The Campaign for College Opportunity

affirming EQUITY
ensuring INCLUSION
empowering ACTION

Ensuring College Access and Success for Black Students in Higher Education

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Preface

Over 50% of American students in our public schools are Latinx, Black, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI), or American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN). Tapping into their talent and ensuring their access to a college education is essential to our future economic power and the success of our multi-racial democracy. Yet, despite the historical exclusion and current underrepresentation of many Americans in our colleges and universities—including those who are first-generation, undocumented, or low-income—anti-equity forces continually threaten to regress the nation back into a pre-civil rights era of darkness and exclusion.

These pressures are not new. Setbacks to our progress, such as the current national attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion and the 2023 Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decision curtailing race-conscious college admissions, follow a lineage of discrimination. That is why the Campaign for College Opportunity launched the Equity, Inclusion, Action (EIA) initiative, which ensures historically underserved students are supported to reclaim their right to a college education free of barriers and empower them to thrive in our nation's economy and democracy. The EIA initiative accomplishes this by equipping higher education stakeholders with a blueprint for resistance, combatting discriminatory attacks with solutions in college preparation, admission, affordability, and completion that protect every student's right to a transformative college degree. True leadership is demonstrated on the frontlines of resistance in activating this blueprint. By standing with students in equity, inclusion, and action, higher education and policy leaders advance the core value that all people in America—regardless of race, ethnicity, zip code, income level, or documentation status—should be afforded a college degree and the opportunity to succeed. Our country's future counts on our fight to make good on the progress our ancestors dreamed of.

Foreword

May 25, 2020 marked an inflection point in the long-standing strained and toxic relationship between the U.S. and the Black people who reside within it. That was the day when George Floyd was tragically murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, who kneeled on his neck and restricted his breathing for approximately 9 minutes. Although it was not the first time a Black person was killed by a law enforcement officer in the U.S., this grotesque act of violence was broadcast on social media for the entire world to see. Shortly after Floyd was killed, we learned of the deaths of Breonna Taylor and Ahmad Aubrey, which had occurred a few months earlier in February 2020. Taylor was a Black woman who was tragically killed when Louisville police officers broke into her apartment and recklessly discharged their firearms, presumably to apprehend her boyfriend. Aubrey, a Black man, was murdered while jogging through a neighborhood in Glynn County, Georgia by 3 white, racist men, one of them a retired police officer.

Floyd, Taylor, and Aubrey's murders sparked protests around the world. Millions marched and organized demands for justice and accountability, and collective voices were raised in affirmation of Black lives mattering. The calls for justice and affirmations were quickly followed by statements of solidarity that were developed by organizations across the U.S., including colleges and universities, that promised to take proactive approaches to stand in solidarity and strengthen their efforts to serve Black communities, students, and educators. Some institutions infused more resources into their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. Others promised scholarships to Black students. Even more eliminated barriers to access in admissions.

Unfortunately, despite enormous outrage expressed and promises made, actions often fell short. Even worse, in recent years, institutions in states like Florida, Texas, and Utah enacted anti-DEI policies and got rid of much-needed resources, programs, and support for Black students. These actions were further emboldened by the 2023 SCOTUS ruling in the *Students for Fair Admissions* (SFFA) case. That decision reversed decades of precedent and ended the ability of colleges and universities to consider race as one of many factors in deciding which qualified applicants to admit. Chief Justice John Roberts, a longtime critic of affirmative action programs, wrote the decision for the court majority, saying that "the nation's colleges and universities must use colorblind criteria in admissions"[1] (para. 3). In dissent, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson wrote, "With let-them-eat-cake obliviousness, today, the majority pulls the ripcord and announces 'colorblindness for all' by legal fiat. But deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life." Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote, "Today, this court stands in the way and rolls back decades of

precedent and momentous progress," adding that the decision "cements a superficial rule of colorblindness as a constitutional principle in an endemically segregated society where race has always mattered and continues to matter." She added that the majority's vision of race neutrality "will entrench racial segregation in higher education because racial inequality will persist so long as it is ignored" (p. 68).[2] We strongly agree with this dissent. Historical inequality in access to American education, broadly, and to higher education, specifically, has been based on race/ethnicity and gender. Closing the intentional gaps that have resulted from this history and providing a quality education for all Americans, especially Black Americans, requires a commitment to addressing this inequality and a focus on practices that work to support outreach, engagement, enrollment, and the success of Black students in higher education. Despite the SCOTUS ruling, and the pervasive federal efforts to weaponize DEI amid a new presidential administration, it is possible to legally pursue bold, courageous innovation and intentional strategies to ensure access to and success in higher education for Black students. This brief contributes to meeting this imperative.

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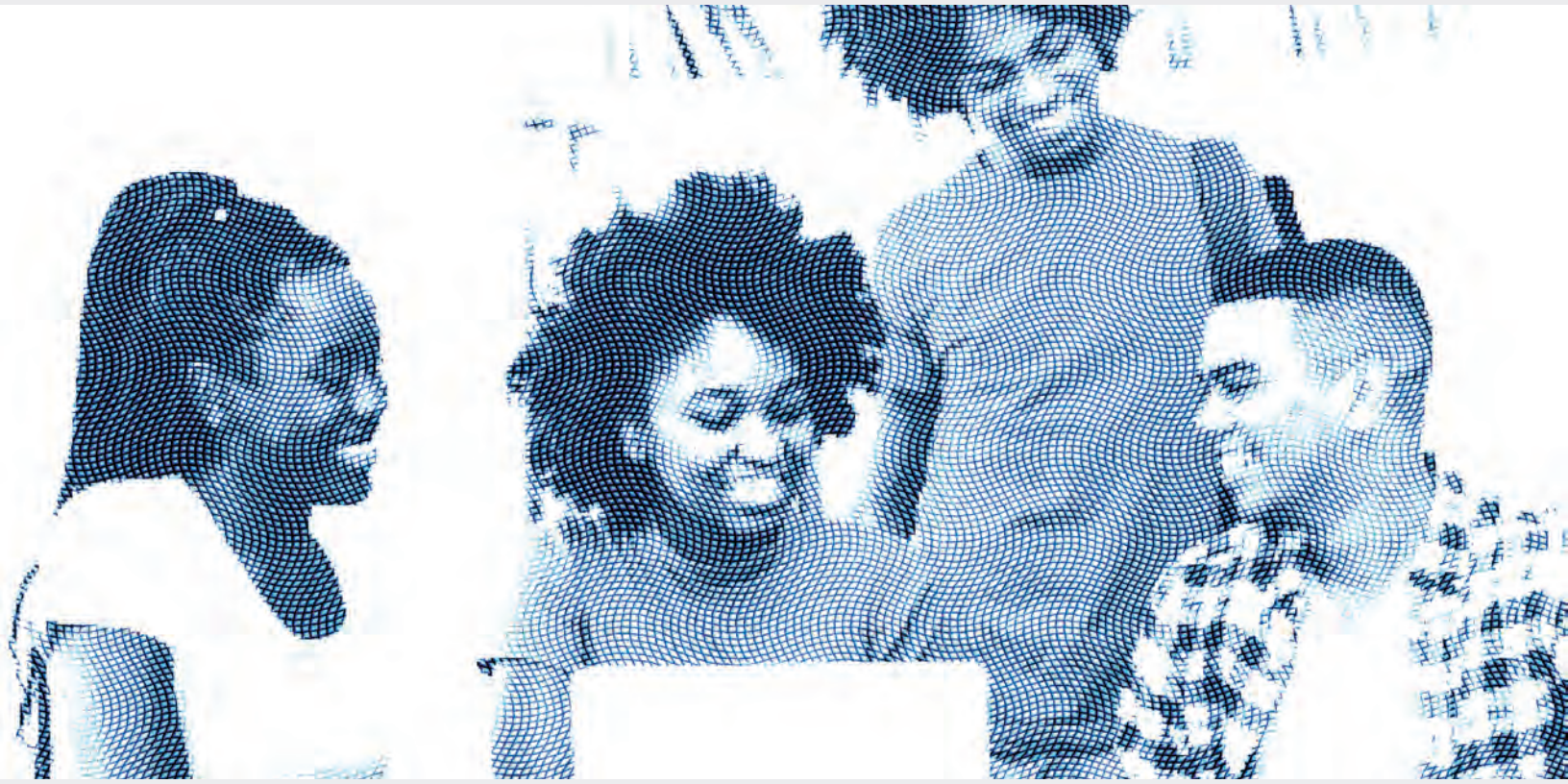
Purpose of This Brief

The Campaign for College Opportunity has always been a champion of ensuring equal and equitable treatment of all students in higher education. We recognize the value and necessity of understanding the experience of all learners from diverse backgrounds by disaggregating data to explore trends, opportunities, and challenges. More importantly, we seek to bring attention to the expertise, assets, and strengths of Americans from all backgrounds, while ensuring that solutions are targeted to support these same students. This is the third brief within our EIA initiative that highlights practices to support historically underserved students. This brief is tailored and informed by experts, best practices, and an authentic commitment to ensure that all Black students can go to college and succeed without sacrificing or leaving their cultural assets behind.

