

PNBC VOTER GUIDE 2024



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A Message from our President

My Brothers and Sisters,

As the denominational home of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., it is in our DNA to speak up and speak out regarding social justice and the rights of our people. The 2024 elections will be different: we must speak to the disregard and disrespect of civil rights and call out the work to undermine basic rights to to live free and vote as unacceptable.

As we prepare to engage candidates who seek national, state and local offices, we must be bold and tireless in our mission to see a more just and equitable world. This toolkit represents an easy to use guide to begin to plan your regional, state and/or congregational action plans for this election season. Together, we can center the issue of passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and the Freedom To Vote Act as every issue we care about ultimately ties to our ability to access the vote! As well as championing two key issues that disproportionately impact our community: Access to quality education and the end to mass incarceration.

OUR CALL TO ACTION!

I believe we all have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. We will begin with the March 21st Voting Rights Action in Washington, Dc. The more of us who commit to attend, the more impact this “call to action” will have. It is our plan to stay connected during this election cycle and to follow-up with everyone as you shape your local plans. PNBC, we must act together. Let’s use these tools as we continue our collective justice work!

*Because of Calvary,
Rev. David R. Peoples, PNBC President*

What's at Stake and our Issue Platform

This year will be the biggest election year in history globally. More than 60 countries representing half the world's population—4 billion people—will go to the polls in 2024, voting in presidential, legislative, and local elections.

In our politically polarized nation, Americans seem to agree on one issue underlying the 2024 elections — a worry over the state of democracy and how the outcome of the presidential contest will affect its future.

As members of PNBC, we understand what's at stake extends beyond the spotlight of presidential elections. It is a dynamic process that occurs at every level of government, from local to national. While the presidential election may capture widespread attention, it's essential to recognize that the decisions made in local elections hold significant sway over the issues we deeply care about. Local elections shape policies and initiatives that directly impact our communities, influencing education, public services, and the overall well-being of residents. *Therefore, our engagement in the democratic process should encompass not only the grand stage of national politics but also the grassroots level where the heartbeat of our concerns resonates most profoundly.* By actively participating in local elections, we contribute to shaping the future of our immediate surroundings and fostering positive change where it matters most—at home.

Our Advocacy Work

Voting Rights:

PNBC advocates for voting rights because we believe casting ballots is a civic sacrament and a form of public prayer—a way of petitioning for and participating in the Beloved Community.

End of Mass Incarceration:

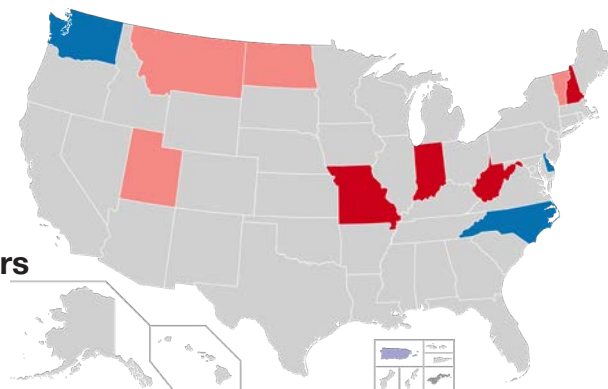
PNBC advocates for criminal legal reform because it believes all flesh is created in the image of God, therefore rejecting the American tradition of mass criminalization of Black bodies.

Education:

PNBC advocates for education equity because we believe in classrooms as sanctuaries of learning and growth and the sacredness of childhood evidenced by God becoming a child in the incarnation.

We know that those who vote early or show up to their local polling sites on Tuesday, November 5th will determine the outcomes. This year, we, the people, will elect:

- The US President/Vice-President
- 11 Governors
- 2024 Gubernatorial Elections
- 11 States Will Elect a Governor
- 35 U.S. Senators
- 435 U.S. House Members
- 169 State legislators
- 2,200 Prosecutors and Sheriffs
- Thousands of School Boards Members



11 states will elect a new Governor

Questions to Ask the National and Gubernatorial Candidates



As leaders within our congregations and pillars of our communities, the responsibility of engaging with Presidential, Senatorial, Congressional and/or Gubernatorial candidates is significant. *When a candidate asks to speak to your congregation, it is crucial to use this opportunity to address key issues impacting our community. This not only enriches the dialogue but allows us to go beyond partisan politics and align with our mission to advocate for justice, equality, and the well-being of all.*

