

PSC-ED-OUS

Moderator: Courtney Gilmore
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03:00 pm CT

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. We will now begin the conference call. At this time, all participants' line will be in listen-only mode until the Question and Answer session at the end of the presentation of today's conference.

During that time, if you would like to ask a question, you may press star and then 1. This call is being recorded, if you have any objections, you may disconnect at this point. Now I will turn the meeting over to your host, Ms. Khalilah Harris Ma'am you may now begin.

Khalilah Harris: Good afternoon everyone on the East coast and good morning - I guess it's also afternoon on the West coast, so thank everyone for joining us. I'm Khalilah Harris. I'm the deputy director at the White House initiative on educational excellence for African American.

I bring greetings from (David John) who had a flight delay and won't be able to join us this afternoon. But I wanted to welcome you and make you aware that the Whitehouse initiative on Educational excellence for African American

has been hosting a series of webinars this year to ensure that we have additional opportunities to engage to public. A two-way communication about critical issues impacting scholars from our community and this particular webinar is critically important especially in light of the Supreme Court's decision on Friday to honor gay marriage.

We are hosting this webinar in commemoration of national pride month and have some amazing guest who you'll hear about in a moment. A part of our work in the initiatives is to support the president advisory commission on educational excellence for African American. And our moderator for this afternoon is one of our commissioners who have been a staunch partner and advocate for African American and particularly African American who are in the LGBT community.

Commissioner Sharon Lettman-Hicks is known as a master strategist and a forward thinker on matters concerning the African American community in January 2014. She was appointed to our commission. She has been recognized for her vision, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit, political savvy and strategic communication skills on various issues ranging from economic empowerment and education, to voting in human rights.

She has unequivocally exhibited her ability to form cohesive leadership teams within organization and build collaborative advocacy coalitions among diverse stakeholders.

She's a nationally recognize leaders who thrive on challenges and seeks to develop leadership in others. Her rally and cry is "own your own power". In October 2009, Sharon assumed a role of executive director and chief executive officer of the National Black Justice coalition which is a civil right

organization dedicated to empowering Black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

And since 2003 NBJC has provided leadership at the inter-section of civil rights groups and LGBT organizations advocating for the unique challenges and needs of the African American LGBT community that are often relegated to the sidelines.

So it's my distinct honor to welcome Commissioner Sharon Lettman-Hicks as our moderator and I'm going to turn this webinar over to her.

Sharon Lettman-Hicks: Thank you (Khalilah) and (Vicky) for that gracious introduction. Again this conversation is going to be about supporting the academic excellence of LGBT Q youths in schools and to applaud the recognition that this is LGBT pride month as stated by (Khalilah).

We're excited to be using this webinar to further engage in a meaningful dialogue on issues concerning one of our most undeserved communities like LGBT Q youth.

A little about the National Black Justice Coalition. We are a civil rights organization dedicated to the empowerment of the Black Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender community. And I wish this to end racism and homophobia.

And as America's leading national Black LGBT civil rights organization focused on federal public policy, it is fitting for us to have that partnership today with the Whitehouse initiative on educational excellence for African American.

And in this space, we take seriously our charge to lead the conversation of Black family, and to strengthening the bond and bridging the gap between the movement of racial justice and LGBT equality.

And ultimately NBJC envision the role that all people are fully empowered to participate safely openly and honestly in family, state and community as well as the late class, gender identity or sexual orientation.

And within the African American community itself, there is substantial need to address critical issues of impact to the black LGBT Q population including efforts to foster acceptance and respect for our own (unintelligible) our own family which brings us to the conversation today.

NBJC has been - has made celebrating and empowering the Black family and the diversity of it as a central component of its efforts as an organization. And we see the Black LGBT population issues, equaling black family issues.

So today, we are focused on Black LGBT students and youth. Substantial to the systematic barriers keep millions of American children from obtaining a safe, quality education. The key barriers to a good education for these young people are unsafe, K2 through 12 schools, under resource schools, the school to present pipeline and barriers to education.

Also LGBT use a couple of safe and increased risk of homelessness. Research show that African American and Native American young people are over representative amongst LGBT homeless youth as well as the broader homeless population.

One study found that among homeless youth who were identified as gay or lesbian, 44% identified as black and homelessness among LGBT youth is

often a result of family rejection and these young people are forced out of their homes by their parents because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Among the consequences, the homelessness of these young people is the difficulty completing school. Because of educational barriers LGBT youths of color often are not academically prepared to apply to or attend a post-secondary educational institution. So those LGBT students of color who are able to pursue higher education are often limited by financial barriers, an unsupported campus client and a lack of institutional support that can play a large role of whether this student can complete his or her study.

So we're going to have a robust conversation from four amazing individuals that have taken the time with us today and I want to briefly introduce our distinguished panel.

First we will have Dr. Eliza Byard, who is the executive director of GLSEN, the group of the Gays, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, an organization known worldwide as an innovative leader in education, youth development and civil rights sector, fighting to end bias-based bullying, violence and discrimination in K through 12 schools and promote a culture of respect for all.

Then we will have Tim'm West who is the managing director of LGBTQ community initiative for Teach for America, an organization with a mission to enlist, develop and mobilize our nation's most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellence.

