CIVIL RIGHTS AND EDUCATION: (HOW) CAN TEACHING CONTRIBUTE TO THE BUILDING OF A JUST DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY?

Deborah Loewenberg Ball

@deborah_ball

Fox Run • Novi, MI • Thursday, November 8, 2018

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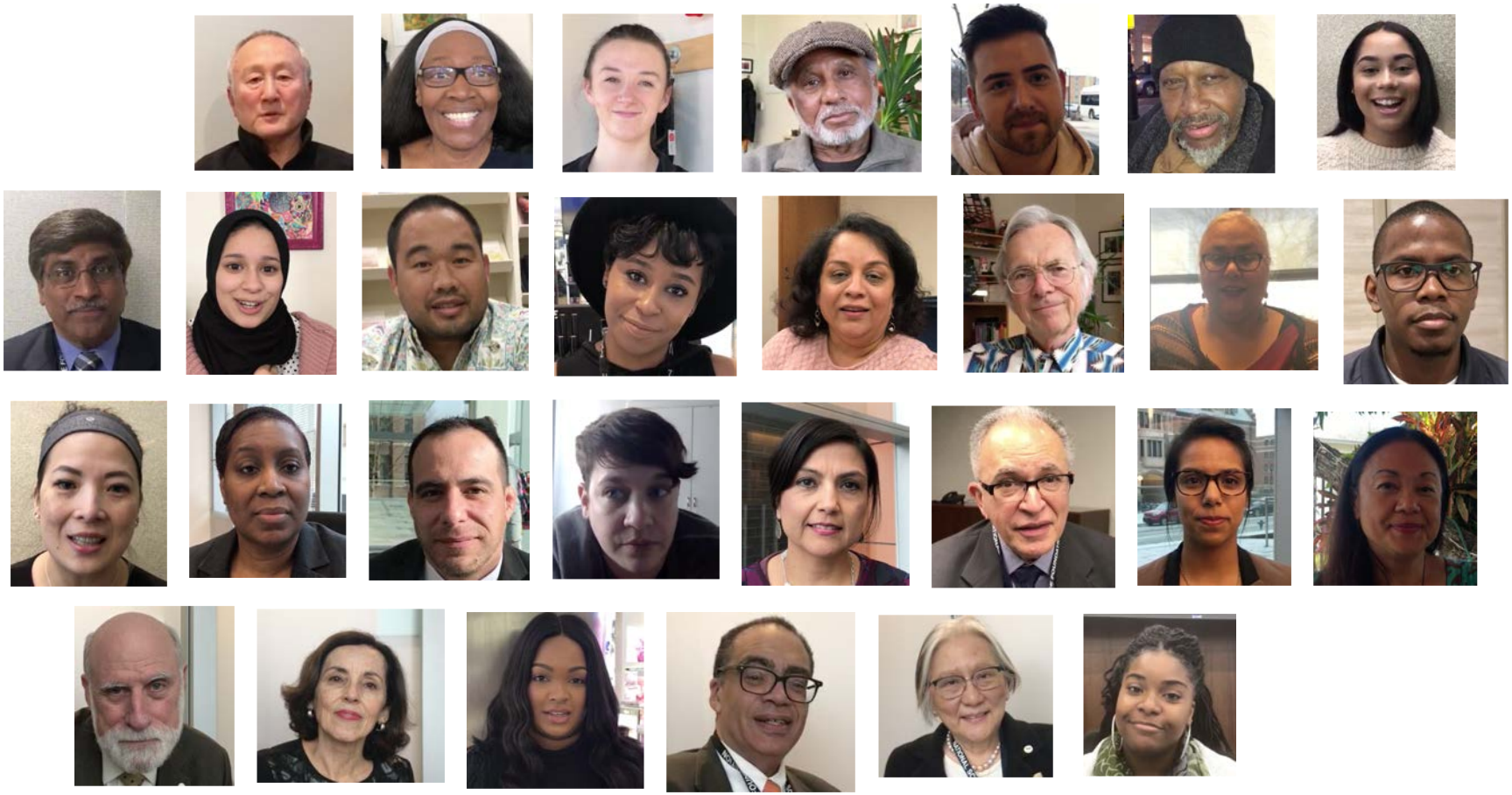

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VIDEO: IS THERE A TEACHER WHO HAD A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON YOU?

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BEFORE BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION…

- Unequal material resources
  - Facilities
  - Books
  - Teachers' and administrators' pay
- No bus transportation
- Unresponsiveness to Black parents' requests

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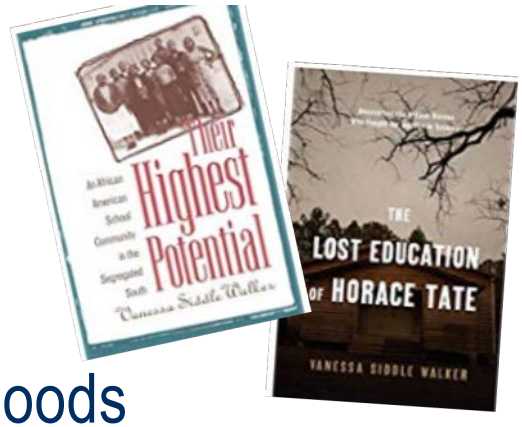
BEFORE BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION…



- Schools rooted in communities and neighborhoods
- Classrooms led by Black teachers and schools by Black principals
- Teachers who were well-trained, dedicated, and demanding and took a personal interest in their students
- Teachers who stayed in their jobs longer than their white counterparts and, thus, had more experience

"The segregated school is most often compared with a 'family' where teachers and principal, with parent-like authority, exercised almost complete autonomy in shaping student learning and insuring student discipline."

(Siddle Walker, V., 1996)

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March 13, 1953

Miss Darla Buchanan
623 Western Avenue
Topeka, Kansas

Dear Miss Buchanan:

Due to the present uncertainty about enrollment next year in schools for negro children, it is not possible at this time to offer you employment for next year. **If the Supreme Court should rule that segregation in the elementary grades is unconstitutional our Board will proceed on the assumption that the majority of people in Topeka will not want to employ negro teachers next year for White children.** It is necessary for me to notify you now that your services will not be needed for next year. This is in compliance with the continuing contract law. If it turns out that segregation is not terminated, there will be nothing to prevent us from negotiating a contract with you at some later date this spring. You will understand that I am sending letters of this kind to only those teachers of negro schools who have been employed during the last year or two. It is presumed that, even though segregation should be declared unconstitutional we would have need for some schools for negro children and we would retain our negro teachers to them. I think I understand that all of you must be under considerable strain, and I sympathize with the uncertainties and inconveniences which you must experience during this period of adjustment. I believe that whatever happens will ultimately turn out to be best for everybody concerned.

