WAYS 2 EQUITY PLAYBOOK ENHANCEMENT

AFRICAN AMERICAN LEARNERS

Santa Clara County Office of Education

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The electronic version of the *Ways to Equity Playbook* can be found here: **https://www.innovationscollaborative.org/cepip.aspx.**

Introduction

The *Ways 2 Equity Playbook* is a tool for Local Education Agencies (LEAs), administrators, directors, teachers, and staff who seek to advance equity for children in grades K-12, regardless of race, gender, ability, and other dimensions of one's identity. Funding for the Playbook comes from the CA Equity Performance and Improvement Program (CEPIP) grant, which aims to address academic, cultural, and socio-emotional barriers to success, particularly for African American students, English Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities. In California's public schools, when compared to White students, data on each of these student groups show that the system is not serving them equitably, as measured through California's Accountability System. This study covers the following indicators: Chronic Absenteeism, Suspension Rate, English Learners Progress, Graduation Rate, College/Career Readiness, and Mathematics. Performance levels include five Status levels, which range from Very High, High, Medium, Low, and Very Low for the 2022-2023 academic school year.

A strategic effort through the Santa Clara County Office of Education and California State Department of Education, the *Playbook* seeks to not only identify and explain the root causes of the systemic equity issues students face but also to offer recommendations on how to tackle these challenges. The intention is to equip leaders and educators with the appropriate research, knowledge, and tools to address these problems in a way that humanizes data and upholds the dignity and worth of all students.

Statewide Demographics

African American/Black[1] students comprise 5.1 percent (298,768) of California's K-12 public schools' student population, compared to 4.3 percent (250,964) two or more races, 9.5 percent (561,795) Asian, 21.1 percent White (1,240,474), and 55.9 percent (3,291,260) Hispanic student populations (California Department of Education, 'California School Dashboard,' 2022). African American students come from diverse ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and embody various learner characteristics that are unique and specific to each child. There are common trends that show a parallel in subjective experiences the student group belongs to in the educational system, including being recipients of special education services, and students with disabilities (SWD). (See section 'Racial Disproportionality in Special Education Statewide').

Over the last two decades, some counties have seen dramatic decreases in the African American population. For instance, between 2000 and 2021, Alameda County experienced a decline in the Black student population from 20.7 percent to 8.8 percent, and San Francisco County experienced a decline from 16.0 percent to 7.6 percent. Today, Sacramento (10.8 percent), Alameda (8.8 percent), and Contra Costa (8.4 percent) are the counties with the largest African American school-age population (kidsdata.org). As the population of African American residents and school-aged students dwindles, few comprehensive studies investigate intersectional factors contributing to the shrinking size of Black communities in California, such as gentrification of California's urban centers and a subsequent housing crisis (Brown, 2016; Bunten, 2019). Moreover, the quest for affordable living (Toppo & Overberg, 2015; Brookings, 2015) is a product of systemic oppression that impacts California schools. There are 273,148 African American K-12 public school students in California, 4.7 percent of the state's public school population. This represents a decline from 2016-17 when African American students comprised 350,338 or 5.6 percent of the student population. Overall, the African American student population in California is in steady decline (Figure 1).

Data on displacement may have implications on where pupils land. As previously stated, gentrification has displaced African American/Black families across California. In the Bay Area, some have moved from urban communities such as East Palo Alto,

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[1] According to the Census 2000, "African American" refers to people in the United States who have origins in any of the black races of Africa. Furthermore, Americans of African descent have defined themselves in terms of their African roots for well over two hundred years. In the article "One-in-Ten Black People Living in the U.S. Are Immigrants," Christine Tamir and Monica Anderson (2022) analyze the foreign-born Black and Black immigrant populations of the United States. This way, African American students in K-12 schools within California are U.S.-born, Second generation, and Third generation or higher pupils. See Appendix A: 'U.S. Black and Black Immigrant Populations' for a more detailed background.

Introduction

Figure 1. Ethnic distribution of students in California's public schools: 2016-17 through 2022- 2023 adopted data from California Department of Education's DataQuest 'Enrollment Multi-Year Summary by Ethnicity' report.

Academic Year	Total	African American	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Filipino	Hispanic or Latino	Pacific Islander	White	Two or More Races	Not Reported
2022-23	**5,852,544**	4.7%	0.4%	9.5%	2.2%	56.1%	0.4%	20.1%	4.3%	2.2%
2021-22	**5,892,240**	5.1%	0.5%	9.5%	2.3%	55.9%	0.4%	21.1%	4.3%	1.0%
2020-21	**6,002,523**	5.2%	0.5%	9.5%	2.4%	55.3%	0.4%	21.7%	4.1%	0.9%
2019-20	**6,163,001**	5.3%	0.5%	9.3%	2.4%	54.9%	0.4%	22.4%	3.9%	0.9%
2018-19	**6,186,278**	5.4%	0.5%	9.3%	2.4%	54.6%	0.5%	22.9%	3.6%	0.9%
2017-18	**6,220,413**	5.5%	0.5%	9.2%	2.4%	54.3%	0.5%	23.2%	3.5%	0.9%
2016-17	**6,228,235**	5.6%	0.5%	9.0%	2.5%	54.2%	0.5%	23.6%	3.3%	0.7%

Oakland, and San Francisco into regions like the Central Valley and East Contra Costa (Cal Matters, 2020). Black populations throughout the state have also become homeless (Cal Matters, 2019). These findings help explain the decline in African American/Black student populations by county and region in California's K-12 public schools.

African American/ Black Students Enhancement

African Americans have fought for equitable education for over a century. Still, African American/Black students continue to face some of the greatest educational barriers of any student group (Appendix A). This section examines the profoundly entrenched inequalities, such as the systematic denial of quality education and residential segregation, that are, in part, expressed as equity gaps in educational achievement, economic prosperity, civic engagement, and lifelong wellness. Further, in this section, promising practices for improving the conditions of the public education system for Black students are offered.

When Black students succeed, everyone succeeds. The opportunities we create for Black youth and students of color will define the country's social, cultural, and political future. This Enhancement explores the subjective experiences of African American/Black students, using new findings (post-pandemic), research-based empirical studies, and local case studies to show how to successfully reach and teach African American students and improve Black student achievement and close opportunity gaps for learners in Pre-K through high school. To understand the status of Blacks in California's educational system, this section examines the following areas: the history of Black struggle for a fair education; who African American students are and what they are experiencing; what is not working in K-12 schools;

and what can be done to rectify equity issues they face systematically, structurally, and socio-emotionally.

History of African Americans/ Blacks in Education

African Americans have always had an enormous desire for fair and equal education. The struggle to achieve this goal has been long and hard throughout history, making equity—ensuring that everyone receives or has what is needed to thrive and reach one's full potential—a formidable task. Today, understanding the current state of Black education in this country requires knowledge of key historical events.

Before the Civil War, the schooling of Blacks was a criminal offense. After the Civil War and the legal end of slavery in 1865, African Americans mobilized to bring public education to the South (Rooks, 2020). Only North Carolina, among Southern states, had established a comprehensive system of education for Whites, and public schools emerged for Black and White students simultaneously in most of the South during Reconstruction (1863-1877). In addition, the nation's first historically Black colleges, such as Howard University in Washington, D.C., and Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, were established during this time (Freedmen's Bureau, 2011).

Having been denied education under slavery, freed Blacks saw schooling as central to their freedom, and freed Blacks of all ages flocked to schools after the Civil War. Much of the funding for Black education came from the state government, but they made efforts to organize schools, purchase land, construct buildings, and raise money to hire teachers. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for their children's school experience. Images from this era reflect overcrowded classrooms, often without black-

board and chalk, with forty or more African American students deeply engaged in learning despite resources. Research shows that many young men and women who attended these schools, known as "freedmen's schools," became teachers who instructed the next generation (Pariseau, 2005). Meanwhile, violence was on the rise during the Reconstruction era.

The ratification of the 13th Amendment abolished slavery in the United States. During Reconstruction, federal, state, and local statutes and policies emerged (e.g., Jim Crow laws and Black Codes) that legalized racial segregation, creating segregated public schooling. Some states required separate textbooks for Black and White students. The local and national governments created these laws to exclude Blacks, denying them the right to vote, obtain employment, and receive access to education. Just as images from this era would show Blacks engaged in learning, they would also depict Blacks in danger of survival. Black schools were vandalized and destroyed, and mobs of violent Whites (e.g., Ku Klux Klan) attacked, tortured, and lynched Black citizens at night. Families were also attacked and forced off their land across the South (Digital History, 2003). As these harsh conditions permeated the U.S., Reconstruction was also a time when many citizens, especially Blacks, stood up, assumed leadership roles, and vigorously opposed the laws. For example, in 1892, an African American train passenger, Homer Plessy, refused to sit in a car for Blacks. He argued that his constitutional rights were violated, which culminated in Plessy v. Ferguson, the landmark 1896 U.S. case. The Supreme Court decision ruled a law that "implies merely a legal distinction" between Whites and Blacks was not unconstitutional (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 2023).

The 1954 landmark case, Brown vs. Board of Education, overturned Plessy vs. Ferguson, ruling that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." The process of desegregation shocked the conscience of the nation. African American students, such as the "Little Rock Nine," faced abuse, humiliation, and racial terror as they stepped foot on previously all-White public high schools, bravely initiating the long-fought desegregation process in American public schools. Meanwhile, the violence against Blacks continued to rise.

In the book *A Life Is More Than a Moment: The Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High*, Will Counts (2007) presents his photographs and artifacts that capture the turbulent times. These include images from 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas, showing swarms of angry mobs of white people waiting for Black students as they approached the school and the National Guard escorting members of Little Rock Nine to class. Countless other images of this period also capture the pervasive and painful violence committed against Blacks who wanted better opportunities. Still, an image can only convey so much about the pain Blacks individually and collectively endured and the trauma from the past they still confront today. Historically, Blacks have been deprived of rights in jobs, voting, and education. The U.S. school system has yet to provide fair education to African American children writ large.

The Current State of African Americans/Blacks and Educational Equity

Racism will always be separate and unequal. The effects of government-backed policies, from environmental racism to job discrimination and housing segregation, mean that Black students living in poverty will likely experience unequal access to quality public education. Moreover, discrimination and housing segregation impacts Blacks in other ways, such as the increased likelihood of interactions and experiences with the police and exposure to toxic environmental hazards and waste. In the NPR Code Switch episode, "Housing Segregation in Everything," Guiterrez, Demy, and Frame (2018) highlight how racist policies were systematically designed, affecting communities, schools, health, policing, and wealth accumulation. While Brown vs. The Board of Education was supposed to end segregation in schools, at the national level, schools today remain highly segregated by race and ethnicity. Blacks and many other historically marginalized groups are still relegated to separate and unequal schools; its consequences are evident in students' academic achievement and performance (PBS Frontline, 2015; Loh et. al., 2022). A 2019 U.S. Department of Education report explains, "In 2016, the percentage of children under the age of 18 in families living in poverty was higher for Black children than Latinx children (31 and 26 percent, respectively), and the percentages for both of these groups were higher than for White and Asian children (10 percent each)" (NCES, 2019). Additional 2017 data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report on mathematics and reading assessments reveal that 7 in 10 Black students (69.2 percent) attend economically segregated schools.

California is no exception to this level of inequity. Black and Latinx students in California are also more likely to attend schools with a large low-income population (Reardon et. al, 2022). Despite funding allocated explicitly to high-poverty schools, due mainly to racial and economic segregation, these students still receive lower quality instruction (Cano, 2019), higher rates of exclusionary discipline (Gonzalez, 2015), and lower test scores (UNCF, 2018).

Introduction

African Americans want high-quality, fair, and equitable educational opportunities for their children. No matter their circumstances and conditions, Blacks inherently desire to want more for themselves, to thrive, and to achieve (Love, 2019). However, racism, systematic oppression, and discrimination flood many communities, classrooms, and school halls, effectively curtailing the road to success for many students (Kohli, 2015). Though many unfairly bear the brunt of these social conditions beyond their control, many push ahead, achieve, and flourish despite adversity (Ed Trust-West, 2015).

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Background

In September 2020, the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) officially launched the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook* at the 7th annual Innovations Collaborative State Conference (ICSC). The *Ways 2 Equity Playbook* is a navigation tool that can be used to identify equity needs throughout organizations with a primary focus on looking at equity through a systems lens to ensure improved student outcomes. To download a free copy, click here.

From November 19, 2020, to May 20, 2021, SCCOE hosted monthly two hour-long informative webinars for educators. A group of 30+ professionals joined to network with peers, shared best practices, and learned about facilitating equity conversations. They participated in thought-provoking activities and take-home tasks to incorporate the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook* elements in their classroom practices. To see previous recordings of the Equity Institutes and Navigating Equity Network series, click here.

