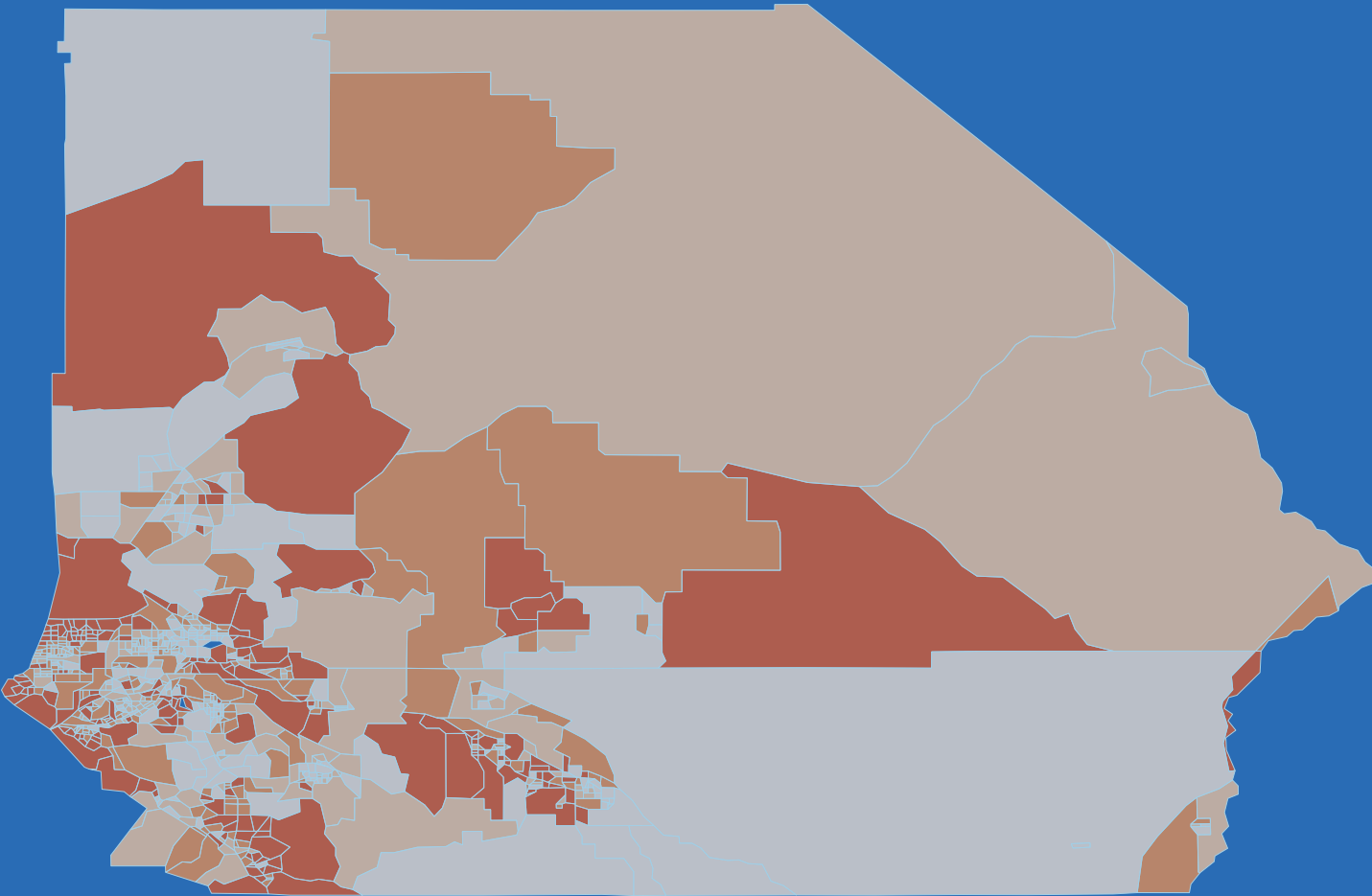


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# State of Education Equity in the Inland Empire

SEPTEMBER 2020



PART SIX IN A SERIES



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Much like in the rest of the country, the historical legacies and contemporary manifestations of racial segregation and discrimination have led to deep inequities in educational attainment in the Inland Empire. Historically, the Inland Empire has been a place where indigenous education was delegitimized and anglicized, and where public education was marked by a high degree of racial segregation and disinvestment in communities of color.