And then we will have Samantha Masters who is the little African American leadership and engagement specialist at (Camp Heronwood) and most recently the youth and campus engagement manager at the Human Rights campaign.

And last but certainly not the least; we will have Jessica Pierce who is a national coach of the Black Youth Project, better known as BYP. BYP is an activist member-based organization of Black activist ages 18 to 35 dedicated to creating justice and freedom for all black people. With building a collective of young black leaders throughout the nation focused on transformative leadership development, non-violent direct action, organizing advocacy and education.

And a shameless plug about Samantha and Jessica, they are both part of the NBJC 2015 cohorts of 100 Black LGBTQ emerging leaders to watch which a consortium of standout leaders is who self-identify as black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming and/or same gender learning.

Our distinguished panel represent both community base and non-profit private sectors and will help address multiple issues including the interactions of race, class and sexuality, the roles of youth activism and the challenges faced by educators and school administrators in their effort to support LGBTQ youth in school.

The discussion will also address best practices and ways in which communities and schools can collaborate to better support African American student in the LGBT community.

So I will yield at this point and turn the mic over to Dr. Eliza Byard.

Eliza Byard: Sharon thank you so very much and thank you to all of the participants in this call and my fellow panelist. It's truly an honor to be here with you today. I am going to take my 5-minutes to frame the issue of how one can look holistically at creating safer school climates for African American LGBTQ youth and some of the very specific challenges and considerations facing this component of the LGBTQ community and these individual young people as the complex and whole people that they are.

GLSEN, the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. We've been working for 25 years to transform K through 12 school environments to try to achieve that culture of respect for all.

So with respect to the context for this discussion, for African American LGBTQ youth and their other LGBTQ peers, there is currently still an environment - a generalized environment of anti-LGBT bias and violence in our schools.

And you can see the problem for these young people is that, simply thinking about the one facet of their identity as LGBTQ youth, they are facing prevalent, pervasive verbal harassment. They are hearing casual use of homophobic remarks and because of this experience, 30% of that population in general missed at least one day of school in the past month because they simply felt too unsafe to go.

As one might expect, this has very specific implications for their academic achievement and their personal wellbeing. And we see this environment is generally true for African American LGBTQ youth as it is for other LGBTQ youth.

The bias and violence they face has a concrete impact on their grade point averages, it means that students who are experiencing this report they are much less likely to plan to graduate from high school and go on to college and they are in answering panels of questions they express having lower self-esteem.

They also have, as we have begun to illuminate through further research and many have indicated from their experience, they have much higher vulnerability to drop out and push out factors.

These students go to school every day expecting to and in fact experiencing violence and harassment. And as a result, school is not a place that they want to be.

What we see beyond this general description of LGBT youth experience is that for African American LGBTQ youth, they face numerous additional pressures as many of our panelists today can amplify.

I will put it to some of its simplest terms just in the way that (Dante) a high school senior put it, you have to pick whether you're going to be black or gay when you're facing pressure from a community, you're facing pressure from all sides to declare who you are and how you're going to be. And you're being attacked on both bases, if you're gay, if you're black; these are all ways that you're feeling like you are in jeopardy.

This experience, the double whammy of this means that you can actually see that for African American LGBTQ students that are experiencing both of these forms of harassment and the overt and covert discrimination that comes from systemic racism you can actually see a compounded effect on their GPA.

They are doing even worse than the general population of LGBTQ students. You can see this compounded impact on their individual wellbeing; they're even more likely to report indicators for depression and reduced self-esteem than their peers. And they are also significantly more likely than their LGBT peers to be disciplined at schools, creating an even higher vulnerability to drop out and push out factors.

In the general school environment, there are a number of in-school interventions that have proven to be extremely important for improving LGBT youth experience in our school. Those are, and if you look to the left, the sort of inner bubble here, the 4 in-school interventions that have been demonstrated to make a significant difference in the lives of these students are one, to have supported school staff and other adults in the school environment.

Two, to have an exposure to an inclusive curriculum that accurately and appropriately reflect their experience. Three, effective school safety policies and other LGBT inclusive school policies that support them and act to reduce anti-LGBT bias and violence in the school environment.

And then four, the presence of Gay Straight Alliances in the school and other opportunities for school leadership. As you move from left to right, you can see the ripple effect that these in-school interventions have on student experience.

Having those in place leads to less - a more positive school climate and an increase sense of safety for young people and then on to very important ways that their lives become better and they are at less risk when they are living with these interventions in place.

Now as you might expect, obviously in thinking about the intersections of LGBTQ experience and anti-LGBTQ bias and systemic racial bias within our systems of education, and our society, there are some critical considerations that have a complicating effect on the effort to have these interventions in place and make sure that African American LGBT students have access to them.

A couple that I'll point out and hopefully come back to in our conversation, a couple critical considerations, one, as I'm sure you're all very acutely aware, the teaching core across the United States is predominantly white. And these white teachers by and large or just speaking generally are having a - have to really work robustly on their cultural competence and their openness and their ability to work cross-culturally in a whole bunch of ways including when it comes to working with African American LGBT students.

We face the issue of funding support to public schools which undermine the ability of these schools to undertake holistic school culture improvement work. You face the challenge that when it comes to curricular inclusion, we're talking not just about including LGBT issues and African American issues and specifically African American LGBT issues within the curriculum. So you have to be very thoughtful about that holistic approach.