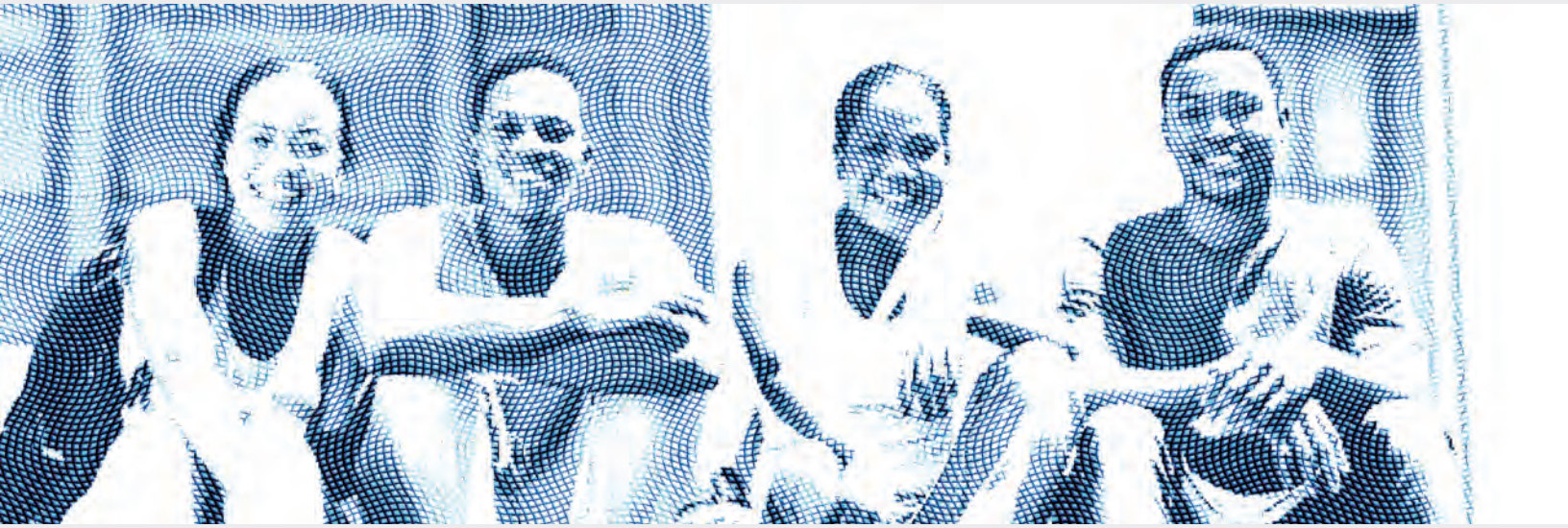


Overview

This brief seeks to serve as a clarion call for all educators and policymakers who believe higher education is a viable pathway to socioeconomic prosperity and eradicating centuries of generational poverty for Black people residing in the U.S. Despite the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which marked the end of de jure segregation in the U.S., Black people continue to suffer the consequences of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and anti-Black racism, as expressed in unequal access to a quality education and job opportunities across the U.S.

In this brief, we discuss the current status of Black students in higher education, with a particular focus on recent trends in college enrollment, persistence, and attainment. We highlight salient challenges and issues that impact the ways in which Black students experience college and university campuses. We discuss the challenges that Black students must often navigate to focus on opportunities that can be leveraged to improve both their experiences and outcomes in higher education. In doing so, we propose a set of innovations and promising practices that can be enacted by college and university leaders. Finally, we offer policy solutions for higher education leaders and state and federal policymakers that can eliminate systemic barriers and transform higher education to ensure Black student success.

This brief is primarily focused on public community colleges and 4-year institutions because they have an obligation to educate the public, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, ability, religion, citizenship, or other indicators of privilege or status. Moreover, because these institutions are supported by public resources, they are often the most affordable and accessible options for higher education, regardless of a student's life circumstances. However, the expertise offered in this brief is also applicable to and relevant for independent colleges and universities.



The Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

It is critical to acknowledge the rich legacy and important role that Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have played in providing access to higher education for Black people in the U.S. and preparing them for the workforce. Of the nearly 4,000 Title IV degree-granting institutions in the U.S., HBCUs comprise only about 100.[3] Yet, HBCUs have consistently outperformed their non-HBCU peers in educating and graduating Black students. Often, they do so with a fraction of the resources—such as state and federal funding, endowments, grants, alumni donations, land, human capital, and other needed resources—that are afforded to predominantly white institutions (PWI) and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs). A disproportionate number of Black professionals, including physicians, lawyers, judges, and scientists, are graduates of HBCUs. Some HBCUs have been applauded for their excellence in attracting students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds, not just Black students, to prepare for careers in pharmacy (e.g., Xavier University in New Orleans) and veterinary medicine (e.g., Tuskegee University in Alabama). Thus, some of the challenges we discuss in the brief may not be as salient at HBCUs as they are at other institutions. Likewise, some of the recommendations for institutional practices and policies might not be applied as seamlessly at HBCUs as at other institutions. Clearly, HBCUs have a lot to teach us about how to effectively educate Black students.[4]

For over 180 years, HBCUs have played a pivotal role in the education and empowerment of Black students in the U.S. These institutions have been at the forefront of providing higher education opportunities to Black Americans during times when access to PWIs was legally restricted or severely limited. They provided a unique space for students who have been historically excluded from higher education and have been effective in cultivating a sense of belonging. HBCUs are also known for their smaller class sizes, allowing for personalized instruction and mentorship, which contribute to higher levels of student engagement and retention.[5]

Despite representing less than 3% of U.S. postsecondary institutions, HBCUs enroll 8% of Black undergraduates and award 13% of all bachelor's degrees earned by Black students.[6] Consistently, HBCUs have demonstrated their success in fostering academic excellence and leadership among Black students. They offer supportive and inclusive environments where students can thrive academically and personally. Research indicates that HBCUs have the distinctive ability to facilitate upward mobility because they have higher rates of mentorship, support, and experiential learning opportunities than non-HBCU institutions.

There has been an increase in applications to HBCU institutions since 2020, in contrast with the overall decline at other postsecondary institutions nationwide, with some HBCUs reporting a 30% increase in applications between the 2019 to 2021 academic cycles. Recent research has indicated that HBCUs provide increased access for lower-income students, which generates greater upward mobility for these students when they graduate, compared to non-HBCU institutions. About 30% of HBCU students move up at least 2 income quintiles from their parents by age 30, compared to 18% of alumni from non-HBCU institutions.

In recent years, HBCUs have partnered with the California Community Colleges to expand opportunities for community college students through the 2-year Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) program.[7] This initiative guarantees community college students with an ADT admission to more than 30 HBCUs to streamline the transfer process, reduce time-to-degree completion, and make higher education more accessible and affordable. Students can receive a fee application waiver and be considered for transfer scholarships if they have a 3.2 or higher grade point average. The ADT has been impactful in expanding access to HBCUs for California's community college students and highlights the commitment of more than 30 participating HBCUs to inclusivity and educational equity.

The State of Higher Education for Black Students

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2022, approximately 334 million people resided in the U.S., of which about 48 million (14%) identified as Black. This reflected a nearly 33% increase from the year 2000, when approximately 36 million people identified as Black.[8] Like most racially minoritized populations, Black people in the U.S. are often viewed as monolithic, but although the vast majority of them identify solely as Black (single race, non-Hispanic), 5.4 million identify as multiracial Black (non-Hispanic) and 3 million identify as Black Hispanic.[9]

In 2022, Black households had a median household income of $53,500, which is more than $20,000 less than the median household income for all races, $74,580.[10] During the same year, the percentage of Black people experiencing poverty dropped to a record low of 17%.[11] Yet, disparities still persist between Black people who experience poverty and members of other racial/ethnic groups. The poverty rate for all racial groups that year was 12%, 11% for whites, 9% for Asians, and 17% for Hispanics.[12]

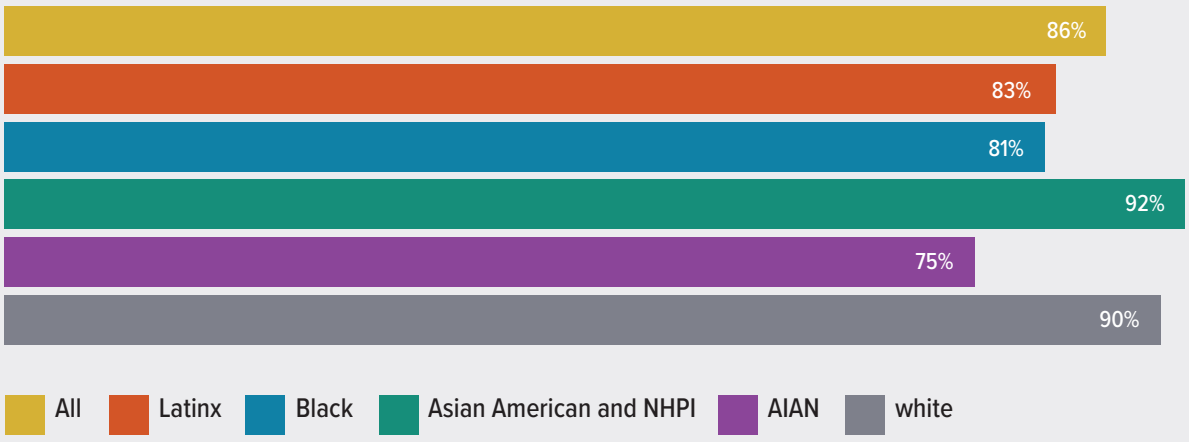
Homeownership is a key indicator of prosperity in the U.S. Owning a home provides families with an asset that can be leveraged for generational wealth-building. Because of racist social and lending policies, like redlining, which make it difficult for Black families to purchase real estate in the U.S., Black people have the lowest homeownership rates. In 2023, that rate was 46% among all major racial/ethnic groups.[13]

In comparison, the overall homeownership rate that year was 66%. Whites had the highest rate of all racial groups, at 74%.[14]

Educational attainment has long been one of the few viable pathways out of low-income status for Black people and other racially minoritized populations in the U.S. An examination of national high school graduation rates for the class of 2019-2020 reveals some disparity for Black students when compared to their peers from other racial/ethnic groups. While the overall graduation rate for the class was 86%, the rate for Black students lagged 5 percentage points behind, at 81% (see Figure 1). When compared to the highest performing racial/ethnic group in the class, Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI) students, the disparity for Black students was 11 percentage points. However, caution is always necessary when comparing aggregated data for the Asian American and NHPI population to other racial/ethnic groups, as these data often mask disparities that exist for Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native Hawaiian students, who routinely are disproportionately impacted and underserved in education.

