

**EDITORIAL**

**Give Communities of Color a Voice in Reshaping Education**

For the first time in our nation's history, the majority of students in public schools are students of color. But in most places, communities of color still have little meaningful say in how their states manage and resource education. As a result, too many students in this new majority are in overcrowded classes and inadequate facilities where teachers are overworked, underpaid and stuck with a curriculum that lacks rigor and relevance.

All students deserve the opportunity to learn and work hard in a healthy environment with excellent teachers, but even 62 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, our nation is reeling from the unfulfilled promise of an equal education for all. Educational equity is vital to our nation; two-thirds of all future jobs will require some level of higher education, and research suggests that within the next 10 years, our economy will face a deficit of 11 million skilled workers. Continuing policies that fail to prepare all students for college and careers is an immoral and self-defeating choice that stunts our nation's economic potential — and mocks our democratic ideals.

But now there's an opportunity for states, districts and schools to make a better choice. The Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, the federal education law Congress passed late last year, requires that parents and communities be meaningfully

By Wade Henderson (President and CEO, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights)

engaged in determining how states equitably educate their children.

Under ESSA, every single state and school district is confronted with a question of enormous consequence: Will they work with new majority communities to develop plans and policies that ensure excellent schools for all children? Or will they continue to make their decisions in a bubble, avoid accountability and do a disservice to students in the process?

Progress is not guaranteed. For this new law to improve education for every student, states need to put communities in the driver's seat and focus on the interests of marginalized students. We have always had strong, clear and diverse voices demanding that our education system serve the interests of their children — but decision-makers rarely listen.

Recent research shows that Black and Latino parents understand what the problems exist in their children's schools — and they have clear ideas about what should change. They know that the schools their children attend don't get as much funding as schools White children attend; they know their children aren't getting as good an education as White children; and they know that race is at least one of the reasons why. But they also believe good teaching and high expectations are critical and they want both for their children.

This is all information that states should be taking into account when determining their policies and programs under the new law. And to do that, states, districts, and schools have to engage new majority parents

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