



Division of Leadership, Wellness, and Student Services



RIVERSIDE COUNTY AFRICAN AMERICAN ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE

BLUEPRINT for Action

A framework for understanding and improving
academic achievement for African American students.

March 2025

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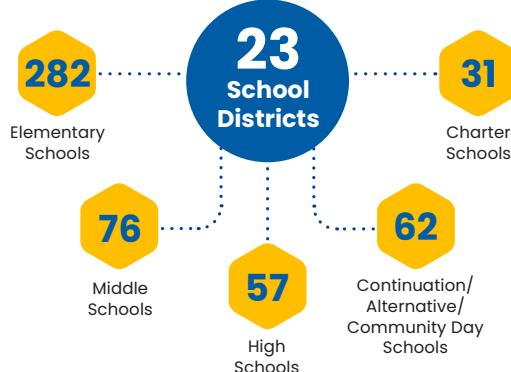
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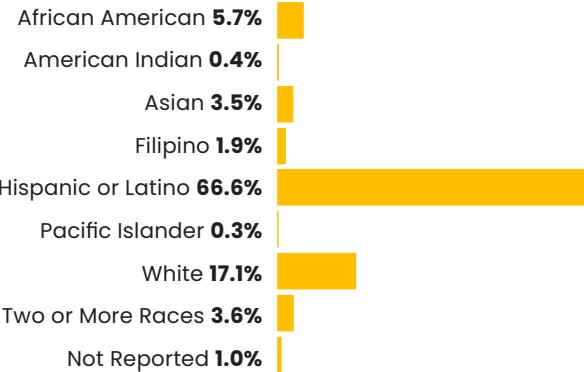
RIVERSIDE COUNTY K-12 PROFILE

Riverside County, the fourth largest county in California, comprises of 23 school districts and is home to a diverse population of over 420,000 students. Listed below is more detail about the county demographic data and student information.

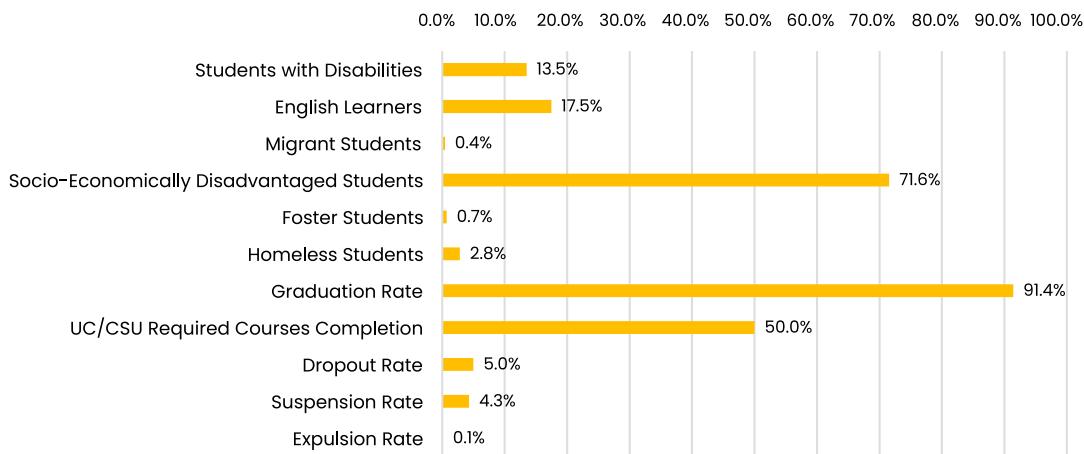
RIVERSIDE COUNTY NUMBER OF SCHOOLS



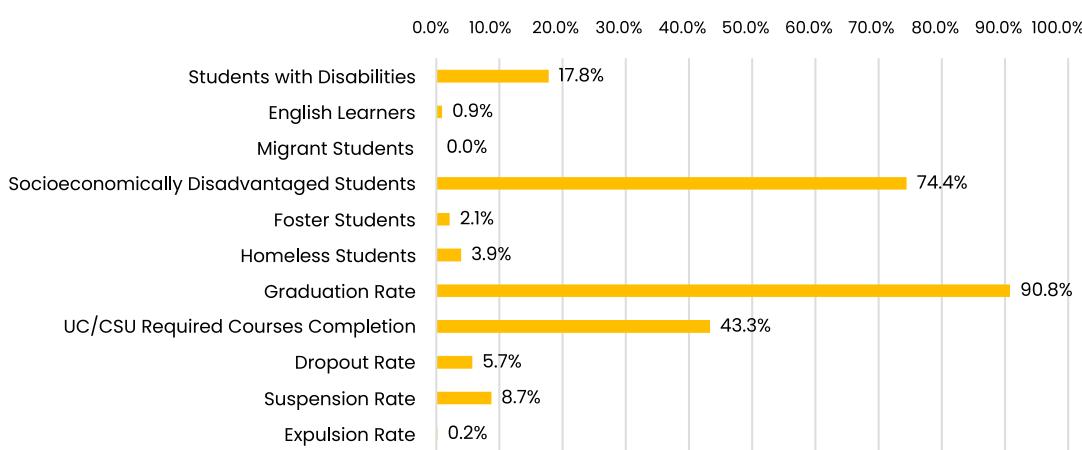
RIVERSIDE COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS



RIVERSIDE COUNTY STUDENT PROFILE



AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT PROFILE



MESSAGE From Riverside County Superintendent of Schools



Dr. Edwin Gomez
Riverside County Superintendent of Schools

If you can believe it, ten years have passed since the first group of courageous leaders came together to create the “Blueprint for Action” as part of the Riverside County African American Achievement Initiative.

As I looked through the list of those pioneers who launched this journey, I recognized many names who have become superintendents, college presidents, state assembly members, and are leading change at the highest levels at the state board of education.

Since the publishing of the current version of the “Blueprint for Action,” much has changed:

- Graduation rates for African American students have risen while dropout rates have decreased.
- Schools and districts have hired educators whose primary function is to address inequities and lead change.
- Ethnic studies courses have become a graduation requirement.
- A global pandemic has come and gone—leaving behind further evidence of the impact of inequities in our communities and schools.

Despite data that shows pockets of improvement, the opportunity gap remains for students of color, which means the topics in the “Blueprint for Action” need even more focus today.

As you look through the updates and data reports, I think you will clearly see the the value in the research, the structure, and available resources as powerful tools and levers for change in our schools and districts.

Student engagement. High quality instruction. Parent engagement and participation.

These are just as important today as they were in 2014, and I remain committed to work with our district superintendents and their leadership teams in Riverside County to stimulate accountability and urgency, while catalyzing school leaders to bring about the change that is called for in the “Blueprint.”

Thank you for refusing to allow the “Blueprint” to vanish into some document from the past and for your ongoing commitment to this work. It takes all of us to make a difference for students and families.

