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NO EXCUSES YET NO SOLUTIONS: THE INHERENT
ANTIBLACKNESS OF THE NO-EXCUSES CHARTER
SCHOOL MODEL

by

TSHALA A. PAJIBO

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Charter School Model

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ABSTRACT

No Excuses Yet No Solutions: The Inherent Anti-Blackness of the No-
Excuses Charter School Model

by

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The No Excuses model of education has routinely been labeled abusive and harmful to students. The No Excuses model has garnered significant pushback from students, families, and stakeholders because of procedures and policies that have caused physical, mental, and bodily harm to young students. While many education stakeholders have examined how No Excuses charters and their policies have harmed Black children, not many have examined *why*. This paper argues that the No Excuses charter model is completely at odds with Black cultural and educational values. This paper suggests deeper studies of the educational mindsets and opinions of No Excuses proponents and stakeholders, extensive quantitative data on the mental health of students within No Excuses Charter Schools, more in-depth studies on the unique learning styles of students within the Black community, and a deeper understanding of the moral education of students in No-Excuses Charter Schools.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Education stakeholders everywhere understand that right now there is a crucial debate happening about the state of public schooling that will determine the educational landscape for generations to come. America has to determine whether charter schools should continue to exist or, at the least, expand throughout the country. Charter schools are independently-operated public schools that have the freedom to design classrooms that meet their students' needs. All charter schools operate under a contract with a charter school authorizer – usually a nonprofit organization, government agency, or university – that holds them accountable to the high standards outlined in their “charter.” (Public Charters) They commit to obtaining specific educational objectives and must have a written performance contract with the authorized public chartering agency. (Charter School Center) Charter schools were originally conceptualized as a solution to the falling quality of public schools in the 1970s. (In-Perspective) The relative freedoms that charters enjoy were meant for the trial and error of experimental teaching and management strategies that could hold the key to improving public schools at large. More recently, however, charter management organizations are less concerned with bettering public schools and sharing successful techniques and strategies. Charter schools are now in competition with, rather than working with, traditional public schools.

Charters also have access to public funds and resources in addition to the private funding they receive from investors and individual stakeholders. For many anti-privatization activists this is especially troubling because an overwhelming amount of data shows that, in general, charter schools do not perform any better than their traditional public-school counterparts. Some data has even come to show that, occasionally, charter schools perform worse. (Miron and Applegate)

Ones unfamiliar with the charter school debate might be asking, “so why is there not a unanimous decision to pull the plug on these projects?” This may be because of the way that

charter proponents have framed their side of the debate. It is an undisputed fact that charter schools more often than not serve urban communities and have a higher-than-average population of Black students. That has allowed charter proponents to frame the continued existence of these schools as a social justice issue. They claim that Black students and families will once again become victimized by federal and state governments if charter schools are not allowed to expand. “Students booted from a charter school that fails face a broad range of negative consequences. As studies have shown, students whose education is disrupted are more likely to experience lower engagement, poorer grades and higher dropout rates. Learning outcomes for younger students, in particular, are often deeply affected when they're forced to switch schools. Charter school closures, the Network for Public Education report highlights, are especially disruptive when they occur midyear, which is frequently the case.” (Newsday) Some charter management organizations have tried to shift pro-school choice sentiment into a sort of social justice movement. If Black students are forced out of charter schools, spaces where they are purportedly seeing significant growth and achievement, what will happen to their educational careers?

However, charter school proponents should thank a specific subculture of charter schooling for the way that they are able to withstand the pile-on of overwhelming data against them. No Excuses Charter Schools, charters that proclaim that there can be ‘no excuses’ for unsatisfactory grades and behavior, have overwhelmingly performed better than public schools on state tests across the country. These schools also boldly guarantee that all of their students will reach and finish four-year college. This is an alluring promise for Black families who have low college attendance and completion rates across the socioeconomic board. No Excuses Charter Schools have complicated the argument against charter schools in ways that anti-privatization activists have yet to remedy.

However, No Excuses Charter Schools are not without serious structural and ethical problems. The No Excuses model of education has routinely been labeled abusive and harmful to students. Observers of No Excuses culture reference children strangely behaving like robots, schools being operated like military boot camp, and the verbal and psychological abuse of children who deviate from the acceptable norm. Legally, abuse is defined as an action that causes harm or injures another person. This can refer to physical abuse, psychological abuse, mental abuse, or child abuse. Child abuse is defined by State and Federal law. Under the Child Abuse prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), child abuse refers to “any act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caregiver that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse exploitation, or an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm.” (Cornell Law) The No Excuses model has garnered significant pushback from students, families, and stakeholders because of procedures and policies that have caused physical, mental, and bodily harm to young students. Detractors also insist that No Excuse Charters have a racism and ableism problem. Black children, being the largest block of students attending No Excuses Charter Schools, face suspension and expulsion rates higher than the traditional public-school average which is already alarmingly high. Neurodivergent children are also more likely to be punished within this system of schooling where adherence to neurotypical behaviors and learning systems determine academic success.

While many education stakeholders have examined how No Excuses charters and their policies have harmed Black children, not many have examined *why*. This paper argues that the No Excuses charter model is completely at odds with Black cultural and educational values. The Black community’s unique needs and desires have not been thoughtfully taken into account when detailing the harms of No Excuses policies and structures. In order for policymakers to finally get behind the idea of capping the number of No Excuses Charter Schools, or even to slowly begin phasing them out of the educational landscape, they need to understand that the existence of No

Excuses Charter Schools inherently threaten Black students and their mental and physical wellbeing.

This paper seeks to establish that No Excuses Charter Schools, and the policies that allow them to thrive, are diametrically opposed to the betterment and care of Black children and families. Black students are unable to truly thrive in education, regardless of high test scores, because No Excuses Charters restrict them from their cultural modes of learning and divorce Black cultural values from the classroom. No Excuses model seeks to force Black students to adhere to a strict model of ‘acceptable,’ ‘scholarly’ behavior which leads to trauma and poor educational outcomes beyond state test scores. The differences in cultural and educational values between Black families and and the No Excuses model fuels poor decision-making and inappropriate practices in charter systems.

CHAPTER 2: ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Proponents of charter schools claim that the charter school model creates higher rates of student achievement, passionate school communities, and happily engaged parents but opponents say otherwise. Detractors say that while charter schools present a seemingly progressive and effective approach to public schools, studies show that children attending charters are not outperforming students at traditional public schools, quality varies from school to school even within larger charter school systems, and family satisfaction decreases over time. Supporters of charters may point to examples of ‘successful’ No Excuses charter systems to make the point that charters can work under specific circumstances but critics argue that even ‘successful’ charter schools commit harm. Opponents claim that the basic No Excuses charter school structure almost ensures the mental and physical abuse of children of color and disabled students because of outdated ideas and approaches on schooling.

