In 2015, The Education Trust–West launched the Black Minds Matter campaign to galvanize Californians around the need to do significantly more to live up to their progressive values, reverse racial inequities in policy, and honor Black students’ civil right to education. As part of the campaign, Ed Trust–West released a report that laid bare the facts: California does too little to support Black student success.

California is home to the 5th largest Black population in the United States: 2.8 million Black people. Of those, approximately half a million are children under the age of 18, many of whom are enrolled in California’s early learning and K-12 public school systems. Over 157,000 Black students attend California public colleges and universities.

Since the original release of Black Minds Matter, the state has made some progress in living up to its espoused commitments to Black students and families. However, progress is too slow. Institutions continue to limit Black students’ access to opportunities and structural supports that are crucial for success in many early learning settings, K-12 school districts, and higher education systems.

Data continue to show that Black families and communities value education and that structural racism impedes Black students’ success in California. Ed Trust–West urges local and state leaders and fellow advocates to use this updated fact sheet as a wake up call to do much more to support California’s Black students. Our Policy Agenda for Accelerating Racial Equity in California Education Systems in 2022 is an important starting place to understand the necessary statewide policy changes that Black students and communities deserve from education systems and leaders.
**EARLY LEARNING:**

Access to learning before kindergarten has wide-ranging positive effects. Black children who have access to early learning opportunities are more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and earn higher incomes.

There are roughly 25,670 Black four-year-olds in California.*

Only 16% of Black four-year-olds are enrolled in California Transitional Kindergarten (TK) classrooms.**

This means that districts serving the highest concentrations of Black students are not adequately enrolling them in TK programs. To achieve universal access, school districts would need to increase Black enrollment in TK programs by 6 times.

Pay disparities disproportionately affects Black early educators.

California’s early learning and early care workforce have a wealth of racial diversity. Around 12% of family care-based providers and 5% of center-based providers in California’s early care workforce are Black.*

However, these early educators are underpaid and undervalued. Early educators with a Bachelor’s degree earn 38% less on average than TK-8 educators with Bachelor’s degrees.**

Black preschool educators earn $12.65 per hour while other racial/ethnic groups earn $14.38 per hour.***

Pay disparities disproportionately affects Black early educators.

Percent of all CA early educators living below the poverty line

- 16%

Percent of CA Black early educators living below the poverty line

- 24%

Black preschool educators earn $12.65 per hour while other racial/ethnic groups earn $14.38 per hour.***

Source(s):


While the total number of suspensions per year has decreased for Black students, they continue to be suspended at disproportionately higher rates - often for the same behaviors for which other students are less harshly punished.*

In 2019, Black students made up 5% of the student population but totaled 15% of students suspended.**

Source(s):  
Note: We cite 2018-19 suspension data here because of the variability in suspension data during the pandemic.

If Black students made up their own school district in California, they would be the second-largest district in the state, next to Los Angeles Unified.

Source(s):  

Black students who have at least one Black teacher between Kindergarten and third grade are 7% more likely to graduate from high school and 13% more likely to enroll in college.*

However, half (50%) of California schools currently don’t have a Black teacher on staff.

Source(s):  
Only 37% of Black students on the CA Healthy Kids survey report high levels of feeling happy, safe, connected, and supported at school. Discriminatory policies play into the disproportionality in school discipline and create a climate where Black students don’t feel welcomed and supported on school campuses. Black students are the least likely to report high levels of school connectedness (37%) about feeling happy, safe, connected, and supported at school when compared to all other racial/ethnic student groups on the CA Healthy Kids survey.


In 2018-19, roughly three in 10 Black students were on grade level in English, and two in 10 were on grade level in math.*

These outcomes directly result from systemic racial inequities in access to supportive, high-quality learning environments.**


While some districts have adopted the A-G courses required for UC/CSU eligibility as the default curriculum, nearly half of districts don’t require students to complete A-G courses successfully to graduate. Further, some high schools don’t even offer a full A-G course sequence.*

As a result, many Black students face challenges meeting A-G requirements, and only 43% graduate from high school eligible for a UC or CSU.**


Despite research showing that dual enrollment leads to higher college graduation rates and less student debt, California has yet to expand such programs equitably.

Only 24 of California’s community college districts have a high representation of Black students in dual enrollment programs.*

Statewide, only 16% of Black high school students are enrolled in these courses that give them early college access.**

When colleges enroll students in transfer-level courses with supportive corequisites rather than remedial courses, Black students are three times more likely to successfully complete a transfer-level course. *

As a result of the overuse of remedial community college courses, only 18% of Black, first-time college students at California Community Colleges are enrolled in math corequisite courses that keep them on track to graduate. * Only six of the 116 California community colleges have stopped enrolling students in remedial courses. **

In 2018-19, around one in three Black 12th graders (29%) in California did not submit a financial aid application. *

Approximately $550 million in federal and state aid goes unused by students in California each year. **

A lack of access to corequisite courses, and other structural barriers to higher education, impact transfer and degree completion rates.

38% of Black students complete an Associate’s degree from a California Community College in six years. The average six-year completion rate is 49%. *

48% of Black students complete a degree from California State University in six years. The average six-year completion rate is 60%. *

76% of Black students complete a degree from the University of California in six years. The average six-year completion rate is 83%. *

As a result, only 26% of Black adults have a bachelor’s degree or higher in California. **