Here are three key things to ask a candidate directly:

Voting Rights:

How do you, as a candidate, prioritize the fundamental right to vote in our democracy? Can you share your stance on ensuring equal access to the ballot, addressing voter suppression, and promoting policies that encourage widespread civic participation within our community? Presidential, Senatorial and Congressional Candidates: Can you share your stance on and potential endorsement of the proposed federal legislation, The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4 / S 4)? This legislation aims to reinstate the process of preclearance, ensuring that any changes to local or state elections undergo federal review. How do you see this Act contributing to social justice and safeguarding voting rights for all Americans, and would you support its passage?

Education:

Education is a cornerstone of empowerment and community development. As a candidate, what are your plans to support and enhance our education system? Specifically, could you elaborate on your approach to ensuring equitable funding, providing quality education for all, and implementing initiatives to bridge educational disparities within our community?

Ending Mass Incarceration:

Mass incarceration is a pressing issue that disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Candidate, how do you view the need for criminal justice reform? Can you share your perspective on alternatives to incarceration and the policies you propose to address systemic issues contributing to the over-reliance on imprisonment?

“for the People, by the People . . .”



In a democracy, the government is meant to be “for the people,” “by the people,” and shaped through the electoral process and civic participation, influencing the policies and laws governing our lives and communities. Despite America’s claim to a long-standing commitment to democracy, the reality is that its relationship with disenfranchisement has tainted this narrative.

The roots of voter suppression trace back to the founding of democracy when white male landowners, through the Constitution of 1788, secured voting rights for themselves, leaving the determination of voting “standards” to individual states. Throughout history, access to the voting booth has been an uphill battle.

Today, the corrupting influence of big money in politics has led to policy efforts resulting in systemic issues such as voter suppression, voter “erasure,” felony disenfranchisement, and gerrymandering. The lack of access to the ballot creates an existential obstruction in government, leading to a significant gap between public interest and public policy.

The Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) believes that every issue is a voting rights issue. From rising living costs, healthcare, and housing challenges to threats like gun violence, police injustice, immigration issues, and the future of work impacted by AI and the digital economy, these issues begin with who has access to the electoral process. PNBC urges its members to engage in local voting rights work and supports the push for a new national voting rights act, such as The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (H.R. 4 / S 4). Understanding and participating in these efforts are crucial for shaping a fair and inclusive democracy.

(Resource for this section: <https://sites.google.com/view/7dsus/home>)



VOTER ACCESS CHANGES BETWEEN 2020 AND 2024			
	Less Access	Largely the same	More Access
Arizona		✓	
Georgia	✓		
Michigan			✓
Nevada			✓
New Hampshire	✓		
North Carolina	✓		
Pennsylvania			✓
Wisconsin	✓		

*pending litigation in Wisconsin could result in significant changes to voter access.

Voter Suppression

Voter suppression refers to intentional efforts to hinder eligible voters from exercising their right to vote.

Tactics: Examples include restrictive voter ID laws, reduced early voting periods, and purging voter rolls.

Impact: Disproportionately affects marginalized communities, suppressing their political representation.

“for the People, by the People . . .”



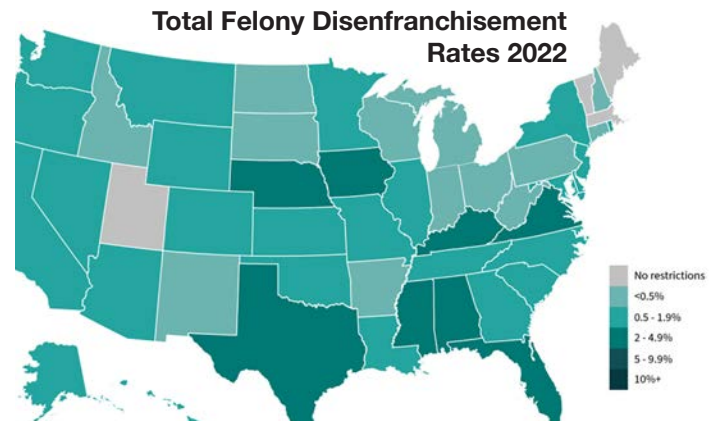
Gerrymandering:

Definition: Gerrymandering is the manipulation of electoral district boundaries to favor a particular political party.

