Supporting Black Girls

Welcome to Women’s History Month, In Morris’ 2016 book Pushout, it is strongly argued that too many girls of color, and particularly, Black girls, are being criminalized in schools by beliefs, policies, and practices that degrade and marginalize their learning and humanity. This criminalization leads to conditions that push them out of schools and leave them vulnerable to confinement and without effective pathways to successful futures (p.8). A deleterious “Pushout” ensues as a result of rigid, zero-tolerance discipline policies and classroom practices that render Black girls invisible or less than acceptable to school personnel. The unacceptability of Black girl culture, learning styles, racial identity and behavior is based upon its “otherness” as compared to the predominant white cultural, middle class norms, and Eurocentric educational frameworks upon which most schools are organized. The white cultural dominant framework in which Black and Brown girls must thrive and navigate for success consists of systemic practices that drive actions and beliefs related to acceptable standards of behavior and often stereotype Black Girls and their participation in schools. “Across the U.S. Black school age girls are twice as likely to be suspended from school as white girls, and we know that girls are not being pushed out of school for more frequent or serious misbehavior” (Venus E. Evans-Winters, in Education Week Teacher, 2019). When we think about the 4-year graduation rate for Black girls in our District which stands at 65.6% and that of White girls which stands at 80.6%, three immediate questions come to mind; 1) Where are one third of our Black girls going without a high school diploma?; 2) Why such a big gap between Black and White girls’ graduation rates?; and 3) Are we as educators contributing to their “pushout” through harsh disciplinary practices and/or a lack of culturally and gender-responsive
curriculum implementation? Perhaps it is a combination of both.

While a plethora of literary research exist that explores the school-to-prison pipeline for Black males (Shirley & Cornell, 2011; Welch & Payne, 2011; Skiba, Peterson & Williams, 1997), limited research is available that demonstrate how exclusionary discipline practices and the lack of a culturally inclusive curriculum has impacted school success for Black girls, and other girls of color. Significant research from Georgetown’s Law Center on Poverty and Inequality (2017) suggests that “people often view black girls as less innocent and more adult like than their white peers”. Black girls are also more likely to be seen by adults as loud, defiant, precocious, and unladylike (Morris, 2016). Oftentimes, unlike White children, Black and Brown girls are not afforded the opportunity to receive supports for a plethora of developmental issues they may be experiencing that would lead to loud and aggressive behaviors.

More daunting is the fact that the actions of a few may be used to legitimize deep seated implicit biases held by teachers and administrators about all females of color. These stereotypical beliefs in many cases lead to harsher discipline and less tolerance of adolescent–like behaviors from females of color, including suspensions, expulsions, and other forms of pushout from schools. As educators, we are obligated to challenge policies and practices that marginalize, criminalize and make invisible any students in our charge. We know and understand that this obligation specifically includes our most vulnerable student populations, our Black females and other girls of color who are often misunderstood, but no doubt possess the intellectual capacity and brilliance which is the lineage of their ancestors.

Let us not forget the legacy of slavery and the perpetuated, transgenerational atrocities committed upon girls and women of color, that sought to dehumanize and de-legitimize Black female racial identity and innocence for generations to come. The historical struggles of Black girls and women continue to serve as a reminder of overarching Black female vulnerability as related to all other sub-group populations in America.

Perhaps when some Black girls demonstrate defiance and raised voices, it should be seen as a survival mechanism, especially Black girls who may come from disenfranchised, low-income communities of color where resources are few and young Black girls need protection and validation. We should always thrive to teach appropriate behaviors and interactions in schools rather than heavily depending upon punitive measures that only serve to further marginalize developing young and adolescent Black females.