You have to make sure that approaches to school discipline and to bullying prevention itself are reparative and restorative in nature. The way we often say it here is that we are against zero tolerance we are for or 100% engagement.

And finally, it is always making sure that your school is creating space and opportunity for young African American LGBTQ leaders and I'm so pleased that LGBTQ youth leadership is represented on this call.

With that let me turn it over to my fellow panelist, I look forward very much to the conversation.

Sharon Lettman-Hicks: Thank you Dr. Byard. Next stop we have Tim'm West with teach for America.

Tim'm West: Sure hello everyone. I am in charge of speaking about a number of things, some of the challenges that administrators faces putting African American LGBTQ student, discussions about the culture (unintelligible) as well as bridging the gaps.

And I felt that the best way to do that through some of the work that I'm doing at Teach for America, let's say, I'll turn that okay, make sure I get to the right slide, is to really just talk about the impact that our educators who identify and who are out. And I speak about that as someone who has about 15 years of experience in classroom, mostly at the secondary level but also post-secondary.

I just want to sort of outline first, some of the challenges and triumphs of these educators of environment. One, discouragement is quite often happening from sometimes Black leadership and mentors in school with regard to being out and that sometimes comes from mentors and leaderships in school who may or may not be LGBT themselves but just sort of a code of silence that somehow being out in your school context can lead to a lack of professional opportunity.

And so I think those that I will feature today are really speaking courageously to changing that norm and to being out in their school context and fall away that's going to help really change the tied to what's happening.

So I've spoken about also the lack of employment protection. Yes marriage equality has happened. But even today, about what happens if you are now applying for a job and you can now identify your spouse as your husband if you're a male or your wife, if you're a female as how that might make you additionally vulnerable to certain kinds of discrimination.

So again we have to look at the intersection of a lot of other things that still need to happen in terms of the educational landscape when it comes to discrimination.

(Unintelligible) school culture and climate that can produce stress and negatively impact performance is something that we have to consider. If someone is constantly worried about being out in on the job or distress of being out on their job, or having to do with parental issues and not having submit to schools, it can negatively impact the quality of their teaching.

I certainly know personally that my experiences as an out teacher was so much more productive for me, because I didn't have to worry about that. I knew I have my school support and ultimately I think I would have been a more effective teacher as some of those settings.

And then lastly in terms of challenges, lack of culture competency or affirmation, for example the stigma of predatory behavior that some people still have in their minds or the completion of sexual identity and sex. So often the critics about having someone be LGBT and out as a teacher, we don't talk about - we shouldn't be talking about our sex lives. We're not talking about sex lives. We're talking about identity and the positive affirmation of identity development that by someone being one as an LGBTQ can have on our students who might themselves be black and LGBTQ.

Triumphs and strong achievement outcomes often overshadowed these concerns. Some of the best teachers I know out there, some of the best administrators are LGBT and black and self-identified school community engagement beyond the classroom is celebrated.

A lot of these teachers, some who don't have children, who really take great pride in assuming that role for their students in the school, some of that notion of taking a village. Character development and resiliency is model for students.

So if you have a teacher who was out in LGBTQ identifying students to get to see it. They are LGBTQ questioning career, that there is someone who's done well for themselves and who's making a difference in their community and I think that modeling is critical and very important.

And then also the intersection of vantage point, that can enable empathy and reliability especially in culture response and teaching model. So I've said a little bit about myself, I'm going to make that slide really quick.

But essentially one of the cool to have - I eventually come out to my students at the Houston I coached on a basketball here in DC. I got an argument with (unintelligible) with second semester, I knew that my report my students were strong, that they knew, I valued and I love them, and I held high expectations for them both inside and outside the classroom.

Whether or not I let that effort fly, the world hurt not just me but other students in the class who were LGBTQ and has the same sex parent. And so the right under my picture are just a list of things of roles that I played in my school as a parent, as a high school English department chair, as a varsity basketball coach, as a PTA liaison, as a curriculum development.

So we pulled lots of different roles in schools and I think affirming that role and the impact it would have in the school setting is really important. Next we have a 1st year core number that's part of the Teach for America core; I was going to be teaching in Jacksonville. As (Sheila Martin) really talks about the inter-fectionality of being a core of her educational experience and aspirations. That she has been a member of the Northern Virginia Pride board of directors. Volunteered in reconciling ministries so day to day work as well.

And also helping planning discussions at the national level. And then she brings that experience to her work as a teacher, we're going to be teaching ELA at a high school in Jacksonville Florida.

We have (Gary Hamilton) who is a DC based teacher not with Teach for America. I think it's important that we amplify the work both inside the organization I work with and beyond it.

He writes for students who deal with racism and poverty on a daily basis. There may be little space to explore the topic of homosexuality. The black community in particular, being open about sexuality is a series challenge. Acting outside of a strong heterosexual stereotype is seen as a weakness equated with being defective and in too many black churches being gay is still seen as a terrible transgression. Because of this at many low income minority schools, including the one in the neighborhood in which he teaches, both students and teachers are still afraid to speak openly about their sexuality.