“

I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.

- Maya Angelou

”

OVERVIEW of the Initiative

The mission of the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) is to ensure the success of all students through extraordinary service, support, and partnerships. In order to achieve this mission, it is critical that we continue to improve educational opportunities for all students. Historically, national and state data has shown that many African American students are not performing at high levels of academic achievement and are disproportionately suspended/expelled or placed in non-College & Career Readiness tracks. The Riverside County African American Achievement

Initiative (RCAAI) was established in 2013-14 to ensure that all African American students in Riverside County achieve the educational outcomes necessary to graduate from high school well prepared for college and the workforce.

To help achieve that goal, we have convened the RCAAI Stakeholder Committee. This committee is a collaborative network comprised of representatives from school districts, higher education, faith-based communities, community organizations, and parents.



PURPOSE of the Document

Within the past 25 years, the landscape of addressing educational (in)equities in California public schools has been quite momentous. To name a few, our state revamped the school funding formula (LCFF), adopted academic standards frameworks that are more rigorous, and pivoted to a new accountability system (LCAP), each with a stated purpose of becoming more equitable. Within those same 25 years, schools/districts in our state have become more racially segregated than when *Brown v. Board* (1954) was decided (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2024), and various educational and engagement data remain seemingly intractable when comparing various racial student groups (California Department of Education, n.d.).

Most recently, our community has been impacted by a global pandemic and our K-12 educational systems continue to respond in ways that try to mitigate the generational impact it continues to have. Although some of these events or outcomes are outside our direct sphere of control, as educators & leaders in public schools, we are called to hold steadfast to our responsibility of caring for and educating a more culturally diverse generation of youth. The Riverside County African American Achievement Initiative (RCAAAI) remains committed to its purpose of understanding the changing landscape of education in our county and providing guidance to improving the educational and engagement outcomes for all Riverside County students, especially our African American students.

If we are committed to interrupting the seemingly intractable educational and engagement outcomes of African American students, then we must acknowledge and directly confront the system-made inequities within our own districts and schools. The purpose of this document is two-fold:

1. To contextualize and summarize county data as it pertains to African American students, and
2. To bring forward the voice and experiences of our African American youth so District leaders, staff, and educators may reevaluate systemic practices and processes in relation to county data and data patterns.

After analyzing multiple outcome and engagement data sources, reviewing emerging educational research, and comparing local narratives from our youth 10 years past, the RCAAAI has reestablished three focus areas. These focus areas are aligned with the state priorities, thus they should be seriously considered or explicitly addressed in the Local Control and Accountability Plans. The areas are:



- Increase student engagement and positive connections to school. (*State Priorities: Pupil Engagement, School Climate*)
- Foster safe and supportive school environments that ensure high-quality instruction for all African American students. (*State Priorities: State Standards, Pupil Achievement, School Climate*)
- Increase & maintain the percentage of parents/caretakers of African American students that participate in school programs, provide decision-making input, and actively engage on parent councils. (*State Priorities: Parental Involvement*)

In the following pages, RCAAAI humbly offers data, ideas, and practical actions that can be considered, implemented, or scrutinized by local school districts in parallel when understanding their own local contexts. The desired results continue to be to improve and sustain equitable outcomes for African American students in and out of the classroom.

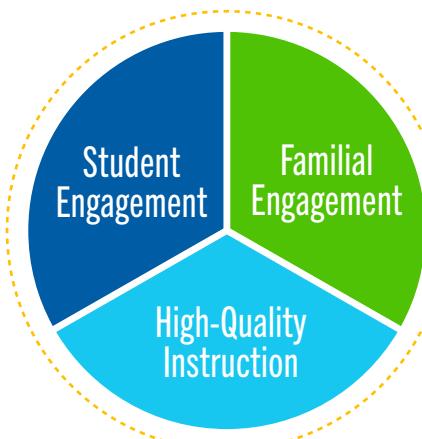
FRAMEWORK

BLUEPRINT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

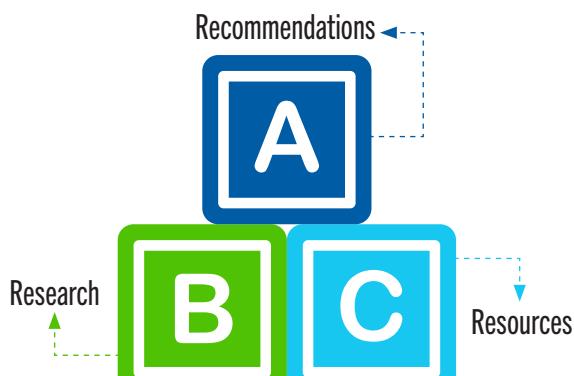


- Identified Focus Areas
- Formed Expert Teams
- Analyzed Issues
Examined Research
Provided Recommendations
Identified Resources

BLUEPRINT FOCUS AREAS



ORGANIZATION OF THE BLUEPRINT



PROCESS

The Blueprint for Action was informed by the work of the Riverside County African American Achievement Initiative and its Stakeholder Committee. Early in its work, the Stakeholder Committee identified three main focus areas that are fundamental to promoting African American student achievement. Each area is aligned with one or more of the eight state priorities of the Local Control and Accountability Plan: Basic Services, Implementation of State Standards, Familial Involvement, Pupil Achievement, Pupil Engagement, School Climate, Course Access, and Other Pupil Outcomes.

After the three main areas were identified, the Stakeholder Committee formed three expert teams aligned to each of the three focus areas. Expert teams met for monthly collaboration and discussion sessions to analyze issues specific to their focus area, examine research literature on each issue, provide research-driven recommendations and identify school and community-based resources to support the recommendations.

ORGANIZATION

This Blueprint is a compilation of the work produced by the expert teams in all three focus areas. The report is organized by the focus area. Under each focus area, we list specific issues that affect African American student achievement. For each issue, we describe selected research on the topic, provide recommendations identified through research, and offer resources to target the specific issue.

DATA

The data used in the report are from the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years and reflect the most recent data available. Quantitative data on enrollment, test scores, suspensions and expulsions, and graduation rates were obtained from DataQuest. Qualitative data were obtained from the Riverside County African American Achievement Initiative focus groups conducted in various districts in the county in 2024.

A blue-tinted photograph of two young students in a classroom. In the foreground, a girl with dark hair and a patterned top is smiling at the camera. Behind her, another student is seated at a desk, also smiling. The desk has a laptop, a keyboard, and a cup of pencils. The background shows classroom shelves.

Focus Area #1

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

LCAP Priorities: Student Engagement, School Climate

The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.

