



**Summary of: *Research Reports Related to Black Teachers in the San Francisco Bay Area*, by Jessica Stovall and Tara Sullivan.**

Research Brief  
August 2022

This brief summarizes two reports: 1) “Grant Us the Sun: What Black Teachers Need for Healing from Antiracism in Schools”, by Jessica Stovall and Tara Sullivan<sup>1</sup> and 2) “We will not be afraid to share who we are: Black teachers’ experiences with anti-racism during a global pandemic”, by Jessica Stovall<sup>2</sup>. The reports discuss findings from a study of Black teachers in the San Francisco Bay Area. “Grant us the Sun” focuses on teachers’ obstacles with antiracism and their hopes for their students. “We will not be afraid to share who we are” discusses similar issues and highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was set in the context of the high attrition rate of Black teachers within a broader national teacher shortage.

The researchers conducted interviews with 30 K-12, Black public school teachers in the Bay Area between January and May of 2022. The researchers also reviewed documents shared by teachers, including a book of poetry and two nonprofit entrepreneurship projects created in response to encounters with antiracism. The analysis in “We will not be afraid to share who we are”, incorporates Critical Race Theory and BlackCrit<sup>3</sup>. The findings in this brief focus on the 21 teachers working in the San Francisco Unified School District.

### **Findings**

The Black teachers in the study reported on the antiracism they experienced in their school and made recommendations for addressing these issues.

- **Black teachers experience low compensation and high workloads:**  
Teachers discussed the high cost of living in the Bay Area leading to financial insecurity, specifically for Black teachers who “... come from a community that has historically been denied the ability to access generational wealth.” Teachers also stated that their pay should reflect the disproportionate amount of emotional work they do compared to their white colleagues. Moreover, they are asked to do additional work such as serving on equity committees, aiding Black and brown students’ wellness, and running Black-centric events without additional pay.
- **Black teachers experience unreasonable expectations:**  
Teachers reported being expected to be the “savior” of the few Black and brown students in their school. Their presence in a school is expected to “fix” problems that schools might have, without recognition of their effective pedagogy. Teachers also reported not being treated as real or appropriate teachers.
- **Black teachers report structural antiracism:**  
Teachers reported that school leadership does not address the underlying structures that continue to reproduce Black suffering and offer only superficial responses to inequities, often within harmful professional development environments. Black teachers are responsible for raising the issue of antiracism and if they did not continually do so, the issue would not be taken seriously.

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<sup>1</sup> Stovall, J. & Sullivan, T. (2022). *Grant Us the Sun: What Black Teachers Need for Healing from Antiracism in Schools*. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Stanford Graduate School of Education and Stanford School of Humanities and Sciences, Stanford University.

<sup>2</sup> Stovall, J. (2022). *We will not be afraid to share who we are: Black teachers’ experiences with antiracism during a global pandemic*. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Stanford University.

<sup>3</sup> A core tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is that racism is endemic to the United States, and that all U.S. institutions, including education, are influenced by and perpetuate stubborn and pervasive racism. BlackCrit is an extension of CRT that focuses specifically on the impact of anti-Black racism and its impact on Black people.

