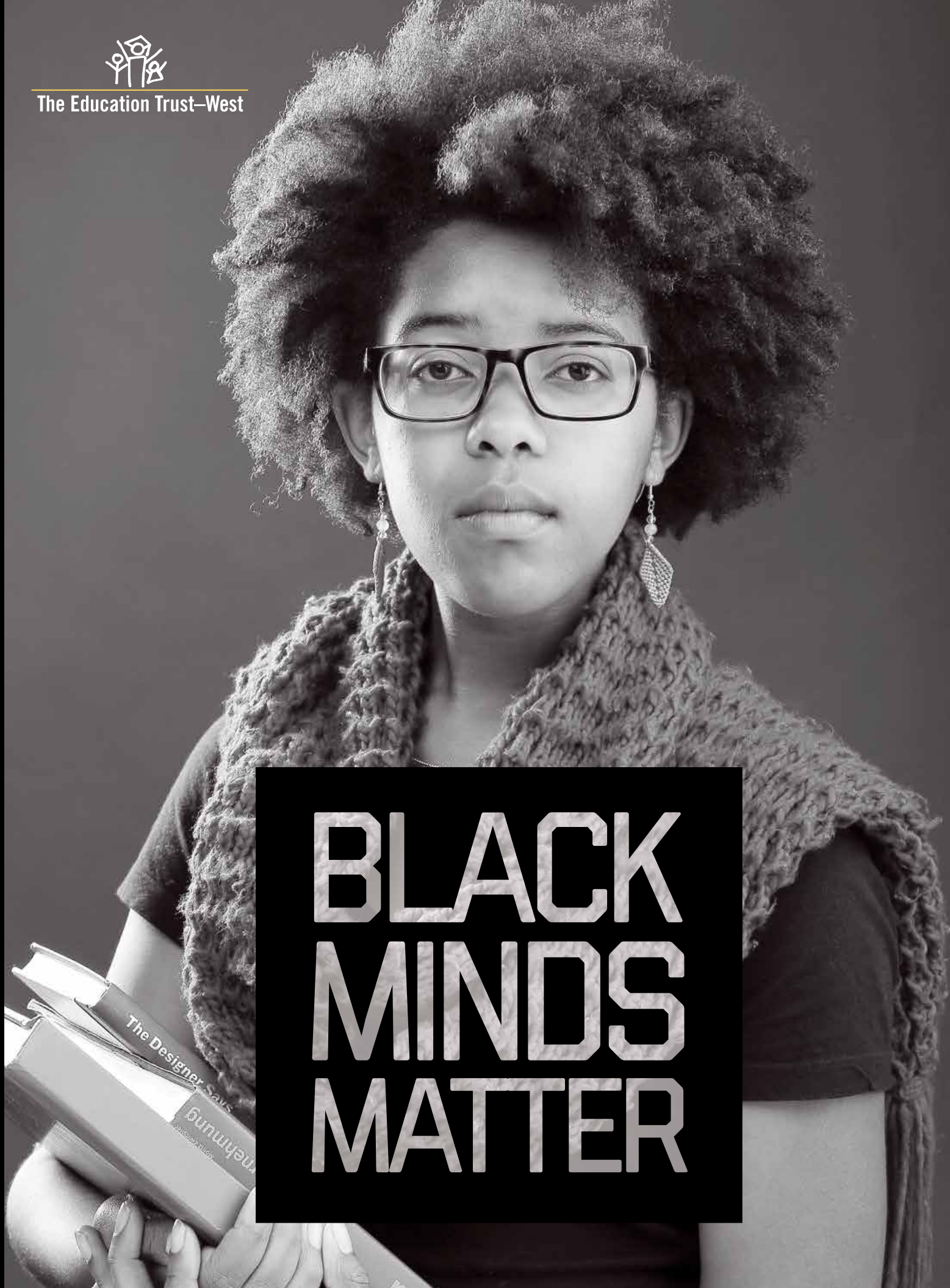




The Education Trust—West



**BLACK
MINDS
MATTER**

BLACK MINDS MATTER: SUPPORTING THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OF BLACK CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA



TOUSSAINT STONE JUGGLES A LOT.

The 17-year-old attends MetWest High School in Oakland. Every day, Toussaint balances his academic, personal, and leadership responsibilities — driving himself and his little sister to school, taking English and math courses at the local community college, co-chairing his school’s Student Leadership Council, and playing on the local football team.

Like many of his classmates, Toussaint dreams of college and a rewarding

career. He speaks of attending Stanford University and pursuing a profession where he can speak to and uplift other African Americans across the country. Toussaint is better positioned than most other Black students in California to achieve this dream. He has access to high-quality programs like the Manhood Development Program offered through Oakland Unified School District, and his small high school offers every student the college-preparatory coursework and the personalized supports and academic schedule necessary to achieve both college and career readiness.

We’d bet on Toussaint. He’s maintained strong grades and test scores, and he has taken the courses he needs to attend a four-year university, positioning him well for success in college. And Toussaint is not alone: In 2015, about 2,800 Black 11th-graders hit the “college ready” mark on the state’s English language arts exam, positioning them to directly enroll in college-level courses if they attend a California State University. Yet, though it is abundantly clear that Black children can achieve at the highest levels, most of the data paint a dire portrait of an education system — preschool through college — that systematically squanders Black talent.

Among California’s many racial and ethnic groups, Black children, whether from upper or lower income families, are the

LEAST LIKELY TO:

- Become proficient readers by third grade;
- Be placed in Gifted and Talented Education programs;
- Master the mid-level mathematics skills that position students for success in college-preparatory math courses;
- Be placed in a full sequence of college-preparatory courses;
- Complete an Advancement Placement (AP) course;
- Graduate from high school in four years; and
- Complete a college degree.

At the same time, they are the

MOST LIKELY TO:

- Be suspended or expelled;
- Be taught by ineffective teachers;
- Be identified for special education; and
- Take remedial, non-credit bearing coursework as college students.



These data make clear that even now, 60 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* and 50 years after the March on Washington, racial injustice is still a troubling hallmark of young, Black lives. As Toussaint and his family know, getting to and through college is the best way to achieve a better life. Yet, from the early childhood years through college, our systems are rigged to provide less quality to the very children who need the most, shortchanging their education and obstructing the social mobility of Black Californians. While the Golden State boasts wealth and jobs, educational and economic opportunity are far out of reach for many of the state's Black residents. The deaths of unarmed youth by law enforcement across the country tell young Black Americans that their lives matter less than other lives. And the experiences of Black students in school tell them that their minds may matter less, as well.

This report looks at the educational experiences and outcomes of California's Black children, preschool through college. It also highlights numerous examples of community, school, and policy efforts to improve those outcomes. We conclude with recommendations for state and local education leaders.

While many California policymakers, educators, community members, parents, and students are keenly aware of opportunity and achievement gaps, the reality facing Black students calls for much more than just awareness. It calls for a movement and political will. To improve outcomes for all California students, we must look at education through the lens of race, including the lens of what it means to be a Black child in California's schools today. We must do so not only in one report, but through an ongoing, collaborative discussion rooted in what we know works, with accountability for our institutions and leaders to reverse these dangerous trends.

Our goal is for *Black Minds Matter* to serve as a rallying point for engagement, discussion, and action. We hope that educators, policymakers, students, parents, and community members will come together to resoundingly say that Black minds really do matter.

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CALIFORNIA'S BLACK STUDENTS

California has the fifth largest Black population in the country and is home to about 900,000 African Americans under the age of 25. About 373,000 of these young people are students in our public K-12 schools, representing 6 percent of the public school population. Another 150,000 Black students attend college in California, either at a public or private institution.

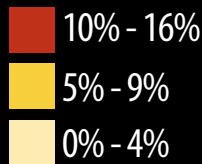
Within our K-12 schools, African American students are concentrated in just a handful of California's 58 counties. The counties serving the largest concentrations of Black students are Solano, Sacramento, Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Francisco. In each of these counties, Black children represent at least 10 percent of the K-12 population. Los Angeles County – the biggest in terms of overall population – is home to the largest number of Black students, nearly 124,000. There, African American students comprise 8 percent of the school age population.

Some of these counties have seen dramatic declines in the African American student population over the last two decades. For example, between 1995 and 2015, Alameda County experienced a decline in the Black student population from 23 percent to 12 percent, and San Francisco County experienced a decline from 18 percent to 10 percent.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2014; California Department of Education, 2014-15 Enrollment; National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System



California has the fifth largest Black population in the country and is home to about 900,000 African Americans under the age of 25.



POLICIES AFFECTING CALIFORNIA'S AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS



The California Department of Education lacks an office, initiative, or committee focused on African American achievement or the achievement gap, more generally.

Over the last 150 years, federal and state laws have played an enormous role in shaping the educational opportunities and school conditions faced by Black children. From the 1870s to the late 1940s, courts and laws helped exclude and segregate Black students. During the Civil Rights era, the pendulum swung toward desegregation and affirmative action policies. However, in the 1990s, California dismantled affirmative action. In addition, Black children often still grow up in highly segregated neighborhoods lacking critical social supports and services.¹

In 2001, the federal No Child Left Behind Act demanded that states shed light on achievement gaps and hold districts and schools accountable for the performance of all student groups. In response, many states and districts experimented with a variety of improvement and turnaround strategies. Some succeeded; many did not. In 2012, President Obama created the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, and in 2014 he launched the My Brother's Keeper initiative. Both of these efforts focus on improving opportunities and achievement for African American youth.

Similar efforts have ebbed and flowed in California. Former state superintendent of public instruction, Jack O'Connell, asked his P-16 Council to examine strategies for closing the achievement gap, and the Council shared its findings and recommendations in a 2008 report. While the current administration has not anchored its work in this report, other initiatives have echoed some of the recommendations. Still, the California Department of Education lacks an office, initiative, or committee focused on African American achievement or the achievement gap, more generally.