– Ethiopian Proverb

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

IMPORTANCE

As widely studied in educational research, positive school engagement is a critical factor in improving student achievement. Specifically, research continues to show that an engaging instructional environment, positive and supportive student-teacher relationships, and a positive school climate promote academic success (Gay, 2018; Milner, 2019). Students that report feeling academically capable and socially integrated in the school environment are more committed to learning, demonstrate higher academic achievement, more successful transition to adulthood, and decreased participation in negative behaviors (Wang & Fredricks, 2014). One way to think locally is to decompose your current system of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), as it pertains to your African American students, by utilizing program evaluation tools like the SWIFT FIA. These tools provide information on the conditions of learning and engagement that may be helpful to making sense of your landscape and opportunities for critical (lack of) progress. Ultimately, understanding the conditions of learning and engagement from different perspectives is essential to making the best decisions possible within a given context. In turn, these decisions will contribute to how students feel, act, and think about school, which affects students' decision-making, engagement, and opportunities.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Examining various qualitative and quantitative engagement data for African American students across Riverside County revealed multiple challenges of lower school engagement among this student group. Upon identifying the challenges, the RCAAII discussed current local-based practices and reviewed emerging research related to each of the issues. What follows are the research-based recommendations and readily available resources to target each of the challenges.

The following pages in this section will outline the research, recommendations, and resources related to increasing and sustaining student engagement and positive connections to school.



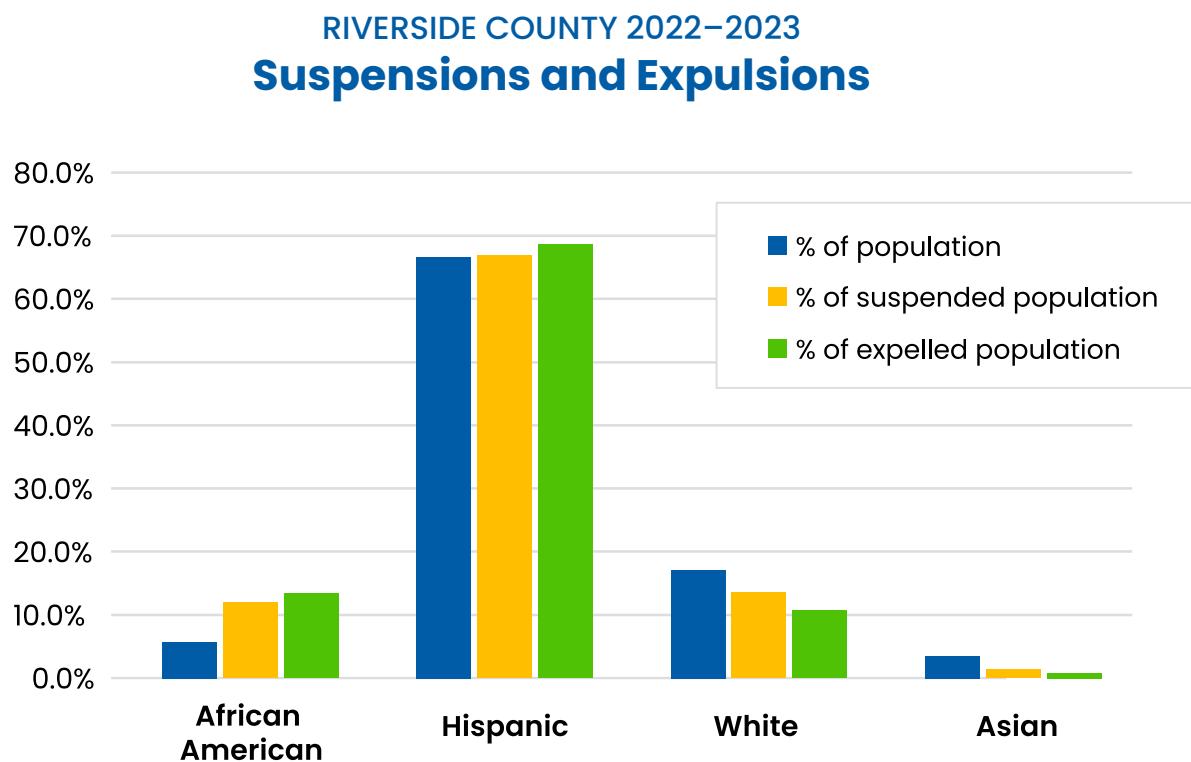
AREA #1: Rethinking School Discipline

RESEARCH & RESULTS

During the interview process with African American students, it became apparent that students do want to do well in school. They understand that their active engagement in school and positive relationships with staff is critical to their success. African American students acknowledge that bad decisions and negative behaviors are detrimental to themselves, their families, their peers, their school, and their future. In relation to that, African American students noticed that when it comes to addressing common negative behaviors among all students, variation in responsiveness and staff capacity to negatively impact African American students disproportionately. Countywide data suggests that African American students continue to receive discipline referrals and are suspended and expelled at disproportionately high rates compared to students of other ethnic groups for similar disciplinary infractions. Research shows that discipline referral disparities are not the result of behavioral differences in student groups but rather racial bias in educators and staff (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Santiago-Rosario et al., 2021). This appears to be one issue worth investigating based on the interview data collected from our African American students.

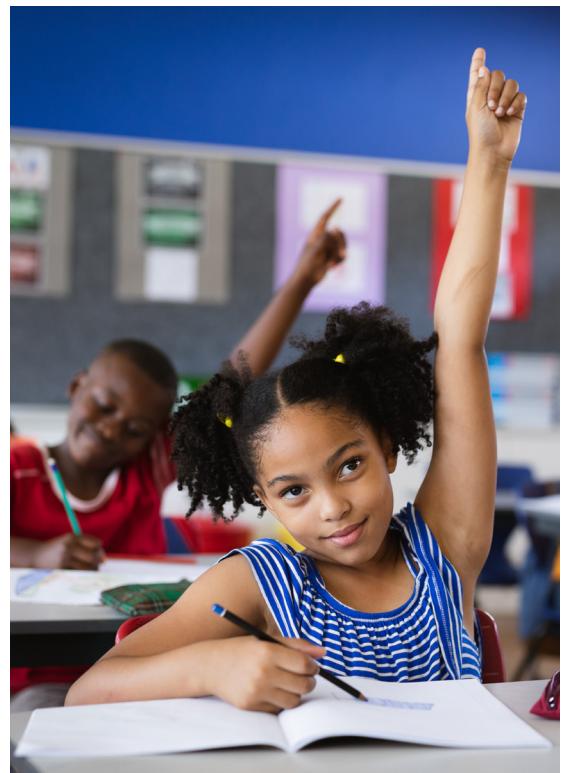
DATA

Analysis of county-wide discipline data revealed that, while accounting for 5.7% of the total enrolled student population in Riverside County, African American students accounted for 12% of suspensions and 13.4% of expulsions, revealing significant disproportionality in suspension and expulsion rates. Comparison data for Hispanic students showed that suspensions and expulsions were comparable to their overall enrollment rates and for White students the discipline and expulsion rates were improving and significantly less than their enrollment rates. However, for African American students, suspension and expulsion rates remain significantly disproportionate, where they are referred, suspended, and expelled at significantly higher rates than their enrollment rates.



