



Leveraging Explicit Value  
for Every Black Learner,  
**Unapologetically.**

# It's Time to GET REAL: Our Commitment to Black Learner Excellence

We are national leaders, committed to a future where the core values of freedom, equality, and justice are manifest in the educational, economic, and personal opportunities of our neighbors and fellow citizens.

We hold the highest regard for our nation's higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, HBCUs, and other institutions whose missions compel them to provide broad educational access to students who have historically been shut out of higher education. We believe these institutions have an invaluable potential to impact our national economic welfare, building a more skilled workforce for a stronger U.S. economy – and improved lives or all.

We share a grave common concern that, over the last decade, the U.S. has lost twenty years of gains in the enrollment of Black learners in community colleges, and in postsecondary education overall.

**Over 600,000 Black students have fallen out of a system that should be the on-ramp to individual fulfillment, family stability, and thriving communities.**

We know that a college credential remains the surest path to economic and social mobility for all, yet we accept that for Black learners, college has not always lived up to its promise.

Black learners, and all learners, deserve postsecondary options that ensure the time and energy they commit to learning will leave them better off than when they started. For all learners, and Black learners especially, the value proposition for education beyond high school must be overwhelmingly and clearly worth the time, effort and expense involved.

The impact is felt both on the individual and social levels. State and national economic and social vibrancy suffer. Currently, Black learners lost from the nation's community college system receive 23% lower pay, on average, than what they would have earned if they had obtained an associate degree. Failing these Black learners—rather than enrolling, retaining and graduating them with an associate degree or other credential—costs the nation at least \$2.9 billion a year in direct wages lost.

**If every working Black adult with a high school diploma or GED earned as much as the average Black college graduate (at least an associate degree), their collective additional earnings would equal an estimated \$222 billion more.**

This increase would not only significantly improve Black learners' financial outlook and life trajectory but also spur the overall economy by filling jobs with skilled workers and increasing disposable income that can be reinvested in the economy.

This amount – \$222 billion – is larger than the total economy in 19 individual states and the District of Columbia and larger than the combined economies of several states within regions<sup>1</sup>.

When we LEVEL UP and Get REAL, Black Americans can contribute billions more to the nation's economy.

With a clear understanding of the data and an ear attuned to Black learners' experiences with postsecondary education, we know that the onus is not on learners to rectify this loss. The responsibility for action lies with **state, federal, and institutional leaders**, supported by **business, philanthropy, and communities (including the schools that prepare our Black learners.)**

**Black learners deserve colleges and universities that are designed to support their excellence. We commit to elevating this work through our own public commitments to LEVEL UP and our collective resolve to elevate Black learner excellence as a moral and economic imperative.**

To LEVEL UP our commitment to Black learners, states and federal policymakers, higher education leaders, and other stakeholders must Get REAL with:



## **Real Transparency and True Affordability.**

We must focus not only on increasing need-based aid but also create visibility on the bottom-line cost students will pay, based on a realistic assessment of what students can reasonably afford.



## **Ensured Success through Shared Ownership.**

At each level—federal, state, system and institutional – we must create mechanisms for the support and shared accountability for the success of Black learners in and beyond their postsecondary experiences.



## **Academic and Social Support.**

Institutions and systems must proactively consider the disproportionate challenges facing Black learners inside and outside of the classroom by developing supports and connecting to community resources to provide intrusive advising, support to remain on pathways to high wage/high demand jobs and address mental health and childcare needs, as well as housing, transportation, technology and food insecurity in an environment that fosters a sense of belonging and respect.



## **Learner-Centered Teaching Practices.**

Teaching practices should center students' lived experiences, perspectives, strengths, and needs as grounding for learning.