Instead, leadership is coming from other corners of the state. The Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, a coalition of youth, community organizations, foundations, and leaders from multiple sectors, pursues policy and system reforms that will help boys and men of color in California. The State Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color has focused statewide attention on Black student achievement, in part with its 2012 report of policy recommendations. The Assembly has also recently established a Select Committee on the Status of Girls and Women of Color in order to draw attention to the academic needs of Black girls and young women. In addition, many California school districts have created initiatives or offices to support the achievement of African American students.

SEE THE TIMELINE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

POLICY TIMELINE: POLICIES AFFECTING BLACK

Over the last 165 years, federal and state laws have played an enormous role in shaping the education

1852 – As part of California’s **fugitive slave law**, the state bans Black children from California public schools — even though California is a free state.



1974 – In **Milliken v. Bradley**, the U.S. Supreme Court prohibits desegregation across school district lines, causing resegregation as white students flee to affluent suburban districts.

1964 – **Title VI of the Federal Civil Rights Act** prohibits any programs receiving federal funds, including public schools, from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sex.



1852 1872 1930 1947 1964 1974

1872 – Preceding *Plessy v. Ferguson* by 6 years, the California Supreme Court, in **Ward v. Flood**, upholds segregation as “separate, but equal” and supports a public school’s refusal to admit a Black student.

1930-1950 – With the second wave of the **Great Migration**, the Black population explodes in California, increasing by 500%.



1947 – After a public school refuses to admit a Mexican American student, **Mendez v. Westminster School District** strikes down school segregation in California. This case prompts the California Legislature to repeal school segregation laws and paves the way for **Brown v. Board of Education** in 1954. Nevertheless, school segregation persists due to the lack of systemic desegregation efforts and continuous discriminatory housing practices.

BLACK STUDENTS IN CALIFORNIA

Equal opportunities and school conditions faced by Black children.



The Education Trust—West



1999 – California passes the **Public Schools Accountability Act** to hold each California school accountable for the academic achievement of all students, including ethnic subgroups. Two years later, the federal **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001** also requires that states report data for each subgroup and requires action if schools aren't making progress toward targets.



2011 – The California State Assembly creates the **Select Committee on Boys and Men of Color**, releasing its 2012 Action Plan with 67 recommendations related to health, education, employment, violence prevention, and youth development.

1978 – In **Regents of the University of California v. Bakke**, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds affirmative action when it rules that universities can consider race and ethnicity in admissions decisions. However, it prohibits schools from using specific quotas.

2008 – California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell convenes the California Pre-kindergarten through Higher Education Council, directing the Council to release a report with recommendations for **Closing the Achievement Gap**.

1978 1995 1999 2008 2009 2011 2015

1995 – The University of California Board of Regents voted to eliminate the use of race in decisions about admissions. The next year, California voters approve **Proposition 209**, ending affirmative action in all of California's public institutions. As a result, between 1995 and 1998, the number of African American, Latino, and Native American students drops by 58 percent at the University of California, Berkeley and 53 percent at University of California, Los Angeles.



2015 – The California State Assembly creates the **Select Committee on the Status of Girls and Women of Color**.

2009 – The California State Board of Education creates an **African American Advisory Committee** to "help better understand the issues concerning the achievement gap that exists between Black students and their counterparts."



THE EARLY YEARS



THE PROBLEM

While many of California's Black children grow up in comfortable homes with parents and caregivers who nurture their growth

and development, many others grow up with parents or caregivers who struggle every day under the effects of long-term economic and institutional disparities. These young Black children are less likely to have access to high quality preschool and early learning opportunities. The result? Achievement gaps begin early, even before children reach school age.

Inequitable from the Start

Black children are more likely than White children to live in homes affected by financial hardship and caregiver instability. More than half of California's Black children live in low-income households, and more than a third live below the poverty line, which in 2013 was about \$23,600 for a family of four.^{2,3} California's Black children are also overrepresented in foster care: While they make up 6 percent of all children in the state, they constitute 22 percent of children in foster care.⁴

Because of disparities in financial stability, health, and well-being, learning gaps appear early. By age 2, low-income children—regardless of race—are already six months behind their higher income peers in language development, and by age 5 they are more than two years behind.⁵ One of the biggest predictors of early school success is a child's vocabulary upon entering kindergarten.⁶ Yet, Black and Latino children in California are less likely than their White peers to be read to every day (see Figure 1).

ABOUT HALF OF YOUNG BLACK CHILDREN ARE READ TO EVERY DAY

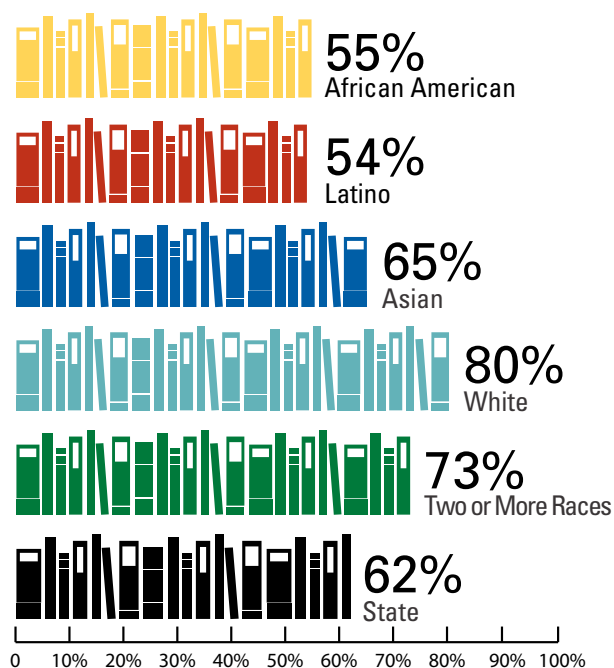


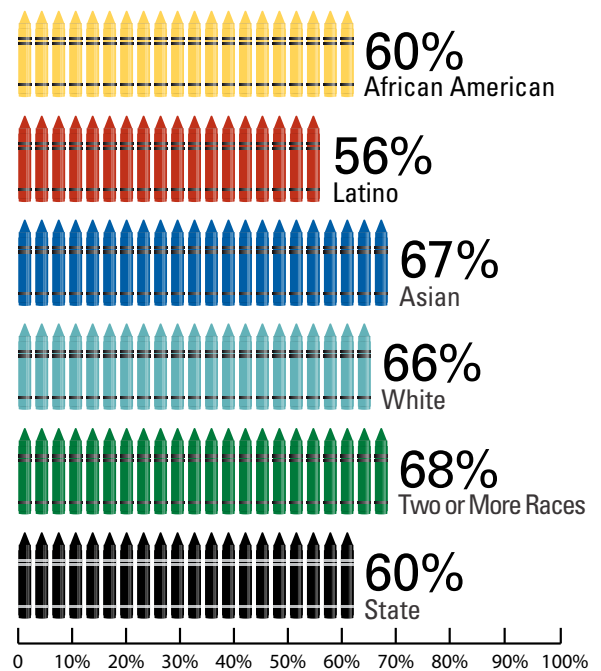
FIGURE 1: California Children Ages 0 to 5 Read to Every Day, 2011-2012

Source: California Health Interview Survey, 2011-2012



Black children are less likely than White and Asian children to attend preschool, due in part to limited access.

LESS THAN 2/3 OF BLACK CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA ARE IN EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS



Limited Access to High-Quality Preschool

Black children are also less likely to attend preschool, with 60 percent of California’s Black 3 to 5-year-olds enrolled in preschool or kindergarten, as compared with 66 percent of White children and 67 percent of Asian children (see Figure 2). This is due, in part, to limited access. Marginalized neighborhoods often have limited preschool options. And while many low-income families have access to Family Child Care Centers, Head Start Centers, and early education programs offered through local school districts, the quality of these programs varies considerably. A national report found that California state-funded preschools meet only 4 out of 10 preschool quality standards.⁷

FIGURE 2: California 3 to 5-Year-Olds Enrolled in Preschool or Kindergarten, 2013

Source: Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 2013 microdata files (Dec. 2014).

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CLOSE THE EARLY LEARNING GAP?



By investing in early interventions, affordable and high-quality preschool, and family engagement programs, California can help Black children gain access to the resources they need to catch up before kindergarten.

Instead of leveling the playing field early, we underinvest in our state's future. It doesn't have to be this way. By investing in early interventions, affordable and high-quality preschool, and family engagement programs, California can help Black children gain access to the resources they need to catch up before kindergarten. Specific strategies that work include these:

1. Making high-quality early learning opportunities available to all children.

Successful initiatives guarantee free or subsidized preschool to all 4-year-olds, provide teachers with coaching and professional development, and monitor the quality of preschool programs. Quality preschool matters, because early academic, social, behavioral, and physical learning during the first five years of life forms the foundation for classroom learning later on. Preschool-age children learn early literacy and math skills, as well as executive function and self-regulation skills that are vital for social, emotional, and academic development. Research has found that well-designed, high-quality preschool can positively impact school readiness, later academic achievement, high school graduation rates, lifetime earnings, and even arrest rates.⁸

2. Engaging families of young learners. In the most welcoming early education schools and settings, family engagement is a core value. Successful schools and programs build upon families' strengths, address trauma, build trust, and encourage engagement. They view a parent as a child's first and most important teacher. They treat parents as partners rather than as obstacles in the way of progress, and they build their knowledge and skills so they can more fully and confidently participate in their child's learning.

