

POLICY & POLITICS TIMELINE

Moments of progress and missed opportunities for California's Black students (2015-25)

The following timeline highlights promising policies passed over the last 10 years in California, many of which were explicitly designed to further racial justice, but have yet to create impact at full scale. It also documents turning points in the state's conversation about anti-Black racism and identifies missed opportunities to make meaningful improvements in educational quality and outcomes for Black students.

California and the nation have long used legislation and legal decisions to shape the educational opportunities afforded to Black students. In our 2015 [Black Minds Matter report](#), we traced 150 years of [policies](#) affecting Black students, from fugitive slave laws banning Black children from attending California schools in 1852, through the state's dismantling of affirmative action in the 1990s, to incremental efforts in the 2000s to begin addressing racial gaps in education.

2015

- ▶ **Black Lives Matter and the Movement for Black Lives Expand in California** | The first chapter of Black Lives Matter formed in Los Angeles (2013) to coordinate protests after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of a Black boy, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, in Florida. By 2015, after the killings of Black Americans by police, including Michael Brown, Rekia Boyd, and Eric Garner, Black Lives Matter gained momentum across the nation and in California, with major demonstrations in cities like Los Angeles, Oakland, and Sacramento demanding police accountability and calling out racial inequities in education, housing, and employment.

2016

- ▶ **Establishment of California College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP)** | Established through Assembly Bill (AB) 288, the CCAP program expands dual enrollment opportunities for students who may not already be college-bound or who are underrepresented in higher education.

2017

- ▶ **State Provides Funding for California College Promise Programs** | California allocated \$46 million in 2018 and \$85 million in 2019 in state funding to provide financial support to first-time, full-time community college students by waiving fees for eligible low-income students. Discretion afforded to community college districts around the use of these funds likely diluted the extent to which these grants narrowed racial gaps in college affordability.
- ▶ **Passage of Equitable Course Placement and Completion Legislation** | AB 705 mandated that community colleges place students directly into transfer-level courses in English and math, benefiting Black students who were disproportionately placed in remedial courses. The policy has increased access to transfer-level coursework, although enactment has been inconsistent across community college districts. It became necessary in 2022 to pass additional legislation (AB 1705) to close a loophole in the original law to strengthen implementation.

2019

- ▶ **California Cradle-to-Career Data System Act (Senate Bill 75)** | Through legislation, the state formally established a longitudinal data system to track students from early childhood through employment. Advocates for marginalized communities championed the system's creation and continue to call for data to be meaningfully disaggregated by race and easily accessible to educational decision-makers as well as students, families, and communities.
- ▶ **Passage of the CROWN Act** | In July of 2019, California became the first state in the nation to pass the CROWN (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) Act, which prohibits schools and employers from enforcing discriminatory policies that restrict natural hairstyles, including locs, braids, twists, and knots.

2020

- ▶ **COVID-19 Pandemic and Distance Learning** | Black Californians were disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, making up 7% of COVID-19 deaths in the state despite comprising 6% of the state's population. In addition to the mental and emotional toll of losing loved ones and the stress of living through a pandemic, the abrupt shift to online learning also disproportionately affected Black students, 36% of whom lacked reliable access to a computer or the internet. The "digital divide" exacerbated existing inequities, leading to increased learning loss, lower engagement, and widening opportunity and outcome gaps. Importantly, remote learning offered some Black students a welcome reprieve from the hostility they experienced in school. Black parents and communities also came together during the crisis to create safe and supportive learning spaces.
- ▶ **Black Lives Matter 2020 Protests** | Widespread protests again erupted across California as part of a national movement against police violence and systemic racism in response to the unjust murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. The movement catalyzed many racial justice-oriented conversations and actions statewide and at school districts, largely because of organizing by students, families, and community members.
- ▶ **Ethnic Studies Requirement at California State University** | CSU passed a policy requiring that all students take an Ethnic Studies course to graduate starting with the class entering in 2021, promoting a more inclusive curriculum that highlights the experiences of Black communities and other marginalized groups.
- ▶ **Failure to Pass Proposition 16** | Proposition 16 sought to repeal Proposition 209 (1996), which banned affirmative action in public employment, contracting, and education. As a result, California continued to be prohibited from considering race in university admissions or state hiring practices, limiting the state's ability to take explicit actions to address racial inequities in education that disproportionately affect Black students.
- ▶ **Reparations Task Force Created** | On September 30, 2020, the governor enacted AB 3121, establishing the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans and charged the California Department of Justice with providing administrative, technical, and legal assistance to the task force.

