

Mission Statement

Black Parents Workshop

www.blackparentsworkshop.org

The **Black Parents Workshop** (“BPW”) is a public policy advocacy organization and adult organizing collective, founded in Maplewood, New Jersey and dedicated to the educational success and cultural grounding of children of African descent. The organization’s initial focus was on the neighboring communities of South Orange and Maplewood, New Jersey. The Workshop serves to support students who identify as African-American, Caribbean, Afro-Latino, or African¹, and the parents or guardians of this student population regardless of the race or ethnicity of the adult.

The Black Parents Workshop was created from a desire to create and pursue our own vision for the well-being and success of Black students in K-12 schools, and a concern that without such a vision and plan the persistence of academic achievement disparities in school districts would continue to deepen. Startling rates of academic disparity threaten the future prospects of our children/students. Additionally, we organize to address concerns over the lack of diversity and cultural competency among teachers and staff in local school districts, disproportionate rates of disciplinary actions taken against Black students from elementary school onward, the failure in New Jersey to implement a state-mandated Black history curriculum, the dearth of Black, male, and other non-white teachers in public schools and the overall treatment of Black students in school districts and larger community. In addition, the Workshop seeks to bring about the implementation of a more inclusive, stimulating and engaging academic program that includes curricula and ancillary programming that provides a more well-rounded experience for all students in school districts.

¹ For historical, cultural and identification purposes we will use “Black” to describe all children who fall within the group of students we intend to serve. For that purpose, we also include students of Hispanic ethnicity and all bi-racial Black students as well. We also welcome the participation of parents/guardians who have previously had children in the district and former students.

The goal of the Black Parents Workshop is the elevation of Black students' academic performance to a level consistent with and beyond their highest performing non-Black peers. The Workshop will achieve this goal by the following means.

1. **Advocacy:** The Workshop will engage in advocacy on behalf of students of African descent and their parents. Our work will include intervention in policy related matters and serving as advocates, with the permission and coordination of parents, on behalf of individual students in matters related to academic performance and disciplinary actions. We will use a wide range of advocacy tools, including social media, news media and litigation to achieve our goal.
2. **Research:** We will avail ourselves of the most current and relevant academic research on academic achievement, school reform and student retention; as well as commission research specific to the interests of students in school districts.
3. **Policy Development & Implementation:** The Workshop will proactively engage in policy development for students of African descent and work to secure the implementation of effective policies that will support our goal of improving Black student academic performance.
4. **Community Engagement:** Outreach to the larger community will be achieved through workshops, meetings and information sessions, and social media messaging designed to enlarge public knowledge of the performance of school districts.
5. **Training and Support:** For parents and students to successfully navigate and engage as part of the school district and their communities.
6. **Youth Empowerment:** Youth directed action that develops leadership skills, socio-political awareness, engagement and ownership of their school and community experiences.

While the primary focus of the Workshop is the academic engagement of students of African descent in the district, we will also consider issues related to access to quality after-school, athletic and recreational programming consistent with our overarching goal. We recognize the value extra-curricular activities play in student development and seek programming that is relevant, affordable and accessible to all students but specifically to the underserved Black student population. The Workshop collectively aims to work to ensure that our children have the highest and best outcomes possible, outcomes we determine for ourselves.

The New “Equal but Separate” in Public Education

This is what segregation in public education looks like in 21st Century America

- It prevents African-American students access to rigorous courses and competitive secondary schools
- It tracks African-American students into classes that are less challenging and inadequate for college or career readiness
- It misuses the disciplinary process to label African-American students behaviorally impaired to justify their classification in special education
- It disproportionately uses suspensions and expulsions to discipline African-American students for minor offenses that their white peers commit but receive lesser punishment
- It justifies segregated schools by using residential segregation as an excuse
- It employs culturally-biased testing instruments to validate low expectations of African-American students’ academic potential
- It makes little effort to offer culturally relevant, bias-free and historically accurate curricula
- It defends the dearth of African-American teachers as a ‘supply’ issue, while making no effort to enhance diversity recruiting
- It denies issues of systemic racism and places the burden of the achievement gap solely on the backs of African-American students and their families

“Even the Supreme Court, despite its original courage and integrity, curbed itself only a little over a year after the 1954 landmark cases, when it handed down its Pupil Placement decision, in effect returning to the states the power to determine the tempo of change. This subsequent decision became the keystone in the structure that slowed school desegregation down to a crawl. Thus America, with segregationist obstruction and majority indifference, silently nibbled away at a promise of true equality that had come before its time.” – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1967)