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"Listen when I come to the table": Reimagining education with and for Black elementary-aged youth and their mothers

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Much of the literature regarding Black youth experiences in schools considers the effects of racism and takes up inquiry through deficit views. Yet, to understand how to shift the system of schooling to provide equitable, liberatory learning experiences, it is critical to center Black children's voices and perspectives. In the current study, we partnered with eleven Black elementary youth and their mothers to explore their dreams for re-imagining schools. We identified four themes related to school improvement from a child-centered, abolitionist lens. Our findings highlight the need to increase opportunities for youth voice in scholarship and practice, and join existing conversations that see education as the practice of liberation and freedom.

KEYWORDS

abolition, Black youth, education, asset-based, freedom dreaming

Introduction

> "I wish you know the schools would be, you know, the space will be created with the child ***at the table*** to be able to vocalize and say "hey, this is what I would like to see in my classroom" right?" Aja, mother and research participant

As the first Black woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress, Shirley Chisholm once said, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair" (Edward M. Kennedy Institute, 2022). In the 50 years since she spoke these words, we have repeatedly seen Black individuals, particularly youth, respond to Chisholm's clarion call. In particular, Black children's imaginations and courageous acts have laid the groundwork for various historical movements (Mims and Kaler-Jones, 2020; Anderson, 2021) because children are "evolutionary problem solvers with audacious imagination" (Grace Lee Boggs as

quoted in Shalaby, 2017). Recently, for example, Black children have organized for police free schools (Welton and Harris, 2022), more COVID-19 safety protocols (Meckler and Natanson, 2022), and the elimination of racist and sexist dress codes (Bakuli, 2022) in schools.

However, Black families have been systematically excluded from school decision making tables and subjected to centuries of systemic state-sanctioned oppression (Jones and Reddick, 2017; Bennett, 2020). Moreover, given the prevalence of racial discrimination and harrassment in schools for Black children (e.g., Anderson and Stevenson, 2019; Basile et al., 2019; Posey-Maddox et al., 2021), much of the existing literature regarding Black children's educational experiences focuses on establishing and addressing problems (e.g., documenting rates of discipline and expulsion and providing recommendations; Morris, 2016; U.S. Office for Civil Rights [OCR], 2018). Yet, the process of documenting and addressing racism and discrimination through research, policy, and practice often omits Black families' voices and dreams (Green, 2020). In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2002), Robin D. G. Kelley asks the following questions: "What are today's young activists dreaming about? We know what they are fighting against, but what are they fighting for?" (2002, p. 8). In the current study, we drew upon Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth and Kelley's freedom dreaming (2002) to center the ways that Black youth and their mothers' re-imagined educational settings that promoted positive learning experiences. In the section below, we outline the theoretical framework, highlighting four specific tenets we utilized in the present study, and situate our asset-based approach within the concepts of freedom dreaming and school abolition.

Community Cultural Wealth as a framework for Black children and their mothers' abolitionist freedom dreams

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005; Yosso and Burciaga, 2016) is an asset-based model that allows scholars to envision a kaleidoscope "of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by communities of color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (Yosso and García, 2007). In relation to the education of Black children, Black youth must frequently cope with experiences of racism and discrimination in their schooling environments. A recent meta-analysis, for example, found that Black students across all K-12 grade levels are more than twice as likely to incur school discipline actions and were also more likely to receive harsher discipline compared to White students (e.g., Black students were suspended while White students were given detention) (Young and Butler, 2018). A study by Jackson et al. (2019), for instance, found that Black youth who encounter police at school exhibit more trauma responses (e.g., heightened emotional distress and post-traumatic stress symptoms) compared to those who encounter law enforcement outside of school.

Thus, we used CCW, specifically the conceptualization of aspirational, resistant, familial, and navigational capital, to highlight how Black children and their families have resisted racism and subordination in schooling environments, and we prioritized the voices and perspectives of Black children.

Aspirational, resistant, navigational, and familial capital

Community Cultural Wealth posits that children of color possess multiple forms of capital. Aspirational capital, or the ability to "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78), takes shape through hopes and dreams, thus nurturing a culture of possibility (Yosso, 2005). Second, resistant capital refers to the knowledge and skills an individual fosters through oppositional behaviors that challenge inequality (Yosso, 2005). This form of capital aligns with what Shalaby (2017) refers to as fearlessness in the face of inequity. Combining all other forms of capital with a recognition of structures of oppression allows for what Solórzano and Yosso (2002) name as transformative resistance, where people of color reimagine spaces to empower and honor legacies of resistance. A study by Morgan and Stahmer (2020), for example, found that single Black mothers relied on their resistant capital to fight for their autistic children to receive appropriate diagnoses and support. Resistant capital also includes caregivers consciously teaching behaviors that challenge the *status quo*; children are taught how to be oppositional with their bodies, minds, and spirits in the face of inequality (p. 81). Additionally, navigational capital refers to one's ability to maneuver through institutions, while highlighting the strength it takes to move successfully through institutions "not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). A 2018 study by Allen and White-Smith, for instance, found that Black parents of young boys used this form of capital to navigate systems related to schooling (e.g., housing zones and school enrollment rules) as well as racist experiences to support the racial socialization of their boys. Finally, familial capital is the knowledge nurtured by kin that "carry a sentence of community history, memory, and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). The concept of "family" also refers to extended and chosen family, including living or deceased relatives, friends, and anyone else considered kin. Thus, given the robust history of these specific forms of capital connected to Black children and their communities, we anticipated that participants would draw on their capital to re-imagine children's educational experiences. In all, we utilized these overlapping and interconnected forms of capital to understand the collective dreams of mothers and their Black elementary-aged children.

Dreaming with and for Black children

In the present study, we also drew upon Kelley's definition of freedom dreams as, "visions fashioned mainly by those marginalized Black activists who proposed a different way out of our constrictions (2002, p. xii). In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Kelley begins by centering the dreams of his mother:

> So with her eyes wide open my mother dreamed and dreamed some more, describing what life could be for us. She wasn't talking about a postmortem world, some kind of heaven or afterlife; and she was not speaking of reincarnation (which she believes in, by the way). She dreamed of land, a spacious house, fresh air, organic food, and endless meadows without boundaries, free of evil and violence, free of toxins and environmental hazards, free of poverty, racism, and sexism. just free. (p. 2)

Kelley describes how his mother "convinced" (p. 2) his family that change was always possible, which served as an impetus for his own political engagement. Through dreaming, Kelley argues that past and present activists envision new worlds. In this spirit, we wanted to explore how Black children and their mothers in our study dreamed about a different way out of discriminatory schooling —of environments where Black children flourished.

