



IWES & BE NOLA Focus Group Results

On April 23, 2019 and April 24, 2019 the Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies (IWES), in partnership with Black Education for New Orleans (BE NOLA), held two focus groups with local educators, school staff and community advocates to discuss the current state of New Orleans' educational system and how it impacts Black children. The ultimate goal of the focus groups was to suggest Calls-To-Action (CTAs) that can be publicized city-wide through IWES' In That Number campaign that will lead to direct action to make New Orleans' education system more compassionate and more trauma-informed. Below you will find all of the ideas generated by the focus group participants, exactly as they were written out during the sessions.

- Stop measuring or stop basing performance on expulsion/suspension rates.
- Provide restorative practices.
- Create alternatives to suspension.
- Evaluate expulsions. If a student/child has done something serious enough to be expelled, let's understand why.
- Increase wages.
- Provide access to effective and equitable unions.
- Screenings of children each year to understand where/ what they are coming from.
- Provide yearly mental health screenings.
- Have a proportionate amount of social workers that match the population of students.
- Employ at least one full time social worker in every school.
- Employ full-time counselors, social workers & school psychologists that look like and understand black children.
- Increase the amount of licensed social workers, licensed therapists and other similar roles.
- Include holistic physical & mental health support in schools that can be accessed by anyone in the neighborhood.
- Employ at least one full time nurse in every school.
- Schools should have a response to support students at the school every time a murder happens, which should include an immediate and long-term plan.
- Agree on a common calendar for all schools to reduce the pain of families (different kids of different schools get out on different times).
- Employ one (1) college and career counselor per hundred (100) students at every school.
- Remove the police presence in schools.
- Create a moratorium on school to prison pipeline attributes (both in practices, structures, etc.): metal detectors, tape on the floors, subjective infractions.
- Have City Council be involved in the school system in order to understand what it lacks.
- Require that the Superintendent present an annual report to the city.
- Each council member should have an account of school leaders in their district to understand the issues and the appropriate amount of resources.
- Have a dedicated committee to address the impact of trauma in N.O. neighborhoods staffed by educators, citizens, medical professionals and social workers (not politicians).
- Have therapists, social workers and trusted educators develop programs and policies that would address trauma in students, educators and families.
- Generate a list of strategies and tools to respond to trauma and to address vicarious trauma.
- Create an education committee that explores policies impacting schools.
- Address aspects of institutions that traumatize children, families, etc.

- Have City Council implement a process of rating of schools that is more family-based and equitable, based on what schools' needs are. Find ways to focus on what successes are happening and stop measuring success on state territory.
- Create a parent & community advisory board in which new start-up charters & existing failing schools need to appear to get approval.
- Create mandatory parent seats (25% minimum) on every charter board to solidify parental voice in decision-making.
- Have direct-run community-based schools.
- Change the entire system back to neighborhood schools.
- Have more local education administrators of color in school leadership.
- Teachers and school leaders should look like the children they serve.
- Change the format of hiring/firing educators. It is difficult to build trust when teachers are coming and going.
- Extend proper maternity leave (2 - 3 months).
- Agree on a common grading system across schools/networks.
- Allow parents to have the ability to weigh in on the budget before it's ever voted on and passed on from a principal.
- Simplify/clarify the relationship between OPSB, CMOs (boards), individual schools, etc. so parents have one clear entity to speak to.
- Implement art-based rehabilitation programs for youth with 1-2 offenses (stop giving kids records).
- Create linkages to the art community.
- Accountability for whole-child development in addition to more numbers-based measures.
- Use mindfulness education.
- Partner with community to leverage cultural traditions and practices that support healing.
- Provide vocational classes as electives in middle school and high school grades along with required curriculum.
- Implement School Resource Officer training to deescalate school calls to avoid suspensions & arrests.
- Train people in each neighborhood in de-escalation.
- Move teachers away from "controlling/disciplining" behavior to seeing behavior as INFORMATION about students' emotional state and coping skills & giving students skills to process negative emotions & trauma.
- Train folks to respond thoughtfully to trauma.
- Train educators to understand that the expression of anger is a call for help, not a character defect.
- Train the staff on social and emotional cues that a child/family member may exhibit.
- Require all educators and leaders to do an annual training on Early Childhood Brain development with a focus on middle school & high school ages so we can understand why behavior manifests.
- Educate folks that work with children on how to interpret and recognize the signs of trauma. Educate about types of trauma youth experience and the impact of trauma. Provide training for all adults who interact with students on trauma.
- Have leader, parent, service provider & teacher training on trauma-informed practices.
- Teach all educators and educational leaders how to be trauma-informed. This training must be ongoing throughout the course of the school year.
- Provide trauma-informed professional development that is available to every teacher and admin; not just ones whose schools/CMOs can afford to contract with providers.
- Administrators, CFO & board members should be mandated to attend intense trauma-informed training.
- Provide parent education classes on trauma, how to identify it, and ways to cope/deal and where to get help.
- Provide better access to literature/novels that model what dealing with trauma positively looks like.
- Host a symposium/summit on trauma in N.O. schools (citywide or neighborhood sessions to address the roots of trauma and its impact, causes/events, internalization, stigma).
- Implement anti-racist/equity trainings.
- Pass local & state policy instituting EDI curricula/courses.
- Provide year-long anti-racism and anti-bias training for each school and a road map assessment on where schools are on getting to culturally relevant ways of being.
- Help educators understand that their students of color and their individual experiences are as diverse as the stars in the sky.
- Too many teachers seeing Black/Brown children through deficit based lenses or as problems to be solved.
- Make sure transient teachers are culturally sensitive and have experience working with our youth on a variety of levels.
- Unearth people's underlying beliefs about low-income children and children of color. Folks think they are inherently bad, lazy, etc. even if they know they have numerous experiences with trauma.
- Therapy for teachers.
- Quality RTI systems.
- Universities should incorporate formal education classes for pre-service teachers.
- Access to mental health service providers.
- More funding for mental health systems for children here in New Orleans.
- Create more job opportunities for our youth.
- Hold accountable schools that are unsafe or inequitable for all students.