

Dr. Kelley Ditzel and Dr. Darryl Hill

Senior Affiliate and Partner, HCM Strategists

February 21, 2024

[5:00 pm] [Dr. Pam Luster \(@DrPamLuster\)](#)

We're back again with an all new #EquityChat sponsored by @CollegeFutures w/your hosts @lamkeithcurry @DrTammeil & @DrPamLuster. This week, we LEVEL UP and Get REAL with @DrDarrylVHill and @KelleyDitzel from @HCMStrat. Welcome Darryl and Kelley!

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

Thank you! Excited to be here

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

Thanks for having us!

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Glad you're here!

[5:05 pm] [Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson \(@DrTammeil\)](#)

Q1 @DrDarrylVHill @KelleyDitzel @HCMStrat. As you engage in equity-focused work, what is your walk-up song or anthem? @DrPamLuster @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

Freedom by Beyonce with Kendrick Lamar comes to mind. It highlights the importance of history and you can feel the passion! "I'ma keep running cause a winner don't quit on themselves." "Open our mind as we caste away oppression."

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

Mine is Wake Up Everybody by Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes!

[5:11 pm] [Dr. Keith Curry \(@iamkeithcurry\)](#)

Q2 @DrDarrylVHill @KelleyDitzel @HCMStrat. Was there a defining moment or experience that catalyzed your journey to engage with #LEVELUP and the #BlackLearnerExcellence call to action? @DrPamLuster @DrTammeil @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

I have been engaged in equity work since childhood really. Trying to understand why in a school district - Shaker Heights, OH – that was about half white and half Black when I attended was so racially segregated. It started with “gifted” student testing in 1st grade.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

And continued with me continually being the only or one of few Black students in honors and then AP classes. It just did not make sense! I knew then there was no way that few Black students were capable of those classes. I wanted to understand what was going on.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

How was one’s ability determined and why were expectations so different seemingly based on race? The learning environments were so different thus creating two completely different school experiences (think projects vs. worksheets).

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

I remember many of us walking out of high school the day the student newspaper published a front-page article titled Black, White, and Shades of Grey. So problematic, right? It basically argued academic achievement gaps (really opportunity gaps) were inevitable based on race.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

So problematic. SMH

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

That was when my actual advocacy started. I asked plenty of questions before then; however, studied education from various disciplines in undergrad. And did Teach for America in Atlanta and ultimately decided earn a PhD in Public Policy to impact education equity more broadly.

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

Personally hearing from [@SecSmithEllis](#) and [@kristinHCM](#) about their efforts and seeing the loss of Black learners in higher education in the data. Also, my personal connection and experience from seeing many of my family members not having the same opportunities that I’ve had.

[5:18 pm] Dr. Luster (@DrPamLuster)

Q3 @DrDarrylVHill @KelleyDitzel @HCMStrat. What does it mean to LEVEL UP and Get REAL, and why is the focus on #BlackLearners so important to achieving #racialequity? @DrTammeil @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

It means to create opportunities and supports for Black learners UNAPOLOGETICALLY. I absolutely love that Dr. Keith Curry and the rest of the Expert Advisory Committee that informed the LEVEL UP report strongly agreed that this effort is unapologetic.

[Dr. Keith Curry #EquityAvengers #RealCollegePrez @lamkeithcurry](#)

We appreciate [@KelleyDitzel @DrDarrylVHill](#)

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

The acronyms literally mean – Leveraging Value for Every Black Learner, Unapologetically (LEVEL UP). And to do that, we must Get REAL: Real transparency and true affordability; Ensured success through shared ownership; Academic and social supports that create a sense of belonging

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

and finally Learner-centered teaching practices for Black learners.

[Dr. Tammeil Gilkerson @DrTammeil](#)

Not finally! Maybe the most important thing!

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

Absolutely! Makes such a difference

[Dr. Keith Curry #EquityAvengers #RealCollegePrez @lamkeithcurry](#)

Impacting the classroom is so important for the r Black Learner Success.

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

Agreed with [@KelleyDitzel](#) and definitely appreciate the unapologetic leadership of [@lamkeithcurry](#)

[5:25 pm] Dr. Gilkerson (@DrTammeil)

Q4 @DrDarrylVHill @KelleyDitzel @HCMStrat. Tell us about the newly release #LEVELUP Playbook. How does this resource build on the #LEVELUP brief and #BlackLearnerExcellence call to action? @DrPamLuster @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

We did not want to create another report that would sit on a shelf. Our intent with the LEVEL UP report was to drive action. Hence, the National Call to Action with 26 leaders signing on. The Playbook is a policy and practice guide for stakeholders to use as a resource for action

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

The current version follows the Get REAL agenda with recommendations for federal policymakers, state policymakers, postsecondary institutions and community and business leaders to drive change. We are currently sharing the document in community summits across the country.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

We seek to ensure it is directly informed by those who will (hopefully) use it. We also continue to engage Black learners in the content and design as we know it is critical to work with those we seek to impact. Black learner voice continues to be a priority and necessary.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

We are moving to create a digitized Playbook that will be easily accessible and digestible for all to use. Stakeholders must uphold policies and practices that dismantle systemic barriers and support Black learners.