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reevaluate discipline referral processes with a focus on identifying patterns and quantity of referrals among administrators, counselors, and teachers (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). In general, a handful of site staff are likely responsible for a disproportionate number of all referrals.
2. Reevaluate discipline systems from the perspective of classroom engagement (Milner, 2019) and/or culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2021). If culture is centered, then it matters how your district/school thinks about culture in so far as a Culture of Poverty (Lewis or Payne) or Poverty of Culture (Ladson-Billings), and understanding that a culture of poverty is a myth (Gorski, 2008).
3. Understand and implement emerging classroom management routines within the context of culturally responsive (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021) and/or asset-based frameworks and practices (California Department of Education, 2023).
4. Implement classroom behavior management techniques that ensure consistent use of consequences for rule violations (Culp, 2006). The focus should be placed on structuring classroom activities and differential instruction that actively engage students in the lesson content.
5. Fully implement school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in all schools.
6. Ongoing professional development on behavior management strategies aligned to culturally responsible teaching practices and trauma-informed strategies, such as Unconscious Bias and Microaggression Professional Development for all staff.
7. Focus on strategies that provide opportunities to create community and a sense of safety for students (i.e., community circles, welcoming parents/guardians, wellness centers, greeting students at the door, humanizing staff.)
8. Root cause analysis to understand the underlying reasons for the behavior to provide behavior-specific intervention and support. (i.e., empathy interviews, student panels, home visits.)
9. Engage parent(s)/caregiver(s) to support them as better advocates for their students in the educational system through workshops on discipline, special education vs. 504, academics, college/career, and attendance.
10. Evaluate district and site disciplinary practices to reduce options for exclusionary discipline and implement alternatives to suspension.
11. There is a need to educate the community, through trainings, on the value and dignity of Career Technical Education (CTE). This can be accomplished by marketing/media campaigns inclusive of student testimonies. Provide workshops for counselors, parents, and administrators, where data is analyzed to show which student groups are benefitting from CTE, and the necessary steps to achieve equity while identifying and eliminating barriers for student success. Promotion of CTE pathways at local school sites to show ALL students potential career opportunities.
12. Provide professional development that helps teachers/administrators focus on the strengths and aspirations of African American students and their families, even as they describe or talk about these students ("You cannot build up what you talk down." Trabian Shorter's, N/A).



AREA #2: Deconstruct Special Education Overrepresentation

RESEARCH & RESULTS

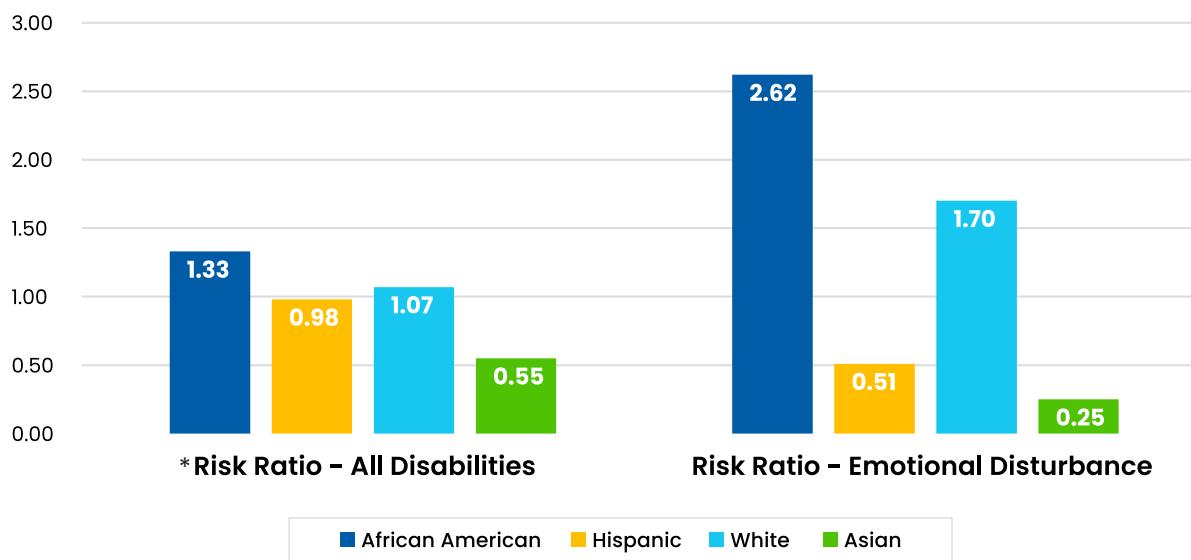
The overrepresentation of African American students in special education is shaped by systemic factors, including harsher disciplinary practices, implicit biases, and subjective perceptions of behavior. These factors often result in disproportionate placement in subjective categories like emotional disability, which depend more on interpretation than objective diagnoses (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). African American students are more likely to face exclusionary discipline, further increasing the risk of misidentification. Implicit biases also contribute, as educators may unconsciously apply racial stereotypes, leading to disproportionate referrals (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005). Addressing these disparities requires culturally responsive practices and equitable discipline systems to ensure fair assessments and support.

DATA

While examining the Riverside County data on special education placement rates for the years of 2022–2023, African American students continue to be disproportionately placed in special education programs, including emotional disturbance (ED).



RIVERSIDE COUNTY Special Education Risk Ratio by Ethnicity



* For more information on Risk Ratios, please go to: spptap.org



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Perform Root Cause Analysis with Equity Lens:** Conduct a comprehensive root cause analysis of the overidentification of African American students in special education, utilizing risk ratios and equity audits. This analysis should examine not only referral sources but also factors such as disciplinary actions, academic performance, and teacher-student interactions. Educators should receive culturally responsive teaching and bias-awareness training to address implicit biases that may influence referrals (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Additionally, assess which Tier 1 universal supports, like social-emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices, could be implemented or improved to prevent unnecessary referrals to the Student Study Team (SST) (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).
- 2. Monitor Referral and Placement Consistently:** Districts and sites will establish and regularly monitor baseline data for all ethnicities in special education, particularly in subjective disability categories. Conduct quarterly disaggregated analyses to identify referral, evaluation, and placement trends. Use standardized referral forms and processes to ensure consistency and reduce bias. Educators should rely on objective criteria when referring students to special education, supplemented by qualitative insights from school staff regarding the context of referral decisions.
- 3. Enhance Parent Involvement in Assessments:** Actively involve parents or guardians in the assessment process by gathering feedback on cultural context during evaluations. School psychologists and evaluators should receive ongoing training in culturally responsive practices to better understand African American communication styles and behaviors. In addition, culturally matched liaisons or advocates should be involved to help bridge cultural gaps and ensure that evaluations are accurate and appropriate (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Harry, 1992). This strategy will lead to a more accurate diagnosis and placement for students.
- 4. Expand Parent Education Workshops with Community Engagement:** Provide workshops to parents that explain the special education referral process, their rights, and the procedures involved. Collaborating with trusted community organizations can enhance engagement. Offer these workshops in multiple formats—in-person, virtual, or recorded sessions—and provide language translation services to increase accessibility. Empowering parents through education fosters a more collaborative approach to the referral process, leading to better student outcomes (Harry & Klinger, 2006).
- 5. Implement Strong Universal Screening and Early Intervention Systems:** Use universal screening, early intervention, and prevention strategies to address academic and behavioral issues before considering special education referrals. Schools should have access to a range of evidence-based interventions and implement real-time progress monitoring to ensure students receive timely support. Teachers should receive ongoing training in how to interpret screening data and apply interventions in culturally responsive ways, preventing unnecessary referrals to special education.