Tactics: Drawing district lines to concentrate or dilute the voting power of certain groups.

Impact: Distorts the democratic process, reduces competition, and can lead to unrepresentative outcomes.

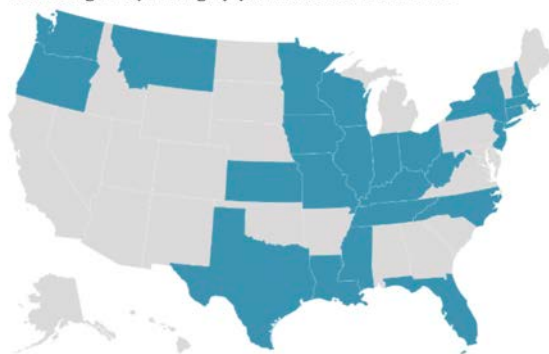
Justice-Impacted People and the Right to Vote: Excluding individuals with criminal records from voting can lead to feelings of alienation and disconnection from the democratic process, hindering their motivation to engage in civic life. People with criminal records face disenfranchisement, being denied the fundamental right to vote, which is a cornerstone of civic participation.



Felony disenfranchisement disproportionately affects marginalized communities, particularly communities of color, contributing to unequal representation in the democratic process.

Impact: Families of those disenfranchised also experience indirect consequences, as the voting rights of a family member can impact the overall political representation of their community.

States Using Principal Voting Equipment That Is 10 Years or Older



Vulnerable Voting Systems

Outdated voting machines can malfunction, leading to lost or miscounted votes, disenfranchising voters and undermining the democratic process.

Long lines caused by slow or malfunctioning equipment may discourage people from voting, particularly in communities with limited resources.

Outmoded voting processes can result in inefficiencies, causing delays in election results.

Slow tabulation and reporting may contribute to public distrust and speculation about the accuracy of the outcome. Communities with limited resources may struggle to update their voting infrastructure, leading to unequal access to reliable and secure voting methods. The impact is often felt disproportionately in marginalized communities, exacerbating existing disparities.



Understanding the Issue

The criminal justice system in the U.S. vividly reflects the enduring impact of slavery and racism. Its roots can be traced back to the era of slavery and Jim Crow, and today we witness the pervasive influence of systemic racism through the widespread issue of mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex. Remarkably, the United States, often celebrated as the land of freedom, holds approximately 25% of the world's prison population. Over the past four decades, our jails and prisons have seen a staggering 500% increase in population, even during periods when crime rates were declining. Furthermore, individuals who have completed their sentences and supposedly “paid their debt” are often subjected to a caste-like system, facing ongoing discrimination in voting, employment, and housing. These areas were critical battlegrounds during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The so-called “war on drugs” has disproportionately targeted communities of color and the impoverished, serving as a tragic tool for racial backlash. It is within this context that advocates of Dr. King’s vision must now engage in their fight.

Statistics

America spends about **\$80 billion** a year on incarceration.

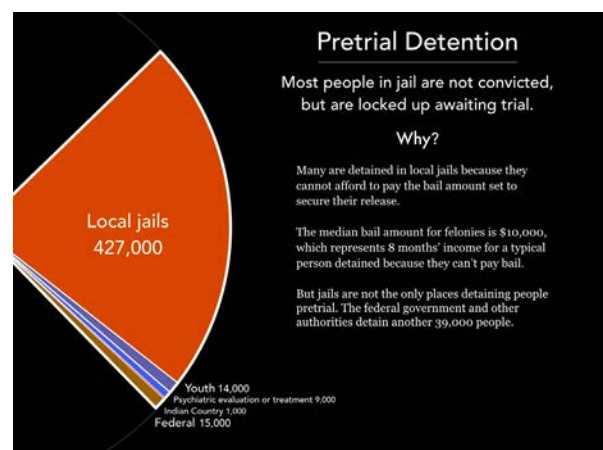
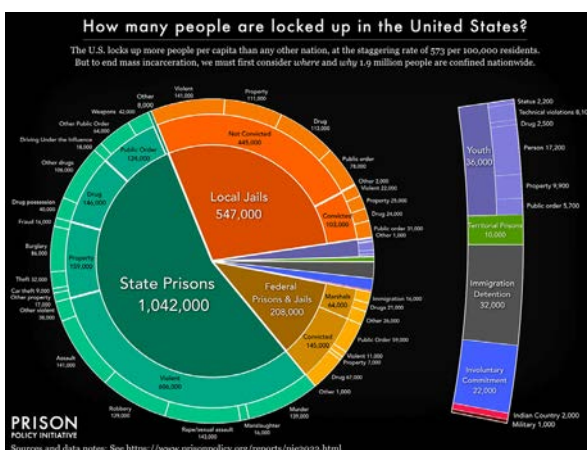
The average cost per prison inmate in the U.S.