The *Playbook* purposefully examines three historically marginalized student groups: African American students, students with disabilities, and English Learners. Additionally it provides targeted universal tools and resources to address the equity efforts of supporting those student groups. The underlying belief is that while we focus our efforts on supporting African American students, students with disabilities, and English Language Learners, these targeted tools and resources will also be a means to addressing the needs of *all* students that we serve.

"We have learned the way to develop the most effective, sustainable model of equity in education begins and continues with a conversation," said Santa Clara County Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Mary Ann Dewan. "With the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook*, we have an opportunity to address and respond to inequitable practices in our education system in a meaningful, deliberative way that will facilitate dialogue and improve communication, which is the only way we will continue to learn, understand and eliminate bias."

The *Ways 2 Equity Playbook* is the culminating two-year project of the California Equity Performance and Improvement Program (CEPIP) grant made possible by Assembly Bill 99, authored and promoted by Assemblywoman Dr. Shirley Weber. The grant was designed to create funding to promote equity in California's public schools by supporting and building capacity within County Offices of Education, local educational agencies, and schools. To fulfill this effort, the SCCOE has partnered with several national equity organizations, including the National Equity Project (NEP) and Western Educational Equity Assistance Center (WEEAC), as well as several local school districts. Case studies highlighting the partnering school districts are featured in the *Playbook*.

Educators using the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook* can access additional resources to support classroom implementation as well as examine school wide systems. In keeping with the navigational metaphor, the Playbook features a series of "on-ramps," allowing users to approach the conversation and equity journey where applicable. The first on-ramp stresses the need for an organization to define equity, which will be discussed next.

Defining Equity

To achieve equity, one must define what is meant by equity. In essence, educational equity means that every student can go to school and feel that they belong, are valued, and can succeed. Noguera ([2019](#)) explains that the "true" meaning of equity is "acknowledging students' differences and giving them what they need to be successful. It also means staying focused on outcomes, both academic and developmental". In other words, to achieve equity, educators and administrators must know the students whom they teach, understand which pedagogies and resources each student needs to thrive, and remain attuned to how quantitative and qualitative data reflect this. This requires focused investigation of the systems in place that are producing the current results. This way, new systems can be established that ensure that each child receives what they need to succeed.

The focus on equitable outcomes rather than equality (sameness) of resources is key to defining "equity". Making this point visually, the graphic below demonstrates that different students require different resources and support to achieve desired outcomes. As Kimberlé Crenshaw ([1998](#)) put it, "Treating different things the same can generate as much inequality as treating the same things differently." Therefore, to achieve equity, educators must be willing to learn how to provide differently for different students. This, however, can be challenging to put into action.

The main purpose of the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook* (*W2EPB*) is to assist schools, districts, and county offices of education in taking thoughtful action by helping them to find their unique pathways to equity. Equity that is, by definition, systemic. Because working toward equity requires ongoing action and continuous improvement, the *W2EPB* definition of equity centers "ways", or practices that support its advancement. It is understood that for many, the road taken will quite likely feel like uncharted territory. Afterall, the infrastructure for equity as an overarching objective for public education has yet to be built into the system—but is both possible and necessary.

With the public education system a legacy has been inherited. Boldly put: the U.S. education system originated as a tool to further privilege the racially and economically advantaged (see Kliewer & Fitzgerald, [2001](#); Rooks, [2020](#)). To a great extent, mental "fitness" was measured through standardized tests norm-referenced to White, educated men, thus advantaging them and those like them while disadvantaging the "other" (Kendi, [2019](#); see also the National Education Association's "[History of Standardized Testing in the United States](#)"). When we analyze data and take honest stock of the outcomes, we see that this pattern persists within the education system. As is shown through the *W2EPB*, it is undeniable that in comparison to most other student groups, White students continue to receive higher test scores, enroll in and pass more honors and Advanced Placement classes, go to college more, have better teachers, and be suspended less.

There is a hard truth in the data presented throughout this document: For students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)[2], poor, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, plus other groups (LGBTQIA+)[3], and/or identified as having disabilities, schools are often institutions which systematically reproduce and maintain their oppression. Consequently, the institution of schooling does not value what these students bring to school: their
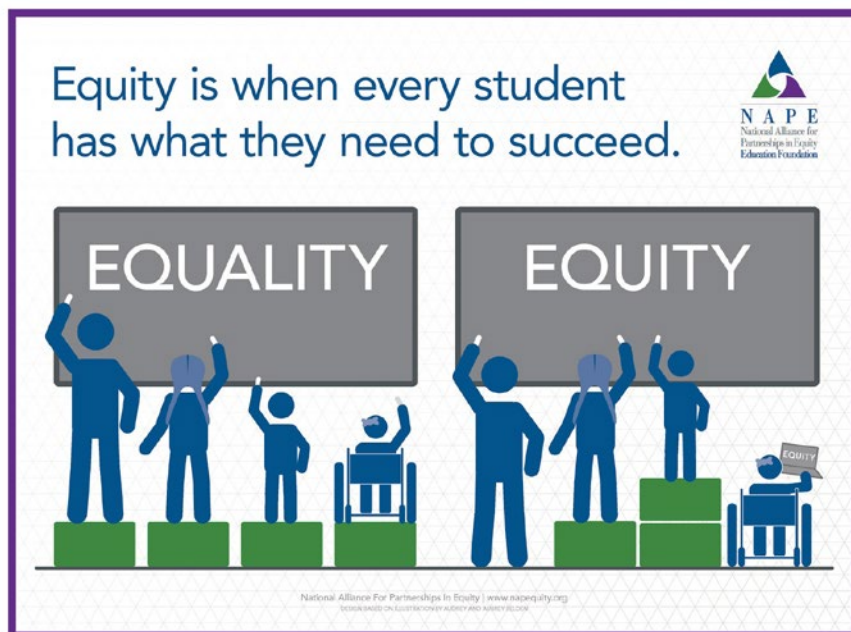
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[2] BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This term is used "to highlight the unique relationship to whiteness that Indigenous and Black (African Americans) people have, which shapes the experiences of and relationship to white supremacy for all people of color within a U.S. context" ([The BIPOC Project](#)). In effect, the term illuminates the fact that U.S. concepts of race were built on white supremacist notions of blackness and indigeneity.

[3] LGBTQIA+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, plus other groups marginalized due to gender and sexual identities.

Defining Equity (from National Equity Project)

Each student[4] receives what they need, when they need it, to thrive social-emotionally and academically.

Working toward equity means that we engage in these practices and behaviors:

- Promoting just and fair inclusion, and creating the conditions in which each person participates, prospers, and reaches their full potential.

- Removing the predictability of success and failure that is currently correlated with a student's ethnicity, culture, race, or socio-economic status.

- Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive school environments for each student and their families.

- Paying attention to the social and historic forces which create and maintain systems in which students are treated differently based on who they are.

culture (Valenzuela, 1999; Perry & Steele, 2004), including their languages (Rosa & Flores, 2017), agency (Paris & Alim, 2017), funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and their bodies (Hattery & Smith, 2017; Morris, 2016). The core motivation of the *W2EPB* is the strong belief that all students deserve dignity and respect and that they should be valued for their full humanity.

At times a deficit perspective (or mindset) is used to understand BIPOC students, students with disabilities, and students whose first language is not English. A deficit perspective views students through what they *do not* have, or what they lack, as opposed to seeing them for the assets they possess and bring to school every day. To counter the pervasiveness of this deficit perspective, a commitment to transforming the education system must be cultivated. Paris and Alim (2017) write, "We believe that equity and access can best be achieved by centering the dynamic practices and selves of students and communities of color in a critical, additive, and expansive vision of schooling" (p. 3). How do we take action toward equity? The objective of the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook* is to offer a response to this question.

Given the profound and heavy nature of the above, people who serve students and schools must be tenacious and bold. It should be expected that the work ahead will be challenging. And while it may be uncomfortable for some, it will be inspiring and uplifting

for many. Working toward equity is the best thing we can do for all students, families, and everyone who makes up the life of schools. Accordingly, it is necessary to cultivate opportunities for what Singleton (2014) calls "courageous conversations", or critical dialogue and reflection. Engagement in such discussions can cultivate essential attitudes of an equity mindset: humility, transparency, courage, and a willingness to learn and change. With emphasis simultaneously placed on work to address implicit biases, great strides can be made to advance equity. From the beginning, the *W2EPB* highlights learning about systemic oppression, activities that address implicit biases, processes which include self-reflection, engagement with equity ideas, and critical dialogue.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your organization's working definition of equity? Whose voices were included in this definition? Whose voices were not?

2. How has your organization engaged in conversations about the meaning of equity? Who has participated in these conversations? Who has not?

3. What are some reasons educators might be fearful about introducing conversations about racism in their classes? What can school leaders do to alleviate that fear? What can we do as individual educators to alleviate that fear in ourselves?

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[4] The use of "student" reflects an awareness of the audience for this playbook. It is understood that those using these materials are engaged in the education sphere. However, there are some realms of the education sphere where "student" may not be the most accurate word when referring to those in TK, preschool, early childhood programs, or adult education programs.

Defining Equity

Resources

- To further examine different types of educational inequity, such as societal, socioeconomic, familial, cultural, etc.: https://www.edglossary.org/equity/
- Equity Literacy Institute offers a free-low-cost self-paced learning module. https://equity-literacy.thinkific.com/
- See Glen Singleton's *Courageous Conversations about Race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools* (2005) for a powerful guide for talking about power and privilege related to race so that education systems can then create plans necessary for their transformation.

Tools

- CA-1 Course with Micro-Credential Badge: "Vision One" https://www.learningdesigned.org/node/975/initiative-resources
- Use the History of Education Timeline Activity to investigate the history of educational inequity. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NCN7QxGbLewItm-mMY_68_IeqpsNVlkqgj45CrucNrfU/edit

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How to Use the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook*

As a product of the California Statewide System of Support, the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook (W2EPB)* draws on methods of continuous improvement in its approach to systems-based equity work. This section provides guidance on how to use the *W2EPB*. Please note that you will find a list of recommended equity audits and assessment resources, but the *W2EPB* is not in itself an equity audit. In addition, the *W2EPB* was designed as a resource to be used electronically, offering digital-only sections and links to online resources and tools throughout. Please check the electronic version for updates, as we understand the *Playbook* as a "prototype" upon which we will continue to iterate with input and new developments in the field. Please see https://www.innovationscollaborative.org/cepip.aspx for the electronic document that includes additional sections: district case studies and a list of equity assessments and audits.

Organization of the Ways 2 Equity Playbook

The *W2EPB* is organized to guide schools, district, and county offices through their equity work. It has been assembled so that the sections of the *Playbook* move the reader from the more conceptual and theoretical to the more practical. However, just as equity work requires simultaneous engagement with theory and practice, the *Playbook* sections strive to address both layers of equity work at the same time. The education system cannot advance equity without seeing these as two parts of an integrated whole.

Preparing for Equity Work

1. In the original *Playbook*, thoroughly read the sections in Part I: Ramping Up. (These pages will orient the reader to the thinking behind the *W2EPB* and its approach to the process.)
2. Assess where to *start* by using the "On-ramps to Equity".
3. Establish your core equity team that is representative of the school community. (Through the process, there will be a need to develop smaller teams to guide specific aspects of the work.)
4. Choose and use assessment/audit tools to take the equity temperature of your site.
5. Using a planning tool, begin designing your site's ways to equity. (E.g. Sampson's "Digging for Equity".)

Engaging the Equity Work

Use the "On-ramps to Equity" to begin the process. As has been stated, undertaking equity work is not a one-size-fits-all process; intentionality and planning are key to achieving successful outcomes. In addition, it is imperative to simultaneously and continuously explore the comingling of implicit bias and systemic oppression in personal reflection and within your educational contexts. Note: The Innovations Collaborative of the Santa Clara County Office of Education has created an online micro-credential module for teachers to support implementation of the *W2EPB* in the classroom: Utilizing the Ways 2 Equity Playbook.

Using Protocols to Guide your Equity Work

Throughout the *W2EPB*, tools, resources, and support are offered in the journey toward equity. Many of these tools come in the form of "protocols". A protocol is a structured process or set of guidelines that promote meaningful, efficient, and equitable inquiry and communication. Using protocols can help ensure that work is collaborative, equitable, and focused. (Links to protocols are provided throughout the *W2EPB*. They can be accessed through the electronic version of the *Playbook* at https://www.innovationscollaborative.org/cepip.aspx)

On-Ramps: Beginning and Continuing on your Equity Journey

These "on-ramps" should be used to help the user identify where they are in their journey, their objectives, and how to proceed. This tool can be used as a self-assessment and inventory of actions, with each component essential to designing and carrying forth equity work. For example, beginning in column #2, everything listed in column #1 is still a necessary component to be addressed and should be as fully engaged as possible. This is intentional. While equity is an urgent need, to truly see changes in any system, the work must be deliberate, purposeful, collaborative, and deep. Use these on-ramps to gauge where you are. From there, engage in continuous improvement cycles. Finally, remember this: Working toward equity is complex, so not everything here happens in every place and at every time. To that end, the following is offered as a set of processes to help your system delve into the work.