AREA #3: Seeing Students for the Greatness They Possess

RESEARCH & RESULTS

After conducting over 20 student panel interviews and synthesizing more than 20 hours of qualitative data from African American students across our county, it became apparent that many African American students do not consistently receive affirmation and recognition for themselves and their developing identities as young people and scholars. Many African American students experience situations where their individuality is essentialized and stereotyped in ways that harm their developing consciousness (in mind and body) as young people and scholars. They often experience interactions (explicit and implicit) with adults on campus that convey low expectations for their capabilities and behavior (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2015). As a result, a positive connection to school is interrupted and compromised in ways that negatively impact student motivation, engagement, and agency.

For example, in certain settings, research indicates that the best first steps are for teachers, school staff, counselors, and administrators to acknowledge, respond, and redress harmful, inequitable practices (i.e., deficit-based language, disproportionate discipline practices/outcomes) and pivot toward cultivating and sustaining equitable, asset-based strategies (Gorski & Swalwell, 2023). Student panel data suggests that African American students respond best when caring, consistent relationships are fostered by recognizing their developing, varied identities focused on high expectations and each student's unique strengths. When relationships are cultivated in this way, the interactions and personal biases of the adults change, which can positively impact student engagement.

DATA: STUDENT VOICE — “

“When kids say the “n-word”, I expect an adult to do something, but they wait for someone else to do something or ignore it. Then you realize they don’t know what to do. So, it gets normalized. That’s not good.”

“I learned more at our week HBCU trip than in all my years in school.”

“Discipline depends on who (adult) is doing it. That’s why it’s not fair.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement and monitor programs that provide staff with the techniques needed to strengthen relationships with students.
2. Partner with community, faith-based programs, and Divine 9 organizations to provide “rites of passage” and mentoring programs at schools. (Okwumabua et al., 2014; West-Olatunji et al., 2008; Anderson, 2007; Grantham, 2004).
3. Ensure that students are involved with one or more school-based clubs and/or participate in extracurricular activities (Wiggan, 2008).
4. Establish cultural events and clubs (e.g., black student unions) that celebrate and affirm the culture and contributions of African Americans throughout the school year.
5. Adopting a growth mindset and using asset-framing transforms lesson design, relationships, services, and support to better meet the needs of all students and educational partners.
6. Build rapport and a positive classroom culture.
7. Ask the students what they need, engage in active listening.
8. Embedding Black history into pre-K-12 curriculum highlights the contributions, struggles, and achievements of Black individuals across the African diaspora. This approach challenges stereotypes, fosters identity and pride, promotes cultural awareness and empathy, and builds a commitment to social justice and equality.
9. Structure professional development and teacher discussion to help support teacher’s focus on engagement and assets.
10. Empower parents.
11. Utilize the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum to support the integration of ethnic studies throughout our instructional programs to promote critical thinking and rigorous analysis of history and other content areas.

“So when we do talk during Black History Month, it just feels performative because no other culture or other successful black people come up at any other times of the year. So it makes it awkward.”

(RCOE African American Achievement Initiative student focus groups.)

RESOURCES (Focus Area #1)

For a list of local resources and organizations providing services that support the recommendations related to student engagement, please refer to the resources listed below.



Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

1. The Technical Assistance Center on PBIS: www.pbis.org
2. Teach Safe Schools: <http://www.teachsafeschools.org/>
3. Association for Positive Behavior Support: <http://www.apbs.org/>

Restorative Justice

1. Restorative Justice Practices – International Institute for Restorative Justice Practices: <http://www.iirp.edu/>

Fair and Equitable Discipline Policies

1. Discipline Policies, Successful Schools, and Racial Justice – National Education Policy Center: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/discipline-policies>
2. Exclusionary School Discipline and School Achievement for Middle and High School Students, by Race and Ethnicity | Pediatrics | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network
3. Racial Inequality in Public School Discipline for Black Students in the United States, Ballard Brief: byu.edu
4. How schools can reduce excessive discipline of their Black students: snexplores.org
5. Reducing racial disparities in school discipline: Stanford Report
6. Locked Out of the Classroom: How Implicit Bias Contributes to Disparities in School Discipline: https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/LDF_Bias_Report_WEB-2.pdf
7. Racial Inequality in Public School Discipline for Black Students in the United States: <https://ballardbrief/byu.edu/issue-briefs/racial-inequality-in-public-school-discipline-for-black-students-in-the-united-states>
8. Creating and Sustaining Discipline Policies That Support Students' Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Academic Well-Being and Success: Strategies for School and District Leaders: https://t4pacenter.ed.gov/Docs/Fact-Sheets/Supporting_Students_School_and_District_Leaders_508.pdf
9. To End Discipline Disparities Affecting Students of Color, Challenge the Status Quo: <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-to-end-discipline-disparities-affecting-students-of-color-challenge-the-status-quo/2023/02>
10. Reducing Suspensions by Improving Academic Engagement among School-age Black Males: https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/state-reports/copy3_of_dignity-disparity-and-desistance-effective-restorative-justice-strategies-to-plug-the-201cschool-to-prison-pipeline/toldson-reducing-suspension-ccrr-conf-2013.pdf

Effective Classroom and Behavior Management

1. TeachingWorks: <https://www.teachingworks.org/>
2. Are the kids really out of control?: <https://ascd.org/el/articles/are-the-kids-really-out-of-control>
3. Following through on restorative practice: <https://ascd.org/el/articles/following-through-on-restorative-practice>

Culturally-Responsive Assessment

1. A Culturally Responsive Classroom Assessment Framework. Center for Assessment: <https://www.nciea.org/blog/a-culturally-responsive-classroom-assessment-framework/>
2. Grading and feedback – Eberly Center – Carnegie Mellon University:
3. <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/diversityequityinclusion/gradingandfeedback/index.html>

Recognizing Potential of Students of Color

1. Teacher's Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS)

Regional Rites of Passage

1. National Rites of Passage Institute: <http://nropi.org/>
2. A Rites of Passage Framework: <http://js.sagamorepub.com/jpra/article/view/23>

Mentoring

1. National Mentoring Partnership: <http://www.mentoring.org/>
2. California Mentoring Partnership: <http://www.camentoringpartnership.org/>
3. An Asset Based Approach to Education: What It Is and Why It Matters:
<https://teachereducation.steinhardt.nyu.edu/an-asset-based-approach-to-education-what-it-is-and-why-it-matters/>





Focus Area #2

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION

LCAP Priorities: Basic Services, Student Achievement, Course Access, Implementation of State Standards

HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION

IMPORTANCE

All children, regardless of race or socioeconomic level, enter school eager to learn.