Black high school students are not supported to graduate at the national average rate.

Figure 1. Adjusted Cohort High School Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 2019-2020.



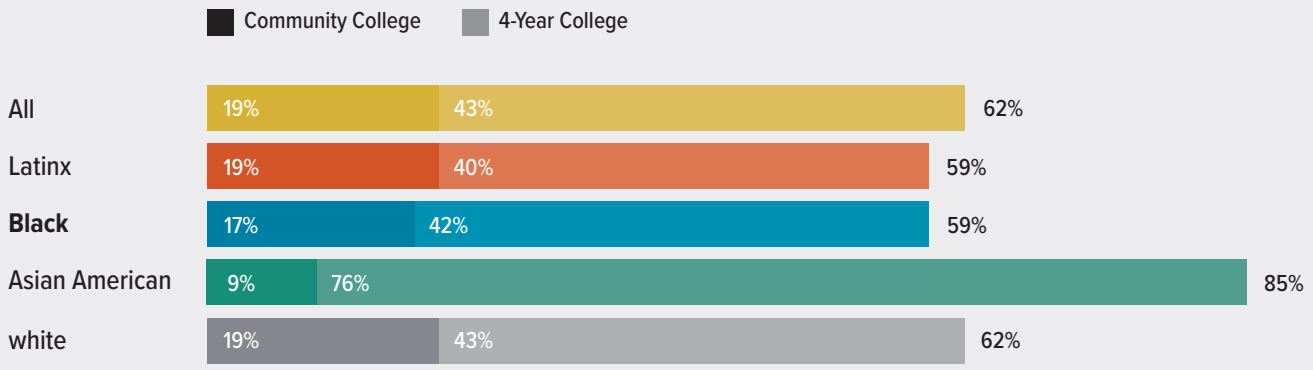
Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics. High School Graduation Rates. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

Since fall 2019, Black students' enrollment in postsecondary education has steadily declined by 8.4%, a rate slightly higher than the 6.3% decline for all racial/ethnic groups during this same time frame.[15] College enrollment declines can be attributed, in part, to several factors—notably the increasing cost of living in the U.S., the rising cost of attending college, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fall 2023, Black undergraduates represented approximately 1.64 million of the 15.25 million undergraduates enrolled in postsecondary education in the U.S.[16, 17] In comparison, approximately 255,000 Black students were enrolled in a private nonprofit 4-year institution, while approximately 127,000 were enrolled in a private, for-profit, 4-year institution.[18]

The patterns of Black students who enroll in college immediately upon completing high school have reflected similar patterns for other racial/ethnic groups. According to data reported by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in 2021, 59% of Black high school graduates enrolled in college within 9 months of completion, compared to 62% for all racial/ethnic groups (see Figure 2). Also, like most students, Black students who matriculated to college immediately after high school in 2021 were nearly 2.5 times more likely to enroll at a 4-year institution than a community college, at 42% and 17%, respectively. Similarly, 43% of all graduates in the class enrolled at a 4-year school immediately upon completion, while 19% enrolled at a community college.

Black students enroll in college immediately after completing high school at rates similar to their peers.

Figure 2. Percentage Rate of Students who Enrolled in College Within 9 Months of High School Graduation, by Race/Ethnicity, 2021.

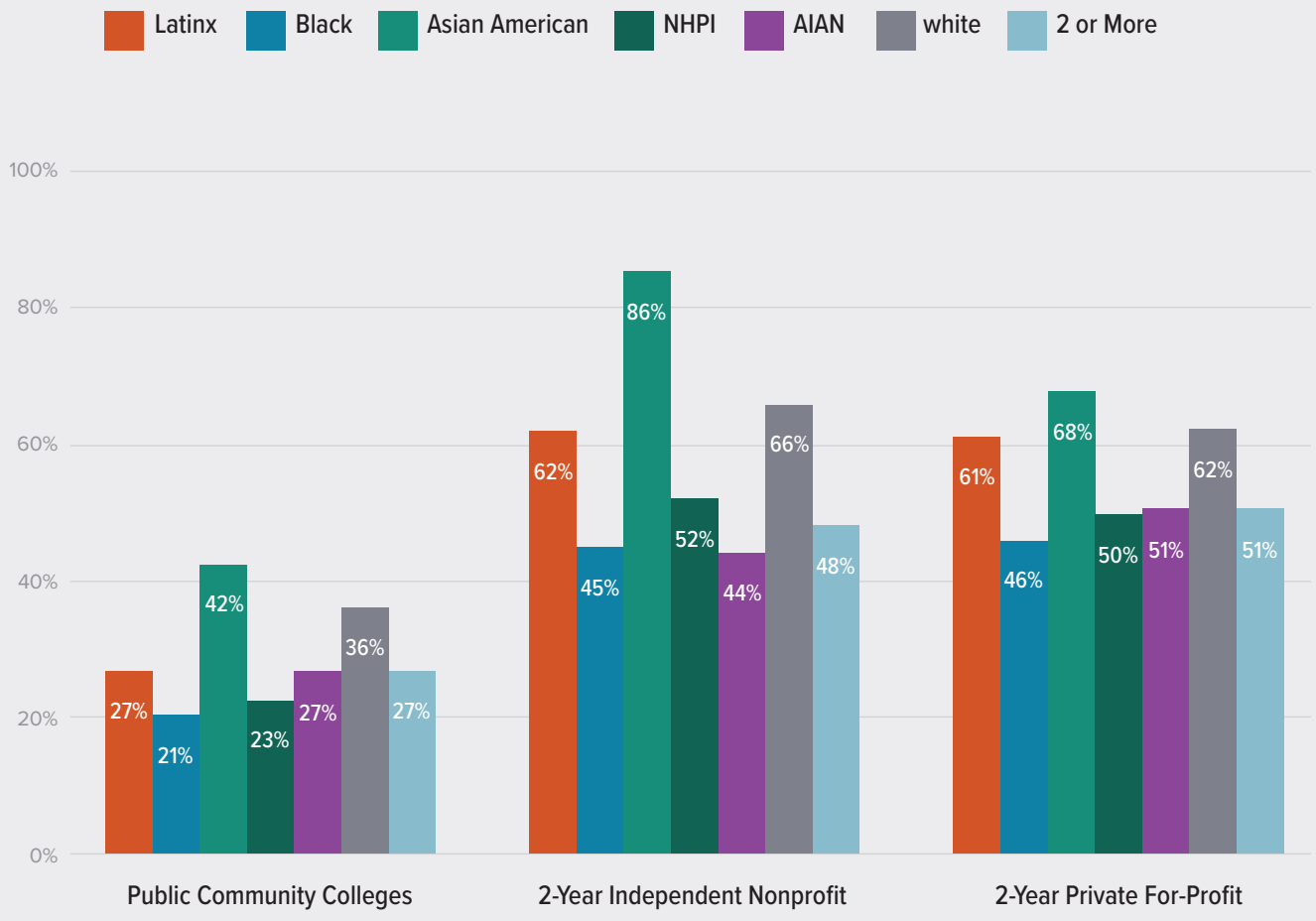


Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Immediate College Enrollment Rate. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

An examination of college graduation data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and institution type reveals disparities for Black students. Three-year graduation rates for Black students who enrolled in a public, private nonprofit, or private for-profit community college in 2019-2020 were 21%, 45%, and 46%, respectively (see Figure 3). In comparison, Asian students in the cohort had the highest 3-year college graduation rate at 42% for those enrolled at a public community college, 86% at a private nonprofit community college, and 68% at a private for-profit community college.

At public and private community colleges, Black students are supported to complete a degree within 3 years at rates far lower than white and Asian students.

Figure 3. Three-Year Cohort Graduation Rates at U.S. Community Colleges by Race/Ethnicity, Students Enrolling in 2019.

