



— CREATING —  
AN  
EQUITABLE  
FUTURE  
IN WASHINGTON STATE

20  
15

BLACK WELL-BEING & BEYOND



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## EDUCATION

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**H**igh-quality education—from preschool through college—is essential to preparing Washingtonians for success as workers, citizens, parents, and the leaders of tomorrow. Learning begins at birth, and the first five years of a child’s life are particularly important for cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development.<sup>24</sup> Higher levels of educational achievement are associated with future success, such as quality job opportunities, higher incomes, good health, and better parenting—the benefits of which pass from one generation to the next.

Our country has a long history of Black Americans fighting to gain equal access to education. From being shut out initially, to “separate but equal” policies under the Supreme Court’s *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling, to its ruling in *Brown v. the Board of Education* making racial segregation in education unconstitutional, Black people have made significant progress in educational access, achievement, and attainment. Today, more Black Washingtonians hold college degrees than ever before, a testament to that progress, and they have been increasingly joined by many Black people born outside of the United States arriving with higher education degrees from their home countries.<sup>25</sup> But much work remains. Unequal access to educational opportunities at every stage prohibits Black students from reaching their full potential. Even those who obtain a degree find it difficult to find work. Many land in jobs that are below their level of education and skill.

\$917

The median cost of child care per month for a family of three in Washington state takes up 27 percent of a Black family's income.

1 in 10

Just one in 10 teachers in Washington state is of color, even though four of every 10 students are of color.



2x

The rate at which Black students in Washington state are suspended or expelled compared to their peers.



\$4.5 BILLION

The amount of additional resources needed to adequately fund K-12 education in Washington state.

25%

The share of a Black family's income needed to pay for average tuition at Washington state's four-year public universities.

## MAJOR OBSTACLES TO EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

For education to be the great equalizer many people perceive it to be, equal access to high-quality education—across early learning, K-12, and higher education—is a precondition. In practice, today's education system falls short of providing equal opportunity for Black students.

**The high cost of early learning opportunities.** High-quality early learning experiences, such as those provided in child care settings, are essential for development and help prepare children to be successful in school. The cost of child care, however, is prohibitive for many families in Washington state. Child care for a family of three can cost up to 18 percent of monthly household income; for a Black family of three it can consume up to 27 percent of income, given their generally lower earnings.<sup>26</sup>

**Inadequate state funding for K-12.** In 2012, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled in *McCleary v. State of Washington* that the state is not fulfilling its paramount duty under the state constitution to fund basic K-12 education. The court recognized that funding for schools varies by geographic location, and that many schools rely too heavily on local taxes to make up for resources that should be provided by the state.<sup>27</sup> In its ruling, the Supreme Court gave the Legislature until 2018 to invest an additional \$4.5 billion into the K-12 system to meet its constitutional obligation.<sup>28</sup>

The lack of adequate school funding is a major barrier for all students, but particularly for students of color, who are more likely than their peers to experience gaps in opportunity within the education system and outside of it. In addition, the unique social and economic circumstances many Black students face—particularly those born outside of the United States—may require specialized, culturally competent investments to help them excel in school. The amount of school funding, as well as the ways in which resources are spent, are both critical to achieving greater equity in Washington state's K-12 system.

**Disproportionality in student discipline.** Being suspended or expelled from school is associated with falling behind in coursework and dropping out, and increases the chances of a student becoming involved with the criminal justice system.<sup>29</sup> At nine percent, the rate of suspension or expulsion for African-American children in Washington state is more than twice as high as the state average of four percent. Black students born outside the United States have a rate of six percent.<sup>30</sup>

**Lack of teacher diversity.** Teachers of color bring a broad range of experience and perspective that is essential for a rapidly diversifying student population. Not only do they serve as positive role models in the community, research shows that students of color who are taught by teachers of color do better in school.<sup>31</sup> Of every 10 students in

Washington state public schools, four are of color, yet just one of every 10 teachers is of color.<sup>32</sup>