Rather than working to silence “loud” Black girls, there should be a myriad of opportunities for Black and Brown girls to uplift their strong voices in positive ways within our schools through research, reading, writing, and speaking about other women of color who have made profound impacts on society and changed the course of American history. According to Morris (2016) “If schools are teaching a curriculum that have erased Black females from the heroic narrative of American exceptionalism are they not implicitly constructing a narrative of exclusion? How and where then, do Black girls situate themselves as Americans and as global citizens?” Cultural competence and cultural duality is critical for Black girls’ knowledge development and ability to make connections between their own culture and the predominant culture of mainstream America. This can be done through a curriculum of female empowerment and cultural inclusion. Ongoing instructional supports and effective teacher-student relationships in a collaborative classroom that recognizes the strengths of girls of color is critical to school attachment and Black girl success, or as has been coined in the Black community, “Black Girl Magic”.

Let us be unafraid of loud voices and defiant attitudes exhibited by our students, but seek to understand why and what supports may be needed. However, always remember that Sojourner Truth raised her voice, Fannie Lou Hamer was loud, Ida B. Wells was defiant, Angela Davis was loud, Gloria Anzaldúa was vocally critical, Joan Baez was defiant, Dolores Huerta was a loud voice for the voiceless, Nina Simone raised her voice in protest, Rigoberto Menchú Tum was defiant, Rosa Parks was defiant, Mary Talbert was loud and defiant, and Harriet Tubman had a “bad attitude and was defiant” as well as many other historical and contemporary heroines of color. We are grateful that the aforementioned social justice change agents were loud and defiant, as our country is better off as a result of their strengths and voices. Let us not silence, but help to mold and shape the strong voices of Black and Brown girls. We never know when one of those voices may help to positively uplift and change the course of human history!

Thank you,
Dr. Morrell,
Guardian of Equity
At Dr. Lydia T. Wright, we have endeavored to make our school a culturally responsive environment. We believe it is the foundation of good instruction and academic success for our students. We began with the realization that even with all its best efforts our school needed to be more student focused and culturally responsive. The school staff received professional development on what it would take to make their class environment, the school environment, their communication with parents and their instructional practices more inclusive of the students we serve. The goal is to make everyone feel valued and connected. We try to not just celebrate diversity, but empower students with disabilities and validate culture. It is vital to build relationships with students as well as families to encourage pride in race, heritage, ability level, and progress. We have worked as a school to focus on achieving an environment where students see themselves in their work and the school community around them. We have worked to partner with our parents because we know that this partnership is essential to building our school community.

To highlight how far we have grown, we would like to share examples from 3 of our classrooms:

**Ms. Blake, Special Education Teacher, Grades 2/3, 12:1:2 Classroom**

The Classroom Environment: The teacher endeavors to have a calm, student-centered and inviting classroom. The materials in the room “are not mine for the students to borrow. They belong to all of us.” Books and materials reflect the students in the room, the city of Buffalo, and the world. Students learn about and have books/materials that reflect the culture of our students. Books, dolls, puppets, and other materials serve as empowering instructional materials for our students who wear hijabs, wear leg braces, or who are in wheelchairs.

Disability Acceptance: Ms. Blake has changed common classroom phrases to make sure she is being inclusive. For example, she says “When we move down the hallway…” instead of using the word “walk,” since everyone may move differently. Students are aware of their personal goals, and track their own progress. When possible, peers assist students instead of adults. Another student may carry books, help with braces, or read to another student who is struggling so they are less dependent on adults. Students often come to the board to “teach,” the class. The physical progress of students is celebrated. Whether students get new braces, put their braces on independently or ride a bike in PT, the class is there to cheer them on. Physical differences (use of only one hand, using crutches, etc.) and academic differences are discussed openly and students can ask one another and the teacher questions. Students sometimes discuss their hospital stays or surgeries and compare experiences.

Celebrating Heritage and Culture: Ms. Blake ensures Read Alouds and topics are meaningful to students. Books are shared that are written by African American authors, women authors and the rights of all people are highlighted and discussed. Multilingual students have the opportunity to teach the class words or phrases in various languages if they choose. Spanish, Bengali, Arabic, Karen, Burmese, and Nepali are the languages students have spoken in the classroom within the last two years. Students can choose to share traditions or stories about their cultural heritage or native country if it pleases them to share.

