

# Research: COVID-19 has likely worsened inequalities for Black students in L.A. County

April 15 2021, by John McDonald

---



Credit: UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools

The UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools today released a new report examining the relationship between educational outcomes

and social, health and environmental factors of Black students in 14 school districts, serving 800 Black students or more in Los Angeles County. Together, these school districts serve more than two-thirds of Black students in the region. The findings spanned neighborhoods from the northern reaches of the Antelope Valley to Long Beach.

Detailing a shrinking and shifting Black student population long beset by low levels of academic achievement, the research makes it clear that a disproportionate number of Black children in L.A. County reside in neighborhoods where poverty is concentrated, educational enrichment opportunities are limited, environmental hazards are severe, and resources are lacking. In many of these communities, the challenges facing Black children in [school](#) are exacerbated by adverse environmental and social conditions related to concentrated poverty, impacting [student learning](#). And given the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 virus on low-income communities, the researchers contend that the challenges facing Black students have likely worsened.

"The impact of the global pandemic on the education of Black students may potentially be devastating," said UCLA Professor of Education Tyrone C. Howard, faculty director of the Center for the Transformation of Schools. "This new research can inform the strategic use of resources to address inequalities, racism, and historical disadvantage, and guide decision making to better serve Black students.

"The long and persistent presence of systemic racism inside and outside of schools continues to affect the educational experiences and outcomes of Black students. The report also offers examples of successful efforts and specific recommendations to assist educators and policymakers."

"Our hope is that this research will generate intense attention on the needs of Black students in the County," adds UCLA researcher Stanley L. Johnson Jr., lead author of the study, "and spur innovative and

meaningful actions to address the economic, social, emotional and environmental challenges that shape and hinder their educational opportunities. We can and must act boldly."

The report includes a detailed table of funding made available to school districts in the report by the recently passed federal American Rescue Plan. The 14 districts examined in the research are in line to receive \$6 billion in COVID-19 relief funding to support learning recovery efforts.

"Black student and families have been impacted by multigenerational roadblocks to learning opportunities prior to the pandemic. As school districts make plans to use these new resources as they reopen in COVID's wake, it is urgent key decisionmakers at the local, state and federal level pay close attention to the needs of Black students and act to address their needs," said Joseph Bishop, co-author of the report and the director of the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools.

The report, *Beyond the Schoolhouse: Digging Deeper* analyzes data from the 14 school districts in LA County with a substantial number of Black students. These districts include: ABC Unified, Antelope Valley Union High School, Bellflower Unified, Centinela Valley Union High School, Compton Unified, Culver City Unified, Inglewood Unified, Long Beach Unified, Los Angeles Unified, Paramount Unified, Pasadena Unified, Pomona Unified, Torrance Unified, and William S. Hart Union High School. The report includes an interactive map of Black student educational outcomes. <http://transformschools.ucla.edu/beyond-the-schoolhouse-digging-deeper/interactive-map/>

The research makes clear that Black students in the districts included in the study live in neighborhoods challenged by concentrated poverty and inequality. In 10 out of 14 school districts where Black students attend school and their surrounding neighborhoods, more than 40 percent of these families live two times below the federal poverty line.

Black student enrollment has also declined across Los Angeles County by 42 percent over the past 20 years. But some districts, including Antelope Valley and William S. Hart High School District, have seen significant growth in enrollment of Black students, raising concerning academic and discipline challenges.

In this context, the report digs deeper into the academic achievement and school climate and policing data, and explores the health and neighborhood conditions of the focus districts. Key among the findings:

## **Academic Achievement**

Black students have historically trailed their student peers on California's measurements of academic achievement. In many of the school districts in the study, the performance of Black students on standardized assessments and [graduation rates](#) is significantly lower than is observed for other groups. For example, in 10 of 14 of the districts, more than half of Black students failed to meet state standards in mathematics in 2018-19. In three of those districts, more than eight in ten students failed to meet the state's standards in mathematics.

