

# COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

## Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 2021 Interim

October 20, 2021

### Call to Order and Roll Call

The 4th meeting of the Commission on Race & Access to Opportunity was held on Wednesday, October 20, 2021, at 3:00 PM, in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Samara Heavrin, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator David P. Givens, Co-Chair; Representative Samara Heavrin, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg and Gerald A. Neal; Representatives Nima Kulkarni and Killian Timoney; Jamir Davis, OJ Oleka, and Erwin Roberts.

Guests: Ashli Watts, President and CEO, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce; Ray Daniels, President and CEO, Equity Solutions Group, LLC; Brigitte Blom, CEO, and Chaka Cummings, Manager, Equity & K12 Policy, the Prichard Committee.

LRC Staff: Alisha Miller and Elishea Schweickart.

### Report from the Task Force on Racial Inequality

Ashli Watts, President & CEO of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, and Ray Daniels, President & CEO of Equity Solutions Group, presented before the commission. In 2020, the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce established the Racial Inequality Task Force. The task force was made up of nine members of the community and focused on education, criminal justice, and economic empowerment. In January 2021, the task force released their report *Achieving Equity to Build a Stronger Kentucky*. The task force used data gathered from across Kentucky to create the report and policy suggestions.

Mr. Daniels testified that in the focus on education, there were achievement gaps between white and black students. These gaps exist across grade levels and subject matter. In 2019, just over 31.1 percent of black students scored proficient on elementary school reading tests while 59.3 percent of white students scored at that level. These achievement gaps also exist when it comes to advance placement courses, gifted programs, high school graduation rates, and transition readiness. Mr. Daniels shared educational policy suggestions, which included:

- Collecting better data and sharing it with policy makers and the community often;

- Improved awareness of racial achievement gaps and gaps in opportunity;
- Adding diversity in the teaching workforce;
- Increasing efforts to get underrepresented students in advanced coursework, such as advanced placement courses;
- Expanding dual credit through increased outreach; and
- More financial assistance to families who need it.

The task force also found that school disciplinary measures disproportionately impact black students as well, which harms achievement and performance. Improved policies are needed to reduce racial bias and avoid removing students from the classroom. Policy suggestions from the report include:

- Regularly disseminating information to the public and policymakers about disparities in disciplinary measures at the school, district and state level, tracking year-to-year changes;
- Determining through research and/or the work of a specifically created task force the factors that contribute to the disparities;
- Adopting alternative approaches to disciplinary measures that remove students from the classroom;
- Incorporating a screening process for implicit bias into the recruitment of school resource officers; and
- Developing detailed reforms and implicit bias training requirements for school resource officers.

Mr. Daniels stated that he believed that parents need to be better informed on the education system as well.

Postsecondary attainment rates for different racial groups in Kentucky were also found to be unequal. Black and Hispanic student population groups were found to be below 30 percent on postsecondary education attainment. This causes many students in Kentucky to be severely disadvantaged, because many high earning jobs require education beyond a high school diploma. Policy suggestions to help postsecondary attainment rates from the report include:

- Collecting and tracking data;
- Making FASFA a requirement for high school graduation; and
- Better tracking employment outcomes to raise awareness of the benefits of postsecondary education.

Ms. Watts discussed criminal justice reform when it comes to racial disparities. The criminal justice system has historically had a disproportionately negative impact on Black Kentuckians. Black Kentuckians have often made up more than 20 percent of the Kentucky prison population, despite only representing about 8.5 percent of Kentucky's overall population. Findings in the report also showed a disproportionately negative impact when it comes to arrests, types of arrests, juvenile justice, and other areas of criminal justice. Ms. Watts thanked the General Assembly for the work they have done over the last several

years on criminal justice reform, and suggested that the General Assembly require racial impact statements for legislation that effect the criminal justice system. Additional policy suggestions include reforming Kentucky's bail system, reclassifying minor drug possession charges as misdemeanors, and expanding access to expungement. The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce also supports former inmates using KEES money.

Economic development in Kentucky is also impacted by racial inequities. Over the last several years the unemployment rate for White Kentuckians has stayed about the same, while it has fluctuated for black Kentuckians. Policy suggestions to help economic development include:

- Create a state Black Entrepreneurship Council to guide initiatives in support of the development and growth of Black-owned businesses and the success of Black entrepreneurs, including the creation of a public-private program to provide startup grants;
- Direct Government agencies and postsecondary institutions by regulation or statute, to regularly collect and publish data on the race of public contract holders; and
- Direct the state Finance Cabinet to produce an annual report on the implementation of the small or small minority owned business set aside program to recommend administrative and/or legislative solutions to improve effectiveness.

The Kentucky Chamber foundation is starting a new diversity, equity, and inclusion center to advance racial equity in Kentucky's business community. They have also endorsed the Equality of Opportunity Initiative launched by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which includes business focused action items.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Oleka, Ms. Watts stated that it all starts with education. If someone does not have a good experience in their education, and they are disproportionately disciplined, it affects them for the rest of their life. Mr. Daniels added that it is important to find each child's skill set, and for educators to get creative with teaching models.

Responding to a question from Representative Kulkarni, Ms. Watts stated that creating databases for minority contractors would help improve state contracts and access to capital. Mr. Daniels added that Lexington has over three hundred minority owned companies, so while databases are important, access to opportunities is also important.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Ms. Watts stated that the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce has not studied gun violence pertaining to minors, but they would be happy to talk with her more about her concerns.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Givens, Ms. Watts stated that one of the first things that can be done to give all children equal access to education is by attracting

and hiring more black educators. Children connect better when they are represented, which leads to them being more successful. Commissioner Oleka added that teachers who are unfair toward minority students also need to be held accountable. Responding to a follow-up question from Co-Chair Givens, Mr. Daniels stated that superintendents need to be given the power and ability to create and move principals around as needed and create curriculum as needed. Ms. Watts added that collecting data is so important. She also stated that they believe charter schools would also help minority students because of the different services that are more easily accessible.

