

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BLACK MINDS MATTER: SUPPORTING THE EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OF BLACK CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA



### HISTORICAL IMPACT OF DISCRIMINATORY POLICY DECISIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL DECISIONS

- Over the past 165 years, court cases and policy legislation have shaped the educational experiences of Black children.
- While there are Black youth and families across California dedicated and committed to education, students unfortunately attend schools in an education system that squanders their talent.
- Despite some progress, the unfortunate reality is that opportunity gaps persist. At the current rate of progress, it will take decades to close the achievement gap between Black students and their peers. This will leave California's nearly 1 million Black youth under age 25 continuing to face an uphill battle to get the education they deserve.



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### PERSISTENT GAPS AND STEREOTYPES

- Black children in California are still
  - The **least** likely to:
    - be placed in gifted and talented education programs
    - have access to and be given a full sequence of college preparatory classes
    - graduate high school in four years
    - complete a college degree
  - The **most** likely to:
    - be suspended or expelled
    - be taught by ineffective teachers
    - require remedial courses when they enter college
- Studies show that teachers hold lower expectations for Black students and that these expectations and perceptions can predict and even influence students' outcomes in schools.
- The deaths of unarmed youth by law enforcement across the country tell young Black Americans that their lives matter less than other lives. The experiences California's Black students have in school tell them that their minds and futures matter less as well.

### IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY – SO WHY IS IT?

- These troubling findings are a result of the lack of access to opportunities and a history of inequitable policy decisions and institutional weaknesses rather than a lack of student ability or parent dedication.
- There are pockets around California where schools, districts, and/or community organizations are committing to closing opportunity and achievement gaps and these efforts are promising.
- But to make the type of impact we need to stop the disenfranchisement of Black students, broader and more systemic changes are needed.
- We know that Black student success is possible – schools and districts around the state where both low-income and higher-income Black students excel demonstrate this.
- These successful promising practices suggest that the persistence of opportunity and achievement gaps is due more to a statewide lack of urgency and commitment than a lack of knowledge and solutions.
- We can learn from what's working to close these gaps and work to replicate best practices through policy changes at the state and local level, through implementing promising practices in schools and districts, and through collaborating with parent and community-based organizations already doing this work.
- Specific policy and practice recommendations in the report are intended to serve as a kicking off point for statewide discussion and engagement, and to lay out an action plan for policymakers committed to ensuring Black minds matter in California.

# CALIFORNIA'S BLACK STUDENTS



The Education Trust–West

California has the fifth largest Black population in the country and is home to about 900,000 African Americans under the age of 25. About 373,000 of these young people are students in our public K-12 schools, representing 6 percent of the public school population. Another 150,000 Black students attend college in California, either at a public or private institution.

Within our K-12 schools, African American students are concentrated in just a handful of California's 58 counties. The counties serving the largest concentrations of Black students are Solano, Sacramento, Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Francisco. In each of these counties, Black children represent at least 10 percent of the K-12 population. Los Angeles County – the biggest in terms of overall population – is home to the largest number of Black students, nearly 124,000. There, African American students comprise 8 percent of the school age population.

Some of these counties have seen dramatic declines in the African American student population over the last two decades. For example, between 1995 and 2015, Alameda County experienced a decline in the Black student population from 23 percent to 12 percent, and San Francisco County experienced a decline from 18 percent to 10 percent.

*Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2014; California Department of Education, 2014-15 Enrollment; National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System*



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