This notion of flourishing, or thriving, through freedom dreaming connects not only to CCW, but to school abolition, and the broader network of abolitionist movements. School abolition builds on the cultural wealth of student communities (Love, 2019) through the facilitation of interactions where "people matter to each other fight together in the pursuit of creating a homeplace that represents their hopes and dreams, and resist oppression all while building a new future" (Love, 2019, p. 68). Meiners (2011) notes that abolition does not mean reform; drawing such a parallel would obfuscate the goals of those advancing abolition work. Instead, school abolitionists envision a world in which schools collectively seek to understand and embody the belief that "no one is disposable" (Barrie, 2020), and work to build conditions that create institutions that are just, loving, equitable, and center Black, Brown, and Indigenous lives (Dunn et al., 2021).

Black mothers' abolitionist freedom dreaming

Throughout history, Black mothers have advocated for their children's education (e.g., Allen and White-Smith, 2018; Leath et al., 2020; Lucas, 2022). For example, Mary Jane Bethune founded the Daytona Beach Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls in 1904 after being the first and only child in her family to go to school and discovering that "the whole world opened up" when she learned to read (Long, 2011). As another example, in 1957, 3 years after the landmark school desegregation lawsuit, *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*, the Harlem Nine (i.e., nine mothers residing in Harlem) filed suit against the New York City Board of Education for operating "separate and unequal schools in Harlem" (Watson, 2021). Specifically, they challenged the zoning policies that prevented their children from attending better resourced schools and learning about their culture and heritage, which negatively impacted their children's overall learning and schooling experience. And recently, Black mothers continue to advocate for their children during the COVID-19 pandemic by engaging in activities such as advocating for educational resources for their children, staying in contact with their children's teacher, seeking additional resources for their children, and, in some cases, deciding to homeschool their children (Parks, 2021; Woldeyohannes, 2021; Lucas, 2022). These three examples illustrate a larger pattern of Black mothers' re-imagining schools beyond their current conditions.

Materials and methods

In the present study, we used qualitative inquiry through community-based research, semi-structured interviews, and narrative thematic analysis to center youth and mother perspectives of their dreams for education.

Community-based methods

We employed a community-based collaborative approach (Denzin, 2015) to our research design by applying Strand et al.'s (2003) three principles of community-based research: (1) research that is a collaborative enterprise, (2) research that validates multiple sources of knowledge and promotes the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination of the knowledge produced, and (3) research with a goal of social action and social change to achieve social justice (p. 8). First, the present study represented a collective exploration of freedom dreams, anchored by our existing relationship with families engaging in a longstanding university-community partnership. To date, we have collaborated on research, policy, and programming aimed to support Black families thriving in and around the city. In particular, the first author joined the partnership as an apprentice, shadowing and learning from those within the partnership, supporting administrative efforts, connecting with community members frequently, and later moved to co-facilitating free workshops for families based on the community's identified needs (e.g., online learning, stress and trauma, grief and loss) and conducting research alongside staff and community members.

Second, we prioritized multiple sources of knowledge by learning from children and their mothers separately through varied methods of interviewing. Additionally, in order to

amplify, highlight, and validate children's knowledge and contributions, we established a Student Advisory Board (SAB) composed of child participants. During the recruitment phase, we asked parents if they would be open to having their children participate in a student group. For those who indicated "yes," we provided information about the Student Advisory Board at the close of those child interviews and invited students to join based on parent responses. Board participation came with additional digital gift card incentives. Four enrolled students in the board: three girls and one boy across 5th and 6th grade (ages 10–11). On the suggestion of the students, we decided to meet every 2 weeks for the duration of the study to give the group ample time to work with the data, work together, and work on sharing ideas for change. Although no data was collected or analyzed from the meetings, we incorporated the content of our collaboration to inform analysis and dissemination with their permission. And, finally, we pursued our goal of social action by engaging in processes such as debriefing with members of the community, presenting our findings to stakeholders, and working directly with members of the SAB to bring thoughtfulness to dissemination and change-making ideas.

Participants

The present sample included 11 Black elementary school students (ages 7–11 years, $M = 9.6$ years) and 11 Black mothers (see **Table 1**) recruited from a larger on-going study exploring family processes and mental health (Duane, 2022). At the time of interviews, children were enrolled in grades second through sixth grade. All children attended a mix of public and charter elementary schools within the large urban midwestern city.

Procedure

During the summer of 2021, families enrolled in larger on-going study (Duane, 2022) who had children between the ages of 7–12 ($N = 68$) were sent a Google form via email, using contact information previously obtained. The first author emailed those who responded to the Google form to schedule a time for both an adult and child interview via Zoom. A total of 31 caregivers expressed interest in participating in interviews. During the recruitment phase, we also asked parents if their child would be interested in participating in a Student Advisory Board, which we elaborate below. We selected families to enroll and created a waitlist based on timestamps of enrollment. Importantly, when selecting participants, we purposefully enrolled fifteen unique families, rather than interviewing multiple children from the same family. While we additionally recruited and interviewed fifteen families in the summer of 2021, when the fall began and school started, four of the families were unable to schedule child interviews, given the on-going stress of the pandemic, family loss and grief, and the stress of shifting between virtual and in-person learning. As a result, the first author interviewed eleven child and adult participants. Parent interviews lasted between 45 min to 1 h, and child interviews lasted between 20 and 50 min, with the average interview being 37 min long. Once interviews were scheduled, child participants were sent a box of supplies to support the virtual interview process (see **Figure 1**). Participants were compensated with $50 digital gift cards for participation in the adult interview and $15 for participation in the child interview portion.

TABLE 1 Participant information.

Mother pseudonym (m)	Child pseudonym (c)	Child's gender and age
Jenna	Jamal	Boy, age 7
Aniyah	Willow	Girl, age 8
Nia	Niles	Boy, age 8
Aja	Christian	Boy, age 9
Whitney	Jayden	Boy, age 9
Dominique	Onika	Girl, age 10
Tamara	Cassandra	Girl, age 11
Kaleyn	Drake	Boy, age 11
Journee	Kyion	Boy, age 11
Zoe	Sarah	Girl, age 11
Imani	Jasmine	Girl, age 11

Interview protocol

The authors designed an interview protocol with the goal of learning more about students' experiences of school-based

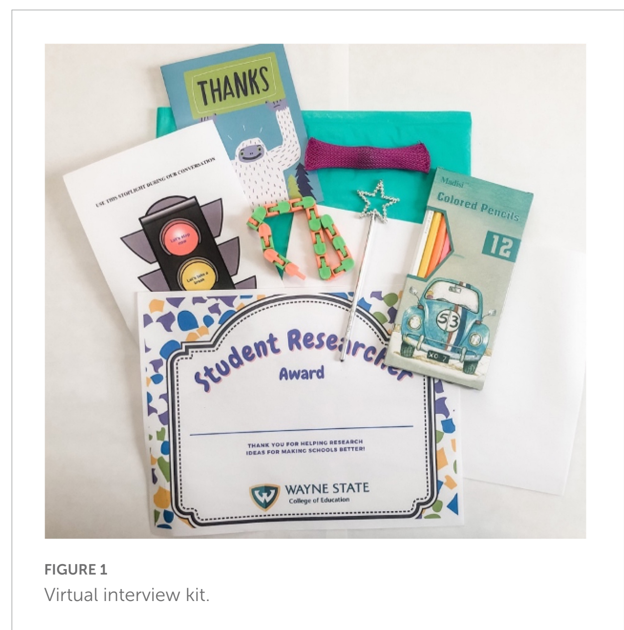

FIGURE 1
Virtual interview kit.

trauma, their forms of coping, and their re-imagining of new educational experiences. In relation to the present study, adult participants responded to the following questions: "Let's dream together. If you could completely reimagine education for your child, what would it be like? What about specific dream learning experiences?" (Duane, 2022). The semi-structured, participant-centered data collection protocol allowed for strategic follow up and conversation.