Black students also trailed their peers on such measurements as graduation rates and completion of courses for UC/CSU eligibility. Black students continue to graduate at a lower rate compared to their counterparts and there is a great deal of variation in graduation rates. For example, only 76 percent of Black students in the Antelope Valley Unified School District graduated in four years compared to 97 percent of Black students in the Torrance Unified School District.

## **School Climate**

The research highlights important findings regarding school policing,

student suspensions, and chronic absenteeism. School policing has a disproportionate impact on Black students. Every [district](#) in the report's sample has some form of police involvement on high school campuses and arrests, and other involvement with school police in Los Angeles County falls especially hard on Black students. A recent UCLA report analyzing 2014-2017 arrest, citation and diversion data, found that although Black student enrollment during this period was just 8 percent in LAUSD, Black students accounted for 25 percent of serious interactions with school police.

The report also finds a great deal of variation in suspension rates for both Black male and female students. In Antelope Valley, Bellflower and Pasadena Unified, Black male and female students are suspended at higher rates far greater than the County average. Black students also exhibit higher rates of chronic absence (defined as missing more than 10 percent of the school year), with 24 percent of Black students in L.A. County chronically absent, a rate significantly higher than other student groups. There is also significant variation in absence rates among the 14 districts studied, with Black students in Antelope Valley and Centinela school districts absent for three or more weeks per year, while more affluent districts such as Culver City have much lower absence rates for Black students (7 percent).

Previous research has shown that Black students in L.A. County are more likely to experience economic and social hardships. The new research finds that in 10 of the 14 focus districts, there are significant poverty disparities between Black and White students. For example, a Black student in Long Beach Unified is three times more likely to receive free or reduced lunch than a white [student](#) in that district. The research also provides analysis of Black youth in foster care, Black students experiencing homelessness, and those challenged by disabilities, raising concerning questions about suspensions, absence and graduation rates in some of the school districts in the study. For example, 12 of the

14 focus districts have chronic absenteeism rates of 20 percent or higher for Black students in foster care, and in eight of the 14 focus districts, Black students are twice as likely to experience homelessness as other groups

## **Health and Environment**

The CDC has said that structural racism poses a serious threat to public health. The new report examines indicators of the environmental and health contexts of Black students in the fourteen focus districts, connecting data from the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (Enviroscan) to specific census tracts with residential concentrations of Black people. In Census tracts for these districts, both Black and White residents are exposed to diesel emissions, yet in neighborhoods in Los Angeles and Long Beach, Black residents have significantly higher rates of exposure than White residents. Groundwater pollutants can also have a significant impact on health. In Los Angeles and Torrance Unified [school districts](#), Blacks reside in census tracts with the worst levels of groundwater pollution while Whites in those districts generally reside in areas with among the lowest levels of groundwater threats. Asthma and low birth weight are two health conditions that have been causally linked to air and water pollution, and that have been shown to disproportionately impact Black students and their families.

"The impact of social, health and environmental conditions on academic performance has too often been overlooked, said Johnson. "Our schools are not separate from our communities. As we return to campus, we need to look beyond the schoolhouse to develop strategies and innovations to address the challenges facing our communities and engage them in ways fuel the success of Black students."

To further that effort, the report identifies examples of school and



community efforts where Black students are well served. The researchers also offer specific recommendations for educators, community members and policy makers at the local, state and federal levels. Those recommendations are focused in three key areas: COVID-19 and reopening schools, in-school policies, and out-of-school policies.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has only underscored the challenges facing Black students in Los Angeles County, our state and our nation," concludes Professor Howard. "But it has also provided an opportunity for real change. We hope this report will be a catalyst for that effort."

"Beyond the Schoolhouse: Digging Deeper, Overcoming Challenges & Expanding Opportunity for Black Youth in Los Angeles" is a project of the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

Citation: Research: COVID-19 has likely worsened inequalities for Black students in L.A. County (2021, April 15) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-04-covid-worsened-inequalities-black-students.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.