3. Offering young black children a healthy start. Successful programs offer African American families access to the same resources other families have, with some starting these services at birth. Strategies include: providing families of new infants a home visit from a nurse or case manager; high-quality health care for children and their families; education for parents on child development, nutrition, early literacy, and school readiness; and access to developmentally appropriate books to support early literacy development.

WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

No one agency or service provider is responsible for closing the early learning gap. Indeed, we can only prepare children to succeed in school and life if we approach this work collectively. The partnerships, collaborations, and initiatives described below show how and where these effective strategies are being put into practice.



KERN COUNTY

The Kern County Black Infant Health Program

The Black Infant Health Program aims to improve health and life outcomes among African American mothers and babies. The program is offered in 15 local health jurisdictions across California and is managed by county public health departments. The Kern County Black Infant Health Program is one of these and serves 100-125 families each year. Participating mothers meet weekly in groups both before and after birth in order to develop life skills, learn strategies for reducing stress, and build social support. Through a partnership with the local United Way and NAACP chapter, families also receive age-appropriate, sensory books to support their children's early literacy development.

ALAMEDA COUNTY

Alameda County Fathers Corps

First 5 Alameda County partners with Alameda County's Public Health Department and Social Services Agency to offer the Fathers Corps program, which builds the capacity of male service providers to support the specific needs of fathers. Developed around the Strengthening Families framework, the program emphasizes the importance of fatherhood during the first 5 years of a child's life. The providers, about 80 percent of whom are African American or Latino, receive training on topics such as school readiness, child development, and community violence. The program has used a train-the-trainer model to reach 50 male service providers working in 25 different agencies across the county. The service providers who have participated in this program hail from the communities they serve, offering them a deep understanding of the fathers and families they assist.

ALAMEDA COUNTY

The Alameda County Public Health Department's Best Babies Zone

The 7-by-12 block neighborhood of Castlemont, in East Oakland, is home to one of three national Best Babies Zone sites. There, community partners work together to provide support for residents and families with young children aimed at strengthening community health and well-being. The Best Babies Zone partners with Youth UpRising (a community transformation group), Castlemont High School, and Lotus Bloom-Room to Bloom (an early childhood hub on the Castlemont High campus). The effort also draws on the services of the Alameda County Public Health Department's home visiting program, which provides families with children up to 3 years of age with a home visit from a nurse or case manager.

STATE WIDE

Statewide: Transitional Kindergarten

California took a step in the right direction when it created Transitional Kindergarten, or TK, and made this available to all students who turn 5 between September 2 and December 2. TK is the first year of a two-year kindergarten program run by local school districts. It provides an essential bridge from pre-K to kindergarten by offering children an additional year to develop social, self-regulation, early literacy and language, math, and inquiry skills. While it's an important part of the early education solution, TK doesn't replace the need for traditional preschool, which offers greater adult support and much smaller adult-to-child ratios.

SACRAMENTO

Black Child Development Institute-Sacramento

National Black Child Development Institute's Family Empowerment Program was developed to guide and coach parents with children birth through 8 years old. The culturally responsive and relevant, trauma-sensitive curriculum builds the capacity of parents to advocate for their children in school and support their children's learning. The program has been piloted in the Sacramento Affiliate, and other communities within the National Affiliate Network, and it will launch nationwide in 2016.

SAN FRANCISCO

The City of San Francisco's Preschool for All Program

San Francisco makes preschool available to all of the city's 4-year-olds. All families are eligible to receive free preschool or partially subsidized tuition. Preschool for All has significantly improved preschool attendance rates in San Francisco, especially among African American and Latino children. The program now serves 75 percent of all 4-year-olds in Bayview – Hunters Point, a neighborhood that has the highest African American concentration of all San Francisco's neighborhoods.⁹

THE SCHOOL YEARS

THE PROBLEM

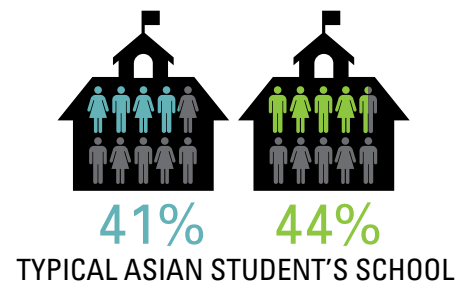
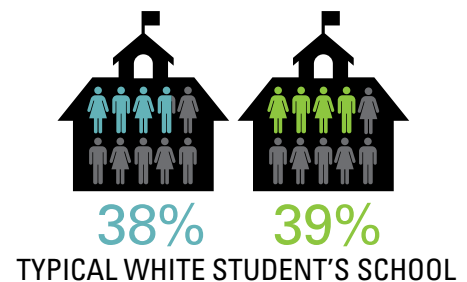
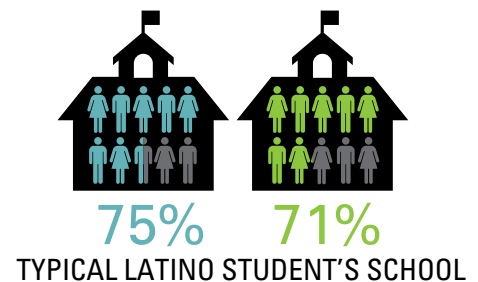
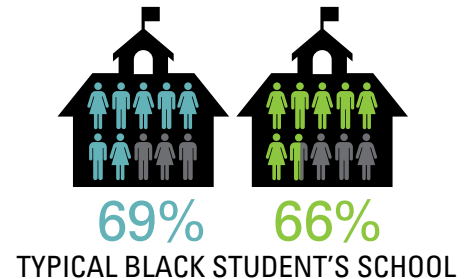
Black children often begin kindergarten already behind. Yet, instead of organizing our K-12 school systems to ameliorate that problem, these children get less in school too. This is just the opposite of what our education systems should be doing. In this section, we describe the barriers and disparities currently faced by Black students, along with the resulting achievement gaps. In the next section, we turn to strategies for correcting these inequities.

Challenging Learning Environments

California's Black students — along with Latino students — often attend highly segregated schools. The typical Black student attends a school where nearly 70 percent of his peers are Black or Latino, and just over 65 percent are poor. (See Figure 3.) Black and Latino students are also more likely than their peers to attend schools with low test scores and graduation rates. Indeed, an African-American student is eight times more likely to attend one of the state's lowest performing schools than a White student.¹⁰



BLACK STUDENTS OFTEN ATTEND HIGHLY SEGREGATED SCHOOLS



■ % of Students that are Black, Latino or American Indian
 ■ % Low Income Students

FIGURE 3: Percentage of Black, Latino, and American Indian children, and percentage of low-income children, in schools attended by the typical student of each race in California, 2013

Source: Adapted from report, *Segregating California's Future* (The Civil Rights Project, 2014).¹¹

African American students are far more likely to be chronically absent, meaning that they miss 10 percent or more of school days — a critical loss of instructional time that often causes students to fall further behind. One estimate is that 20 percent of Black elementary school students are chronically absent, as compared with 8 percent of White and Latino students, and 2 percent of Asian students.¹²

Students also can't effectively learn if they don't feel safe. Yet, California's Black students are twice as likely as their White peers to feel unsafe or very unsafe at school (see Figure 4). Black students are also more likely to face disciplinary action. They are three times as likely as White students to be suspended and expelled, with both boys and girls disproportionately affected (see Figure 5). While boys are more likely than girls to be suspended, national data reveal that Black girls are suspended six times as often as their White counterparts.¹³ These disciplinary tactics exclude students from learning, take a toll socially and emotionally, contribute to disengagement from school, and are frequently a precursor to encounters with law enforcement or the juvenile justice system.

Researchers find that teacher bias and discrimination at least partly explain these disciplinary disparities. One study found that teachers more quickly develop negative responses to student behavior when those students are Black.¹⁴ Another found that teachers are more likely to suspend a student who conducts a minor offense like using a cell phone or violating the dress code if that student is Black.¹⁵



BLACK STUDENTS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY AS WHITE STUDENTS TO FEEL UNSAFE AT SCHOOL

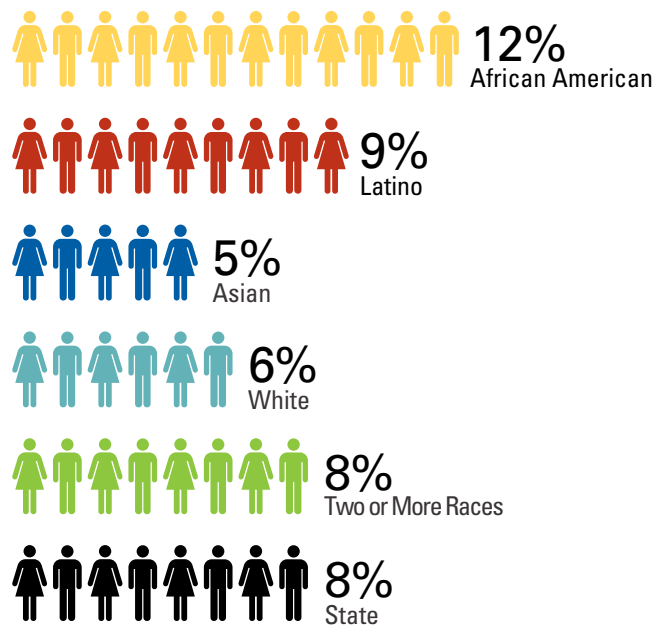


FIGURE 4: Percent of California students feeling unsafe or very unsafe at school in grades 7, 9, and 11. Source: California Department of Education