Schools across the county know to meet this eagerness with instructional strategies, materials, learning environments, and assessment practices that reflect students' culture, build confidence, and allow children to show what they know. However, data from student interviews strongly suggests that implementation of culturally and community - responsive strategies is fragmented, inconsistent, or lacking educator, counselor, or administrator buy-in.



The California state standards and respective curricular frameworks, emphasize rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills to assure that all students graduate high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college or career. All students should receive high-quality, culturally responsive instruction (Ladson-Billings, 2021) that is developed in local, community-responsive ways (Duncan-Andrade, 2022). These pivots are supported by the data collected from the student panel interviews and aligned with the curricular frameworks adopted by the State Board of Education. An example of this is the development and implementation of Ethnic Studies as a high school graduation requirement. While all students receive standards-aligned instruction, the educators, administrators, staff, and district leaders who serve them are nascent and/or lack the capacity to re-frame systemic practices and norms from a community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) perspective.

Several studies on successful African American students show that they perform better with materials and concepts that are directly related to their personal experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Aguirre, Mayfield-Ingram, & Martin, 2013) and are sensitive to the educators' and administrators' perceived confidence in their abilities, also known as the Pygmalion effect (Duncan-Andrade, 2022). Efforts to improve the academic outcomes of African American students should focus on changing the conditions of learning in schools, rather than trying to change the students within schools (Gorski & Swalwell, 2023; Lewis & Diamond, 2017).

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Closing the opportunity gap between African American students and their peers from other ethnic backgrounds has been a critical goal of the public school system for decades. However, we can pivot away from the framing of and *gap gazing* at (Gutierrez, 2008) the proverbial "achievement gap" as a metric of equity to acknowledging its short-sightedness and lack of historical analysis on the accumulation of compounded inequality by communities of color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As a result, we can conclude that the perceived benefits of trying to close the achievement gap are significantly outweighed by the continuing inequitable distribution & investment of institutional & educational capital (human, programs, & fiscal) for communities of color (Carter & Welner, 2013).

Research studies continue to suggest that several factors might be affecting the academic factors of African American students:

1. Curricular materials and instruction in all subject areas do not accurately and truthfully reflect the full history and contributions of African Americans to the world in an integrated and ongoing way. Furthermore, the overemphasis on African American people overcoming obstacles overshadows the inequitable conditions and (racist) systems that are placed on African American people and other communities of color for the last 400 years.
2. Instructional practices do not regularly incorporate techniques and strategies that are culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2021) and/or community-responsive (Duncan-Andrade, 2022).
3. Teachers working with African American students



and other culturally and linguistically-diverse students do not receive sufficient professional development in the areas of culturally relevant pedagogy, community cultural wealth, explicit and implicit bias, and the emerging fields and intersections of learning, neuroscience, and mental health.

4. African American students at all educational levels do not receive equitable opportunities to engage in authentic learning (Lewis & Diamond, 2017; Oakes, 2005). Percentages of African American students enrolled in state-funded preschool programs are lower than that of students of all other ethnic backgrounds. African American students enroll in and complete advanced coursework at lower rates than students of other backgrounds (Carter & Welner 2013).



AREA #1: Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Instruction

RESEARCH & RESULTS

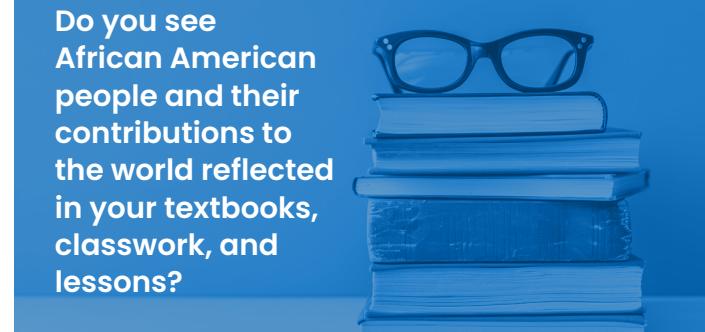
Years of research indicate that African American students have less access to high-quality curricula in subjects such as math and science, rigorous programming (e.g., Advanced Placement courses), and valuable resources (well-stocked libraries, labs, texts, etc.) that support high-quality curricula (Carter & Welner, 2013; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). In addition, African American students have inequitable access to rigorous instruction that involves a focus on higher-order cognitive processes. African American students tend to have instruction that focuses on levels 1 (recall) and 2 (skills). African American students may not have access to curriculum, learning materials, and instruction that reflect the historical contributions of African American's to the world. Let alone a curriculum where these ideas are integrated across the disciplines.

During student focus group interviews, a considerable number of students mentioned that when the schools did focus on African American people, it was mostly negative and about slavery. African American students mentioned that there was very little coverage of African American contributions taught during the school year, with the exception of Martin Luther King Jr., specifically only mentioned during Black History Month (February).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adopt and implement curricular materials, with an emphasis on literacy and writing, that reflect African American historical traditions and contributions to the fields of science, art and literature. Issues that are relevant to African American experience across time should be incorporated into lessons (Chardin, 2020).
2. Design and adopt a Board approved African American Ethnic Studies course utilizing the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum as a guide. Your district can also adopt the Advanced Placement (AP) African American History course. Implement Ethnic Studies courses, including a course in African American Ethnic Studies and/or AP African American History.
3. Utilize the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum to support the integration of ethnic studies throughout our instructional programs to promote critical thinking and rigorous analysis of history and other content areas.
4. District intentionally form a curriculum selection team that includes Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) representation.
5. Continue to offer and build educator and staff capacity around asset-based pedagogies, such as unconscious biased, trauma-informed practices, Positive Behavior, Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).
6. District implementation of culturally relevant curriculum and instruction leaders.
7. Being intentional with hiring Black, Indigenous, People of Color teachers and administrators.
8. Be BRAVE!
9. Offer African American students instruction that goes beyond Level 1 (recall and reproduction) and Level 2 (skills and concepts), emphasizing Level 3 (strategic thinking) and Level 4 (extended thinking) to provide more rigorous learning opportunities (Aungst, 2014).