The state of education across the country is a dismal state of affairs. The United States ranks 27th in the world for education, a significant and terrifying decrease from 1990 when it ranked 6th, and, even still, the nation spends less on primary and secondary school education every passing decade. (Business Insider, 2018) The creation of charter schools was meant to stop this rapid educational decline from happening. Charter schools were meant to be educational laboratories where looser educational and operational regulations were meant to inspire education experts, educators, and local communities to experiment with nontraditional methods of teaching in order to find better, alternative ways to educate our nation's children. However, in the three decades that charter schools have been operational, they have done little to advance our knowledge of better educational approaches or the education ranking of the nation while creating national conversation about the abusive practices used almost universally across different charter school networks.

This objective fact is why, to students, parents, and education officials throughout the country, the opposing claims are confusing. Why does half of the literature available about charter schools claim that they are successful while the other half claims that charter schools are proven to be destructive to students' growth and learning? The root of the problem lies in the discrepancy between how Black students and families define 'academic success' versus how charter school networks and proponents define 'academic success.' While No Excuses charter schools usually define 'academic success' through "dimensions valued by upper-class White elites," lower-income and racially-diverse communities usually define academic success through "self-direction, teamwork, and creativity." (Lamboy and Lu, 2017)

The term academic success is used ubiquitously throughout educational research, scholarly literature, and even in casual settings among students, parents, and educators. However, there is still no specific definition of the term even after decades of educational research. 'Academic

success' refers to a range of different outcomes that encompass things as far and in-between as career readiness, moral character, and credential attainment. Before one can engage with the No Excuses charter model debate in a meaningful way, they must first define 'academic success' in a measurable, specific way. York, Gibson, and Rankin create a new definition of 'academic success' by analyzing a range of definitions provided in educational research and scholarly literature on student achievements. York et. al use Alexander Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome model to situate 'academic success' as an outcome defined by six, more specific, subcategories of success, all of which were consistently referenced throughout educational research. Academic success is "inclusive of academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and postcollege performance." (York, Gibson, Rankin, 2015)

After providing a new, succinct definition of academic success, York et al. make the argument that there are little to no studies publicly available that accurately measure academic success.

[W]e found incongruence in the literature between how academic success was defined and how it was measured. These findings suggest that despite reports that have advocated for more detailed views of the term (Kuh et al., 2006), the bulk of published research continues to narrowly measure academic success as academic achievement; more specifically, operationalized as grades and/or GPA... [R]esearch has indicated that grades and GPA are not always accurate measures of learning or growth in cognitive capabilities... a narrow operationalization of academic success within educational research and assessment is statistically inconsistent as grading approaches differ greatly within and between institutions, resulting in unreliable measurements. Inaccurate assessment of student growth and learning may contribute

to the inability to review the construct between institutions. (York, Gibson, Rankin, 2015)

Academic achievement is widely measured by grades and GPA because educational researchers have never had a singular definition of ‘academic success’ based on theoretical conceptualization. Most literature centered on academic achievement uses grades to make a case about academic success. This makes sense since grades and GPAs are almost always readily available assessments of student achievement. However, this leaves educational researchers with no real understanding of whether the nation’s students are actually achieving any real measure of academic success. Although York et. al readily admit that this challenge is not new or due to their emerging definition of academic success, it does highlight the fact that there has never been a concrete, reliable method of determining student success.

While York et. al provide a definition of academic success that is specific and incorporates the different subcategories of outcomes that educational researchers widely agree contribute to overall academic success, they do not succinctly define the six subcategories. This leads to the definition of academic success still being, in some ways, incomplete. Even though none of the six are accurately defined within the literature, the subcategories of ‘satisfaction,’ ‘persistence,’ and ‘career success,’ not having rigid definitions defeats the purpose of their paper. While the educational sphere now has a working definition for ‘academic success’ and what it encompasses, they now have to figure out a way to define the six subcategories that contribute to academic success. This lack of foresight in not creating specific definitions for these categories will result in educational research being just as non-uniform as it was before. One scholar’s definitions of ‘persistence’ and ‘career success’ could, in theory, be totally different from another’s definition of ‘persistence’ and ‘career success,’ leading to different standards and/or measurements of the broader category of academic success.

Aside from that specific limitation of York et al.'s paper, they also crafted their definition of academic success from collecting, analyzing, and categorizing different definitions of academic success strictly from writers of academic literature. There is no contribution from students, parents, educators, and labor market leaders. (York, Gibson, Rankin, 2015) This is particularly egregious because within their literature, York et al. reference the fact that educators and students, in particular, have different considerations of what constitutes academic success and how it should be measured. Limiting the scope of the paper to just the definitions created within the ivory tower puts educators and students at the mercy of a definition that may not encompass other important subcategorical outcomes that contribute to academic success.

CHAPTER 3: INTEGRITOUS DATA REPORTING

Even with a standard working definition of academic success there are still concerns about the integrity of data reporters on both sides of the charter school debate. Margaret Raymond, director of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), acknowledges that the discussion on the effectiveness of charter schools has been led nowhere because opponents and supporters have manipulated so much of the data it's difficult for anyone to pinpoint what needs to be done and why. Raymond's paper highlights the disintegrated methods of data collecting and reporting from both sides of the aisle while acknowledging that both supporters and detractors of charters have valid points and concerns.

Charter schools and its supporters are notorious for underreporting or neglecting to report the data it has on their own students and their progress. When charter school organizations find themselves backed against a wall, Raymond points out that goalposts are moved or completely removed from the playing field. "Regardless of industry or mission, organizations morph quickly to adopt a second purpose: their own preservation. Organizations display a range of adaptive

behaviors including aggressive defense of their domains, reclassifying missions to eliminate difficult or unpleasant aspects of their work, and reinforcing the status quo, which translates into resistance to new ideas or technological innovation.” (Raymond, 2014) Charter schools, environments with relaxed operational regulations, are able to withhold and manipulate data in ways that public schools cannot.