Included in the virtual interview kit sent to children was a small magic wand. With this, child participants were invited to use this magic wand to create a brand-new school. Then, they were asked to describe this new school. Specifically, child participants were invited to respond to the following prompt:

> *Once upon a time, there was a magic kid who could fly and used this wand [children received a magic wand prop to aid in imagining] to make things disappear and create new things. One day, they flew to the grocery store and made it disappear. When they waved their magic wand, they brought back the grocery store but it was different and better! Everything was rainbow colored and all the food was free. If you had this magic wand and could make your school disappear then bring it back better, what would it be like?* (Duane, 2022).

The child-led data collection protocol allowed for strategic follow-up about school-specific categories including teachers, students, classrooms, lessons, rules, and school staff.

Epistemological orientation

Historically, Black children's voices have not been at the forefront of research narratives. We draw from the work of scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings who defines voice as "naming one's own reality" (1998, p. 13), and Edwards et al. (2016) who establish centering as creating opportunities for individuals to tell their own stories from their own perspectives, making space for listening and sharing experiences, resisting deficit narratives, and developing a thorough understanding of individual points of view (p. 434). To these definitions, we also add that in centering voices, we position children as experts, build reciprocal relationships, and work collaboratively with and for youth. By centering Black children's voices in particular, we can learn with and from them about how they make meaning of their experiences and their visions for systemic change. Centering narratives does not mean 'giving' children a voice; all children have voices. Yet their voices often go unheard because they are systematically minoritized based on age, race, class, gender identity, ability, and more. By highlighting children's narrative through an explicit community-based methodology, we co-created spaces for children to represent themselves, identify priorities, and ultimately, formulate action plans to advance true liberatory work in schools, thus providing opportunities for children to embody their inherent power, rather than 'give' voice. By working in community with children and their families, we generated ideas and suggestions for advancing social justice and abolitionist initiatives within schools and communities.

Researcher positionality statement

As scholars, teachers, thinkers, collaborators, and friends, we too are dreamers. We dream separately and together about a world where education is equitable and liberatory for Black youth. These dreams continue to evolve, and are informed by our positionalities. The first author is a White, cisgender, middle-class, non-disabled woman, who carries her own school-based trauma to this work. As an elementary teacher turned research fellow with a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology, she continues to work in concert with families, colleagues, mentors, and community members to actively unlearn harmful practices, dismantle internalized White supremacy characteristics (Okun, 2021), and interrupt systemic inequities through deep community-based, reciprocal relationships. Dr. Duane takes seriously the work of understanding and interrogating Whiteness, and her "intersections of privilege" to "stand in solidarity and confront anti-Blackness" (Love, 2019, p. 117).

The second author is a Black, cisgender, middle-class, non-disabled woman whose mother and grandmothers convinced her that change was always possible for Black people. As an assistant professor of Applied Psychology, the ultimate goal of Dr. Mims' research is to freedom dream with Black children and their families, and then use that brilliance to guide the development of new research, policies, practices, and narratives. For over a decade, Dr. Mims has worked to center the dreams of Black children and their families in her research and teaching. She is passionate about working with her students to "pick up the battle and make it a better world just where you are," as Maya Angelou charges.

Analytic approach

After the interviews, the Zoom videos were transcribed by the first author and two graduate students. Then, the transcripts were de-identified. The coding analysis was guided by narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008) of both sets of interviews iteratively in two phases: descriptive and interpretive (Murray, 2009). First, we engaged in a descriptive stage that involved immersion in the data. Then, with two other members of the research team, a Black counseling psychology doctoral student and White counseling psychology master's student, read and re-read transcripts to identify and familiarize ourselves with the content of narratives provided by children and their mothers (Riessman, 2008; Smith, 2016). We noted thoughts regarding the data each time we visit the transcripts, during which time the focus will be to identify what is said and generate early

common themes of stories being told, which differs greatly from how stories are told and how individuals make meaning of experiences (Smith, 2016). In this phase, analysis also involved inductive/open coding, developing themes and subthemes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Together, we met frequently to confer codes generated and check for consistencies in our processes. Instead of focusing on mini-units or fragments, the initial phase of analysis focused on the overarching stories told.

In the second interpretative phase of analysis, the first author worked with the Student Advisory Board (SAB), to connect themes across the narratives to the theoretical frameworks and conceptual model (Murray, 2009). The SAB was instrumental during this phase, often talking about patterns and themes in ways the adults had not considered. These child perspectives mattered greatly and took priority in the data analysis phase. We also explored the settings, contexts, and processes surrounding the child. Thus, data collected from parents served not as a means to triangulate (Flick, 2018) or validate child experiences but instead to invite multiple views and perspectives to explore the idea of re-imagining. We saw the data collection and analyses as iterative and holistic, where one set of interviews informs the other.

We also shared the sources and analysis of de-identified data with the Student Advisory Board to enhance reciprocity. We demonstrated goodwill by honoring the brilliance that children bring (Bullock et al., 2012) to each aspect of the research project. This also meant centering the project around respect for children's competence as a methodological technique, which cannot be stressed enough. Simply put, children were the best witnesses to their own experiences; they were change agents in the process with distinct abilities and capabilities to understand, interpret, and interrogate events.

Finally, the coding team, in consultation with peer and subject matter experts, determined that there were four categories of *re-imagining*, specifically: learning opportunities, family engagement, infrastructure and resources, and culture.

Ethical considerations

Given that this study centered the experiences of children, it was important for us to name the ethical considerations associated with working with young children. The authors also underscore the need to understand research ethics with children as far more than a set of standards or skills, but an overall approach to research in general, from planning to presenting data. Specifically in this study, we incorporate the calls to consider "How will the findings benefit children?" and "Are the basic assumptions about children underlying the research positive?" [see Alderson and Morrow (2011) for a more extensive discussion of conducting ethical research with children]. In aiming to center, amplify, and highlight Black children's voices, we explicitly served children while contributing to a positive process of critiquing systems, not students. Flipping the lens and urging scholars and practitioners to interrogate systemic inequities rather than pathologize and blame individual children and their communities (Goldin and Khasnabis, 2020; Petrone and Stanton, 2021), is one piece of how we take up abolitionist, child-centered stances in our work.