\$33,274

Over **70 million** Americans have some type of criminal record.

That's **1 in 3** adults in America.

Source: Multifaith Initiative to End Mass Incarceration



Source: Prison Policy Initiative

Action:

- Voting for Prosecutors and Sheriffs
- Moving from “Law and Order” Politics to “Beloved Community.”

The District Attorney (DA) and sheriffs are pivotal in our justice system, shaping local criminal systems. With 2,200 on the 2024 ballot, voters influence the direction of justice. DAs hold significant power, deciding which cases to prosecute and how harshly, while sheriffs impact county jails. Break from traditional rhetoric; elect reform-minded leaders to bring change to mass incarceration. Take action for a justice system that prioritizes reform over punitive practices.

Sheriff elections in 2024



As of December 2023. New special elections may occur as vacancies arise.

BOLTS

Source: jusa.org/2023/12/27/prosecutor-and-sheriff-elections-in-2024-could-be-as-important-as-president-and-congress/



Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders

Our current school system does not prepare the majority of students of color to choose their own pathway to possibility. Instead, their path is determined for them in the face of inequitable preparation, as evidenced by lower rates of literacy and higher suspension and dropout rates than their white counterparts, as well as teachers with low expectations and a lack of teachers of color. Before the pandemic, school was already not serving our students, and this has only been exacerbated in the aftermath. Students of color are missing crucial academic time due to punitive disciplinary systems, on top of the chronic absenteeism that has increased post-pandemic. As a result the potential of generations of students of color falling even further behind academically. Add to that the attack on "Critical Race Theory" and our civil liberties, and our students are being failed even further.

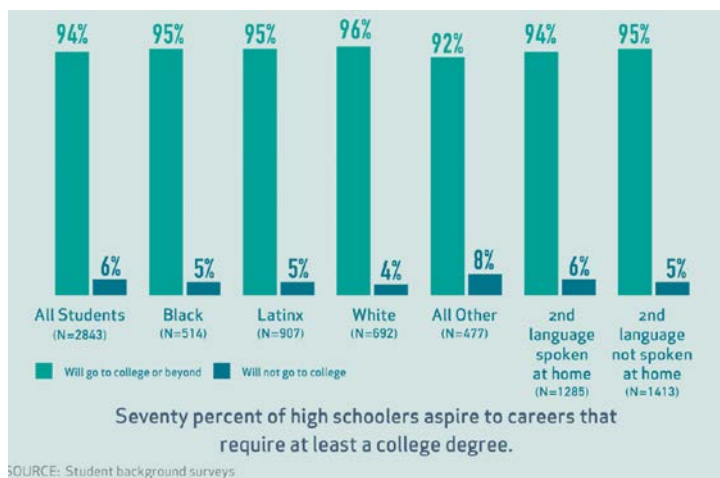
What can we do? Elect local school board leaders who work to ensure kids have pipelines to possibilities.

Myths and Realities

Myth 1: College ain't for everybody

Reality: Many students do want to pursue college or postsecondary pathways. Regardless of their chosen careers, all students will need some kind of postsecondary training. We need school to prepare our students to pursue their dreams.

Data: Of high schoolers surveyed across 5 school districts, 94% reported that they want to attend college, and 70% of those students aspired to a career for which they needed at least a college degree. (Source: *The Opportunity Myth*, TNTP).



Students have big, clear plans for themselves.

94%

of students we surveyed said college was part of their plan.

Myths and Realities

Myth 2:

All teachers expect their students to succeed.