BLACK STUDENTS ARE THREE TIMES AS LIKELY AS WHITE STUDENTS TO BE SUSPENDED

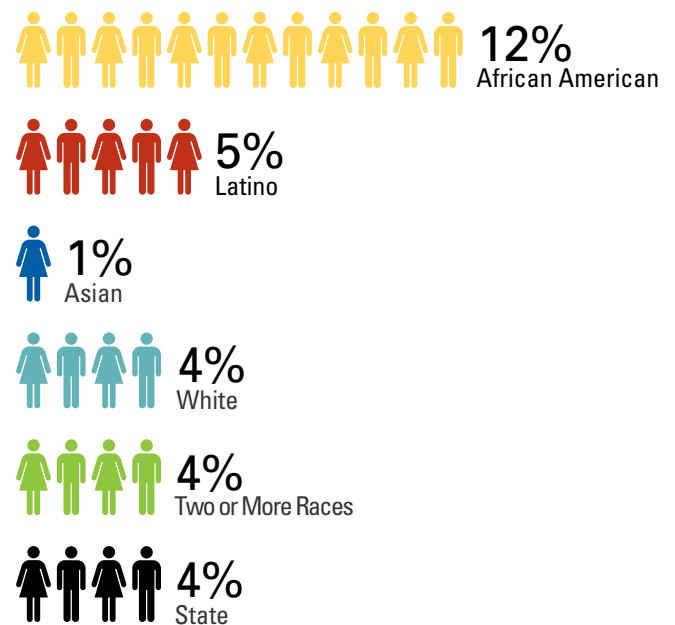


FIGURE 5: Percent of California students suspended at least once in 2013-2014. Source: California Department of Education



Inequitable Access to Quality Curriculum and Instruction

Teachers are the most important in-school factor in improving student achievement.¹⁶ But unfortunately, students in the state’s most segregated schools are taught by less experienced, less qualified, and lower paid teachers.¹⁷ Our own research has found that high-poverty schools are more likely than low-poverty schools to experience teacher layoffs during tough budget times, and that African American and Latino students are twice as likely as their White and Asian peers to be taught by one of the district’s least effective teachers.¹⁸

California’s Black students are twice as likely as White students to be identified for learning disabilities, and more likely to be identified for special education in general.¹⁹ Conversely, White students are nearly three times as likely to be identified for Gifted and Talented Education (GATE).²⁰ Many referrals to special education for learning disabilities could be avoided by correctly identifying and addressing students’ academic needs. Unfortunately, once identified for special education, correctly or not, students rarely catch up to their peers.²¹

In high school, Black students have less access to challenging college-preparatory classes, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and rigorous math and science courses (see Figure 6). This is in part because Black students are more likely to attend schools with fewer of these course offerings. Often, their high schools offer the classes yet choose to steer students of color away from these courses and into less rigorous tracks that offer a smattering of remedial academic courses and disjointed electives, sometimes under the guise of career and technical education.²² As a result, only 31 percent of African American 12th grade graduates take and complete the “A-G” coursework necessary to be eligible to apply to the University of California or California State University (see Figure 7).

Black students not only have less rigorous core academic content, but they also have less access to a broad and enriching curriculum: They are more likely than their peers to attend schools with fewer resources like guidance counselors, librarians, science labs, art, and music instruction, and they have fewer out-of-school time learning opportunities. Most harmful of all, they too often encounter low expectations. Indeed, study after study has found that teachers hold lower expectations for students of color and low-income students, even though a teacher’s expectations and perceptions can predict and even influence students’ later school outcomes.²³

BLACK STUDENTS ARE UNDERREPRESENTED IN RIGOROUS COURSES

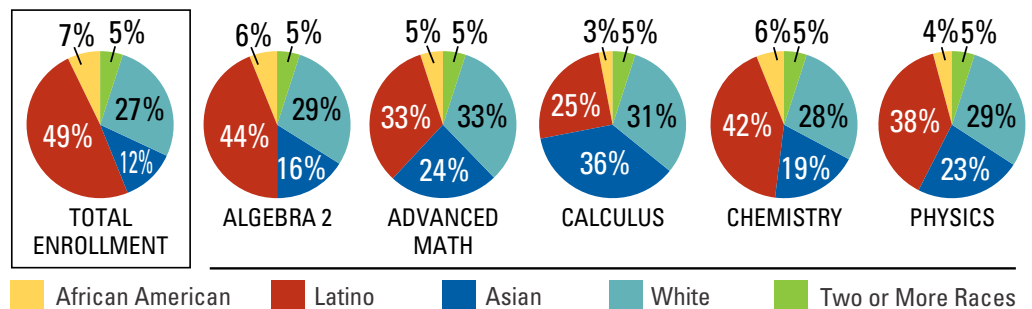


FIGURE 6: Race or ethnicity of California high school students in rigorous coursework, as compared with race or ethnicity of students overall

Source: Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, Analysis by Education Trust-West.

Black students not only have less rigorous core academic content, but they also have less access to a broad and enriching curriculum.

LESS THAN ONE THIRD OF BLACK STUDENTS COMPLETE THE A-G COURSES REQUIRED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR A UC OR CSU

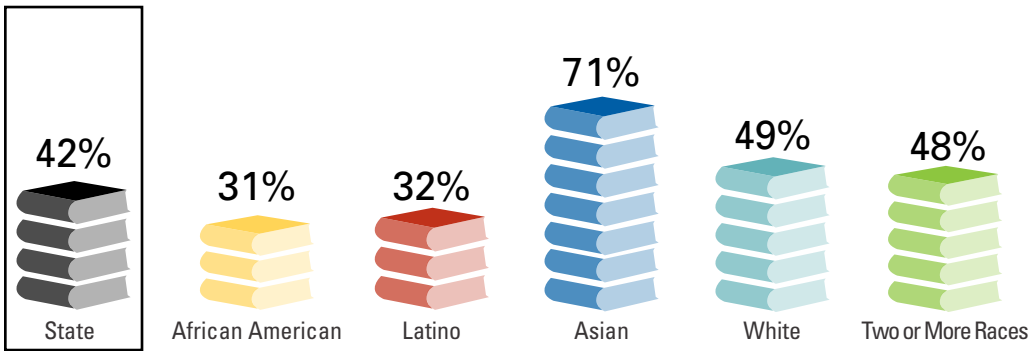


FIGURE 7: Percent of California 12th grade graduates completing the A-G course sequence, 2014

Source: California Department of Education

Persistent Achievement Gaps

It's clear that African American students face myriad obstacles during their school years. As a result of these barriers, outcomes are far worse for Black students than for most other students.

When we look at California's newest test scores — or indeed, any set of state or national test scores — Black children consistently lag behind their White and Asian peers, and marginally behind their Latino peers (see Figure 8). On the most recent test results, non-low-income Black students perform about the same as low-income white students.²⁴ The achievement gaps evidenced by California's new Common Core-aligned assessment make these disparities particularly apparent and should create concern and urgency around the need to support Black children in realizing the more rigorous demands of the new state standards.

ACHIEVEMENT GAPS FOR BLACK STUDENTS EVIDENT IN NEW STATE TEST RESULTS

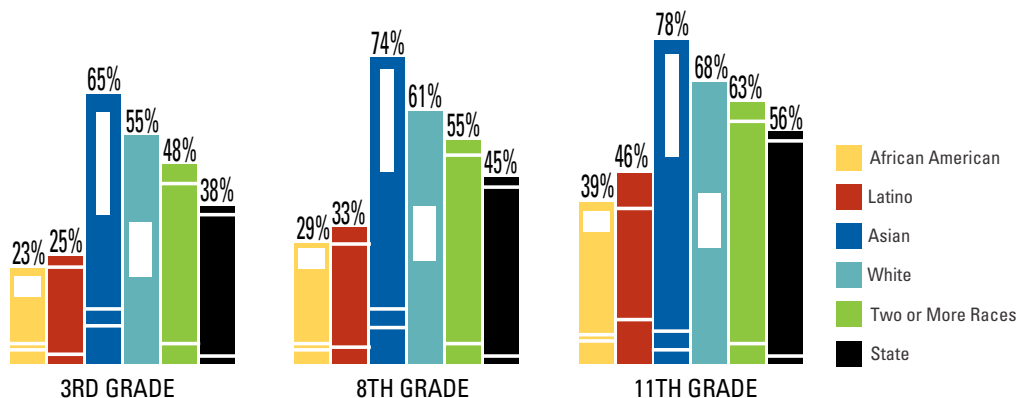


FIGURE 8: Percent of California's third, eighth, and 11th-graders meeting or exceeding standards in English language arts on the 2015 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress

Source: California Department of Education



Study after study has found that teachers hold lower expectations for students of color.

A teacher's expectations and perceptions can predict and even influence students' later school outcomes.

Dropout rates are far higher for Black students than for other students, and conversely, graduation rates are lower.



Dropout rates are far higher for Black students than for other students, and conversely, graduation rates are lower. In fact, the gap in graduation rates between African American students and their White peers is 20 percent, and the gap between African American and Asian students is an astounding 24 percent (see Figure 9).

Overall, 68 percent of California’s Black students graduate from high school in four years. But this state-level figure masks enormous variability at the school level. Most high schools actually exceed this 68 percent figure. In fact, three-quarters of traditional high schools graduate 80 percent or more of their Black students. The really abysmal graduation rates are found in the most segregated high schools. In addition, Black students are disproportionately found in alternative schools like continuation schools, juvenile court schools, and others. While the state does not publicly report graduation rates for these types of high schools, the missions of these schools and the limited data available suggest that their graduation rates are quite low.