2021

- ▶ **AB 101 Makes Ethnic Studies a High School Graduation Requirement** | In 2021, California became the first state to require that all high school students complete a semester of Ethnic Studies, starting with the graduating class of 2029-30. This curriculum includes African American history and perspectives, promoting a more culturally responsive education.
- ▶ **Black Student Achievement Plan (BSAP) Adopted by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Board of Education** | In 2021, after widespread community calls to action, the LAUSD Board of Education adopted BSAP to address persistent achievement gaps faced by the district's 38,500 Black students. BSAP provided additional funding to identified schools to offer targeted social-emotional and academic support aimed at closing opportunity gaps. In response to conservative pushback, the district overhauled the plan in late 2024, removing the exclusive focus on Black students and changed the criteria for selecting schools for the program.

2022

- ▶ **Book Bans Targeting Black History and Antiracism Literature** | As part of a broader national movement, some California school districts saw efforts to ban or challenge books that discuss race, Black history, and antiracist movements ramp up in the early 2020s. In 2023, the state passed AB 1078 to prevent book bans in schools and protect students from this targeted call for censorship, and in 2024, the state extended these protections to public libraries.
- ▶ **AB 469 Introduces Financial Aid for All** | AB 469 mandated that school districts ensure high school students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act Application (CADAA) before graduating, increasing access to financial aid for college.

2023

- ▶ **Failure to Pass AB 2774** | Modeled after the Lowest Performing Students Block Grant and first proposed in 2018, this bill would have required that school districts target funding through the state's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) to the student groups that are "lowest performing" on state standardized tests, which as a result of systemic racism, consistently includes Black students. This policy had the potential to shift policy toward targeted interventions for Black students but was quashed over concerns that it violated Proposition 209. Instead, the governor included an "Equity Multiplier" in the LCFF formula, which targets funding to districts with high mobility rates and poverty levels.
- ▶ **Supreme Court Decision Bans Race-Conscious Affirmative Action in College Admissions** | The U.S. Supreme Court banned race-based affirmative action in college admissions in June 2023. The ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* reversed the 2003 decision that allowed colleges to consider race in admissions to promote diversity. Although California's Proposition 209 predated this legislation by nearly two decades, the national anti-affirmative action shift is worth noting for its chilling effect on race-conscious policymaking generally.
- ▶ **California Reparations Task Force Released its Final Report** | Released in June 2023, the report details comprehensive recommendations to address the lasting harms of slavery and systemic racism on Black Californians. It outlines proposals for reparative justice, including policy changes in education, housing, health care, and criminal justice, with the goal of reducing racial discrimination across the state.

2024

- ▶ **SB 1348 Designates California Black-Serving Institutions** | The first of its kind in the nation, this legislation is aimed at supporting higher education institutions that serve a significant number of Black students and have demonstrated a commitment to supporting Black students to excel. Modeled after historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), it lays the groundwork for improvement of academic support, recruitment, and retention for Black students in California's higher education systems.
- ▶ **Cayla J. v. the State of California** | In one of the largest education-related settlements in U.S. history, California committed to proposing new legislation and allocating at least \$2 billion to support students who fell behind during the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding will prioritize evidence-based programs aimed at closing achievement gaps, particularly for students from low-income Black and Latinx communities, who faced disproportionate educational challenges.



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.