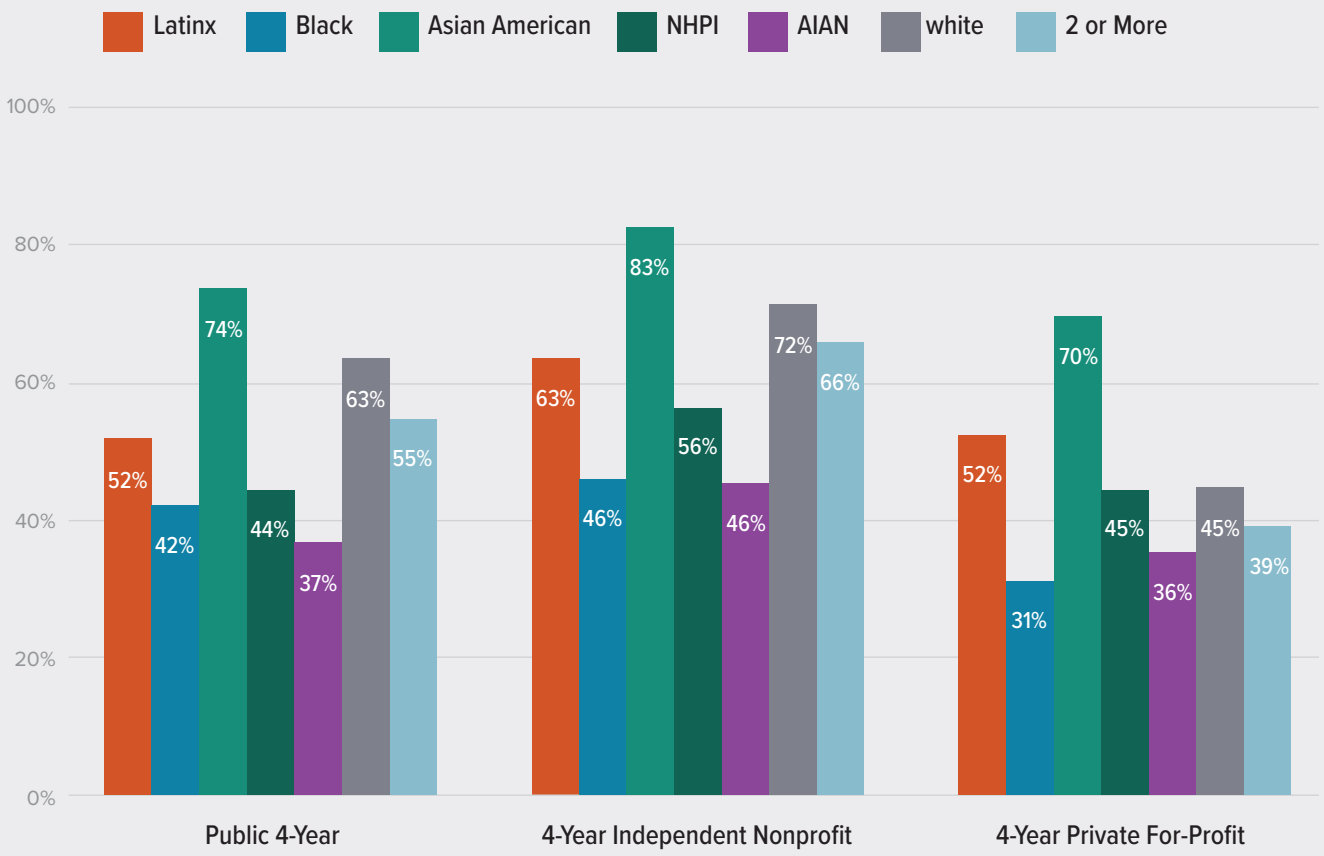


Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

In 2016-2017, a similar pattern existed for Black students who enrolled in 4-year institutions. As shown in Figure 4 below, less than half of Black students in the 2016-2017 cohort graduated within 6 years, regardless of institution type.[19] Moreover, along with American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) students, Black students had the lowest college graduation rates among the 7 racial/ethnic groups for whom data are reported. The 6-year graduation rate for Black students in the cohort was 42% for those enrolled at a public 4-year school and 46% at a private nonprofit 4-year school. Less than a third of Black students in the cohort who were enrolled at a private, for-profit, 4-year institution graduated within 6 years.

Public 4-year colleges and universities in the U.S. support less than half (42%) of Black students to complete a degree within 6 years.

Figure 4. Six-Year Cohort Graduation Rates at U.S. 4-Year Colleges and Universities by Race/Ethnicity, Students Enrolling in 2016.



Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

Approximately 29.8 million Black people in the U.S. (62%) are 25 years or older.[20] Among them, approximately 7.8 million (25%) have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, 9.6 million (32%) have completed some college but have yet to earn a bachelor's degree, and approximately 8.9 million (31%) have completed high school but have not attended college (see Table 1 below).

Just 1 in 4 Black Americans have a bachelor's degree, a rate ten percentage points lower than the national average.

Table 1. Educational Attainment in the United States by Racial/Ethnic Background, Ages 25 and Over.

	Less Than High School	HS Graduates	Some College/ Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Graduate or Professional Degree	BA or Higher
All	10%	26%	28%	22%	14%	36%
Latinx	27%	28%	25%	14%	7%	20%
Black	**12%**	**31%**	**32%**	**15%**	**10%**	**25%**
Asian American	12%	14%	17%	31%	27%	58%
NHPI	11%	37%	32%	14%	6%	20%
AIAN	15%	34%	34%	11%	6%	17%
white	6%	26%	29%	24%	16%	40%
2 or More	8%	24%	32%	23%	14%	36%
Other	11%	22%	27%	23%	17%	41%

Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics. High School Graduation Rates. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

As shown in Table 1, the degree attainment rate for all races, comparatively, was 36%. The college degree attainment rate for whites was 40%—15 percentage points higher than the rate for Black people. The gap in degree attainment between Black people and the highest performing group, Asian Americans (58%), was 33 percentage points.

Although the degree attainment rate for Black people has increased from 19% in 2012 to the current rate of 25%, pursuing postsecondary education for Black students comes with salient challenges. In 2019-2020, 60% of Black college students received a Pell Grant, compared to 40% of all students.[21] Black students are also more likely to rely on student loans to pay for college. Whereas slightly more than a third of all students received a federal student loan, nearly half of Black students did so in the 2019-20 academic year.[22] Black students also reported higher levels of debt-related education stress than other students.[23]

How Black Students Experience College and University Campuses

Next, we turn our focus to how Black students experience college and university campuses and highlight salient challenges and the navigational capital required to overcome them.

The founding of Harvard College (now Harvard University) in 1636 marked the beginning of higher education in the U.S. Yet, Black students were not allowed to study at a U.S. college until the 1790s, when John Chavis studied ministry at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). Even though more than 230 years and many legislative acts have passed since Chavis first studied there, Black students continue to experience challenges to access and success in higher education that can be attributed to their racial/ethnic identities. Chronic racism, disproportionate representation among students and educators, curricula that do not acknowledge the contributions and lived experiences of Black people, and persistent equity gaps in student success are some of the major factors that contribute to Black students feeling unsafe, unwelcome, and excluded at U.S. colleges and universities. Collectively, these challenges impact Black students' success and result in the disparate academic outcomes highlighted earlier.

Scholars have consistently concluded that Black students' experiences are remarkably different from those of their white peers,[24] who often perceive their campuses in positive ways.[25] That Black students experience college and university campuses as chronically racist has been well-documented in decades of published research.[26] As Harper and Hurtado (2007) noted, "Researchers have consistently found that racial/ethnic minority students and their white peers who attend the same institution often view the campus racial climate in different ways" (p. 12).[27] Approximately 1 in 5 Black students reports being "discriminated against" and feeling "physically unsafe" and "psychologically unsafe" at their institutions.[28]

According to data reported by the U.S. Department of Education, race was a motivating bias in more than half of the hate crimes that occurred on college and university campuses in 2020.[29] However, racism need not rise to the level of a reported hate crime to have a negative impact on Black students. Black students frequently report experiencing racial microaggressions, which are covertly communicated verbal or nonverbal messages that convey to people of color that they are not welcome in particular contexts or spaces.[30] Wood and Harris (2024) have written extensively about "racelighting" at colleges and universities to describe the questioning, second-guessing, and undermining that often occurs when people of color illuminate their experiences with racism.[31] Wood and Harris identified 4 types of messages that are often used to racelight people of color, including: (1) stereotype advancement, which involves the use of race-based stereotypes to justify negative perceptions of people of color; (2) inauthentic allyship, which gives the false pretense that a person, institution, or other entity will support and protect people of color from racism; (3) resistive actions, which are efforts enacted to protect those who engage in racist behavior from accountability; and (4) misrepresentation of the past, which entails reframing history, past

events, and injustices against people of color in ways that advance white supremacy. Smith, Allen, and Danley's (2007) concept of racial battle fatigue is rooted in the notion that Black people experience racism—be it subtle or overt—nearly every day, which results in both physiological and psychological consequences.[32] Racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, and racelighting have been linked by scholars to Black students' experiences with stereotype threat[33] and imposter phenomenon,[34] which can negatively impact academic performance and success. Stereotype threat is "a situational threat—a threat in the air—that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists (e.g., skateboarders, older adults, white men, gang members). Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype" (p. 614).[35] Clance and Imes define imposter phenomenon as "an internal experience of intellectual phoniness" that individuals with marginalized, salient identities can experience in response to oppressive educational environments, despite high levels of academic and professional achievement (p. 241).[36]