1 IN 5 BLACK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CALIFORNIA DROP OUT

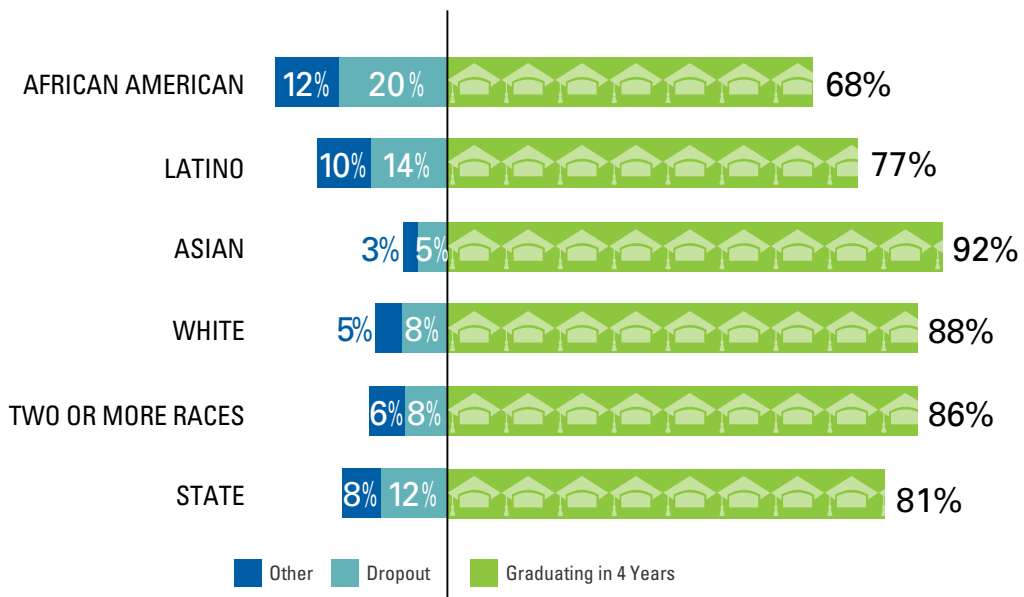


FIGURE 9: 2014 Cohort graduation and dropout rates

Source: California Department of Education. Note: “Other” includes students who are still enrolled and those who have completed high school without a diploma. Data may not sum precisely to 100 due to rounding.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY



Across California and the nation, we find schools and districts closing opportunity and achievement gaps for Black students. Many of these also serve concentrations of students from low-income families and above-average concentrations of African American students. For example, at Laurel Street Elementary in Compton, students — almost all of whom are either Latino or African American, most of whom are low income — are learning challenging material.

On the first-year administration of the Smarter Balanced assessment, the percentage of Laurel Street's third-grade Black students who met or exceeded state standards surpassed the state's proficiency rates for all students, regardless of race, in both math and English language arts. And at the ethnically diverse Bridgeway Island Elementary in West Sacramento, eighth-grade Black students not only surpassed state proficiency rates for all students in both subjects, but also posted some of the highest scores in the state for Black eighth graders: 62 percent meeting or exceeding standards in math, and 54 percent in English language arts.

Finally, students at Kearny Digital Media and Design in San Diego—15 percent of whom are Black and 70 percent of whom are low-income—are learning in a thematic, interdisciplinary, project-based environment. Every student in the class of 2014 graduated from high school in four years, and on the first year administration of Smarter Balanced, 67 percent of Black eleventh graders met or exceeded English language arts standards.²⁵



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CLOSE THE OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT GAPS?

High-performing schools and districts offer all students access to enriching learning opportunities that allow them to stretch their thinking, expand their content knowledge, and build and refine their academic skills.



There is plenty of evidence — both from research and from schools like those highlighted in this report — on what it takes to disrupt disparities and close gaps. Many educators offer students the opportunity to engage in rigorous, relevant, and equitable learning opportunities. And many schools and districts, in partnership with nonprofit organizations and community partners, are building programs that engage Black students in school; support them physically, socially, and emotionally; and boost their academic achievement. Strategies that work include these:

1. Offering and ensuring academic relevance, rigor, and supports. High-performing schools and districts offer all students access to enriching learning opportunities that allows them to stretch their thinking, expand their content knowledge, and build and refine their academic skills. These schools and districts remove barriers to entry into honors, GATE, A-G, and AP courses, and dismantle harmful systems of tracking.

Effective educators make instruction relevant to students from diverse backgrounds, and they offer immediate academic interventions and supports when a student is struggling or behind in credits. They also recognize that some African American students who speak a dialect different than what educators expect — often called Standard English Learners — may need extra supports to master the significant reading and writing demands of the new Common Core standards. At the same time, the new focus on literacy may help close the language gap for these students — something too easily overlooked under our old standards and assessments.

2. Ensuring equitable access to effective educators. High-performing schools and districts recruit, support, and recognize effective teachers — and ensure that students of color have equitable access to these teachers. They offer all teachers the supports they need to teach our new, more rigorous standards. In addition, they show teachers how to address cultural and linguistic diversity while maintaining high expectations for student performance. These schools and districts train teachers to infuse racially, linguistically, and culturally responsive practices into their work with students, families, and coworkers. This approach recognizes that teachers don't automatically know how to deal with issues of race. In Berkeley Unified School District, teachers receive training from colleagues who have been tapped as "equity teacher leaders," and principals participate in professional learning communities to discuss issues of equity.

3. Extending learning time. Learning opportunities outside of the school day allow students to enrich their learning, catch up if academically behind, gain important life skills, and receive support and encouragement in a safe and structured environment. Black students — both those who struggle academically and those who are high performers ready for greater challenges — are among the many children who stand to benefit from extended learning during the summer and after school.

Black Girls CODE and the CAAAE Greene Scholars Program are two examples of Bay Area programs that seek to interest Black youth in STEM careers through expanded learning time programs. Black Girls CODE exposes Black girls ages 7 to 17 to computer science, robotics, web design, and coding. The CAAAE Greene Scholars Program has served about 450 students, 90 percent of participants have graduated from college in four years, and 60 percent have obtained degrees in STEM fields — eight times the national average for Black students. In Southern California, L.A.'s BEST provides an example of a citywide program that provides free afterschool homework assistance, educational enrichment, and recreational activities to over 25,000 high-need students.

4. Improving school climate and fixing school discipline. In order to reduce suspensions and expulsions and more positively address student behavior, many districts and schools are implementing research-based approaches like restorative justice and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). These practices largely center on increasing communication and actively resolving conflicts.

In addition, school boards in Azusa Unified, San Francisco Unified, Oakland Unified, Los Angeles Unified, Pasadena Unified, Newark Unified, San Leandro Unified, and Albany Unified are among those that have recently eliminated willful defiance and disruptive behavior as reasons to suspend students.

5. Providing a broad range of health, wellness, and socio-emotional supports. To fully participate in and succeed in school, Black students' physical, mental, and emotional needs must be met. Many African American students — particularly those who come from low-income families or have experienced trauma — benefit from support offered by nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists. All Black students, regardless of economic background, can benefit from mentorship and opportunities to engage with the community. Addressing physical and mental health problems prevents chronic absence, which in turn improves academic outcomes.²⁶

Research also shows that youth who participate in mentorship programs do better in school and are less likely to be involved with substance abuse or delinquency.²⁷ Recognizing this, school districts across the state of California are partnering with organizations like The 100 Black Men of America, Concerned Black Men of Los Angeles, and Big Brothers Big Sisters to connect African American youth with mentors, often African American community members and leaders. The national program, BLACK GIRLS ROCK!, focuses on not only mentorship but also empowerment. Through leadership training and arts programming, BLACK GIRLS ROCK! empowers teenaged Black girls to lead, innovate, and serve their communities.



Black students — both those who struggle academically and those who are high performers ready for greater challenges — are among the many children who stand to benefit from extended learning during the summer and after school.

WHERE IT'S HAPPENING: CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DISTRICTS MAKING BLACK ACHIEVEMENT A PRIORITY



A growing number of district leaders are investing in programs and personnel to meet the specific needs of African American students. California districts like those featured here have formed task forces, initiatives, or departments to improve Black student outcomes. These state efforts are part of a growing national trend to address opportunity gaps facing young people of color, especially Black men. These efforts include the federal My Brother's Keeper initiative, and offices for African American achievement in major urban districts like Minneapolis Public Schools and the District of Columbia Public Schools.

These districts address not just one of the effective strategies listed in the previous section, but many. They recognize that a comprehensive set of solutions is needed in order to close opportunity and achievement gaps for African American students.



OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT OFFICE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ACHIEVEMENT

Oakland Unified established its Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) in 2010 to address the epidemic failure of African American male students in the district. To realize this mission, says Executive Director Chris Chatmon, the AAMA office closely collaborates with staff overseeing the district's community schools partnerships, PBIS programs, teacher professional development programs, and curriculum development.

The AAMA's hallmark program, the Manhood Development Program (MDP), enrolls over 400 Black male students at 16 schools. The elective course is designed to address and counteract the often negative narrative about African American males, help these students develop a strong sense of self, and help close the achievement gap between Black young men and their White male counterparts.

"The teachers push self-transformation, and there are hundreds of books on Black history and Black culture," says Toussaint Stone, the student introduced at the beginning of this report. "You learn more about who you are."

The curriculum is rooted in African and African American history, culture, and excellence. The course focuses on preparing students for college and careers: Teachers encourage them to complete A-G coursework and help them apply to college and for financial aid. The AAMA has a mentorship component that matches elementary students with middle and high school student mentors who serve on Student Leadership Councils. Additionally, the program seeks to reduce suspension, expulsion, and arrest rates by setting high expectations for conduct and using PBIS. To date, suspension rates for MDP students have decreased by one-third, GPAs are higher, and graduation rates have increased by 10 percent. Overall, the district's graduation rate for African American males has improved each of the last three years, from 47 percent in 2011 to 53 percent in 2014.²⁸ Still, this ranks the district among the worst in the state when it comes to Black male graduation rates, reinforcing the need for OUSD to continue addressing this vulnerable population of students.