Do you see
African American
people and their
contributions to
the world reflected
in your textbooks,
classwork, and
lessons?



AREA #2: Professional Development

RESEARCH & RESULTS

Due to a lack of intentionally designed professional development of administrators and teachers in the areas of culturally relevant, community-responsive, and implicit/explicit bias, many educators continue to implement policies and practices that harm African American students. For example, your district may have disparities in discipline referrals, suspension/expulsion, College-Career Readiness, A-G rates, and Special Education placement.

Literature defines culturally-responsive teaching as using culture-specific knowledge, prior knowledge, and performance styles of students from diverse backgrounds to make learning more appropriate and effective for them (Gay, 2018). Multiple research studies on the effectiveness of culturally-responsive teaching demonstrated that such teaching practices were successful at motivating and engaging students (Hammond, 2014) as well as improving students' performance in various academic disciplines (Boykin & Ellison, 2008; Lee, 2006).



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prioritize culturally responsive instruction into district-based induction programs for 1st and 2nd year teachers.
2. Provide ongoing professional development focused on Equity Literacy (Gorski & Swalwell, 2023), culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2021), community-responsiveness (Duncan-Andrade, 2022), or implicit/explicit biases.
3. Riverside County Office of Education should collaborate with institutions of higher education to advocate for the development of more preservice teacher training courses focused on culturally-responsive teaching, mental health and wellness, and unconscious bias.
4. Develop a pipeline between colleges, universities, and school districts to recruit, hire, train, and retain African American teachers/teachers of color.
5. Develop professional development monitoring routines that focus on transfer of learning, contextual application, and student performance outcomes.
6. Engage educators and staff on learning about the larger school community (cultural-centric professional development through the lens of Ethnic Studies).
7. Address legacy programs (traditional "shop classes" that do not lead to high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand jobs) using labor market data to make informed curricular/program/pathway decisions.

AREA #3: Learning Opportunity Gaps

RESEARCH & RESULTS

African American students experience learning opportunity gaps at all educational levels (ECE, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary). The opportunity gap between African American students and their white peers has been documented persistently in the research literature over the last several decades (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; NCES, 2014). Research suggests that this gap exists even before children enter school, widens by 3rd and 4th grade and persists throughout middle and high school. According to the findings presented in the Nation's Report Card, over the last 30 years, African American students have demonstrated significantly lower scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Reading and Mathematics in 4th, 8th, and 12th grades (NAEP, 2005). Examination of various quantitative data revealed that similar to the national trends reported by NAEP, African American students in Riverside County exhibited lower educational outcomes compared to students of other ethnic backgrounds in several areas: standardized test scores, college & career readiness rates, graduation rates, and A-G completion rates.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY Student Data by Ethnicity



Preschool Enrollment

African American: 5.2%
Hispanic: 50.5%
White: 4.6%
Asian: 0.9%



A-G Completion Rates

African American: 43.3%
Hispanic: 45.3%
White: 59.4%
Asian: 73%



Graduation Rates

African American: 90.8%
Hispanic: 90.5%
White: 93.1%
Asian: 95.7%



Dropout Rates

African American: 5.7%
Hispanic: 5.6%
White: 3.78%
Asian: 1.6%

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are disaggregated by grade span to offer suggestions for improving instruction for African American students at each educational level:

1. **Early Childhood** - Increase the percentage of African American students enrolled in district or county preschool programs and ensure that the programs are culturally relevant and academically appropriate.
2. **Elementary School** - Monitor to ensure African American student proficiency in literacy by 3rd or 4th grade. Implement high-quality evidence-based interventions to ensure 3rd and 4th grade proficiency in literacy.
3. **Middle School**
 - a. Ensure successful transition from middle to high school by providing comprehensive College and Career Readiness interest inventory.
 - b. Reevaluate placement practices for all "advanced" or "accelerated" or "intervention" middle school math courses that are different than grade-level math courses through a lens of classroom engagement (Milner, 2021). In addition, does your placement practice utilize multiple measures, including parent/student voice, for placement into/out of an "accelerated" or "intervention" math course in middle school?
4. **High School**
 - a. Exposure and placement in rigorous coursework beginning in 9th grade. Access, success, and support in advanced coursework; dual and concurrent enrollment support to succeed in advanced courses: advanced placement, honors classes, and dual enrollment.
 - b. Establish support and frequent monitoring of college application completion, essential testing, and financial aid to meet college and career training applications.
 - c. Create programs that provide school-to-college and school-to-career experiences utilizing community stakeholders (career training, university shadowing, mentoring and internships), CCI, Internships, Externships, and completion of CTE pathways.
 - d. Post secondary exposure to college and career, financial aid resources.
 - e. Develop a 4 to 6-year plan.
5. **Create safe spaces** for students and families (i.e. Leadership advisory for African American students and parents/caregivers).
6. **Leverage curriculum**.
 - a. Intentionality with lesson planning at all levels.
 - b. Examine the texts and materials currently in use.
7. **Professional Development**
Embed curriculum with training and strategic implementation.
8. **Problem Based Learning**
9. **Reevaluate legacy programs** (traditional "shop classes" that do not lead to high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand jobs) using labor market data to make informed curricular/program/pathway decisions.

RESOURCES (Focus Area #2)

Curriculum and Instruction

1. African American History Curriculum Guide: Grades 9 to 12. New Jersey State Library: http://www.njstatelib.org/research_library/new_jersey_resources/digital_collection/african_american_history_curriculum/
2. Aungst, G. (2014). Using Webb's depth of knowledge to increase rigor. Edutopia: <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/webbs-depth-knowledge-increase-rigor-gerald-aungst>
3. Footsteps to Freedom: Educator's Tour of the Underground Railroad: Black Voice Foundation

Books

1. Williams, M. (2001) The 10 Lenses: Your Guide to Living and Working in a Multicultural World.
2. Chartock, R. K. (2010). Strategies and Lessons for Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Primer for K-12 Teachers
3. Gay, G. (2018). Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice.
4. Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children.
5. Le, E., Menkart, D., & Okazawa-Rey, M. (2008). Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development.
6. Lee, Carol D. (2007) Culture, Literacy, and Learning: Taking Bloom in the Midst of the Whirlwind.
7. Paul, D.G. (2000). Raising Black Children Who Love Reading And Writing: A Guide From Birth Through Age 6.
8. Tatum, A. (2005). Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males.
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Focus Area #3

PARENT AND FAMILIAL ENGAGEMENT

LCAP Priorities: Parental Involvement

The idea is that even before you can build an asset-based program, you have to recognize and acknowledge the assets, strengths and aspirations of the people, that is, the students and their families, themselves.