Parent Involvement: In this classroom parents are seen as partners. Photos and videos of students are shared with parents on a regular basis. Each student makes a scrapbook at the end of the year. For our Kwanzaa Project (Nia), parents were asked to write a letter to their child telling them their hopes and dreams for their future. Students separately wrote a paragraph about their own plans for the future. Both letters were part of a visually pleasing Kwanzaa display.

**Mrs. Krull, Building Math Teacher, Grades 4-8**

Allowing Students to Have a Voice: Ms. Krull believes student voice is the key to learning and culturally responsive practices. She values the students’ perspective in learning. In her class, students can be seen working in groups to solve problems and explaining their thinking. Students show work and justify their answers. Students have a say in how the task is performed (play games, small group, independently). Allowing all students to have an opportunity to respond is a
goal in her class each day. Building relationships with the students so that they feel comfortable when they are in her classroom is very important. Recognizing student’s effort/success on a daily basis is critical to student success.

**Relevant Real World Problem Solving:** Mrs. Krull integrates real world problems. Student interests are considered when presenting word problems. Sometimes they are rewritten to ensure student interest. Their names are used in the problem and real world connections. Mrs. Krull turns math into rigorous math games through math Task cards, scavenger hunts, scoots, and vocabulary walks which encourage students’ movement. The importance of technology integration with Prodigy and gaming is evident.

**Welcoming Classroom Environment:** An inviting classroom with extra lights, plants, that is also clean, and well-organized, with pictures and a Peace Corner attends to students social and emotional needs. Students have an area in which they can go to calm down or to just have a quiet space to work. Students have access to the resources they need to be successful.

Mrs. Elliott, English Language Arts, Grades 7 & 8

**Welcoming Classroom Environment:** Mrs. Elliott uses small lamps in her room to alter the “classic” classroom environment; the goal is to create a comfortable atmosphere for student learning. This allows the students to feel ‘relaxed’ as they work on the material they are learning. This helps to shift the focus on the pressure of learning new, or difficult, material from intimidating to accessible.

**Student Interest:** To connect with her students, and to meet them ‘where they are’, Mrs. Elliott periodically uses social media references like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for sharing information. For example, she often use memes that will help her to explain complex concepts to the students in a way that they may better understand. This allows them the opportunity to access concepts better prior to module learning.

**Tying in students’ cultures and backgrounds:** Very often, Mrs. Elliott uses culturally relevant, current events to tie into the module learning experience. She allows students to think about how their academic work applies to real life. The use of culturally specific language/terms helps her students understand their purpose(s) for learning, which is an integral part of the learning process. Once students have found a personal purpose for learning, they tend to try harder, which, in turn, helps them apply themselves more.

**Teaching students to advocate for themselves:** Because of the transition to high school, it is important to Mrs. Elliott that all of her students have the ability to advocate for themselves and their education. She holds restorative groups for teachers and students to resolve conflicts; to help create a comfortable learning atmosphere for all parties involved. The key to teaching is fostering good working relationships; students can now take the lead during Restorative Circles. Students are also able to go to other homerooms to help facilitate Restorative Circles as a result. Mrs. Elliott encourages her students to take on leadership roles; to put themselves in uncomfortable situations so that they may feel empowered.

As a school, we continue to engage in activities that promote social justice and cultural responsiveness. Our December Faculty Meeting centered around tying instructional expectations to high expectations and monitoring our beliefs about the students we serve. We turn-keyed a portion of our Disproportionality session related to the book *Multiplication is for White people.* We have follow-up training to ensure our new and returning staff understand and implement our culturally responsive teaching goals scheduled for March.

Kudos to Mrs. Dabney and the great teachers at Dr. Lydia T. Wright School for outstanding efforts in implementing and engaging culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, which in the words of Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, “It’s just good teaching”. Keep up the great work!
celebrate Black History Month by honoring WNY’s unique Underground Railroad heritage and the freedom seekers who once traversed through the land on which we live today.