Again if you look at the credentials of each of these persons, it's just amazing what they've been doing in general. I think courageous acts are going to be out. If (Alison Gay) who had just assumed the role as a dean of a school in Arkansas Delta, of both rural and urban impact. Right so one of the greatest

challenges I've had is to decide who I am as a school leader? I've been out since high school, however working place I have no legal protections. Whether the most important premier students are seeing themselves in those who are teaching them.

The challenge for me has been to be myself and also I guess walking that fine line of what is acceptable to save students and teachers and in our person's color. And I thought about myself as being part of the LGBTQ community until I get an education and more specifically Teach for America which is by far the most informative community I've been a part of as an educator.

I think it means a lot for me now since I'm going into school leadership. I'm really happy to see (Alice) step up as a school leader. We have (Omar Keer) many of you have seen an article about he actually recently resigned from the school after deciding to read a book called King and King and really just talks about his experience growing up as a black gay man North Carolina and being assaulted daily where teachers stood around and said nothing to the other peers. And that really prompted his decision to read this book which did land a bit of controversy but I certainly want to applaud him for his courage and resiliency and really standing his ground on that issue and hopefully some really nice institution will pick him as an amazing educator.

And then lastly we have (Guy Turner) who's actually a principal and delivers public charter school at Young. He writes a drop on experiences as a low income student of (unintelligible) BC and I've used it over the course of my teaching, to shape my works as an instructional lead teacher, teacher-mentor, teacher of the year, assistant principal and now its principal and leader of the nation's first replication of an expeditionary learning school.

It's meaningful for colleagues at school as well as students and family to see a school leader who shows up daily at creative school culture and climate in which all students can thrive and feel accepted.

My achievement isn't in spite of being gay but because I'm gay and with that I will turn the presentation over to our next presenter.

Khalila Harris: Thank you Tim'm. And now we will have Samantha Master.

Samantha Master: Hello. I am still honored to be within esteemed group of panelist and of course speaking to all of you today about the intersections of race gender in the collegiate experience and those opportunities of this for us to support African American or Black LGBT student on college campuses.

And I'll start off by saying that I am a 4th generation historical Black college student. I come from a long line of historic - of investment and historical black colleges and so this is especially important to me because I was out when I was in college.

And so as we've talked about the intersections of race gender in the collegiate experience, I always focus all my attention to the compasses of a collective because I think they did a really great framework on how you think about intersectionality.

And one of the things I'd like to start with is the statement that says, the most general statement of our policy at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual and class section and see that, that particular task, the development of an integrated analysis and practice, based upon the fact that the major system of oppression are inter-locked.

And so in that statement in 1979, a group of Black primary lesbian and some bi-sexual women got together to talk about how they name their particular experience as Black queer women.

And so when we talk about the school to prison pipeline for example which I'm sure many of you are familiar with, we often focus on the experiences of black presumably heterosexual, presumably straight gender men and boys. And that we don't necessarily do a great job, is uncovering the ways that gender and sexual orientation influence the school present pipeline.

And so what does it mean then to be a black boy who is assigned female at birth or a black girl who is assigned boy at birth and the ways specifically that gender stereotyping and gender pleasing impact the ways that again people are used to educational system. And that continues into colleges and so, within the collegiate experience, we have a particularly similar text of work about the experience of this African American and Black LGBTQ students at historical black colleges, called facilitating climate - campus climate of (unintelligible) in a progressive change in each we could use which adapting that they came out of Stillman college and what this tells us is that LGBT students feel especially erased.

And even though there are now instances of physical violence which certain deaths have happened, but the types of emotional traumas that are perpetuated by simply not seeing oneself in text or not being affirmed within institutions of having their humanity questioned as to whether or not they should even be spoken to respectfully and so that looks like, you know, the use of derogatory source in classroom really does impact the psychic health of our young Black LGBTQ folks.

A colleague and friend of mind (Marcus Gooney) often says that there are no safe spaces for black LGBTQ folks in college, right? And so what that means is that at predominantly white universities, black students are often maligned meaning that LGBTQ spaces that are supposedly inclusive or often anti-black and then in a similar story black colleges and universities and minority service institutions, there's a lot of reticence often to really have an in-depth conversation and then an in depth institutional commitment to addressing the needs of LGBTQ students.

And so what are the promising practices going on within colleges and universities to address these very specific issues. One is I think as my previous listeners have mentioned and listed up, there's an immense need that universities have curricula that is reflective of the experiences of students in their classroom.

And so on this thing we have conversations within colleges and universities about LGBTQ people but there is not an intentional reflection of Black LGBTQ people within the curricula right? And not just within a liberal arts curricula but within a vast amount of university curricula.

Also naming LGBTQ people as colleges and universities are talking - or as administrators within colleges and universities are addressing student groups right? And so there is an importance in acknowledging simply by verbally naming LGBTQ students.

Of course there is a need for Gay alliances and for LGBTQ centers and that phase that is universal - that is recognized by the university and the institution as a safe place for LGBTQ people is incredibly impactful and certainly in that last, these non-discrimination policies, that's protect both students, faculty and staff are really, really important.

And so there are some campuses doing amazing work in the realm of affirming everything up, the unique experiences of Black LGBT students. The North Carolina Central University in Durham North Carolina was the second HBCU to have an LGBT resource center but there's also with the help allied faculty and staff in a real institutional commitment and integration of LGBT issues both within curricula, within training and development and within student services and support.

