

KEEP DREAMING

VILLAGE OF WISDOM
MARCH 2021

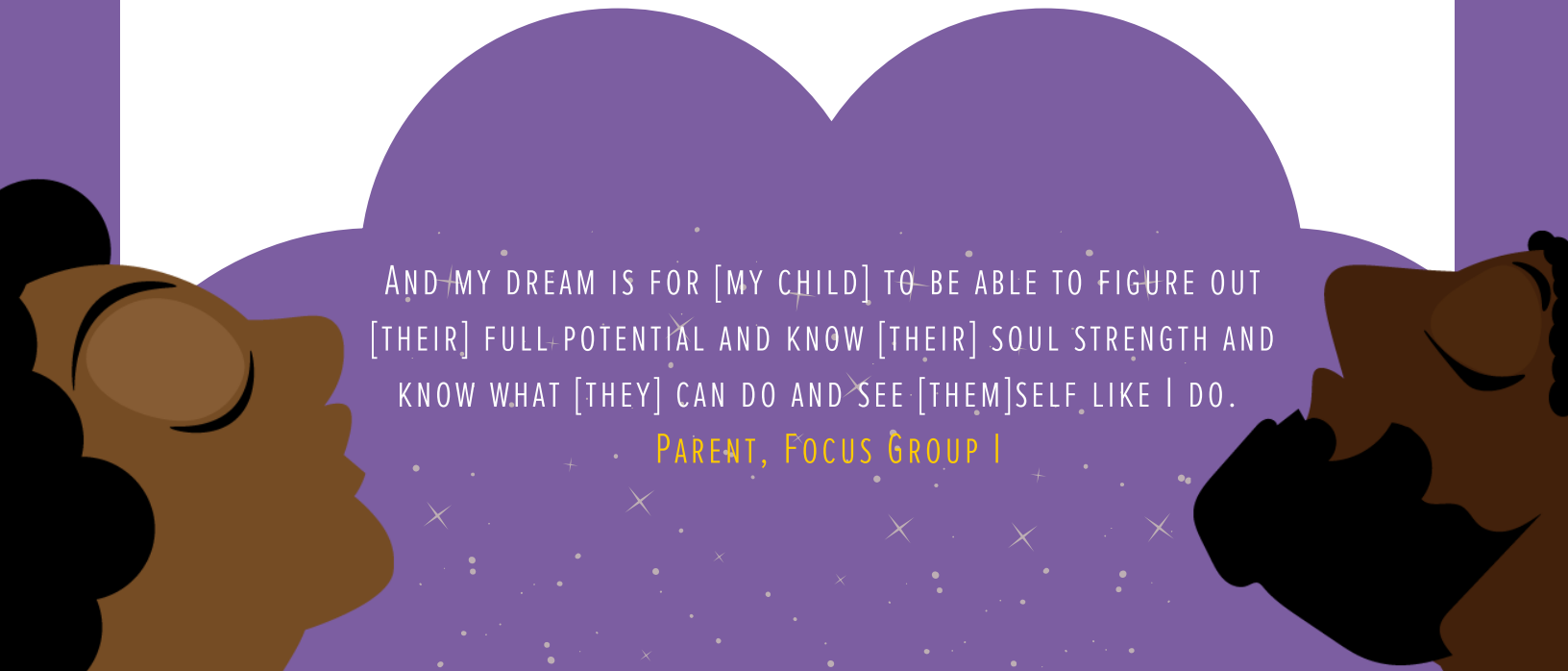
OVERVIEW

In late summer of 2020, Village of Wisdom (VOW) extended an invitation and orientation to Black parents to serve as researchers in a community-driven project designed to illuminate the dreams of Black parents, Black students, and teachers of Black students amid the COVID pandemic and online learning environment. Five Black women parents emerged from the invitation and completed more than 40 hours of learning to prepare them to lead the research project. These VOW Parent Researchers increased their knowledge of ethical practices in research, question design, data collection and analysis. The VOW Parent Researchers then facilitated 6 focus groups in Fall of 2020 with Black parents, Black students, and teachers of Black students via Zoom. They worked alongside Dr. Rabiatu Barrie (from Adler University) to identify emergent codes and to develop themes from the transcripts. This report is a summary of two emergent themes captured in the transcripts that align with the [Keep Dreaming](#) vision authored by VOW Parent Researchers.



DREAMS, ASPIRATIONS FOR BLACK STUDENTS

The theme dreams, aspirations for Black students emerged from responses expressed across all participants, a need for Black students to realize and actualize their brilliance, unique gifts, and talents. All participants expressed how dreams, aspirations are essential for Black students during COVID and for the future. While parents more easily articulated dreams for their children, both parents and teachers' responses expressed words like "full potential" and "pride" and "anything is possible". Though the Black students' responses did not include terms like "full potential" or "anything is possible", they expressed their dreams, aspirations were tied to taking care of their mothers, their friends, and those in need (e.g., those experiencing homelessness) by accumulating wealth or by "getting money". Black students also expressed their dreams, aspirations of being in classrooms that connected expressions like brilliance, pride, and full potential with Blackness. All participants, parents, teachers, and students, expressed a unified dream where Blackness was amplified, valued, and preserved.