Findings

Both the mothers and the children provided rich descriptions of the schooling environments they envisioned. Mothers often rooted their reimagining in their knowledge of their children's strengths, interests, talents, and learning needs. Children spoke from experiences they had in elementary school thus far while drawing on their radical imaginations (Kelley, 2002). The re-imaginings of the children (c) and the mothers (m) will be presented as a collective re-imagination, rather than as separate children and/or mothers' vision because they represent a world where Black children experience educational freedom rooted in generational ways of knowing and dreaming. There were four themes for Black children and mothers' re-imagining: learning opportunities, family engagement, infrastructure and resources, educators, and culture (see **Table 2** for the complete list with definitions and illustrative quotes).

Theme 1: Imagining schools as a space to learn new and different things

Learning opportunities was the most frequently cited request among mothers and children. A majority of participants felt that society needs to re-imagine *what* and *how* children learn. With respect to *what* children learn, participants explored dreams for content taught and learned. Participants also discussed *how* children could learn, dreaming about pedagogical approaches that facilitate learning. Each will be discussed in greater detail below.

The design to change what they learn

Most children and their parents discussed their desire for elementary students to learn more about science, technology, art, math, and literacy. Cassandra (c) talked about how she wanted to learn most about "science . . . lots about science." Kyion (c) wanted to have "chemicals" and more scientific learning opportunities, while Jayden dreamed about reading books about "garbage" and "science." Christian (c) integrated his curiosity around science and technology to dream about learning. He said, "[I'd learn about] designing and rockets too and science. I love science. And robots." Niles (c) talked about wanting schools to "pass out MacBooks" to learn about computers and how to do "like YouTube and stuff." Drake (c) was also interested in robotics and wanted to learn about how "we could do robotics." Jamal (c) also wanted to learn

TABLE 2 Study themes, subthemes, and illustrative quotes.

THEME 1: IMAGINING SCHOOLS AS A SPACE TO LEARN NEW AND DIFFERENT THINGS	
Black children and their mother's collective re-imagination about learning	
Subtheme 1: The Design to Change What they Learn The content taught and learned	"There needs to be more activity. They don't have physical activity anymore in these schools. You know, they don't have music, we had music class, we had, they don't have any of that anymore, so that would be perfect" (Kaylen) (m)
Subtheme 2: The Desire to Change How they Learn (and Don't) Pedagogical approaches to facilitate learning	"We'd learn from the teachers of course but maybe there could be videos explaining it better? Because today we actually did a video and it helped the class more... We were learning about glaciers and how most of the lakes like Lake Michigan how they were formed and the glaciers melted and moved back and [the videos] show, like pictures of the glaciers moving back." (Dominique) (c)
Subtheme 3: Eliminating Homework Altogether. Doing away with tasks assigned by teachers that must be carried out during non-school hours (Cooper, 1989)	"If I really just make a main thing disappear, it would have to be all that homework!" (Sarah) (c)
THEME 2: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AS A MEANS TO BRING SAFETY TO SCHOOL	
The "investments families make into their children's education" (e.g., material resources, time, and energy), and also mutual relationships between parents and school	
	"So creating a new space, comfortable, you know, comfortable with their leader, with their teacher, knowing that they can go and talk to them and asking different questions." (Aja) (m)
THEME 3: INCREASED AND IMPROVED INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES TO FACILITATE LEARNING	
The tools, technologies, and facilities of the school	
Subtheme 1: Increasing Recess Time and Activities Structured opportunities for play, often outside	"recess all day long" (Willow) (c)
Subtheme 2: Improving Lunch *Food served in cafeterias*	"make food that we like" (Cassandra) (c)
Subtheme 3: Bettering the Built Learning Environment How classrooms are set up and what they include (e.g., light, temperature, desk setup)	"basketball [posters] on one side, hockey on the other side." (Jayden) (c)
Subtheme 4: Providing School Supplies Tools provided and used for teaching and learning	"[school] will get us supplies instead of us buying a bunch of random stuff." (Kyion) (c)
THEME 4: CULTIVATING CHILD-CENTERED POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE	
All beliefs, values, attitudes, and expected behaviors that are evident in the way a school operates (Fullan, 2007)	
Subtheme 1: Implementing and Increasing Inclusivity and Accessibility Serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities (Berlach and Chambers, 2011), and accessibility, the broad range of constantly changing tools and features that support the learning of students with disabilities (McAlvage and Rice, 2018).	"You need the book and if you don't have the book, then it needs to be accessible at any time, at any given time. So if it has to be on the computer, cool. But it needs to be also be available in audio...audio version." (Journee) (m)
Subtheme 2: Reframing and Re-imagining Safety Individual's perception of how safe school is (Shumow and Lomax, 2001)	"Where it's like, let's see what's going on with the child, you know? Let's get the parents involved. Do we have to have a meeting, you know? Can we email? Can we talk, whatever? Just to get to the root of the problem because they're thinking about the overall health. [Safety is] mentally, emotionally, physically of the child, so that's, that's all." (Aniyah) (m)
Subtheme 3: Eliminating Carceral Discipline Structures Rules and strategies employed to promote learning and safety	"The only rules I would have would be like no fighting, or running, or hitting people." (Niles) (c)

more about technology, placing a particular emphasis on video gaming and hoping he could 1 day learn "um, how to beat a video game." Finally, Jayden (c) wanted to learn more about "TVs, PS4s, and Xbox."

Integrating art was another aspect of learning opportunities that participants discussed. For example, Sarah (c), whose mother described her as a brilliant artist, wanted to learn about art, and specifically anime art because she is "really big on anime, and I'm really big on art." Christian (c) and Niles (c) both wanted to learn about "design." Kyion (c), too, wanted to "have art." When asked about what she wanted her daughter to learn about, Aniyah (m) talked at length about bringing all aspects of art (e.g., visual, music, illustration) back into learning to create "well rounded teaching":

> Like, bringing in that art, bringing in the illustrations, bringing in the sound, bringing in a hands on, things that they get [to] touch with their hands to remember. You know, so things like that. I would love to see more. More just well-rounded teaching. (Aniyah) (m)

Kaylen (m) discussed bringing back physical activity, and the importance of music:

> There needs to be more activity. They don't have physical activity anymore in these schools. You know, they don't have music, we had music class, we had, they don't have any of that anymore, so that would be perfect (Kaylen).

Dominique (m) spoke at length about Onika's (c) incredible art skills and how she wished that her learning was more arts-based:

> I would want something extremely artistic like. [Tells Onika to go get one of her drawings]. She's extremely good with drawing and she has to get this from her dad because I can't draw things. And he's okay with drawing, but I think she surpasses him but she's extremely good. She loves painting and she loves creating. So if I could just reimagine, it would definitely be artistic-based. She's so much of a free spirit . . . I guess more so not the math reading science space, but more so than that I want that to still be in there, because I want her to have, you know, the general understanding, but more so that artistic side you know what she gravitates more toward.

Finally, mothers talked about the importance of learning literacy skills (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, and listening) that will both help them succeed academically, and in life. Imani dreamed about students learning more reading to "be success[ful] for in life." Whitney (m) wanted to see more "literacy programs within schools," and noted a serious discrepancy between what she sees in her son's reading at home, and what the schools claim to be his literacy progress.