And I don't think that's really understated. Additionally, Morgan State University in Baltimore Maryland has done an incredible job at elevating the needs of LGBT students because the president of the university created an LGBT advisory task force that was passively uncovering the unique needs of LGBTQ students.

And states like the National Black Justice coalition out on the heel and emerging leaders day provides space for young African - young black LGBTQ people to really connect with each other for colleges.

And so the importance of being able to have close campus dialogues about the needs of black queer and transgender I think is incredibly important. One of the ways that I became - I that I started organizing in colleges is through being able to have conversations with other black queer and trans folks at different historically black colleges across the nations and as coming out with a set of issues that we will often see and as we began to synthesize those issues we were able to really impact the type of change we wanted to see in our own campuses which help again hopefully to change the narrative.

Additionally having support for young folks who are facing things like family despoilment so at (Dillon) university they created a fund in order to support

students who have been rejected by their families and are no longer have support.

And so creating actual institutional investment for young black queer and trans use who are state - who face the potential of being expelled from their families because of their sexual orientation and gender identity is one of the things that university administrators in campuses can do to create more inclusive phases. And with that I would turn it over to our next panelist.

Khalila Harris: Thank you so much Samantha and now we will have Jessica Pierce.

Jessica Pierce: Hi, well first let me say thank you. This has been great to just really listen to everybody and I'm sitting over here. I've been echoing and kind of snapping in the office. But I just want to take couple of minutes to talk about what this looks like from my own organizational alliance.

So I work with Black Youth Project 100. So we're an organization that focuses on Black proliferation that is the core center of work that we do, that is what we focus on. And so, you know, for us and if you start talking about being black and being LGBTQ in higher education, I think for us we have to actually take a step back and maybe even look at what it looks like before you can get to introduce at the higher education which I think is a piece of semantics are really getting to with the facts and research that (unintelligible) you know, I think that this is something that has become a little progress.

We are literally living at the intersections and at those intersections we're being impacted in many negative ways by a lot of these issues. So you know for us we look at the K through 12 through some parts and we look at you know, we look at what's actually happening with our black girls.

And so a lot of times that's left out of this narrative is that the gender piece of this as well and when we look at young black girls, you know we're seeing simply that we're getting suspended more right? So the young black girls are being suspended 3 times more than you know black boys and white boys.

We're talking about suspended 6 times more than white girl's right? And then we're actually looking at complete suspension you know we're seeing that black girls are 12% of the suspension that are actually happening. And that's just you know, one piece of it but I think when we look at that, and we're thinking about how people are coming into this space of higher education, that's a very important piece for us to look at because we're talking about systems that are already criminalizing our lives before we even entered into systems of higher education.

So to even get to higher education and to simply be present in these instances, in these institutions in it, there's been a lot of trauma that happens before that. There's been a lot of discrimination there. There's been a lot of prejudice that happens before they even enter into these new institutions of higher education.

And I think one spend we're actually in the institutions of higher education that we're actually dealing with these issues in the way that everyone else is really pretty accurately described. And I think for us originally what we're looking at is then how do we create institutions outside of the institutions of higher education that can still support our young people who are still in these institutions of higher education who are trying to excel, who are trying to thrive every single day.

And I think for us, what that looks like is that actually talks about looking at organization as becoming the new institutions in a lot of ways. You know we are holding space for these experience as we are talking about human

practices in a lot of ways, because sometimes all it takes is really a simple acknowledgment of the issues that we have dealt with and for the fact that we have criminalize of giving the people the tools as - that they can actually use to begin to start making change in their lives and also within their institutions. So that's a lot of the work that we do on a local level right now.

Is that we have trainings. We really focus on leadership development and community building as two major pillars of our work because part of it is making sure that we're keeping people individually strong. And that we're actually then looking at - then once they go back into these institutions that they are strong individually and then they then have the tools to be able to build the community within these institutions as well.

So we're giving people the tools to talk about what does it mean to be a leader or what does that look like? How do you support yourself? How do you talk about the issues that you have? How can you look at creating policies?

And so you know we've create policy documents. We have - we actually give this space to young black people to actually own the policies they want to see and to start giving space and words to the changes they want to see so it becomes tangible.

Because for us, it's taking the frustration, moving that through the real process of healing so that people are individually healed and then looking at the root cause of these issues which is often just the system and then looking at how we actually address those systems inside.

So us we occupy the space as an organization outside of the system, work around these policies, working on creating the change and then we're strengthening the individuals who then go into the institutions and then also

run the inside strategy from working within the institutions of higher education. And I think for us, you know, the other piece about it is really also being clear about how can we be more effective even in how we talk about these issues.

It's not enough to just say, that we want to have the people at the table or the Black LGBT is experience is something that we really want to talk about or we want to make things more diverse. Like these are things that we often hear a lot and some of that gets to the point where it's a little bit of lip service, and you know we want to push people to actual plan where we're saying that if you're going to be intentional about addressing these intersection identity, if you're going to be intentional about actually addressing these issues of our community then you have to be intentional about how you build your program.

