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Governance Brief

African-American Students in Focus, Issue 1

Demographics and Achievement of California's African-American Students

Introduction

The Local Control Funding Formula, along with an improving state economy, have provided additional resources for California's K-12 public schools serving large numbers of low-income, English learner and foster youth students. For LCFF's strategy of equitable resources leading to improved achievement to be successful, it is crucial that district and county leaders across the state invest these funds in ways that effectively tackle achievement gaps.

Many African-American students come from comfortable homes, have families that have been afforded the opportunity to achieve educational and economic success, and live in neighborhoods and attend schools that are safe and well-resourced. However, a greater share of these students do not have such opportunities and advantages, and this is reflected in the achievement gaps between African-American students and their peers. These gaps persist when comparing African-American students to their peers across all income levels — low-income African-American students have lower achievement levels than their other low-income peers and African-American students who are not low-income have lower achievement levels than their peers who are not low-income.

A host of conditions has contributed to these gaps. African-American students have more limited access to high quality early childhood education, disproportionately attend schools where the majority of their peers are low-income, are more often taught by instructors who are less experienced or teaching outside of their credential field, and are more likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods that have fewer public resources such as parks and libraries — resources that play a key role in educational success. These conditions contribute to challenges for African-American students that their peers are less likely to face. To ensure that African-American students achieve the college and career success that is the ultimate goal of the education system, education leaders must find ways to address these challenges. This will take time and require efforts of many institutions, with the public school system playing a crucial role.

This governance brief is part of CSBA's effort to shed light on the educational needs of California's diverse student population. It is the first in a series focused on African-American students. The goal of the series is to describe challenges that must be addressed to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to achieve their potential and highlight schools, districts, and programs that are successfully addressing these challenges and closing achievement gaps — and thus serve as guideposts for broader efforts. Taking findings from a number of reports and data sources (such as the Education Trust-West's *Black Minds Matter* report), this brief focuses on the conditions of African-American students in California's K-12 public schools. A subsequent brief will focus on existing and potential strategies and considerations for how boards and state, county, and district leaders can be part of the solution.

African-American Students Are Highly Concentrated in California School Districts

Almost 400,000 African-American students attend California K-12 public schools. This is the sixth largest population of African-American students in the country — larger than the overall student population of 15 other states. While six percent of public school students in California are African American (compared to 16 percent nationally), this average masks their concentration in a limited number of school districts. More than 20 California school districts have an African-American student population that is near or above the national average. In addition, 12 California school districts have

an African-American student population that is more than one-fifth of their total enrollment (Table I).[1]

Table I: *School Districts with the Highest Percentage of African-American Students, 2014-15 School Year*

District	% African American	African-American Enrollment
Emery USD	55%	380
Inglewood USD	40%	5,447
Vallejo City USD	30%	4,468
Lancaster ESD	29%	4,399
Mojave USD	28%	747
Oakland USD	27%	12,839
Antioch USD	26%	4,768
Eastside Union ESD	25%	836
Adelanto ESD	23%	2,341
Sausalito Marin City SD	22%	116
Hawthorne SD	21%	1,843
John Swett USD	20%	343
Victor ESD	20%	2,387
Victor Valley Union HSD	19%	2,681
Compton USD	19%	4,249
Berkeley USD	19%	1,958
Pittsburg USD	18%	2,020
West Contra Costa USD	18%	5,621
Antelope Valley Union HSD	18%	4,494
Natomas USD	18%	2,397

African-American students are also concentrated in certain California counties. School districts with the greatest percentages of African-American students are principally in the largest urban areas in Northern California, including Sacramento, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Solano counties. A map showing the concentration of African-American students in each county can be found in the Education Trust-West's *Black Minds Matter* report.

Because of the concentration cited above, the majority of African-American students can be found in just a handful of California school districts. More than half of African-American students attend school in just 22 school districts and more than three-fourths in just 77 school districts. By comparison, half of all California K-12 students enroll in 75 school districts and three-fourths in 197 school districts.[2]

In terms of numbers (not percentages), California's largest urban school districts serve the greatest numbers of African-American students. These school districts are in the largest five urban centers in California: Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, San Francisco-Oakland, San Diego, Riverside-San Bernardino, and Sacramento. Although these districts might not have the highest concentration of African-American students, all of them have a proportion of African-American students that is above the state average of six percent and for 14 of the 20, this percentage is more than twice the state average (Table II).