The mixed media collage was constructed by the one hundred plus scholars enrolled in the MBK program. The subject matter is based on inspiration they gained during summer fieldwork expeditions to Buffalo's Michigan Street African-American Heritage Corridor and the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center. We are proud to announce that on February 9, 2019, the MBK Freedom Collage was officially installed for display in the Education Exhibition Hallway at Buffalo's world-renowned Albright-Knox Art Gallery. The ceremony included scholars, parent and family members, Board of Education Members, teachers, and friends of MBK. The interactive display was featured from February 9th through 24th, 2019.

The MBK scholars included several layers of symbolism on the MBK Freedom Collage. Burlap represents a common material used for the storage and shipment of goods on the triangular trade routes. As our scholars learned at the Underground Railroad Heritage Center in Niagara Falls, NY, those who were enslaved also innovatively used burlap to make clothing as well as a variety of other items. The red, yellow, green, and black clothing scraps represent the colors of the freedom seekers’ homeland. The jean and colorless scraps represent the few types of clothing materials given to those who were enslaved on plantations. In joining these scraps of clothing, we represent the origin, depletion, and return to vibrant color patterns worn by the freedom seekers and their ancestors. The scraps of clothing were also inspired by our study of the colorful work of Gullah artist Diane Britton Dunham.

The drift wood seen hanging on, and beneath, the collage was collected on the rocky shores of Lake Erie near Broderick Park in the exact location where many freedom seekers crossed the swift paced Niagara River into Canada, many perishing in their attempt. This drift wood is soaked with the same water that soaked the many freedom seekers as they made their way across the border. The creek stones also seen at the bottom of our collage were borrowed, with permission, from a creek in Allegany County, NY on which, according to a local Seneca historian, freedom seekers traveled during the last segment of their journey with the help of local Seneca.

The scholars incorporated a broken chain link to honor and symbolize those who began their journey to freedom on the Underground Railroad the exact moment they broke free from their chains. With this chain link, we honored the Tula Monument of Curacao, the Path to Freedom Sculpture in Facer Park in Sandusky, Ohio, and the Emancipation Statue in Barbados, all of which we studied for inspiration and all of which incorporated chains or broken chains in their symbolic tributes. We pressed on a hand print to allow our MBK scholars to imagine themselves as a freedom seeker, pushing up on the ground below, using any remaining strength to continue the courageous journey to freedom. And, finally, to complete their collage, each scholar wrote the word freedom in their preferred or home language.

The MBK Freedom Collage reinforces the value of gaining deeper knowledge about WNY’s Underground Railroad heritage while adding another layer of creative, visible learning artifacts to the portfolios of the young men of color in the MBK Male Academy. An educational best practice in terms of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (CLRT) is to eradicate disempowering and disengaging curriculum orientations, such as outdated teacher centered instruction and many common forms of formative, summative, and standardized test instruments. The MBK Freedom Collage provided an ideal creative assessment of our scholars learning and offered all our scholars the opportunity to demonstrate newly gained background knowledge in living color and texture. Moreover, their work provides a personalized gift to our community for Black History Month 2019 and therefore reflects the MBK goal of community service and outreach as outlined in our MBK Creed.

We have been tweeting out reports and pictures of the project and our daily accomplishments have received praise and
ongoing support from the Buffalo Schools Parent Teacher Organization, Mayor Byron Brown, NYSED Commissioner MaryEllen Elia and former United States Secretary of Education Dr. John King.

We are honored that many notable BPS community members added to the MBK Freedom Collage. This includes Board of Education Vice President of Student Achievement, Dr. Theresa A. Harris-Tigg, Park District Board Member, Mr. Louis Petrucci, and our Superintendent, Dr. Kriner Cash. This has been an amazing experience for our scholars in terms of schooling and the celebration of the visible products of their learning.
Over 800 middle school students from ten schools in our district are enrolled in the Global Scholars program. This program provides the opportunity for our young scholars to collaborate with students from 50 cities in 25 different countries around the world. Collaborations of 8-10 classrooms from different cities work together to examine current global issues, sharing local commonalities and proposing solutions to these problems. The program culminates with a community action project in the spring. Students who participate in Global Scholars gain appreciation for diversity, cultural understanding, global knowledge and engagement. Students also build and strengthen their digital literacy, communication, and problem solving skills.

