

Comments to the
Senate Study Committee
On Educational Development of African American
Children in Georgia, SR 468
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To Senator Gail Davenport, Committee Chairperson, and the other members of this Study Committee, I like to thank you for the opportunity to offer comments regarding this very important work. I would especially like to thank Senator Kay Kirkpatrick who connected me to Senator Davenport and the committee. My name is Carol Massey and I am a resident of Cobb County and a 42 year member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Our organization's membership consists of over 250,000, mostly Black college-educated women worldwide, with chapters in almost every state in this country and in several other countries including, England, Japan, Germany, the Republic of Korea and several Caribbean countries.

As an organization dedicated to public service, major programs are based on the Five-Point Programmatic Thrust:

- Economic Development;
- Physical and Mental Health
- Educational Development
- Political Awareness and Involvement
- International Awareness and Involvement

The focus of your Study Committee, the educational needs of African American children, aligns with all of these five programmatic areas. Obtaining a quality education is fundamental to an individual becoming a productive citizen in society. Without completion of a quality high school education, a young person will have difficulty becoming gainfully and legally employed. There is extensive documentation on the dropout rates among incarcerated individuals. This is especially true if the person gets introduced to the criminal justice system early. Unfortunately, the introduction to "living in a police state" often starts in the schools. The increased presence of law enforcement in schools, normalizes living in a police state.

The annual costs associated with maintaining individuals in the criminal system far exceed the annual per student investment in public education. Good stewardship of public funds should warrant efforts to improve return on investment in public education to prevent and reduce expenditures in the criminal justice system.

In many states, access to primary and secondary public education is a constitutional right. The Georgia state constitution imposes upon the state the primary obligation to assure that all students are provided an adequate education. So the question is, how is adequate defined? My assumption is that an “adequate education” is one provided in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning for all students. Yet, when we consider graduation vs. drop out rates, suspension and expulsion rates, it is clear that the State is not meeting its “obligation” to all students, particularly , African American students.

The Georgia Department of Education has extensive data sets that detail the experience of African American students. But data without policy, application, and accountability to make improvements is a wasted resource. So it is my hope that the work of this Study Committee will include recommendations for policy changes and accountability measures that will incentivize and require school boards, superintendents, administrators, teachers and community stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for African American students in Georgia.

One aspect of the African American student experience that is glaringly in need is improvement is the disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion. Throughout Georgia, African American students are 2-3 times more likely to be suspended or expelled for similar infractions than their white counterparts. The details of this issue are documented in numerous reports, including:

- The Georgia Department of Education, 2005
- The Georgia Appleseed Effective Student Discipline: Keeping Kids in Class project, and
- Disproportionate Impact of K-12 School Suspensions and Expulsion on Black Students in Southern States, by Edward J. Smith and Shaun R. Harper, Penn Graduate School of Education, Center for race and Equity in Education, (the Smith Harper report).

Other data that underscore the need for improved outcomes for African American students is that of GaDOE regarding College and Career Readiness. Key points from that data set include:

- 30% of Georgia public school districts have enrollments of 60% or more African American.
- 68% of Georgia public school districts have enrollments of 60% or more white.
- Comparison of those population’s rating on the CCRPI shows

	Black	White
A	0%	< 1%
B	0%	25%
C	17%	63%
D	43%	9%
F	40%	0%

- Overall, Black students accounted for 37% of public school enrollment but reflected 67% of suspensions and 64% of expulsions.

Something is just wrong with what African American children are experiencing! These schools are failing to provide a basic constitutional obligation, that being a quality education that will prepare them to be contributing members of society.

Earlier on I mentioned the role of stakeholders in addressing this problem. The MRAC of DST has committed to being a part of efforts to find, implement, evaluate and continuously refine solutions to these problems.

In 2017, MRAC was successful in having its resolution, *Preparing Black Males for Success: Reducing the High Rates of School Expulsion and Suspension of Black Males in Southern States*, adopted by the National Convention. Since that time, a 15-member sub-committee of chapter members has been studying the issues that disrupt the educational process and place too many Black children in the “school-to-prison pipeline”.

The paper, *Reclaiming the Future for Our Sons and Daughters* outlines a model that includes four strategies:

Advocacy and Public Policy

School district/Site and Teacher Support and Accountability

Parent Support and Community Awareness, and

Student Support: In-school and In-community

From our work thus far, we would like to make the following recommendations to your Study Committee:

- Extension of the Study Committee beyond its December 1, 2019 deadline to submit its report to the Governor’s Office, and expansion of its membership to include additional stakeholders, such as parents, advocacy and community organizations, educators and students to conduct further analysis and hearings on these issues around the state.
- Re-consideration and revision of zero-tolerance policies to ensure more consistent application across the state and within school districts.
- Review of the role of law enforcement/school resource officers in experience of African American students.
- Requirements for school resource officers to complete training on child development to differentiate their interaction with children in the school setting vs adults in the general population and in judicial settings.
- Inclusion of cultural competence, implicit bias, critical incident training in classroom management curriculum in teacher preparation programs.
- Incentives for school districts and school sites that develop and implement annual professional development opportunities for administrators and staff in cultural competence and recognizing implicit bias.
- Incentivize the implementation of Restorative Justice policies and practices in school districts.

- Implementation of Continuous Quality Improvement strategies aimed at the reduction of the disproportionate rates of suspensions and expulsions of African American students.

In conclusion, there is much work to be done to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for African American students in Georgia. We've heard that it takes a village to raise a child. I and other members of my sorority would like to join you in the village that embraces all children and works for success in their education pursuits.

Thank you.