Charter schools are not required to report certain data about student progress and achievement to the general public which is why there is an overwhelming amount of information about major charter schools that the public does not know about and does not have access to. “The idea was later embraced by the American Federation of Teachers... [T]here was a need for schools that could operate with greater flexibility and could serve as a laboratory for innovations that would then be applied to public schools... The problem here is that charter schools are frequently not accountable. Indeed, they are stunningly opaque, more black boxes than transparent laboratories for education.” (The Nation, 2014) Charter schools have the advantage of only having to report the data that they want the world to see. While charter schools do have to report the entirety of their academic data to their district’s charter management organization(s), these organizations find it extremely difficult to begin the process to close schools that lack sufficient proof of academic achievement in the school building. “Authorizers determine which schools to charter, monitor progress and performance and decide whether or not to renew the charter at the end of its term. However, more than half of all authorizers reported difficulty in closing a school that is having problems. In addition, the charter contract, with its tailored outcomes, may have diminished importance in the current high-stakes accountability environment.” (U.S. Department of Education) Even though there is a supposed system for accountability that is supposed to protect students and families, the process to close unsuccessful or inadequate charter schools is oftentimes difficult and takes an extended amount of time. This dynamic leads to the “enduring proportion of

underperforming charter schools, some of which are in their second decade of operations.” (Raymond, 2014) However, Raymond then turns to the opponents of charters to examine the ways in which they are disintegrated with the data they have compiled on their side.

Charter school detractors are right to highlight that there is unimpressive data and information freely available regarding the performance of charter schools. However, their framing of the available data is misleading and discounts the measurable progress being made by many bigger charter school systems across the country. Raymond admits that the evidence that has been compiled on the performance of children in charter schools does little to resolve the questions about academic success. Charter schools, like public schools, vary from system to system, and even within the same charter system schools produce varying results. This is due to different instructional approaches, mission statements, operational decisions, and a variety of other factors. However, what charter school detractors conveniently dismiss during discussions of charter performance is that the data overwhelmingly proves that charter schools are steadily improving.

The charter school sector is steadily improving, both relative to the learning that students would otherwise gain in ‘traditional’ public schools and against its past performance. Examining the learning gains of all the students in charter schools in the 27 states, the average student learned more in reading— the annual equivalent of 14 extra school days— than just four years ago. The improvement means that charter school students have seven more days of learning than their peers in other public schools... On multiple measures, the charter sector has demonstrated improvement... Detractors pay little heed to the progress in the sector and instead perform a rudimentary (and as it happens, flawed) calculation. Their claim is that if 25% of charter schools are outperforming their local schools it means that 75% are failing to perform. (As an aside, the computation is faulty because many schools that

are no different than their local alternatives are posting equivalent academic gain in an atmosphere of already-realized high achievement.) (Raymond, 2014)

Even with all of the troubling data available on charter schools, there is enough data collected to prove that charter schools are at least, if nothing else, outperforming traditional public schools. Raymond goes as far to suggest that the disingenuous framing of charter school data from detractors threatens the possible gains in education for our nation's most disadvantaged students. By discounting the "data-proven" gains from charter schools, opponents neglect to interrogate how some of the best charters are able to produce such promising results and incorporate such methods in local public schools.

Raymond's paper strives to offer a balanced and fair assessment of charter schools instead of writing an obviously biased narrative that neglects to acknowledge the most compelling arguments from either side. However, her paper majorly falls short in one very huge way. After she points out the fact that charter schools are able to (and do) manipulate and withhold data from the general public she fails to give the reader any reason as to why we should seriously acknowledge any data coming directly provided by charter systems. The privilege to withhold academic data is an advantage that public schools do not have. While both public schools and charter schools have to report yearly state testing data, charter schools are able to withhold information about any other real measure of academic achievement unless a petition is made to and accepted by a charter management board from the general public. While state tests are generally accepted by education stakeholders as a significant measure of student growth and achievement it does not and cannot paint a full picture of the year-long learning that happens within school buildings.

While there is no general streamlined definition of 'academic success' in the world of academia, No Excuses charter school networks almost-universally and continuously point towards state-testing and four-year college acceptance rates as proof of their high-rates of academic

achievement. Considering the demographic that charter schools usually serve, this makes sense in context. Charter schools usually serve underrepresented, low-income communities of color— a demographic that performs poorly on state tests and have the lowest rates of four-year college acceptances across the board. This data is easily measurable and easily compared across educational institutions and looks to support the data that charter schools are largely achieving their missions of sending all their students to college. Within this context, charter schools are absolutely producing high levels of academic success; many charter schools boast higher college acceptance and attendance rates than their public school counterparts.

However, college acceptance and attendance rates alone cannot suffice as the measurement of academic success. While most No Excuses charter schools do not provide data on four-year college completion rates, KIPP Charter School released a study of their college graduates in 2011. The study evaluated the progress of students that graduated from KIPP middle schools ten or more years before the study. The network found “that 33% of these students had graduated from college, a figure that is higher than the national average of 30% and significantly higher than what is typical of students from low-income families (8.3%). While this figure is impressive, it is considerably lower than KIPP administrators and teachers anticipated. In all, 67% of students and parents did not receive the promise of college. Additionally, 89% of KIPP graduates had entered college, but only 33% graduated. (KIPP, 2011)” (Lambooy and Lu, 2017) While KIPP made significant progress towards getting low-income students into and through college the network still broke its steadfast, mission-centered promise to parents. “When we began in one classroom in 1995 in the South Bronx, we promised our first kids and families we'd do whatever it takes for our students to be successful. Today, we make the same sacred promise to more than 9,450 students and alumni on their way to get them to and through college and careers.” (KIPP Network) If No Excuses charter

schools promise to get their students into and throughout college but fail to deliver, they are definitely not making good on their guarantees of academic success.

Further, even their claims of achieving 100% college acceptance rates need closer examination. While these statements are technically true, are the caliber of colleges that No Excuses charter school students are being accepted into any better than the colleges that their public school counterparts are gaining entry into?

“No Excuses schools use their ‘100% college acceptance rates’ to promote their model, and it is one of the most important points of data used to justify rapid growth. This generates significant pressure for teachers and administrators to push students toward college, even if they are not academically and psychologically prepared or if they are not in a position to take on the duties and/or debts associated with higher education. As a college counselor at a No Excuses high school in New Orleans explained to one author of this study,

‘it’s easy to get a kid into any old college. We make them apply to places they’ll definitely get into even if we know they are not going to go there. We have to show that we tried to get them into college and then at least they have a choice, even if it may not be the best one.’” (Lambooy and Lu, 2017)

By their own metrics charter schools are not even meeting their own narrow definition of academic success. If Black students are attending No Excuses schools, high-stress and high-stakes learning environments, and are still not being able to gain admission into great universities and colleges then the claim that these kinds of schools are Black students’ best chance at amazing college education seems to be a falsehood. If we use the York et. al model of calculating ‘academic success’ then No Excuses Charter School students are not meeting the criteria there either.