- **The COVID-19 pandemic compounded antiblackness:**  
Teachers reported that the pandemic compounded issues of antiblackness as many had experienced deep personal losses, reflecting the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Black community. They asserted that the pandemic disproportionately impacted Black and brown children as well and that students need asset-based, healing-based care to address these impacts. The racial inequities exposed and reinforced after the global pandemic led teachers to display more courage to disrupt anti-Black harm in their own schools, even with the threat of consequences.
- **Antiblackness impacts teacher retention:**  
Although the pandemic exacerbated issues related to their students and their salaries, teachers reported that it was their on-going experiences with antiblackness and disproportionate workloads that were factors regarding their decision to leave teaching. However, although some teachers were leaving, almost half of the study participants planned to continue teaching until retirement.
- **Black teachers recommend addressing antiblackness and improving retention through affinity spaces:**  
Teachers recommended affinity spaces to troubleshoot issues together, provide mentorship to one another, coalition build, and debrief their experiences with anti-Blackness. Advocating for affinity spaces also highlights the need to have enough Black teachers in their school and not work in isolation.
- **Black teachers recommend policies to address the negative impact of antiblackness on their students:**  
Teachers reported the pain of witnessing lower expectations for racially minoritized students. They stressed the importance of increasing monetary and social-emotional resources for Black students such as more college and career counseling opportunities; Black affirming after-school programs; and psychological support. They also stressed the importance of the entire district, not just Black educators, supporting Black students, and wanting to see concrete plans and commitments. Teachers also talked about implementing imaginative, creative, and Black-affirming curricula and pedagogy and programs that help Black students prepare for life beyond the classroom.

### **Recommendations for San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)**

Based on discussions with SFUSD Black educators, the researchers recommend the following action steps for supporting the educational and socioemotional well-being of SFUSD's Black teachers and Black students:

- **Hire more Black Educators:** The researchers recommend that SFUSD administrators, Pathway to Teaching Program, and Human Resources collaborate with community partners to develop concrete, detailed plans and timelines for hiring Black educators in SFUSD. These detailed plans should include target numbers of Black educators desired district-wide, while also considering school-site specific target numbers.
- **Hire more Black Mental Health Professionals:** In addition to increasing the representation of Black educators in SFUSD, there is also a need to increase students' and teachers' access to school-based Black mental health professionals, who are trauma-informed and are capable of understanding and supporting the psychological needs of Black students. The researchers recommend that SFUSD should develop a detailed plan and timeline for the recruitment and hiring of Black mental health

professionals. The district should also hire an in-house Black therapist to run group based therapeutic support groups that will be free for Black teachers.

- **Implement formal racial affinity spaces:** In addition to the group therapy model that will focus on the wellness/mental health of Black teachers, the researchers recommend that SFUSD administrators support Black teachers through dedicated professional development time that will support teachers in their pedagogy and leadership. Due to the nature of the antiblackness, they face, affinity spaces are an affirming way for teachers to improve their practice in community with other Black educators. SFUSD should provide structural support for ensuring the success of these spaces, such as providing dedicated and protected meeting times, meeting spaces, food, and meeting materials for these affinity spaces. If the meetings occur outside of contractual time, teachers should be paid for their attendance to both address salary concerns and to ensure the district is not asking teachers to perform additional unpaid labor.
- **Train Leadership:** Provide training to school and district level administrators as well as Human Resources on how to best recruit and retain Black teachers. This training can support leadership in understanding the unique talents and experiences of Black teachers, as well as designing environments for their thriving. Local community organizations like the Black Teacher Project/ National Equity Project have already designed and facilitated workshops on recruiting and retaining Black teachers, so the district could potentially collaborate with local organizations for the training.
- **Provide a feedback loop:** SFUSD's Human Resources Departments should develop a consistent feedback process between administration and Black teachers, especially new Black teacher hires, to ensure these educators are being supported in their educational roles. This feedback can include *paid* quarterly survey or focus groups. In addition, district level administrators should encourage standing meeting times between administrators and Black educators to create safe spaces for bringing up concerns about antiblackness without fear of retaliation. SFUSD should have dedicated resources to address consistent concerns brought up in these feedback loops.
- **Support Black Student wellbeing:** The educators desired to see increased monetary and socioemotional resources for supporting Black students. They discussed a desire to have opportunities to share more creative, imaginative, Black-affirming pedagogy with their students, and they wished for a desire to see this pedagogy implemented in classroom spaces in addition to within comprehensive after-school programs. Finally, in order to invest in the future career development of Black students, these educators recommended providing more comprehensive college and career counseling services for Black students, for example, through increased community outreach. The researchers recommend additional focus groups with Black teachers to gain their ideas on how to address Black student wellbeing.