AND MY DREAM IS FOR [MY CHILD] TO BE ABLE TO FIGURE OUT [THEIR] FULL-POTENTIAL AND KNOW [THEIR] SOUL STRENGTH AND KNOW WHAT [THEY] CAN DO AND SEE [THEM]SELF LIKE I DO.

PARENT, FOCUS GROUP 1

"I WANT TO SEE AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT FOR MY BLACK STUDENTS, SO THAT THEY CAN PRESERVE THEIR BLACKNESS AND NOT BE IN A POSITION WHERE THEY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE BEING BLACK... AND I WOULD LIKE TO SEE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR MY BLACK STUDENTS THAT THEY CAN COME IN AND BE THEIR AUTHENTIC SELVES AND THAT THEY LEARN HOW TO PRESENT THEMSELVES IN ANY ARENA, BUT IT'S OK TO CHILL AND KICK IT AND ACT BLACK AND BLACK IS A THING AND IT'S NOT SOMETHING TO BE ASHAMED OF BUT SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF..."

TEACHER, FOCUS GROUP II

"I WOULD WANNA LEARN ABOUT, MORE ABOUT LIKE AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE AND LIKE FOOD, LANGUAGE, TRADITIONS OF WHAT WE WOULD DO...UM, LET'S SEE...DANCING, FOOD...YOU KNOW LIKE PEOPLE FROM LIKE AFRICA... LIKE WHAT LANGUAGE DO THEY SPEAK? WHAT INTERESTS THEY HAVE?...A LOT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIKE WRITERS AND POETS..."