"PRE" WORK:

- Beginning this journey means preparing your system to engage in work that is sometimes messy, often emotional, and challenges our most basic assumptions.
- Leadership must communicate the importance, excitement, and challenge of this work toward equity to staff: personal work and institutional work.
- Gather and explore relevant data, both public and internal; especially investigating disproportionality through an intersectional data analysis of the focal student groups: African American students, students with disabilities, and English learners.
- Read through the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook*, highlighting areas of focus.

	1. **Starting your Engine:** Learn about Equity in your System	2. **Picking up Speed:** Dive into Planning for Equity	3. **Merging onto the Highway:** Share Plans and Begin your Equity Cycles	Relevant *W2EPB* Sections: Access to find information and tools
Leadership Development	☐ Establish a core leadership team that will identify and develop a broader equity leadership team ☐ Identify trainings/education for leadership team on systemic racism & implicit bias ☐ Take implicit bias assessment ☐ Explore equity literature for future book circles (see resources) ☐ Establish community agreements/norms	☐ Establish a broader, representative equity leadership team across stakeholder groups ☐ Leadership team engage in an equity assessment ☐ Develop smaller leadership teams for specific areas of work (ongoing) ☐ Identify an equity team facilitator who is available, consistent, and experienced ☐ Initiate equity literature book circles/equity discussions with all staff	☐ Ensure that representative stakeholders are participants at all levels of process ☐ Continue equity literature book circles/equity discussions with all staff	Team Development & Facilitation Implicit Bias & Cultivating Equity Mindshifts Equity Literature
Teacher/Staff Development	☐ Take implicit bias assessment ☐ Participate in trainings/ education on systemic racism & implicit bias ☐ Explore equity literature for future book circles (see resources)	☐ Reflect on results of implicit bias assessment; consider next steps for individuals and collective action based on results ☐ Further focus trainings/ education for teachers on systemic racism & implicit bias ☐ Initiate equity literature book circles/equity discussions with all staff	☐ Continued, focused trainings/education for teachers on addressing systemic racism & implicit bias through effective pedagogy ☐ Continue equity literature book circles/equity discussions with all staff	Team Development & Facilitation Implicit Bias & Cultivating Equity Mindshifts Equity Literature
Data & Research	☐ Needs assessment: Investigate Dashboard data of districts/schools using data exploration protocol ☐ Identify focal student groups ☐ Needs assessment: Survey teachers, staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders ☐ Explore equity audits/ assessments to use in your context	☐ Continue to collect relevant quantitative and qualitative data at the local and state levels ☐ Conduct intersectional data analysis for disproportionality ☐ Conduct root cause analysis	☐ Continue to collect and share relevant quantitative and qualitative data ☐ Continue to conduct intersectional data analysis for disproportionality, with attention to African American students, SWD, and ELs ☐ Plan cycles of research and measurement for improvement	Using Data to Inform Equity List of Equity Audits & Assessments African American Students Students with Disabilities English Learners

On-Ramps: Beginning and Continuing on your Equity Journey

	1. **Starting your Engine:** Learn about Equity in your System	2. **Picking up Speed:** Dive into Planning for Equity	3. **Merging onto the Highway:** Share Plans and Begin your Equity Cycles	Relevant *W2EPB* **Sections: Access to find information and tools**
Planning	☐ Identify and broadly define equity challenges ☐ Begin to draft equity goals that explicitly address inequities found in needs assessment ☐ Develop a timeline starting with these on-ramps and cycles of continuous improvement	☐ Develop shared definition of equity ☐ Define and prioritize your equity goals ☐ Choose set of tools to address the challenge based on defined equity goals ☐ Begin drafting an equity plan (made up of report of findings, tools, strategies, communication plan, plan to monitor progress)	☐ Narrow focus to one equity challenge, drawing on stakeholder input ☐ Finalize equity plan ☐ Initiate and continue use of equity tools and strategies ☐ Check for integrity of the equity plan	Defining Equity Using Data to Inform Equity
Communication	☐ Identify stakeholders ☐ Begin development of communication plan	☐ Continue to develop communication plan ☐ Share equity data with community of stakeholders	☐ Finalize communication plan ☐ Communicate the equity plan to stakeholders ☐ Continue to share data findings and open up conversations with stakeholders	Developing an Equity Communication Plan
Culture & Climate	☐ Calibrate potential equity goals to mission and vision ☐ Begin process of ongoing personal reflection	☐ Align equity objectives to mission and vision ☐ Continue ongoing personal reflection ☐ Include students and community representation in decision-making and work	☐ Check for and build student and community representation in decision-making and work	Creating a Culture of Inclusion & Belonging Implicit Bias & Cultivating Equity Mindshifts Student Engagement Family Engagement
Progress Monitoring	☐ Check-in with teachers and staff about their response to the equity focus	☐ Continue monitoring equity and representativeness of leadership team	☐ Monitor progress: Schedule regular meetings (every 2-4 weeks) ☐ Monitor leadership capacity-building	Team Development & Facilitation Using Data to Inform Equity

These on-ramps were developed at the Santa Clara County Office of Education from a combination of vetted sources: *The Equity Framework*, (Linton, 2011); *Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation (SAM)*, (Stockslager, K., et. al., 2016), *Culturally Responsive Organizational Series*, Sampson, 2019, and the SCCOE *W2EPB* Team.

Equity Issues Impacting African American Students

This section focuses on persistent equity challenges in California's K-12 public schools that impact the experiences and academic attainment of Black/African American students. These equity issues reflect decades' worth of research and findings in special education, chronic absenteeism, school discipline, suspension rates, academic achievement, graduation rates, student engagement, and parent engagement. To conclude each focus area, *guiding questions* are offered to help readers understand the context (e.g., structural and institutional) as well as reflection questions to explore their direct role (e.g., personal biases) in addressing the problems affecting African American students.

Studies reveal that at every benchmark in Black students' lives, from early childhood education through postsecondary education, they encounter far more significant obstacles than many of their peers. Black students face racial discrimination through implicit bias, microaggressions, subtle racial epithets, and explicit racism in and outside school. They experience systematically lower expectations for achievement and excessive school discipline (Anderson, 2018).

Unlike the legally sanctioned racism of the past, these discriminatory behaviors may be subtly expressed and, therefore, difficult to name and address. Ultimately, however, the subconscious beliefs of teachers and administrators, coupled with educational policies and practices, are tied to a history of oppression that result in inequities for Black students (Quereshi & Okonofua, 2017). Therefore, at the national and state levels, African American students are more likely to:

- Attend schools in economically disadvantaged or low-income, racially segregated communities (Brownstein and Boschma, 2016; Hannah-Jones, 2014).
- Experience barriers to attending high quality early childhood and preschool education programs (Morgan et al., 2012; EdTrust, 2019).
- Be chronically absent (See the section 'Chronic Absenteeism.')
- Experience exclusionary discipline through punishment, suspension, or expulsion (More in the section, 'Suspension Rates and School Discipline').
- Experience inequitable access to quality curriculum and instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Quiocho & Rios, 2000).
- Receive instruction from ineffective teachers regardless of the quality of the school (Ed Trust-West, 2015; Lewis & Diamond, 2015).
- Experience bias and discrimination (Anderson, 2018).

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- *YOUNG LEARNERS, MISSED OPPORTUNITIES: Ensuring That Black and Latino Children Have Access to High-Quality State-Funded Pre-school.* The Education West. (2019, November). Retrieved from https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Young-Learners-Missed-Opportunities.pdf.

Racial Disproportionality in Special Education Statewide

Students with disabilities are disproportionately[5] African American and Hispanic, with African American students representing 5.2 percent of the overall student population but 7.5 percent of students with disabilities in the California education system (Kids data, 'Special Education Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity,' 2023). In California, 13 percent of all students (more than 800,000) children and youth ages 0-22 received special education services in 2020. There are common special education trends that reflect the overrepresentation of Black/African American students in these ways:

- Black/African American students with disabilities have mild conditions like speech impairments and specific learning disorders (such as dyslexia).
- Black/African American students with disabilities from non-low-income backgrounds had about twice the likelihood of being identified with intellectual disabilities (ID) or emotional disturbances (ED), compared to White students from non-low-income backgrounds in the states studied (NCLD, 2020).
- Black/African American students with disabilities are more likely to receive a disciplinary removal than all students with disabilities (OSEP, 2021).

Data trends also show that African American/Black students with disabilities in California schools are disproportionately low-income, attending high-needs schools.[6] Among all students receiving special education services in California, the most common category of disability was specific learning disability (37.2 percent), speech or learning impairment (20.8 percent), and other health impairment (13.7 percent). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2022) defines a specific learning

disability as, a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations." Autism, learning disabilities, and speech/language impairments were the most common primary disabilities among students in special education in 2020, accounting for nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of special education enrollment.

Additionally, students ages 3–21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) also have other categories of disabilities. These include health impairments, such as having limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, or diabetes (National Center for Education Statistics, 'Students With Disabilities,' 2022).

As noted in the report on 'Special Education Enrollment by Disability,' "Approximately 6 in 10 California students face socioeconomic challenges related to family income, homelessness, living in a migratory household, or involvement with the foster care system; nearly 1 in 5 have limited English language proficiency; and about 1 in 8 have disabilities for which they receive special education services. These children typically need additional support to achieve their academic potential" (Kids data, 2023). Districts, schools, teachers, and caregivers/parents must work together to coordinate special education services, including special accommodations, that will meet the targeted academic, physical, and socio-emotional needs of Black/African American students with learning disabilities.

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[5] Disproportionality is the overrepresentation of a specific race or ethnicity identified in one or more of four areas: identification of a disability in general; identification of a specific race or ethnicity in a specific disability category; discipline; and placement.

[6] The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 defines a high-needs school as "within the top quartile of elementary and secondary schools statewide, as ranked by the number of unfilled, available teacher positions; or is located in an area where at least 30 percent of students come from families with incomes below the poverty line; or an area with a high percentage of out-of-field-teachers, high teacher turnover rate, or a high percentage of teachers who are not certified or licensed."

Guiding Questions

1. Are Black/African American children disproportionately overrepresented in special education within your school or district? What is the percentage?
2. To what extent are the resources and supports for addressing disproportionality sufficiently funded?

Reflection Questions

3. Of the Black/African American students in special education classes, what percentage of students' families have low socio-economic status?
4. What contributes to the overrepresentation of African American students qualifying for special education services?
5. What are the effects of a disproportionate representation of African American students in special education programs?
6. How can family involvement prevent the over-representation of African American students?

Resources

- Alliance of Black School Educators, Inc. 'Addressing Over-Representation Of African American Students in Special Education: The Prereferral Intervention Process. An Administrator's Guide.' https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/ERIC-ED466051/pdf/ERIC-ED466051.pdf.
- California Department of Education. 'Memorandum from the Director of Special Education.' https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/memo091422.asp.
- Colorin Colorado. 'Disproportionate Representation of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in Special Education: Measuring the Problem.' https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/disproportionate-representation-culturally-and-linguistically-diverse-students-special.
- COPAA.' Presentation on Racial Disparities in Education.' https://cdn.ymaws.com/copaa.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/SREC_Files/Disproportionality/COPAA_Presentation_on_Racial.pdf.
- COPAA. 'Presentation on the Role Race and Poverty and Language Play in Education.' https://cdn.ymaws.com/copaa.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/SREC_Files/Disproportionality/COPAA_Presentation_on_the_Ro.pdf.

Take Action

- Digital Promise. 'Resources for Supporting Learners with Disabilities.' https://digitalpromise.org/online-learning/sped-resources/?fwp_paged=3.
- Edutopia. 'How to Avoid Overidentifying Black Male Students for Special Education.' https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-avoid-overidentifying-black-male-students-special-education/.

- Edutopia. 'Occupational Therapy Shifts From Tactile to Digital.' https://www.edutopia.org/article/occupational-therapy-shifts-tactile-digital.
- Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA). 'Core Principles.' https://ldaamerica.org/category/core-principles/.
- Paths to Literacy. 'Getting Started with a Struggling Reader with Visual Impairments.' https://www.pathstoliteracy.org/getting-started-struggling-reader-visual-impairments/.
- TIES Center. 'TIES helps educators, parents, and administrators create and support inclusive school communities.' https://tiescenter.org/
- U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. 'Preventing DISPROPORTIONALITY by Strengthening District Policies and Procedures —An Assessment and Strategic Planning Process.' https://ed.sc.gov/sites/scdoe/assets/File/programs-services/173/documents/NCCRESt-district_rubric.pdf.

