

Carlesa R. Finney

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PERSONAL STATEMENT

As an advocate and educator, I have been committed to developing policies, programs, and practices that uncover and mitigate the causes of disparate academic and discipline outcomes. My varied experiences in leadership and practical application of education policy addressing the negative impacts of poverty and other social constructs such as those related to race, ethnicity, and gender have directly influenced more equitable outcomes, particularly for students of color. My familiarity with many of the issues facing the youth comes from years of experience developing programs for children and adolescents for public schools and within a prestigious hospital in a large city, in student services for a community college; while serving on the county school board, and working as the liaison between a public school and the community in a large district to address long-standing and persistent disparities in education access and success for students in poverty, regardless of race, ethnic minorities; especially African American students, and students receiving special education services.

As founding Director of one of Maryland's first *Family Support Centers* to promote self-sufficiency and as founding chairman of a non-profit that operated childcare centers; both public/private partnership ventures in public housing communities, I facilitated positive outcomes for young parents and their children. My service as a member and in leadership on the county school board and executive level for one of Maryland's largest school districts and in my work in student services for one of Maryland's premier community colleges has enabled me to support student achievement, interface with the public, teach, create and conduct professional trainings and workshops. I have engaged in debates and discussions about national education issues in various roles over the course of my career in various ways at the state and nationally, having served on a national board to promote parent engagement and at the state level to lead efforts to improve minority student achievement.

I have led highly effective teams to utilize data that illustrates disparate outcomes as a "driver" to recommend action and to introduce the most current research and effective practices in executive and senior level discussions and planning, resulting in cultural, systemic, and programmatic improvements in students' academic access, reductions in discipline disproportionality, more responsive school climates, and broad-based community engagement. In addition to work that has directly impacted academic achievement access and outcomes, I have researched various aspects of student conduct and discipline and effective practices, offering significant input into state and national conversations about disproportionality. I co-led a system-wide discipline audit which resulted, among other things, in a change in practices and in professional development to teachers in classroom management. I co-chaired and championed a system-wide cultural proficiency professional development plan as a foundation for creating culturally responsive environments.

My success galvanizing practitioners, parents, politicians and policymakers, advocates, civic and faith-based community organizations and individuals to support student development and achievement has been recognized. My proven influence in varied political situations and the initiation of model programs to demonstrate how to engage parents, students and other stakeholders that share the responsibility to eliminate disparities has allowed me to communicate the urgency, inspire innovative solutions, and to work collaboratively to strengthen individuals and families, and engage organizations and communities to promote success for all students, no exceptions. And a significant part of what I have done or have supervised staff is to create community-based support for students outside of school and to establish processes for mediation at student conduct and special education hearings as well as to aid parents in understanding their rights and responsibilities and in how to access the appropriate resources to advocate their children.

I am always honored to share in more detail how my years of distinguished leadership and passion for equity and fairness could contribute to the work with "like-minded" advocates who are promoting and influencing authentic change to improve outcomes, particularly for public school students - where there is so often the need for more; more resources, more creativity, more sensitivity, and more of a commitment to systemic change to eliminate disparities.