Liberatory
BLACK EDUCATOR RETENTION
FRAMEWORK

DESIGNED BY AND FOR BLACK EDUCATORS IN CALIFORNIA

BlackEducatorsAdvocate.org

"Despite a long history of Black educators in our country, **only seven percent of all public school teachers today are Black** - and just two percent of teachers are Black men." - **U.S. Department of Education, 2024**

BACKGROUND

Most recently, efforts to recruit and retain Black educators have been at the forefront of national debate and conversation as statistics have shown the historic decline of Black educators in the profession. With most effort being put toward recruiting Black educators (e.g., diversifying recruitment materials, partnering with historically Black colleges and universities, etc.), less attention has been given toward retention - that is ensuring that Black educators currently in the field stay in the field. Furthermore, if we want to address both recruitment and retention, as a state and as a nation, we will have to reckon with the anti-black history that got us here in the first place.

The presence of Black teachers declined with the erasure of Black schools as a result of desegregation (Fairclough, 2001; Foster, 1997). Even though they were professionals, Black educators were often viewed as inferior to Whites. As such, as Black schools were denied resources and forced to close due to the broken promises of desegregation, Black teachers were denied, too. Put plainly, the decline of Black educators is systemic and by design (e.g., bias in hiring patterns; assigning Black teachers to substitute roles; and the overarching narrative and belief on the part of many whites and some Black people that both Black teachers and students were inferior to Whites, etc.). This history coupled with the lived experiences of Black educators in California inform this framework. As Black educators made clear, current school conditions still carry the residue of the anti-black policies and practices responsible for the decline of Black educators. Our ultimate desire is to see an increase in the number of Black educators in schools throughout the state. However, we believe it is negligent to recruit, hire and send Black teachers into anti-black schools. We asked that of Black educators during desegregation, which resulted in the erasure of somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 Black educators (Siddle Walker, 2019). We must not only dream of an education profession that includes Black teachers, we must be intentional about pairing that dream with action that restores the dignity that has historically been denied to them.

OVERVIEW OF THE FRAMEWORK

The Liberatory Black Educator Retention Framework was designed by a collective of Black educators in California, most of whom reside and work in Los Angeles. This collective of educators is currently employed at traditional public schools, charter schools and independent schools serving in roles such as classroom teachers, school psychologists, instructional coaches,

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1 Fairclough, A. (2001). Teaching equality: Black schools in the age of Jim Crow. University of Georgia Press.
Foster, M. (1997). Black teachers on teaching. The New Press.

2 Siddle Walker, V. (2019, January 25). What Black educators built. ASCD. https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/what-black-educators-built