- Trabian Shorters

PARENT AND FAMILIAL ENGAGEMENT

IMPORTANCE

Experience and research confirm that effectively engaging African American families in their children's school life and meaningful family-school partnerships are strongly associated with positive outcomes for African American students. Educators and school staff effectively partnering with African American families produces a strong network of positive support within which African American students learn and thrive. Therefore, the two-way or dual nature of family engagement is promoted as essential. Parents appreciate contributing to their children's education. Educators and school staff benefit from having the support and trust of the African American families and students they serve.

1. Engaging diverse African American families in equitable partnerships ensures that educators and school staff benefit from African American families' knowledge, expertise, perspectives, and experiences, collectively referred to as their funds of knowledge.
2. Equitable family engagement is characterized by integrating these funds of knowledge into school and classroom activities, resulting in richer learning experiences for African American students and ensuring that they receive an excellent education.

Effective family engagement also requires that African American families experience respect and inclusion as valued members of their school communities. Educators and school staff employ multiple methods to welcome African American families and foster effective engagement in all activities and aspects of school life to ensure inclusion and a sense of belonging. Schools and African American families are committed to preparing all students for success in their postsecondary educational pursuits and careers. These long-term outcomes for students are among the most critical areas for collaboration between educators, school staff, and African

American families. Working collaboratively, educators and African American families help students aspire to success and provide the support they need to excel socially, emotionally, and academically in school and beyond. Family engagement involves an intentional partnership between educators, African American families, and community members to create optimal learning experiences for students to prepare them for school, work, and adult life. The shared vision and responsibility are reflected in school policies, principles, and practices that promote family engagement. Consequently, African American family members commit to actively contributing to their children's learning and academic development, building positive relationships with the staff, and supporting the school. Years of experience and research have established that family engagement is integral to teaching and learning. The research on family engagement and effective schools highlights several elements for successful family-school partnerships.



CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Experience and research confirm that effectively engaging African American families in the school life of their children and meaningful family-school partnerships is strongly associated with positive outcomes for African American students. Educators and school staff effectively partnering with African American families produces a strong network of positive support within which African American students learn and thrive. Therefore, the two-way or dual nature of family engagement is promoted as essential. Parents appreciate being able to contribute to their children's education, and educators and school staff benefit from having the support and trust of the African American families and students they serve. Some key features of familial engagement are:

1. Engaging diverse African American families in equitable partnerships ensures that educators and school staff benefit from the knowledge, expertise, perspectives, and experiences of African American families, collectively, referred to as their funds of knowledge.
2. Equitable family engagement is characterized by integrating these funds of knowledge into school and classroom activities, resulting in richer learning experiences for African American students and ensuring that they receive an excellent education.



Effective family engagement also requires that African American families experience respect and inclusion as valued members of their school communities. To ensure inclusion and a sense of belonging, educators and school staff employ multiple methods to welcome African American families and foster effective engagement in all activities and aspects of school life.



Schools and African American families share a commitment to prepare all students for success in their postsecondary educational pursuits and their careers. These long-term outcomes for students are among the most important areas for collaboration between educators, school staff, and African American families. Working collaboratively, educators and African American families help students aspire to success and provide all of the support they need to excel socially, emotionally, and academically in school and beyond.

Family engagement involves an intentional partnership between educators, African American families, and community members to create optimal learning experiences for students to prepare them for school, work, and adult life. The shared vision and responsibility are reflected in school policies, principles, and practices that promote family engagement. Consequently, African American family members commit to actively contributing to their children's learning and academic development, building positive relationships with the staff, and supporting the school.

Years of experience and research have established that family engagement is integral to teaching and learning. The research on family engagement and effective schools highlights a number of elements for successful family-school partnerships.

AREA #1: Increasing Familial Engagement

RESEARCH & RESULTS

Parents of African American students are not as actively engaged in providing input and decision-making as parents of students from other ethnic backgrounds. Current parent engagement programs do not target parents/caregivers of African American students.

Additionally, parents of African American children report feeling alienated and not welcome on campus and indicate that these feelings prevent or discourage their school involvement.

Knowing the importance of parent involvement and the impact it has on student achievement, as well as deficit-based perceptions of African American parental school involvement, the educational partners set out to identify research and evidence-based recommendations, strategies, and resources that can help increase the involvement of parents/caregivers of African American children.



60% of Riverside County school districts have an African American Parent Advisory Committee.

RCOE Parent Engagement Centers (PEC) reports significantly **lower rates** of African American parent participation in their trainings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reach out to parents of African American students through Parent Engagement Centers.
2. Develop school and district parent advisory groups and collaborative councils for parents and caregivers of African American students. Create parent liaisons through the advisory council for African American parents/caregivers.
3. Administer surveys and conduct parent focus groups that identify parent/caregiver needs or issues. Select goals and identify the actions that will be taken to address issues identified by parents/caregivers to create safe and welcoming environments on campus and increase parent involvement.
4. Establish and provide ongoing capacity building of office staff, faculty, and administration on cultural responsiveness and cultural sensitivity.
5. Partner with faith-based and community organizations to reach and develop a positive rapport with parents and care givers of African American students.
6. Define engagement vs. parent involvement.
7. Exposure and broad communication of resources, expectations, and opportunities (i.e. Dual enrollment, CTE, AP, IB, VAPA, etc.).
8. High Expectations (i.e. Go beyond "average" or "grade level" on how to help students excel).
9. Conduct needs assessment for parenting/family needs.
10. Build capacity and understanding of how to navigate the education system (advocates, partners, collaboration).
11. Create connections (create networks) and build rapport between other families, sites, staff, and districts.
12. Adopt student (focus) groups, such as Youth Equity Stewardship (YES!) Advisory Boards.
13. Dive into data.

"Building a supportive community for students who feel isolated is essential. We want every student to feel valued, heard, and empowered to thrive."

"Implementing mentoring programs is crucial for helping students connect with their school environment and providing them with a safe space."

"Recognize the differences between school culture and community culture. Advocate for leveraging community assets and the knowledge of caregivers to build coherence and foster positive relationships."

RESOURCES (Focus Area #3)

Curriculum and Instruction

1. Footsteps to Freedom: Educator's Tour of the Underground Railroad: Black Voice Foundation
2. National Network of Partnership Schools (nnps.jhucos.com) (Promising Practices Targeting African American Parents)
3. Clarke Louque, A. R., Lindsey, R.B., Quezada, R.L., & Jew, C.L. (2019). *Equity Partnerships: A culturally proficient Guide to Family, School, and Community Engagement*. Corwin.
4. Epstein, J.L. & Sheldon, S.B. (2022) *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*. Routledge.
5. Ishimaru, A.M. (2019). *Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborations with Families and Communities*. Teachers College Press.



A large stack of books is the central focus, with many more books visible in the background on shelves. The books are of various sizes and colors, creating a dense, textured appearance. The lighting is soft, suggesting an indoor environment like a library.

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