BEYOND THE SCHOOLHOUSE: DIGGING DEEPER

COVID-19 & Reopening Schools for Black Students in Los Angeles

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
This report builds upon a 2019 analysis that explored how various educational, health, and social factors impact the academic and developmental outcomes of Black students in Los Angeles.

In this report, we focus on 14 school districts in Los Angeles County that have populations of 800 or more Black students. Collectively, these districts serve two out of three Black students in Los Angeles.

We are releasing this report at a time when all students in Los Angeles County are navigating a pandemic. We cannot ignore the profound impacts COVID-19 is having on Black students and their families. Many are experiencing financial, physical, and emotional hardships associated with job loss, lack of adequate healthcare, and social isolation from prolonged shutdowns. Given that many of the inequities discussed in this report were already pervasive prior to the pandemic, we present our findings along with a set of recommendations for reopening schools and prioritizing the academic success and well-being of Black students with $6 billion in new federal monies available to these 14 school districts.

Promising models implemented by districts and schools are offered including descriptions of features and benefits, core objectives, approaches, and practices in support of the social and emotional needs of Black students and families. Finally, we present recommendations for policymakers at all levels of government—city, county, state and federal—that can help to mitigate the disadvantages faced by Black students. While safety remains the number one priority, a more comprehensive approach will be needed to respond to the growing gaps between Black youth and many of their peers. To be clear, schools cannot be expected to do this alone. The needs of Black youth in this moment require a comprehensive and urgent response that extends beyond the schoolhouse.
UNDERLYING FACTORS

Poverty & Economic Inequality

Higher concentration of poverty
In 10 out of the 14 focus districts, more than 40% of all families in these districts live 200% or more below the federal poverty line.

Housing instability/homelessness
In 8 out of the 14 focus districts, Black students are twice as likely to experience homelessness than other student groups. In Centinela Valley Union High School District, Black students experience homelessness at three times the rate of the district overall.

Shifting Enrollment Patterns—Decline of Black families in LA County

Over the past two decades, there has been a steady decline of Black students enrolled in Los Angeles County Schools. The population of Black people in Los Angeles County has declined with many of the remaining students migrating to Antelope Valley. Districts such as Los Angeles, Inglewood, and Compton have experienced significant declines in enrollment of Black students.

IF THE 109,000 BLACK STUDENTS IN LA COUNTY WERE IN A SINGLE SCHOOL DISTRICT, IT WOULD BE THE THIRD LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA, AND THE 26TH LARGEST IN THE NATION.
KEY FINDINGS

Health and Neighborhood Conditions

Groundwater pollution
In Los Angeles and Torrance Unified school districts, Black families reside in census tracts with the highest levels of groundwater pollution, while White families in those school districts generally live in areas with the lowest levels of groundwater threats.

Air pollution
Black families tend to reside in parts of Los Angeles County with higher lead exposure rates, greater proximity to waste dump sites, higher concentrations of air pollution from surrounding oil production and in close proximity to high-density transportation arteries. These environmental factors are linked to asthma and other chronic respiratory illnesses and low birth weights.

Respiratory illnesses
The census tracts for Black people located within Los Angeles Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Antelope Valley Union High School District are in the 90th percentile or above for respiratory-related emergency room visits. For those same school districts, chronic absenteeism and dropout rates are notably higher.

Low birth weight
Antelope Valley Union High School District and Los Angeles Unified School District each have extreme spatial-racial disparities. Black student populations in these districts are concentrated in census tracts that have among the highest rates of low birth weights in the state.

Academic Outcomes

English Language Arts and Mathematics Standards
At least 50% of Black students in third and eighth grade in Inglewood and Paramount Unified school districts are not meeting standards in ELA and Mathematics.

- In 12 out of the 14 focus districts, almost 50% of Black students in eighth grade are not meeting grade level standards for Mathematics.
- In 3 out of the 10 focus districts (Antelope Valley, Compton, and Inglewood) the proportion of Black students not meeting 11th grade Mathematics standards exceeds 80%.

Graduation Rates
In 12 out of the 14 focus districts, Black students have graduation rates that meet or exceed Los Angeles County and state averages. However, Black students in Antelope Valley Union High School District and Los Angeles Unified School District have graduation rates below Los Angeles County and state averages.

A-G Requirements
In 13 out of the 14 focus districts, the UC/CSU eligibility rate for Black students is below both overall Los Angeles County (57%) and state (51%) averages.

Click here to view our INTERACTIVE MAP that displays data from all 14 focus districts.
Beyond the schoolhouse: COVID-19 & Reopening Schools for Black Students in Los Angeles

Policy Recommendations

Policymakers at the city, district, county, state and federal level should prioritize efforts that explicitly support the education, health, and well-being of Black families in Los Angeles County. Policy recommendations are organized into three main themes: COVID-19 & reopening schools, in-school, and out-of-school policies.