SAN BERNARDINO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

OFFICE OF EQUITY AND TARGETED STUDENT SUPPORT

The San Bernardino Unified School District formed a Task Force for African American Student Achievement in the summer of 2014. As one of its initial efforts, this task force issued a report and recommendations in collaboration with the community's African American Education Collaborative — a coalition of nearly a dozen community, faith-based, and civil rights organizations. The task force found that in San Bernardino City Unified, only 67 percent of the African American students graduated on time, and 65 percent of all African American students were chronically absent. They also found that while African American boys are just 7 percent of the student population, they represent more than half of all suspension incidents.²⁹

To address these dire statistics, the Task Force proposed a collective impact strategy that aims to

improve outcomes in several school clusters. Action Planning Teams of district and school personnel, community and business leaders, parents, and students are tackling the key focus areas of parent engagement, student support, college readiness, and cultural competency training. These teams are studying the issues, collecting data, and proposing specific strategies. For example, one team proposes to increase parent awareness and involvement at various stages of literacy development in order to reinforce learning at school and home. Assistant Superintendent Dr. Kennon Mitchell noted that the Task Force is also consulting with high-achieving Black students and their families to identify and replicate the strategies that helped them achieve success.



SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

African American students, though less than 10 percent of the total enrollment of San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD), perform worse than their peers across an array of outcomes. Black students account for 50 percent of the district's suspension incidents, and just 65 percent of African American students graduate compared with 82 percent of students overall.³⁰

To address these disparities, SFUSD Superintendent Richard Carranza commissioned a study in 2013 that resulted in the development of an African American Achievement and Leadership Initiative and created a new grant-funded special assistant position to lead the effort. This initiative complements other district efforts to support Black students, like the African American Postsecondary Pathway Project, which is a partnership between the district and community-based organizations designed to prepare high school seniors for postsecondary options and the workforce.

The African American Achievement and Leadership Initiative revolves around three focus areas. First,

the district seeks to build community trust. It formed an African American Advisory Council to monitor student progress and make ongoing recommendations, establish stronger partnerships with parents, and recruit and retain additional African American teachers. Second, the district aims to reduce implicit bias by addressing teacher mind-sets, helping students develop positive identity, and infusing culturally relevant pedagogy into the curriculum.

Third, the district plans to identify and replicate programs proven to work — like PBIS, Restorative Practices, and Response to Intervention. To implement these behavioral support programs, Behavior Action Teams conduct trainings at school sites with faculty, students, and parents on best practices for managing student discipline. Although this initiative is only in the second year of implementation, the percentage of Black students suspended in San Francisco Unified fell from 11 percent in 2012 to 8 percent in 2014 — a decline of nearly 200 Black student suspensions.³¹



SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Since 2010, Sacramento City Unified has offered an array of youth development programs —both in-school and through expanded learning — for students of color, and African American students in particular. These initiatives embrace a social justice framework that positions students as agents of change in their communities, not merely recipients of service. For many of the district’s initiatives, it partners with direct service providers from the community. Stacey Bell, the district’s youth development director, describes these partnerships with culturally relevant supplemental service providers as a grassroots effort. “We’re interested in working with true cultural brokers that are already doing work within the community.” Specific programming and the students served varies by school site.

A key program in this effort is the Men’s Leadership Academy (MLA), which serves approximately 150 students, many of whom are African American, at eight school sites. Started as a lunch club, the program has a vision for graduates to become leaders around issues of boys of color. Now a school day and afterschool course, the program focuses on leadership development, culturally relevant content,

social justice youth development, and restorative justice practices. Knowing that outcomes for girls of color are often as devastating as for boys, the district has created a parallel Women’s Leadership Academy at two sites during the day to mirror MLA’s work but with a greater focus on issues related to trauma, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, and teen pregnancy prevention.

An example of supplemental programming designed for African American students is Blacks Making a Difference (BMAD). This intensive mentoring and support program is offered at school sites with high proportions of African American students. The goals of BMAD include guiding students to reexamine negative stereotypes and establish a more positive sense of identity; providing students with academic support, including case management; exposing students to career development strategies; and arranging for students to visit college campuses and take culturally responsive college tours. BMAD graduates have not only moved onto college but also continue to serve their communities by inspiring the next generation of scholars.

COLLEGE AND BEYOND



THE PROBLEM

Although high school dropout rates among Black students are disturbingly high, the vast majority — nearly 90 percent — secure a high school diploma or equivalent by young adulthood. However, a high school diploma has proven insufficient for Black youth to realize the American Dream. The income gap between high school and college graduates is growing, exacerbating racial and socioeconomic disparities.³² This affects not only individual income earners, but also the statewide economy, as California is falling woefully short in producing the degree and certificate-holders it needs to remain economically competitive.³³ For Black young adults, these degrees and certificates are too often out of reach. Black youth are underrepresented in college, they are more likely than other racial groups to require remedial coursework, and are less likely to graduate.

College Enrollment Patterns

Black freshmen are far more likely to attend community colleges than public four-year universities (see Figure 10). To be sure, this is true for all groups and represents ratios generally consistent with California's 55-year-old Master Plan for Higher Education, which calls for a far greater number of seats in community colleges than in the California State University (CSU) and University of California (UC) systems.³⁴

A high school diploma has proven insufficient for Black youth to realize the American Dream.

WHERE DO CALIFORNIA'S BLACK STUDENTS GO TO COLLEGE?

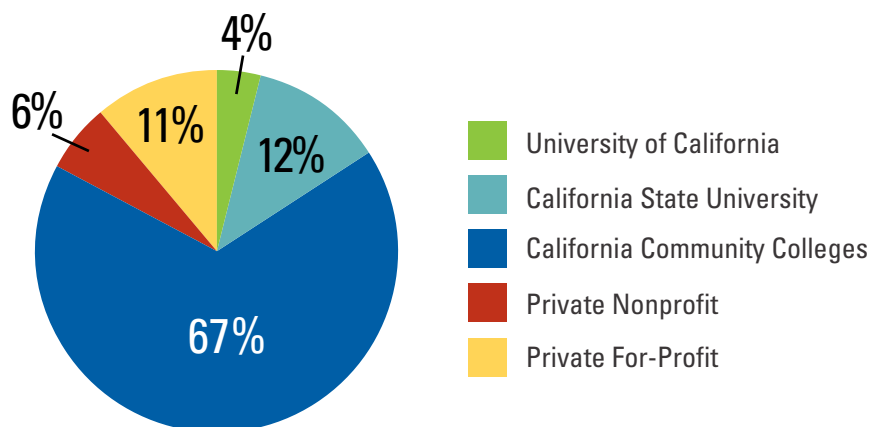


FIGURE 10: Institution types attended by California's Black first-time freshmen

Note: For-profit and nonprofit institutions include Title IV eligible two-year and four-year colleges. This excludes for-profit and less than two-year institutions that only offer career certifications in areas such as cosmetology and massage therapy.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS).



Black college students are more likely than their peers to require remedial, non-credit bearing coursework that must be completed before they can start making headway on their degrees.

California’s Black college freshmen disproportionately attend private for-profit colleges, and they are unrepresented in the California State University and University of California systems (see Figure 11). This is cause for concern, because students who attend four-year institutions, particularly the UCs, are far more likely to earn degrees — as we’ll discuss in the next sections.

FIRST-TIME FRESHMAN ENROLLMENT BY INSTITUTION TYPE, 2013

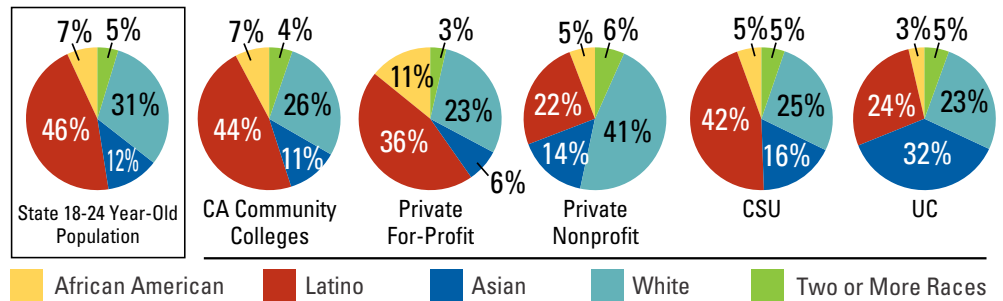


FIGURE 11: Undergraduate enrollment by institution type, 2013

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS).

High Remediation Rates

Regardless of the institution they attend, Black college students are more likely than their peers to require remedial, non-credit bearing coursework that must be completed before they can start making headway on their degrees. This means that they are paying for classes that do not earn credits.