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- *State Performance Review. California School Dashboard.* California Department of Education. (2022). Retrieved from https://www.ca-schooldashboard.org/reports/ca/2022.
- *Special Education Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity.* Kidsdata.org. (2020). Retrieved from https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/97/special-education-race/table#fmt=248&loc=2&tf=110&ch=7,11,70,85,10,72,9,73&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc.
- *Significant Disproportionality in Special Education: Current Trends and Actions for Impact.* National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLB). (2020). Retrieved from https://www.ncld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2020-NCLD-Disproportionality_Trends-and-Actions-for-Impact_FINAL-1.pdf.
- The Condition of Education. (2022). *Students with Disabilities.* National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/2022/cgg_508.pdf.

Intersectionality

California's public school system aims to provide each student with what they need to thrive in school. Taking into account the vast and diverse student body that makes up the largest public school system[7] in the nation, examining student demographic trends can support efforts to advance equity by: (1) uncovering how the circumstances into which children are born and grow up strongly influence their well-being and academic success, and

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[7] California schools serve an increasingly diverse population of more than 6 million students, a majority of whom are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Equity Issues Impacting African American Students

(2) helping to project potential equity challenges and coordinate school and community services planning.

Persistent equity issues have historical underpinnings, which impact African American students' well-being and educational outcomes. From systemic oppression and racism to residential segregation to unequal access to early childhood education, these known factors impacting the experiences of African American students in California's public schools have long-lasting effects. Years of research and scientific study have shown that racism, for example, impacts a child's development, which can have lifelong effects on learning, behavior, and physical and mental health. For example, in the article "Racism and Child Development" (2019) researchers at Harvard University's Center of the Developing Child explain:

Advances in science are presenting an increasingly clear picture of how significant adversity in the lives of young children can disrupt the development of the brain and other biological systems. These early disruptions can undermine young children's opportunities to achieve their full potential. And, while they may be invisible to those who do not experience them, there is no doubt that both systemic racism and interpersonal discrimination can lead to chronic stress activation that imposes significant hardships on families raising young children (Harvard University).

This study is one of many empirical studies showing that the conditions in which African American children and youth are raised strongly influence their life trajectories (Heard-Garris, et. al, 2018; Patcher and Coll, 2009; Clark and Clark, 1999). For instance, African American students from historically

marginalized and low-income backgrounds experience everyday racism, stressors, and oppression that undermine their health and development. Exposure to traumatic events in childhood will affect development, a phenomenon known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), in which some children are at greater risk than others (CDC, "Fast Facts: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences"). All aspects of the child's environment (e.g., home, school, community) that undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding shape one's academic engagement and academic achievement, and life outcomes.

Guiding Questions

1. What activities exist in your school, district, or community to address ACEs and their outcomes for African American students?
2. What opportunities do you see for using The ACE Study to improve outcomes for Black/African American students in your school, district, or community?

Reflection Questions

3. In your equity conversations, how likely are you to specifically discuss the impact of everyday racism on Black/African American students?
4. In your equity conversations, how likely are you to specifically discuss racial issues Black/African American students face in your school, district, or organization?
5. How does your role impact ACEs and their outcomes for Black/African American students?

Resources

- "Children Are Not Colorblind: How Young Children Learn Race" (Winkler, 2020). https://theivyacademy.org/children-are-not-colorblind-how-young-children-learn-race/.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ACE Study. Tools to address adverse childhood experiences. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html.
- Conversations about Historical Trauma: Part Two, Summer 2013. National Child Traumatic Stress Network. A series on historical trauma outlines how historical trauma has impacted African Americans who are descendants of enslaved Africans. https://www.nctsn.org/resources/conversations-about-historical-trauma-part-two.
- FRIENDS National Center. Historical Trauma Among African Americans, ACEs, and Hope. https://soundcloud.com/user-616990317/historical-trauma-among-african-americans-aces-and-hope.
- Racial Healing Handbook-Being Antiracist. This handout is from the "Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism, and Engage in Collective Healing '' by Anneliese A. Singh, Ph.D., LPC. https://nmaahc.si.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/resources/racialhealinghandbook_p87to94.pdf.

Take Action

- Talking About Race (National Museum of African American History & Culture). https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race.
- Talking About Race Effectively (Living Room Conversations). https://www.livingroomconversations.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/race_and_ethnicity_3.pdf.
- Talking to Young Children About Race and Racism (PBS, 2023). https://www.pbs.org/parents/talking-about-racism.
- Talking to Young Children About Race and Racism: A Discussion Guide (PBS, 2020). https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/talking-to-young-children-about-race-and-racism-a-discussion-guide.
- Teaching Young Children about Race: A Guide for Parents and Teachers (Teaching for Change, 2015). https://www.teachingforchange.org/teaching-about-race.
- The Color Line. Teaching Activity (Bigelow). https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/color-line-colonial-laws.
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Chronic Absenteeism

In California, pupils who miss 10 percent or more of the instructional days in a 180-day academic year are chronically absent. While prevalent across the state, students of different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses experience chronic absenteeism at different rates. In 2018-19, more than 12 percent of California's K-12 public school students were chronically absent. The rate was much higher for specific student groups such as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (20.2 percent), American Indian or Alaskan Native (21.8 percent), Black or African American (22.5 percent), compared to Asian (4.3 percent), White (9.9 percent), and Hispanic or Latino (13.4 percent) student groups (CDE, 2022, ED data, 2023). On the California School Dashboard[8], Black or African American students' chronic absenteeism is twice as high as the state average in 2019, with about 22 percent compared to 12 percent of all students, as noted above. (Note that as a result of the statewide physical school closures in February/March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the state did not report chronic absenteeism data or suspension and expulsion data for 2019-20. For more information, please see the CDE's Covid-19 and Data Reporting page.)

Data has shown that lower-income or socioeconomically underprivileged African American students are more likely to be chronically absent than their peers—the numbers for the 2020-2021 and 2021-22 academic school years show that existing inequities have been exacerbated. Racial disparities in chronic absenteeism existed before the pandemic among student groups, including but not limited to foster, homeless, students with disabilities, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The highest levels of chronic absenteeism occurred in students experiencing homelessness (29.5 and 46.1 percent), Native Hawaiin or Pacific Islander (22.4 and 42.8 percent), Black or African American (26.8 and 45.2 percent), and American Indian or Alaska Native students (26.9 percent and 43.6 percent) (citation). The only student group whose 2021-22 chronic absenteeism rate that did

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8 The dashboard offers a broad look at student performance through multiple measures of academic achievement and school engagement and is an accountability tool that designates low-performing districts for several levels of county and state assistance. The public can use it to look up the data for each measure and the ratings by more than a dozen student groups.

Equity Issues Impacting African American Students

not rise above the state's pre-pandemic rate of 12.1 percent in 2018-19 was Asian students. Their rate in 2021-22 was 11.4 percent (EdSource, 2022; CDE, 2023). See **Figure 2**. 'Chronic Absenteeism Rate by Race and Ethnicity.'

Chronic absenteeism can be detrimental to all students. Research suggests the reasons for chronic absenteeism vary as to the challenges our students and families face—including housing shortages, poor air quality, poor health, limited transportation, and a lack of safety—the prevalence of these issues is higher for historically and economically disadvantaged communities, and particularly African American students (Balfanz & Brynes, 2012; Ready, 2010; American Lung Association, 2022). This way, African Americans tend to live where there is greater exposure to environmental pollutants (e.g., air pollution & pollution particles), diesel emissions, and other pollution, which can directly lead to adverse health effects (Shah et al., 2020; Tessum et al., 2021). Asthma is an epidemic among school-age children in the U.S.and is a known health issue linked to student absenteeism, a risk factor for diminished achievement, school dropout, and reduced college and career opportunities. In the study "An Underpinning of School Inequities: Asthma Absences and Lost Revenue in California Schools" (Kreger, Cairoli, and Brindis, 2020), the authors provide asthma school absences for California's 20 largest school districts. They found that African American elementary boys have 9.4 absences per year, disproportionately higher than other racial and ethnic student groups. Another study found that chronic health problems such as asthma contributed to unexcused absences among African American students in K-12 schools (Jones & Willis, 2020).

As has been discussed, in California, Black households experience the highest levels of residential segregation due to factors such as individual, structural, and institutional racial discrimination. Redlining is an example of structural-institutional racism, as Massey and Denton (1993) detailed over 30 years ago in their book *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*. However, Black children and families living in poverty face the aforementioned factors affecting their ability to prepare for, respond to, or cope with the impacts of housing unaffordability, climate change, school closures, and chronic stress resulting from discrimination. All of these factors contribute to African American/Black children not going to school.

The Consequences of Chronic Absenteeism

Chronic absenteeism leads to many adverse outcomes and has long-term negative consequences for students and districts. For early elementary school students, a research study has shown an association between chronically absent kindergartens and lower achievement in reading and mathematics later on in school (Romero and Lee, 2007). The authors explain, "On average, children missing 10% or more of the school year scored five points less than did those who were absent up to 3% of the school year in kindergarten" (p. 3). Their study also reveals that chronic absenteeism in kindergarten was detrimental, particularly for the reading performance of Latino students in first grade (p. 4). Similarly, Gottfried (2014) evaluates chronic absenteeism's effects on students' academic and socioemotional outcomes. Using data from Kindergarten students from the 2010-2013 school year, he found that chronic

Figure 2. Chronic Absenteeism Rate by Race and Ethnicity

| Chronic Absenteeism Rate By Race and Ethnicity	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
American Indian or Alaska Native	21%	21.8%	N/A	26.9%	43.6%
Asian	3.8%	4.3%	N/A	3.9%	11.4%
Black or African American	20.1%	22.5%	N/A	26.8%	42.5%
Filipino	5.2%	6.2%	N/A	4.2%	15.5%
Hispanic or Latino	12.1%	13.4%	N/A	17.1%	35.4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	17.4%	20.2%	N/A	22.4%	42.8%
None Reported	14.9 %	13.5%	N/A	14.9%	30.4%
Two or More Races	10.6%	11%	N/A	10.9%	24.4%
White	9.7%	9.9%	N/A	10%	23.2%
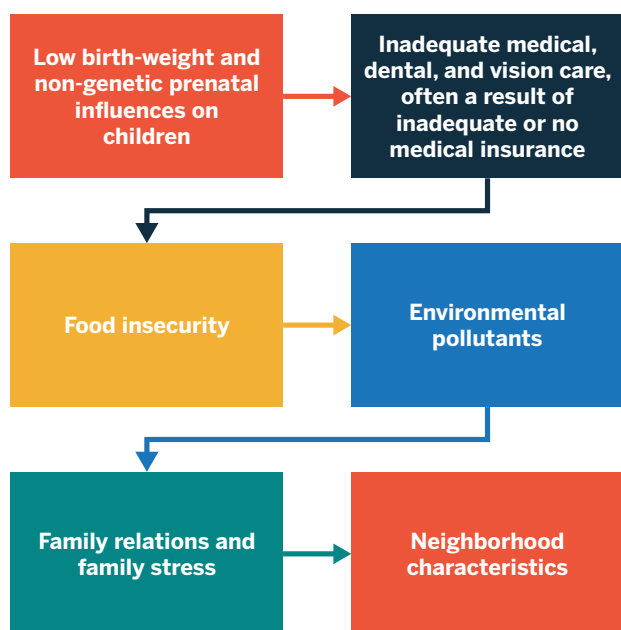
Figure 3. Out of School Factors and School Success Affecting Learning Outcomes' from a study on common factors significantly affecting the health and learning opportunities of socio-economically underprivileged children (Berliner, 2009).

absenteeism reduces reading and math achievement outcomes and decreases social engagement in general. Both studies show missing school undermines students' learning and performance, reducing opportunities for valuable instructional time and interactions with peers and teachers. Other findings show the impact chronic absenteeism has on the funding schools receive (Attendance Works, 2018; Syverson and Duncomb, 2022).

Students' repeated absences may impact how they feel about school—their performance and sense of belonging. In the article "New California absenteeism data shows big discrepancies between White, Black Students," Jones and Willis (2020) cite an example of a Black male senior in high school to illustrate this point. They write:

> When Shawn Brown was in middle school in the Central Valley, there was a period when getting to school was a constant struggle. His parents' car had broken down, and he had to take a bus across town. Nearly every day Brown was either late or absent entirely.

> "All the time. That's how often I got marked absent," said Brown, 17, who is Black. "It was a double problem because I was in trouble for missing school, and then I was so behind I didn't know what was going on in class. It was bad."

> The period lasted about a month. No one at the school offered to help him, he said, although his parents were notified of his sporadic attendance.

Though conditions outside the school alter life chances for African American/Black students, systems and structures within K-12 education, which sometimes lead to disciplinary consequences, keep African American students from flourishing. We must support coordinated community efforts that address the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism, affecting millions of children in our nation's public schools each year, notably, Black pupils in California, and outline strategies to improve the conditions they face in schools.

Guiding Questions

1. What constitutes chronic absence in your school or district?
2. Does your school or district provide easy access to their policies and procedures on absenteeism to families and students?
3. How do your school and district respond when an African American student has missed multiple days of school?