<sup>1</sup> This is more than the sum of the combined economies of these state regions: East (Vermont + Maine + Rhode Island), West (Wyoming + Alaska + Montana) and South/mid Atlantic (Mississippi + Delaware). Source: Analysis by HCM Strategists using data from the National Economic Analysis, and calculations by Postsecondary Analytics using data from Current Population Survey, Table PINC-03. [February 2023]





**We, the undersigned, are proud to support efforts to LEVEL UP and Get REAL to advance Black learner excellence and call our colleagues in the field to action to share in the responsibility and promise for Black learner excellence.**

***We call to action states,*** a great source of innovation-led transformation in this nation, to directly invest in concrete strategies to make postsecondary education more relevant to the lived experiences of learners and create stronger pathways to economic agency.

***We call to action the federal government*** to focus its capacity to collect data, produce research and elevate priorities through policy, regulation and investment in a postsecondary education system that values all learners, and unapologetically serves Black learners well.

***We call to action our nation's colleges and universities*** to examine what it means to be a Black-serving institution, with budgets that reflect the commitment to enrolling and graduating more Black Americans ready for the nation's family-sustaining jobs in fulfilling careers.

***We call to action leaders in communities across this nation*** to examine the data, listen to Black learners, and develop action and accountability plans to ensure policies and strategies are indeed meeting the needs of learners and strengthening communities. This includes a call to companies of all sizes to direct their leadership, influence, and resources to this shared agenda promoting Black learner excellence in a way that benefits us all.

***We call to action American philanthropy*** to join us as unapologetic leaders for Black learner excellence and support, starting first with targeted investment in an intentional playbook that moves us from conversation to action and ultimately reflecting our common commitments with funding priorities that enable us all to take responsibility to LEVEL UP and get REAL.



## National Panel Members

<b>Dr. Keith Curry (CHAIR)</b>	President, Compton College
<b>Dr. Aaron Thompson</b>	President, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education
<b>Adenike Huggins</b>	Senior Director, Education Policy and Advocacy, National Urban League
<b>Dr. Angel B. Pérez</b>	CEO, National Association of College Admissions Counselors
<b>Dr. Brian Bridges</b>	Secretary of Higher Education, State of New Jersey
<b>Chris Mathias</b>	Representative, Idaho House
<b>Cheryl Oldham</b>	Vice President, Education Policy, US Chamber of Commerce
<b>Denise Forte</b>	President, The Education Trust
<b>Dr. Edward Bush</b>	President, Cosumnes River College
<b>Eloy Oakley</b>	President & CEO, College Futures Foundation
<b>Jee Hang Lee</b>	President, Association of Community College Trustees
<b>Dr. Karen Stout</b>	President, Achieving the Dream
<b>Dr. Kim Hunter Reed</b>	Commissioner of Higher Education, State of Louisiana
<b>Margaret Spellings</b>	President & CEO of Texas2036
<b>Mark Becker</b>	President, Association of Public Land-Grant Universities
<b>Dr. Michelle Asha Cooper</b>	Vice President for Public Policy, Executive Director DC Office, Lumina Foundation
<b>Dr. Mildred García</b>	President, American Association of State Colleges and Universities
<b>Morgan Polk</b>	Director, Education, Health & Labor Policy, National Urban League
<b>Nicole Lynn Lewis</b>	Founder & CEO, Generation Hope
<b>Peter Taylor</b>	President (retired), ECMC Foundation
<b>Dr. Rebecca Martin</b>	Executive Director, National Association of System Heads
<b>Dr. Roslyn Artis</b>	President, Benedict College
<b>Dr. Shaun Harper</b>	Provost Professor, University of Southern California
<b>Dr. Ted Mitchell</b>	President, American Council on Education
<b>Dr. Walter G. Bumphus</b>	President & CEO, American Association of Community Colleges
<b>Zaldwaynaka ("Z") Scott, Esq.</b>	President, Chicago State University

Learn more here: <https://www.community4blacklearnerexcellence.com/>

To join us in this important work and commit to get REAL on behalf of Black learners, please contact [info@hcmstrategists.com](mailto:info@hcmstrategists.com) to learn more about how your organization can commit to this Call to Action.