Sincerely,
Wendell Godwin, Superintendent of Schools

(Tillman, L. C., 2004)

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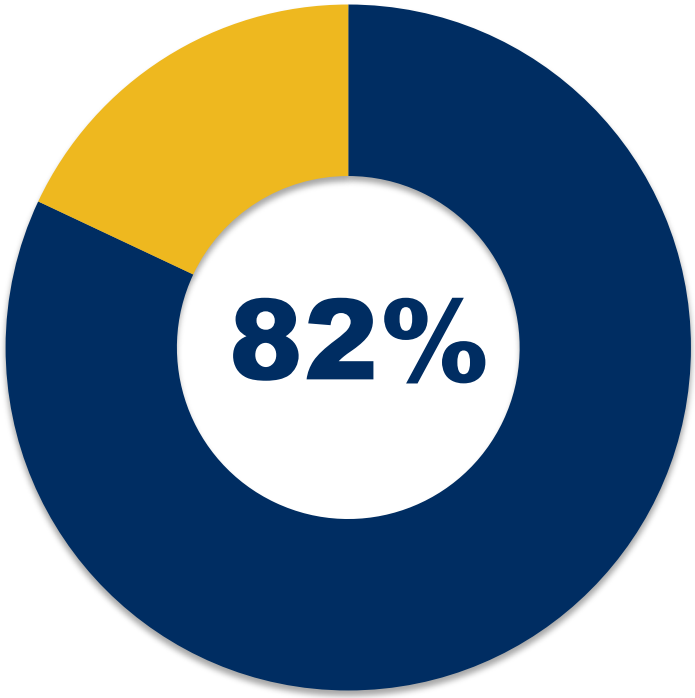
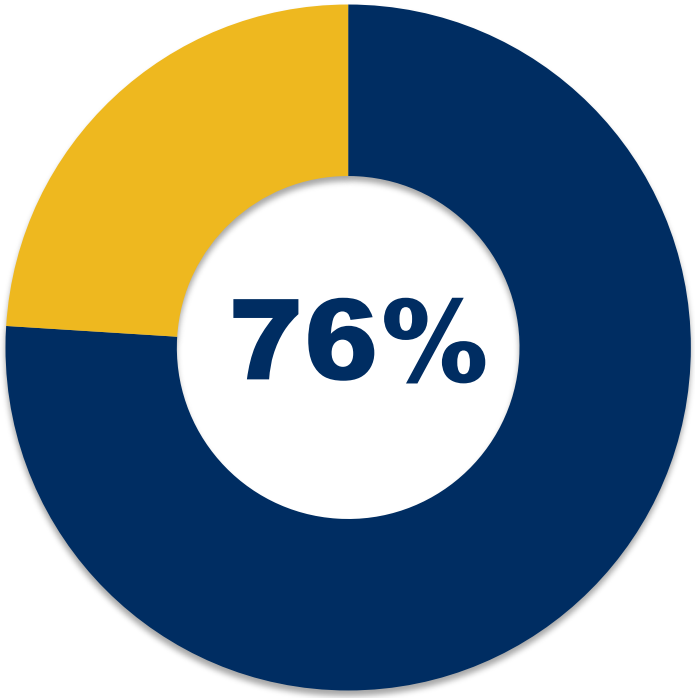
TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS: RACE AND GENDER



WHITE



WOMEN

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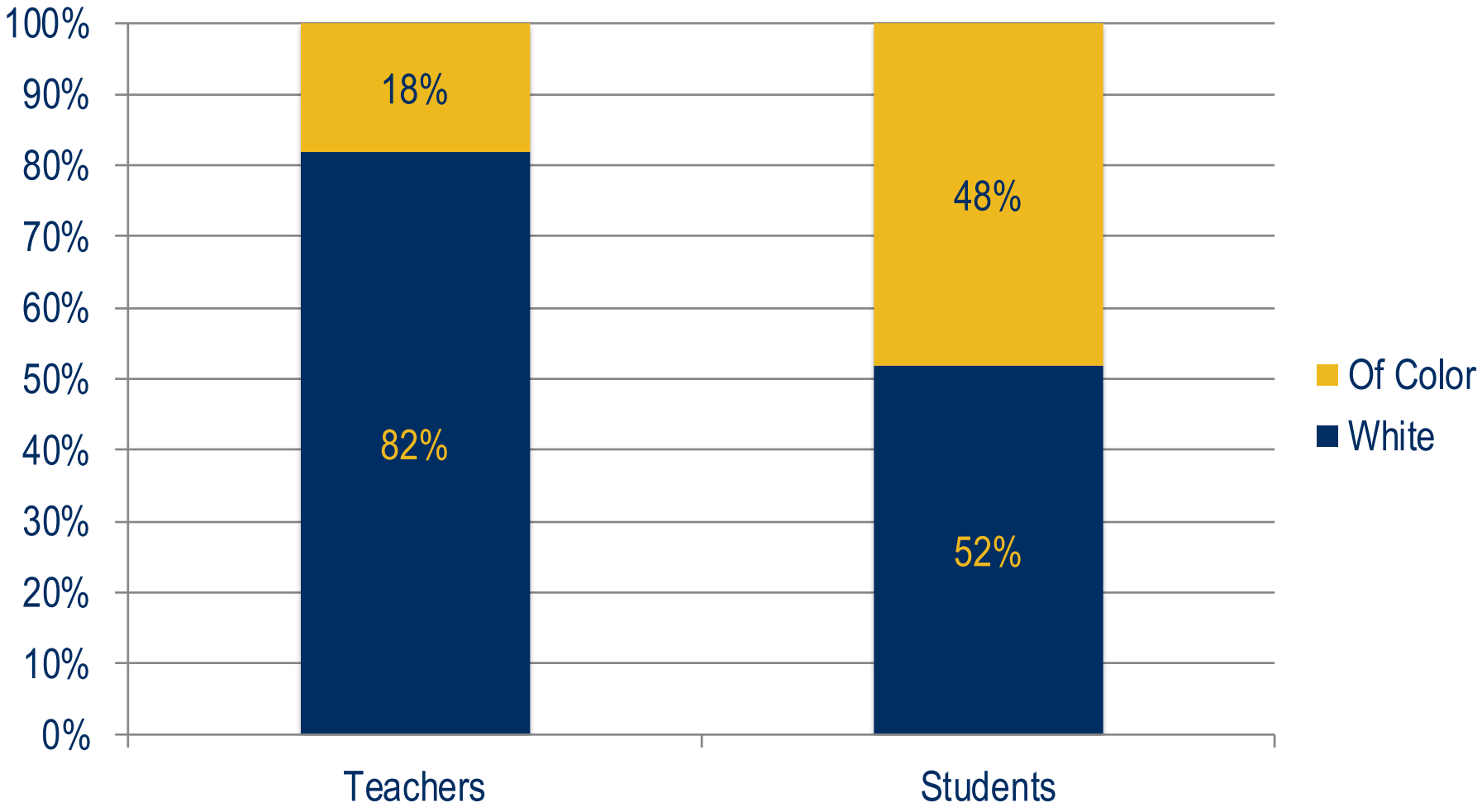
DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDE IN THE U.S.: K–12 TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