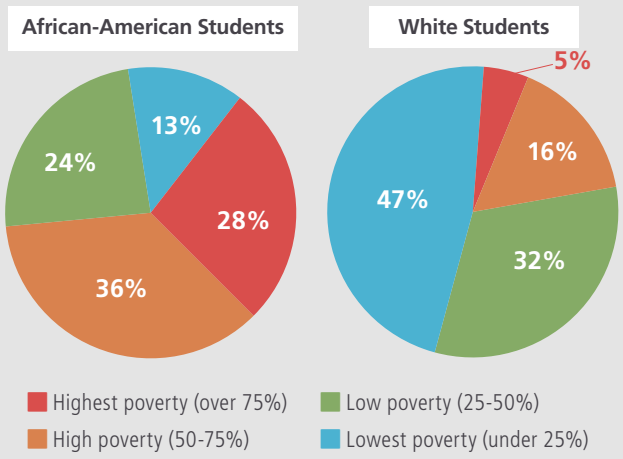
Table II: *School Districts with the Largest Enrollment of African-American Students, 2014-15 School Year*

District	African-American Enrollment	% African American
Los Angeles USD	56,863	9%
Oakland USD	12,839	27%
San Diego USD	12,085	9%
Long Beach USD	11,446	14%
Elk Grove USD	8,824	14%
Sacramento City USD	8,103	17%
San Bernardino City USD	7,113	13%
Fresno USD	6,562	9%
San Francisco USD	5,635	10%
West Contra Costa USD	5,621	18%
Inglewood USD	5,447	40%
Moreno Valley USD	5,375	16%
Antioch USD	4,768	26%
Twin Rivers USD	4,511	15%
Antelope Valley Union HSD	4,494	18%
Vallejo City USD	4,468	30%
Stockton USD	4,412	11%
Lancaster ESD	4,399	29%
Compton USD	4,249	19%
San Juan USD	3,805	8%

African-American Students Are More Likely to Attend High-Poverty, Less Diverse Schools

Not only are African-American students more likely to grow up in poverty than their white peers, they are also much more likely to attend schools with higher poverty rates. Of the 373,000 African-American students in California, 64 percent (237,000) attend schools where more than half of the students are economically disadvantaged. By comparison, only 21 percent of white students attend schools with such high levels of poverty. Looking at the schools with the highest levels of poverty in the state — those where more than three-fourths of students are economically disadvantaged — 28 percent of African-American students attend such high-poverty schools, compared to only five percent of their white peers.[3]

Tables III & IV: *Type of Schools that African-American and White Students Attend, by Concentration of Economically Disadvantaged Students*



African-American students are also more likely to attend less ethnically diverse schools. When looking at schools based on their enrollment of non-white students, nearly three out of four African-American students attend schools that have a student enrollment that is more than 75 percent non-white. By comparison, less than one in five white students attend schools that are more than 75 percent non-white.

There is often an overlap between the students who attend high-poverty and less ethnically diverse schools. For example, the vast majority of African-American students who attend high-poverty schools also attend schools that have a less diverse student population.

Students Perform Better in Socio-economically Diverse Schools

The lack of ethnic and socio-economic diversity in schools that most African-American students attend is not conducive to student success. Economically disadvantaged students in schools enrolling peers with mixed income levels do better than similar economically disadvantaged students in high-poverty schools. Research supporting socio-economic integration goes back to the 1966 Coleman Report. Coleman found that the strongest school-related predictor of student achievement was the socio-economic composition of the student body, a finding that has been replicated by many subsequent studies.[3] For example, a 2010 analysis found that students of all socio-economic statuses, races, ethnicities, and grade levels were likely to have higher mathematics performance if they attended socio-economically and racially integrated schools.[5]

Integrating lower- and higher-income students can result in improving other outcomes as well. For example, low-income students who attend more affluent schools improve their chances of attending a four-year university by 68 percent.[5] In addition, researchers report that upward mobility increases for low-income families who live in socio-economically diverse neighborhoods and that school quality is one of the contributors to this outcome.[7]

Poverty Has an Impact on Educational Outcomes

In California, nearly half (47 percent) of all children are from low-income families (making below $47,248 for a family of four with two children in 2013). A greater share, 59 percent, of African-American children are from low-income families compared to 25 percent of white children.[8] When considering the lowest-income families who are defined as living in poverty (i.e., those who have an income of less than $23,624 for a family of four), more than one in three African-American children live in poverty compared to one in 10 white children.