At the same time, the Inland Empire has also been a place of community empowerment and progress. The region spawned great community leaders like Frances Grice who fought local busing laws all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973. The work of community engagement and empowerment to produce educational equity continues today, as is evident in the various nonprofit organizations we profile. Important, too, are the efforts of allies within government and educational systems, who are working in various ways to reform policies and practices that improve educational attainment, particularly among students of color.

Despite these efforts, we see persistent racial and gender inequities in education in the Inland Empire. School discipline, which has been shown to have detrimental effects on youth well-being and educational attainment, continues to be disproportionately high among Black Black and Native American students. These racial disparities persist, even though there have been some notable reductions in overall suspension rates due to changes in state policy and local practices. In addition to school discipline, deep racial disparities persist on a host of measures ranging from access to early childhood education, to elementary school math and language scores, to A-G completion rates, to college degree attainment.

Currently, the push for equity in education is at a crossroads in the Inland Empire. The COVID-19 pandemic has created the space and opportunity to redesign our systems of education, built on equity and inclusion from the ground up. Important reforms during a redesign include having more representatives school boards, administrators, and staff; greater cultural competency among teachers and widespread adoption of ethnic studies; increased funding for underserved schools and districts; and improvements in the timeliness and comprehensiveness of local data that can improve educational equity.

This report highlights several important partnerships and collaboratives that are already underway, including those focused on “collective impact” involving leaders and administrators across educational and workforce systems. Fostering greater community engagement and influence in these efforts would ensure that these collective efforts move with greater urgency, and have greater impact.

## HISTORY OF EDUCATION

The Inland Empire is home to diverse groups of Native American people and tribes including the Alliklik, Chumash, Cahuilla, Gabrielino, Kitanemuk, Serrano, Luiseño, Chemehuevi, Kumeyaay, and Mojave. These groups lived across the region’s deserts, valleys, and mountains dating back over 10,000 years (Patterson 2016). First nations in the region were largely autonomous and self-sufficient communities, with diverse social and cultural norms.

Before contact with Europeans, Native Americans had established an effective educational system which ensured a smooth transmission of their cultures to the next generation (Yeboah 2005). This system was composed of teaching youth the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and dispositions required for successful functioning as adults in real world settings (Johnson et al., 2005). Native American education delineated social responsibility, skill orientation, political participation, and spiritual and moral values (Franklin, 1979).

Native American education was holistic and included developing a healthy attitude toward labor, developing a sense of belonging and encouraging active participation in community activities (Banks, 2003). Both boys and girls had equal access to this education system, albeit in gendered ways. Boys were taught by their fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and other male elders. Girls were instructed by their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, female elders and other members of their families. Sometimes, both boys and girls received instruction at the feet of either male or female elders (Mould 2004). There were barely any dropouts and the community was able to ensure that every child received a full education (Mould 2004).

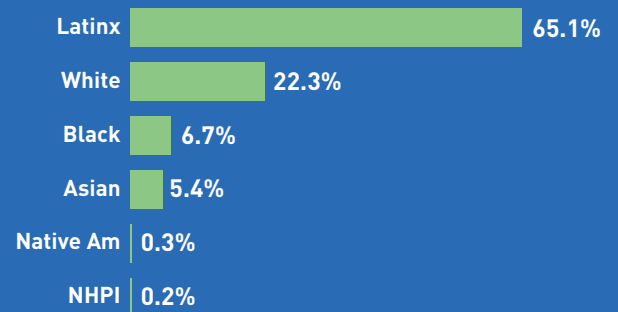
### From Spanish Colony to Statehood

As Spaniards started to settle in the region in the 1700s, they gradually imposed a Euro-centric educational system based on an Anglo-conformist assimilationist approach (Yeboah 2005). This approach included educating Native Americans to be “less Native American” and more European, often based on the teachings of Catholicism. This Anglo-conformist and assimilationist approach left deep psychological and emotional scars that prevented most Native Americans from achieving their fullest potential. Fortunately, today, Native American leaders are successfully making efforts to reverse the adverse effects of these deep-rooted historical biases, synthesizing traditional Native American educational practices with European American practices (Yeboah 2005).