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WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- Adults—especially white adults—routinely perceive children of color as:
  - older (biologically and socially)
  - less innocent
  - more defiant
- Transgressions by children of color are more often viewed as intentional and malicious (rather than the result of immature decision-making)
- Children of color disproportionately receive harsher discipline than their white peers

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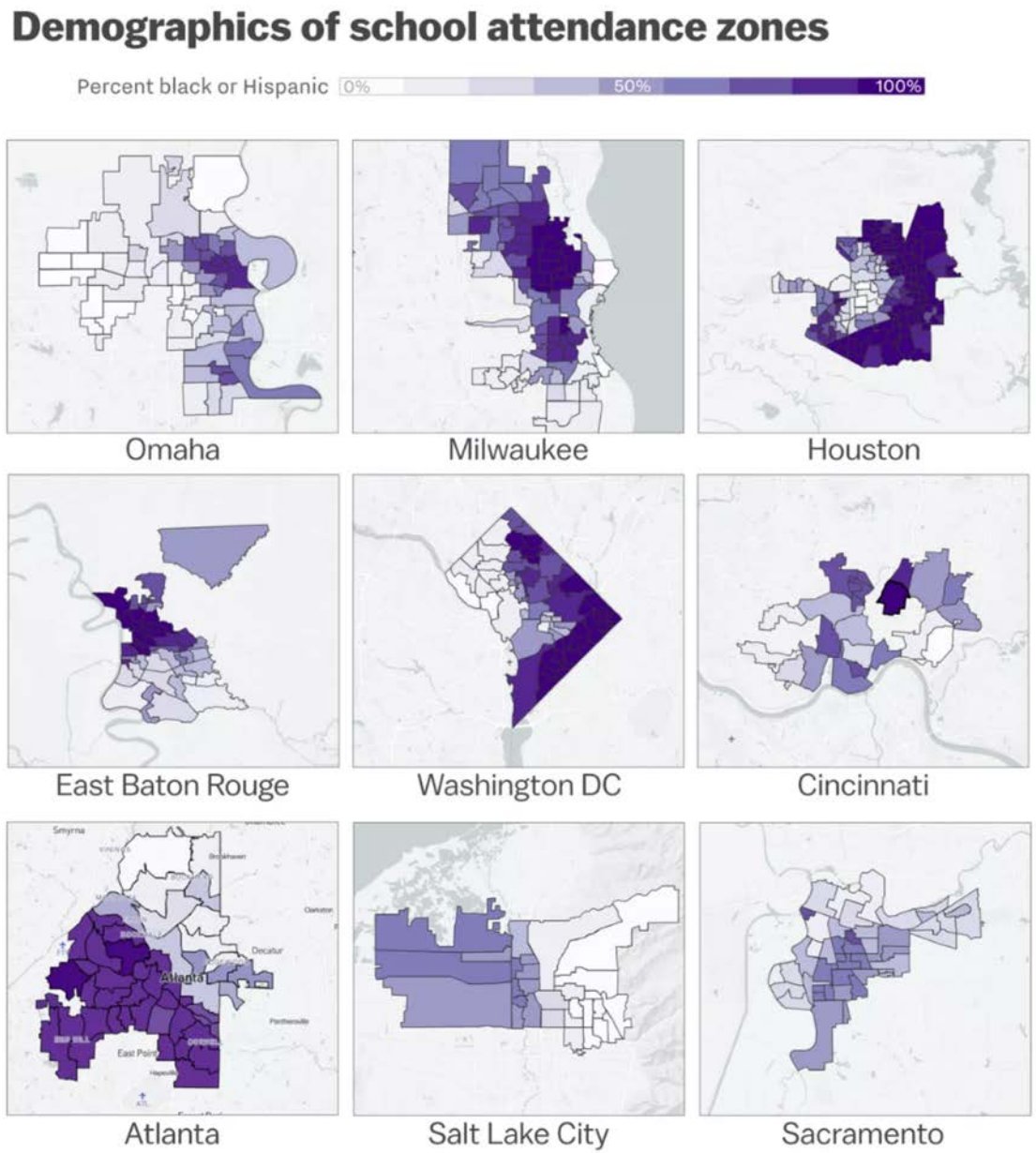

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FROM ACHIEVEMENT GAP TO OPPORTUNITY GAP

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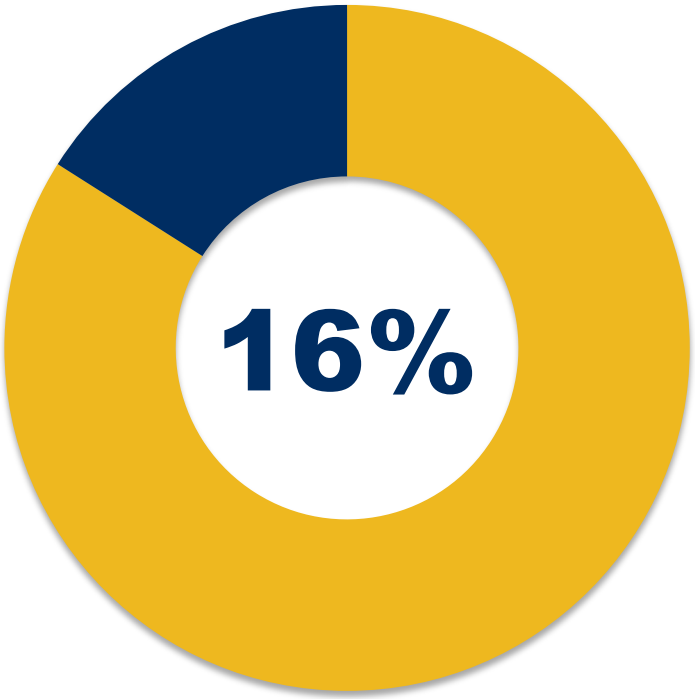
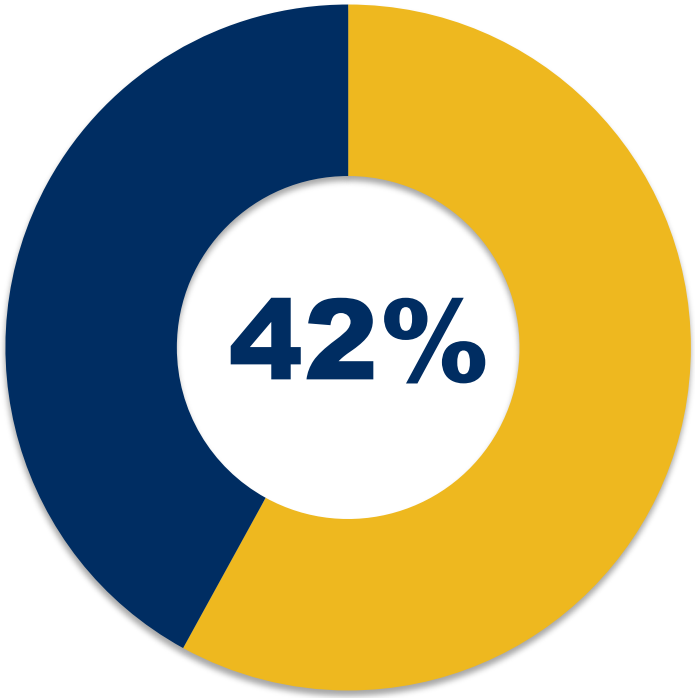
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE "DISCIPLINE GAP"?

