

ACCESS DENIED:

2009 API Rankings Reveal Unequal Access to California's Best Schools



The Education Trust–West

California's newest statewide rankings reveal all-too familiar achievement gaps.

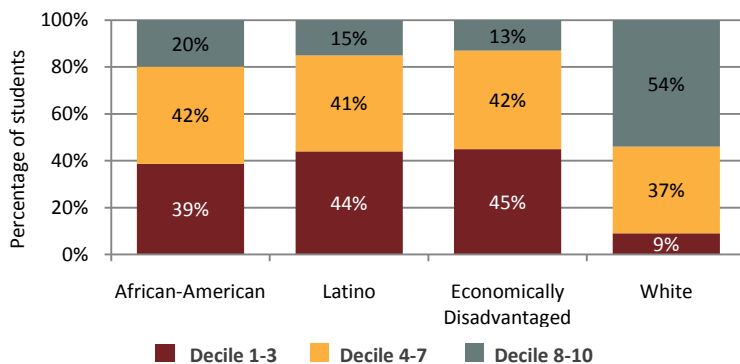
The state's 2009 Base Annual Performance Index (API) data and statewide rankings reveal that race and class are stubbornly linked to educational opportunity, and that systemic inequity is pervasive in California's schools. Our state leaders must take action to close these gaps and ensure all students have access to a high-quality education.

HIGH-NEED STUDENTS ARE CONCENTRATED IN THE STATE'S LOWEST PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Using API scores, California provides a statewide rank for every school on a scale from 1-10, whereby schools in the 10th decile (top 10 percent) are the highest achieving, and schools in the first decile are the lowest achieving.

The 2009 statewide rankings indicate that students of color and low-income students are overwhelmingly concentrated in the lowest-achieving schools:

PERCENTAGE OF SUBGROUPS ATTENDING DECILES 1-3, 4-7, AND 8-10 SCHOOLS



- 39 percent of African-American students attend the state's bottom 30 percent of schools. 44 percent of Latinos and 45 percent of economically disadvantaged students are concentrated in the bottom 30 percent of schools.
- Only 20 percent of African-American, 15 percent of Latino, and 13 percent of economically disadvantaged students have access to the top 30 percent of schools
- By contrast, 54 percent of white students attend the top 30 percent of schools and only 9 percent attend the bottom 30 percent schools.
- An African-American student is six times more likely to attend one of the state's lowest performing schools than a white student; Latino and economically disadvantaged students are almost four times more likely to attend one of the state's lowest performing schools than a white student.

In addition, students of color and low-income students are significantly overrepresented in the lowest-performing schools:

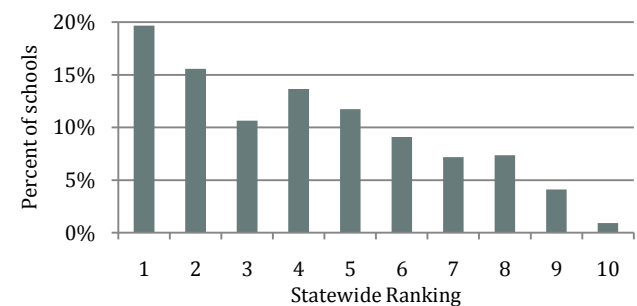
- While Latino students represent 49 percent of the state's K-12 population, they represent 74 percent of the population in decile 1-3 schools.
- Economically disadvantaged students represent 54 percent of California's school-age population, but they make up 83 percent of students in decile 1-3 schools.

SCHOOLS SERVING STUDENTS OF COLOR AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY LOWER ACHIEVING

When we look at schools with significant numbers of African-American, Latino, white, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, the performance distribution is shockingly unequal.

In schools where African-American students constitute a significant subgroup,ⁱ only 10 schools (1 percent) are in the top decile, and nearly half are in the lowest thirty percent.