STUDENT, FOCUS GROUP II

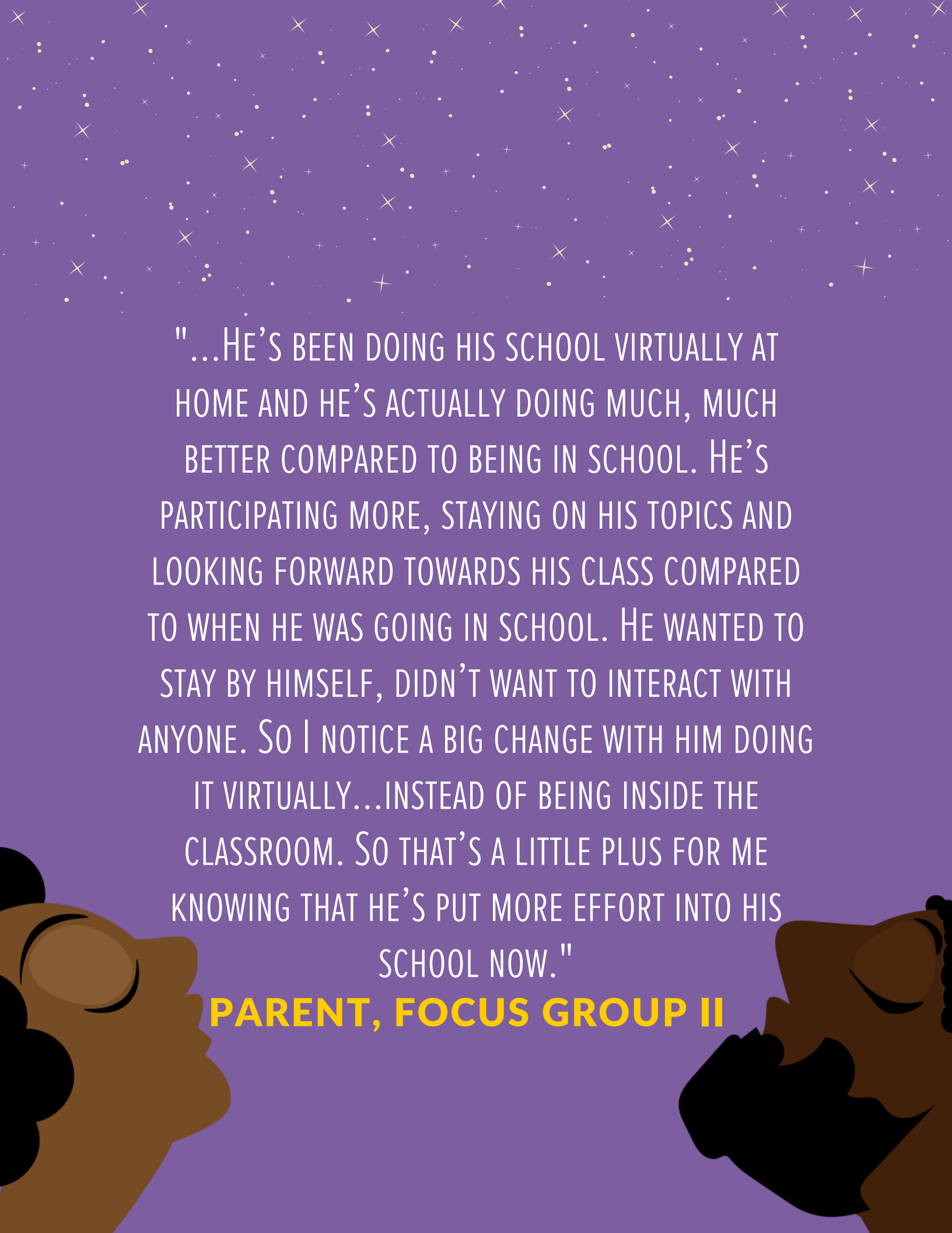


NEW POSSIBILITIES DURING ONLINE LEARNING

The theme of new possibilities during online learning became expressed as opportunities where new learning emerged and where new connections were made between parents, teachers and students. The theme largely represented responses gathered from Black parents and Black students. Teachers were less likely to express new possibilities, though some noted how the online learning environment allowed them to see the value of having parents close in the home and how the online environment allowed them to deliver more intentional content. Parents' responses expressed that the at-home learning environment allowed them to build stronger bonds with their child and it created opportunities for them to learn more about their child and child's schoolwork. Additionally, parents expressed the at-home learning environment allowed their child to feel safe and limited their child's interactions with school personnel and peers the parent perceived as harmful. Students expressed how they were able to do things they enjoyed—such as riding their bikes, playing video games, and board games with family members. Both parents and students expressed valuing the shorter class time and the breaks (e.g., Wellness Wednesdays program in Durham) provided by the school district and using this time to take much needed mental pauses.

THIS VIRTUAL LEARNING, [WHAT IT] HAS CAUSED ME TO DO IS TO SLOW EVERYTHING DOWN. JUST SLOW DOWN. THE CONTENT IS THERE BUT THE WAY I TEACH IT NOW IS SO MUCH MORE INTENTIONAL.

TEACHER, FOCUS GROUP II



"...HE'S BEEN DOING HIS SCHOOL VIRTUALLY AT HOME AND HE'S ACTUALLY DOING MUCH, MUCH BETTER COMPARED TO BEING IN SCHOOL. HE'S PARTICIPATING MORE, STAYING ON HIS TOPICS AND LOOKING FORWARD TOWARDS HIS CLASS COMPARED TO WHEN HE WAS GOING IN SCHOOL. HE WANTED TO STAY BY HIMSELF, DIDN'T WANT TO INTERACT WITH ANYONE. SO I NOTICE A BIG CHANGE WITH HIM DOING IT VIRTUALLY...INSTEAD OF BEING INSIDE THE CLASSROOM. SO THAT'S A LITTLE PLUS FOR ME KNOWING THAT HE'S PUT MORE EFFORT INTO HIS SCHOOL NOW."

PARENT, FOCUS GROUP II

CONCLUSION

VOW Parent Researchers authored the theme, Keep Dreaming, to position the dreams, aspirations of Black parents, Black students, and teachers. Keep Dreaming inspires us to do the work needed to create learning environments where Black students are their authentic selves and where teachers affirm and validate Blackness in the classroom and in the curriculum. Several recommendations emerged for public schools and the broader community to consider in their equity efforts:

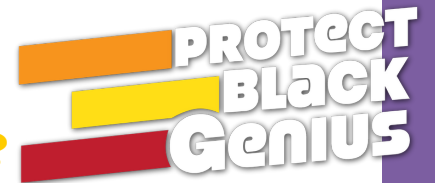
- **Be daring and willing to bring Blackness into the learning environment and to affirm Black students and their families.**
- **Continue to establish and cultivate communication pathways between the district, Black parents, and students.**
- **Dedicate time and resources to improve how teachers increase their cultural competence and how they build culturally affirming learning environments.**
- **Develop a mechanism to identify and hold teachers and school personnel accountable for causing any harm that targets the racial identity of Black students.**

In truth, Keep Dreaming should encourage all of us to continue to dream, but it should be a vision that anchors dreams in a reality. Village of Wisdom (VOW) continues to build on the wisdom of Black parents and the community to affirm Black Genius, the intellectual curiosity and creativity of Black youth.

The full report that describes the challenges of #KeepDreaming in the context of the public education system will be released by VOW soon.



KEEP DREAMING



HOW DO WE PROTECT BLACK GENIUS?

- We protect Black Genius and encourage Black students and Black parents to #KeepDreaming by remembering to [breathe](#) (a Black to School Video).
- We protect Black Genius and encourage Black parents and Black students to #KeepDreaming by using our [learning activities and conversation guides](#).
- We protect Black Genius and encourage educators and school districts to use the [Culturally Affirming Climate Survey \(CACS\)](#) to learn where you can engage in actionable change.

AUTHORSHIP

This report is a summary of the dreams, aspirations of participants involved in a larger study conducted by VOW and Parent Researchers. It is authored by members of the village, which include Black parents, Black researchers, community organizers, education activists and dreamers.

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<https://www.villageofwisdom.org/research>