Reality: “Compared to their White counterparts, Black teachers have higher expectations for Black students. They’re also less likely to perceive Black students as disruptive, inattentive, or unable to do homework.” (*Source: Why Teachers of Color Matter, Edutopia*)

Data: *Though 53% of U.S. students are students of color, 80% of teachers are white, and 40% of schools do not have even one teacher of color (Source: Broken Pipeline, TNTP). “A 2018 study found that Black students who had a single Black teacher were 13% more likely to enroll in college. With two Black teachers, that number jumped to 32%.” (Source: Why Teachers of Color Matter, Edutopia)*



Myth 3:

There’s no connection between success in school and prison.

Reality: Research consistently demonstrates clear links between literacy, being pushed out of school, and being incarcerated.

Data: *85% of all juveniles who interface with the court system are functionally low literate. In addition, more than 60% of all prison inmates are functionally illiterate - Source: Begin to Read). High school dropouts are 63% more likely to end up incarcerated than college graduates. (Source: EMI School to Prison Pipeline toolkit 2)*



What can we do? We must upend the school-to-prison pipeline, and instead foster pathways to possibilities. Students should be in school, taught by teachers with high expectations who support them to pursue their dreams. Students should be allowed to dream, feel a sense of belonging, and engage in restorative practices, rather than being pushed out by punitive disciplinary measures that mirror the carceral system.

Action:

• Voting for School Board Members

Moving from Student Achievement Gap to Pipelines to Possibilities

The recent upswing in focus on school board elections highlights the significant political divisions prevalent throughout the nation. Some political activists view school boards as effective platforms for promoting partisan political goals at a relatively low cost. The approaching elections have the potential to reveal distinctly different viewpoints on crucial aspects of public education, encompassing:

- Approaches to addressing racism in school curriculum.
- Controversies surrounding book bans and limitations on freedom of speech and assembly.
- Implementing restorative practices in student discipline.
- Increasing the representation of black teachers to better address the cultural needs of students of color.



Search here to find your local school board election.

https://ballotpedia.org/School_board_elections,_2024

Questions to Ask Prosecutors/District Attorney (DA) Candidates:

DRUG LAWS

Studies show racial disparities in drug law enforcement even though white people and people of color use and sell drugs at the same rate. What would you do to minimize these disparities?

- Implement implicit bias training for law enforcement.
- Advocate for the decriminalization of certain drug offenses.
- Focus on community policing and engagement to build trust.

What do you think is the most effective way to deal with low-level drug offenders?

- Support diversion programs for non-violent drug offenders.
- Promote rehabilitation and treatment over incarceration.
- Explore restorative justice approaches for drug-related offenses.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

What would you do to reduce the number of juveniles – particularly African Americans and Latino youth – who are brought into the criminal justice system? What policies would you implement to ensure fair and unbiased use of prosecutorial discretion in juvenile court?

- Address systemic issues contributing to disparities.
- Implement training to eliminate bias in prosecutorial decisions.

USE OF FORCE

As District Attorney, how would you handle a fatal use of force incident involving local police?

- Conduct thorough and transparent investigations.
- Collaborate with independent agencies for oversight.
- Pursue charges if the evidence supports criminal conduct.

REHABILITATION AND PREVENTION

We believe that many “crimes” are a result of poverty and the need for mental health support in the community. If elected, what programs and policies would you implement as District Attorney to reduce the criminalization of poverty and provide mental health support?

- Advocate for diversion programs addressing root causes.
- Collaborate with community organizations for mental health support.
- Review and reform bail policies that impact low-income individuals.

Do you support diversion and mentor programs for first-time offenders ages 18-25? If so, what would you do as District Attorney to promote such programs?

- Support and expand diversion programs for young adults.
- Collaborate with community organizations to provide mentorship.
- Advocate for policies recognizing the developmental stage of young adults.

Questions to Ask Prosecutors/District Attorney (DA) Candidates *Continued*

JAILS

What steps would you take to reduce the pretrial incarceration rate in our county safely?

- Implement risk assessment tools for pretrial decisions.
- Advocate for bail reform to address disparities.
- Promote alternatives to pretrial detention, such as electronic monitoring.

Questions to Ask Sheriff Candidates

DRUG LAWS

What do you think is the most effective way to deal with low-level drug offenders?

