

# Opinion: Righting systemic racism in Louisville should focus on Black school children

Tytianna Wells and Christie Welch

Opinion contributors, The Courier-Journal, Dec. 18, 2020

*Tytianna Wells and Christie Welch are ambassadors for the non-profit Christopher 2X Game Changers Inc. Wells, CEO and founder of Honey Tree Publishing, is the author of eight books including "#Am I Next?: A poetic movement for political reform and Black liberation" and a Ph.D. candidate in curriculum and instruction at the University of Louisville. Welch, the owner of Through the Stone crystal jewelry line, is a 2019 Cum Laude graduate of the University of Louisville with majors in Pan African Studies and Humanities and minors in philosophy and religious studies.*

As peaceful protesters in the aftermath of Breonna Taylor's death, we and thousands of others raised our voices for reforms to address her killing and longstanding systemic racism.

While police reforms are critical, the needs of Black children must become a major focus if we are ever going to heal and transition to a more equitable, just community. The needs are great, including healthcare, food, housing, safety and especially education.

As a community, we have been failing our Black children forever, and that's an unforgivable historic injustice.

Disproportionately, they're behind before they get to first grade. Too many are not ready to learn and there's a good chance they'll never catch up.

We've seen firsthand — too many times — the low expectations toward Black students and the lack of confidence and low self-esteem that instills in them. They're too often taught a curriculum and subjected to a testing system that does not appropriately incorporate Black culture, history, or

achievement, that fails to connect to them. In Jefferson County, only 13% of teachers are Black for a student body that is 36% Black. Research shows Black children do better in school when people who look like them are in leadership roles.

We've seen how the integration of schools has been made the job of Black students. Of students from west Louisville and downtown areas who are bussed across town, 90% are Black; 5% are white, based on reported Jefferson County Public Schools data. This assignment plan, in effect for more than 30 years, has failed them academically because they still lag unacceptably behind white students on achievement tests.

Sadly, we've seen how many Black students end up hopeless about their future and never reach their full potential.

Maybe those factors are why more and more Black families are choosing to homeschool their kids. But for many, that isn't a choice because they live in a low income, single-family home with a working parent.

These families need supports for their children to achieve in school. Many of these children are traumatized by the poverty and the dysfunction of their circumstances including frequent changes of residences, or homelessness. Many are traumatized by exposure to violence including gun violence and scared. Without help, they aren't in an emotional state where they can learn.

As a community, now recognizing historic racial injustices, we have an opportunity to begin righting what's been so wrong about how we've allowed our Black children to be treated.

We need a system that no longer punishes Black children disproportionately and puts the responsibility of school desegregation on them; a system that assumes they have potential, encourages them and

gives them the tools to succeed; that defies history by ensuring that any predominately Black school is not a neglected school; that provides school resources based on need regardless of race; that increases their chances of success with more teachers who look like them and a curriculum that connects to them so they can reach their full potential.