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WEST

# BLACK MINDS MATTER

Building Bright  
Black Futures

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The overwhelming majority of young Black Californians (88%) are optimistic about their futures and believe they can achieve their dreams (93%)—the highest rates among all racial groups. What does the state of California need to do to ensure that our educational systems support, rather than stifle, this powerful mindset of abundance and aspiration?

A decade ago, EdTrust-West created the [Black Minds Matter campaign](#) to serve as a rallying point for engagement, discussion, and action to dismantle structural racism in California's schools and colleges. Now, with the Black Minds Matter 2025 report, we highlight how the state has failed to dedicate adequate leadership and resources to provide the high-quality education Black Californians deserve. A full 70 years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), it is far past time for our leaders and institutions to choose a different path. In the face of national leadership that openly opposes the pursuit of racial justice and aims to dismantle public education, courageous action by the state on behalf of Black students and families is needed now more than ever.

Data is a powerful tool that enables us to understand the stubborn persistence of inequities baked into our educational systems and project what our children's futures might look like depending on the choices we, as a state and society, make today. The simple fact is if we allow our schools to continue neglecting Black students and families, it will take at least until 2089 for all Black students to reach grade-level standards in math and at least until 2070 for the same in reading.

The hundreds of thousands of Black students served by our public schools, colleges, and universities deserve better than for us to settle for the glacial progress that is the status quo.

In Black Minds Matter 2025, we lay out data on disparities over the past decade, document the current state of education for Black Californians, and

imagine an alternative future where policymakers and education leaders are willing to take bold action to build robust, joyful, loving schools and systems for Black students. Following is a summary of our findings and recommendations, divided between transitional kindergarten through 12th grade (TK-12) and college access and success.

## **TK-12** In TK-12, segregated opportunities continue to create unequal outcomes for Black students.

### **California's education systems create opportunity gaps by:**

- ▶ Fostering low levels of inclusion and engagement for Black students and their families.
- ▶ Failing to create affirming, joyful learning environments for Black students.
- ▶ Depriving Black students of access to Black teachers, fully prepared teachers, and teachers with the most experience.
- ▶ Operating with inadequate resources and ineffectively targeting existing funding toward improving educational quality for Black students.

### **These systemic barriers hold Black students back from achieving their aspirations by creating outcome gaps. Black students are:**

- ▶ Not supported to consistently meet grade-level standards in core subjects.
- ▶ Supported to learn less material over the course of a school year than every other student group.
- ▶ Too often pushed out of school, causing Black students to graduate from high school at the lowest rates of any racial group.

## **COLLEGE ACCESS & SUCCESS** In higher education, segregated access and supports derail students' dreams of attaining a degree.

### **California's high schools, colleges, and universities all have a role to play in supporting college access and success. High schools currently contribute to opportunity gaps for Black students by:**

- ▶ Limiting students' access to colleges and universities by supporting too few Black students to participate and succeed in college preparatory coursework.
- ▶ Neglecting to support half of all Black high school seniors to apply for financial aid.

### **And colleges and universities create additional opportunity gaps by:**

- ▶ Enrolling Black students at disproportionately low rates.
- ▶ Lacking sufficient holistic supports to meet students' basic needs and enable them to persist through degree completion.

### **These inequities in college participation, affordability, and supports contribute to outcome gaps that have long-term effects on Black Californians' educational attainment, professional prospects, earnings potential, and overall well-being, including the following:**

- ▶ Only a third of Black Californians hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and gendered gaps in completion have widened.
- ▶ Across all three of California's public higher education systems, Black Californians stop out of college at higher rates than other groups and are supported to earn their degrees at some of the lowest rates.
- ▶ Black Californians are forced to take on more college debt than any other group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS We can, and must, do better. What would it take to change the trajectory California's schools and colleges create for our Black students?

Although the data we trace over the last decade reveals sobering structural problems, positive change is well within our grasp. Change agents in communities across the state are already doing powerful work to create pathways to educational success. They provide proof that we can pave a path to a brighter future, starting with listening to and following the lead of Black students and families.

We urge local and state leaders to become change agents themselves by taking bold, visionary actions needed to break free from the current cycle of complacency and provide the high-quality education California's Black students deserve. Only then will the Golden State finally make meaningful progress toward eradicating gaps in opportunity and outcomes in our schools and colleges once and for all.

To provide a strong foundation for transformative change, we recommend California create a State Commission on Black Education Transformation charged with guiding, monitoring, and evaluating the immediate implementation of policies and practices to support Black students' success. The Commission should have the authority to allocate resources, set timelines, and ensure that state and local agencies follow through on commitments, including holding state leaders accountable for taking action to rebuild schools and colleges into settings where all Black students thrive.

### **In TK-12, we also recommend that the state:**

- ▶ Modify the state's funding formula to address racial disparities and provide abundant resources for Black students' education.
- ▶ Fully scale comprehensive community school models that create welcoming and affirming environments for Black students.
- ▶ Invest in and require schools to use proven strategies to recruit, support, and value Black teachers.

### **When it comes to college access and success, we also recommend that the state:**

- ▶ Require all high schools to make A-G their default curriculum.
- ▶ Create a universal dual enrollment policy and shift to automatic acceleration.
- ▶ Fund free college that covers the full cost of attendance.
- ▶ Enact a statewide direct admissions policy.
- ▶ Use the Black Serving Institution (BSI) designation to secure funding and raise the bar for colleges' responsibilities for Black student success.



To read the full Black Minds Matter 2025 report, access data sources, and for more advocacy resources to support Black students in California, scan the QR code.