In 1821, the Mexican War of Independence gave Mexico [including present-day Riverside and San Bernardino counties] independence from Spain. This transition of power led to a period of unrest in the region, which

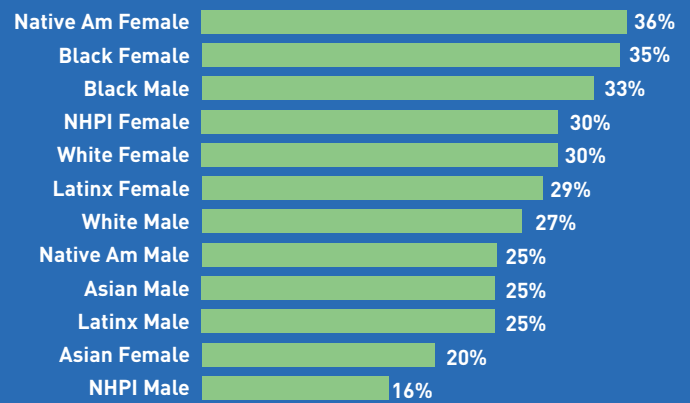
## KEY FACTS

### SCHOOL-AGE POP SHARE, INLAND EMPIRE 2018



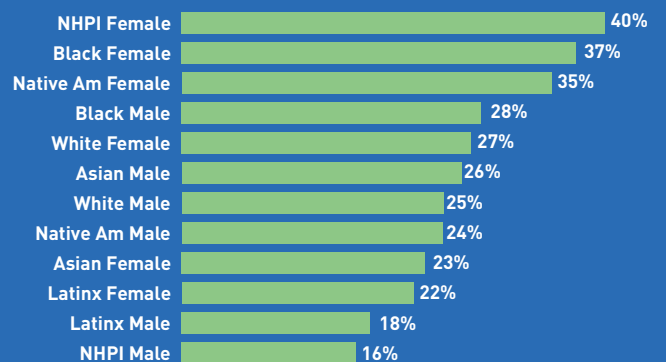
Source: American Community Survey 2018 5-YR PUMS

### STARTED COLLEGE WITHOUT COMPLETION IN THE INLAND EMPIRE, AGES 25 TO 34 (2018)



Source: American Community Survey 2018 5-YR PUMS

### STARTED COLLEGE WITHOUT COMPLETION IN THE INLAND EMPIRE, AGES 25 TO 34 (2008)



Source: American Community Survey 2008 5-YR PUMS

ultimately affected the varying education systems of the time (Patterson 2016). The Mexican government imposed laws without much consideration for local conditions, causing friction between the government and residents (Robinson 1979). This factionalism grew worse during the Mexican-American War (1846-48), which ended with Mexico formally ceding California and other territories to the United States.

The discovery of gold in 1849 hastened the establishment of California statehood in 1850. It also upended social relations in the state, as White settlers arrived in large numbers, outnumbering the Mexican American population and soon passing laws limiting the rights of Chinese immigrants and all other nonwhite populations in the state (Colbern and Ramakrishnan, 2020). While the education system was more standardized after statehood, California schools remained segregated. For example, by 1887 about 14,300 Native American children were enrolled in 227 schools run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs or by religious groups in the state (Feagin & Feagin, 2003).

During these early years, even though students were segregated based on race the teachers and administrators were still mostly White Anglos, unreflective of the students they were meant to serve. Often, teachers and administrators would blame any educational problems on cultural differences and the students themselves. Anglo schools focused only on the dominant culture and expected all students to operate as if they were members of the dominant culture, giving an advantage to students from the dominant group and a disadvantage to those from minority groups (Johnson et al., 2005). Thus, in an effort to assist their students to be high achievers in school, many White Anglo teachers continued educating them away from their own cultures and imposing Anglo-European culture on them. For example, even today many schools and textbooks exclude Native American experiences and their immeasurable contributions to this society and the rest of the world and provide little to nothing to assist Native American children identify with their own cultures (Yeboah 2002).

