a body of research that you both are familiar with. Which is that in most classrooms, the curriculum that's been developed, the teachers who are teaching the curriculum, the markers for success, are all constructed in such a way that they do not feel like they are constructed with Black boys in mind, right?

So, you're entering into a classroom, classroom setting with the relationship with the teacher, relationship with the material, the pedagogy, et cetera, which in some ways dismisses your

existence. How do we work on that in the school setting? So, this is not, you know, just preparing our boys to navigate, which is, you know, a system which is obviously very, very challenging. But it's like also adults can do something and we can do something in the school. How do we do that?

MR. HOWARD: Yeah, Dr. Davis said something earlier that I think was so, so important, right? I think it's small things but they're big things. When you walk into a school, where do Black boys see pictures of people who look like them? Where to Black boys see quotes from famous African Americans? Where do Black boys begin to see, you know, pieces of literature that are reflective of them?

I think we as parents have got to go in and do our own inventory. I can tell you on many occasions, schools did not want to see me walking in because my thing would be let me look on your walls. Let me see where my son feels validated in your classroom. Let me look at the curriculum and make sure you're not sort of engaging in what Rich Milner calls curricular violence meaning that you render my son invisible because all the books you're reading do not reflect him.

Rudine Sims Bishop talks about creating classrooms and content and curriculum that are windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. We have to walk in the classrooms ask teachers what are you doing from a curriculum standpoint and an instructional standpoint to make my Black boy feel like he is seen, validated, and heard. And if they're not doing that, then we have to be resources. Okay, I'll bring you some books in. I'll bring you some posters in. I'll bring you some texts in. I'll bring you some lessons in. So, don't give me an excuse that you don't know how. If you don't know how, I can assist.

And we have to be insistent upon that even at the high school level. My kids would get so embarrassed. Dad, don't show up in my chemistry class and ask my chemistry teacher about how come we don’t have any Black scientists on the walls. Yeah, I'm that father and we need to be that present.

MS. BUSETTE: Thank you, Dr. Howard. Dr. Davis?

MR. DAVIS: No, I agree with all that. When I taught mathematics, like I said, when I got to college that's the first time I knew about that. So, when I taught students, that was one of the first things I wanted to make sure that they knew that they came from greatness. That the mathematics that

you're talking about, your ancestors created. Pythagoras theorem, you better look at the temples. I mean, the pyramids in Africa, those are where you ancestors created. So, if you want to say that Pythagoras theorem was first, no, you have to look at where mathematics originated. The first highly technological civilization in Africa.

And we don't often talk about that when we talk about mathematics or any of the STEM areas that all of the scientific knowledge that we're talking about, existed long before the Greeks and the Europeans. But we don't bring those things into the STEM areas although those things are used to justify the current scientific racism that we see that exists within STEM curriculum.

MS. BUSETTE: Well, I want to thank you both. You know, good conversations like this always have a way of feeling like you need more time. And I think that's always a mark of an excellent conversation. I want to thank the audience. We had so many excellent questions. I was only able to fit in like a small fraction. But I want you both to know that people were very, very engaged. And we're going to save the chat because there were a lot of questions to connect with you directly and also to get information that you mentioned or resources that you mentioned.

So, I want to thank you both. I want to ask the audience to also warmly thank you for spending the time with us and also offering your perspectives. This is a very important topic. I hope we will be able to make sure progress in the next few years than we have in the last 50 years. And I know you will be part of that.

Thank you very much. And thank you to the audience for your engagement.

MR. HOWARD: Thank you, Camille. And thank you to the Brookings Institute. And thank you, Dr. Davis. Stay brilliant. Keep doing the work you're doing. I appreciate it.

MR. DAVIS: You too good brother. Thank you all.

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