



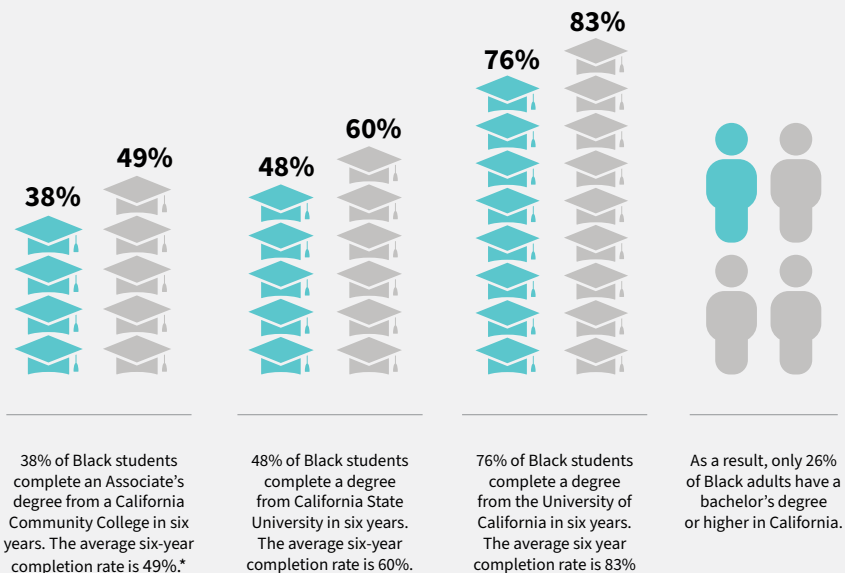
# Equity Alert



## Black Minds Matter: Establishing Black-Serving Institutions (BSIs) in California's Higher Education Landscape

California is home to the **fifth-largest population of Black people in the United States**, approximately 2.8 million individuals. However, when Black Californians seek access to our state's colleges and universities, they face undue bureaucratic and financial barriers. Furthermore, once they enroll, they experience institutions that are ineffective at serving them. This institutional underperformance is evident across all three public segments of higher education, as each falls below average in supporting Black students' attainment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Six-Year Completion Rates for Black Students in California Higher Education (2020)



Source: EdTrust-West. (2022, April 19). *Black Minds Matter: 2022 Factsheet* (p. 5). Retrieved from <https://west.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ed-trust-black-minds-matter-fact-sheet-update-final-june29.pdf>

This Equity Alert explores a legislative proposal to create a California Black-Serving Institutions (BSI) Program intended to improve how Black Californians experience and succeed in higher education. We explain the proposal, discuss the potential benefits, and highlight critical considerations to strengthen the effectiveness of the designation and improve the ways colleges and universities in our state support Black student success.

## WHAT IS SENATE BILL (SB) 1348 (BRADFORD) & WHAT WILL IT DO?

Senate Bill (SB) 1348 seeks to establish the California Black-Serving Institutions Program to designate campuses that excel at providing academic resources to Black and African American students. The bill notably establishes eligibility criteria for colleges and universities in California to qualify for inclusion in the Black-Serving Institutions Program. To be eligible, an institution must have a headcount of at least 1,500 Black and African American students or meet a 10% Black student body enrollment threshold. If selected, the BSI designation would be valid for five academic years with the option for renewal with evidence of satisfactory progress in supporting Black student success. See Table 1 below for an initial estimate of the number of institutions that would be eligible for the program.



**Table 1: Eligible Public Institutions Based on Enrollment Criteria (Fall 2023 Enrollment)**

<b>University of California (UC)</b>	5 out of 10 UCs
<b>California State University (CSU)</b>	3 out of 23 CSUs
<b>California Community Colleges (CCC)</b>	25 out of 117 Community Colleges

**Note:** Eligibility counts include California's public 2-year and 4-year institutions. Private colleges and universities would also be eligible for the program but are not included in this analysis, as the most recent publicly available enrollment data for these institutions is from the Fall of 2022.

**Sources:** University of California. (January 19, 2024). *UC Fall Enrollment at a Glance Dashboard*. Retrieved from <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/fall-enrollment-glance>

California State University. (n.d.). *CSU Enrollment Data Dashboard*. Retrieved from [https://tableau.calstate.edu/views/SelfEnrollmentDashboard/EnrollmentSummary?iframeSizedToWindow=true&embed=y&showAppBanner=false&display\\_count=no&showVizHome=no](https://tableau.calstate.edu/views/SelfEnrollmentDashboard/EnrollmentSummary?iframeSizedToWindow=true&embed=y&showAppBanner=false&display_count=no&showVizHome=no)

California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (n.d.). *DataMart Student Headcount Summary Report*. Retrieved from <https://datamart.cccco.edu/>

The bill also outlines additional criteria that institutions must describe and confirm via an application process to be selected as a BSI. As part of the application process, eligible colleges and universities must 1) explain their institutional commitment to Black and African American student success and 2) share key data points.



### Institutional Commitment

Each applicant must demonstrate an institutional commitment by submitting:

- 1 A Student Success Plan for Black and African American students,
- 2 Certification from senior leadership affirming the campus's intention to focus on Black student success, and
- 3 An explanation of how the institution will allocate resources to support Black student success.