### Racial Exclusion After Statehood

The first formal school in the Riverside area was the parish school of La Placita in 1844, just prior to statehood. The area's first formal public school district was not formed until 1863, with the formation of the San Salvador school district in San Bernardino County. At the time, school districts in California were provided for entirely by local bonds, which meant that wealthier and whiter areas generally received higher quality instruction. Schools in the Riverside area were not

brought under centralized control until the appointment of Arthur Wheelock as superintendent in 1902. Although he professionalized and expanded the area's education system, he was also responsible for further entrenching segregation in the local education system, by making it de facto almost impossible for minority students to transfer into some schools. The Lowell school in Riverside was considered the "boundary" between White and non-White areas during his tenure and beyond.

Around this time the population of Riverside became more diverse due to the growing citrus industry, which brought laborers from all over, as well as the railroad industry. Often, the children of these laborers were denied access and entry into local schools in both counties (Hendrick 1997). In addition to Latinx workers, these industries also attracted many Asian laborers, mainly from Korea and Japan. Significant segregation persisted in the public education system for the children of this group as well.

A prime example of this is the story of Jukichi Harada, a Japanese born immigrant working in Riverside. In 1915, Mr. Harada bought a house in downtown Riverside and put it in the name of his minor children, specifically because it would allow his American born children to attend public schools in Riverside.<sup>1</sup> However, as a foreign national, he was unable to own land in California, due to the California alien land act. The case between him and the state, *California v. Harada*, attracted national attention, and Harada was eventually allowed to buy the property for his children, although the law against foreign born residents being allowed to own property remained on the books. The Harada house is today a national historic landmark in Riverside, and illustrates the long history of fighting for educational equity and inclusion in the Inland Empire.

### Education & Civil Rights in the 1950s & 60s

During the Civil Rights Movement, several Inland Empire activists moved to make their schools more inclusive by combating desegregation. Chief among them was Frances Grice.<sup>2</sup> A longtime resident of San Bernardino, Grice was responsible for numerous job-training programs, such as Operation Second Chance, a mentoring program for young adults from troubled areas of San Bernardino and Riverside. However, perhaps her most significant contribution to the cause of educational equity in the Inland Empire was the ruling in 1973, largely because of her efforts, by the state Supreme Court that San Bernardino schools were engaging in segregation and discrimination, something that she had been working to combat for decades. Her efforts to get San Bernardino schools to integrate are considered to have been integral to the city being

awarded the 1977 All-America City award by the National Civic League, something that many longtime city residents consider to be a high-water mark for the city. Riverside also had a notable civil rights history in education, with its school district being the first large one in the country to integrate without a court order. This process was very far from peaceful though, as half of the segregated Lowell school was burned down in suspected arson in 1965, which prompted protests (Littleworth 2014). Community leaders, including many minority youth, intensified their advocacy, circulating petitions and organizing boycotts calling for the true desegregation of Riverside schools. The school district soon relented, agreeing to a plan for racial integration in Riverside public schools (Littleworth 2014).

## CONTEMPORARY STRUGGLES

In the 1990s, the Inland Empire continued to diversify further. In particular, although the Inland Empire remained less diverse than LA county, an increasing portion of Southern California's Black population moved to the area given rising home prices in Los Angeles and Orange counties. Unfortunately, much of the affordability of the area at the time was driven by the decreasing economic fortunes of the area, as large employers such as Norton Air Force base closed and others such as Kaiser Steel were sold and downscaled. Since then, the region experienced a sharp boom-and-bust cycle associated with housing construction, followed by a massive increase in logistics development that has worsened the outlook with respect to jobs that pay sufficient wages to cover housing and other living expenses (Center for Social Innovation, State of Work in the Inland Empire, 2018).