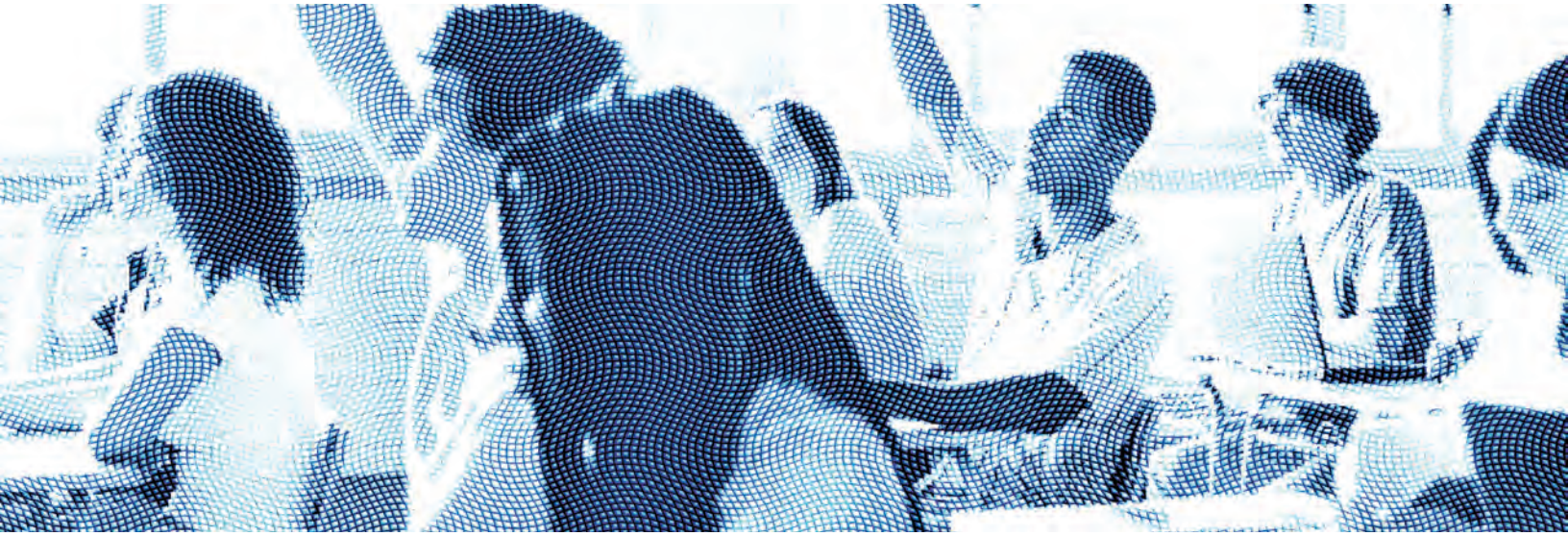
In addition to their experiences with campus racism, a factor contributing to Black students feeling unsafe, unwelcome, and excluded on college and university campuses is the lack of Black educators at most institutions. While Black educators are underrepresented nationally in nearly all educator roles at most colleges and universities, they are woefully underrepresented among full-time faculty members. In fall 2022, Black faculty members represented about 7% (112,000) of the approximately 1.6 million full-time faculty members at degree-granting institutions in the U.S.[37] Black faculty members play an important role in shaping educational experiences and outcomes for students. In addition to serving as role models for Black students interested in pursuing academic careers, Black faculty members are more likely than their white colleagues to take on the responsibility of building relationships with Black students, infusing Black scholarship into curricula, and intentionally creating learning environments that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive for Black students.[38] They also take on a disproportionate amount of what is often described as "invisible labor" on college campuses, such as mentoring students who desire faculty careers and engaging in efforts that advance DEI at the institution. This work is described as invisible because it can be incredibly labor-intensive in regard to the time and resources (e.g., financial, emotional, cognitive) invested. Undoubtedly, institutions benefit from this work and have come to rely on it to support the retention, belonging, and success of Black students; to recruit, hire, and retain Black educators; and to promote DEI at the institution. Nevertheless, invisible labor is typically unrecognized or not valued in faculty tenure and promotion processes.

The cost of pursuing a college or university education is yet another persistent challenge that negatively impacts the experiences of Black students. In the 2023-2024 academic year, the total cost of attendance (inclusive of tuition and fees, housing and food, books and supplies, transportation, and other related

expenses) at a public 2-year institution in the U.S. was $19,860. The total cost of attending a public 4-year institution was $28,840 for an in-state student and $46,730 for an out-of-state student when both types of students live on campus. The total cost of attending a private 4-year institution with on-campus housing was $60,420.[39] As noted previously in the brief, Black students are more likely than their white peers to receive student loans to pay for their education, and they report higher levels of debt-related education stress. Moreover, Black students are nearly twice as likely as other students to report that they have taken on full-time work, a responsibility that competes with their studies.[40]

Finally, Black students' experiences with racism; financial pressures; the demands of work, family commitments, and education stress; as well as other life stressors contribute to mental health and wellness concerns, notably chronic anxiety and depression. In 2022, 37% of Black students indicated that "support from a school counselor or mental health professional" would enable them to remain enrolled in college, compared to 28% of all other students.[41] Yet, given the high demand for mental health support at colleges and universities since the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning that occurred in 2020, these services can be extremely difficult to access. Moreover, the time, cost, and social stigma associated with the need for mental health support in communities of color are additional barriers that complicate proactive and responsible help-seeking for Black students.

Given the challenges of experiencing racism, the high cost of paying for college, the underrepresentation of Black college educators, and mental health and wellness concerns, ensuring that Black students have equitable access and opportunities to succeed in higher education requires strategic institutional action and targeted policy interventions.



Opportunities to Advance Black Student Success at our Colleges and Universities

We propose policy and practice interventions that have the potential to improve Black students' access to, and feeling of belonging and success in, postsecondary education. The proposed policies and practices are aligned with the trends and challenges discussed in this brief and focus primarily on demonstrating an institutional commitment to Black students that holds institutions and educators accountable for these students' success, increases and improves their access to higher education, closes gaps in success, makes higher education more affordable, and engenders a sense of belonging.

While developing these ideas, we are mindful of the current political climate, the election and presidency of Donald Trump, and recognize that there is resistance to enacting some of these ideas in some states, particularly those that have proposed or enacted anti-DEI legislation. That said, we did not allow the current political climate to dilute or limit the policies and practices we propose to better serve Black students in the U.S.

It is important to note that institutional efforts to meet the needs of Black students must occur while acknowledging the heterogeneity and intersectionality that exist within Black communities. While it is true that Black students on college and university campuses often have shared experiences, how they make sense of their experiences and respond to education environments is largely determined by their salient identities that intersect race/ethnicity and where they are developmentally within them. Therefore, the application of the practices and innovations proposed herein must take into account the broad range of Black identities, including as women, student-athletes, student parents, adult learners, U.S.-born, foreign-born, neurodivergent, disabled, LGBTQIA-identified, and English-language learners.

Recommended Innovations and Promising Practices

Black students' enrollment in postsecondary education has declined by 8.4% since fall 2019, which is among the highest rate of decline for all racial/ethnic groups. There are also significant disparities between Black high school graduates who enroll in college immediately upon completion compared to their white peers. Given these trends, increasing Black students' access to higher education must be at the forefront of any effort to improve education and life outcomes for Black people in the U.S.

Institutions committed to providing access to Black students would benefit from developing a strategic outreach and engagement plan that supports an increased number of applications from and an increased enrollment of Black students.

Resources:

Ensuring Fairness in College Admissions

Advancing Equity by Rethinking the Use of Tests in College Admissions

The Urgency of Fair and Equitable Holistic Review of College Applicants

Expert Spotlight: Olufemi "Femi" Ogundele

Early exposure to college by way of enrichment programs and initiatives that target students before and during high school can serve Black students well. These efforts should not just expose Black students to college but allow them to immerse themselves on campuses for sustained periods of time.

Resource:

Expert Spotlight: Youlonda Copeland-Morgan

Summer programs that allow students to take courses, obtain information about applying to college, and spend nights in campus residence halls can go a long way in demystifying the college experience for Black students.

Dual enrollment programs that allow students to take college classes while in high school are also valuable for Black students' college trajectories.

Resource:

Greater Equity in College Access Through High School/College Dual Enrollment Programs

Access efforts must also account for the important role that community colleges play in providing access to higher education for Black students and pathways to transfer for those who want to earn bachelor's degrees at 4-year institutions.

Resource:

Advancing Equity With Effective Community College Transfer Pathways

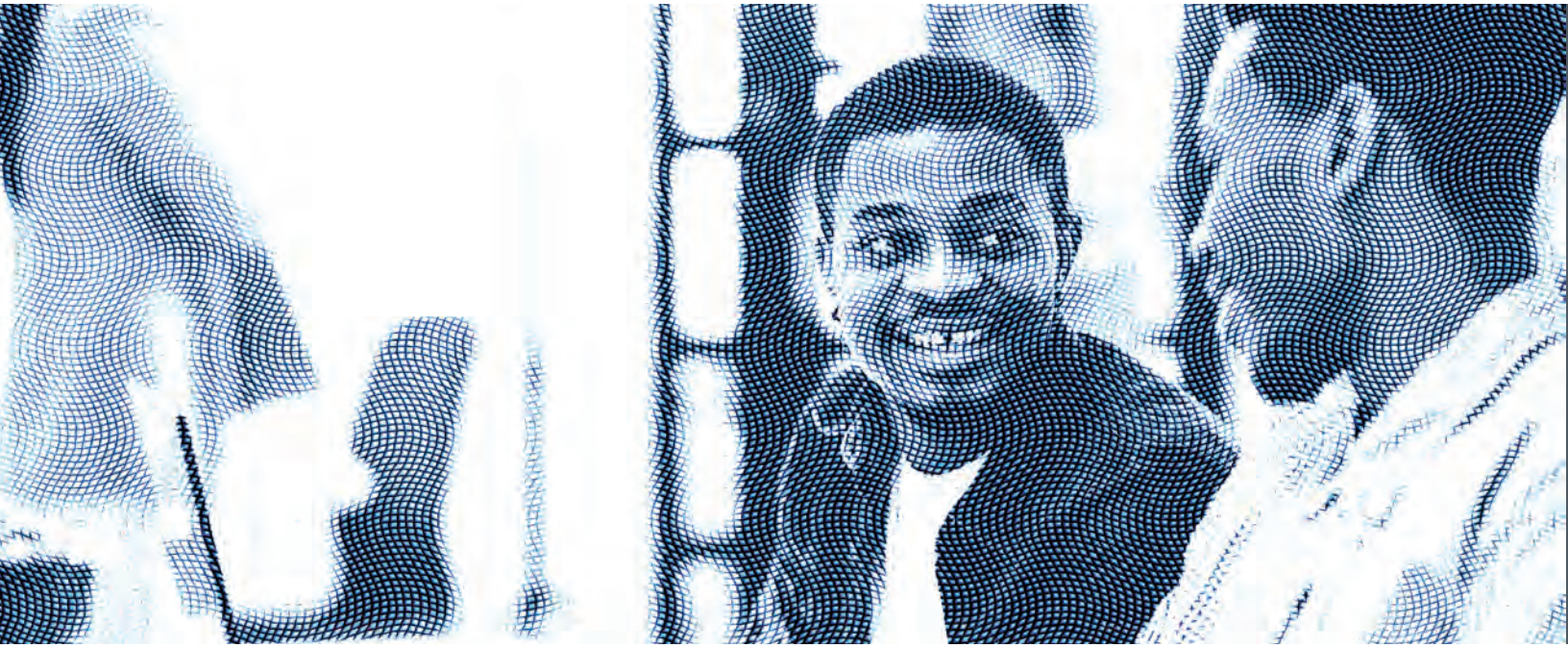
Colleges and university admissions centers should make sure they are adequately staffed with educators who are responsible for establishing transfer partnerships with local community colleges, engaging in direct outreach to Black transfer students, among other students, and developing programs and services to create a transfer-receptive culture for Black and other transfer students.[42, 43]

Finally, college affordability is directly related to college access. Institutions must continue to develop strategies to ensure that Black students, among others, are able to pay for tuition, fees, technology, supplies, living expenses, and other costs associated with attending college. Having a robust portfolio of grants, scholarships, and other financial support for Black and low-income students is essential. Moreover, supporting students who struggle to meet basic needs, like food, housing, and transportation, is also an important strategy for ensuring affordability and access to college for Black students. For example, all students at Compton College are entitled to 1 free meal per day and a weekly food voucher, which can be used at a farmers' market hosted on campus. Students have reported that these resources significantly improve their access to nutritious food and reduce the stress of daily meal planning, allowing them to concentrate more effectively on their studies. While some institutions may not have the resources to support every student in this way, they should consider doing so for Pell Grant-eligible students.