CHAPTER 4: DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING BLACK EDUCATIONAL VALUES

It comes as no surprise, then, that No Excuses charter schools are also not aligned with what their communities define as academic success. Charter schools, boasting service to underserved communities of color and communities of lower-income, do little to listen to the voices that make up their school communities. “Some advocates of school choice and privatization embrace the language of the Civil Rights Movement without holding any explicit commitment to making schools more participatory. While they favor parental choice of schools, they do not necessarily advocate for parental or teacher voice in school-level decision-making, governance, curriculum, personnel, or discipline policy. In fact, in 1990, [they] famously argued that the central problem facing public education was that it was too democratic; allowing different stakeholders to fight over their visions for schooling was detrimental to school quality. More recently, former New York City Chancellor Joel Klein echoed this argument, asserting it was not desirable to run schools by ‘plebiscite.’” (ABC-CLIO) Any organization would find it hard to cater to the needs of a specific community without first talking to them and discussing what kind of help they desire and/or need. No Excuses Charter Schools often enter Black communities without any understanding or willingness to understand the intricacies of these neighborhoods and the vision they have for their children’s education. No Excuses Charter organizations have a specific idea of schooling in mind when they enter these communities and they do little to shift gears or try to understand when members of the school community are unsatisfied or harmed by school organization or structure. “The Black and Latino parents interviewed in a no-excuses middle school valued discipline, but viewed it as more than rule following. They wanted demanding academic expectations alongside a caring and structured environment that would help their children develop the self-discipline to make good choices... [T]hese parents told us that they did not want their children to become ‘robots’ or ‘little mindless minion[s], just going by what somebody says.’ Their

concerns echo an earlier study that Joanne Golann published in 2015, questioning whether the no-excuses model's emphasis on obedience adequately prepares students for the self-directed learning skills they need to be successful in college." (Golann and Debs, 2019)

If No Excuses Charter School proponents actually sat down and talked with Black community members then they would have a better understanding of the ways that their school model disabuses their students of the educational values of their community. The skills that charter school parents want their kids to learn and develop are more aligned with competencies that would enable them to be strong, local community pillars and providers.

"Many parents themselves faced the same steep odds that inspire them to seek great educational options for their kids, and this leaves them with less cultural capital to pass along to their children. Annette Lareau finds that families in low-income communities tend to raise children according to a model of 'natural growth', with parents taking a less active role in determining the social structures and activities of their children (Lareau, 2003). This approach has its own advantages over concerted cultivation, including decreased entitlement and increases in self-direction, teamwork, and creativity. Children also develop skills and mindsets linked to caring for relatives and loved ones. These traits, however, are not easily packaged and measured as they are often unstructured, nor are all of these traits valued by elites who control access to economic and social structures. Given these family background conditions, along with constraints on educational spending, housing, health care, and food access, schools in low-income areas face a difficult problem: How can they best help students achieve success when the standards for measuring success are set up by and for a more affluent population?" (Citation)

While it is a fact that college degrees improve the general earnings and quality of life of the people who are able to acquire them, the values (or lack of) being taught to students in charter schools are not equipping them to be better people or community members. In fact, there are studies that show that No Excuses Charter Schools may encourage a lack of morality in school children. “The second problem with the new character education is that it unwittingly promotes an amoral and careerist ‘looking out for number one’ point-of-view. Never before has character education been so completely untethered from morals, values, and ethics... Today’s grit and self-control are basically industry and temperance in the guise of psychological constructs rather than moral imperatives. Why is this distinction important? While it takes grit and self-control to be a successful heart surgeon, the same could be said about a suicide bomber. When your character education scheme fails to distinguish between doctors and terrorists, heroes and villains, it would appear to have a basic flaw. Following the KIPP growth card protocol, Bernie Madoff’s character point average, for instance, would be stellar. He was, by most accounts, an extremely hard working, charming, wildly optimistic man.” (Snyder, 2014) Emphasis is put on test scores, ruthless competition, and individualism instead of embodying kindness, committing good deeds, and having an open-minded approach when going out into the world.

Black families value different character traits and, while that is not necessarily a bad thing to consider, an alarming amount of No Excuses Charter Schools refuse to incorporate meaningful, culturally-responsive character education. No Excuses Charters almost exclusively serve student populations of color but their directions and goals are molded by white supremacist, affluent norms. “It has already been documented that “no excuses” charters conceptualize the purpose of schooling as individualistic and economic— getting students into college and out of poverty (Goodman, 2013; Sondel, 2015). To that end, many participants defined success as the production of assessment data and compliance with White cultural norms in an effort to prepare them for

college and their subsequent role in the labor market. This ideology promotes a colorblind narrative of meritocracy, which minimizes the role of racial and economic marginalization including the biased nature of standardized tests (i.e., Jencks, 1998) and the role of racism in students' future opportunities (i.e., Hamilton, Darity, Price, Sridharan, & Tippett, 2015). Furthermore, it perpetuates anti-Blackness insofar as students' Black culture is seen through a deficit lens as something to be remedied in the interest of social mobility." In No Excuses charters cultural norms and values from children of color and lower-income households are only referenced during spirit days or in academic pep rallies. Divorcing students of color and lower-income households from the values and norms they are likely to learn at home in order to, maybe, give them a chance at completing college seems irresponsible, racially insensitive, and ethically wrong. Especially considering the fact that the affluent white students who No Excuses charter students are supposed to be emulating do not get treated to the same militaristic rules and procedures that Black, brown, and lower-income children in charter schools are subjected to. "The high-discipline model favored by urban charter networks... serve[s] high Black and hispanic student populations. Students are often held to exacting discipline and conduct standards, which these schools claim is necessary to achieve the high test scores for which they've become known. By contrast there's the progressive model made famous by Waldorf and Montessori schools but which has been adapted for a wide range of suburban schools populated by white students... Here, students don't sit in orderly rows, hands folded on their desks, tracking speakers with their eyes. Instead, their lives at school are much more self-directed and centered on the students as individuals." In suburban, white, affluent schools children are not mistreated or policed in the same way that poor Black and brown children are in No Excuses Charters. The contrast between Black students being forced to adhere to militaristic standards of schooling and white students being able to have autonomy and peace of

mind within their school building rings alarm bells for education stakeholders and anyone else who believes in educational equity.

As they stand now, charter schools are not equipped to provide healthy, (self-)empowering education to the children that they serve. In the past, claims that charter schools were engaging in racially insensitive and discriminatory practices were silenced by claims of successful academic results and the ability of charter school students to enter the collegiate world on an even playing field. However, the data that is publicly available to the public (which is not much as charter schools are allowed to cherry-pick the information that they deliver to the public) proves otherwise. The No Excuses model which is acknowledged to be an affront to children's autonomy and mental and physical growth is now not even proven to deliver the desired results.