In addition, the specter of racial exclusion has continued to haunt public schools in the Inland Empire. Community organizations and parents have long organized to get school boards and administrators to be more attentive to the needs of communities of color, low-income residents, and students facing a variety of challenges. Recent years have seen an escalation of community mobilization on issues ranging from racial inequities in school discipline to inadequate support for historically disadvantaged communities. Most recently, movements for racial justice including the movement for Black lives, have focused greater urgency and attention to racial inequities in education. Thus, for example, several sites in Riverside and San Bernardino counties had protests in the wake of the killing by George Floyd, with the City of Riverside's protests numbering in the thousands. The Black Lives Matter movement has also prompted movement on the local government level, with county governments, cities, and school boards declaring racial inequity as a high priority for systemic changes in policies and practices.

## PROFILE

### GROWING INLAND ACHIEVEMENT

**Representative:** Ann Marie Sakrekoff

**Position:** Senior Director

Growing Inland Achievement is a regional, collective impact organization that focuses on educational and economic equity. Founded in 2015 through a Governor's Innovation grant, GIA connects organizations and serves as the intermediary for institutions. Senior Director Ann Marie Sakrekoff describes the work of GIA as inter-segmental, including working across segments of education and making connections with civic and business sectors as well as nonprofits to create systems change. "There are systems that were created long ago that are broken and not serving our students or institutions. It is our job to help institutions identify those systems," says Ann Marie.

Ann Marie believes that the high levels of collaboration between institutions and organizations across the region are one of the strengths of the IE. She believes that much of the success in the region can be attributed to data-driven policies. One of the catalysts of educational success are the leaders who are taking the initiative surrounding conversations around equity, which helps to facilitate action on areas of injustice.

Ann Marie believes that students need more support in the transitional spaces between educational segments, particularly from high school to post-secondary education and transferring from a two-year institution to a four-year institution. "There is a lot of work that needs to happen where students may graduate or be ready to transfer but the support is not there. The rates are not where they need to be in order for the region to have a robust economy and unfortunately it is lower for our marginalized students. We need to have targeted support for our students who are struggling, and for Black students in particular." She underscores the need for comprehensive data to better understand these gaps in student education.

Additional support is also needed for our returning adult students in our region. Ann Marie believes we need to identify the reasons that students may have left school and what we can do to support them. Reforms such as creating a cohort model of adult education, or taking one class at a time on a consistent schedule could make a large-scale impact for our region, say Ann Marie.

Ann Marie believes that we need to engage our students and families more in these conversations and the decision-making processes. We also need to have more student involvement and to pay them for their time. Finally, we need more basic needs support and technology support. As she notes, "I'm excited about the opportunities that I've seen on the horizon, but I also recognize and that it will take a lot of hard work and building relationships with each other. We need to build community as we continue this work."



## STUDENT PERSPECTIVES & VOICES

Recently, there has been significant movement in the education sector in the U.S. towards a system that encourages more student-centered learning, schools, discussions, activities, and philosophy. Student voices can refer to the values, opinions, beliefs, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds of individual students and groups of students in a school, and to instructional approaches and techniques that are based on student choices, interests, passions, and ambitions.

As the foundational element in this system, student voices are increasingly becoming more and more important. In fact, research indicates that students who believe they have a voice in school are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who do not believe they have a voice (Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016).

Student voices not only let students have a say in their own learning, but bring untapped expertise and knowledge that can provide renewed relevance and authenticity to classrooms and school reform efforts. Student expertise can provide relevant insight to educators who are seeking to promote greater engagement, community, and success in their schools. In fact, research suggests that student voices are one of the most powerful tools for school improvement (DeFur & Korinek 2010). Additionally, student voices can be a powerful tool for school improvement at all levels of education (Mauder et al. 2013).

In this section, we wanted to highlight two current research projects that directly engaged local students and their perspectives.