Black students make up—



of school **ENROLLMENT**



of those **SUSPENDED** more than once

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IT STARTS EARLY

- Black preschoolers 3.6 times more likely to be suspended than white children
- 19% of preschool population; 47% of suspensions

Yale study (2016) with 135 teachers

- Videos of Black boy and girl, white boy and girl
- No problematic behavior in either video
- Eye-tracking technology showed that teachers were watching the Black children more
- 42% of the teachers said that the Black boy's behavior needed attention

(Gilliam, Maupin, et al., 2016)

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

- Many studies that show effects of racial and gender bias in teachers' perceptions, interpretations, and interactions with students
- These affect: assignment to special education and gifted/talented programs, discipline (including suspensions and expulsions)

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FIELD TRIP:
FIFTH-GRADE CLASSROOM

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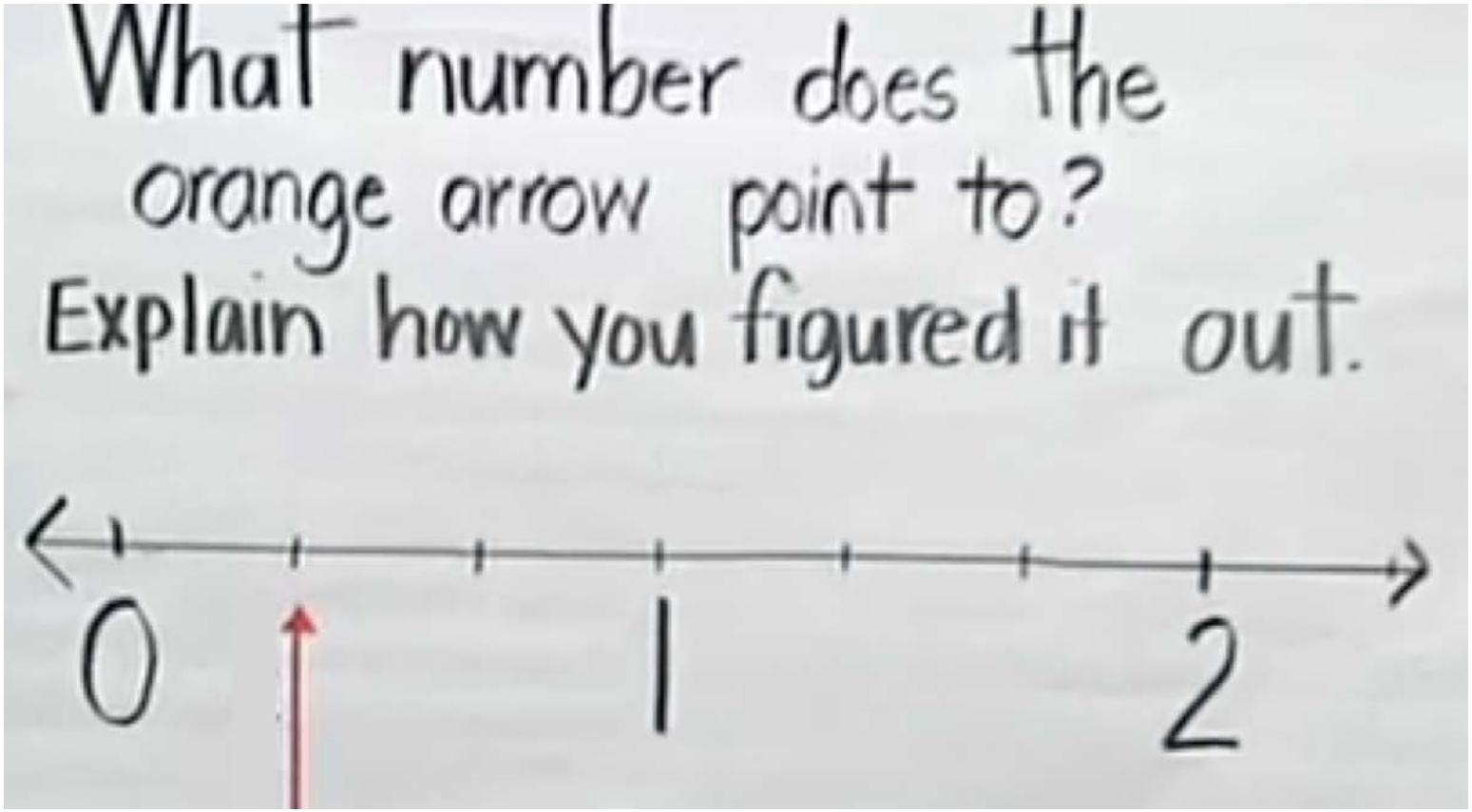