Reflection Questions

4. How does chronic absence affect African American student achievement in your school or district?
5. What makes it difficult for African American students to attend school on time? What are common out-of-school factors have you seen? How does your school or district support students and families to overcome these obstacles?
6. Who should become involved in monitoring and tracking attendance/chronic absence in your school or district? Is chronic absenteeism mostly a matter for administrators and teachers?

Resources

- American Federation of Teachers. 'What Research Tells Us about Poor Attendance at School.' https://www.aft.org/ae/winter2019-2020/marsh.
- Attendance Works. 'Advancing Student Success by Reducing Chronic Absence.' https://www.attendanceworks.org/.
- Administrative Office of the Courts. Center for Families, Children, and the Courts. 'Truancy and School Discipline: An Overview of the Literature and Statistics.' https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/AOC_Briefing_-_Truancy_and_School_Discipline.pdf.
- Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools. 'Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing What We Know From Nationally Available Data.' https://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16.pdf.
- Changing Minds. 'HELPING CHILDREN BY CHANGING MINDS.' https://changingmindsnow.org.

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- Learning Policy Institute. 'Eliminating Chronic Absenteeism: Making ESSA's Equity Promise Real: State Strategies to Close the Opportunity Gap.' https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/essa-equity-promise-report.

- North Bethesda, MD: Safe Start Center, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. *'Identifying Polyvictimization and Trauma Among Court- Involved Children and Youth: A Checklist and Resource Guide for Attorneys and Other Court-Appointed Advocates.'* https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh176/files/programs/safestart/IdentifyingPolyvictimization.pdf.

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- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. 'NCTSN BENCH CARDS FOR THE TRAUMA-INFORMED JUDGE.' https://www.nctsn.org/resources/nctsn-bench-cards-trauma-informed-judge.

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Take Action

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- Attendance Works. 'Parent Video Discussion Guide.' https://www.attendanceworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2014.044_AW_ParentToolkit.VideoDiscussionOnly.01.pdf.

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- California Department of Education. 'Reducing Chronic Absence through Expanded Learning Programs and Existing School Resources.' (webinar) https://www.facebook.com/CAEducation/videos/reducing-chronic-absence-through-expanded-learning-programs-and-existing-school-/563614352401918.

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School Discipline

Evidence shows inequities in school discipline. Some schools and districts in California take a more punitive approach to discipline, resulting in the over-representation of Black children in exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions, expulsions, and other punishments). These disciplinary measures given to African American students (Appendix B), for example, entail discriminatory practices, law enforcement citations, and selective application of rules directed at Black students in comparison to other racial groups in response to but not limited to, the following reasons:

- Dress code violations
- "Being loud"
- Inappropriate behavior
- Truancy
- Creating a hostile environment

Black or African American students are also more likely to be restrained and isolated, and during the pandemic parents reported Black children experienced being digitally isolated during remote learning (e.g., placed in Zoom breakout rooms) or excluded from participating in online classes even in Positive Behaviors and Intervention Supports (PBIS) schools (Wood et al., 2021; Taketa, 2021). Focusing on Black students' over-representation in school discipline is key to reducing profoundly harmful discipline practices that prevent them from learning in the classroom and engaging with constituents in school. As State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tony Thurmond, explains, "...it is important to

take steps to reduce the use of disproportionate discipline, which can have harmful consequences for students. Taking students out of the learning environment through suspensions and expulsions is proven to push them toward the criminal justice system, and this is something we must work to prevent" (CDE, 2021). Simply put, when Black students miss school and are chronically absent, they fall behind socially and academically, reducing the opportunities for social interactions and cognitive skill development in the classroom.

Over the past several years, the California Department of Education has focused on pooling Black or African American students' suspension and expulsion and other educational outcomes data. The statewide suspension rate showed that 3.1 percent of the state's 6,066,021 students were suspended for at least one day. That rate was 'Very High' for foster youth and 'High' for African American, American Indian, students experiencing homelessness, and students with disabilities (California School Dashboard, 2022). These student groups represent the majority of student populations in the low performance of achievement gaps across California schools. Black or African American students' suspension rate is more than double the state average, with 7.9 percent compared to 3 percent of all California School students. They include students who are suspended multiple times (CDE, 2022). The percentages vary based on the student's gender: 9.9 percentage for Black males and 5.9 percentage for Black females (CDE, 2021). Moreover, students who were suspended or expelled were more likely to be retained, be pushed out of school, or be referred to the juvenile justice system (The Council of State Government's Justice System, 2011).

Figure 4. Statewide Suspension Rates by Race Compared to Statewide Average, 2018-2019
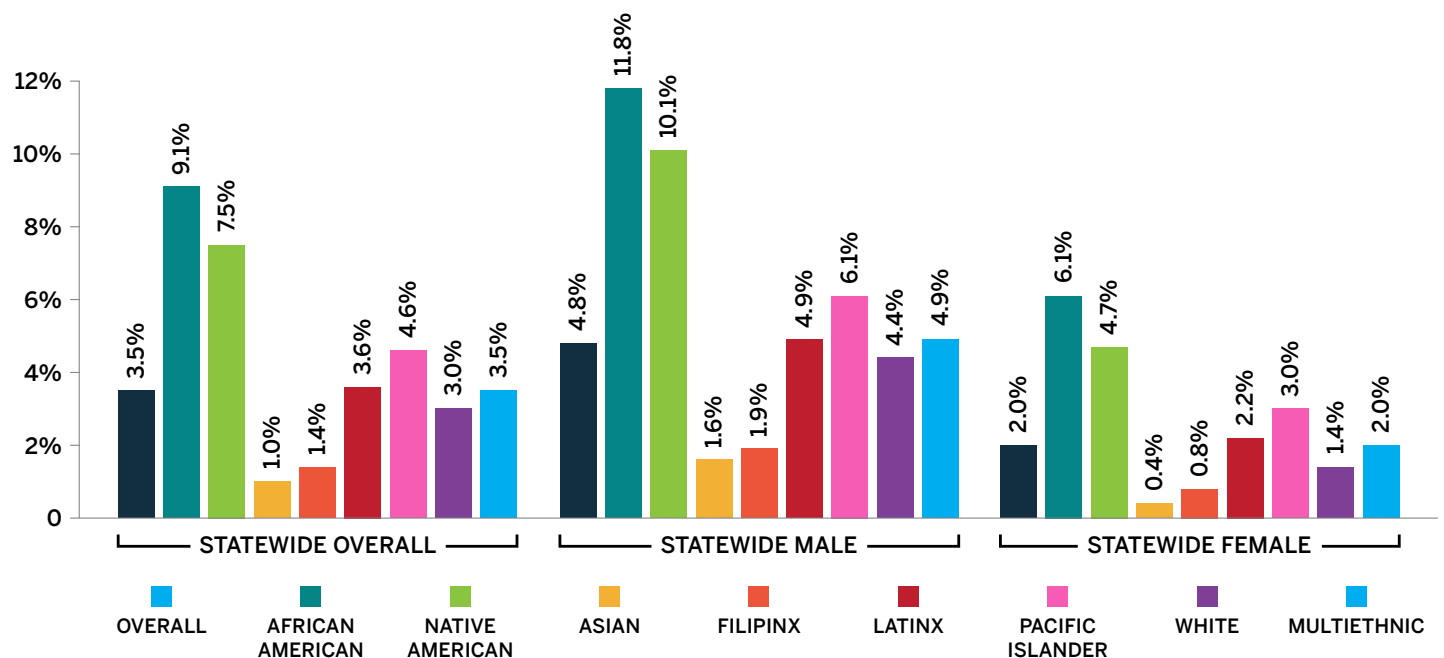
Equity Issues Impacting African American Students

Studies aim to address why Black or African American children are disproportionately disciplined and suspended in K-12 schools. Black students, especially Black boys, are likely to encounter extreme surveillance and punishment for their behavior, even when the behavior is similar to that of their non-Black peers, which results in high rates of suspension and expulsion (Riddle and Sinclair, 2019; Gregory and Weinstein, 2008). In a recent study, "Suspending Our Future: How Inequality Disciplinary Practices Disenfranchise Black Kids in California's Public Schools," Wood et al., (2021), looking back to pre-COVID19 data, examine the use of suspensions and other forms of exclusionary discipline and how they affect the education of Black children in California public schools using data from the 2018–19 school year. **Figure 4** 'Statewide Suspension Rates by Race Compared to Statewide Average, 2018-2019' demonstrates that Black students were significantly overrepresented in school suspensions (Wood et al., 2021).

Other noteworthy data in the report include suspension rates for nonbinary students, top suspension districts (e.g., smaller enrollment of Black students), and Black male and female compared to statewide averages, school type share of top 100 suspension schools in California for Black students, etc. Broken down by gender, the average statewide suspension rate for males was 4.8 percent during the 2018–19 school year compared to 11.8 percent for African American males. The average was just 2 percent for females compared to 6.1 percent for African American females. Again worth mentioning, data on students that identify as non-binary is starting to be collected. The findings show that schools and districts can be volatile toward Black students. As the term "school-to-prison pipeline" reflects, for Black boys in particular, discipline often begins in the principal's office and ends in prison; that is, school suspensions increase the risk that Black boys end up incarcerated (Fowler, 2011; Heitzeg, 2009).

Guiding Questions

1. What are the rates of suspension and expulsion for Black/African American students in your context? How about if you disaggregate by gender?
2. What are Black/African American students being disciplined for?
3. Are there alternatives to suspension (e.g. sending students to other classrooms) used in your context? Is data tracked for this? If so, which students are being sent out?

Reflection Questions

4. What factors lead to the disproportionate discipline of African American students in your district or school? As you identify examples, consider what it is about your school's educators, policies, practices, and people contributing to inequities.
5. What evidence-based practices/strategies can address the disproportionate discipline of African American students in your district or school?

6. What are the activities and tasks needed to implement these practices/strategies?
7. Review the 'PBIS Cultural Responsiveness Field Guide: Resources for Trainers and Coaches', and discuss the following questions: who in your district or school should be at the table in the planning process, and when the strategies implemented to address the disproportionality of African American students are evaluated?

Resources

- Administrative Office of the Courts. Center for Families, Children, and the Courts. 'THE EFFECTS OF COMPLEX TRAUMA ON YOUTH: Implications for School Discipline and Court-Involved Youth.' https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/effects-complex-trauma-on-youth-briefing.pdf.
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- California Department of Education. 'State Guidance for New Laws on Discipline.' https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/el/le/yr21ltr0819.asp.
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Take Action

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- PBIS. 5- point Intervention Approach for Enhancing Equity in School Discipline. https://www.pbis.org/resource/a-5-point-intervention-approach-for-enhancing-equity-in-school-discipline.

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Academic Achievement

In the California school accountability system, "academic achievement" refers to the standardized assessments of English Language Arts, math, and science that students undertake each year. To address equity in student achievement, the underlying factors at play must be considered. This section provides a concise definition of academic achievement measures and explores the influences on African American/Black students' academic success. It also discusses the "achievement gap" versus the "opportunity gap" within this population and highlights effective practices and tools to address disparities. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of graduation rates, college and career readiness, as well as student and family engagement in fostering equitable academic outcomes.

This country has had a history of neglect in fostering academic success for all Black students, especially low-income Black children and youth. From being denied access to a formal education during slavery to being relegated to poorly funded segregated schools after emancipation, Black children and families have had to fight to access high-quality education programs. Today, what is known as the "achievement gap" highlights long-standing equity issues within educational systems and is frequently used when comparing the data on Black students' performance on State assessments to their White counterparts. Many educational and structural conditions, which the pandemic has exacerbated, impact the academic achievement of African American students.

In California, two academic indicators shed light on the academic performance of Black/ African American students: English language arts/literacy (ELA) and Mathematics. There are also indicators such as The CAASPP Test Results for California's Assessment or Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments that show student performance outcomes in grades 3-8 and 11. Facts for economically disadvantaged students show: from

2018-2019, 27.62 percent of Black or African American students' Met or Exceeded Standard for ELA' and 16.14 percent 'Met or Exceeded Standard for Math' compared to 47.41 percent of white students who 'Met or Exceeded Standard for ELA' and 34.79 percent 'Met or Exceeded Standard for Math.' **Figures 5 & 6** shows performance data over the past two years. When reviewing the data, consider the following: (1) due to the suspension of testing as a result of the novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), 2019–20 results are not available; (2) Due to factors surrounding the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, testing participation in 2020–21 varied; interpret with caution; and (3) Intersectionality plays a crucial role in interpreting data for Black or African American students; additional findings may vary for different student groups within the same race/ethnicity: disability status, gender, homeless status, and foster status.

In 2021, among eighth graders in the U.S., for example, only 12.59 percent of all Black students (socio economic status controlled) scored at or above a proficient level in mathematics, compared with 60.44 percent of White students. Similarly, only

Figure 5. '2020- 2021 English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Test Results for Economically Disadvantaged Black or African American Students: All Grades' from caaspp.