### INLAND EMPIRE DESERT STUDENT VOICES 2020

In early 2020, Crafton Hills College, Growing Inland Achievement, California Community Colleges, and the Student Senate for California Community Colleges partnered to do an in-depth study on community college students in the Inland Empire. The goal was to take a deep dive into the student journey, looking at both the impacts of COVID and beyond. The study had a representative sample of local students with diverse backgrounds. Methods for data collection included (1) cognitive interviewing, (2) journaling, (3) focus groups, and (4) surveys.

Some of the most interesting findings include:

- *Students equate success with access to information*
- *Students want a combo of self-guided and guided info to make important decisions*
- *Students rely mostly on mobile devices; access to laptops is limited*
- *College websites are often gatekeepers especially for low income and diverse students*
- *Students transfer between community colleges hoping other schools will better meet their needs*
- *Black students report more likely to report feeling left out/isolated - students suggest more groups specific to their needs*

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the findings. If you would like to learn more about this comprehensive study, please contact Growing Inland Achievement for details

## INLAND EMPIRE BLACK EDUCATION AGENDA

Spearheaded by BLU Educational Foundation, the upcoming research report entitled the "Inland Empire Black Education Agenda" takes a deep dive into the experiences of Black students in the region. Too often, educational decisions are made for Black students without input from them, their families or the community. This study aims to provide insight to the education community on Black students and their families. The work highlights their top five educational priorities.

Through a mixed methods approach, this study identified Black students and their families top 5 educational priorities. These priorities are weighted by significance and include: (1) increase Black academic success, (2) creating and expanding the teaching of Black history, (3) better college and career access, (4) effective and more diverse teachers, and (5) achieving better graduation rates.

Author's of the study urge local district and school leaders to move past speaking about Black Educational Excellence and begin putting systems in place that ensure districts and schools develop educators who are critically self-aware, culturally responsive, and who strategically engage Black students and parents in an inclusive school environment. To read the full-report contact BLU Educational Foundation.

Black-led organizations have been at the forefront of this engagement and have taken strategic action in the region, aimed at addressing these inequities. For example, The Black Equity Initiative was formed in 2014 and is composed of Inland Empire organizations that aim to improve social conditions through empowerment, education, and policy change. Guided by a deep commitment to the liberation and self-determination of black people, this work advances our mission by helping us to deepen our influence and reach for educational equity throughout the region.

The Black Equity Initiative works on a variety of issues ranging including criminal justice reform, educational attainment, youth development, youth empowerment, and health and well-being. It was this work that ultimately led to the creation of the \$5 million dollar Black Equity Fund, focused on investment in Black-led organizations.

### **ACLU Complaint Against San Bernardino County**

Although there has been some promising gains in recent months, the fight for equity in education continues. For example, in an ongoing case filed in June 2020, a complaint was filed against the San Bernardino County Office of Education (SBCOE) alleging that more than \$300 million dollars in unaccounted or misspent funds were diverted from high need students of color to law enforcement in the county.<sup>3</sup>

The complaint alleges that the county education officials violated their oversight and accountability obligations under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), California's school funding law, by approving deficient 2019-20 school spending plans known as "LCAPs" within SBCOE's jurisdiction. Notably, it is the first complaint filed under the 2013 LCFF law directly and solely against a county office of education for deficient district spending.

Under the LCFF, when high-need students enroll in a school district, they bring with them state funds that must be spent on new or improved services that are effective and directed towards them. The allegations from the ACLU claim that "SBCOE's failure to fulfill its oversight obligation is particularly troubling when the highlighted districts include some of the lowest performing schools in the state and ones with high suspension and chronic absenteeism rates."

## **WHAT DOES EQUITY IN EDUCATION MEAN?**

Before going through the data, it is important to have a foundation of what equity in education means, both theoretically and in action. This section details some of the previous academic research on the subject and provides a

## **PROFILE**

### **BLU EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION**

**Representative:** Dina Walker & Rakayla Simpson  
**Position:** President & CEO; College Prep Advisor, Public Policy and Advocacy Fellow

BLU Educational Foundation provides education and human services programming for youth, adults, and organizations to build healthy and productive communities. They focus on education, health, civic engagement, leadership, advocacy, and the arts. Based out of San Bernardino, much of their work centers on college access and working with high schools throughout the region.