In addition, eligible institutions must communicate that the campus has a robust African American studies program, co-curricular learning opportunities or campus affinity centers, and outreach programs and services that demonstrate a commitment to Black student success.



### Data Collection

Each applicant must provide baseline data. Four-year college and university applicants would need to share graduation rates for all students and Black students for the three previous academic years, while community colleges would need to share the number of degree and certificate programs and transfer rates for all students and Black students for the three previous academic years. In addition, applicants must provide key performance indicators (KPIs) delineating the success of Black and African American students to be attained during the five years of the institution's BSI designation.



## WHY “SERVING” INSTITUTIONS MATTER FOR BLACK STUDENT SUCCESS

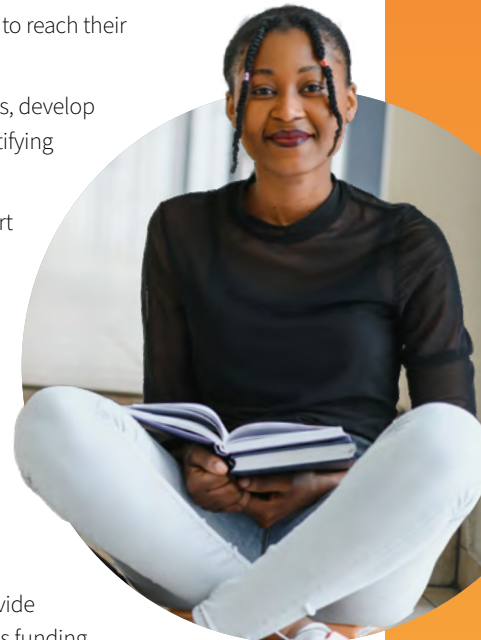
Although enrollment triggers eligibility for the proposed BSI designation, it’s important to recognize the concept of “**servingsness**” in colleges and universities that have a stated intention of serving Black students in various ways. A designation like the proposed California BSI Program could benefit students, institutions, and the state if implemented well.

- For Black students, a BSI designation could signal during the **college search process** that certain institutions in the state are welcoming to Black students and have an explicit commitment to supporting them in myriad ways to reach their academic goals, thus driving them to apply.
- For institutions, the designation provides an opportunity to convey their commitment to Black students, develop and execute their Black Student Success plan, and ideally, in the future, serve as a mechanism for identifying institutions eligible for targeted financial support from the state and/or federal government.
- Finally, the **state would benefit** from enhancing California colleges and universities’ capacity to support Black student success and increase attainment rates. This would aid in retaining and nurturing Black talent within California, which is beneficial for the economy and the workforce.

## WHAT ADVOCATES SHOULD WATCH FOR AS THE BILL MOVES THROUGH THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

We think SB 1348 is a great starting point and has the potential to improve how institutions in California serve and support Black students. As the bill progresses, advocates should closely monitor its development and urge legislators to consider the following measures to enhance equity in the future:

- **Maximizing Funding Allocation:** Currently, the bill does not allocate additional funding for campuses selected as BSIs. Because **funding matters for student success**, we hope this new designation will provide an opportunity to identify and target state and/or federal funding to these colleges and universities. This funding could support evidence-based programs and practices aimed at supporting Black students.
- **Prioritizing Evidence-Based Strategies:** While the current bill language requires that institutions establish KPIs, these indicators must be linked to strategies and practices proven effective in supporting Black student success. Evidence-based approaches may involve bringing an anti-racist perspective to course planning. This could include infusing a racial justice lens to support Black students by creating and implementing Black student success course goals, learning outcomes, courses **designed to foster a sense of belonging**, course curriculum that centers Black voices, and the creation of classroom and campus environments that are welcoming and affirming spaces for Black students.<sup>1</sup> Other strategies could entail **targeted and intentional cluster hiring of Black faculty and staff**, **auditing current policies and practices** that disproportionately harm Black student success, conducting **campus climate studies and assessments**, implementing anonymous reporting systems for racial discrimination, and developing policies and procedures to resolve and systemically address discrimination.







- **Strengthening Data Reporting & Transparency:** To maintain their BSI designation, we recommend that institutions be required to form a committee tasked with monitoring the progress of Black student outcomes and adjusting their goals, plans, and budgets accordingly. The committee should include Black students, community members, and other campus stakeholders, ensuring a comprehensive assessment of the institution's progress and the achievement of its Black student success objectives. Institutions should also be required to develop accessible and public-facing data tools and resources to track and monitor disaggregated Black student success. These tools will serve as robust accountability resources for the committee, enabling them to monitor Black students' success and progress toward goals, provide oversight, and leverage the data and the institution's budget to take action to remedy equity gaps impacting Black students.



## CONCLUSION

Introducing a BSI designation in California presents a unique opportunity for our state to demonstrate its commitment to Black communities and the success of Black students. Senator Bradford's proposal is a strong start, and advocates should collaborate to ensure the bill becomes law this year. Moreover, advocates should continue to work together in the future to improve the program and designation. This includes identifying sustained investments in BSIs, expanding community engagement, and embracing evidence-based practices and continuous improvement.

## ENDNOTES

1. We recognize the legal limitations that Proposition 209 and other laws might present to advance these recommendations. We also acknowledge that legality in the United States has often masked what is right or just.