ELA
Percent of students within each achievement level

- 19.62% Standard Met (LEVEL 3)
- 25.03% Standard Nearly Met (LEVEL 2)
- 7.70% Standard Exceeded (LEVEL 4)
- 47.65% Standard Not Met (LEVEL 1)

27.32% Met or Exceeded *Standard for ELA*

Mathematics
Percent of students within each achievement level

- 22.78% Standard Nearly Met (LEVEL 2)
- 9.75% Standard Met (LEVEL 3)
- 3.35% Standard Exceeded (LEVEL 4)
- 64.11% Standard Not Met (LEVEL 1)

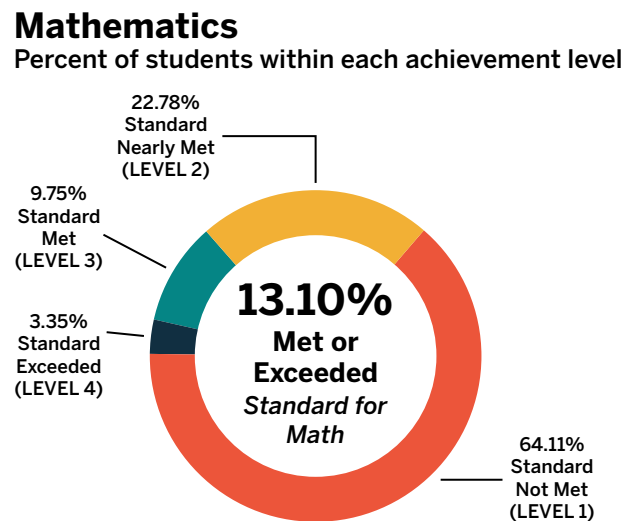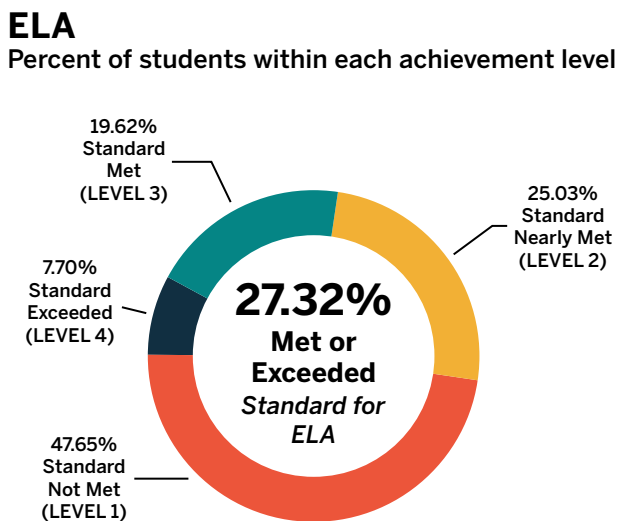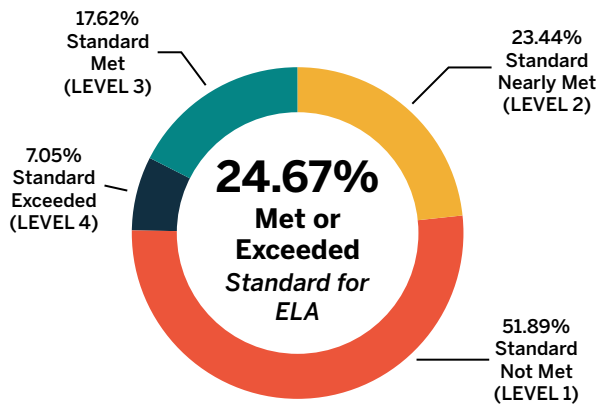**13.10%** Met or Exceeded *Standard for Math*

Figure 6. '2021- 2022 English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Test Results for Economically Disadvantaged Black or African American Students: All Grades' from caaspp.

ELA
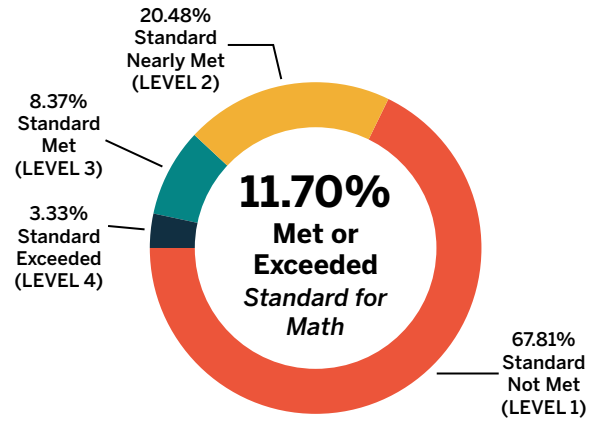**Percent of students within each achievement level**

17.62% Standard Met (LEVEL 3)

23.44% Standard Nearly Met (LEVEL 2)

7.05% Standard Exceeded (LEVEL 4)

24.67%
Met or Exceeded
Standard for ELA

51.89% Standard Not Met (LEVEL 1)

Mathematics
Percent of students within each achievement level

20.48% Standard Nearly Met (LEVEL 2)

8.37% Standard Met (LEVEL 3)

3.33% Standard Exceeded (LEVEL 4)

11.70%
Met or Exceeded
Standard for Math

67.81% Standard Not Met (LEVEL 1)

30.17 percent of Black students scored at or above a proficient level in reading, compared with 42.94 percent of white students. This "gap" has narrowed substantially since the 1970s, though recent progress is minimal, and the disparity remains very large (Stanford CEPA). Some practitioners and advocates for Black/African American children believe that the concept of the achievement gap fosters a negative view of Black students and perpetuates deficit frames (Quinn & Desruisseaux, 2022). Instead, the "opportunity gap" frame better articulates the significant and persistent disparity in Black students' educational achievements (test scores, grades, high school graduation, college attendance) as compared to White students (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Stanford CEPA).

Guiding Questions

1. What are the results for Black/African American students on state tests in your school or district?

Reflection Questions

2. What are the academic achievement and opportunity gaps for, and how do they affect Black/African American students in your school or district?
3. What school and/or classroom practices contribute to the achievement and opportunity gaps for Black/African Americans in your school or district?
4. What out-of-school conditions impact Black students' ability to be academically successful?
5. What interventions have been shown to be associated with improved academic achievement of Black/African students in your school or district?
6. What tools or practices do teachers perceive effective in decreasing the achievement gap for African American students on state-mandated assessments?

Resources

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Take Action

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Graduation Rates and A-G Completion

Recent data for 'the 2021-22 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate' (ACGR) show that African American students' graduation and A-G requirement rates are as follows: cohort graduation rate (78.6 percent) and Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Requirements (8,704 students) compared to cohort graduation rate (90.6 percent) and Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Requirements (57,612 students) for white students in California's schools. The graduation rates for African American students have increased since 2020-2021 and 2020-2019. **Figure 7.** 'Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)': African American Students.

Since the 2017-2018 academic school year, the enrollment of Black/African American students in California's public schools has decreased, and the graduation rates remain below average. The data also reveals that 8,704 (32.4 percent) of Black/African American students are graduating from high school having taken courses required for California Public University (referred to as "A-G requirements"), including four years of English, three years of mathematics, two years of social studies/science, two years of science with required lab, two years of foreign language, one year of visual and performing arts, and one year of electives.

Figure 7. 'Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)': African American Students

Year	Cohort Students	Regular HS Diploma Graduates	Cohort Graduation Rate	Graduates Meeting UC/CSU Requirements
2021-22	26,811	21,063	78.6%	8,704
2020-21	28,294	20,502	72.5%	8,708
2019-20	27,914	21,431	76.8%	8,695
2018-19	29,058	22,312	76.8%	8,915
2017-18	31,158	22,851	73.3%	9,044

College and Career Readiness

The most recent data for ['2019-20 College-Going Rate for California High School Students'](#) demonstrate the achievement and opportunity gap's impact on Black/African American students in the State. The results for racial and ethnic subgroups show Asian (85.1 percent), Filipino (70.9 percent), and white (68.8 percent) students all have significantly higher college-going rates than Black (53 percent), Hispanic (55.2 percent) and American Indian or Alaska Native (47.4 percent) students. The rate is slightly lower for socioeconomically disadvantaged African American students (50.2 percent). The college-going rate also varies in counties where schools and districts have histories of student achievement, demonstrated by test scores and graduation rates for Black students that either fail to reach, meet or exceed statewide averages.

Student Engagement

Recent data shows that 79 percent of White female teachers make up the educator workforce, a figure that has been steady for decades. In contrast, Black, Asian, and Hispanic women are underrepresented in the teaching workforce. Yet, recently there has been a slight increase in Hispanic teachers ([NCES](#)). Many children of color are in classrooms with teachers who do not reflect their identities and, therefore, only sometimes see themselves reflected in the school. There is a disproportion between Black/African American students and Black/African American teachers in the California educational system, according to the most recent data on the ethnic distribution of public school students. In 2018-19, only 3.9 percent of public school teachers were Black. Yet, Black students make up just over 5.4 percent of students attending public schools ([CDE](#)). There are opportunities for public schools and educators to do better for Black students, including improving the representation of Black teachers and leaders and supporting all involved in schools to reach African American learners successfully.

There are many ways to academically, socially, and culturally engage African American students in primary and secondary education. Examining the relationship between the student and the environment is the cornerstone of promoting Black student engagement. To begin, consider taking into account the following objectives:

1. Raise awareness of the trauma, (i.e.stemming from racism and toxic stress), experienced by African American children and youth (Harris, [2014](#); Bichell, [2017](#); Morsy and Rothstein, [2019](#)).

2. Teach techniques and strategies to support educators in building meaningful and authentic relationships with African American children (Carter, [2008](#); Kendi, [2019](#); Adair and Sachdeva, [2021](#)).

3. Practice having honest, objective, and supportive conversations to become better advocates for African American students (Bowman, [2021](#); Nimmo, LeeKeenan & Derman-Sparks, [2021](#)).

The first objective encourages educators to learn what trauma is, how to recognize trauma in African American students, and how trauma impacts students' ability to engage in the school day fully. This does not mean that adults without appropriate credentials should diagnose students, as this would only perpetuate biases; instead, the goal is to understand that Black students living in socioeconomically underserved communities and those who are otherwise marginalized face daily challenges, which include trauma, that often goes unrecognized or undiscussed in conversations on student engagement. The second objective calls for fostering healthy and productive relationships with students, ensuring that their academic and non-academic (socio-emotional needs) are met, factors that matter when addressing dropout rates, and academic achievement and opportunities gaps (Appendix D). When school leaders, educators, and advocates coalesce to discuss paths toward academic success for African American students, broader equity issues within educational systems are unavoidable. The final objective is for adults to critically examine race, bias, racial inequity, and racism at every level in our society, for example, schools, impacting students of color (e.g., microaggression, suspensions, etc.) and utilize strategies to address them.

Academic Achievement

Guiding Questions

1. How does your district or school define student engagement? What are the key elements?
2. Are issues and perspectives of African American students and other BIPOC groups included in the definition?

Reflection Questions

3. What is the relationship between student engagement and academic performance?
4. What are the main factors that influence student engagement for African American students?
5. What policies and practices in your school or district serve to meet the needs of African American students who have become disaffected from school?

Resources

- East Harlem Tutorial Program. 'Our Guiding Principles.' https://www.ehtp.org/our-beliefs/our-guiding-principles.
- Department of Biology, San Francisco State University. Kimberly D. Tanner. 'Structure Matters: Twenty-One Teaching Strategies to Promote Student Engagement and Cultivate Classroom Equity.' https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3762997/pdf/322.pdf.
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- U.S. Department of Education. 'White House Initiative on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for Black Americans.' https://sites.ed.gov/whblackeducation/resources/.

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- Learning Forward Foundation. 'A PROMISING PATH TOWARD EQUITY RESTORATIVE CIRCLES DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS, BUILD COMMUNITY, AND BRIDGE DIFFERENCES.' https://www.morningsidecenter.org/sites/default/files/2018-10/Learning%20Forward-Promising-path-to-ward-equity%20Aug2018.pdf.
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- National Association of State Board Educators (NASBE). National Association of Engagement: NASBE Study Group on Student Engagement. https://nasbe.nyc3.digitaloceanspaces.com/2015/03/StudentEngagementStudyGroupReport_March-2015_FINAL-1.pdf.
- National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI). 'Faith-Based and Community Leaders Early Learning Toolkit.' https://sites.ed.gov/whblackeducation/files/2016/10/Revised-Early-Learning-Toolkit-NBCDI-Conference-9.30.16-1.pdf.
- Teaching Tolerance. "Social Justice Standards: A Professional Development Facilitator Guide.' https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/facilitator-guides.
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Family Engagement

Engaging families requires that leaders, teachers, and advocates partnering with Black/African American families cultivate academic success for Black children from prekindergarten through postsecondary education. Relevant data on Black/African American families and children can help inform opportunities to accomplish state-wide goals of closing opportunity gaps, reducing suspension and dropout rates, etc. Several characteristics of African American children's families influence processes of engagement, nationally, include:

- In 2020, the poverty rate[9] was the highest for Black students (28 percent) under age 18, a decrease since 2010 (39 percent) (NCES, 2022).
- In 2019, 45 percent of Black students attended high-poverty schools, the highest for all racial and ethnic public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (NCES, 2022).
- In 2022, 7 percent of African American students lived in households where their parents' education level was less than high school (NCES, 2022).
- In 2022, 33 percent of African American students under age 18 lived in households in which parents had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher compared to Asian (78 percent) and White (59 percent) households (NCES, 2022).