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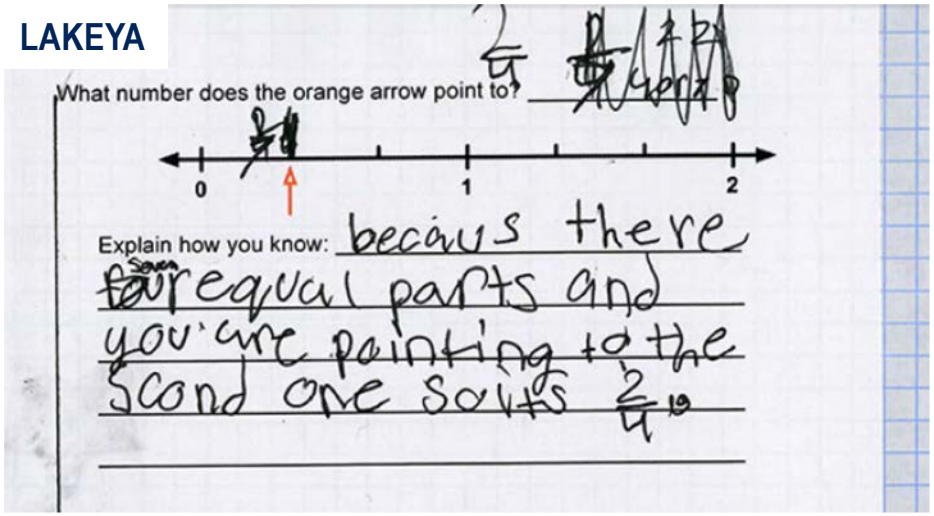
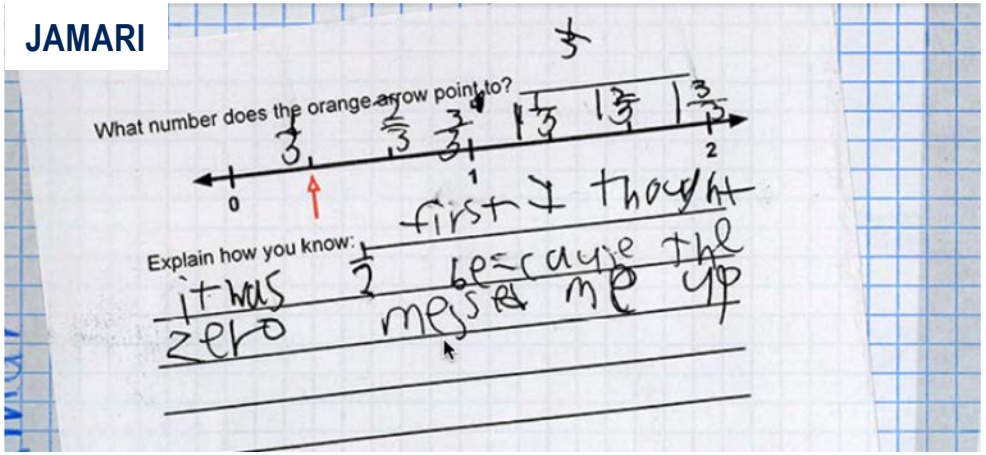
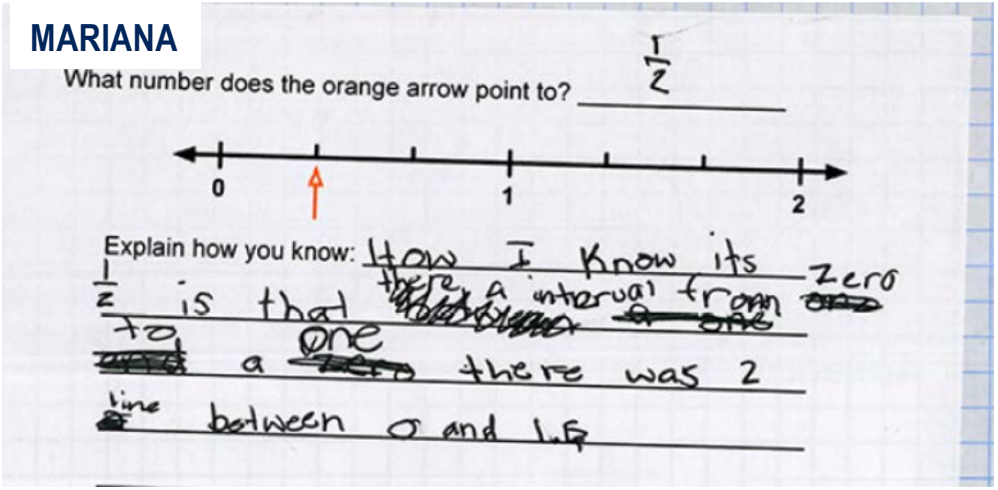
LAKEYA



