



Media Contact: Diana Huynh
dhuynh@ccedresults.org, (206) 838-6612

South King County Black Students Describe How Schools Can Help Them Succeed

SEATTLE—Much attention is given to the need for improving education outcomes for Black students, but rarely does research start by talking to students themselves or diving more deeply into the diversity of the Black community. A new Road Map Project report, *Start With Us*, takes a different approach; it's driven by what local Black high schoolers say they need from the education system serving them. South King County is home to more than 18,500 Black public-school students.

Start With Us shows the need for systems to combat racial bias, promote positive identity development, and listen more closely to students. It also includes new data on several dimensions of college readiness and postsecondary success. During focus groups called Listening Sessions, local Black high schoolers shared what mattered most to them when it comes to their education, in addition to the four qualities they say make up an ideal school environment:

Teachers Who Can Identify With Students. Students want more teachers, principals and staff who look like them to improve cultural understanding and connections. “At my real school, none of that really happens,” a 15-year-old Somali student said.

An Environment That Values Autonomy and Emphasizes Learning. Emphasis should be on gaining knowledge, not test performance. “I don’t like that the school I go to is more about passing, not all about learning,” a 16-year-old African-American student said.

Preparation for Life Beyond High School. Adults at a school have important roles to play when it comes to ensuring student success after graduation. A 17-year-old African-American student said, “[My ideal school] makes me feel like I can pass high school and go to college and become successful in whatever I do. It’s different from [my current school] because I don’t think I can pass and need more work.”

Culturally Relevant Lessons, Including on Pan-African History. Students want to have an in-depth understanding of their history. “At my real school, we don’t get taught about our history and [there are] no resources,” a 15-year-old African-American and Japanese student said.

“What our students are asking for is very reasonable, attainable, and much aligned with developmental research and best practices,” Dr. Shelby Cooley, the report’s author, said. “In the education world, we

are quick to point to racial disparities, but we fail at setting up basic conditions for our youth—particularly those of African descent—to succeed.” Cooley is a research scientist with the Community Center for Education Results, a nonprofit created to staff the Road Map Project initiative.

The Road Map Project is focused on seven South King County school districts, including the southern half of Seattle Public Schools, where there is a remarkably diverse population of Black students; they speak 82 primary languages and come from 79 countries. The initiative’s [most recent progress report](#) shows that although 66 percent of its Black high schoolers go on to college, only 18 percent receive a two- or four-year credential by their mid-twenties.

“There are many local efforts and programs serving our Black students,” said Rashad Norris, Highline College director of community engagement. “But few of them are making the necessary connections to maximize the impact we can all have on our students’ success. I hope this report can serve as a starting point for better alignment and collaboration. We can always do a better job listening to our Black youth.”

Start With Us uses a novel combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to incorporate youth voice. The report focuses on systemic issues that affect the educational experience for Black youth during the high school to postsecondary years. It also covers racial bias, racial identity, exclusionary discipline and school climate.

To download the report, visit www.roadmapproject.org/StartWithUs.

About the Road Map Project

The Road Map Project is an initiative to improve student achievement from cradle through college and career in South King County and South Seattle. Through multisector collaboration with more than 200 partners, the Road Map Project aims to increase equitable policies and practices in education systems to close opportunity gaps, and for 70 percent of its youth to earn a college or career credential by 2030. For more, visit www.roadmapproject.org.