principals, and district level staff. The group included novice educators and experienced educators with experience ranging from as little as two years in the field to more than 20 years in the field. For six months, these educators gathered monthly to discuss the state of Black education in California and to share their hopes and dreams for Black education in the state. An educational researcher then coded the hopes, dreams and experiences of Black educators and shared the codes with them. Then, Black educators used the codes to develop the tenets of this framework before educators defined each tenet and offered examples for each tenet.
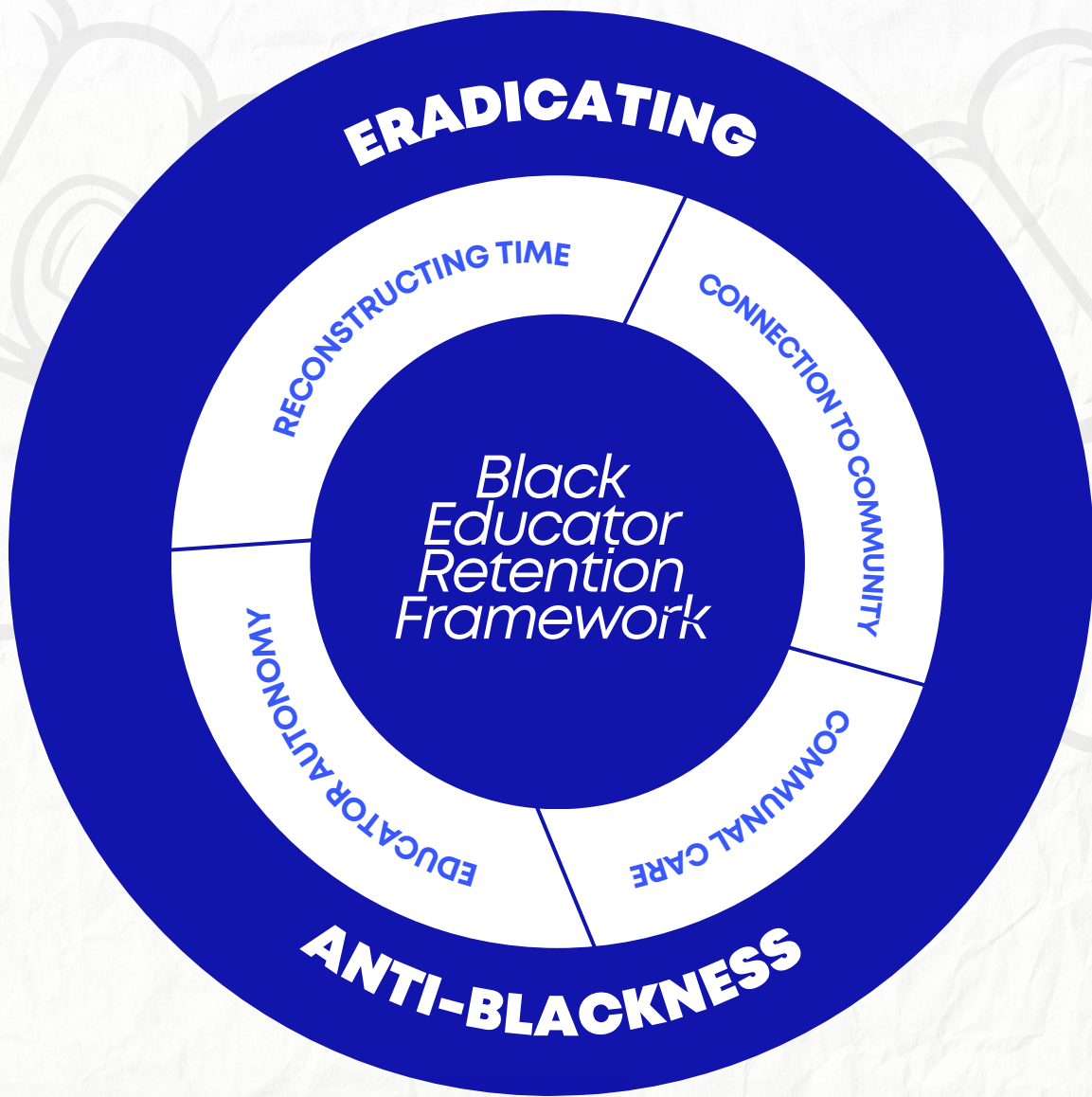
FRAMEWORK TENETS

The framework is broken down into five tenets:

1. Eradicating Anti-blackness
2. Reconstructing Time
3. EducatorAutonomy
4. Connection to Community
5. Communal Care

THIS TOOL IS DESIGNED TO

introduce school leaders to each of the five tenets of the framework. Rather than a destination or completion point, this framework serves as a way for schools to design and measure ongoing retention strategies through an approach that gets at the roots of anti-blackness and Black educator erasure. Each of these are living, breathing tenets, meaning that they should expand, shift and grow to meet the needs of each school community. For the purposes of this framework, we offer definitions with the understanding that community context and the experiences of the Black educators in your community matter most. When in doubt, center the voices of the Black educators at your school.

ERADICATING

RECONSTRUCTING TIME

CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

Black Educator Retention Framework

EDUCATOR AUTONOMY

COMMUNAL CARE

ANTI-BLACKNESS

THE FRAMEWORK

We re-imagined education through a lens of Black liberation, that is spaces free from being othered and from anti-blackness in all of its forms. We re-imagined educational spaces that moved at the pace of the people rather than at the pace of politicians; spaces where Black educators were trusted and honored for their expertise; spaces where communities and schools were one in the same; spaces where our individual forms of care and wellness were bound together. The sections that follow offer an introduction to explore our freedom dreams for education and for the retention of Black educators in California and beyond. As we assert throughout this tool, it is simply not enough to recruit us, you must co-design spaces with us that are for us.