Resources:

Equitable College Affordability Policies and Practices

Advancing Equity Through a Universal Financial Aid Application Policy



Compton College by JingKe888 on Flickr.

Compton College's Food Security & Basic Needs Programs

Compton College in southern Los Angeles has implemented a comprehensive food security program to support students. Dedicated to ensuring student success by providing essential resources, Compton College offers several food resources for students, including the Tartar Food Pantry, and provides students with 1 free meal a day at the Everytable Cafeteria on campus. The college partners with the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank for a monthly mobile food pantry on campus and hosts a weekly farmers' market where students are eligible for $20 in vouchers weekly to spend at the market. It also provides students with one-on-one CalFresh application support. In 2023, 30% of students used the campus food pantry, 42% utilized farmers' market vouchers, and 32% participated in food distribution days, highlighting the significant impact of these food insecurity programs.[44]

In addition to offering food-related support to their students, Compton College has expanded to offer other basic needs services, such as technology, including laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots. During the 2021-2022 academic year, the college distributed basic needs-related support to 3,060 students (students may have received more than one form of support). In a longitudinal analysis, the institution reported that students who received food and technology support showed higher course success rates than those who did not.[45]

Current Housing Support:

Compton College offers housing referral services to connect students with community resources for housing and other essential needs. The college provides programs like CalWORKs, which supports students transitioning from welfare to self-sufficiency, and emergency grants to assist those facing housing crises. These services aim to help students maintain stability while pursuing their education.[46]

Housing Support COVID-19 Pandemic:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Compton College partnered with the Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD) to implement the Shallow Subsidy Housing Assistance Program (SSHAP). CRCD, a community development organization based in South LA, focuses on enhancing the quality of life in South Central LA. Through the partnership, which lasted from September 2020 to January 2022, students who needed housing assistance received rental subsidies, housing stability planning, and connections to additional support services.[47]

Between 2020 and 2022, Compton College's SSHAP program significantly reduced homelessness among its participants. At the start of the program, 43% of SSHAP-enrolled students had experienced homelessness in the past year, compared to 21% of non-participants. By the end of the program in 2022, the percentage had dropped to 29%. Similarly, in 2020, 18% of participants reported having no stable housing prior to joining SSHAP; however by 2022, the rate had fallen to 6%. **Over the program's 2-year span, students also demonstrated improved financial stability in managing housing costs, along with a reduction in housing instability. By 2022, fewer students reported needing to move within the previous 12 months compared to baseline levels observed at the program's outset.**[48]

Future Housing Support:

In June 2022, California lawmakers allocated $80.4 million in the 2022-2023 state budget to the Compton Community College District (CCCD) for a 250-bed student housing facility at Compton College. This housing aims to enhance students' focus on education and career goals, provide a safe environment, and foster independence. It also enables Compton College to better support historically marginalized groups, including foster youth and veterans. The facility will play a key role in improving students' financial and educational outcomes.[49]

Sacramento State University by Ronbo76 on Wikimedia Commons.

The Black Honors College at Sacramento State University

In 2024, Sacramento State University established the nation's first Black Honors College, aimed at fostering academic excellence and community. This pioneering program offers specialized coursework in Black history, life, and culture, and includes biweekly seminars on economic empowerment, self-determination, and leadership. It also features designated weekly study hours, paid internships, and research opportunities. To remain in the honors college, students are expected to actively participate in study hours and seminars and to engage with at least 80% of the events and programming.[50] The honors college and its expectations provide a support system and community for Black students, faculty, and staff members. **Students benefit from specialized residential living and a learning community that provides shared housing and access to academic advisers, counselors, and therapists, ensuring comprehensive academic and personal support. Mentorship from Black faculty and staff members further enhances this support network, encouraging academic success and personal growth**. The Black Honors College is designed to empower students with a strong sense of self-efficacy. Additionally, the program includes cultural events, networking opportunities, and partnerships with local organizations to enrich students' academic and professional trajectories. Sacramento State's holistic approach not only elevates the educational experience for Black students, but also contributes to a more inclusive campus environment.

African American Male Education Network Development

The African American Male Education Network Development (A2MEND) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in 2006 by 6 emerging African American male administrators who leveraged their scholarly and professional expertise to create institutional change within California's community college system.[51] Its mission is to improve academic success, close achievement gaps, and increase transfer rates for underrepresented students, while also developing culturally competent servant leaders through initiatives like the Student Leadership Mentor Academy, which offers mentorship and resources to foster institutional change.[52] The organization specifically supports the retention and success of men of color through targeted mentorship and academic advising. Dedicated to advancing the interests and success of underrepresented students, faculty and staff members, and administrators, A2MEND aims to create a sense of belonging, engage students in discussions about identity and systemic barriers, and empower them to navigate higher education successfully by addressing the systemic issues and improving retention rates.[53] **Since it was established, A2MEND has mentored over 500 African American male community college students, awarded $500,000 in scholarships, provided 25 learning abroad scholarships, and established 44 campus-based student charters across California.**[54] The A2MEND charter strives to advance the community college sector's Vision 2030 goals by conducting targeted recruitment events, organizing campus programs, and providing academic and financial support while engaging in community outreach initiatives.

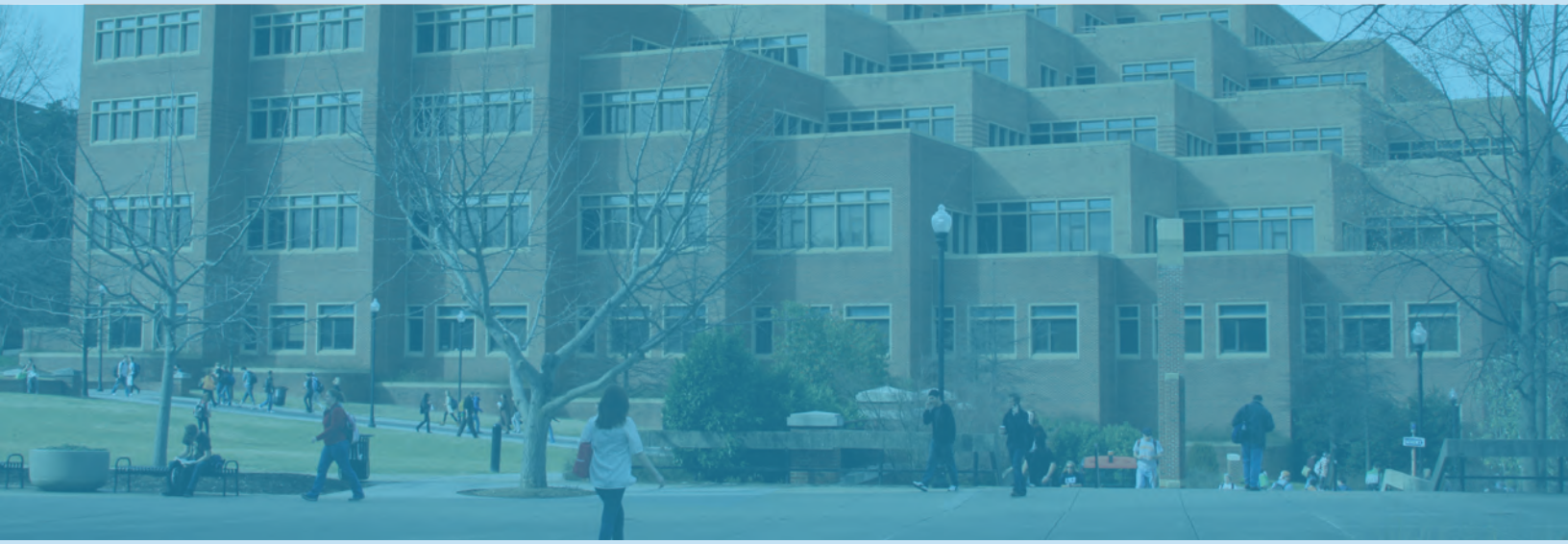
Bronx Community College by Onasill - Bill Badzo on Flickr.

The City University of New York's Black Male Initiative

The City University of New York's (CUNY) Black Male Initiative (BMI) was established in 2005 with funding from the New York City Council after hearings led by Councilman Charles Barron. Through the grant, 15 demonstration projects were funded to improve the enrollment and graduation rates of students from underrepresented groups.[55] The CUNY-wide initiative aims to increase, encourage, and support the inclusion and educational success of students, particularly African, African American, Caribbean, and Latino/Hispanic males. The BMI envisions creating model programs throughout the university to provide additional layers of academic and social support that will be integrated into academic departments and student affairs offices, with the primary goal of increasing enrollment, retention, GPA, and graduation rates of underrepresented students.

