



Education



The education Black children receive is, by necessity, in two parts: in formal educational settings like schools and at home. Our education should lead us to a fulfilling career and the freedom to live our lives. Seven months into the pandemic, statewide enrollment in the public K-12 system dropped by 40,000 students.⁴⁴ Even with a return to in-person schooling, it still has not returned to previous levels. The discussion around educating Black children is evolving. Black parents may be exploring options outside the public school system. They are looking for different avenues that help their children think critically about the world and move steadily toward self-actualization.

Contextual to Factors Related to Education

The cost of quality early learning and child care

Brain science aligns with what we already know: investing in quality early learning from birth to three years old is critical to children’s development.⁴⁵ In the U.S., parents — a child’s most important teacher — are forced to choose between time with our children and employment income. Child care is so expensive that it can be more cost effective for a parent to quit their job and stay home, especially if a child has a disability or needs additional support.

The U.S. is one of seven countries in the world without federal paid parental leave.⁴⁶ Nationally, only 4% of employers offer subsidized

child care.⁴⁷ Despite Washington being one of a few states that offers 12 weeks of paid parental leave, for most families, it isn’t enough to spend the time we need with our children in those critical early years. Washington’s Fair Start for Kids Act is a good beginning to taking care of families.⁴⁸ Passed in 2021, it reduces child care co-pays and expands eligibility and services for those at 60% of the state median income, which is \$3,677 per month (or \$44,124 per year) for a family of two.⁴⁹ That still leaves many Black families in a financial quandary as the median household income for Black families in Washington state is \$56,250.⁵⁰

Child Care as a Share of Black Median Household Income

	Child Care (Per Infant)*	Child Care (Per 4-year-old)*
Costs	\$14,554	\$11,051
Percentage of Black Median Household Income (\$56,250)**	25.9%	19.6%

*EPI, October 2020. <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/#/WA>

**Washington State Budget & Policy Center analysis of 2014-2019 American Community Survey Integrated Public-Use Microdata Series (www.ipums.org)

Public school funding structures benefit the already resourced

In Washington state, 50,716 Black children were enrolled in K-12 grade levels in public school for the 2021-22 school year. In 2020, there were 52,284 Black children ages 5-17 total in our state.⁵¹ The average per child cost for the 2019-20 school year in Washington was \$17,082.⁵² However, this amount does not include additional funds that are raised and spent by Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), which vary based on the wealth of parents in the district.

Despite racial segregation being illegal, public schools still effectively offer segregated educational experiences for the majority of Black children. Funding for public schools is tied to property taxes.⁵³ Those taxes are based on the assessed value of homes in the area. Racist practices like redlining and restrictive covenants have impacted

both who lives where and how much money a school district has to spend. In 2018, wealthier school districts received 7.6% more funding than high-poverty districts due to inequitable funding structures.⁵⁴ A recent study shows that students exposed to an increase of at least 10% in school funding each year (K-3) experienced a 2% reduction in the likelihood of being arrested as an adult.⁵⁵ Schools with higher poverty levels are also more likely to see teacher turnover.⁵⁶

Alignment with stated values of equity would mean putting more resources where they are needed most. When schools lack services, opportunities, and maintained buildings, it speaks volumes to our children about how much they’re valued. This is something parents then must work overtime to address at home.

Cost of higher education

In 2019, 60% of Black students in the state moved immediately from high school to college, up from 2015.⁵⁷ Since the pandemic, that number has likely declined. More and more, the idea that we all need a college education is being questioned. Once young people are ready for post-secondary education, the cost of college and the debt incurred is a deterrent and stalls economic mobility. Since 1980, the cost to attend a four-year college has increased by 180%.⁵⁸ There's also the emotional and psychological cost when attending a predominantly white institution. Racist experiences in schools erode Black students' well-being, bringing up feelings of anger, loneliness, social isolation, and invisibility.⁵⁹ Beyond higher education, other avenues exist to the careers we want to be in, including the trades.

Higher education takes 45% of the income of an average Black household in Washington, down from 61% in 2015.⁶⁰



In 2020-21 school year, 1.5% of Washington's teachers were Black.⁶²

Who is teaching our children and youth

White educators made up approximately 88% of classroom teachers statewide during the 2018-19 school year, while white students and students of color made up 53% and 47% respectively of Washington's student population.⁶¹ In the 2020-21 school year, just 1.5% of Washington's teachers were Black.⁶²

For Black children, having teachers who look like them matters immensely. Black students who had at least one Black teacher in grades K-3 were 13% more likely to graduate from high school and 19% more likely to enroll in college than their same-school, same-race peers. Males and students in relatively disadvantaged schools would gain the most from having a same-race teacher.⁶³

In a state that is still majority white, it is critical that white students have early and often experiences in which Black people are in positions of power. These are important opportunities to disrupt racism at a young age.