At the California community colleges, 87 percent of incoming Black students are required to take pre-college level “developmental” courses.³⁵ This affects overall college persistence: Students who start community college in developmental courses complete a degree at just half the rate of their peers who went straight into college-level courses.³⁶ At the CSU level, 51 percent of Black freshmen entering in 2014 needed remediation in math, and 44 percent needed remediation in English before they could take college-level math and English courses. By contrast, only 15 percent of White students needed remediation in math and 11 percent needed remediation in English.³⁷

Low Completion Rates

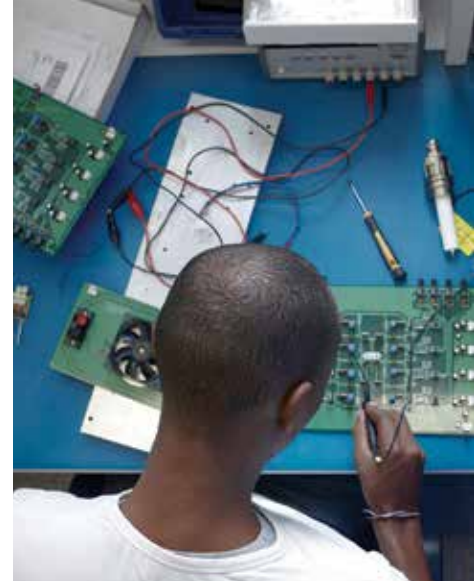
Black students are far less likely than White and Asian students to earn a degree or certificate. Indeed, for both Black and Latino students, it’s more likely than not that they will leave a CSU or community college without having secured a degree or certificate, or having transferred to a four-year institution.³⁸

With community colleges enrolling the vast majority of Black students, their success rates matter a great deal. Yet in 2013, these colleges awarded a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year institution to only 37 percent of Black students — and that’s within six years of enrollment, even though these colleges are meant to offer two-year degrees and transfer pathways to four-year colleges.³⁹

Black students attending for-profit colleges face similar success rates. While these colleges vary dramatically in quality and mission, on average, they saddle students with large loans while failing to offer them meaningful degrees — when they award degrees at all.⁴⁰ Six-year graduation rates in these colleges are around 35 percent,⁴¹ and students at these schools make up nearly half of all California students defaulting on their student loans.⁴²

Black students attending CSU campuses don't fare much better, in terms of completion. Only 37 percent complete a degree within six years of starting.³⁸ (See Figure 12) Still, some CSUs perform much better. For example, 63 percent of Black students at San Diego State University graduate in six years, as compared with graduation rates of 68 and 60 percent for White and Latino students, respectively.⁴³

At UC campuses, graduation rates are much higher: 73 percent of Black students complete a degree within six years. Black students fare best overall at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where 85 percent graduate in six years.⁴⁴ At the same time, Black students represent only 4 percent of the student body at UCLA, a figure that has declined by 2 percentage points since affirmative action was banned at the University of California in 1995.⁴⁵ (See Figure 12 for completion rates by higher education type.)



Black students represent only 4 percent of the student body at UCLA, a figure that has declined by 2 percentage points since affirmative action was banned at the University of California in 1995.

ARE CALIFORNIA'S BLACK STUDENTS COMPLETING COLLEGE?

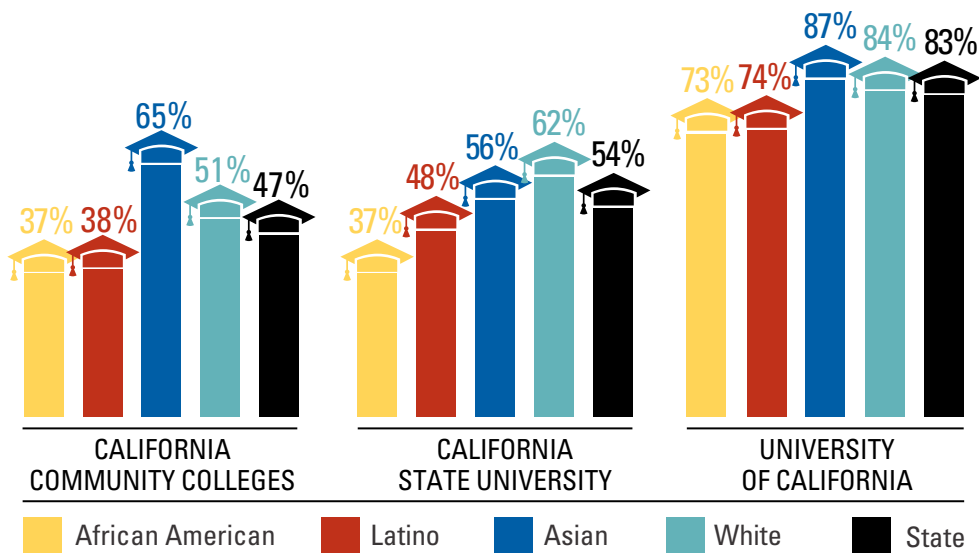


FIGURE 12: Six-year graduation rates for freshmen entering CSU in 2008 and UC in 2007. Six-year degree, certificate or transfer rates for degree-seeking students who entered community college in 2008.

Note: Community college cohort defined by students earning more than six units and attempting any math or English course within first three years of enrollment.

Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office 2015 Statewide Student Success Scorecard; CSU Division of Analytic Studies; UC Office of the President, 2015.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO IMPROVE COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS?



California's Black students are more likely to attend and complete college when they receive early, continuing college-going supports, have access to adequate financial aid, and are swiftly accelerated through pre-college coursework.

California's Black students are more likely to attend and complete college when they receive early, continuing college-going supports, have access to adequate financial aid, and are swiftly accelerated through pre-college coursework. Strategies that work include these:

- 1. Providing college-going supports.** For many students, particularly those whose parents did not attend college, learning about college is the first step to getting there. While students must be academically prepared, they must also be able to navigate the daunting college application and financial aid gauntlets. Successful programs build students' college awareness, help them plan for college, assist them in completing college and financial aid applications, and provide the continued academic support they need to complete college-preparatory coursework.
- 2. Focusing institutional efforts on student success.** Getting to college is just the first step, and the next is making it through. Equity-minded institutions take it upon themselves to strengthen academic and social supports for vulnerable college students, including students of color and those who are the first in their families to attend college. These supports include tutoring, individualized academic counseling, and mentorship programs. These institutions should use data proactively to spot where students are off track and intervene and should redesign high enrollment courses to focus on student success.
- 3. Expanding access to financial aid.** Sadly, too many students face financial barriers to pursue a college education and many do not go simply because they lack information about financial aid options, or because they perceive the cost of tuition as out of reach — even when Pell grants, Cal Grants, institutional aid, and scholarships may actually make it affordable. Successful school districts and community partners counteract this by actively reaching out to students and their families. These programs familiarize students and families with the financial aid application process, help them complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and connect them with scholarship funds — which can play an important role in making college affordable, particularly for California's most underserved students.
- 4. Accelerating access to college-level coursework.** Because students who start college in remedial, non-credit bearing courses are far less likely to complete a degree,⁴⁶ a number of community colleges and organizations are reforming developmental education, with many seeking to move students through these pre-college courses as swiftly as possible.

WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

Institutions of higher education, school districts, and nonprofit organizations are showing that it's possible to support students to and through college. Here, we share some examples of those that are implementing effective strategies for California's Black students.

RIVERSIDE

Riverside Unified School District's Heritage Plan

This district program strives to improve academic outcomes and college-going rates for African American Students. Mentor teachers at each high school invite academically promising 10th – 12th graders to participate in the program. The teachers work closely with counselors, who review the student transcripts, to identify A-G courses still needed for college eligibility. They monitor grade progress, build students' college awareness and help them plan for college. Students visit nearby colleges and universities, and receive help in completing applications for college, applying for financial aid, drafting personal statements, and transitioning to college through partnerships with CSU San Bernardino and University of California - Riverside's Early Academic Outreach Program.

CSU

The CSU African American Initiative

In partnership with churches serving predominantly African American congregations, CSU representatives build parent and student awareness about what it takes to get to college. During "Super Sunday," CSU leaders attend services at more than 100 churches to deliver a message about the importance of preparing for college. Available in the East Bay and Los Angeles areas through church partners, the Summer Algebra Institute helps middle school students prepare for college preparatory math courses. The "Super Saturday College Fair" allows students and families to visit a CSU campus to learn about the admissions process, financial aid, careers and more.

EAST BAY

East Bay College Access Network

East Bay College Access Network (CAN) partners with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) to increase the number of students applying for and receiving college financial aid. Through organized collaboration between OUSD, the schools, and nonprofits, and from in-class financial aid assistance and data tracking to OUSD staff trainings, the CAN helps the district increase access to college financial aid for all students. CAN tells us that since beginning their work, schools supported by the CAN have seen a 30 percentage-point jump in the percent of students applying for Cal Grants.

CSU FULLERTON

California State University, Fullerton

At CSU Fullerton, one of the most diverse CSU campuses, first-generation, underrepresented students enrolled in traditionally challenging courses can attend peer-led, group sessions of supplemental instruction. Those students who attend on a consistent basis earn about half to one full grade higher than their peers. The campus also offers a Male Success Initiative (MSI), which aims to raise retention and graduation rates of low-income, first-generation, Black and Latino male students. Each MSI freshman is paired with two mentors: an upperclassman and a faculty member. Participants attend a monthly gathering to share successes and challenges, and to offer each other moral support. With a six-year graduation rate of 43 percent for Black students, CSU Fullerton does better than the CSU average of 37 percent — though these results still demand improvement.

EAST BAY

The East Bay College Fund

The East Bay College Fund operates a variety of college access, persistence, and financial aid programs. Recipients of the Great Expectations Scholarship receive a four-year, \$16,000 award and are paired with mentors, attend career workshops, and receive assistance finding internships. The Launch Scholarship Program provides community college students with smaller scholarships to help them complete their degrees and transfer to four-year institutions. Since its founding in 2002, 80 percent of scholarship recipients have completed their bachelor's degree within six years, a rate significantly higher than the national average for low-income students.

STATE WIDE

The California Acceleration Project

The California Acceleration Project works to transform remediation in community colleges to increase completion and equity. Through its professional development network, community college faculty learn to redesign curricula and change their placement policies to accelerate students into credit-bearing courses. Faculty share a set of design principles for high-challenge, high-support instruction, with remediation provided just-in-time in the context of college-level tasks. In math, CAP colleges offer redesigned pathways for students in majors that require statistics. So far, the results look promising: CAP tells us that math completion rates for Black students in CAP are four times greater than for Black students in traditional remediation.