School Climate and Policing

High suspension rates
In 13 out of the 14 focus districts, Black students with disabilities are two to 10 times more likely to be suspended than the average Los Angeles County student.

High chronic absenteeism rates
Black students in Antelope Valley Union High School District, Centinela Valley Union High School District and Los Angeles Unified School District have chronic absenteeism rates above the Los Angeles County overall rate of 25% for Black students. This percentage is significantly higher than white students (11%), Asian students (4%), Hispanic students (15%), and the state and Los Angeles County averages (14%).

School policing
All 14 focus districts have a school police force; many use video surveillance, random searches, and controlled entry/metal detectors. Black student enrollment during 2014-2017 was just 8% in Los Angeles Unified School District, but at one of the 14 focus districts, Black students accounted for 25% of serious interactions with school police. Los Angeles Unified School District has the largest school police department in the country.

Special Populations of Black Youth (Economically Disadvantaged, Students in Foster Care, Students Experiencing Homelessness)

Poverty disparities
In 10 out of the 14 focus districts, there are significant poverty disparities between Black and White students.

High chronic absenteeism rates
12 out of the 14 focus districts have chronic absenteeism rates of 20% or higher for Black students in foster care.

High homelessness rates
In 8 out of the 14 districts, Black students are twice as likely to experience homelessness than other student groups.
Ensure connectivity across cities so students and families have access to virtual support, resources and instruction.

Assess student well-being using universal screening strategies to support the use of targeted resources for students who are showing the most significant need for remediation including tiered support models during the school day, expanded learning time, tutoring, and year-round academic support.

Encourage sharing of resources and instructional models across all 80 districts to focus on universal, targeted, and supplemental support strategies.

Dedicate more funds to districts to supplement Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) resources, requiring clear articulation of evidence-based practices to support student learning and growth for Black students and families.

Require counties and districts to use funds to focus on addressing existing gaps, including the digital divide and student achievement disparities.
Focus on Essential Skills & Competencies Across Subjects

Encourage businesses and nonprofit leaders to offer internships and work-based learning opportunities that can strengthen student critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication and civic skills in applied settings.

Develop strategies with young people so they can help identify what type of academic, social and emotional support they need to succeed.

Establish common strategies and models for supporting school districts as they work to create engaging and personalized learning experiences, including universal screening strategies to frequently monitor and adjust instruction particularly in core subjects for Black students.

Strengthen the pipeline for more Black educators to enter the profession, a factor which has been shown to significantly improve achievement and college matriculation rates.

Increase Title I investments and encourage school systems to use Title I funds to address opportunity gaps for Black students.
**Healthy, Positive Learning Environments**

**CITIES**

Examine city policies and policing patterns to ensure Black students and families are not being unfairly targeted, thus negatively impacting young people on school campuses.

**SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

Incorporate regular student surveys like Turnaround for Children’s well-being index and stay abreast of California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) results to determine and respond to student social, emotional, physical and psychological health.

Engage relevant stakeholders and outside experts, if needed, in difficult discussions around underlying issues that may be contributing to patterns of disproportionality to implement the CA Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework to promote adult behavior changes.

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

Support LA County schools and districts to implement culturally responsive practices by using the California Multi-Tiered System of Support (CA MTSS) to support the needs of Black students’ academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs within a tiered framework of support.

Expand the County’s community schools pilot across 15 high schools and districts to include feeder elementary schools that serve a higher proportion of Black students.

**FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

Incentivize schools, districts and states to support students, teachers and school leaders in making improvements to classroom and behavior management, especially where rates of disciplinary exclusion are high.

Increase federal support for the McKinney-Vento Act in California, where two out of three housing insecure young people attend schools with no federal aid. This can help to ensure that Black students experiencing homelessness are getting necessary education services.
Students’ & Families’ Basic Needs

Establish clear benchmarks for anti-poverty efforts carried out in coordination with nonprofit and county agencies.

Link families to community-based organizations, agencies and case workers who can help young peoples and families on a case-by-case basis.

Leverage Measure J funds to target investments in these 14 communities to focus on youth development, job training, small business development and supportive housing services.

Encourage partnerships between education, housing and child welfare stakeholders & dedicate state community schools grants to Black communities.

Prioritize federal housing vouchers, food stamps, cash grants, Medicaid, and tax credits which all have been found to boost student learning for financially struggling families.
Family, Maternal & Infant Health

**Cities**

Encourage centralized and mobile clinics to screen for and address maternal and infant health issues.

**School Districts**

Establish opportunities for community health clinics to come to school campuses to meet with and provide health care services to families and small children.

**Los Angeles County**

Work with medical providers to identify barriers to accessing maternal mental health services.

**State of California**

Invest in home visiting models that eliminate access challenges for expectant Black mothers.

**Federal Government**

Expand health care coverage for uninsured women throughout their lifespan, with a particular emphasis on their reproductive years, to ensure that every woman receives a basic level of coverage and has a medical home.

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