You have to be intentional about who's reading these programs. You have to be intentional about these from the beginning. And so that means before you create the program, before you know, you've encountered the first issue because I think that what we're seeing right now is a lot of these things that I work with is that they're having problems within programs that could have been prevented on the front end if people have been more proactive about really want to you know work within and focus on our community.

And so for us, how we do that is also by putting it in our documents, in our words. We're really clear as an organization that we are a Black liberation organization that works from queer and feminist ones.

And we put that intentionally into our works. It is what we say when we're talking to the media. It's on our website and then we really talk about a term that we've coined in our values which we call recall radical and purpose

inclusion of key communities. So for us, you know that's us being really clear and really being purposeful but also being a pretty radical.

So being willing to push ourselves maybe further than maybe comfortable to everybody because it's not about making everybody feel comfortable, it's getting to a place where everybody feels like they have a space and they have a legitimate right to higher education and to have that just like anybody else.

And so I think for us that's being purposeful and proactive but also radical and pushing the boundaries a little bit.

And I think in terms of resources we have additional resources on our website and I provided my contact information as well. But you know, right now we're literally in the thick of it.

We're working on creating an organizing manual that talks about how we effectively run campaigns and create policies but even in front of that we're creating a glossary of terms as that actually outlines all of these specific communities, these ideologies, the vision framework but like it's putting it into real words. And that's been a struggle and I'm not going to say it's an easy a process but it's a process that we have to do because we want to make sure that when people look at our documents, when people look at our campaigns that they see that we are purposely including all identities and that we're focusing on the intersections that we live in.

Because we literally live at those intersections and we're putting it at the front of our work so that people can see it before we even open our doors, before we even open our mouths, before the forum season starts, before they even get into the thick of our campaign.

So I do want to say, if people are doing that type of work, that's definitely something that you know, we have people on staff who are doing that work, who are literally doing on those type of document and are committed to helping other people do that same type of work.

So thank you for that.

Khalila Harris: Thank you Jessica. First let me thank all of our panelist here. You all are simply phenomenal and gave a wealth of information to also digest. We've got an open floor now for questions and some commentary and we have our first question, from (Allison Gay). Given the recently passed legislation on same sex marriage and thus the recognition of that verse families in schools.

How long do you think it will take to legally create safe places in schools that traditionally do not support the safety of LGBTQ students? I'd like to first throw that to Eliza or Tim'm.

Dr. Eliza Byard: Tim'm maybe I'll jump in and then hand it to you just to say ((Crosstalk))

Tim'm West: sure.

Dr. Eliza Byard: Yes thanks. I just say a very important question it will - the recent supreme court decision is going to bring this issue into schools at a greater rate than ever before and it's going to require teachers and school leaders to be ready to do the work of managing the conversations that are going to come up and being welcoming of the families who were going to show up.

In terms of - so there are two ways, it will be the conversation in the hallways that needs to be addressed and it will be the families and the communities and just a greater dignity of all the students in the schools that would need to be

upheld and I think in terms of legal responses we are a couple of things on deck.

There is the safe school improvement act and the student non-discrimination act currently at the federal level, safe school improvement act would create enumerated LGBT inclusive bullying prevention policies as a requirement of federal funding

The student non-discrimination act would add sexual orientation, gender expression and gender identity to non-discrimination protection in schools for students at the federal level.

And I think as Tim'm spoken to earlier we need non-discrimination protections for teachers as well on the basis of being LGBT. So they are fully empowered to be out and themselves in the school environment.

I would say, I'm not going to take a bet on how long that will be, but I know the issues is going to be front and center and I think the conversation is going to be even more heated than it has been because we're beginning to see backlash. So with that Tim'm I'll throw it to you.

Tim'm West: No I think that's a great straight bridge to what I was going to say which is I think we have to prepare ourselves as a community to be prepared for the backlash that sometimes in particular in our suburban and rural regions and some other places where it's presumed to be the overwhelming opinion that like gay marriage is still not something people want and I think they're going to be all sorts of micro-aggressions and things done on the parts of people to try to keep this as a silent issue but I think all the more important that we support things like the safe school improvement act and student non-discrimination act.

Because further than creating a progressive policy it holds institutions accountable right? So you look at a place like Chicago where I dealt with previously before coming to DC and Chicago had some of the more progressive policies with regard to LGBTQ kids, I mean youth and students on the book, but you know that doesn't stop the principal on the south or the west side or the north side who doesn't agree with that issue from not really enforcing it.

And so I think there are two things. It's not just about having the progressive policies, but it's also about measures that ensure that those are going too enforced.

Dr. Eliza Byard: Sorry one ore quick note, this is Eliza. I think just to say, the other thing I'd like us to be really aware of that would further undermine our public school system as a backlash measure would be increased attention to voucher programs that allow the use public money for religious schools and/or tax credit programs for tuition.

Like we have even here in New York State now, thanks to Governor Cuomo, this allows more money to be taken out of public systems and put into religious schools and part of this is about people who say I don't want my child going to a school where LGBT people are respected.

Khalila Harris: So you see that was a question I've got that are submitted to some of our professionals that we really appreciate that depth of knowledge. I want to throw a challenge question to Samantha and Jessica especially with some of the information you just heard.

On the same note of the passage of things that marriage universally in the United States, what are some of the concerns you have about the safety and/or the recognition of the LGBT equality amongst young people especially those in school, on K through 12 and on the collegiate level.