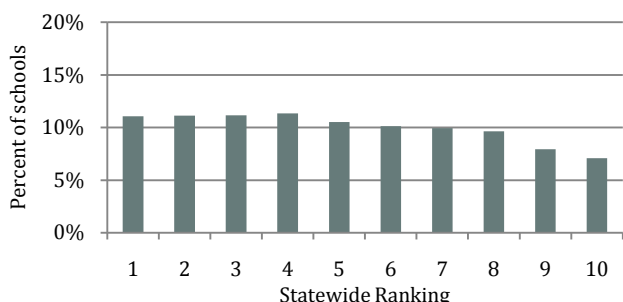
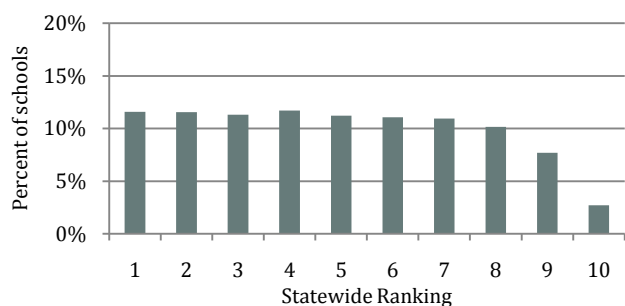
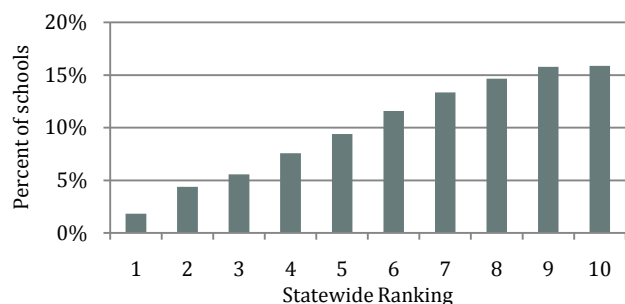
SCHOOLS WITH A SIGNIFICANT AFRICAN-AMERICAN SUBGROUP (N = 1098)



Because Latino and economically disadvantaged students comprise a greater share of California's population and are distributed more evenly across schools, the trend line for those subgroups is smoother. Nevertheless, a pronounced negative trend is evident.

The same is true for schools serving significant numbers of economically disadvantaged students. Only 10 percent of these schools are ranked in the top two deciles (9 and 10).

In contrast, only two percent of schools serving significant numbers of white students are ranked in the lowest decile. In fact, there are more schools in decile 10 than in deciles 1, 2, and 3 combined.

SCHOOLS WITH A SIGNIFICANT LATINO SUBGROUP (N = 6680)**SCHOOLS WITH A SIGNIFICANT ECONOMICALLY-DISADVANTAGED SUBGROUP (N = 6839)****SCHOOLS WITH A SIGNIFICANT WHITE SUBGROUP (N = 4600)****WHAT EXPLAINS THESE UNEQUAL OUTCOMES?**

Data from the earliest grades reveals that students in poverty enter school at a disadvantage. Many of these students are English language learners and students of color who have had fewer opportunities and resources, even before stepping foot in school. We know that great schools can close these gaps, putting all students on a path toward college and career readiness and success. But rather than rushing vital resources to students who need them the most, California continues to deny its highest-need students adequate and equal resources, such as high-quality facilities and college preparatory course offerings. Further, these students are disproportionately taught by

inexperienced and out-of-field teachers.ⁱⁱ The schools they attend are often plagued by high teacher turnover, a culture of low-expectations, and years of dismal performance.

Instead of blaming the students, blame must be placed on a broken system that fails to provide equitable access to high-quality education and promotes the replication of the societal status quo.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY

Although small in number, there are decile 8-10 schools serving large numbers of students in poverty and students of color. These schools, and an abundance of research, provide evidence that *all* students are capable of high levels of academic achievement, regardless of background. All students can excel when given access to:

- **Great Teachers and Leaders.** Research tells us that the most important factors in improving student achievement are great teachers and effective leaders. All students must have equitable access to teachers and leaders with a proven track record of success.
- **Rigorous Curriculum, High Expectations and Targeted Support.** We know that students who are taught at high levels can achieve at high levels. All students must have access to rigorous college-preparatory curriculum, effective instruction, and targeted supports. High expectations are the basis for success in school, college and careers.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO DISRUPT PATTERNS OF INEQUITY?

It is possible to offer every California student a high-quality education. But we must first acknowledge the pervasive inequity in California's schools and demand that our state's policymakers and education leaders address these inequities by taking courageous action. Actions should include:

- ✓ Implement policies to identify, recruit and retain highly-effective teachers and principals. Ensure the high-quality teachers and leaders are equitably distributed. Make it easier for principals and administrators to remove ineffective teachers.
- ✓ Ensure that high-need students have access to the supports and interventions they need from the earliest grades, including universal preschool, research-based reading and math interventions, additional learning time, effective Response to Intervention Systems (RTI), and data-driven instruction. Elementary and middle school students must receive the rigorous curriculum and effective instruction needed to reach and exceed grade-level standards. At the high school level, all students must have access to college- and career-ready coursework.
- ✓ Provide additional resources to the state's lowest performing schools in exchange for greater accountability. Ensure that these schools have the flexibility needed to aggressively turn around performance. This includes offering principals the freedom to select teachers and retain their most effective staff when budget cuts require layoffs. Close schools that are chronically underperforming.

i California defines a subgroup as "numerically significant" if there are at least 100 students with valid test scores, or if the subgroup constitutes 15 percent of the school's tested enrollment (> 50 students). Only schools with current 2009 statewide rankings were included in these analyses.

ii The Status of the Teaching Profession (2009): The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, <http://www.cftl.org/documents/2009/TCFSummaryFact09.pdf>.