> They stated that he, um, is still scoring below average in reading and math, reading and math. . . . So, but then it just really baffles me because, when he sits here with me the boy can read me a whole book. . . . The boy he's reading, I see his elevation. So how are you going to tell me that" (Whitney) (m).

Whitney (m) also emphasized how the current method of teaching literacy feels like "few people [in schools] are really serious about trying to get these kids where they should be reading level wise." Additionally, Kyion (c) centered literacy in his learning opportunities; talking at length about using books to learn about different subjects like social studies and science, and dreamed about having "books about the world and then, occasionally you will read the book and write down what it was about." Drake (c) wanted more literacy, too, specifically, "like more stories about like, myths and stuff." Onika (c) talked about being really into "wizarding stuff . . . like magic," and wanted to see more chapter books and "books that we'd actually be interested in, not just like what's that they could find in like, a local library. In all, participants named how much they would re-imagine what students learn about.

The desire to change how they learn (and don't)

Participants also talked at length about re-imagining how children learn. Participants named components of humanizing pedagogy, a form of teaching that both respects and uses the reality and perspectives of students (Salazar, 2013). For example, Tamara had "different dreams" for each of her children and wanted to speak about each dream separately, centering each child's strengths and interests. Aja (m) talked at length about wanting learning opportunities to include children:

> I wish you know the schools would be, you know, the space will be created with the child at the table to be able to vocalize and say "hey, this is what I would like to see in my classroom" right? . . . And it won't seem like "oh he's bad because he wants to build," because by him wanting to build, you can incorporate reading and math into that. And he's learning, you know. (Aja) (m)

Jenna (m) talked about a particular method of teaching where educators "observe the kid and teach them what they're interested in." She went on to describe her son's interests and how his love of nature could be woven into how he learns. Jenna described the importance of starting with his interests to keep Jamal both engaged and learning.

> I love that he loves nature, he [goes] on nature walks. And like be out. . .he has a metal detector that he uses. He has a little thing where he picks up bugs he created. [Laughs] One of these days, he created a book and put different kind of leaves in it and wrote a sentence about it so he likes that type of [thing] . . . Of course if that's something he's interested in, he likes it, he's going to learn, he's going to pay attention, he's not going to get bored. . . . Or just something that will get him interested in something like, something that will kinda, I guess fuel his learning. And not necessarily, you know, and he won't be bored. (Jenna)

Zoe (m) also focused on learning opportunities that start with her daughter Sarah's input, with Sarah driving the design "so that she can guide as to what would keep her attention." For Zoe, having Sarah (c) create her "own space" and designing it "in the way that [she was] hoping" was an important element to re-imagining how her daughter learns. Children participants, too, named having their ideas and voices be part of the conversation about how they learn. Kyion (c) talked about how he did not want the teachers to present "just a bunch of math problems and you'd be like 'solve this,'" but instead work with students to best understand how to find answers to math problems and putting problems "in different expressions" based on what students need in that moment of instruction. Dominique (c) appreciates different modes of instruction and

dreamed about teachers who saw that and integrated more videos in learning.

> We'd learn from the teachers of course but maybe there could be videos explaining it better? Because today we actually did a video and it helped the class more . . . We were learning about glaciers and how most of the lakes like Lake Michigan how they were formed and the glaciers melted and moved back and [the videos] show, like pictures of the glaciers moving back. (Dominique)

Tamara (m) also talked about wanting to center student perspectives and future career dreams in how students learn. For example, if a child is interested in being a chef, she said, the instruction would focus on "saying, oh, you're going to be a chef. Oh, so then it should be like, you know, focused around that. That's what I think. That would be my perfect world." Other participants, like Aja (m), talked about the child driving the inquiry and lessons, and having variation in how learning occurs.

> The child should be able to say, like, "can we learn about this today?" or on this day, lead up to it, you know, "I would like to learn about this, can we pick a day, where we can learn about that?" Not "we're going to open this book or I'm going to play this YouTube video and then we're going to do the problem." It was a lot of that I saw it in their school like YouTube was playing, and then the teacher came and did a problem on the board, and then the child was expected to sit down and do the worksheet. I would like to see more small groups and that doesn't mean secluding one from the others in the classroom. And you know, there are kids who are comfortable working by themselves. I would like for that to be okay. (Aja) (m)

Eliminating homework altogether

Another sub-theme within the learning opportunities we identified was around eliminating homework; almost every participant, parent and child, talked about a world where homework no longer existed. This connects to how and what children learn, in that most participants did not see the merit of homework at the elementary level. For participants, homework took away the joy of learning, while also placing unrealistic burdens on parents and students. When asked about a dream school, Willow (c) quickly replied "no homework." Sarah (c) was excited at the prompt to imagine eradicating the system completely, especially as it related to homework: "If I really just make a main thing disappear, it would have to be all that homework!" When asked a follow up question later about changing school, she was certain to re-emphasize her point about eliminating homework, stating "I'd rather just get rid of homework" (Sarah). Jamal (c) also advocated for "no homework" when he was dreaming about education.

Mothers, too, felt strongly about removing homework from their newly imagined educational spaces. Given the age of their children, many parents felt responsible for assisting with homework completion, and the added pressure of making sure it was completed correctly. Aja (m) shared how homework, for her family, "wasn't logical and it wasn't realistic." She elaborated on how didn't see the necessity for it, and the discrepancies she saw between her children's schools and other districts.

> But it was like, [my kids' teachers] were like a stickler for that a lot of times. And I didn't understand like why there wasn't any um. . . I can't think of the word, but why are you being so stern on this? Like, why is this a deal breaker? Like you ready to really fail my baby, a first grader, about some homework assignments? You look at other schools, you know, especially in the suburbs and they don't even have homework? And they tell you like homework is not necessarily, like, it's not the go-to to measure a child's intelligence. (Aja) (m)

Dominique (m), too, had strong feelings about removing homework from educational spaces.

> I would not wish this on my worst enemy to be sitting at home with their child trying to do homework. It seems like it might be kind of easy and she always got good grades so it's not an issue of, like, that. Some stuff she didn't understand and some stuff I couldn't explain either like, so I will be googling assignments trying to figure out how do you figure it, but I don't know and I'd be like wait till you get in school tomorrow to ask and. I don't know. It was not a good experience. (Dominique)

Tamara (m) also felt that homework was inessential to her children's learning, especially after being in school for so long.

> [School starts at] like 7 am. I think it's ridiculous that they have to come home and do homework. I just, it just really ruffles my feathers like they're in school all day. Like, constantly. They go from one class to the next class. And then you know, from that class to the next class all day, so basically like a one to seven [period], from like, first grade up to like, 12th grade. It's ridiculous. I feel like the homework. If we live in a perfect world, I feel like the homework should just be exempt. (Tamara)

With homework off the table, participants explored more of what and how they hope students can 1 day learn.