### **Racial Equity in Education: A PC Primary Goal**

Brigitte Blom, CEO, and Chaka Cummings, Manager of Equity & K12 Policy, from the Prichard Committee presented before the commission. Since 2008, the Prichard Committee has been measuring Kentucky's educational progress compared to other states. They have chosen 12 key indicators for measuring Kentucky's educational progress. These indicators include:

- Babies with healthy birth weight;
- Children above 200 percent poverty;
- Preschool participation (ages 3-4);
- Fourth grade reading proficiency;
- Eighth grade math proficiency;
- High school graduation;
- Postsecondary Enrollment;
- Graduation from 2-year institutions;
- Graduation from 4-year institutions;
- Associate degree or higher;
- Voter turnout; and
- Median household income.

Access to broadband internet has recently been added as an indicator because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the 1980's, Kentucky has made some progress, though Ms. Blom stated more progress needs to be made to improve the lives of Kentuckians. Currently, Kentucky is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> from the bottom of the nation in poverty. Education is a big component in improving lives in Kentucky.

The Prichard Committee added equity rankings to each of their 12 key indicators in 2020. By adding these equity rankings, they can see if each indicator is the same or if interventions are needed. Ms. Blom provided an example that showed that in 2015 Kentucky was 8<sup>th</sup> in the nation for 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading, Kentucky is now ranked at 26<sup>th</sup> in the nation. Not only has the overall 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading rank dropped, but only 14 percent of Kentucky's black students are meeting the basic proficiency standard compared to 39 percent of Kentucky's white students.

Ms. Blom also provided areas that schools and communities need to focus on. These include:

- Bold leadership at the state and local levels;
- Accountability, including accepting data that is gathered;
- School climate and culture;
- Instruction in the classroom;
- Communities that work together; and
- Sustainability of effective practices.

In 2020, the Prichard Committee hosted a week long webinar titled *Black Minds Matter*. Blog posts were also shared before that webinar that provided information about failing Kentucky's black students. Reading scores have been stagnant for African American 4<sup>th</sup> graders, and in 2019 only 11 percent of African American 8<sup>th</sup> grades were proficient in math. In 2019, only 30 percent scored proficient or above in KPREP reading.

Many believe that family structure and kindergarten readiness are key components of future student success. Mr. Cummings stated data gathered from the Kentucky Department of Education shows that black students come into kindergarten only slightly less ready than their white peers, but by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade only black students experience a drop in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency. Other demographic groups see an improvement in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade literacy when compared to the kindergarten readiness statistics. The National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) highlights data showing the gap in reading proficiency between white students and black students continues to widen as students' progress in their education. The gap grew from 19 points in 2002 to 25 points in 2019. Mr. Cummings also spoke about the gap in 8<sup>th</sup> grade math. Middle school math is the prerequisite for higher level high school math courses, which could set students up for better success in higher education. NAEP shows an 8<sup>th</sup> grade math gap growing from 20 points in 2002 to 21 points in 2019.

Transition readiness data gathered by the Prichard Committee supports the importance of student proficiency data. From 2019 to 2021 black students experienced a drop in college transition readiness in math. Currently, Kentucky is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the nation in high school graduation rates, which means students who are not ready are graduating anyway. Data shows that black students have experienced an eight percent drop when it comes to continuing to higher education. These inequities ultimately lead to an \$11,000 difference in median household incomes.

Ms. Blom presented several possible solutions to the commission, including:

- Availability to high-quality early childhood education, which reduces achievement gaps;
- Increasing the number of National Board Certified Teachers;

- Establishing a fund for teaching excellence to work toward closing the educational gaps;
- Increasing family engagement in their students learning;
- Supporting performance-based funding for higher education;
- Increasing FAFSA participation by district; and
- Increasing postsecondary opportunities.

The Prichard Committee has also released a statement cautioning the General Assembly against legislation that could actually harm equity in Kentucky schools.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Heavrin, Ms. Blom stated that test score assessment over the last two years is not a value judgment on Kentucky educators, but an assessment of the impact of a global health pandemic on the educational system. Responding to a follow-up question from Co-Chair Heavrin, Ms. Blom stated that many students have been disproportionately impacted because of the pandemic, but there are also some good things happening as well. An example was increasing advanced placement courses among African American students.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Davis, Ms. Blom stated that the Prichard Committee does not have specific data when it comes to Career and Technical Education Programs.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Oleka, Mr. Cummings stated that based on the data they have, elementary school experiences for black students need to be further studied to fully understand why the educational gaps are happening. Responding to a follow-up question from Commissioner Oleka, Ms. Blom stated that performance-based funding is proving to be an accountability model for post-secondary education.

Responding to a comment from Representative Timoney, Mr. Cummings stated that a way to get educators of color in classrooms is to get leaders of color in schools.

Responding to a question from Co-Chair Givens, Ms. Blom stated that Jefferson County is home to 1/7<sup>th</sup> of the student population in Kentucky and is the most diverse area of Kentucky. To close achievement gaps in Kentucky, achievement gaps in Jefferson County must be closed, and strategies they have discussed could help do that.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Ms. Blom stated that we need to be sure the high school diploma is meaningful and students are graduating from high school when they are actually ready.

With there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:04 PM.