CHAPTER 5: DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING BLACK CULTURAL VALUES

Culture is defined as “the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.” (Mirriam-Webster) It would be a mistake to imagine that the only culture that matters when discussing education and learning habits are school and classroom cultures. Children start to absorb cultural understandings and values at very early ages. Since culture is central to how one acts, reacts, and moves throughout the world, children observe the actions and behaviors of the people around them and develop basic cultural understanding. “[I]t is evident that culture does not surround or cover the ‘universal’ child. Rather, culture is necessary for development—it completes the child. Culture provides the script for ‘how to be’ and for how to participate as a member in good standing in one’s cultural community and in particular social contexts. Simultaneously, a cultural psychology perspective recognizes that children are active constituents of their own cultures and that changes in individuals initiate changes in their relations with others and thus in their immediate cultural settings.” (Schweder et al., 1998) It serves best to

first consider home life and community care when thinking about how children learn to absorb, process, and retain information. Though it is long overdue, there aren't as many in-depth studies of the intricacies of Black culture and the implication it has on Black people's learning and learning abilities as one would imagine there might be. Even with the dearth of studies examining the exact ins-and-outs of Black culture and learning there are elements of it that are generally agreed upon within sociology circles.

Black culture is heavily influenced by West African culture. Many Black cultural staples like African-American Vernacular English or 'Ebonics', music such as hip-hop and rhythm and blues, and spiritual traditions and many more elements can be traced back to specific West African cultures. The retainment of specific West African traditions even throughout the centuries of ethnic displacement due to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade are the cause of these 'Africanisms.' Africanisms refer to "the characteristics of African culture that can be traced through societal practices and institutions of the African diaspora." (Asante, 2005) Most of the Africanisms within Black culture are linguistic, non-verbal communication, and learning styles. "The almost total absence of visible African artifacts in African-American culture led to the general belief that nothing African survived the tyranny of American slavery. Prohibited by slaveholders from participating in traditional ceremonies and rituals, Africans in the United States for the most part did not develop complete, formal African art forms. The functions of African artists were in fact nearly meaningless in such an alien context. But while the visible artifacts of religious sculpture gradually disappeared, subtler linguistic and communicative artifacts were sustained and embellished by the Africans' creativity when any more conspicuous elements of African cultures would have produced even greater repression." (Holloway, 2005)

Similar to any other ethnic group, views on morality and values are also developed through cultural understanding. In Black communities emphasis is put on interconnectedness and

brotherhood. It is common to understand that all Black people, regardless of familial association and personal relationships, are related in a broader sense of the term. Within Black cultural spaces it is usual for group members to call unrelated elders ‘auntie,’ ‘uncle,’ ‘ma,’ or even ‘pops.’ They may often call people within the same age range ‘cousin,’ ‘bro,’ or ‘sis.’ Even in actual familial circles cousins are sometimes raised so closely that they refer to each other as siblings. Within this community there is, largely, not an ‘I before you’ mentality. It is generally understood that one only truly rises if the entire ethnic group, or rather *the family*, rises.

Within Black cultural belief and understanding wisdom and education are considered to be the surefire ways to ensure economic and social mobility. Contrary to the popular belief in wider American consciousness, the Black community values education and schooling more than other ethnic groups. “[C]ontrary to this popular narrative, Black students place great value on academic performance. According to Mickelson (1990), Black students ‘embrace the dominant ideology about the positive links between education and mobility.’ More recently, Downey, Ainsworth, and Qian (2009) found the same across a secondary analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study. In the analysis, they found that Black students have more positive pro-school attitudes than their White counterparts, including attitudes about the importance of education, doing well in school, and seeing themselves as a good student. In the classroom, Black students are also found to be invested in their learning. For example, Shernoff and Schmidt (2008) found that Black students report higher levels of engagement, intrinsic motivation, and positive emotions in their classrooms than their White counterparts. Lastly, while Black students’ aspirations and connection to school are high, their expectations for educational success are actually higher than other groups of students (Harris, 2006).” The positive association of education with status, respect, and worldliness in Black culture is oftentimes overlooked because of and overshadowed by the knowledge of Black students’ poor performance in educational settings. While Black children tend to struggle in

educational settings, they value knowledge and their education at higher numbers than their peers and have greater hopes for what their education can do for them professionally than other ethnic groups.

While this may not be a direct Africanism, many West African countries celebrate the attainment and display of intellectual depth and knowledge. Elders in West African cultures are afforded much respect not only because of their age and resilience but also for their perceived amount of wisdom and knowledge. It is expected that all people learn and experience as much as they can in order to become a well-learned and respected community elder. “[I]n African society, old age was regarded as wisdom hence the saying that, ‘when the society lost [an] older person it lost the present [and] when it lost [a] young person it is said to [have] lost the future.’ Due to their reservoir of knowledge and wisdom, older people were free to... [equip] the younger ones with the necessary skills and attitudes that would help younger people to function effectively in the society (Ering, 2008 and Abanyam, 2013).” (Abanyam, 2013) While there is no way to know for sure whether or not the Black community’s love for education is directly derived from the West African cultural understanding of knowledge and education there can be no doubt that education is not taken lightly in Black communities. Black families see education as one of the surest ways to advance one’s career and earnings in the current American landscape. The Black community is already fully invested in the benefits and pleasures of education.

Many stakeholders in education question why, if the Black community values education so much, they consistently underperform academically by wide margins. Putting aside systemic and structural issues such as generational poverty, environmental racism, and the psychological effects of witnessing and/or experiencing extreme amounts of racialized violence, it has been studied that Black people, in general, do not learn and retain information the same way that white people, in general, do. While it is not the only aspect, culture is a major factor that determines a person’s

learning style(s). “How learning styles develop depends on the culture that has been modeled and reinforced by childrearing practices (Anderson, 1988; Banks & Banks, 1993; Hale, 1982; Ishii-Jordan & Peterson, 1994; McIntyre, 1992; Owens, 1987; Phillips, 1983). Upon entering school, students attempt to gather and process incoming information through strategies that have been rewarded previously in their home or community (Anderson, 1988; Jenkins, 1982; Smith, 1993). However, in school, if the students’ culture is incongruent with the norms of the classroom, then poor academic performance and low self-esteem could result (Irvine, 2003).” (Carter et. al, 2008)

The naming and study of Black learning styles is quite recent. In 1983, Alfred Wade Boykin published a study explaining and examining a single dimension of the Black cultural experience, ‘verve.’ “[H]e defined verve as having energy, being intense, and having expressive body language, which also implies a propensity to remain stimulating and lively. He also contended that it denotes a tendency to attend to several concerns at once and to shift focus among them rather than to focus on a single concern or series of concerns in a rigidly sequential fashion.” (Carter et. al, 2008) Having a verve learning style may mean that students need to be physically stimulated while learning lessons, have movement or “brain breaks,” or even just simply engaging in hands-on learning, among other things. In traditional public schools, verve-centered learning is more likely to be incorporated in early education spaces but is quickly phased out or used very sparingly in lessons and spaces that educate older students.