Since its inception, CUNY's BMI has graduated over 100,000 students, trained more than 30,000 mentors, and expanded to 30 programs across 25 campuses.[56] Recently, the program has evolved to include wellness and career development, leveraging partnerships with the New York State My Brother's Keeper program, the Eagle Academy Foundation, and elected officials to tackle workforce development and immigrant challenges. The BMI has also recently collaborated with CUNY Graduate Center to demystify the graduate school admissions process. Through panels and discussions with faculty members, students, and alumni, students learned about different types of graduate programs through the Graduate Center, CUNY School of Law, and CUNY School of Medicine, and gained insights into admissions and financial aid.

The CUNY BMI program targets increasing enrollment and supporting success for underrepresented students through 6 strategic pillars. These include diversity recruitment, the utilization of various outreach methods to attract students, particularly males, to CUNY; culturally competent peer-to-peer mentoring, where trained upperclassmen provide support to lower division students, while acknowledging their diverse backgrounds and cultural differences; academic enhancements, such as tutoring and academic support to foster a sense of belonging and improve retention; institutional commitment by senior leaders to secure resources and support; advisory committee meetings, where internal and external partners collaborate to ensure project success; and socioemotional programming, which provides workshops and activities to help students manage emotions, set goals, and build positive relationships.



Hodges Library at University of Tennessee, Knoxville by Wyoming_Jackrabbit on Flickr.

The University of Tennessee Knoxville's Center for Career Development & Academic Exploration

The University of Tennessee Center for Career Development and Academic Exploration (CCDAE) in Knoxville has implemented initiatives committed to fostering an inclusive environment that supports the career development of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students. **The center emphasizes the importance of supporting students to explore their strengths, to make informed decisions about internships and employment, and to acquire tools to overcome stereotypes and barriers that may hinder their progress.** The center's key initiatives include connecting students with organizations related to culture and diversity through tools like the Campus Labs Student Organization Finder, and providing guidance through mentorship programs, specifically the university's Multicultural Mentoring Program. Students are also guided to assess potential employers through resources like Glassdoor and DiversityInc to verify compliance with federal laws using the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

The CCDAE implements practices that are designed to empower students from underrepresented backgrounds to find affirming and supportive workplaces while navigating their career paths. Overall, these practices ensure that students from underrepresented backgrounds can find affirming and supportive workplaces.

Spelman College by Broadmoor on Wikimedia Commons.

Spelman College Wellness Center

Spelman College, an HBCU in Georgia, launched a Wellness Revolution in 2012.[57] The comprehensive initiative was designed to enhance the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of its students. It was created in response to the alarming health statistics among Black women, who are significantly more likely to develop high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, breast cancer, and strokes. Beverly Tatum, Spelman's president, noted that many of these illnesses can be prevented and shared her personal experience of attending too many funerals for young alumni. Recognizing the specific challenges Black women face in higher education, Spelman established a holistic approach to student wellness and success. Since its inception, the wellness initiative has introduced a range of offerings, including yoga classes, fitness challenges, cooking demonstrations, and mental health workshops. **Spelman College has integrated wellness into its campus life, promoting healthy habits, such as increased hydration and stress management techniques, and offering healthier dining choices on campus.**[58] As part of its commitment to a healthier lifestyle for students and faculty and staff members, the college removed soda machines and Krispy Kreme doughnuts from campus and invested in a $17 million fitness center, which features an Olympic-sized pool and weight training equipment.

To support its efforts, Spelman College partnered with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to cosponsor a summit on nutrition, physical activity, and wellness; connect students with health researchers through internships to cultivate interest in scientific careers; and educate potential national partners about the Wellness Revolution[59] as a model program for college women. Students have embraced the wellness initiative at Spelman College, with more of them engaging in healthier habits, such as drinking more water and participating in fitness activities together. By prioritizing the health and well-being of its students, the college's Wellness Revolution serves as a model for how HBCUs and other institutions can create supportive environments that promote the overall success of their student bodies.

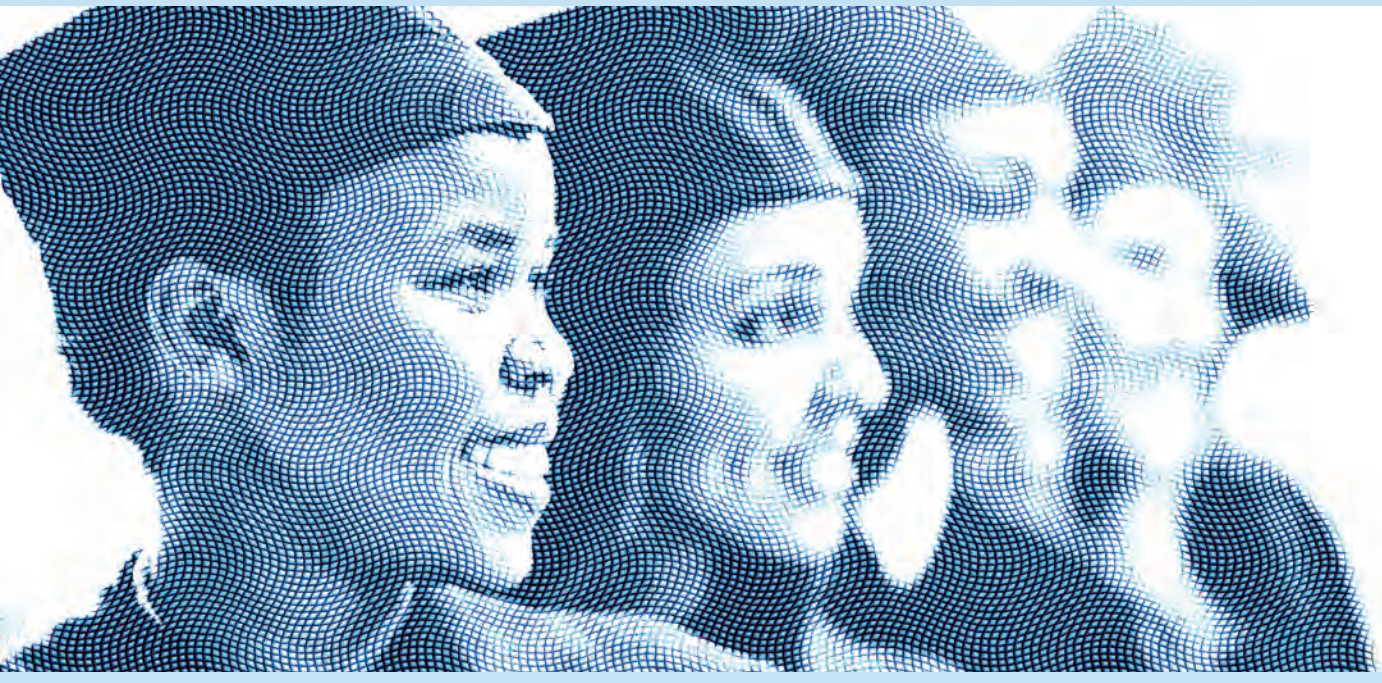
UC San Diego's Black Academic Excellence Initiative

University of California (UC), San Diego's Black Academic Excellence Initiative (BAEI), led by Vice Chancellor Becky Petitt, is dedicated to improving the experience of Black students, faculty, and staff members on campus.[60] The initiative fosters community conversations and collaborations to create inclusive spaces. The BAEI Advisory Committee was established to recommend ways to enhance the presence and experience of Black students at UC San Diego. The initiatives brought forth by the committee aligned with the campus's Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence, which focuses on access and success, climate, and accountability, aiming to create a welcoming environment and ensure institutional accountability.[61] The committee's primary goal is to develop recommendations that strengthen support

for UC San Diego's Black campus community. The initiative aims to enhance undergraduate student enrollment by increasing scholarship funds, ensuring that prospective and admitted students can pursue higher education at UC San Diego.

Founded on May 10, 1930, at Howard University, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) is the umbrella organization for the Divine Nine, 9 historically Black fraternities and sororities.[62] Its mission is to provide a unified voice for these organizations, foster collaboration, and advocate for the needs and interests of Black students. At UC San Diego, the NPHC is an integral component of the Black Academic Excellence Initiative. **The NPHC Plaza[63] at UC San Diego, the first of its kind in the University of California system, is a student-centered space dedicated to promoting the values and contributions of the Divine Nine. This plaza serves as a hub for cultural appreciation, collaboration, and advocacy.**

The NPHC at UC San Diego is the coordinating body for the campus chapters of the Divine Nine organizations. It plays a critical role in guiding these chapters, ensuring they adhere to NPHC policies. The council organizes and supports a variety of events and programs, including social, service, cultural, and professional development activities, with the initiatives aiming to enhance cultural awareness, engage the campus community, and provide resources and support for Black students. Through these efforts, it connects the campus with the broader network of historically Black fraternities and sororities, working to enrich the student experience and advocate for the needs of Black students.



Each of these innovative programs feature key elements of strategies and practices noted below that support Black student success.

Create Welcoming Campuses

One of the most important things a campus can do is to intentionally establish "Black-affirming" spaces, such as Black resource centers, Black honors colleges, Black studies programs, and Black collections in the campus library. Black students regularly report that spaces like these not only engender a sense of belonging at their campuses but also help to counter negative stereotypes about Black students being intellectually inferior to their non-Black peers.

Resources:

How Universities Can Build and Sustain Welcoming and Equitable Campus Environments

Representation Matters

It is important that colleges make sure Black students are equitably represented in institutional governance bodies, like associated students and boards of trustees, as these entities often play a key role in advocating for students and preparing them for leadership roles when they graduate. Far too often, Black students are either underrepresented or not represented at all in important leadership roles across campus.