Jessica Pierce: Yes this is Jessica. I can quickly respond to that. I think the first piece of it is just that it's always been more than marriage and I think that's been the messaging that we've seen from a lot of organizations and media outlets but I even think beyond that, I think for the young clear black folks that I know is that it was never marriage. It was not - it was more than marriage, it just never was marriage. Because it's hard to really talk about issues like marriage because when you talk about issues like marriage it is speaking to a somewhat privilege point of - perspective. And I think that that's something like in our community, in our organization, we have to be really clear about. Is that there is a level of privilege to be having that conversation when really there's some people who don't even have a place to live or don't have a job or don't have adequate healthcare.

And I think when we even look at our young people at higher education, those are still the issue. Their bill is also talking about healthcare right? Like they're looking at the fact that their healthcare plans don't include dental coverage or mental health coverage. They're still talking about the fact that they can't afford to live on campus the first year and sometimes they are required to live on campus.

And I think like those issues, whether you'd be on campus or you'd be in higher education or outside of higher education are the basic livelihood issues that we need to talk about I think the young black folks that were hoping that people start to really focus on now.

You know because there are whole organizations that have built missions around marriage equality and now that we've won that, I think it's going to be really terrific. And I think folks are really looking to see how organizations are going to shift to really talk about these issues that we've been hoping that people will talk about.

How do we talk about healthcare? How do we talk about employment security and safety and I think that these will be those moments we're actually really telling for us right? Is if we're able to really shift and deal with these issues and talk about them and put them at the center of our work, then we'll see that these communities and the young black people I think will feel a lot more censored in this work with this organization.

Samantha Master: I think that's a really amazing point Jessica or several amazing points. And I also like to elevate that 50% of black respondents to the national center for transgender equalities and Jessica the return surveys, so 50% of black respondents who attended school, especially a Tran's identity, a transgender identity or gender non-conforming identity, face harassment right? And that's K through 12.

So half of black young people who are transgender and non-conforming face some sort of harassment. And so I think that there is no way to talk about this ruling around marriage equality and kind of expecting young black LGBTQ people to be excited and happy without addressing the fact that many of them are facing as Jessica said like physical violence, psychological violence, unemployment, homelessness.

You know those are the things that are speaking to our young community and I think it is impossible to talk to them about these things without naming the

types of consistent anti-black must they face since we've got walking outside or walking down the street.

And in addition, the main concern about young black queer folks, I think that there has to be a lot of attention paid and I am hoping with the elevation of folks like (Deborah Cox) and Janet Mock and (Kate Milan) that we can have a really serious conversation about all of the ways we do to service to our trans and gender non-conforming black youth because when we look at the statistics on violence, it is primarily black people being killed. It's young black people.

The average life expectancy for a black transgender woman is 35 years old right? And because of those statistics, because of those experiences, marriage has not only never going to be issue but we are in desperate needs of resources investment, program and culturally competent, culturally relevant, culturally responsive educational system instructions that work to ensure that our young folks have access and not just great careers but to longer stands of life and longer term life.

Khalila Harris: so pivoting the conversation a little bit, I actually think I'm going to come back to that one. We talked a lot about safe space and affirming spaces and it's just like this flowery term.

What you know, we have things like we've just talked ultimately about the transgender population and the biggest conversation that we've come up is whether or not they are gender neutral, rationally resolved, gender inclusive rationally as one tool of development of schools that are safe and welcoming to all stakeholders.

And you know the safe place is much larger and more significant ways of demonstration but those are technical and tactical measures that we need to take. Give us any of the powers, give us your feedback on what does a safe school environment or safe space look like for some of our listeners and maybe trying to advance their efforts on their - in their school environment, or their knowledge on the subject.

Tim'm West: I could speak a little to that. This is Tim'm. You know, I think part of why our focus on the impact of K-through 12 is that if you're in a school setting, for example a lot of the efforts to address little black male achievement, there's a singular focus often on addressing cultural competence around race.

But some of these schools have been some of the more homophobic environments that I've ever experienced and as a youth director in Chicago, many of the students who went to these schools, were they felt affirmed on their race were traumatized daily on the basis of their gender, expression, or they're being LGBT.

And so I think it's just not enough that whenever we have these conversations - I've done numerous conversations on the DC area around sort of black male achievement and not one mentioned at all about the intersection of orientation and achievement.

And I think the same thing sometimes happens in discussions about black girls. So I feel like part of the solution is about like are there people - are we creating spaces, are school leadership looking for talented black LGBT people to hold places in schools as administrators, as teachers as a way of helping build and create that safe school culture and climate.

I know that as an organization, that one of the PFAs, I think game has been the recruitment of more people of color to be a part of that course.

So last year 50% of our core were people of color and I think that that's something that we're proud of and have continue to work towards because we understand that like having people who represent and affirm and reflect the experiences of our kids and the students that we work with is still critical.

Khalila Harris: Anyone else would like to add to that? ((Crosstalk))

Woman: What do safe and inclusive environment look like? They look like what Tim'm said having teachers and professionals within schools that accurately reflect the experiences or vast array of students.