Though there haven’t been many significant studies on the correlation between increased verve-centered assignments and activities and other culturally responsive teaching practices within classrooms, the studies that we can reference show a positive correlation between increased academic performance (higher test scores and grades) and increased implementation of verve-centered learning in the classroom. “Academic underachievement in African American children may be due to non-stimulating environments that are inadequate in allowing for the expression of

behavioral variability (Shade, 1990). Additionally, research has also shown that, when culturally responsive teaching and instructional methods are incorporated, African American children perform just as well or better academically than their European American counterparts (Gay, 2000; Irvine 2003).” (Carter et. al, 2008) This is exciting information for stakeholders who are invested in culturally-responsive teaching and practices; if schools are willing to shift some of the ways that lessons are given in the classroom Black students would have a greater chance of performing satisfactorily in school. However, in most of America’s schools there is a lack of verve implementation in classroom lessons and projects because the American public education system caters to white learning styles and educational preferences. Verve, within the context of American racism, is easy to mistake for aggression, disorderliness, or disrespect. “In the classroom, high levels of verve may appear to be behavior problems to teachers. Teachers often express concern and perceive African American children as difficult students in the classroom. In situations such as these, the school culture is incongruent with students who exhibit high levels of verve. As a result, African American students may feel stifled, have a difficult time suppressing their movement style and find it difficult to achieve academically in traditional school settings that are not culturally responsive.” (Carter et. al, 2008) Black students may find themselves in a hostile environment if they lean into their cultural modes of learning and may find it necessary to conform to white norms of learning. It takes significant effort to adjust to another, unfamiliar mode of learning, especially when it differs tremendously from one’s natural or preferred learning style.

Black Cultural and Educational Values vs. The No Excuses Model

Black cultural values are very naturally at odds with the values and teaching styles of No Excuses Charter Schools. In order to understand why one must first contextualize and understand what No Excuses Charter Schools are and what they set out to do within the communities they

enter. “The term ‘no excuses’ comes from the idea that schools should make no excuses for student failure (Carter, 2000) and has come to describe a group of urban charter schools that subscribe to a similar model. No-excuses schools share several practices— a longer school day and school year, intensive professional development for teachers, data-driven instruction, and after-school tutoring— but most controversial is their highly structured and strict disciplinary approach. Advocates defend no-excuses discipline on the grounds that it holds students to high expectations and provides the order necessary for student learning; critics argue that it has deleterious effects on student well-being and reinforces racist ideologies by using methods that would not be acceptable for white, middle-class children.” Charter Schools have always been geared towards having young children of color assimilate within the educational system in order to have them work their way into the middle class of American society. The mission goal, in itself, is already opposed to Black cultural values and understanding. Black culture has only been maintained and has been able to thrive because of resistance to and rejection of white cultural norms and society.

Black communities take pride in their traditions and ways of life; complete assimilation has never been a cultural goal of the community. Further, the attainment of knowledge and educational merits and accomplishments have never solely been about clawing one’s way into a higher social standing or class. Knowledge is a communal gift that aids the betterment of the community and larger society. While education in the Black community is definitely considered a way to excel financially and professionally, the grander idea is to give back to one’s community, not to excel and leave where one comes from. “An obligation to support and give back to other African-Americans influenced their educational aspirations, framed how they thought about higher education and defined how they viewed their roles in and responsibilities to their families and community. Carson also found collectivism to be a key part of African Americans students’ identity across academic standing (e.g., freshman, senior). Similarly, Phinney, Dennis, and Osorio

(2006) assessed 713 ethnically diverse freshmen on their reasons for attending college. Results revealed ethnically diverse students have reasons for pursuing college that are connected to a collectivist orientation. Attending college in order to help one's immediate and extended family, to prove to others that you can be successful and to help others with the same racial or ethnic identity were identified as motivating factors specifically associated with African-American and other racially-diverse students." (McCallum, 2017) Changing or trying to redirect the educational goals of students only bring negative effects. Studies show that when students are not motivated by self and personal values when inside of the classroom they perform worse, on average, than students who have genuine intrinsic motivation to learn. The No Excuse model puts Black children at a disadvantage by divorcing them from their intrinsic sources of motivation. Pushing individualist values on Black children instead of incorporating their cultural values within the classroom and showing them how their education can be used for the betterment of their communities and greater society is a choice that doesn't make logical or moral sense. Students should be allowed to bring their motivations and passions within the classroom and marry them with their learning experience. The individualist outlook on education and learning is one that has been developed through neoliberal understanding of schooling.

The individualist outlook naturally births the presence of unfriendly competition. No Excuses Charter Schools are known for their toxic intra-school competitiveness. "Around this institutionally validated concept of academic rigour, the language of sports was ever-present in the textual vocabulary and institutional discourses. Common words were 'players', 'training', 'protocols' and 'game day', as well as 'plan of attack' or 'counter-attack'. The state-wide test itself was referred to as 'the finish line'. Kerr (2006) asserts that texts contribute to 'text-mediated relations' that are 'embedded in policies that regulate everyday practices' (p. 33), where, in this sense, texts structure discourses and determine acceptable forms of action. Using the language

associated with sports has connotations of self-improvement, perfection and technique, and the connotation of competition and winning/losing. Such words structure social relations in powerful and problematic ways, privileging a certain narrow conception of what learning is and what learning can be. In the [no-excuses] model, learning is always cast in meritocratic terms, depicted as an investment in oneself and one's future employability; therefore, a failure to learn—to keep up with the rigour of learning—is a disinvestment in one's future.” (Garth, 2020) This particular way of educating is unnecessarily embarrassing for students who struggle with academic material and standardized testing and could be potentially harmful to a child's mental health; it promotes rigid individualism and contributes to a culture of bullying. Students who are not able to perform satisfactorily risk ridicule from peers and authority figures. “Class competition negatively affected students' academic achievement by increasing their learning anxiety, which was consistent with conclusions drawn by Sariem et al. (2014) and D'Agostino et al. (2021). According to Lewin's field theory (Lewin, 1936), individuals' mental activity and behaviors are closely related with the environment they live [in]. For students who daily live in a competitive atmosphere, the pressure of comparison and potential failures leads them to feel uneasy and anxious about learning outcomes. Anxiety is experienced particularly strongly when control over the outcome of a competition seems impossible (Pekrun, 2006).” (Li et. al, 2022) Test scores are, and probably always will be, individual achievements, however, this kind of environment erodes and discounts the benefits of a communal learning experience. Classrooms in No Excuses Charter Schools are not 'school families' or rooms of friends and friendly peers, they are the battleground of ruthless academic competition. This school-wide culture needlessly adds to the stress of the schooling experience.

