



Full Comparative Analysis of Key Findings (All Cities)

1. Drivers of Educational Challenges

- **Common Themes:** Across all cities, participants identified *poverty*, *funding inequities*, and *economic disenfranchisement* as critical drivers. This persistent lack of resources is compounded by systemic issues, such as internalized low expectations for Black students and barriers to family engagement.
 - **Unique Insights:**
 - *Memphis:* Emphasis on *crime and safety concerns* both in and outside school settings, affecting the learning environment and overall student well-being.
 - *Philadelphia:* Highlighted *mental health support* as a critical, unmet need for students, with the lack of consistent psychological services creating additional barriers to educational success.
 - *Atlanta:* Cited the *flight of the Black middle class* as a factor that further exacerbates disparities in public schools, diminishing resources and support in predominantly Black schools.

2. Barriers to Improvement

- **Common Themes:** *Systemic inertia*, low expectations, and *political disengagement* are major barriers in each city. Political barriers, including red tape, lack of funding, and resistance to change, were echoed by all cities, as well as issues with teacher quality and retention.
 - **Unique Insights:**
 - *Houston:* Emphasized *political manipulation* and the takeover of school boards by conservative interests, which participants saw as directly harmful to Black students.
 - *Philadelphia:* Voiced strong distrust of political leaders and the *influence of teachers' unions* as significant barriers to improvement.
 - *Atlanta:* Identified *systemic unwillingness to take risks* as a cultural barrier, suggesting that entrenched attitudes prevent necessary innovation.

3. Successful Strategies

- **Common Themes:** Each city highlighted the success of *community organizations*, *wrap-around services*, and *charter schools* or specialized educational institutions that support culturally relevant, high-quality education. *Mentorship programs* and initiatives that provide after-school support were also seen as effective across the board.
 - **Unique Insights:**
 - *Memphis:* Cited specific local organizations, like Memphis Lift, which actively engages parents in the educational landscape.



- *Philadelphia*: Noted that *vocational and technical programs* have been particularly successful, providing alternative pathways to success for students who might struggle in traditional academic settings.
- *Houston*: Emphasized the role of *Black churches* as anchors of community support, offering youth programs and mental health advocacy.

4. Political Priorities and Barriers

- **Common Themes:** All cities called for *equitable funding*, the removal of cultural and systemic biases in education, and increased political advocacy to prioritize Black education. Political distrust was a prominent theme, with participants expressing frustration over ineffective leadership and the influence of policies that don't serve their communities.
 - **Unique Insights:**
 - *Chicago*: Emphasized the need for *housing reinvestment and workforce development* as foundational elements in supporting students' educational success.
 - *Atlanta*: Highlighted a need to educate Black families on *school choice and charter options*, believing that informed families can better navigate educational systems.
 - *Philadelphia*: Advocated for *legislation that views Black and Brown education as a civil right*, emphasizing the necessity of legal protections to ensure equal opportunities.

5. Opportunities for Improvement

- **Common Themes:** Each city acknowledged the need for expanded *mental health services, career pathway exposure, and trauma-informed support*. Participants stressed that educational success for Black students is inextricably linked to holistic, wrap-around services that go beyond the classroom.
 - **Unique Insights:**
 - *Houston*: Called for *increased mentorship programs* and community involvement through church-led initiatives to foster academic and social development.
 - *Atlanta*: Suggested community-centered schools with smaller class sizes and an emphasis on reading and collaborative learning as avenues for improved student outcomes.
 - *Philadelphia*: Urged for *intergenerational support and green spaces* in every neighborhood, aiming to create nurturing, supportive environments that foster both academic and personal growth.

6. Personal and Communal Agency



- **Common Themes:** There was a strong sense across all cities that improving Black education requires *community-led initiatives, parental advocacy, and a culture of accountability* within schools and districts. Community involvement, particularly in school boards and political processes, was seen as crucial for sustaining meaningful changes.
 - **Unique Insights:**
 - *Memphis:* Emphasized *building community-led support systems*, including programs for basic needs such as clothing, feeding, and transportation.
 - *Philadelphia:* Focused on *mobilizing parents and community members* to take on active roles in after-school programs, volunteering, and supporting arts education.
 - *Houston:* Stressed *retaining Black teachers* and providing intentional support for them to help create an affirming environment for Black students.

Overall Insights and Future Directions

The data gathered across these five cities provides a clear roadmap for addressing the systemic and community-driven challenges in Black education. Each city offered both overlapping themes and unique contributions, underscoring that while common challenges exist, local contexts must be considered in crafting solutions.

- **Consistent Needs:** Equitable funding, wrap-around support services, mental health resources, and community-driven advocacy emerged as universal needs across all cities. Participants in each city emphasized that improving educational outcomes for Black students will require dismantling long-standing biases and investing in resources that support the whole student.
- **Unique Priorities:** The varying socio-political landscapes in each city contribute to unique priorities. For example, Houston and Atlanta focused on political advocacy and school board dynamics, while Philadelphia placed greater emphasis on vocational programs and civic legislation for educational equity.

Recommendations for the New Niagara Initiative

1. **Support Localized, Community-Driven Solutions**

Each city's unique insights emphasize the importance of developing localized solutions. The New Niagara Initiative can play a vital role in facilitating community-led programs and creating a network for sharing successful strategies across cities.
2. **Advocate for Equitable Funding**

Given the universal call for equitable funding, the New Niagara Initiative should advocate for state and federal policies that ensure resources reach underfunded Black schools. This effort could include lobbying for changes in school funding formulas and campaigning against policies that redirect funds away from public schools.
3. **Expand Mentorship and Wrap-Around Services**

Wrap-around services, particularly in mental health and mentorship, were frequently cited as



essential to student success. Partnering with local organizations in each city to expand these services could help address students' academic and personal needs.

4. **Champion Policy Changes That Protect Black Education**

Legislative advocacy can support Black and Brown education as a civil right, as emphasized in Philadelphia. This advocacy could involve pushing for protections against policies that disproportionately affect Black students and supporting laws that mandate culturally responsive curricula.

5. **Empower Community Voices in Educational Policy**

Empowering parents, students, and community members to take active roles in school boards and political processes can drive long-term change. The New Niagara Initiative should prioritize programs that train community leaders, increase political engagement, and provide tools for grassroots advocacy.

Conclusion

The first leg of the New Niagara Initiative has revealed both the resilience of Black communities and the urgency of the educational challenges they face. Moving forward, the initiative has a unique opportunity to act as a unifying force, building on the strengths of each community and advocating for systemic change. Together, we can create a future where Black students across the country receive the high-quality, equitable education they deserve.