



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

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



FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

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

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

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

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

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

- Create and expand school district options like magnet schools, so that parents have more choices regarding where they send their children to school. These options should be made available, in particular, to students who would otherwise be assigned to low-performing or intensely segregated neighborhood schools.
- Through countywide programs and regional magnet schools, offer families the option to attend high-performing public schools outside of their districts. As the UCLA Civil Rights Project points out, most segregation is among school districts, not within them. If we make it possible for students to voluntarily cross district lines, families will have more options and our schools may have more diversity.⁴¹

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

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

5. Address school climate issues through policy change.

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

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

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



FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT AND HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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