

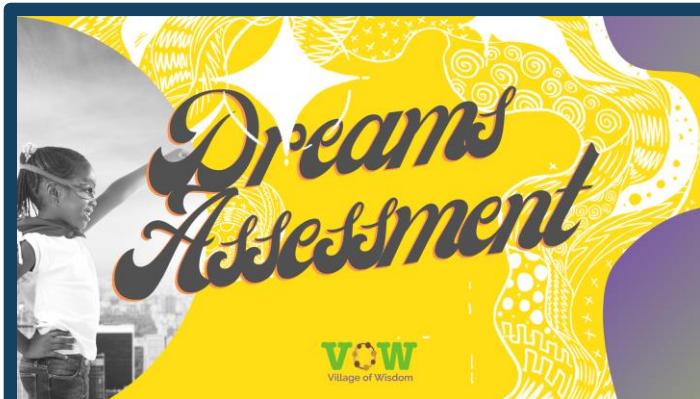


Dreams Assessment Model and Dream-andments Outline how Black Students can Thrive

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A teacher decided to ask a group of Black students to share their dreams of an ideal school while sitting in a segregated classroom in North Carolina six decades ago (Library of Congress, n.d.). It was not surprising that these young people compared their dreams to those of their white peers and realized these peers had everything they could imagine in school, while they did not.

Despite the legal end to segregation in 1972, Black students in North Carolina are more likely to be enrolled in and attend high-poverty schools. For example, close to 77 percent of students of color attend under-resourced and high-poverty schools in North Carolina, compared to just 23 percent of white studentsⁱ.



Black students are less likely to be referred into academic and intellectually gifted opportunities and advanced courses despite receiving the same scores on the state's end-of-grade exams as their non-Black peers. In addition, Black students, on average, miss more days of school and learning due to disproportionate discipline.

"A Dreams Assessment, Time to Turn Dreams into Systems Change for Black Families and Young People to Thrive."

Highlights

Community Researchers can drive transformative research methodologies to address racial justice.

Village of Wisdom guided new Community Researchers to develop a dream plan.

The process equipped community members with a set of tools needed to organize, advocate, and advance equity.

Collectively, attending under resourced schools, not having access to academically gifted opportunities and advanced courses, and missing instruction defer the dreams of Black students and amplify the opportunity gap. Unfortunately, this opportunity gap extends into barriers to college access and employment.

The decades of dreaming of equity in education among Black families, the barriers Black students face in education access and opportunities, continue to inspire inter-generational movements and Village of Wisdom's Dreams Assessment Model.

Dreams Assessment centers the dreams of a community and builds their capacity to inform and drive the change they seek, and the solutions needed to address education inequities. Village of Wisdom, a nonprofit organization in Durham, North Carolina, designed their own Dreams Assessment to position Black parents as researchers and to translate research findings into tools for action. These tools for action became a series of *Dreamandments*, policies and conditions needed for Black learners to thrive in education.

Methods

Using appreciative inquiry and other transformative research approaches, Village of Wisdom prepared Black parents to become Community Researchers, identifying the dreams of Black students, and understanding how these dreams translated into ideal and culturally affirming learning conditions. These Black parents were five mothers who participated in a year-long experience from the height of COVID-19 in late spring of 2020 to the summer of 2021. The Parent Researchers led focus groups with Black students, parents of Black students, and teachers to understand their dreams for learning during COVID and beyond. Findings from the focus groups included a synthesis of this collection of dreams into a list of conditions needed for Black learners to thrive. These conditions can now serve as a marker of accountability for school districts and community leaders.

Results

- Black parents were credentialed as Community Researchers and as co-authors. Their work informs the instructional decisions of teachers, education, and community leaders.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Community Psychology acknowledges interconnected systems and how these systems can inhibit or promote the well-being of individuals. Community-based participatory and action research in Community Psychology and, more recently, transformative and decolonized methodologies are aligned with the field's values for empowerment, social justice, and research as action and praxis. Putting individuals in a "dreams" orientation versus a "needs" orientation can shift mental states and disrupts systems that see Black and Brown communities from a place of inferiority, deficit, or deviance. In translating findings from the Dreams Assessment into a list of *Dreamandments*, Community Researchers can identify where actionable change can occur from the policy level to new practices adopted in classrooms.

- The Community Researchers developed a 10-point plan outlining the conditions needed to build more racially equitable policies and practices in education. Black parents then created a toolkit that provided culturally affirming learning strategies for parents and educators.
- A replicable and adapted Dreams Assessment Model can be used across the nation and in other communities.

What Does This Mean For?

Research and Evaluation: A Dreams Assessment Model provided a way for Community Researchers to identify dreams community members hold for themselves, their neighborhoods, and institutions within their communities. Researchers can reduce ecological fallacy when working with community members most proximal to the issue and by relying on their expert knowledge to translate research into actional change in policy and practice. Inferences deduced from research are now driven and informed by community members—thus building the collective capacity to not only enact change but to sustain change over time.

Practice: Village of Wisdom, a nonprofit situated in the heart of a Black community in Durham, North Carolina seeks to demonstrate how research translates into praxis and transformative outcomes when it honors a community-driven approach. Village of Wisdom builds community power through experiential learning. Village of Wisdom tapped into Black parents' sense of agency, broader efficacy, and identities as researchers.

Social Action: The Dreams Assessment Model implemented by Village of Wisdom led to the translating of findings into Dreamandments, outlining a series of conditions needed for Black students to thrive in the local school system. Village of Wisdom is working with nonprofits and organizations to align the Dreamandments with advocacy at the local and state level. This alignment is closely linked to building the critical mass needed to see some of these Dreamandments take form. Some of these Dreamandments will be translated into policy briefs and inform the decision-making structure of schools, school districts and community advocacy. These Dreamandments will continue to guide Village of Wisdom's programming, tool development, and advance the broader aim of building more culturally affirming learning environments across North Carolina and the nation.

Similar Settings: Black and Brown communities may feel pressured to pay attention to the concerns of their everyday reality, contending with both real and perceived danger, and see dreaming as a luxury or a process they are unable to explore. The Dreams Assessment Model holds space and encourages participants to translate an imagined world into reality. The result is community power, conditions and solutions identified, and a vision that allows community members to hold schools, and education and community leaders accountable to these dreams.

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ⁱ Oakes, J., Cookson, P., Levin, S., Carver-Thomas, D., Frelow, F., Berry, B., Yang, M., George, J., Brooks, J., & Guin, S. (2019). Providing an equal opportunity for a sound basic education in North Carolina's high-poverty schools: Assessing needs and opportunities. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.