Eurocentric approaches to education

In addition to representation, Black teachers bring their lived, racialized experience with them to the classroom — and to the curriculum. Young Black folks and their families are taking a critical look at the curriculum schools are teaching. In addition to curricula, eurocentric teaching methods inhibit the ability of students to learn and demonstrate mastery in a multitude of ways and on their own time.⁶⁴

Practices that incorporate experiential learning, figurative and symbolic learning, and direct engagement through interaction open possibilities for students to excel.

“When Black students don’t see themselves in the curriculum at school — when they don’t see themselves as respected and important — they can rightfully feel alienated and disengaged.”⁶⁵

In 2019, the state legislature mandated that OSPI create an Ethnic Studies Advisory Committee to identify and make available ethnic studies materials and resources for use in grades K-12. The nuance: It remains optional for graduation. Each school district, in coordination with schools, families, and community-based organizations can determine what ethnic studies material is taught and when it is taught at the district level.⁶⁶

House Bill 1149 was introduced to the Washington House of Representatives in 2021 with the goal to expand learning about social determinants of health, healthy community building, and baseline understanding of public health, but it did not pass.⁶⁷

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Implicit bias of teachers and administrators

We are grateful for the wisdom, strength, and resolve of Black students turned organizers who are calling attention to how racism in the learning environment actively impacts racism in their field, whether it be policy, health care, education, or urban planning. Protest at the earliest of ages looks like defiance and disconnection, which is likely met with some form of punishment. The culture of compliance within schools needs to transform to one of belonging.

Discipline data are counted by unduplicated student disciplinary action measures. In the 2019-20 school year, 5% of Black students were disciplined. This is a significant drop from the 2015 report; however, this is most likely due to the pandemic, where discipline rates dropped for every racial group. In the 2018-19 school year, 8.2% of Black students were suspended or expelled. Discipline starts with teachers. Black teachers are more likely to believe in Black children's ability to succeed, and respond accordingly. They are also less likely to view Black students' behavior as disruptive.⁶⁸

Washington's Schools Suspend Students at Different Rates

Washington state has worked to reduce disparities in school discipline rates among different groups of students. Still, schools were doling out short-term suspensions to Black, homeless, and Native students, and students with disabilities at significantly higher rates than their peers.

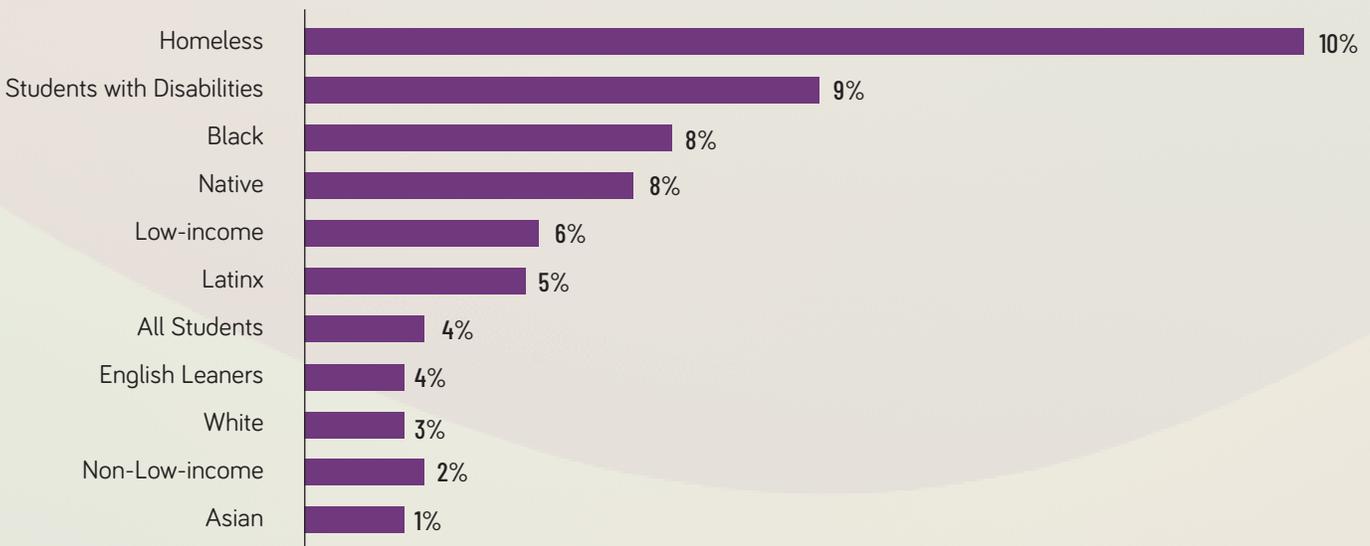


Chart: Lauren Flannery / The Seattle Times - Source: The Education Trust; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Discipline Rates, 2019