The naming and shaming of students who do not academically perform in acceptable ways is a breeding ground for toxicity. Students witness their teachers ruthlessly berate their underperforming peers and see fit to imitate the bullying behavior. Ramon Griffin wrote a case

study on the psychological trauma that young Black boys experience within No Excuses Charter Schools; his interviews with Black teenagers highlight the racism and belittlement that Black students often face within these environments.

“Mista’s perceptions of the ‘No Excuses’ environment continued when he claimed that the school also perpetuated a culture of embarrassment and humiliation for certain students. He mentioned one instance where he was singled out by the principal in the cafeteria, Mista said:

He would just go around picking random people, just talking about them. Not always bad but some people were bad. And I’m just sitting there. I’m just chilling. Had on my badge, looking around, looking at him, like talking. He just pointed at me, ain’t gonna be nothing when he gets older. Ain’t gonna be nothing but a garbage man when you grow up.

The embarrassment that he felt during that moment caused him to run out of the cafeteria in disgust. Unfortunately, he said that that was not the only time he was singled out and humiliated by school personnel in the ‘No Excuses’ environment...

I guess I was rebellious. Cuz certain things, I felt like they shouldn’t’ve suspended me for or even called to the office for. I talked back. I tried to explain myself or a situation. Of course, you can’t always explain yourself to elders or that principal. But, I felt like I was getting suspended, detention for simple things I shouldn’t even be talked to about. Sometimes, they pointed me out when they knew who the person was. Yet, they still pointed me out.

Much like his prior experiences, Mista felt that he was wrongly accused of wrongdoing on multiple occasions and had no one to protect him. Thus, he perpetually remained cautious around certain people when similar situations

occurred. When asked if he communicated the unfair disciplinary habits, perceived targeted microaggressions, and blatant bullying and humiliation to his mother, Mista felt that it was not a viable option to stop the hurtful treatment.” (Griffin, 2018)

As shameful and horrifying as this knowledge is, it becomes even worse when juxtaposed against Black cultural values. In Black cultural spaces communalism is a very important part of living and experiencing the world. Life, through the eyes of Black understanding, is a cooperative experience. Tasks and learning experiences are ‘group projects’ meant to be shared and collaborated on. In ruthlessly competitive spaces Black children are taken out of their element and trained to see their classmates and peers as academic adversaries instead of partners and collaborators in the educational experience as they have learned to do within their homes. Black students, no matter how stringent and/or consistent the culture of academic competition is, continuously reject such ways of achieving academic praise and success. “Marryshow (1992) found that rather than reject all high achievers. Black children rejected only those who achieved via mainstream cultural modes. In Marryshow's study, the two high achievers who exhibited behaviors found within the home and community experiences of African Americans were rated significantly more socially desirable than were the two high achievers who exhibited mainstream cultural behavior, suggesting that Black children do not generally dislike academic high achievers as Fordham (1988) argued, but maintain positive attitudes toward high achievers who excel via attitudes and behaviors that are more congruent with their own culturally rooted value systems.” (Sankofa et. al, 2005) Black children are more likely to reject people and methods who are heavily influenced by white educational norms. This continues to add to a toxic classroom culture; students who are able to successfully perform academically in No Excuses Charter Schools are likely to be unconsciously looked down upon by their underperforming classmates. This unproductive learning

environment is created and sustained by individualist thinking and never-ending high-stakes competition within the school building.

CHAPTER 6: OPPOSING CULTURAL VALUES CREATING INAPPROPRIATE SCHOOLING PRACTICES

The inappropriate and often abusive practices that are employed in No Excuses charter schools seem to be baked into the model itself. The model takes a ‘colorblind approach,’ ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity, to education. Instead of creating curriculums and teaching strategies that are catered to Black students and their specific needs and acknowledging the hurdles that they must face due to structural oppression, No Excuses models encourage the idea that one can train Black children to rise above their material realities. This disregard for societal context and the lack of commitment to work towards structural solutions leads to the adultification of and increased stress and negative mental health outcomes for Black children.

Adultification is “a form of racial prejudice where children of minority groups are treated as being more mature than they actually are by a reasonable social standard of development.” (Blake et. al, 2017) Expecting Black children to have the ability to overcome centuries of oppression and structural barriers in order to perform just as well, or better, than their white counterparts through sheer willpower is a symptom of the adultification of Black children. Black children should not be expected or pressured to perform academically when their most basic needs are not being met. In No Excuses Charter circles, many stakeholders reference the “resilience” and “strength” of Black and brown children to justify their militaristic approach on education and schooling. This is just racism taking on a different form. Perceiving Black children as stronger, more resilient, and more capable than their peers is a product of racist pseudoscience that asserted Black people were

superhuman. The schooling conditions that are in place as No Excuses Charter Schools would have a hard time being implemented at white, suburban, affluent schools simply because parents and administrators would not allow it. In those schools it is understood that the No Excuses model borders on child abuse and negatively impacts the morale of children. Somehow, though, these same conditions are good enough, and even said to be beneficial, for Black children.

The implementation of No Excuses schooling, a system that is designed to train Black children to imitate white children and assimilate into white cultural society, is also a callback to racist views on Black existence and personhood. The thought that Black people are incapable of learning, growth, and intelligence unless they rigidly obey and conform to standards of whiteness is still alive in the No Excuses model. School culture that punishes and redirects behaviors that deviate from the white cultural norms are not equipped or worthy of educating Black children.