Theme 2: Family engagement as a means to bring safety to school

Family engagement was another theme we identified in our analysis of participant interviews. When participants dreamed about increased family engagement on school campuses, they tended to dream in ways that prioritized children's strengths, comfort, safety, and acts of resistance. Family engagement, for them, was much more than parents attending parent–teacher conferences and supporting fundraising efforts. It became an opportunity to bring the safety of home to school. Jenna (m) talked about how she is already planning to seek out ways to get involved to "have a presence" and "see what's going on in school," describing her desire to be more active for the sake of her son's learning experiences and as a form of resistance to future school-based trauma:

> I really want to figure out a way to kind of insert myself in a school. . . . Kind of try to find a way to, to make sure I'm involved. And they know I'm involved and they get to know [my son] and they get to see his strengths and they try to help build his strength instead of just kind of pushing him aside (Jenna) (m).

Willow (c) wanted her educational space to include families, too: "I want the parents to be able to come. And that babies will be allowed, parents will be allowed. Because Mommy's fun." Sarah (c) also wanted her family to be present, especially during lunch. She spent a few minutes explaining to me how bad the current cafeteria food is, and how her dreams to fix it include "just [bringing the] entire family instead." But she did not just want her own family present, but rather, to open the invitation to everyone, stating, "I will let people bring their families." Aja also dreamed about more family engagement in her perfect educational world for her children, and one in which school staff saw the strengths and unique attributes parents bring to truly partner with her.

> My hope is that the administrators would be more transparent and realize that there's always, like, opportunity for growth and for teaching, you know. You don't know everything. And you can learn from a parent, I'm not an educator, I don't have a masters, but I am a parent, you know? I know my child best so listen when I come to the table with suggestions, right? (Aja) (m).

Theme 3: Increased and improved infrastructure and resources to facilitate learning

An abolitionist approach problematizes unfair school funding structures that are nested within unjust capitalist systems, or what Dunn et al. (2021) refer to as "racist education with capitalist motives" (p. 219). Many participants re-imagined school infrastructure, including school buildings, playgrounds, classrooms, and libraries, and school resources when dreaming about change. Participants named how unequal and harmful existing school infrastructure and resources, or lack thereof, were for elementary children. For example, Dominique (c) dreamed about buildings with improved facility quality.

> The bathrooms, there are like doors missing on some of the stalls. The sinks don't work as well. . . make the bathrooms better, to make it more like, better as in like not being so cramped, there being more than 4 sinks, maybe 5 sinks. The bathroom doors being on the door still. I'd make, maybe, like, say I would redo the floors because the floors are really old and they're like different patterns and stuff. I'd fix the lights because its like pretty dark. Like when you're walking down the hallway, it's pretty dark. . . . Oh um, like brighter but like with sunlight and [the building] would be like cleaner, maybe sometimes? (Dominique) (c).

Though the concepts of infrastructure and resources are distinct entities, they are overlapping and thus, placed together in the results, because of how hard it is to disentangle the buildings and facilities from the resources. Participants dreamed about changes in: facilities, classrooms, supplies, recess, and lunch.

Increasing recess time and activities

When participants dreamed about re-imagining education, recess was often named. Kyion (c), as one example, dreamed about fifth graders (who are considered middle schoolers at his school) having recess:

> Oh yeah and the middle schoolers would get recess! . . . There's usually no break until lunchtime, usually there will be like a "special" like gym, art or.swim? Usually that would be like the somewhat recess but its not like everybody else below [fifth who get recess] (Kyion) (c).

Willow (c) was adamant about having "recess all day long" but still learning to "still be smart," while Niles (c) explained methodically that, in his dream space, there would be a total of "four recesses." When asked what he might do during those recesses, he explained that he would "play monopoly, football, and drive RC cars" (Niles) (c).

Improving lunch

Lunch, too, was another area that participants wanted to see major shifts in. Like other entities funded by the government, lunch funding has fluctuated, historically. Research has named lunch funding as a partisan issue, with nutritional standards and money allocations shifting during each presidential administration (Kam, 2020). Participants in the study talked at length about how bad school lunch food was, and dreamed about a world where lunches were "edible." Sarah (c) spent

several minutes discussing the inedible food selection at her current cafetiera, and the need to better food:

> Better food! Yeah, I question our food over there sometimes. There is this one time when they made macaroni and cheese, and the cheese was very. Brick like. . . . The cheese didn't even taste like cheese, it just tasted like overdue milk. And so, I mostly just get pizza because I don't trust anything over there anymore, because there was another time where they made breakfast for lunch and everything looked so dry. The bacon, the quote-unquote bacon that they had, looked like jerky! (Sarah)

Similarly, Jamal (c) discussed how "hot lunches" were not hot and he therefore didn't eat them. In his magic school, he would "make hot lunch have stuff that's actually meant to be hot" (Jamal). In the same way that Niles (c) advocated for four recesses, he also hoped for a world with "two lunches" to accompany those recesses. Cassandra (c) dreamed about opportunities for students to "make food that we like," instead of what has traditionally been served. Finally, Dominique (c) would create a magic school where there is "no silent lunch." When I asked if there was anything else she'd want at her magic school, she replied "That's all I can really think about" (Dominique).

Bettering the built learning environment

Participants also had a myriad of ideas about reimagining classrooms: how they are set up, and what they include, referring to the built learning environment– from desk configuration to color schemes. For example, Drake (c) discussed "bigger classrooms" that included "an area for the teacher like in the corner of something [and] a TV." Jayden (c) wanted "red and Black walls" and Christian (c) similarly hoped to create classrooms that had "all posters" on the walls, with "basketball [posters] on one side, hockey on the other side." Dominique (c) also wanted desks with seats connected to them, to provide "more room" to be able to sit down. Journee (m) shared several ideas about what a dream classroom might include because, she said, "classroom sizes aren't just proper for them," as she talked about how rooms need to be bigger. She also had ideas for classrooms to have "like library cubicles" where "you can still kinda see somebody, but you're in your own space." She also hoped to see more technology for each student, and an opportunity for children to have screens "right there" at their desks for work time that project or transfer "straight to the computer" (Journee). Finally, Sarah took dreaming a bit more literally, and imagined classrooms that had beds and clouds for desks:

> My mom gave me this one idea, probably beds. But our class would have probably been asleep for the entire day, so that when it really work out as great. Maybe if we sat on clouds, that probably would have been better. I'd rather sit on clouds, than at a hard desk and chair. (Sarah) (c)

Providing school supplies

Participants also re-imagined what supplies would be both provided and utilized for teaching and learning. Given the disproportionate funding structures of U.S. schools, teachers are often left to fend for themselves to acquire classroom supplies (Kaufhold et al., 2006). Participants dreamed about spaces that had adequate, and ample, supplies for everyone. **Table 3** details the list of supplies that participants dreamed about seeing. Several also noted that they hoped these school supplies would be "newer." As one example, Dominique (c) talked about how run down some of her current supplies were.