President & CEO Dina Walker believes that investment in early childhood education across the region is lagging and that this especially affects low-income students of color. At all educational levels, Dina believes that utilizing more and better data is essential in reaching the students and families that are left behind. Dina advocates for using disaggregated data to have a better understanding of the gaps in which students are continuously being left behind, particularly in terms of gaps in race and gender. As Dina explains, "When you say that a program worked really well, but only for these people, you're making a decision of who you're not going to serve."

Dina and Rakayla note that these disparities are growing even larger due to impacts from COVID-19. With the transition to distance learning and increased reliance on online platforms, BLU is advocating for more resources to address the needs of students. As Rakayla says, "We're doing virtual college advising and many of the students don't have a computer. So many people don't have access to reliable internet on their computers or their phones."

When asked about the future prospects of education equity in the region, Dina suggested that real systemic change is necessary. "If we're really serious about making real changes we have to come to grips with the fact this system doesn't work. It's been 10, 20 years and we can still see these gaps in student achievement. We should be able to try something new, but we are too afraid to change the system" said Dina. She stated that "we can't continue to invest in bad programs that are failing so many students."

Despite these challenges, Dina and Rakayala did note the recent positive movement in community engagement and innovation in the region both with the Riverside County Office of Education and with San Bernardino City Unified.

foundation for understanding the data presented in the following sections.

An equitable education system helps all students develop the knowledge and skills they need to be engaged and become productive members of society. More importantly, giving all children an equitable start would lead to better economic and social outcomes for individuals, for regions, and for our nation.

As illustrated by previous research, education outcomes are highly inequitable across family income groups and also in terms of gender, legal status, disability, race/ethnicity, and other indicators. Moreover, on many of these indicators, gaps in outcomes are larger now than in the past (Cahalan et al. 2015). Researchers note that one of the root causes for this widening inequality in higher education is the continued disinvestment of state funds for public colleges and universities that has been occurring since the 1980s and the declining value of federal student grant aid. These gaps also persist in early childhood education and the K-12 system.

Aside from an increase in resources and funding, scholars also note that rethinking academic standards to be more culturally appropriate and inclusive is needed in tandem with providing extra support to students who need it. Experts in education note the importance of a student-centered learning approach, which should be individually personalized and engaging for each student. Due to these inequities, the U.S. has an educational system that serves to sort students in ways related to later life chances based on their demographic characteristics rather than provide all youth with the opportunity to use their creative potential to realize the many benefits of education, which will ultimately contribute to the advancement and well-being of everyone (Cahalan et al. 2015).

When looking at previous academic research we find that the concept of educational equity has two distinct categories: (1) fairness - which means ensuring that personal and social circumstances do not prevent students from achieving their academic potential, and (2) inclusion - which means setting a basic minimum standard for education that is shared by all students regardless of background, personal characteristics, or location.

## RACE & INTERSECTIONALITY

There are many identities that encompass the label of a “student.” The term intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1990) is the concept that individuals often find themselves at the intersection of multiple identities including factors such as race, class, and immigration status. Each of these identities may have a

different relationship to power, privilege, oppression and marginalization. Due to these various identities, experiencing life as a student may differ drastically for each individual. For example, the life experiences of wealthy White students and students of color are remarkably distinct, sometimes even if they attend the same school or university.

Employing intersectionality provides a framework to better understand the progress and challenges of groups like LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, students of color, first generation students, undocumented students and more. We highlight a few of these groups in the following sections. Using this lens, we can better understand complex social relations in our region, and advocate for improved data collection that can lead to policies and investments that are more effectively tailored to specific populations.

### LGBTQ+ Students

A student community that is often overlooked are the LGBTQ+ students. The experience of LGBTQ+ students is often overlooked in the conversation surrounding education equity. These students can face additional challenges due to discrimination and increased health risks. Research suggests that LGBTQ+ students report statistically higher truancy, lower grades, greater expectations not to finish high school, and lower expectations to attend a four-year college than other students (Aragon 2014). Discrimination and victimization can often account for academic disparities between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ youth (Aragon 2014).