STATE WIDE

The Umoja Community

Umoja (a term meaning "unity" in Kiswahili) has affiliated programs at 34 California community colleges. These affiliates work to increase academic performance, ensure college persistence, and raise retention rates of Black community college students. Through these programs, students learn in small communities that allow them to develop relationships with a cohort of students. They are also matched with college faculty or community member mentors, enroll in college guidance courses, have access to tutoring and supplemental instruction, and engage in service learning projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report, we have documented the tragic opportunity and achievement gaps affecting Black children, from cradle to career. We have also described the strategies that help reverse these troubling trends. From these efforts, it is clear that progress is possible. We urge California's leaders — including those in state government, school districts, and institutions of higher education — to learn from these promising practices and to do more to serve California's Black students. We offer the following recommendations.



FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

1. Provide equitable access to affordable and high-quality early learning opportunities.

- Guarantee high-quality preschool to all low-income 4-year-olds rather than the sorely limited number of students for whom the state currently has space.
- Provide districts with the extra resources they need to effectively implement Transitional Kindergarten, including funding for teacher training, family engagement, and community outreach.

2. Develop and improve data and accountability systems so educators, advocates, and parents have up-to-date information that can help them identify and address disparities.

- The state's system of accountability for school and district performance is in flux. Under the newly designed system, the state should direct supports, technical assistance, and interventions to schools and districts that fail to serve all groups of students well. This means not only disaggregating data by race and other subgroups, but also requiring action in schools and districts that have persistent opportunity or achievement gaps.
- Track attendance through the state's longitudinal data system. Adopt a common definition for chronic absence and collect chronic absence data for all school districts across the state.
- Establish a state commission, agency, or partnership to act as a clearinghouse for postsecondary education information so that educators, community members, and policy makers have comprehensive, reliable data on high school-to-college transitions, postsecondary persistence, and college graduation.

3. Break the relationship between ZIP code and school performance, so that a child's address does not determine his or her educational destiny.

- Create and expand school district options like magnet schools,

so that parents have more choices regarding where they send their children to school. These options should be made available, in particular, to students who would otherwise be assigned to low-performing or intensely segregated neighborhood schools.

- Through countywide programs and regional magnet schools, offer families the option to attend high-performing public schools outside of their districts. As the UCLA Civil Rights Project points out, most segregation is among school districts, not within them. If we make it possible for students to voluntarily cross district lines, families will have more options and our schools may have more diversity.⁴¹

4. Ensure all students have the effective educators, rigorous standards and instruction, and academic resources they need to succeed.

- Create statewide programs, such as loan forgiveness programs, that incentivize effective teachers and principals, especially culturally and linguistically diverse educators, to teach in our highest need schools and subject areas.
- Invest more state funding in Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards implementation, especially as the state finds itself with one-time revenues to spend on K-12 education. These funds should be primarily used to support teacher development, training, collaboration, and planning so educators can help all children, and especially our state's highest need students, master the new standards.
- Monitor the implementation of the new state standards to identify how effectively they are supporting the learning of California's Black, Latino, low-income, and English learner students.

5. Address school climate issues through policy change.

- Extend state data reporting to include cross-tabulations of suspension and expulsions by race and gender in order to see how Black boys and Black girls are affected by local discipline practices.
- Monitor the impact of recent legislation that eliminates willful defiance as a reason for suspending students in kindergarten through third grade and expulsion of all students for the same reason.
- Strictly limit exclusionary discipline practices like out-of-school suspensions that cause students to miss out on critical learning time and have a disproportionate impact on Black students.

6. Expand access to higher education, especially our UC and CSU campuses, for underrepresented students, and increase accountability for persistence and graduation.

- As long as K-12 opportunities are stacked against certain racial groups, institutions of higher education should be allowed to consider race as one of many factors when making admissions decisions.
- Increase the number of UC and CSU seats for California-resident freshmen, especially on college campuses that have experienced a decline in the percentage of newly enrolled African American students and other historically underrepresented groups, and for top high school graduates who are historically underrepresented.
- Fund colleges for both enrollment growth and successful outcomes.



FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

1. Within districts, provide intensive supports to struggling or highly segregated schools, and offer families at those schools meaningful ways to be engaged and secure the best educational opportunities for their children.

- a. Use both quantitative and qualitative data to identify schools in need of support and develop meaningful improvement plans for them. Engage parents and students as true partners in identifying the best turnaround solutions for struggling schools.
- b. Consistent with the spirit of the Local Control Funding Formula, target more resources and support to schools with high concentrations of low-income students, students of color, English learners, foster youth, and homeless youth.
- c. Create more high-quality public choice options for families, including magnet schools, college and career-preparatory academies, and early college or dual-enrollment high school programs.

2. Expand access to early education opportunities, especially for low-income families and families of color.

- a. Through partnerships between school districts and early education providers, make quality preschool and early education more accessible and affordable to families. This includes bringing preschools into the school district in order to create more seamless pre-K to third-grade transitions.

3. Provide all students, including African American students, rigorous college and career-preparatory courses and instruction. Provide targeted supports to students who are struggling academically.

- a. Expand access to rigorous classes, including A-G, AP, and credit-bearing courses at local colleges.
- b. Expand access to expanded learning time both after school and in the summer.
- c. Disaggregate data by race in order to identify gaps in access to rigorous learning opportunities like A-G courses, AP classes, and GATE programs. Use this data to engage stakeholders in discussion and planning on closing opportunity and achievement gaps.
- d. For students who are struggling academically, offer opportunities for them to catch up to their peers and get on track for high school graduation and college. This includes offering tutoring; expanding before- and after-school learning time; providing opportunities to remediate 'D' grades, which are not accepted by the UC and CSU systems; and creating opportunities to recover credits.
- e. Generate a personalized learning plan for each high-need student, especially foster youth, truant youth, and academically struggling students — subgroups that are disproportionately African American. These plans should address each child's unique academic, socio-emotional, and health needs.
- f. Create district programs that incentivize effective teachers and principals, especially culturally and linguistically diverse educators, to teach in our highest need schools and subject areas.

4. Improve school climate so that students feel safe, supported, and engaged in — rather than pushed out of — school.

- a. Eliminate willful defiance and disruption as allowable reasons for suspension of students in grades four and above. State law already prohibits this in kindergarten through third grade, but districts must act locally to disallow this practice for older students. Districts that have already made this move may consider prohibiting out-of-school suspensions entirely so that students don't miss out on critical learning time.
- b. Provide teachers, counselors, and administrators with training on restorative discipline practices and culturally relevant instruction, and strategies for recognizing and addressing hidden biases.

5. Offer Black students a full range of health and social services — in partnership with community-based organizations and other agencies — to ensure they are physically, socially, and emotionally ready to learn.

- a. In schools serving high concentrations of low-income and African American students, make medical, dental, mental health, and counseling services readily available.
- b. Offer Black youth opportunities to build healthy relationships with adults and their communities through mentorship, service, and internship programs.
- c. Hire counselors or social workers specifically charged with providing academic and socio-emotional supports for foster youth and students on probation. In addition, strengthen coordination between agencies that serve foster youth, schools, and districts to create a continuum of support from home to school.

6. Meaningfully and deliberately engage African American parent, student, and community members in school and district decisions.

- a. Ensure that parents and guardians of African American children are proportionately represented on parent advisory and school site councils; actively solicit the input of diverse families when developing school and district plans.
- b. Build formal partnerships between the district and community or faith-based organizations representing African American communities.
- c. Create opportunities for Black youth to use their voice: For example, establish student groups for African American students, and create seats for students of color on district advisory committees.

7. In higher education, implement and expand campus programs and student supports that increase persistence and graduation rates.

- a. Implement and expand academic and social support programs that help first-generation college students and African American youth transition from high school to college.
- b. To speed the transition from high school to college-level coursework, especially in our CSU system and community colleges, create policies and programs that place more students directly in college-level English and math. Redesign and streamline remedial courses to reduce the time students spend in those non-credit bearing classes.

CONCLUSION

If we believe California is a land of opportunity, we must also acknowledge that this rate of progress is unacceptable. As a state with the fifth largest Black population in the country, we must do more and we must do better.



As a nation, we hold equality, fairness, and hard work as important values. Yet while we believe that every child has an equal opportunity to succeed, the sad truth is that they don't. A Black child, whether rich or poor, faces barriers to success in school and life, from cradle to career. And if that child comes from a low-income family, she faces a double disadvantage.

Improving our education system is not just a matter of one "fix." All Black children need effective teachers, rigorous coursework, academic supports and enrichment, safe learning environments, and more if they are to get the world-class education they deserve. Countless individuals know this. The efforts by organizations, school districts, and universities showcased in this report are just a fraction of the powerful work being done in communities around California. These groups are successfully chipping away at disparities and inequities in schools. However, if we continue to chip away at the rate we are, it will be decades before we erase opportunity and achievement gaps. If we believe California is a land of opportunity, we must also acknowledge that this rate of progress is unacceptable. As a state with the fifth largest Black population in the country, we must do more and we must do better.

The recommendations proposed here challenge district and state leaders to address the systemic inequities bearing down on young Black Californians. Both the report and the recommendations included in it are intended to be part of a larger effort that addresses educational disparities with the sense of fierce urgency our students deserve.

What will this take? It will take amplifying the voices of students, community members, and parents who know from their lived experience what these statistics look and feel like. It will take a coordinated, concerted effort by educators, administrators, researchers, elected officials, and policymakers to prioritize equity. It will take a collective agreement that the future will be far brighter for all Californians if we ignite young Black minds today.

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OUR MISSION

The Education Trust–West works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-K through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We offer our appreciation to California Community Foundation, the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, and the United Way of the Bay Area for their generous support, which made this report possible.

We also offer our gratitude to the many individuals who shared their expertise and perspectives with us. There are too many to name here, but we enormously benefited from the collective wisdom and experience of the school district leaders, higher education leaders, state leaders, early childhood professionals, researchers, community advocates, and nonprofit leaders who spoke with us as we were developing this report.



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