> [We would] have newer school supplies because we have these whiteboards, we were literally using them today, they were, like, old and broken with pieces chipping off of them, like, stains from other markers, scratches on it and stuff. . . . We can have like newer books. Like the school books that we have like, our ELA our social studies books they're really old, like they've had them since I was in kindergarten, pretty much. Like there are pieces, like pages ripping and kids have wrote in them and stuff (Dominique) (c).

Others hoped that supplies would be provided, rather than students and families, or teachers, having to purchase them. Jasmine (c) argued that teachers should not have to "pay for nothing," and Kyion (c) hoped that the school "will get us supplies instead of us buying a bunch of random stuff."

Theme 4: Cultivating child-centered positive school culture

The final theme we derived from our analysis around participants re-imagining schools as education spaces relates to

TABLE 3 List of supplies participants want included/provided.

- Enough desks for students
- Dry erase white boards
- Walls without holes
- Indestructible soap dispensers
- Books
- Chairs that roll
- More and new gym equipment
- White
- Desks with storage
- Science supplies
- Comfortable desk chairs
- A dance studio
- Fidgets (e.g., slime, poppers, finger fidgets)

aspects of school culture. Fullan (2007) defined school culture as a term that encompasses all beliefs, values, attitudes, and expected behaviors that are evident in the way a school operates. With this, participants dreamed about aspects of school culture including: inclusivity and accessibility, safety, and discipline.

Implementing and increasing inclusivity and accessibility

The first sub-theme within this category is that of inclusivity, the idea of serving students with a full range of abilities and disabilities (Berlach and Chambers, 2011), and accessibility, the notion of access to all aspects of learning (e.g., knowledge transfer, communication, class participation, designing learning, assessment) (Thurber and Bandy, 2018). Conversations about these two ideas often occurred at the same time, with participants naming how they hoped, books, for example, would be both accessible to students and inclusive of diverse identities. Journee (m) named this explicitly, talking at length about her dreams for accessible books in schools. She discussed wanting to have books that were available on the computer and in audio versions for children who may have access needs. Aniyah (m) wanted to make sure that the "educational tools" reach everybody. She hoped that educators who implement learning resources would consult with experts to ensure that everyone in class could access them. She also gave several examples of what that could look like, sharing about providing additional pictures, sounds, historical landmarks, to ensure that educators are "coming at [the learning] from every aspect" (Aniyah) (m).

With respect to inclusivity specifically, participants also talked about wanting to cultivate educational spaces where children of all identities were seen and supported. Sarah (c) told a story about her assistant principal making offensive jokes about a disabled boy and how the subsequent response from students was to "call him out" for it. In her magic school, those kinds of hurtful statements would not exist. Additionally, participants talked about inclusivity related to gender identity and sexual orientation as well. One mother has a child who identifies as part of the LGBTQIA + community. She dreamed of "some kind of system" for her child, and all children. This system, in her eyes, could include a class that supports their coping as they come "to that reality at such an early age." She also hoped for a space that teaches children of this group to "express [themselves]" and talk openly. She felt strongly that gender identity and sexual orientation "should be talked about. It's like how are you not going to talk about it when they're the ones going through it?" Other parents, too, talked about cultivating spaces where students know they can "be themselves."

Reframing and re-imagining safety

Participants in this study thought about safety in several different ways. For some, it was the absence of bullying. For others, it was the presence of kindness, compassion, and support. Drake (c), as an example, dreamed about a school where everybody was "very kind" and "very careful" who "help each other." Others, too, talked about every member of the school community "will be friends" and "everybody will play" (Willow) (c). Some talked about safety in the context of "respect," where students and staff show respect for themselves and for each other. Jasmine (c) dreamed about feeling "positive energy" in her magic school, with positivity from teachers, students, staff, and even classrooms. When asked if her current school had positive energy, she simply replied "no." Cassandra (c) talked at length about having dogs at school because, as she said, "I love dogs... I'll pick out like, like dogs like the names of dogs. And like, the breed of the dogs. I'll pick that out too." When asked why choosing dogs was important, she replied, "like dogs help everyone feel good."

Mothers, in particular, named how important it was for their children to feel safe. They connected the idea of safety to comfort and being seen– many wanted educational spaces that truly *saw* their children for who they are, and used that knowledge to meet their children's needs, "mentally, emotionally, physically" (Aniyah) (m). Aja (m) explained that safety translated to spaces where children were "acknowledged" and "listened to." Others described dream spaces where educators intervened early and often to ensure children felt safe and comfortable. Aniyah (m) described how she wanted staff to check in with her daughter, and communicate frequently with her, inviting her for meetings, sending emails, talking after school, to stay on the same page about Willow's sense of safety. She elaborated on what she meant by safety.

> As far as the, the, the safety goes, speaking of emotional safety, yeah. When you see that need, not ignoring it ... [mental health is] being ignored ...And then [safety is] also getting down to the root of the problem with everything. ... Just to get to the root of the problem because they're thinking about the overall health. Mentally, emotionally, physically of the child. (Aniyah) (m)

Participants imagined a world where educators actively see children, address needs, intervene when needed, and provide opportunities for children to "be themselves."

Eliminating carceral discipline structures

The final sub-theme around school culture relates to school discipline, and how staff support environments that are conducive to learning. This, too, was a common topic of conversation among both parents and children. In the present study, school personnel enacted harsh disciplinary actions on Black students by mandating strict rules, policing uniforms and appearance, punishing behavior, hyper-monitoring attendance, and academic performance. Given this reality, many participants spent time dreaming about spaces where policing did not exist– literally, by talking about removing police presence and metal detectors, and figuratively,

through softer rules, less discipline (e.g., less suspensions) and "kinder" educators.

Participants also spoke about eliminating uniforms. Overall, participants reported that they did not like uniforms and would do away with them in their dream scenarios. Kyion (c) talked about this, advocating for eliminating both uniforms and suspensions, with the sole caveat that "the only thing you can get suspended for" is trying to wear a uniform. When children were asked about what the rules would be in their magic schools, an overwhelming majority were in favor of "no rules." Some had stipulations that rules would exist for safety; as Niles (c) put it, "the only rules I would have would be like no fighting, or running, or hitting people." Children also talked about reducing how "strict" teachers were and replacing them with teachers who were "kind" and "helpful." In terms of broader school discipline policy, Cassandra raised an important issue around the policing of hall passes: she would eliminate this policy immediately.

> Let us walk around this school without getting without having to wear a pass or didn't have a pass. Because it's very difficult to, like, find your pass when you're out. (Cassandra) (c)

Whitney (m) and Jayden (c) were also concerned about the presence of police and metal detectors in schools, as discussed in previous sections. Participants dreamed that these forms of policing would also not exist, even though Jayden "got used to it." Overall, participants dreamed about lessening what they perceived to be harsh disciplinary measures and policies.

Discussion

> "If we could wave a magic wand and just completely reimagine schools . . . what would you want it to be like?"