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

We are definitely aiming for practicality and hope to reach a variety of stakeholders through the way that it is constructed. We welcome feedback from everyone!

[5:32 pm] [Dr. Curry \(@iamkeithcurry\)](#)

Q5 @DrDarrylVHill @KelleyDitzel @HCMStrat. #LEVELUP has made significant strides since the initial call to action. How do we keep the momentum of this national initiative moving forward?
@DrPamLuster @DrTammeil @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

Continue to find ways to amplify the message. We have forthcoming events in LA, Chicago, and Detroit that should bring awareness. Also, building coalitions of the willing as we recently saw at our legislative briefing on Capitol Hill.

[HCMStrategists @HCMStrat](#)

The LEVEL UP briefing was truly special, particularly the amazing student panel:

<https://youtu.be/xV26CldrKIM>

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

The students were amazing! Such a great reminder of what we're working for - the purpose of these efforts.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

One immediate step is to make sure you've joined the movement at <https://blacklearnersuccess.com/speakup>. You can sign on to the petition as well as access the various publications and resources including the Playbook. We are also traveling to several communities to engage directly.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

We know context matters. There are state and local issues that must be addressed. Resources are needed, of course – we continue to explore funding opportunities. We truly welcome input and continued connections as we collectively work toward realizing Black learner excellence.

[5:39 pm] [Dr. Luster \(@DrPamLuster\)](#)

Q6 @DrDarrylVHill @KelleyDitzel @HCMStrat. To do this work, we must continue learning and partnering with others. How do you educate yourself and who is informing your practice?
@DrTammeil @iamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

We are informed by field leaders such as [@iamkeithcurry](#), organizations such as [@AchieveTheDream](#), in addition to directly from promising and outstanding students who have shared their perspectives. It is important to hear directly from those who are most impacted by the work!

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

There is never enough time! There are so many working on aspects of this issue and we seek to honor previous efforts and continue to drive toward change. I personally prioritize direct input of Black learners, engaging with community and working collaboratively toward impact.

[5:46pm] [Dr. Gilkerson \(@DrTammeil\)](#)

Q7 @DrDarrylVHill @KelleyDitzel@HCMStrat. We all have a vision of the future we want to live in. What is your freedom dream for higher education and what gives you hope for its future? @DrPamLuster @iamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat #EquityAvengers

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

My dream is simple--that we have equitable outcomes for Black students and students from impoverished backgrounds. Efforts like LEVEL UP and allies like the [#EquityAvengers](#) both give me hope that we will bring attention to the needs and inform necessary changes

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

Love this question, I will continue to revisit this...my freedom dream is that every learner, including my own two boys, have the option to pursue whatever theychoose. That their trajectory is not decided for them or limited in any way.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

I also sincerely hope that education is reimagined to be an empowering place for Black learners where we are seen and edified in all aspects from curriculum to faculty, leadership to how and where learning happens. Conversations like this give me hope.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

The continued receptiveness of LEVEL UP by so many stakeholders gives me hope. And most importantly, my two Black sons give me hope – I have to work toward change for them and all other Black children who deserve to dream big and live unapologetically free.

[5:53 pm] [Dr. Curry \(@iamkeithcurry\)](#)

Q8 [@DrDarrylVHill](#) [@KelleyDitzel](#) [@HCMStrat](#). The road to racial equity is long. How are you sustaining yourself? What practice would you recommend to other [#EquityAvengers](#)? [@DrPamLuster](#) [@DrTammeil](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#) [#EquityAvengers](#)

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

Celebrate wins as they come. Find your people to support and enrich you throughout these efforts...Take time for self-care and time with loved ones. Remember all who have fought before us and why racial equity matters.

[Kelley Ditzel @KelleyDitzel](#)

It is quite humbling to think about the fact we are in many ways living our ancestors' wildest dreams!

[Dr. Darryl Hill @DrDarrylVHill](#)

It may seem cliché but finding time to take care of my health through regular exercise. Staying in touch with students also keeps me grounded. Also it's important to unplug—I highly recommend a news diet since the constant cycle of news can be overwhelming.

[6:00 pm] [Dr. Luster \(@DrPamLuster\)](#)

TY @DrDarrylVHill @KelleyDitzel for joining us on #EquityChat @CollegeFutures. We're glad to be partners in the #LEVELUP initiative. Join us next week as we host @abigailseldin, Chief Growth Officer @ScholAmerica. @IamKeithCurry @DrTammeil @DrPamLuster @equityavengers OUT!