Extreme poverty takes its toll on families, which is reflected in the number of African-American students who are in foster care. As of July 2015, there were 13,879 African-American children in foster care, making up 22 percent of all foster care children in California.[9] While California data on the ethnicity of students experiencing homelessness is not available, there were 297,615 homeless students in California in 2014, with the percentage and number increasing over the past decade.[10] Nationwide, homeless youth are disproportionately African American — these students represent 32% of youth experiencing homelessness in the U.S.[11]

Growing up in poverty often means more limited access to resources, which affects African-American students early on. For example, only 60 percent of African-American students statewide have access to preschool programs compared to 66 percent of their white peers.[12] This disparity in access to preschool programs is magnified when considering the quality of programs. African-American families are often limited to publicly funded early education programs. Unfortunately, a national report found that California state-funded preschools met only four out of 10 preschool quality standards.[13] This disadvantage sets the stage for challenges that become more apparent as children progress through the K-12 education system.

Low-income African-American students are also more likely to live in areas of concentrated poverty, defined as areas where more than 40 percent of the population has incomes that are below the poverty threshold. Living in neighborhoods of such concentrated poverty contributes further to the disparities in access to the kind of resources that support students' learning, health, and well-being. Neighborhoods of concentrated poverty have fewer local resources, public places, libraries, grocery stores, quality health centers, and other social services, all of which are important contributors to student academic achievement.

Limited Access to Quality Instruction and Positive School Environment

The disproportionate numbers of African-American students who attend high-poverty and less diverse schools can be a contributing factor to the existing gap in access to resources. For example, the *Black Minds Matter* report cites that African-American students, in addition to being more likely to attend schools with higher poverty rates, are also more likely to attend schools with lower test scores and lower graduation rates than their white peers. The following factors that limit learning opportunities are critical in considering how to improve outcomes for African-American students:

1. **Greater Numbers of Underprepared Teachers.** Schools with the highest poverty rates have greater numbers of teachers who have less experience and preparation. While research has shown that teachers are the most important in-school contributors to student achievement, high-poverty schools experience greater rates of teacher turnover, employ more underprepared and underqualified teachers (i.e., those without full certification or who are teaching in subject areas in which they are not certified), and experience higher rates of staff absenteeism — meaning that students spend more time in classrooms with substitute teachers.

   The recent California educator equity plan highlighted data showing that in districts with a higher proportion of minority and low-income students, those students were more likely to be taught by an inexperienced (less than two years of experience), out of field, or intern teacher.[14] In addition, while the LCFF has shifted more funding toward districts that have a higher proportion of high-need students, high teacher turnover and the result in cost to hire and train new teachers is also an important factor to consider. This cost takes resources away from the classroom.

2. **More Limited Access to a Rigorous Curriculum.** Many factors contribute to an education system in which African-American students are often denied access to a rigorous curriculum. These include district policies, teacher attitudes, and the lack of options in under-resourced schools. For example, African-American students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement courses in California. During the 2011-12 school year, they made up only three percent of enrollment in AP mathematics and AP science.[15] In addition, African-American and Latino students are more likely to be held back and are less likely than their peers to be placed in courses for which they qualify and for which they have met the prerequisites. As was highlighted in CSBA's *Math Misplacement* brief, many successful students in California's K-12 schools are unnecessarily held back in mathematics despite earning good grades and test scores.[16] Research has shown this practice to disproportionately affect African- American and Latino students.

   Additional findings from the *Black Minds Matter* report highlight the lack of access to a quality curriculum, including that:

   - African-American students are three times less likely to be identified for Gifted and Talented Education (GATE).
   - Only 31 percent of African-American high school graduates complete A-G coursework, compared to 49 percent of their white peers.
   - African-American students are under-represented in rigorous courses, including Algebra 2, advanced math, calculus, chemistry, and physics.

3. **Positive School Culture and Cultural Relevance is Key.** A positive school culture and climate where students feel welcomed, valued, and safe is associated with better student outcomes. As a diverse state, California has a particular opportunity and responsibility to ensure that new textbook adoptions, standards, and teacher and principal preparation programs support cultural awareness and inclusion that values all students' backgrounds. One critical reason that this is important is that, unfortunately, multiple studies have shown that teachers hold lower expectations for students of color and low-income students.[17] These negative expectations show up in discipline statistics as well: African-American students are three times as likely to be suspended or expelled — including for the same infractions as their white peers.[18]

Persistent and Striking Achievement Gaps

The previous sections describe some of the conditions of limited opportunities in the schools and communities of many African-American students. This section addresses some of the outcomes resulting from these limited opportunities. The most recent results of the Smarter Balanced Assessments show wide achievement gaps between African-American students and their peers. Across all grades and in both English language arts/literacy and mathematics, a lower proportion of African-American students met or exceeded standards than their Latino, white and Asian peers. For example, there is a 32 percentage point gap between African-American students and their white peers in both sixth-grade mathematics and English language arts/literacy.