[9] The measure of child poverty includes all children who live in a household or are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (except a child who is the spouse of the householder).

Academic Achievement

- Black or African American, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native households lack high-speed home internet access and one in six do not have a computer, a barrier for student learning (National Urban League, 2023).

In 2014, the California Department of Education and the California Comprehensive Center (CACC) at WestEd created the 'Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts,' for leaders in school districts and county offices of education to use as they work with schools, families, and communities to plan, implement, and evaluate family engagement practices that directly impact improved student achievement. They highlight seven program dimensions that have implications for promoting family engagement among African American families and communities—**Figure 8**. 'The Family Engagement Framework Seven Program Dimensions.' In utilizing each dimension, leaders also need cultural competence and cultural humility skills to work effectively with families of Black or African descent. Examples are offered in **Figure 8**.

Though African American parents and guardians understand that being involved or visible at their children's school is important, studies have shown that in-person engagement is more complicated than involvement at home due to time, transportation issues, and work constraints for low-income families (Bridges et al., 2012). Therefore, providing African American parents and caregivers with learning activities to facilitate at home for children and opportunities to evaluate said tools/resources, in tandem with school/home communication, are beneficial

to improve work quality, student behavior, higher attendance rates, and foster better study skills and higher student academic achievement. Below are parent involvement activities associated with academic achievement for African American students, and examples to consider:

- **Standard 1: Learning at home (Interactive Homework)**
  a. Create engaging lessons tailored to Black students for the purposes of promoting academic outcomes, identity affirmation, and representation within their learning.
- **Standard 2: School/home communication (Parents visit school or attend school events)**
  a. Facilitate wellness days that specifically focus on student well-being and include a segment during Black History Month events.
- **Standard 3: Building parents strengths (Supportive and helpful parenting approach)**
  a. Offer educational resources to African American parents and caregivers (e.g., classes, workshops) that utilize holistic support systems in which academic resourcing is paired with practices that promote students' overall well-being, both academic and socio-emotional needs, creating a comprehensive support network.
- **Standard 4: Volunteering (General volunteering in the classroom or on field trips)**
  a. Coordinate supervision of African American students' family members' volunteering activities or providing of resources to support learning, creativity, innovation, and play.

Figure 8. 'The Family Engagement Framework Seven Program Dimensions' adopted program dimensions adapted from (CDE, 2016, p 6).

Program Dimension	Description
Involvement	Parents, staff, students, and community members participate in developing, implementing, and evaluating core and categorical programs.
Governance and Administration	Policies, plans, and administration of categorical programs meet statutory requirements.
Funding	Allocation and use of funds meet statutory requirements for allowable expenditures.
Standards, Assessment, and Accountability	Categorical programs meet state standards, are based on the assessed needs of program participants, and achieve the intended outcomes of the categorical program.
Staffing and Professional Development	Staff members are recruited, trained, assigned, and assisted to ensure the program's effectiveness.
Opportunity and Equal Educational Access	Participants have equitable access to all programs the local educational agency (LEA) provides, as required by law.
Teaching and Learning	Participants receive core and categorical program services that meet their assessed needs.

- **Standard 5: Decision Making (Parent involvement in developing policies and programs)**
  a. Build African American parents' and caregivers' capacity and skill sets to participate in curricular and budgetary decision-making by offering virtual or in-person trainings and providing childcare and food in the evening.
- **Standard 6: Other (District, school, teacher perception, or support of parent involvement)**
  a. Ensure tools for communicating with African American families are reproducible or adaptable and are disseminated in print or via the Internet.

The standards above come from a chart on 'Parent Involvement Activities Associated with Student Achievement,' which includes empirical studies to support each standard. However, the examples proposed are adapted to help foster achievement for African American students (CDE, 2014, p. 42).

Guiding Questions

1. How does your school or district define family engagement and parent involvement?
2. In what ways do parents/guardians of Black/African students engage with their children's education in your school or district?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between staff, teachers, and/or administrators' perceptions of family engagement and the perceptions of African American families?

Reflection Questions

4. Are there barriers impeding African American parental involvement in your school or district?
5. Are there ways African American caregivers and parents show familial involvement that is empowering? What are some of the strategies you've observed?
6. How can increasing teachers' cultural competence increase their ability to recognize diverse forms of parental engagement and create positive family–school partnerships?

Resources

- **California Association of African-American Superintendents and Administrators. 'Equity in Action.'** https://ccee-ca.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Item-10-Attachment-2-CAAASA-Report-%E2%80%93-Equity-in-Action.pdf.
- **California Department of Education. 'Family Engagement Framework: A Tool for California School Districts.'** https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/sw/t1/documents/familyengageframe1.pdf.
- **California Teacher Association (CTA). 'Families Can Help Kids Stay Engaged: Family Involvement.'** https://www.cta.org/get-involved/parents-and-community/family-involvement.
- **Families in Schools. 'Ready or Not: How California School Districts are Reimagining Parent Engagement in the Era of Local Control Funding Formula.'**

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- **State Support Network. 'Strategies for Equitable Family Engagement.'** https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Family_Engagement_Surveys.pdf.

Take Action

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Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

This section highlights culturally relevant pedagogy (and the related instructional practices of culturally responsive teaching and culturally sustaining pedagogy) as a practice of equity and effective skill-building (Appendix C). Culturally relevant pedagogy is explained, barriers to its implementation are underlined, and promising practices are presented.

What is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?

Employing culturally relevant pedagogy helps teachers bridge the identities and communities to which students belong while simultaneously meeting learning objectives and expectations in the classroom. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) acknowledges and utilizes students' cultural and historical backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences to inform the teachers' classroom and methodology. Gloria Ladson-Billings coined CRP in a 1995 article. In her proceeding book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, Ladson-Billings (1994) writes that culturally relevant pedagogy "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 17). These classroom settings can improve the lives of Black/African American students and the outcomes of all children. This approach has proven effective in teacher education programs that should prepare teachers to teach African Americans and all students of color successfully. In another book, Ladson-Billings (2001) emphasizes that students must "experience academic success; develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness in which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 143). Effective training is required for new teachers to realize these goals.

The terminology and meaning of "culturally relevant pedagogy" have evolved over the past decade and are sometimes used synonymously with culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Gonzalez, 2017) and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Each of these frameworks offers a variation on the original concept of culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching is "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant…" (p. 31). (Appendix E.) Paris (2012) wishes to expand the terminology and goals of CRT and writes, "The term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive to or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access

to dominant cultural competence" (p. 95). While the terminology differs, it is clear that there is a commitment to the wellness and achievement of Black, Indigenous, and students of color in each of these frameworks.

Multicultural awareness and knowledge foreground the fundamental principles of culturally relevant teaching. However, as the author of the book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*, Zaretta Hammond (2017) points out in an interview, the most critical facet to remember about culturally responsive, resonant, or sustaining teaching is that it "is about building the learning capacity of the individual student. There is a focus on leveraging the affective and cognitive scaffolding students bring with them." To do this, teachers must develop relationships with students that allow all students to be their authentic selves and feel a sense of belonging. A human-care approach to teaching that is culturally relevant will enable teachers to see students' identities and cultural, historical, and familial backgrounds as assets instead of detriments to learning. Therefore, the onus is on teachers to work toward a common goal and understand how to leverage students' experiences to help create an inclusive classroom and curricula that reach and empower all learners. In addition, districts should ensure that policies surrounding curriculum and pedagogy explicitly support teachers in these efforts.

Researchers emphasize that culturally relevant education is an inclusive framework to describe teachers' attempts to effectively teach diverse students and integrate multicultural content and socio-political consciousness in learning environments (Dover, 2013). For instance, teachers who employ culturally relevant pedagogy embody specific characteristics. An "inside-out" or "windows and mirrors" approach to leading is required for teachers to teach diverse students effectively. They must be conscious of their positionality. In other words, they must be aware of their identities and the unintentional biases they hold regarding race, gender, and socio-economic status, and they must recognize how these factors show up in the classroom (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Barriers to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Challenges arise in the district's and teachers' interpretation, implementation, and evaluation of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching practices, which pose barriers to successfully reaching students of color and producing positive outcomes. These can include:

- Teachers and administrators, such as principals, are not always aware of their implicit biases, which are the subconscious beliefs that individuals hold.
- Teachers and districts do not address the sociopolitical consciousness in their definition of CRP, which is vital for effectively tackling the systemic roots of racism in American schools.
- The terms "relevant" and "responsive" can easily lead to essentializing practices.

- CRP is not just about helping a student or some students; it is about transforming the system, changing how teachers relate to students, and continuous learning.
- CRP is not to be mistaken for implementing superficial classroom practices without spending time cultivating relationships and making spaces where students can express their full humanity.

Promising Practices in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: STEM Education

In 2022, A Black Education Network (ABEN) launched the ABEN Stem Initiative (ASI), a culturally-relevant STEM curriculum aimed "to immerse youth of African ancestry in a STEM ecosystem to activate and/or increase their interests in science, technology, engineering, and math fields." The program is designed for students in grades 3-5, to help foster creativity, critical thinking, and identity learning outcomes in STEM education and CRP practices for African American learners—all skills and abilities central to students' success in K-12 schools.

Theresa Y. Ribonson, Ph.D. science educator, dedicated her career to supporting African American and marginalized communities. Dr. Robinson believes that implementing CRP across content areas helps shape and prepare students to maximize their potential in STEM studies. She recently partnered with ABEN to share her expertise and help support the launch of the ABEN STEM Initiative. In a recent webinar, "How to Improve Student Learning Through Culturally Relevant Practices," on the effectiveness of STEM education in promoting non-cognitive and cognitive skills among African American learners, Robinson (2022) stressed the urgency to improve student learning by implementing CRP practices. She contends that concepts in science are developed for children through sensory experiences, observing, and interacting with the world around them, especially for K-8 students. This way, there are STEM capabilities central to the integration of CRP and mathematic and scientific skill development for all learners, which include *cognitive competencies* (e.g., knowledge of math, chemistry, and other scientific and engineering fields), *STEM skills* (e.g., complex problem solving, technology, design, and programming), *STEM abilities* (e.g., deductive and inductive reasoning, mathematical reasoning, and facility with numbers), and *non-cognitive competencies* (e.g., preferences for investigative and independent work).

Robinson also argues for the following while emphasizing the need for culturally relevant pedagogies (CRP) in science education:

1. Visual and performing arts are essential to the development of the whole child.

2. Social studies and literacy are essential pathways for STEM understanding for K-8 learners.
3. Not all students will desire nor become employed in the STEM workforce.
4. STEM cognitive skills and abilities for all learners.
5. Standards and concept development are not sacrificed when teaching using culturally relevant practices.

Robinson's multi-dimensional perspective reinforces the rationale that integrating CRP across content areas is a conduit for all learners' mathematical and scientific development in STEM education. She offers some best practices for teaching math for social justice, whether students desire to become scientists, pursue other STEM-related professions, or have completely different career paths.

Educators who teach math for social justice create mathematical tasks for students. "We are not sacrificing the content and the standards when we teach STEM in culturally relevant ways," Robinson (2002) argues. She developed questions centered on five themes for educators to use as check-points to ensure they teach math in ways that advance social justice. These include:

1. **Ownership:** How do you support productive struggle among students? How do you provide opportunities for students to pose new questions for community problems that can be addressed either partly or fully through mathematics?

2. **Culture and History:** How do you acknowledge students' funds of knowledge, histories of mathematics and communities, and cultures of students?
3. **Windows/Mirror:** What opportunities are provided so students can see themselves and others in the curriculum, or a new way of viewing the world?
4. **Living Practices:** How do you promote mathematics as something in motion?
5. **Participation/Positioning:** How do you shift the role of authority from teachers/text to students?

These questions are helpful for K-8 school administrators to leverage in supporting department chairs and performing equity audits that help sustain CRP and foster STEM capabilities among students at their respective school sites.

Dr. Robinson argues, "It is important to ensure that they [White] teachers understand who they are so they can see their students for who they are." It takes dedicated teachers who are self-aware and possess cognitive and listening skills, such as cultural humility, to implement CRP practices in the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching is crucial, but preserving learners' culture throughout is important. This way, it's worth exploring new iterations of Ladson-Billings culturally relevant pedagogy and embracing the notion that as demographics evolve, so should the frameworks and theories to unpack the subjective experiences of individuals living in a racialized society, school, and communities.