TENET 1: ERADICATING ANTI-BLACKNESS

Often lacking, from even the best retention frameworks for Black educators, has been the audacity to call out anti-blackness. Comrie, et. al (2022) define anti-blackness as follows:

Anti-Blackness is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, actions, practices, and behaviors of individuals and institutions that devalue, minimize, and marginalize the full participation of Black people —visibly (or perceived to be) of African descent. It is the systematic denial of Black humanity and dignity, which makes Black people effectively ineligible for full citizenship. The Anti-Blackness paradigm positions Blackness as inherently problematic, rather than recognizing the long, rich, and diverse history of Black people

throughout the African diaspora, and acknowledging that Black communities across the United States (and the world) have been severely disadvantaged as a result of historical and contemporary systemic racism (p. 74).

Unlike definitions of racism, prejudice or bias, this definition allows us to center the specific experiences and conditions of Black people without conflating issues that plague people of color or other groups who have been historically marginalized. In doing so, this specificity provides an opportunity for the voices, experiences and expertise of Black educators to counter the loud and damning voices of oppression.

3   Williams Comrie, J., Landor, A. M., Townsend Riley, K., & Williamson, J. D. (2022). Anti-blackness/Colorism. Moving Toward Antibigotry, 74-81. https://www.bu.edu/antiracism-center/files/2022/06/Anti-Black.pdf

ERADICATING ANTI-BLACKNESS AS THE GLUE

We see the first tenet, eradicating anti-blackness, as the most essential tenet of them all. Safe spaces for Black Educators cannot exist in the presence of anti-blackness. We also recognize eradicating anti-blackness as the heaviest lift because anti-blackness is deeply embedded in the fabric of the United States. It is normal. It is the default. Given this truth, we believe that the first step on the journey to eradicate anti-blackness is in the ability to name, acknowledge and address anti-blackness in the beliefs, attitudes, policies and practices that shape the school experience.

TENET 2: RECONSTRUCTING TIME

"What if Black people could reconstruct time?" - Nigel Richard, Atlantic Fellows for Racial Equity

Time, or a lack thereof, has been a topic of conversation in education for decades, especially due to the demands and constraints of teachers having to teach to state tests. Embedded in our definition of time is a genuine desire to connect, a desire to know each other and to use that knowledge to design educational spaces that matter and mean something to educators and students. It takes time to do each of these things. Moreover, it takes a shift from factory model approaches to education to humanizing approaches that see and center educators and students.

"There shouldn't be a 'by January a student has to be here or do this,'" a Black educator expressed. "We should have time to create individualized education plans and markers for each student."

TENET 3: EDUCATOR AUTONOMY

Educator autonomy was deeply connected to trust and dignity, which often tied back to the historic denial of trust and dignity. As schools desegregated, Black teachers were robbed of their dignity and treated as if they could not be trusted to teach or work with non-Black students (Foster, 1997). Today, even if unintentionally, this plays out as Black educators feeling like they are over-observed and imprisoned by state-mandated curriculum and standards that do not allow for the creative freedom to do what is best for students.

"Being able to do what is best for our community without overly justifying for those who want and expect us to fail. Education systems want to see Black students on the bottom of every educational statistic, so anti-blackness can prevail with data to support its findings," one educator expressed.

"Imagine how free we could be as educators if we had more say in the curriculum, how we teach, and assess our students. One curriculum or assessment doesn't fit all," one educator dreamed.

"We had the autonomy to teach the way our children learn best," another educator dreamed.

TENET 4: CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

"I dream of Black educator centered schools as the heartbeat of the community," an educator said.

Typically, schools have open houses or back-to-school nights followed by two 15-minute parent-teacher conferences a year. Throughout the year, depending on a child's interest and involvement, other after-school programming for families are offered. Schools that successfully do these things are typically applauded. However, Black educators wanted more. These forms of assembling did not always get at the ways in which we dreamed about connections to community. We desired a deeper, community-centric relationship and connection to the community. We wanted time to build community and to be in the community.

"I dream of Black-educator-centered schools as a key chain to the community ecosystem," another educator said.