Resources:

Still Left Out: How Exclusion In California's Colleges & Universities Continues To Hurt Our Values, Students, and Democracy

Equity-Minded Faculty Hiring Practices: Promoting Fairness, Inclusion, and Faculty Diversity to Support Student Success in Higher Education

Commit to Being a Black-Serving Institution

Campuses that are committed to Black students must also unapologetically affirm their status as Black-Serving Institutions. Black-Serving Institutions are colleges and universities that enroll a significant number of Black students and demonstrate a transparent commitment to their success. This commitment can be reflected in each institution's academic and student support programs, campus engagement opportunities, hiring practices, professional learning, and accountability processes. Additionally, it should be reflected in the institution's mission and strategic plan, with measurable goals

committed to outreach to and the engagement of prospective Black students, and in the tracking of Black student enrollment, persistence, course success, and college completions. Of course, ensuring Black excellence in traditional student success metrics, like graduation and transfer rates, is also paramount. Senate Bill 1348 (SB 1348) has been passed by the California Legislature, establishing the California Black-Serving Institution designation. This designation formally recognizes colleges and universities in the state that excel at supporting Black students in achieving postsecondary excellence and success.[64] Policy efforts like SB 1348 can be very effective in encouraging institutions to affirm their Black-serving status and to be intentional about their strategies for supporting Black students.

Support Excellence Among Teaching Faculty

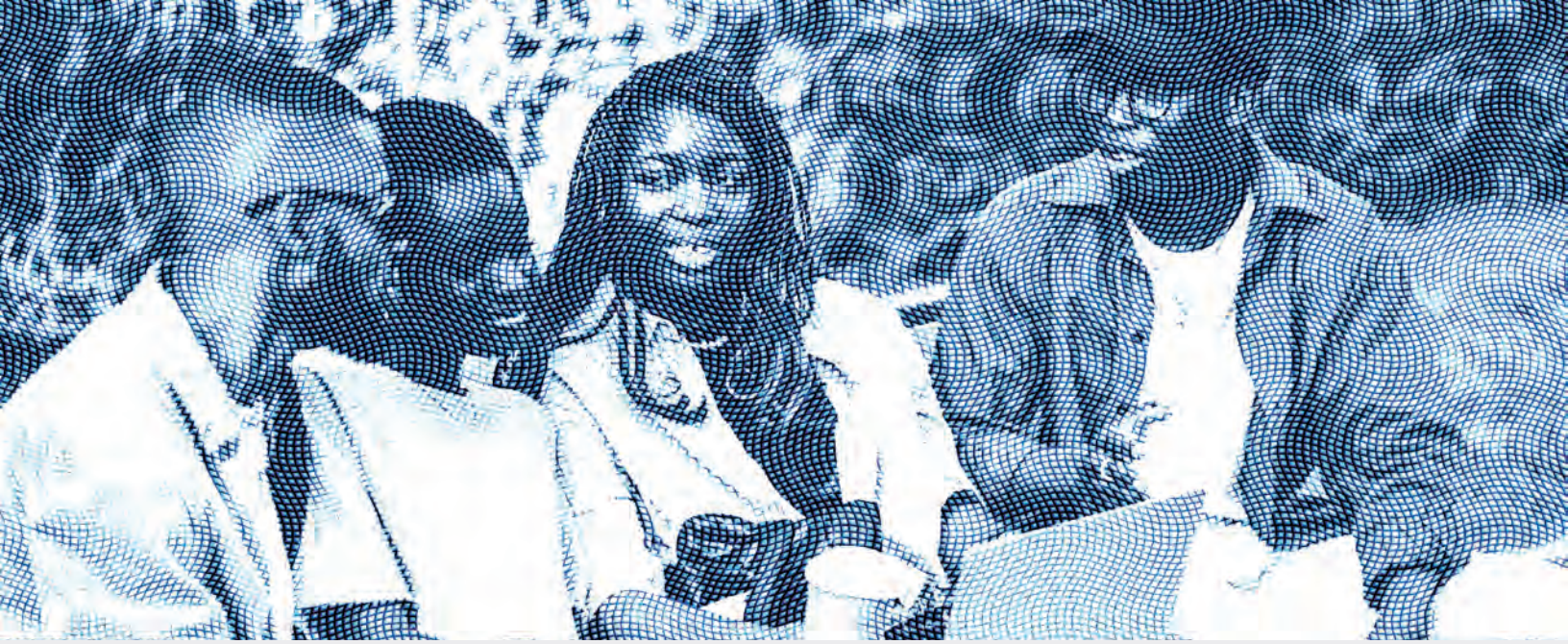
Institutions that are unapologetically committed to Black students' success should also require their Centers for Teaching and Learning and other professional development units to offer all campus educators ongoing learning opportunities for teaching and serving Black students, among other students.

Invest in Research Opportunities

Supporting the faculty by providing institutional grants or other resources to engage Black students, among other students, in undergraduate research, which has been identified by researchers as a high impact practice that contributes to student success, can also be beneficial to students and faculty members.

Provide Access and Preparation for Jobs

In addition, it is essential that community colleges that host pre-apprenticeship and workforce development programs, which lead to employment that pays livable wages in their regions, make sure that Black students are equitably represented among those who enroll in and complete these programs.



Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations can have a sustained and measurable impact on Black students' access to and success in higher education.

Recommended Policy Solutions for College and University Leaders

- ✓ Ensure announcements for open tenure/tenure-track faculty and management-level positions state that a desired qualification for applicants is a demonstrated commitment to the institution's efforts to serve or close equity gaps for Black students, among other students.
- ✓ Incorporate metrics into periodic performance reviews for all employees, including management level positions, to evaluate their contributions to advancing the institution's efforts to serve minoritized students with emphasis on efforts directed to serve Black students.
- ✓ Tenured and tenure-track faculty members seeking promotions should provide evidence of their contributions to the institution's efforts to support Black and other historically marginalized students through their teaching, research, and/or service activities.

- ✓ The curriculum committee should require all new course proposals to ensure the inclusion, contribution, and perspectives of Black scholarship, along with other contributions from racially diverse scholars.

- ✓ Faculty members whose courses consistently yield high rates of D's, F's, and withdrawal (DFW) grades for Black and other disproportionately impacted students should be supported to develop a professional learning plan to improve their effectiveness in teaching and supporting Black students and others who are disproportionately impacted.

Recommended Policy Solutions for State Policymakers

- ✓ Establish a "Black-Serving Institution" designation to be awarded to qualifying institutional applicants whose enrolled student population is at least 10% percent Black. It is imperative that awarded institutions demonstrate a commitment to reducing gaps in retention, time-to-degree, or time-to-certificate completion, and increasing graduation rates for this student population.

- ✓ Assign a governing board that is responsible for the management of the Black-Serving Institution designation.

- ✓ Require every public institution to develop an equity plan that identifies any disproportionate impact on the enrollment, persistence, and success of Black students, among others. Identify goals/targets to eliminate such disproportionate impacts within a specified time frame and the actions that will be undertaken by the institution to achieve these goals/targets.

- ✓ Resource every public high school to establish a dual enrollment program with a local community college (and vice versa) and ensure that the representation of Black students in the program is proportional to or exceeds the students' representation at the high school. Require some dual enrollment courses to be offered in-person at the high school to ensure access for students who do not have transportation.

- ✓ Invest in student support services to provide access to academic counseling/advising and mental health counseling in the evening hours and on weekends.
- ✓ Establish a system- or statewide center for Black student excellence that provides leadership, strategy, resources, and professional learning that can directly impact the success of Black students at every public institution in the state or system.[65]
- ✓ Implement tuition and fee waivers for undergraduate students who come from households that earn less than the state's median household income.
- ✓ Invest in cradle-to-career data systems that allow researchers to monitor student outcomes from K-12 through postsecondary education and into the workforce. Ensure that these data can be disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

Recommended Policy Solutions for Federal Policymakers

- ✓ Implement a scorecard that reports on institutional effectiveness in serving Black students, among others, in the areas of access, persistence/completion, excellence, and institutional receptivity.
- ✓ Encourage institutional accrediting agencies to include student success metrics for Black and other students in the criteria used to assess institutional quality and effectiveness.
- ✓ Increase the Pell Grant amount to cover the full cost of attendance at public colleges or universities.

Conclusion

Gianna Floyd, George Floyd's daughter will turn 12 years old this year. About 6 years from now, she will be completing high school and likely considering what opportunities await her as she prepares to enter adulthood. Hopefully, college will be a viable option for Gianna. Whether she chooses to attend a local community college, a 4-year public institution, or an independent college or university, she deserves to have access to the people and resources she needs to achieve excellence as a Black college student. Far too often, Black students like Gianna are not afforded the opportunity to maximize their potential, whether it's due to the overwhelming cost of attending college, the lack of access to mentors, or the lack of exposure to an academic curriculum that engages their identities and lived experiences.

By the time Gianna enrolls in college, we hope that institutions will have found more innovative ways to create and sustain Black-affirming spaces on campus, that more colleges will be designated as Black-Serving Institutions, and that there will be a critical mass of Black faculty members on Gianna's campus to whom she can go for mentoring and undergraduate research opportunities. As a matter of fact, we desire for Gianna to have more than just hope to depend on to reach her dreams. We desire a safe, welcoming, and rewarding journey to and through post-secondary education for her. Ensuring Gianna's success, and that of the many young talented boys and girls like her, is both a moral and economic imperative. The future of this country depends on our ability to support young and gifted Black scholars. This brief is a value-added resource for those who are fully committed to creating the conditions for Gianna and her peers to get in and through college and thrive while doing so.

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