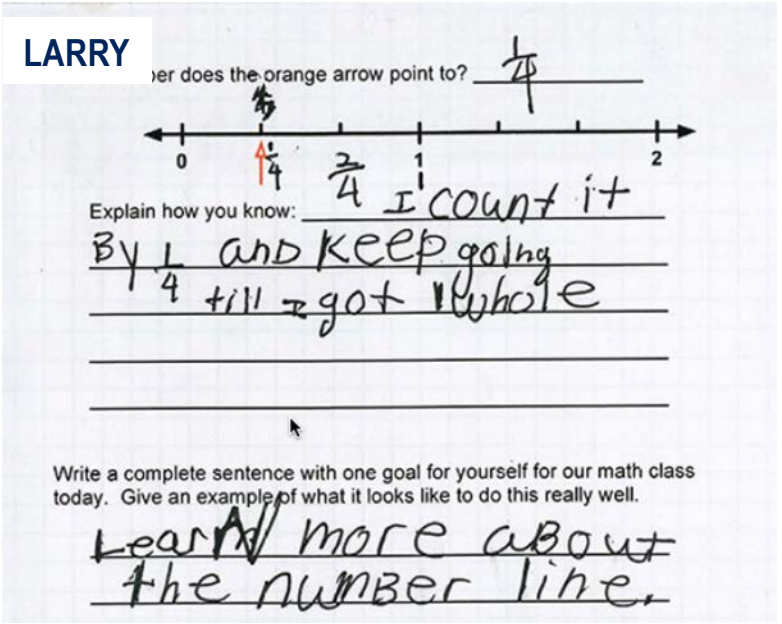
JAMARI



MARIANA



LARRY



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ANIYAH AND TONI

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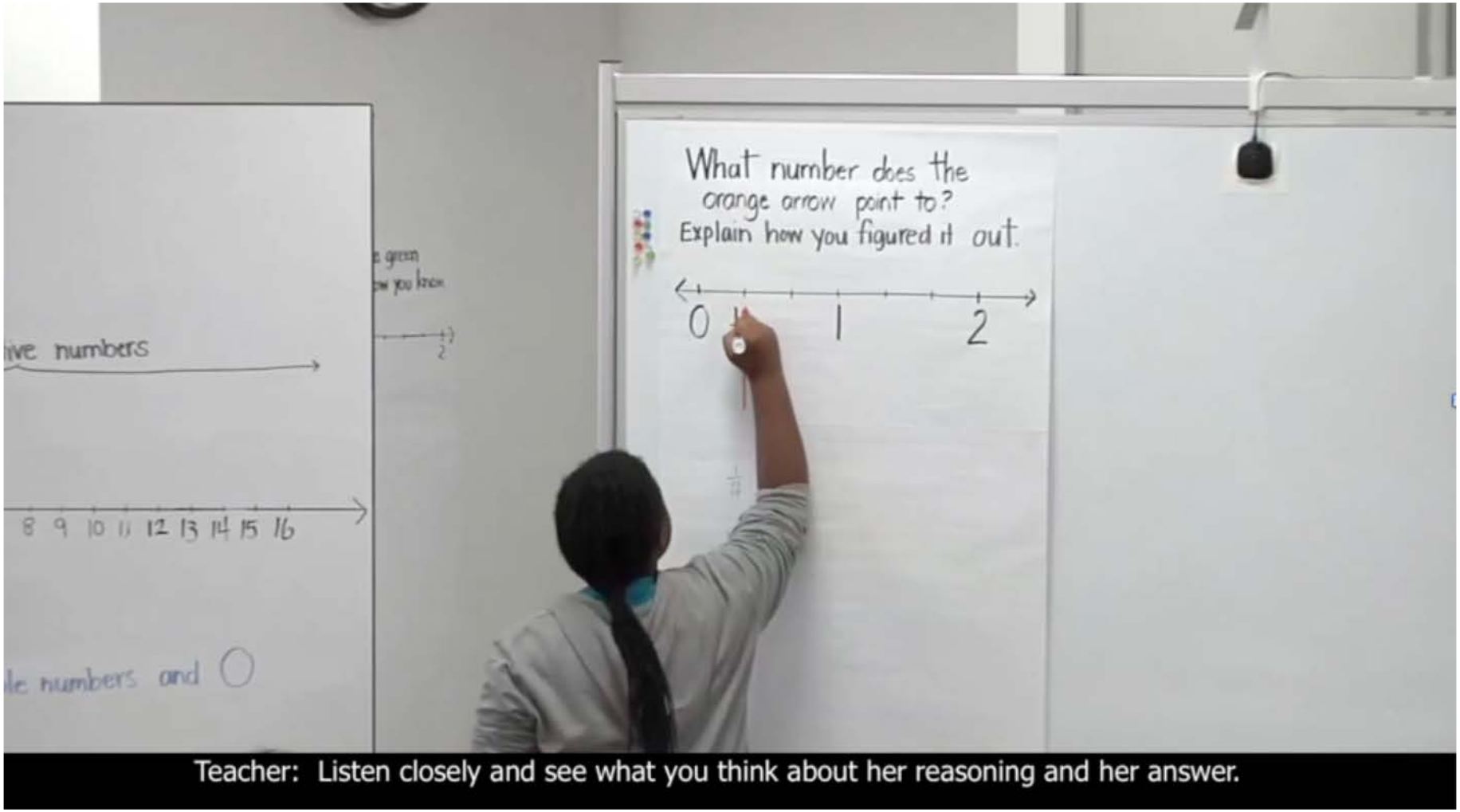
VIDEO: ANIYAH AND TONI



This video and additional supporting materials are available online here.

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WHAT DO YOU NOTICE?

(Gholson, Evan-Winter, Neal-Jackson)

- Toni is asking a question of Aniyah.
- Toni is laughing and playing with her hair.
- Toni and Aniyah are Black girls, who are positioned with different statuses in the classroom, have different physical embodiments, and perform their meanings and understandings of their Black-girlness in different ways.
- **What to do next?**

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WHAT COULD THE TEACHER DO NEXT?

1. "Toni, when you're ready to participate appropriately by not playing with your hair and laughing, and have a question to ask, I will come back to you."
2. "You need to be a better listener, Toni. Aniyah already explained why she picked one-seventh. Who else has a real question for Aniyah?"
3. "What do others think?"

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WHAT DOES EACH OF THESE DIFFERENT MOVES DO?

POSSIBLE NEXT MOVES

1. "Toni, when you're ready to participate appropriately by not playing with your hair and laughing, and have a question to ask, I will come back to you."

2. "You need to be a better listener, Toni. Aniyah already explained why she picked one-seventh. Who else has a real question for Aniyah?"

3. "What do others think?"

POSSIBLE RESULTS

1. Toni is publicly excluded from the discussion.

2. Toni is judged to not be listening, her question is judged as not good, and she is excluded from the discussion.

3. Toni is excluded and her mathematical point is sidelined.

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WHAT DO THESE THREE DIFFERENT TEACHING MOVES *DO* TO TONI?

- Her contributions to the class are not positioned as appropriate or valuable.
- Her participation and mathematical attentiveness are made invisible.
- She is seen as being a distraction, mocking Aniyah, and as playing with her hair.
- These combine to eclipse her humanity.