While proficiency rates are lower for African-American students across all grades, the 11th-grade scores are particularly noticeable. These are students nearing the end of their K-12 public education years who should be prepared for college, career, and civic life. Unfortunately, only 13 percent of African-American students met or exceeded standards in mathematics and 37 percent in English language arts/literacy. Moreover, these are the students who have persisted in school. Many others with the greatest challenges may have already dropped out.[19]

Questions for Board Members

As important decision makers in their districts and counties, board members have the responsibility to ask questions and think strategically about closing achievement gaps for all students. While this brief has focused on state-level statistics, the challenges for individual districts and counties will be different depending on their demographics, geography, history, and local community needs.

Table V: *2015 Smarter Balanced Assessment Results in Mathematics, Percentage of Students in 3rd, 6th, and 11th Grade That Meet or Exceed Standards by Ethnicity*

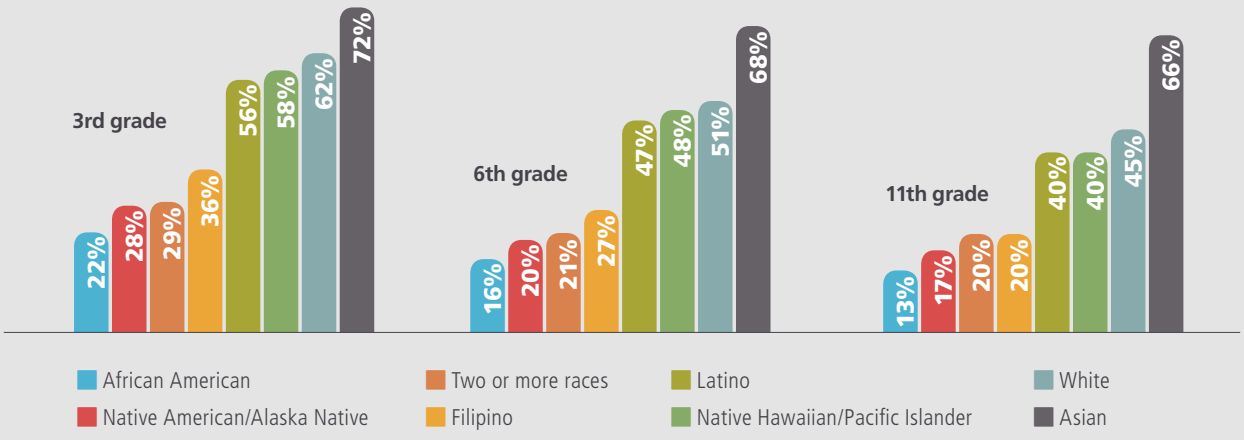
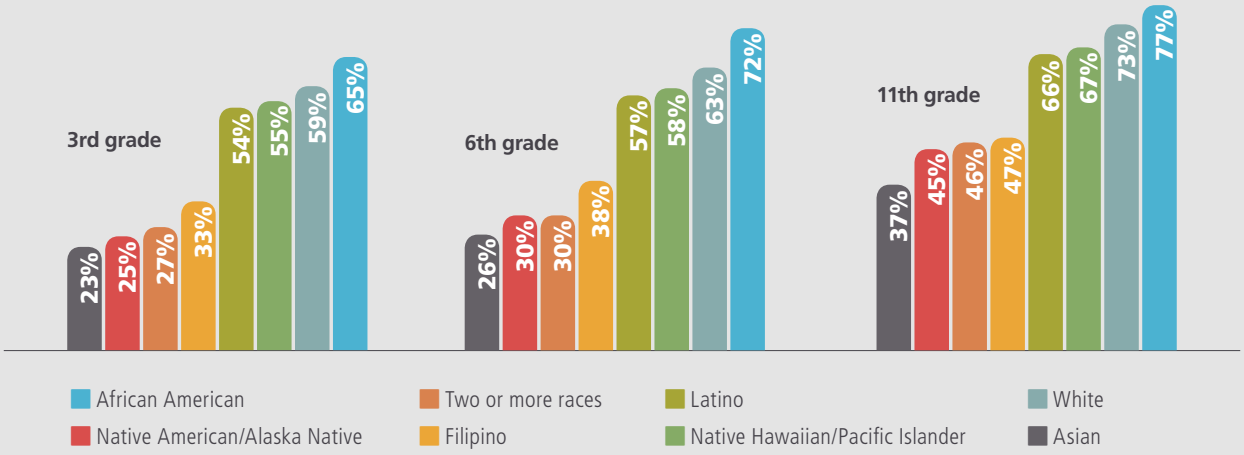


Table VI: *2015 Smarter Balanced Assessment Results in English Language Arts/Literacy, Percentage of Students in 3rd, 6th and 11th Grade that Meet or Exceed Standards by Ethnicity*