TENET 5: COMMUNAL CARE

Historically, Black educators have always been on the frontlines. As with all frontline work, a need to care for self and each other is essential. The final tenet of this framework takes up communal care, which is connected but different from self care. Self care is an individual responsibility that emphasizes the importance of an individual person caring for themselves. We think self care is important, however; these individual framings of care do not center Blackness and Black ways of being. Communal care simply gives us permission to love each other intentionally and out loud.

"We need spaces where caring for each other is a shared responsibility... where we can support mental health needs with empathy. This can help create a better work-life balance," an educator expressed.

In the schooling context, Black educators need opportunities to gather and to spend time together to resist and to confront issues of humanization. They need spaces where they are affirmed. These spaces could include access to wellness activities including exercise, meditation and yoga. It could be time to laugh over food. These communal spaces should exist at school district, city and state levels.
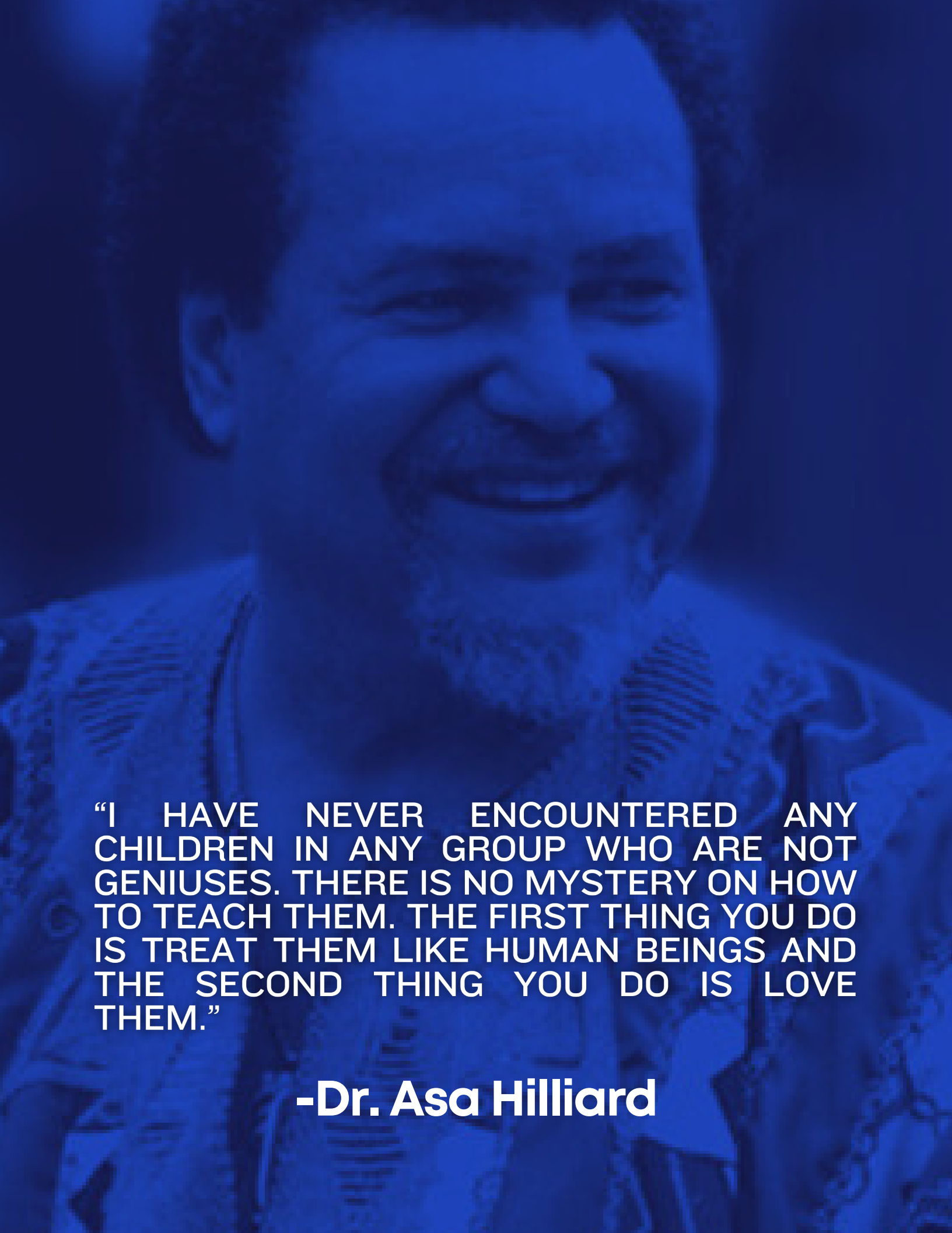
SELF ASSESSMENT