Thanks to the hard work of teachers, students in Buffalo are showcasing our city on a digital global discussion board via posts, replies, and sharing digital projects. The curricular activities this year are focused on the water system including daily usage and waste in our city and throughout the world. Participating students have researched their water footprint, completed school water audits and discussed ways to conserve water.

Teachers have taken global engagement and cultural understanding to the next level by researching, presenting, and facilitating live video Skype lessons with classrooms outside of Buffalo. Michele Shinners and Elizabeth Curtis from School 93 and their students did a wonderful job in two such lessons this year with classrooms in Paris, France and Genoa, Italy. Melissa Eggleston’s students at School 45 also shined during their Skype with students from San Diego. Marcus Anderson and Peter Zona’s classroom at School 59 erased miles while communicating naturally with students from Madrid, Spain. Most recently, the sixth grade Global Scholars students from School 81 took part in a Skype with fifth graders in London, England. Teachers Kristin Golding and Kara Williams’ students represented our city well conversing with their peers in a culturally responsive and articulate manner. Students love these Skype experiences which provide them with the opportunity to speak “face-to-face” with young people all around the world, learning about their daily lives. They are often surprised to discover how many things they have in common!

Buffalo Public School 81’s Skype with London, England

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkdYjc9SYiE
When it comes to effective parent-teacher communication to support student success, particularly students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, parents and educators may conceptualize this idea through unique lenses. Beliefs, customs, values, language, availability, trust, etc. are all important factors that if not proactively acknowledged and addressed, may create communication barriers.

Although we are at the halfway point of the school year, if you have not already established sound communication practices with parents, it’s not too late! Over the next few months, we will explore critical keys to enhance effective communication and strengthen the home-school connection.

KEY 1-BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS
Positively communicate with parents and caregivers inviting a reciprocal partnership to benefit their children. Explain your preferred method of communication and determine theirs. McGinty and Mendoza-Reis advise that educators also acknowledge the perceived power differential between parents and teachers, especially when working with culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Negative past experiences (as either a student or a parent), immigration status, different cultural norms and expectations, lack of English language fluency, among other things, can exacerbate parental discomfort and the inclination to disengage from the school context. The use of parent engagement liaisons may offset some of the perceived power differential, as can genuinely acknowledging the many barriers and constraints that parents may have to overcome just to make it to a meeting or parent-teacher conference. As you work to build a respectful and trusting relationship with parents and caregivers, exercise discretion and avoid discussing students with other parents or engaging in any negative student/parent-talk with colleagues.

KEY 2-SETTING EXPECTATIONS
Let parents and caregivers know that you value their questions and feedback. Decide when you intend to receive and return phone calls, emails and also when you’re available for school visits. It’s important to be available during those established times. Provide this information in your newsletters. Earmarking designated times and sticking to them provide consistency and also eliminate the need for parents to grab your ear in the parking lot or to monopolize your attention outside your classroom door before or after school.

Next month will explore the Key – Timely Communication

March is Women’s History month, and an ideal time to celebrate women athletes of color. Many women of color have helped to open barriers for women to participate in athletics.

**Althea Gibson** was the first woman of color to win a Grand Slam (the French Open in 1956) in both singles and doubles and went on to win Wimbledon, the US Nationals and won a total of 11 Grand Slam tournaments. She broke barriers for both women and people of color in tennis. Gibson stated, “Shaking hands with the Queen of England was a long way from being forced to sit in the colored section of the bus going into downtown Wilmington, North Carolina.” After retiring from tennis she played golf professionally needing to change in her car at some tournaments since many clubhouses were segregated. Gibson was arguably the best American female tennis player until the Williams sisters (Serena and Venus). After retiring from tennis, Gibson played golf professionally becoming one of American golf’s top 50 earners despite the challenges she faced due to racism and sexism.