> "It [*sic*] will reimagine the entire school system." Journee, mother and research participant

The present study explored how Black children and their mothers described their visions for ways out of the "constrictions" of contemporary schooling, focusing specifically on exploring how their visions aligned with ongoing abolition movements. We used elements of the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005) to contextualize the families' school re-imaginings, specifically, (1) to situate their responses within existing forms of capital that contribute to Black children and their families' abilities to resist racism and subordination in schooling environments, (2) to frame their responses within an asset based framework of Black families' strengths, and (3) to center the voices of Black children and their mothers to offer recommendations for school abolition. Combined, participant perspectives broadened conversations of building loving, equitable institutions (Love, 2019) by documenting a myriad of opportunities to re-imagine schools from the perspectives of those most affected by school –young children and their mothers. Our findings underscore the need for increased opportunities where Black youth are not simply "given a seat" at the table of educational transformation, but where we cultivate spaces for youth to build the table themselves. These findings also support new policies and practices that center freedom for Black children in schools: freedom from hyper-surveillance and racist structures, freedom to imagine, freedom to learn, and freedom to live. The following section presents a discussion related to our findings and areas for future scholarship, policy, and practice.

Decision making with Black children "at the table"

This study is one of few studies to freedom dream with Black youth. Our qualitative approach and magic wand vignette explicitly provided space for participants to dream. Findings highlight the importance of including youth in decision making across research, policy, and practice. When asked directly, the children's aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) shines: participants in this study had many dreams about what they wanted their educational experiences to be like. Specifically, children re-imagined almost every aspect of the schooling experience–from content to curricular materials. The dreams of the Black youth, complemented by their mothers' dreams, build on the legacy of youth advocacy and further decades of research calling for increased opportunity for student voice and agency in the classroom (e.g., Cook-Sather, 2020). Excerpts also highlight the creativity, brilliance, and ingenuity of elementary-aged Black youth. For example, when children shared dreams about schools with cloud chairs and dogs in classrooms, they drew on their various and overlapping forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) while extending their capital into freedom dreaming. This dreaming breaks the mold of traditional approaches to schooling, advancing the endless possibilities that exist– if only we listen to children. Though we may not, as a field, be able to realize all the dreams shared, the spirit of participants' contributions provide important insights into the role of starting with student ideas as the basis for teaching and learning in education and beyond.

Expanding academic and co-curricular offerings for Black children

Participants' dreams also revealed gaps in current offerings, both academic and non, for Black youth in schools. Their calls

for equitable resources echo the calls made by "evolutionary problem solvers with audacious imagination" (Grace Lee Boggs as quoted in Shalaby, 2017) (i.e., children) and abolitionist freedom dreaming mothers throughout history. These findings also align with the Harlem Nine's vision for equitable schooling made decades earlier, signaling that opportunity gaps are still pervasive for Black children (Milner, 2021). Countless research and lived experiences demonstrate that the American public school system is less likely to provide access to "well-prepared teachers, material resources, and [academic] instruction itself" to Black students (Smith et al., 2016, p. 21). The dearth of current opportunities underscores the importance of investing in, and expanding academic and co-curricular (e.g., sports, clubs, student groups) programming for Black youth.

The qualitative methodologies utilized in this study provided an opportunity for participants to share which opportunities they dream about in great detail. For example, children spoke about limited, or non-existent, recess time, which often accompanied school days without art and scientific inquiry. This finding is related to the dearth of current opportunities and underscores the importance of investing in, and expanding academic and co-curricular (e.g., sports, clubs, student groups) programming for Black youth. Many participants also dreamed about schooling experiences that integrated both academic and co-curricular programming into one cohesive school day. Kaylen (m) talked about seeing music and physical activity as part of the academic curriculum, as did Aniyah (m) and Kadyn (c), rather than solely providing extra curricular opportunities before and afterschool. Other participants discussed the importance of providing access to learning about future career paths, integrating identity exploration such as awareness of gender, sexual orientation, and increasing availability of mental health resources. Broadly, participants also wanted to see increased opportunities for students to access and learn in the academic content areas such as science, technology, arts, English, and math which is consistent with scholarship that explores the importance of STEAM activities for Black youth (Allen-Handy et al., 2020).

Future directions: Abolishing systems that harm to build anew

> "To choose abolition is to wonder
> and expand
> and imagine
> and inquire
> and create
> and share
> *infinitely*." (Gross, 2021, p. 179)

Findings from this study join existing conversations and future directions for research related to freedom dreaming and school abolition. However, to look toward the future, we must acknowledge that current forms of schooling cause trauma for Black youth (Duane, 2022). For example, participants frequently named the harm caused by carceral discipline structures (e.g., suspensions, silent lunches, policing uniforms, hyper surveillance, metal detectors) and dreamed about teachers who looked like them, policies that didn't police, and spaces where learning is possible. Future research can and should take up questions related to youth dreams for abolishing carceral structures. But research is not enough. We echo the call of abolitionists across networks who insist on the complete removal of police in schools (e.g., Love, 2019; Kaba, 2021; Kaler-Jones and Koppel, 2022). Only then can we honor the dreams of these and other Black students who deserve schools that affirm and uplift their humanity.

To ensure that every educational space that Black children navigate in childhood promotes healthy growth and development, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers must also continue to explore how local, statewide, and national policies and educational practices cause trauma while working to center Black youth voice. Many participants also named the lack of instructional resources (e.g., books, technology) and crumbling infrastructure, which tie directly to capitalist structures for school district funding. Abolitionists argue for completely redesigning the funding structures and divesting from racial settler capitalism (Love, 2019; Paris, 2021), though this dearth of research necessitates further exploration. Like others, we believe that a singular focus on reform is incomplete (Meiners and Winn, 2010; Meiners, 2011). Whereas reform is necessary in spaces where immediate changes are needed (e.g., school discipline), reform efforts must also, as Meiners (2011) reminds us, be connected to a larger abolitionist movement. Abolition is not simply the termination of policies and practices that harm (Stovall, 2016, 2018); it is also centered on building radical trust, joy, and imagination (Dunn et al., 2021). This approach requires that educators, policymakers, and scholars listen to *youth* to dismantle, but perhaps more importantly, work to build anew.

Finally, we encourage the field to continue to look for opportunities to support youth in "constructing their own table." Gross (2021) writes, "it's when we wonder that our freedom dreams create ever-possible futures, and it's when we ask the kids to wonder that these freedom dreams become our present realities. We owe it to them to listen." (p. 178). Through ongoing, reflexive, and adaptive processes that require robust community building, seeing children for their truths, honoring legacies of community cultural wealth

(Yosso, 2005), and taking up critical inquiry to current systems of (in)equality, we can continue to dream about possibilities in education—toward environments where Black children flourish and Black mothers see their dreams actualized.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because this was a qualitative study that does not have a raw dataset outside of transcripts. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to AD, Addison.Duane@berkeley.edu.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Wayne State University Institutional Review Board. Informed consent to participate in this study was provided by the participants' legal guardian/next of kin.

Author contributions

Both authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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