The self-assessment chart provided is designed for school leaders to evaluate their current practices in retaining Black educators across five key tenets. To use this assessment effectively, the school leader should review each tenet and consider the extent to which their organization has implemented related strategies and initiatives.

For example, under "Eradicating Anti-Blackness," the leader would assess whether their school conducts workshops and training sessions addressing anti-Blackness regularly. Similarly, for "Educator Autonomy," they would assess if Black educators are in decision-making positions where they. can propose and lead initiatives with resources.

The purpose of this self-assessment is to promote reflection and awareness regarding efforts to retain Black educators. By assessing their current practices on a scale from 1 to 5 (ranging from Novice learner to Proficient learner), school leaders can identify areas of strength and areas that may require improvement.

1 = Novice Learner 2 = Developing Learner 3 = Skilled Learner
4 = Advanced Learner 5 = Proficient Learner

	TENETS: BLACK EDUCATOR RETENTION	RATING (1-5) - NOVICE TO PROFICIENT LEARNER
1	**Eradicating Anti-Blackness:** We actively name, address and challenge anti-blackness in all of its forms (i.e., school's philosophy and mission statement, curriculum and instruction, pedagogical approaches, professional development, etc.)	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐
2	**Reconstructing Time:** Black educators at our school are given the time they need to do what is best for each individual child.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐
3	**Educator Autonomy:** Black educators at our school are in decision-making positions where they can propose and lead initiatives with resources and support to carry out those initiatives.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐
4	**Communal Care:** Our school takes care of its educators through holistic on-site wellness programs, including affinity groups and time to step away from their duties when overwhelmed.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐
5	**Connection to Community:** Our school allocates time, as part of the normal school day, for communities to be part of schools and for educators to spend time in community, including but not limited to an on-campus resource center, community conversations on the harm schools have caused in communities, and wrap around support services for families.	1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

"I HAVE NEVER ENCOUNTERED ANY CHILDREN IN ANY GROUP WHO ARE NOT GENIUSES. THERE IS NO MYSTERY ON HOW TO TEACH THEM. THE FIRST THING YOU DO IS TREAT THEM LIKE HUMAN BEINGS AND THE SECOND THING YOU DO IS LOVE THEM."

-Dr. Asa Hilliard

CONCLUSION

"I dream of Black educator centered schools as something that is realistically in our future. We may have to create our own schools," one Black educator shared.

In the quote above, we see both hope and despair. As the educator above dreamed, we want to see schools that center Black educators as something that is realistic in our future. The audacious decision to center Black educators is one that will elevate the entire field of education. This approach is a humanizing one, a liberating one. We are hopeful that these dreams can manifest in schools throughout the state and nation. But this has never been a matter of can or cannot. This is about will. As is embedded in the latter part of this quote, we question whether or not desegregated schools will be what we have always hoped they would be. Will education be what America promised they would be? Will we acknowledge, address and repair the historic harm done to Black educators? Or will we continue to watch an entire field suffer at the hands of anti-blackness?

We will spend our lives and the lives of those coming after us on decolonizing and liberating educational spaces. We know that. Still, in this lifetime, there are steps we can take to repair the harm done to Black educators. If we are to make progress, and to create more affirming spaces for Black educators, we must take steps now. We believe that schools can and must center Black educators. As we asserted throughout this tool, to move forward, we must be willing to grapple with history. We must be willing to do what we have historically failed to do - that is to humanize and center Black people. Then, and only then, can we actually address the recruitment and retention of Black educators because as bell hooks reminded us, "by confronting the past without shame, we are free of its hold on us."

BLACK EDUCATOR
ADVOCATES NETWORK

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