Promising Practices in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: History/Social Studies

In the article "Culturally Relevant, Purpose-Driven Learning & Teaching in a Middle School Social Studies Classroom," Milner (2014) investigates how a teacher's ability to emphasize purpose to her middle school students within an urban public school fosters culturally relevant teaching in the classroom. He argued that the teacher, who was African American, empowered her students to critically reflect on the challenges in their local community to develop a sociopolitical consciousness. He conceptualizes several culturally relevant teaching practices that shape the teacher's efforts to create conscientious students—all encapsulate the kind of purposeful teaching described in the literature on culturally relevant education. They entailed the following:

1. Building relationships with her students
2. Seeing teaching and learning as a mission and responsibility
3. Remembering race
4. Moving beyond materialism
5. Accepting and serving in multiple roles
6. Promoting self and school pride

Promising Practices in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: English Language Arts

Several bodies of research show how culturally relevant materials engage students in English language arts (Feger, 2006; Hastie, Martin, & Buchanan, 2006; Beach et al., 2015). Implementing culturally relevant pedagogy in the English Language Arts classroom can take on different forms, such as hip-hop pedagogy, where students analyze lyrics and express their voices on issues and tensions plaguing their communities (Prier, 2012; Hill & Ladson-Billings, 2009). In her study, "Hybrid Texts, Fifth Graders, Rap Music, and Writing," Christianakis (2011) explores a teacher's practice of using language, rap, and poetry to help urban fifth-grade students develop their literacy skills in the classroom. She found that as the diverse group of students from low-income families "expressed their intellectual creativity," they became increasingly engaged in the curriculum. They were more motivated to complete their work (p. 1157). When teachers recognize students' cultural backgrounds and incorporate aspects of their cultures, including linguistic identity, into their pedagogy and teaching, they enhance students' literacy experiences and increase their sociopolitical awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Guiding Questions

1. What is the goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy?
2. What should educators and leaders ask themselves when taking a culturally sustaining approach? How do educators and leaders in your district address this question?
3. What is the difference between culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy?

Reflection Questions

4. How have you incorporated CRP into teaching and/or curriculum?
5. What can educators do to move toward culturally sustaining pedagogy in your school or district?

Resources

- A Black Education Network (ABEN). 'ABEN Webinar Series Playlist.' https://www.aben4ace.org/webinars.
- BRn. Larry Ferlazzo with Django Paris. 'The Look and Feel of Culturally Responsive Instruction.' https://www.bamradio-network.com/track/the-look-and-feel-of-culturally-responsive-instruction/.
- CT.Gov. 'Ethical and Professional Dilemmas for Educators Supplemental Scenarios for Culturally Responsive Teaching.' https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/TEAM/Module_5_Participants_Guide.pdf.

- Learning for Justice. 'Introduction to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGTVjJu-RaZ8.
- Region X. Equity Assistance Center at Education Northwest. 'Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Guide to Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching All Students Equitably.' https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/resources/culturally-responsive-teaching.pdf.
- Wellesley Centers for Women . LaShawnda Lindsay, Ph.D. 'The Black Girls Create Project: A Pilot Culturally Responsive Informal STEM Learning Program.' https://www.wcwonline.org/Active-Projects/the-black-girls-create-project-a-pilot-culturally-responsive-informal-stem-learning-program.

Take Action

- Argument-Centered Education. 'Professional Reading Group Discussion Questions: These are questions for a professional reading group's discussion of *Culturally Responsive Teaching & the Brain* (Corwin, 2015), by Zaretta Hammond.' https://argumentcenterededucation.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CulturallyResponsiveTeachingtheBrainDiscQuestions17.10.21.pdf.
- nea (National Education Association). 'Black History Month Lessons & Resources Bring African-American culture & history into your curriculum.' https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/black-history-month-lessons-resources.
- Paris, Django and H. Samy Alim, Eds. (2017). *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- **Project READY: Reimagining Equity & Access for Diverse Youth. 'Module 17: Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy.'** https://ready.web.unc.edu/section-2-transforming-practice/module-17/.

- **UCLA Center for the Transformation of School. 'Beyond the Schoolhouse: Bright Spots Schools & Organizations Cultivating Excellence in Los Angeles Black Youth.'** https://transformschools.ucla.edu/research/bright-spots/.

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Appendices

Appendix A: U.S. Black and Black Immigrant Populations

U.S. Black population and **Black population**	Refers to all people who self-identify as Black in the United States. This includes those who say their race is only Black; those who say Black is one of two or more races in their background; and those who say their race is Black, or that one of their races is Black but also indicate they are of Hispanic or Latino or Black origin.
Black immigrants, the **Black immigrant population**, **Black migrants** and the **foreign-born Black population**	Refers to person who were both born outside the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories to parents neither of whom was a U.S.. citizen, and who identify their race as Black. This is inclusive of those who say Black is one of two or more races in their background (regardless of Hispanic origin) in U.S. Census Bureau surveys from 2000 and later.
U.S. born	Refers to those who are U.S. citizens at birth, namely people born in the U.S., Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and those born abroad to at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen.
U.S. foreign born, **U.S. migrants** and **U.S. immigrants**	Refers to people born outside the U.S., Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories to parents neither of who was a U.S. citizen. Unless otherwise specified, immigrant population estimates include all immigrants regardless of citizenship or legal status.
Second generation	Refers to people born in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories with at least one first-generation, or immigrant, parent.
Third generation or higher	Refers to people born in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories with both parents born in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories.
Lawful immigrant	Defined as naturalized citizens; people granted lawful permanent residence (previously known as legal permanent residence); those granted asylum; people admitted as refugees; and people admitted under a set of specific authorized temporary statuses for longer-term residence and work.
Unauthorized immigrants	Refers to all foreign-born noncitizens residing in the country who are not **lawful immigrants**. These definitions reflect standard and customary usage by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and academic researchers.
African immigrants, **African-born immigrants** and **immigrants born in African countries**	Refers to any immigrants who self-identify as Black and are from any country on the African continent, regardless of sub-region.

Appendix B: 'Willful Defiance' (Poem by Written by Patrice Hill and Denisha "Coco" Blossom)

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HE5OJdeYAewgKkUkh7wKrckD0rT2PuZozKPGs7SgMN8/edit?usp=sharing

Appendices

Appendix C: Research-based, high-quality skills for teaching African American and all students equitably

| Delpit	Ladson-Billings	Sleeter
See students' brilliance: Do not teach less content to poor, urban children but instead, teach more!	Believe that students are capable of academic success.	Hold high expectations for students' learning, regardless of how they are doing now.
Ensure that all students gain access to "basic skills"—the conventions and strategies that are essential to success in American society.	See teaching pedagogy as art—unpredictable, always in the process of becoming.	Engage students academically by building on what they know and what interests them.
Demand critical thinking, regardless of the methodology or instructional program being used.	See yourself as a member of your students' community.	Relate to students' families and communities and regard them in culturally accurate ways.
Provide the emotional ego strength to challenge racist societal views of the competence and worthiness of the children and their families.	See teaching as a way to give back to the community.	Envision students as constructive participants in a multicultural democracy.
Recognize and build on children's strengths.	Believe in a Freirean notion of "teaching as mining" or pulling knowledge out.	
Use familiar metaphors, analogies, and experiences from the children's world to connect what children already know to school knowledge.	Maintain fluid teacher/student relationships.	
Create a sense of family and caring in the service of academic achievement.	Demonstrate connectedness with all of the students.	
Monitor and assess children's needs, and then address them with a wealth of diverse strategies.	Develop a community of learners.	
Honor and respect the children's home culture.	Encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another.	
Foster a sense of children's connection to community—to something greater than themselves.	Believe knowledge is not static but meant to be shared, recycled, and constructed.	

Source: Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009

Appendix D: Feelings Wheel

Dr. Gloria Willcox developed the feeling wheel to help clients expand their vocabulary of emotion. The feelings wheel helps people describe and identify their emotions more accurately.

Instructions:

1. Introduce the 'Feelings Wheel' visual and concept to students
2. Have the student describe the situation, person, or incident impacting their emotional well-being.
3. Be an active listener and allow the student to talk freely without interrupting.
4. Ask the student to add an X to all words that apply to their feelings.
5. Review each word and explain the power of feelings and emotions historically used as a catalyst for productivity and empowerment.
6. Help them brainstorm ways to use their power to revisit the situation, person, or incident effectively.

Reference: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/036215378201200411
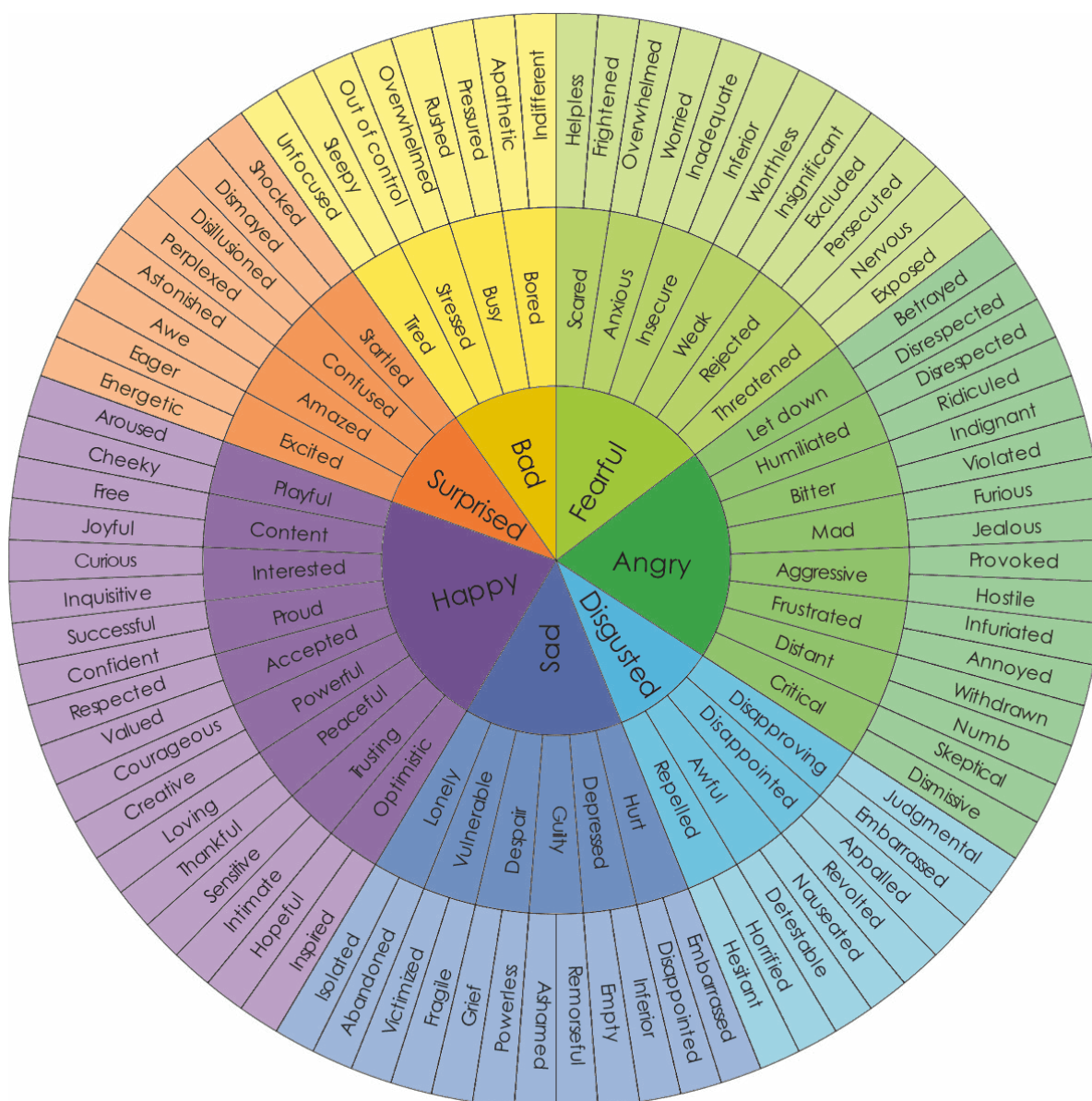
Appendices

Appendix E: Tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogies and Similar Frameworks

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1anKktMhUzbjuN0iT8_ON2mNQnXE2nLL3OBu1pw406hs/edit

Appendix F: Additional Culturally Relevant Best Practices By Subject

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dfoBGarBsC0URcmxNiWyEyAu65rYqAZv4Xfmilpb-m8/edit

Acknowledgements

For Additional Resources and Tools, on the Below Listed Sections, Visit the *Ways 2 Equity Playbook*:

African American Students

Students with Disabilities

English Learners

Building an Equity Team

Developing an Equity Communication Plan

Implicit Bias and Cultivating Equity Mindedness

Using Data to Inform and Drive Equity Work

Academic Achievement: The Opportunity Gap

Student Engagement

Family Engagement

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