**Lisa Fernandez**, daughter of Cuban and Puerto Rican parents, was widely regarded as the best softball player in the world. In her first outing as a pitcher at age 8 she walked numerous batters and her team lost 25-0. At the age of 12 a noted pitching coach told her she would never be an elite pitcher since her arms were too short and she was ready to give up. Her mother told her, “If you ever let someone in life tell what you can and cannot do, you’ll never make it.” Lisa worked harder, becoming the softball pitcher who led UCLA to two NCAA national championships in 1990 and 1992. She also took home three Olympic gold medals while setting an Olympic record by striking out 25 batters in a single game. After retiring from playing, she served as an assistant coach at her alma mater, UCLA.

Locally, **Felisha Legette-Jack**, began her career in basketball as star player at Nottingham High School and Syracuse University. She worked 12 years as a college basketball assistant coach before serving as head coach of two different programs before being fired from Indiana in 2012. At that point she applied for every assistant coach position that was open but there were no takers. The University at Buffalo ended up giving her a second chance when no one else would. At UB, a mid-major program, she has grown from an emotional leader to a motivational leader pushing her 2018 team to an At-Large NCAA bid and a Sweet 16 appearance. Legette-Jack has said what anchors her is the relationships with players and that women use their voice. It’s unfortunate a lot of women don’t get opportunities not because they’re not great enough but because they don’t speak up enough. Currently 45% of Division 1 players are black women, while just 10.9 percent of coaches are black women.

While it is important to note that Title IX has opened up opportunities for women in athletics, inequities still exist in society. Opportunities to participate in high school sports has improved, yet it is still an unequal field as the figures from the 2015-16 school year showed that 3.32 million girls participated compared to 4.54 million boys as cited by the National Women’s Law Center (NWLC). The inequities are particularly true for women of color who have the lowest participation rates.

Among the benefits of participation in athletics for females are:

- Greater academic success
- Increased career opportunities
- Greater incidence of responsible social behaviors
- Improved health outcomes
- Improved mental health and increased personal skills

Over the past forty years, Title IX has dramatically increased opportunities for women to participate in sports with a tenfold increase in participation in high school sports and a six times increase in participation in collegiate athletics. Yet participation rates of women of color lag behind those of men and white women. Young women of color need equal representation in athletics as participants, coaches and athletic administrators. With March as Women History month, let us continue to promote athletic participation by all young women, but especially for women of color.
Culturally Relevant Science

Engagement is the first STEP to Interest. Students at Dr. Charles Drew Science Magnet using thermal imaging with Praxair.

Culturally relevant science instruction can take your science teaching to the next level, where your students, and especially your underrepresented students, find what you’re teaching engaging and relevant to their lives. In order to do this, you should not change the science content; instead, you need to modify your teaching to be culturally relevant.

As a teacher, instructing science under the new New York State P-12 Science Learning Standards (NYSSLS) you should already be providing hands-on, inquiry-based science experiments, which will increase achievement through engagement; but you also need to ask yourself if your lessons speak to the diversity of the students that you are teaching. Are your lessons culturally relevant? When you set high expectations for students, which can be as simple as calling them “scientists” no matter what their age is, it shows that you, as their teacher believe they can achieve great things. They feel valued. Secondly, many students of color have spent their entire lives trying to fit into a dominant culture and/or understand science through a dominant culture, while their own culture has been suppressed, oppressed, and devalued in the field. This has a profound affect on your students learning and appreciation of science.

So how do you apply culturally relevant teaching to science?

• For starters, be willing to look at your own beliefs and biases toward others. In the process, you might even find ways to mitigate the global stereotype that all scientists are White males that wear glasses and like to blow things up in the laboratory (Finson, 2002).

• You might think about how science has historically been done by and for men, and how this has shaped the field? How might a discussion about this change the way our students view and learn science? Let’s use genetics as an example:

• While genetics education might start
with Gregor Mendel, communities like the Native Americans have been doing experiments on corn for thousands of years but didn’t write down their findings because they followed an oral tradition. How might a Native student who brings this prior knowledge into the classroom then respond to a teacher who posits Mendel as the founder of genetics?