Strict body expectations are a strong example of the racism that is baked into No Excuses culture. Students in these environments are not allowed to remove their bodies from ‘scholarly’ body positions. This is usually described as having a rigidly still body, clasped hands on desk, feet flat on the floor at all times, and eyes always following the speaker or presenter. During transitions, students are not allowed to talk at all and they move as one unit in straight lines. Neutral observers of No Excuses Charter’s body expectations liken it to the systemic policing of Black bodies that has been a problem in America since the times of chattel slavery. If Black students do not use or move their bodies in a way that pleases their teacher or administration, they are subject to unnecessary demerits or even escalated punishments such as detention, suspension, or expulsion. Some students are even berated during classroom lessons if their bodies become “distracting” to the learning environment. If one takes into consideration that Black students, in general, are born into an ethnic culture that values and rewards learning through verve-centered effort then it is

rational to acknowledge that this manner of bodily expectations are directly at odds with Black children's natural and/or preferred ways of learning.

When considering neurodivergent Black children this becomes an even bigger problem. Neurodivergence in the Black community is a common occurrence with a substantial number of people affected. Sixteen percent (4.8 million) of Black and African American people reported having a mental illness, and 22.4 percent of those (1.1 million people) reported a serious mental illness over the past year. (MHA National, 2018) Yet, time and time again, charter detractors have pointed to evidence that No Excuse models discriminate against and forcefully filter out neurodivergent students from the school community.

Neurodivergent students are given demerits, detention slips, suspensions, and expulsions at higher rates than their neurotypical counterparts. "Of the students with disabilities who are enrolled in charter schools, their chances of being removed from school via suspension are higher than their peers in traditional public schools. Of the 4752 charter schools analyzed in the study, 1093 of them (about twenty-five percent) suspended students with disabilities at a rate that was ten or more percentage points higher than students without disabilities in those schools. Alarming, 235 charter schools across the nation suspended fifty percent of all their enrolled students with disabilities. Thus, in some charter schools, a student with a disability has a fifty-fifty chance of being suspended at some point during the year." (Roberts, 2018) This is a predictable conclusion when considering that Black neurodivergent people have higher levels of verve than Black neurotypicals. These facts draw parallels to the way that Black neurodivergent people are treated at the hands of the state. Neurodivergent Black people are more likely to be mistreated, manhandled, or killed by the police than other groups. Anti-privatization activists point to these parallels to reinforce the conclusion that No Excuses models are willingly recreating racist and ableist conditions within school buildings.

The culture of cutthroat competition is also a symptom of catering to white-American cultural values. “If much of life is seen as a race, then a person must run the race in order to succeed; a person has the responsibility to compete with others, even though we know not everyone will be successful. If every person has an equal chance to succeed in the United States, then many would say that it is every person’s duty to try... In fact, generally speaking, any group of people who do not compete successfully—for whatever reason—do not fit into the mainstream of American life as well as those who do compete and succeed.” (Vintage American Ways, 2020) An essential characteristic of No Excuses Charters is the competitive nature of classroom environments. Students walk past walls of class-wide grade point averages and graded tests and classwork every day for the purpose of comparison and competitiveness. The No Excuses model explains that students with high grades will look to their other peers and feel inspired to reach higher if they are not at the top of the class or where they would want to be. Students who are at the top of the class will not become stagnant because they are aware that their classmates who are lower-ranked could potentially knock them off the pedestal at any time. Students with low grades will feel the pressure to better themselves and their grades and will ultimately benefit from this display of their personal information/work because it will create drive.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Even if the No Excuses model actually achieved the goal of getting Black children to and through college the end would not justify the means. The model perpetuates racism by restricting access to cultural modes of learning. Black students are not allowed to exist as who they want to be when they walk through the doors of the school building. They are required to act like people they have probably never met and who they do not share culture or everyday experiences with. This external pressure leads to major internalized stress, depression, anxiety, and other mental health

issues that impact their ability to grow as people. No Excuses values do not align with those of the Black communities they frequently serve because they are modeled after and for academic standards, curriculum, and behavioral expectations that do not take their personal experiences, collective struggles, and material realities into consideration. There is a lack of respect for Black culture, experiences, and values that is reflected through the disregard of serious concerns about the long-term wellbeing and happiness of Black students that undermines any real or potential gains in regards to academic performance. Understanding and focusing on the goals of the urban communities that they are pushing into should be the first priority of No Excuses model proponents but it is often not. Supporters of the No Excuses model may be too focused on academic data and the end-goal of getting students accepted into college to fully take on the task of reforming their schools and giving power to students, families, and educators.

Moving forward, education stakeholders who are anti-privatization need to focus less on proving that No Excuses models harm academic careers and lean more into the devastating socioemotional effects that they have on vulnerable Black students and families. Black students and families turn to No Excuses Charters to help them try to escape the racial disparities that largely prevent Black people from accomplishing their academic and professional goals. No Excuses proponents frequently suggest that their disciplinary and academic policies are generally supported by most of the families they serve because they continue to enroll their children year after year. However, many families struggle with their choices referencing the dearth of satisfactory options when it comes to financially-accessible K-12 schooling. No Excuses Charters take advantage of the desperation that Black parents feel when coming to terms with the realities of the education system and the outcomes for Black students. The No Excuses model demands complete compliance at all times without consideration for external and internal circumstances that

may prevent full compliance 100% of the time. This creates a school environment and community that does not create an open, safe space for genuine community input and suggestions.

While the state of education in America is in dire straits, and becomes even worse when zeroing in on the Black community, there is not enough research or talk in educational reform circles about the fact that No Excuses models have the potential to create a public health crisis in the Black community. There are several case studies and data sets that point to the fact that rigid No Excuses models have incredibly damaging effects on adolescent psyches and mental health. However, No Excuses model detractors are not digging deeper into studying how the No Excuses charter model is inherently incapable of ensuring the best for Black children. With more in-depth case studies, listening to the voices of the Black students and families who have been victimized by the No Excuses model, and focusing on the mental and physical health crises that these schools are creating, instead of arguing about academic data, charter school detractors can make a better case against the proliferation of No Excuses Charter Schools that are rooted in ethics and care for Black students rather than their (potential) academic worth.

However, there is not enough data and studies within the education reform realm to meaningfully shift the public dialogue about charter schools. This paper suggests extensive quantitative data on the mental health of students within No Excuses Charter Schools, more in-depth studies on the unique learning styles of students within the Black community, and a deeper understanding of the moral education of students in No-Excuses Charter Schools. These are three data areas that are extensively lacking. The biggest problem that education reform stakeholders have at this moment is the lack of sufficient quantitative data to back the overwhelming qualitative data that is already available to the public as well as leaders in education. While qualitative data, anecdotes, personal experiences, pictures, videos, and archival retrieval (among other things) is just

as valuable and telling as quantitative data there is a special focus on concrete numbers when it comes to discussing the No Excuses model and the charter school debate in general.

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