- Support diversion programs for non-violent drug offenders.
- Advocate for community-based rehabilitation over incarceration.
- Collaborate with local agencies to address underlying causes of drug offenses.

How would you increase access to drug treatment for people charged and convicted of low-level offenses?

- Establish partnerships with treatment facilities and community organizations.
- Advocate for funding and resources for drug treatment programs.
- Promote education and awareness about available treatment options.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Do you support sending young offenders to restorative justice programs and other avenues that divert young people out of the juvenile justice system and toward new opportunities? If so, what would you do as Sheriff to promote these programs?

- Support diversion programs for non-violent drug offenders.
- Advocate for community-based rehabilitation over incarceration.
- Collaborate with local agencies to address underlying causes of drug offenses.

How would you increase access to drug treatment for people charged and convicted of low-level offenses?

- Support and promote restorative justice programs for young offenders.
- Collaborate with community organizations to create opportunities for diversion.
- Advocate for policies prioritizing intervention and rehabilitation over incarceration for young offenders.

Questions to Ask Sheriff Candidates

USE OF FORCE

Do you support civilian oversight of law enforcement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for civilian oversight to enhance accountability. • Collaborate with community leaders to establish effective oversight mechanisms. • Promote transparency in the use of force investigations.
How would you encourage community participation in law enforcement oversight? Many people are too intimidated to file a complaint in a Sheriff's Department. How would you reduce this barrier to community feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish anonymous reporting mechanisms for community feedback. • Conduct community forums and outreach events to encourage open dialogue. • Implement community liaisons to facilitate community and law enforcement communication.

REHABILITATION AND PREVENTION

Do you support rehabilitation programs in prison, jail, and the local community? If so, how would you advocate to continue expanding funding for these programs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for increased funding for evidence-based rehabilitation programs. • Collaborate with community organizations to expand local rehabilitation initiatives. • Educate the public and policymakers on the long-term benefits of rehabilitation programs.
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JAILS

Do you support the use of an evidence-based assessment tool to reduce the reliance on money bail that keeps so many people incarcerated for no public safety reason while they await their day in court?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for the use of evidence-based assessment tools to inform bail decisions. • Promote policies that prioritize public safety over monetary considerations. • Collaborate with stakeholders to implement fair and just bail practices.
As Sheriff, how would you reduce the pretrial jail population in our county?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement alternatives to pretrial detention, such as electronic monitoring. • Advocate for policies prioritizing non-violent offenders for release pending trial. • Collaborate with local agencies to address systemic issues contributing to pretrial incarceration.

Questions to Ask the School Board Candidate

The recent upswing in focus on school board elections highlights the significant political divisions prevalent throughout the nation.. The approaching elections have the potential to reveal distinctly different viewpoints on crucial aspects of public education, encompassing:

- **Approaches to addressing racism in school curriculum.**
- **Controversies surrounding book bans and limitations on freedom of speech and assembly.**
- **Implementing restorative practices in student discipline.**
- **Increasing the representation of Black teachers and teachers who have high expectations for all students.**

Questions to Ask

Answers We Are Looking For

How do you plan to approach and address racism within the school curriculum to promote inclusivity, diversity, and a more equitable educational experience for black and brown students?

- Integrate diverse perspectives and histories into the curriculum.
- Collaborate with educators and communities to develop culturally responsive materials.
- Implement anti-bias training for teachers and staff.

How do you plan to address controversies related to book bans and restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly within the educational environment, ensuring a balanced and inclusive discourse?

- Advocate for diverse perspectives in educational materials. Encourage policies that protect freedom of speech and assembly.
- Engage with the community in decision-making processes related to curriculum content.

How do you envision implementing restorative practices in student discipline to foster a more inclusive and rehabilitative approach within the educational system?

Reduce police presence in schools
Prioritize restorative justice over punitive measures.
Provide training for educators on restorative practices.
Collaborate with students, parents, and community members in developing restorative policies.

What strategies do you propose to increase the representation of black teachers in schools, aiming better to meet the cultural needs of black and brown students and enhance diversity within the teaching

- Implement targeted recruitment efforts to attract black educators.
- Support mentorship and professional development opportunities for aspiring black teachers.
- Advocate for policies that create an inclusive and welcoming environment for educators of color.