**Rising cost of college tuition.** The growing cost of higher education is felt by all Washingtonians, but is particularly significant for students with low incomes and those of color. College tuition for four-year public universities has increased by 81 percent since the start of the Great Recession.<sup>33</sup> Today one year of tuition at a four-year public university in Washington state would take one quarter (25 percent) of a Black family's median income.<sup>34</sup>




## MAKING PROGRESS ON EQUITY IN EDUCATION: KEY GAPS TO CLOSE

For the 80,000 Black children in Washington state public schools, difficulty finding affordable, high-quality early learning opportunities, lack of adequate school funding for K-12, disproportionate disciplinary action, a lack of teacher diversity, and the prohibitive cost of higher education combine to affect their achievement and attainment across the education pipeline, as well as their future opportunities in the labor market.

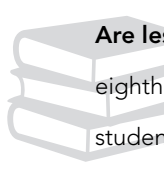
### COMPARED TO THEIR PEERS, BLACK STUDENTS IN WASHINGTON STATE:



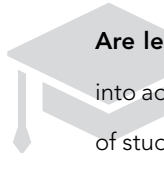
**Have lower rates of preschool enrollment.** The cost of child care is likely just one reason why less than half (45 percent) of Black children are enrolled in preschool compared to their peers (53 percent).<sup>36</sup> Other reasons may include a shortage of child care availability in neighborhoods, lack of culturally competent child care, or differences in care preference by racial or ethnic background.



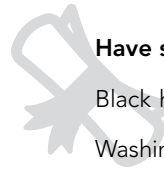
**Are slightly less likely to be prepared for kindergarten.** At 41 percent, the share of children ready for kindergarten in Washington state is low overall; Black kindergarteners are only slightly behind their peers, with 39 percent prepared in all six areas of kindergarten readiness.<sup>37</sup>



**Are less likely to meet standards in third grade reading and eighth grade math.** Proficiency in third grade reading and eighth grade math are key predictors of future success in school.<sup>38</sup> The achievement gap is evident by third grade, with Black students trailing their peers in reading proficiency by 15 percentage points. By eighth grade, Black students trail their peers in meeting math standards by 22 percentage points.<sup>39</sup>



**Are less likely to graduate from high school on-time.** Graduating from high school is an essential step in transitioning into adulthood. Sixty-five percent of Black students entering ninth grade graduate within four years, compared to 76 percent of students overall.<sup>40</sup>



**Have similar rates of college enrollment after they graduate high school, but have lower degree completion rates.** Black high-school graduates have similar rates of college enrollment as their peers. However, colleges and universities in Washington state are less likely to retain Black students. For students entering college in 2005, for example, the rate of completion at public universities was 68 percent overall, but 52 percent for Black students.<sup>41</sup>

## DIALOGUE FOR AN EQUITABLE FUTURE

Access to an affordable, high-quality, and integrated system of early learning, K-12, and higher education remains one of the most important opportunities Washingtonians need to reach their full potential and compete in the 21st century economy. Each stage of education serves as a building block for the next, and when students receive the opportunities they need to excel and achieve, the impact is cumulative and lifelong. Higher educational attainment is associated with increased earnings and economic security, greater job satisfaction, and a greater sense of control over one's life—all of which enhance individual well-being and have large returns for society.<sup>42</sup> Below are questions to be explored in collaboration with the Black community to improve opportunities and outcomes across the entire education pipeline.

1. How can we expand high quality early learning opportunities for Black children and families? How does the Black community define “quality” in education, and how is it similar or different for African-Americans and Black people born outside of the United States?
2. How will the state provide adequate funding to close the achievement gap? What resources do Black students need to stay in school and excel? Are different resources needed for African-American students and Black students born outside of the United States?
3. What are the root causes of Black students being disciplined more than their peers? How can we reform discipline policy and devise more constructive strategies to keep Black children engaged in school?
4. How can we bring greater diversity into our children's classrooms?
5. If Black students who graduate are just as likely to enroll in college, why do they have lower rates of obtaining an associate's degree or more? In addition to the prohibitive cost of higher education, what are the major reasons colleges cannot retain Black students, and what strategies can be pursued to improve their rates of college completion?