• A second genetics lesson may not focus on Gregor Mendel, but around researchers of color: Priya Moorjani, a geneticist who has used genomic data to understand the origins of the Indian caste system; Kono Yasui, a biologist who researched the genetics of several plant species; or Rick Kittles who used genetics to trace the ancestry of African Americans. Or you might choose a woman like Barbara McClintock who won the Nobel Prize for her work in genetics.

• You should infuse issues of social justice in your lessons and science activities. One example involves teaching students’ science vocabulary. Author Zanetta Hammond suggests making a game of it, making the activity a social one, or “storifying” it. This strategy employs the techniques of oral traditions: listening, repetition, memorization and learning which are common to many cultures.

• Group work; many communities of color often share a history where they pool their resources and value their community. Creating groups where students can socialize and work together is not only inclusive of all cultures, but models the collaborative nature of scientific work.

• You can help students make connections between the science content, the contributions made by underrepresented scientists, and your students’ lives. This does not mean you change the science content. But you can incorporate data, photos, examples, and information from different cultures into each lesson so multicultural science education is occurring, as opposed to being taught in isolation.

• If you are working with African-American learners, you could talk about and show photos of prominent African-American scientists (e.g., biologists Ernest Just and Dr. Charles Drew), show data and graphs of diseases that disproportionately affect African Americans, or provide examples of scientific research that has been unjustly done to African Americans (e.g., Tuskegee experiment) as a result of racism.

• By utilizing the techniques of science, such as the scientific method, arguing from evidence, and problem solving you can elucidate and challenge stereotypes and prejudices. The key is that you are incorporating different perspectives and creating an inclusive, relevant, and supportive environment for learners from various backgrounds.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgB-Diy8imo

STEM Video
It is human nature to want to feel a sense of belonging. We want to feel like we fit in and that we can connect with those around us. If you think back to a time when you were in a situation where you did not feel quite comfortable, what words would you use to describe how you felt? When people are asked this question, some common themes emerge: a new setting, feeling different than everyone else, others who are unwelcoming or unfriendly, not knowing anyone. For our students, their responses may be quite similar. This is why “Creating a Welcoming Environment” serves as the cornerstone to our District’s High Leverage Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategies.

In Chapter 6, “I Don’t Like It When They Don’t Say My Name Right”: Why “Reforming” Can’t Mean “Whitening,” Lisa Delpit emphasizes the importance of forming connections and bonds with students. She begins the chapter with a very thorough historical journey of how the desegregation of schools resulted in pushing out of an overwhelming amount of Black educators. Black educators were often unjustifiably fired, laid off, or forced to resign or retire. The impact was primarily felt by urban districts and schools with high percentages of Black students. Inexperienced teachers, usually White, were often hired to fill the “open” positions, which created the additional problem of a high transience rate with teachers. As new teachers gained more experience, they frequently left to take positions in different districts, further creating more open positions.

This has created a ripple effect that is still seen in education today. In our own district, where around 80% of the student population is represented by non-White students, an overwhelming majority of our educators are White. This is not to say that a White educator cannot connect, understand, or effectively teach students of color. But it is to highlight that there are at least some lived experiences that will be different. As Delpit writes, “When a child cannot connect the attitude and perspectives of a teacher with the attitudes and perspectives of community people who love him, understanding suffers” (p. 115).

Building meaningful relationships and forming strong connections with students who are of a different race, ethnicity, culture, and/or background from yourself are not impossible, nor are they difficult. But it does take effort on the part of the educator and also a mindset of creating a welcoming environment and a culturally inclusive classroom. To conclude this article, a selection of “Look Fors” from our District’s High-Leverage CLRT Strategies have been highlighted that parallel the essence of Lisa Delpit’s Chapter 6:

- The teacher knows students’ names and can pronounce them correctly
- Images, symbols, artifacts, and role models displayed represent the diversity of the students being taught
- Multilingual labels of classroom items
- The teacher values and encourages the use of students’ home languages (translanguaging)
- The teacher makes connections between the cultures and backgrounds of the students and the curriculum being taught

Reflective Question:
- Many CLRT professional development sessions begin with a discussion of group norms. These include:
  - Listen to understand
  - Be patient and speak your truth
  - Avoid assumptions

How can you relate these norms to creating a welcoming environment and a culturally inclusive classroom?