Seeking answers to the following questions can help board members better understand their local context:

1. What are the student demographics in my district or county and how do they compare to the demographics of individual schools?
2. Within individual schools, do African-American students have access to and enroll in rigorous coursework?
3. What supports are provided to help African Americans succeed in these rigorous courses?
4. What is the achievement of African-American students across the district or county and within individual schools? What is the achievement gap countywide, districtwide, and in each school?
5. What additional supports are available for students in poverty, both provided by the county office of education, the school district or through other organizations? Are there additional partnerships that can be leveraged to enhance supports?
6. Is the school environment relevant to all students based on their backgrounds and cultures? Does the course content relate to the experiences and backgrounds of African-American students (for example, does the history curriculum highlight the achievements of African Americans)? Is the district or county staff equipped to relate to students' experiences and background? Does the teaching and administrative staff reflect the diversity of the student population?
7. Does the district or county have any programs specific to African-American students? Are they effective, supported, and funded adequately?

Conclusion

The conversation about how to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to achieve their potential should continue to be a top priority for board members. This brief, while focusing on the condition of African-American students in California, is a starting point from which local and state educational leaders can gain insight to inform steps to improve student achievement. CSBA will continue to focus on how board members can best improve outcomes for California's diverse student population. To support these efforts, a second brief in this series, *African-American students in Focus, Issue 2: Closing Opportunity and Achievement Gaps for African-American Students* will focus on possible solutions and recommendations for board members and other education leaders to improve the achievement of African-American students in California.

Resources for Board Members

The Education Trust-West's *Black Minds Matter* report: http://bit.ly/1MQxhsY

CSBA's *Math Misplacement* brief: http://bit.ly/1ozgW0n

U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection: http://ocrdata.ed.gov/

UCLA Civil Rights Project: http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu

Endnotes

1 CSBA Analysis of California Department of Education, Student & School Data Files, "Enrollment by School". Downloaded on March 21, 2016 at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/#e

2 See endnote 1

3 CSBA Analysis of California Department of Education, Student & School Data Files, "Enrollment by School" and "Student Poverty-FRPM Data". Downloaded March 21, 2016 at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/#e

4 Coleman et al. (1966), "Equality of Educational Opportunity". Available at http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED012275

5 Mickelson, R.A., & Bottia, M. (2010), "Integrated Education and Mathematics Outcomes: A Synthesis of Social Science Research." North Carolina Law Review 87, 993-1089.

6 Gregory J. Palardy (2013), "High School Socioeconomic Segregation and Student Attainment", American Educational Research Journal. Available at http://bit.ly/1Vmy6MI

7 Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez (2014), "Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States". Available at http://bit.ly/1eipsN5

8 National Center for Children in Poverty, "California Demographics of Low-Income Children" and "California Demographics of Poor Children". Accessed on March 21, 2016 at http://bit.ly/1qIBbKC

9 California Child Welfare Indicators Project, "Children in Foster Care California CWS Outcomes System, October 1, 2015". Accessed on March 21, 2016 at http://bit.ly/1NuUWx5

10 Kidsdata, "Homeless Public School Students, 2014". Accessed on March 21, 2016 at http://bit.ly/1S7SrQs

11 Congressional Research Service (2013), "Runaway and Homeless Youth: Demographics and Programs". Available at http://bit.ly/1S7SzPX

12 Education Trust-West (2015), "*Black Minds Matter*: Supporting the Educational Success of Black Children in California". Available at http://bit.ly/1WziAyS

13 Steven Barnett, Megan Carolan, James Squires, Kirsty Clarke *Brown*, and Michelle Horowitz (2015), "The State of Preschool 2014: State Preschool Yearbook", National Institute for Early Education Research. Available at http://bit.ly/1WziAyS

14 California Department of Education (2015), "California State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators". Available at http://1.usa.gov/1SgvNe0

15 U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, "2011-12 Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Enrollment Estimations by Program Type". Downloaded on March 21, 2016 at http://1.usa.gov/1SAPG9s

16 CSBA Governance Brief (2015), "Math Misplacement". Available at http://bit.ly/1qpZPiM

17 Ulrich Boser, Megan Wilhelm, and Robert Hanna (2014), "The Power of Pygmalion Effect: Teachers Expectations Strongly Predict College Completion", Center for American Progress. Available at http://ampr.gs/23FWgU7

18 See endnote 12

19 CSBA Analysis of California Department of Education, CAASPP Test Results for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, "2015 California Statewide Research File". Downloaded on March 21, 2016 at http://bit.ly/1TS9ESv