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Open Letter to President Barack Obama **From: Educators and Activists of African Ancestry**

(Sign below)

November 7, 2012

Dear President Barack Obama,

Educators and Activists of African Ancestry are a nationwide group of educators in the public and private education sectors representing the full spectrum of pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, teacher preparation and administration.

For several years we have collaborated to promote a National Black Education Agenda with specific emphasis upon the advancement of Academic and Cultural Excellence for people of African ancestry. Because there are inextricable connections between the best interests of our nation, revitalizing our urban communities and the educational futures of African Americans, we believe this policy agenda will benefit the entire society.

The state of emergency of our national education system persists, i.e., unproven charter schools, “parent triggers,” the rapidly escalating privatization and corporatization of education and the inevitable relegation of a substantial portion of students to second and third class training for peonage to corporations. We strongly urge that you implement these recommendations to stem the crisis of education in African American communities to benefit our entire nation in social, political and economic development.

To address this crisis, it is our contention that our nation needs a new National Education Policy that views Education as a Human Right. A major goal is to include affirmative cultural and heritage knowledge of all youth and families—rather than the current curricula that may include diverse others, but remains centered on the experiences of Europeans and Euro-Americans.

“The human right to education guarantees every child access to quality schools and services without discrimination, including quality teachers and curricula, and safe and welcoming school environments that respect human dignity. Education must be aimed at each child to participate in society and do work that is rewarding” (The National Economic and Social Rights Initiative- NESRI- www.nesri.org).

Teachers and administrators serving African American students must be trained in the history and cultures of those students and their communities.

Mr. President, below we offer ten fundamental policy recommendations to make real the promises of a truly egalitarian national education system for Academic and Cultural Excellence

and civic responsibility. These policy recommendations serve as a starting point, a basis, a foundation—not an exhaustive list of ideas, nor all that should encompass a national education system. For the well being of the entire nation, but also in the particular interest of students of African ancestry and other underserved students of color, we call upon you, President Obama to introduce an Education Rights Act whose purpose shall be to repeal and replace the NCLB legislation with a national policy that views Education as a Human Right and therefore, includes funding for the respective states in these policy areas:

1. ***Curriculum Development, Research & Evaluation:*** Revised anti-racist, complete, culturally competent curriculum materials to assure truthfulness regarding the crime of slavery and post-slavery in America, and to engage in research to evaluate the relationship among truthful, anti-racist curriculum, pedagogy and student achievement -- pre-K through high school. This includes acknowledgement of the cultural soundness of English Language Learners and speakers of African-American English (a home language in many Africa American homes). While Standard U.S. English should be taught as necessary for broad discourse, teachers should also recognize Black English as a cultural fact and not devalue it. This means that students would learn to code switch on appropriate occasions such as job interviews or scholarship interviews.
 2. ***Schools provide the full range of comprehensive curricula, classes and personal development,*** so that all students have access to, i.e., grade-appropriate STEM classes and 5-days-a-week access to 2 hours per day of physical education and creative arts. All schools that receive taxpayer dollars must be prohibited from discriminatory practices, in terms of admissions and retention, against students with education challenges, notably “special education” and students whose primary language is not English.
 3. ***Charter schools:*** Enact a mandate from the US Department of Education to ensure that Charter schools serve as transitional laboratories for innovation that systematically share methodological and other successes. Charter schools should be structured so that they do not drain resources from or contribute to the demise of local public schools and are not controlled by corporations. Charter schools should be funded solely through public funds
 4. ***Academic performance evaluations and policy decisions should be based on comprehensive assessments,*** not solely on mind-numbing high-stakes testing. Such evaluations must encompass documented interventions to assist educators and parents to maximize students’ academic outcomes.
- High-stakes testing has been thoroughly documented to show that these norm-referenced tests measure very little about students’ intellectual acumen. They, in fact, are reflections of students’ socio-economic status, their level of Eurocentric acculturation, while minimizing critical-thinking skills and maximizing their use as a main teacher evaluation tool.
5. ***Teacher Training/Methodology, Recruitment and Leadership Training:*** Teachers prepared at undergraduate and post-graduate levels to teach the revised curriculum; to help educators understand their own biases toward students of African ancestry and other underserved students of color and the effects of those biases on student achievement. In addition, to help reverse the trend of shrinking numbers of African American educators, a national policy needs to be implemented to help recruit *and* retain African American educators.
 6. ***Police in Schools:*** Enact a mandate from the US Dept. of Education that immediately removes the presence and authority of the local police department-directly or indirectly-as

security agents in public school buildings. Fully fund and coordinate a national program to assist students, educators and parents in creating local school safety policies and practices that more humanely address the social/emotional and safety issues that arise in schools.

7. ***Military Presence in Our Schools:*** Remove all military presence on school grounds and eliminate the solicitation of new recruits on school grounds. Military recruiters target poor communities creating an “economic draft.”

8. ***Parent and Student Unions for Community-Based Decision Making:*** Support parent and student responsibility in the education process, enact a mandate from the US Department of Education to develop parent and student organizations and to require the participation of parent, student and community-selected education advocates in all decision-making aspects of K-12 education processes.

9. ***Green Schools for All:*** Provide for the building of new and the repair of old schools in urban, suburban and rural areas that will become “State-of-the-Art” Green schools fully equipped with technology and meaningful curricula to prepare all students for productive work, healthy living and civic responsibility as global citizens.

10. ***Adult Education Programs:*** Provide adult education programs that address the educational needs of out-of-school youth, adults, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, and to prepare our workforce for democratic participation in the economy, including the new technological and environmental challenges we currently face and will face.

11. ***Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):*** To strengthen and preserve HBCUs as they continue to have higher retention and graduation rates for students of African ancestry.

12. ***Office of Educational Equity:*** Establish the ***Office of Educational Equity*** to implement and monitor, conduct research and evaluate the above recommendations.

Educators of African Ancestry have the recognized curriculum, pedagogical techniques, education systems models and requisite resources to assist in the creation of a new national education system.

We are a highly knowledgeable and experienced group of people who are ready right now to assist!

Our children are not the problem! We are the solution!

*(Sign on Adjacent pages or go to the NBEA—Black Education Now website:
<http://blackeducationnow.org>)*



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