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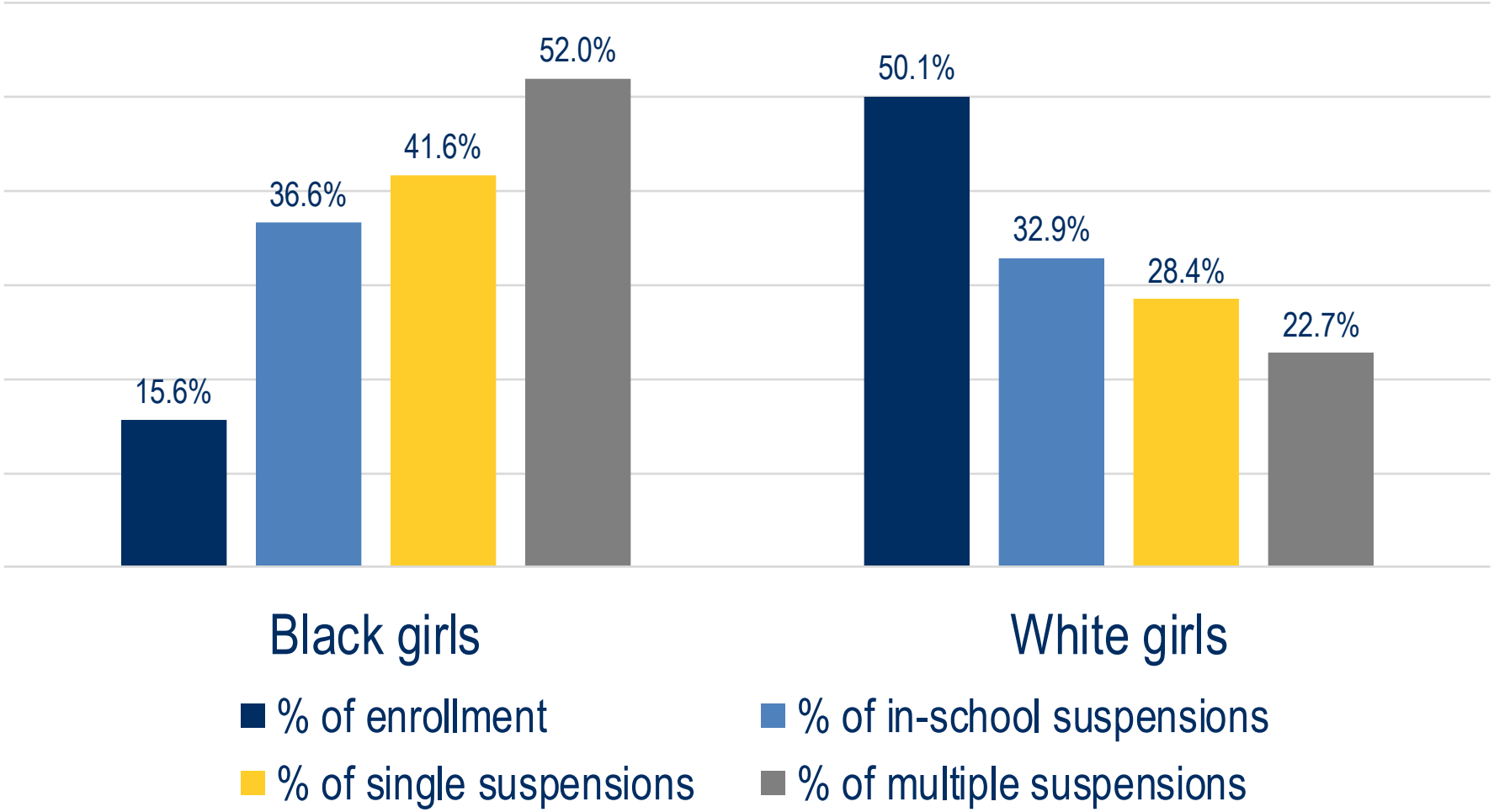
BLACK GIRLS' RATES OF SUSPENSION



(Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017)

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BLACK GIRLS MORE LIKELY TO BE DISCIPLINED FOR SUBJECTIVE INFRACTIONS

2X

For minor violations (dress code violations, inappropriate cell phone use, loitering)

2.5X

For disobedience

3X

For disruptive behavior

3X

For bullying/ harassment

(Epstein, Blake, & González, 2017)

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WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO DISRUPT THE PATTERNS THROUGH WHICH A BLACK GIRL IS MARGINALIZED?

- Seeing Toni's question as key to the class's work
- Assuming that Black children are smart, and thus Toni and Aniyah
- . . . AND having something different to ***DO***

(Gholson & Martin, 2014, Langer-Osuna, 2015, 2017; Leonard & Martin, 2013; Martin, 2012, 2015)

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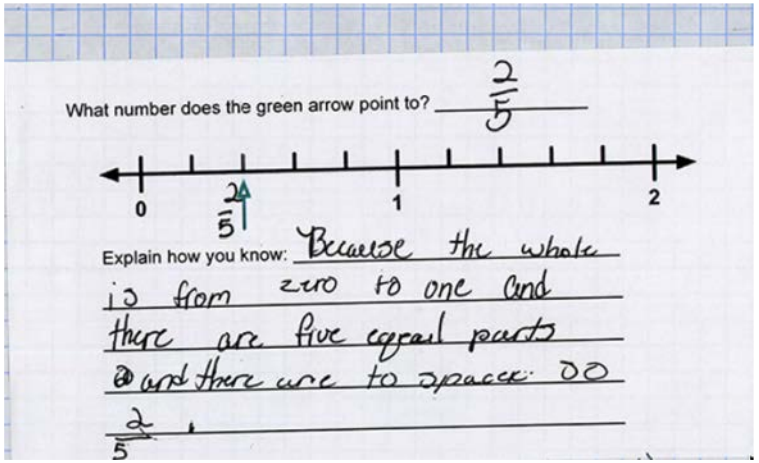
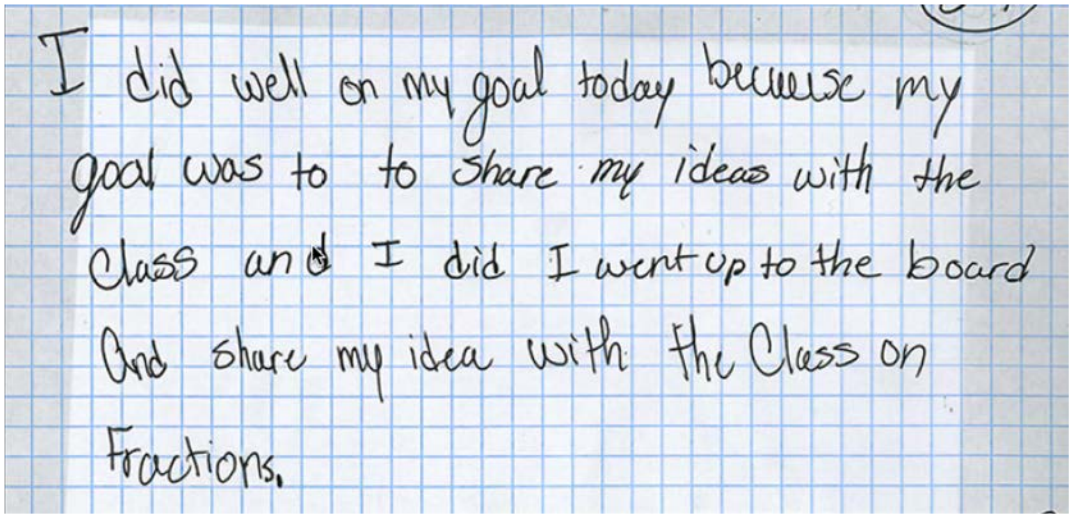
ANIYAH

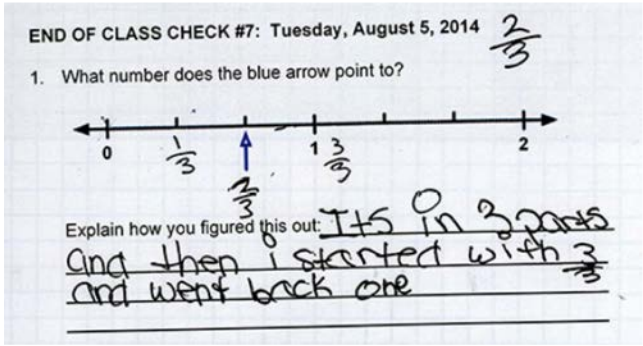
- Identified the "whole" as 0 to 1 on the number line





TONI

- Modeled at the board a complete explanation of how to understand and identify a fraction on the line



THE OTHER CHILDREN

- Developed a depth of understanding of fractions as numbers on the line and how to explain them
- Saw smart Black girls
- Learned about challenging others

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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the **fierce urgency of now**. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late.

Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter—but beautiful—struggle for a new world.

April 4, 1967

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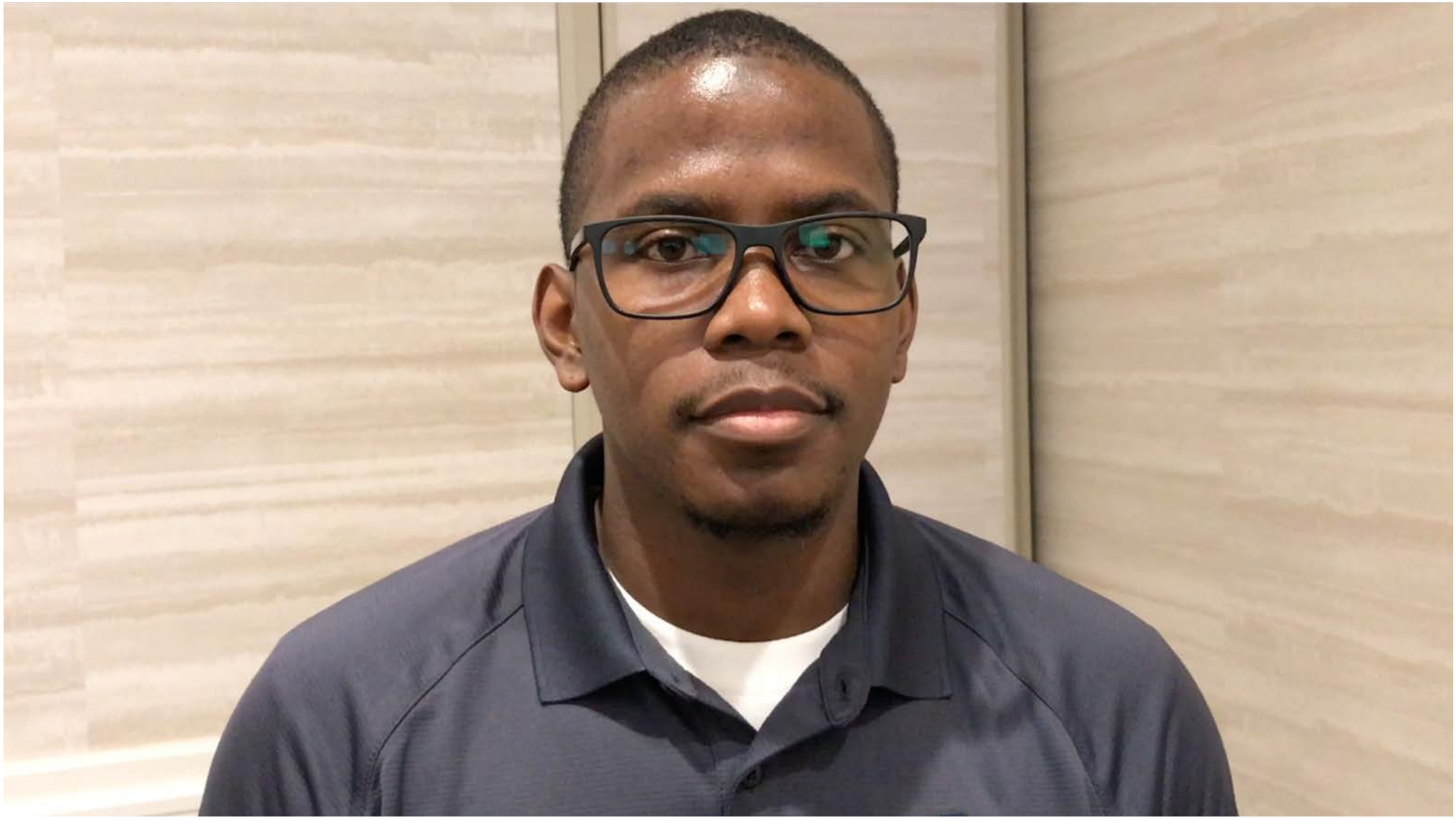
VIDEO: BRANDON



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THANK YOU!

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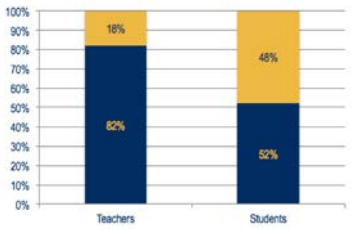
Center for American Progress. (2014). Teacher diversity revisited: A new state-by-state analysis. Washington, DC: Boser.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results From the 2012–13 Teacher Follow-up Survey* (NCES 2014-077). Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=28.



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Center for American Progress. (2014). Teacher diversity revisited: A new state-by-state analysis. Washington, DC: Boser.

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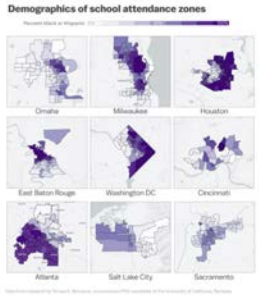
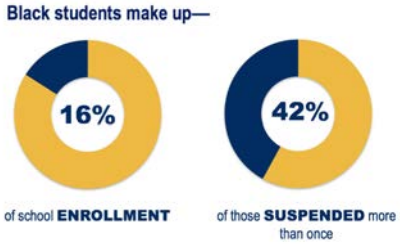


Image on slide 10:

Chang, A. (2018, March 5). The data proves that school segregation is getting worse. Retrieved from https://www.vox.com/2018/3/5/17080218/school-segregation-getting-worse-data



Data on slide 12:

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. (2014). Data Snapshot: School Discipline. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf

Data on slides 24 and 25:

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CREDITS

Image on slide 28:
(1963). [Photo of Martin Luther King Jr. addressing a crowd from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the Aug. 28, 1963, march on Washington, D.C.] [Photograph]. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:USMC-09611.jpg
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