It looks like zero tolerance policies; it looks like unlimiting suspension and expulsion to violent offenses, to ending like dress code based violations. It looks like ensuring that within policies and within practices, LGBTQ folks are covered.

It looks like having - when you were doing black history month in December highlighting Black LGBTQ folks like we talk about (unintelligible), we talk about (JR Breston) but we don't talk about the fullness of who they are.

It looks like having black LGBTQ folks when you're doing women's history month, when you're doing Latino/Latina history month. I mean because we live at the intersections of all of these identities right? And so it looks like young people having the help and support they need within the classroom of not being - you know I was watching the (Nina Simon) documentary and she said, freedom looks like - what freedom is to me is to live without fear.

And so when I think of safe and affirming environment it looks like for our young people, is one where they do not need to fear, that if they come out to someone they will be treated poorly. That their experiences will be demeaned or brushed off and that they can feel comfortable identifying supportive adults within their schools and they do not - and there's a school culture that fosters healthy dialogue and affirmation among them.

Dr. Eliza Byard: IF I may, this is Eliza, I just wanted to say, hear, hear to all of that and specially jump off at the point about healthy dialogue. One of the things that we've been working on at GLSEN is picking up on the experience of educators who have been bringing black lives matter into their classrooms and into their school communities, to try to create healthy conversation and in environments where too often you do not have very visible sufficient visible African American leadership and in some schools and to ensure that this school is prepared to really welcome people and have discussions about whether - what's going on in people lives.

And also just say, I think the other thing about safe and affirming school environment is renewing the societal commitment as the president reminded us all on Friday to having - making sure that we're not consigning people to dilapidated schools and under resource schools and really showing them that they matter with the way that we invest in education.

Khalila Harris: Excellent we are at our time. And I know that we can go on to another whole another hour. Can I ask each participant to give us a one minute - each panelist to give us a one minute wrap up? Starting with Jessica?

Jessica Pierce: yes absolutely I think you know, just thank you to everyone that got on to this call and to all my fellow panelist first off. And secondly I would like to say that you know I think this is a continuing process and you know as long as

we're in this together and we're trying to figure this out, trying to come up with solution, trying to figure out how we better strengthen these institutions to make them more like the community they come from. And another there's other tools and resources that directly 100 that definitely can survive. But definitely like individually, I think you know as long as we support each other through this process, we'll all better for it, at the end of the day.

Khalila Harris: Thank you Jessica. Dr. Byard?

Dr. Eliza Byard: I'll simply say it's an honor to be here with this panel and GLSEN.org we provide our resources as much as possible for free but also look to support the amazing work of organizations like those others on this call to work both systematically and at the community level to make sure that our schools is the best they can be for everyone.

Thank you to everyone for this great work.

Khalila Harris: Thank you Dr. Byard. Tim'm West?

Tim'm West: Yes I just want to say I'm also grateful to be on this really diverse panel and we're very adamant about even working through my organization and it's really all of us working across partnerships. We have a great partnership with GLSEN. We turned a project, we're forming that within NBJC and a number of other stakeholders and so that's really important.

But just lastly, that the impact that a singular teacher who was out and Black and LGBT can have, if they are affirmed in their identity on shaping the school culture aplyment is tremendous.

And I know that from just my experience personally sometimes as the only LGBT identifying teacher period at the school that older schools were certain things were not said in the hallway.

Where kids - where students begin to develop a new way of relating to each other and so I can't really stress enough that if we want to see this change, then we have to really look at our practices and to prevent and that punish teachers when they decide to be out in their identities.

Khalila Harris: Thank you brother West. Samantha Master?

Samantha Master: yes again, I will echo that this is just such an esteemed panel. Thank you to our moderators Khalilah and Commissioner Lettman-Hicks who have just done a fantastic job.

I don't think I can understate the importance of ensuring that both the educators and the curricula in your schools reflect the experience of the students. When we say that black lives matter, we mean all black lives right? So when BYP, when we do our work from a Black queer feminist way, we are doing it with the intention of centering the most marginalized.

And so if you look at your scholars and your students and your young people as folks whose lives matter then it is your responsibility as an educator or as an administrator to ensure that they are safe, affirmed and uplifted throughout the wholeness of their identities.

And so please don't hesitate to reach out to Sharon, to Khalila, to Jessica, to Tim'm, to Dr. Byard or myself about creating more inclusive environment and how we can support you because we are all in this journey together.

Sharon Lettman-Hicks: Samantha thank you so much. I'd like to just do a few acknowledgements to our graduate intern (Courtney Gilmore) for coordinating behind the scenes and putting together this wonderful webinar. Deputy Director of Whitehouse initiatives on educational excellence for African American, Miss Khalila Harris who has been simply phenomenal to work with. And on behalf of the Whitehouse initiative on educational excellence for African American, our executive director Mr. (David Yan) and on behalf of the national black justice coalition, I thank you all for your time today. Our participants on the phone are outstanding panelist and all my friends that took the time to be a part of this as well as my colleagues, I truly appreciate you today and I think we'll all be richer on behalf of some of the challenges of black LGBTQ youth in our education system in this country and we look forward to the next time together. Have a good evening.

Woman: Thank you everyone. This concludes our call.

Coordinator: Thank you that concludes today's conference, thank you everyone for participating, you may now disconnect.

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