Community Identified Approaches to Education

There is no one vision of education in which every detail is the same for every student. We want different approaches because we have a diversity of brilliance and creativity. In the end, we all envision rich, integrated educational spaces that teach students how to grow into themselves and shape a better society. Education that is interactive, hands on, and culturally relevant.

Fund the Black community to plan how we want our education systems to function

We want planning dollars so we can create the time for families to get precise about what we want and how to get there.

- Fund community to envision the types of organizations we want in a world that produces well-being, the positions needed in those organizations, and the skillsets required to do a good job.
- Center the right voices and expertise at the right time, providing income for community-led strategy and planning work.
- Design regular, accessible spaces for administrators to plan with Black families. School board meetings are still highly inaccessible to most families.
- Gather systemwide data that speaks to decision points within education systems.

Utilize mastery- or competency-based learning toward self-actualization

Learning spaces across the lifespan would nurture our creativity using mastery- or competency-based learning models, allowing students to lean into their strengths and master things on their own time using a lens of targeted universalism.⁶⁹

- Provide money up front for learners who require additional tools to get where they want to go.
- Select and design curriculum with the input of Black students to create the jobs of tomorrow.
- Integrate education with the world that exists outside of the school walls in order to achieve mastery that is real-world applicable.
- Better integrate community involvement, health, civics, arts, and food systems.

Redefine academic standards to cultivate Black brilliance

Academic standards and related assessments should speak to our different gifts and contributions we bring to the world.

- Shift the focus of evaluation more toward the system than students.
- Disaggregate system data to get to targeted universalism.
- Make better use of the data that's already there such as entry assessments to inform teaching.
- Redefine assessment standards. Standardized tests have a racist history.⁷⁰
- Create shared definitions of what mastery looks like with a baseline belief in the ability of Black students to succeed, honoring their uniqueness and dignity.

Cultivate loving interactions within the education ecosystem

Nurture our humanity and honor our dignity from the earliest of ages. Ensure the norms, culture, structures, and policies across the education ecosystem foster love, rather than perpetuate trauma.

- Tend to the social-emotional environment of the system: interactions between educators and administrators, educators and students, and educators and themselves.
- Provide teachers the adequate support to grow, self-regulate, and set boundaries.
- Create new norms and new organizational cultures rooted in belonging, and set an expectation for continued healing, self-reflection, and love.
- Fund the people and programs that facilitate healing in the learning environment.

Create practices of accountability and transparency at all levels of decision making

We want clear and meaningful accountability at every level, tailored specifically to the scope of decision making and authority of that role.

- Be willing to admit when a strategy won't work as well as you thought it might.
- Connect administrative leadership pay to performance outcomes.
- Test and purposefully align strategies to contribute to district, state, and community-directed outcomes, before implementing schoolwide plans.
- Create a connected cross-sector network of partners from K-12 to higher education.
- Map out how all partner agencies — public health, housing authorities, transportation, etc. — are working collectively to support our children, rather than each agency having separate plans.
- Ensure families, broader community, incoming staff, and faculty are able to understand and follow decision-making processes.
- Create a process beyond school board meetings for community dialogue (not just feedback) that enables everyone to understand how a policy is working in real time and allows everyone to shift in the moment in response to what is happening.
- Better utilize ombudsman-type processes to evaluate classroom exclusion and reentry.

Revisit job descriptions and organizational structures, and diversify the workforce

To cultivate a generation that will create the jobs of tomorrow, we want to look with fresh eyes at the workforce.

- Assess and rework policies and collective bargaining agreements to better align with our goals.
- Outline creative pathways to our future workforce with Black youth at the center.
- Address pay equity for teachers and offer more paid teacher residencies.
- Define clear roles across the educational system and balance workloads to consider emotional labor.
- Place teachers with specific skills and lived experiences to strategically support the students in that school.
- Set expectations that schools hire racially and gender diverse teachers and pay them well.