Source:
School 6 hosted a Multicultural Night event for students, staff, and families on Wednesday January 23rd. It was a true celebration of the diversity at B.E.S.T. with dozens of multicultural dishes cooked by staff and families, live music, local vendors, and a soccer shoot-out! Many families attended and learned all about the cultures and languages of the students at School 6! Students who have recently transitioned to some of our Buffalo area high schools also attended! The sense of family and community is robust at B.E.S.T.!

Each hallway represented a different continent including Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America. Tables were set up for each country or culture represented, and a spokesperson sat at each one, waiting to share with visitors. School 6 is home to a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds so it is quite international in nature. Throughout the evening, students were excited to share their varying customs, traditional cultural dress and music.

Students created posters highlighting the different countries from those specific continents, and a video project was created by 3rd and 4th grade ELLs in Stand-Alone classes. The projects showcased their journey to the United States. Projects that empower students to share where they come from and what has shaped them throughout their lives are so impactful. Teachers have the ability to give students such a sense of voice; the teachers at School 6 were instrumental in encouraging their students to share!

This event truly was a great success in welcoming families and learning about the cultures represented by many of the students at School 6!

Photo credit: Karen Piotrowski (Principal of Buffalo Elementary School of Technology), Danika Johnson (ENL Teacher) and Alicia Brown (ENL Teacher)
Women’s History Month

From the very beginning, women have demonstrated strength and power unlike any other. As we live out the month of March, let us remember all that women have done to help us in our personal lives, in our schools, in our communities, and in our country. Many women have come forward, fought, bled, stood up, and even died for social justice, not only for gender issues, but for humanity as a whole. With each generation, women have raised the bar for how they are treated, where they can go, and what they can do. They have demonstrated what unity can build up and even tear down. Many women have successfully fought and won battles to equalize the playing field for women in almost every realm of human endeavor. These struggles for equality are exemplars of female empowerment and have positively shaped our nation and world for generations to come. Many of the world’s problems have been solved by women who took a stand for humanity, creating and telling their own stories through tremendous work and efforts.

This picture page is a tribute which demonstrates the hardships, triumphs, fights, and the victories of queens throughout time. Let each picture sink in and resound with honor.

Peace, until we meet again,

By: A Voice for the People
Current Events:

MBK Male Academy: Saturday, March 2, 2019 @ McKinley High School, 9:00am – 3:00pm, “All Our Relations”, Featuring Native American Community Services President, Pete Hill.

Our Story Project Saturday Academy, March 2, (East, Middle Early College, McKinley) All @McKinley for Social Justice Workshop with Dr. Jevon Hunter, 9:00am-12:00pm.

TAC-D Disproportionality/ Culturally Responsive Education Training @ West Hertel 8:15-3:00
Group A, March 5th
Group B, March 6th
Group C, March 7th

CLRT Work Group March 8th, @ Riverside Room 330, 3:00-4:00

Our Story Project Saturday Academy, March 9, (East, Middle Early College, McKinley) All @ East 9:00am-12:00pm

CLRT Districtwide Teacher Training for Teachers in grades PK and K (Day 2): March 12th, 13th, &14th @ East, 8:15 am-3:30pm

MBK Male Academy: Saturday, March 16th, 2019 @ McKinley High School, 9:00am – 3:00pm

URBAN FORUM: March 19th, @ East Community High School, 8:15-3:30, Featuring Dr. Tyrone Howard, Griot Brandon Brown

MBK Male Academy Family Culmination Ceremony and Luncheon: March 23, 2019 @ McKinley 10:00am-2:00pm