For LGBTQ+ students in higher learning, on campus resources like the Queer and Transgender Resource Center at CSUSB and the LGBT Resource Center at UC Riverside can be helpful in building community and providing important information. Additionally, some research has noted the positive impacts of organizations like Gay-Straight Alliances for students at all levels (Lee 2002). These type of alliances can positively impact academic performance, school/social/and family relationships, comfort level with sexual orientation, development of strategies to handle assumptions of heterosexuality, sense of physical safety, increased perceived ability to contribute to society, and an enhanced sense of belonging to school community (Lee 2002).

More data, specifically local data, on LGBTQ+ students is needed to better advocate for the resources they need to move toward better equity in their education experience.

### Students with Disabilities



Another student group that should be highlighted when talking about equity are students with disabilities. Disabilities is a broad term in itself and includes students with both physical and developmental disabilities that can impact the different ways they are able to learn.

As state leaders continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, most schools across the Inland Empire are working in a hybrid model of remote learning and in-school teaching. These school closures and disruptions exacerbate the existing inequities in our education system—presenting the most significant challenges to students and families who are under-served in normal circumstances, including students with disabilities.

With many schools transitioning unevenly to distance learning—and little public information about whether and how they are providing specialized instruction, related services, and accommodations to students with disabilities—this period brings enormous risks for these students. Research has shown that these type of disruptions to daily routines and online learning can be especially challenging for students with disabilities (Basham et al. 2015). For example, most schools in the Inland Empire began distance learning mid-August and 2-4 weeks in, special education parents reported on a scale of 1-10, 1 being extremely poor and 10 being excellent, scored the distance learning process as 4.2 in a recent Inland Empire survey.<sup>4</sup>

Schools must work to ensure that students with disabilities have all the support they need for meaningful instruction, including the structured guidance and support they receive while in a classroom. As state, school district, and school leaders continue to plan for and respond to these uncertain times, they must prioritize the services and support students with disabilities need.

Apart from the new challenges associated with COVID-19, students with disabilities can face additional difficulty in the education system. For example, students with disabilities that are transitioning between different levels of education often do not have the resources and supports needed for the next step in their education. As the number of students with disabilities entering higher education rises, there needs to be stronger and more comprehensive transition programs between high schools and post-secondary institutions. Under many current transition plans, students with disabilities often leave high school without the self-advocacy skills they need to be successful in college (Eckes & Ochoa 2005).

### Undocumented Students

The inclusion of undocumented students, at all education levels, is essential for full equity in education. While legal

## PROFILE

### DR. TALISA SULLIVAN

**Position:** Independent Educational Consultant

Dr. Talisa Sullivan is an independent educational consultant working in the region. When asked about education equity in the I.E., Dr. Sullivan noted that although there are examples of successful educational programs, she believes there is room for improvement at all levels of education. She believes that by providing resources to our most under-served communities, including trainings and workshops for parents and more educational support for students, education leaders can address some of these concerns. She also highlighted the need to ensure that our educational leaders look at equity from a holistic perspective rather than as single metric to be met, “Equity is not a target or a check-mark, but more of a process and journey,” described Dr. Sullivan.

In the earlier grades, Dr. Sullivan described the unequal processes that result in labeling English Language Learners (ELL) and Black students as special needs, resulting in a lack of scaffolds that put them at a disadvantage once they reach middle school. As she described, “They have already fallen so far behind and we still have them in a system where they’re not thriving. We have to pay closer attention to students who have challenges in the primary grades not focus on labeling them as having special needs, behavior problems, or being deficient.” This system follows students up through the secondary level where many students are no longer engaged and many instructors are not prepared to engage these students, described Dr. Sullivan.

Dr. Sullivan is passionate about the need for sustainable systems at all levels of education. This includes hiring teachers and education leaders with diverse experience and perspectives and similar backgrounds as the students they serve, as well as having staff that will be experts in cultural competency and would be able to provide ongoing training. As she described, “There are some best practices that you have visited before, but some best practices are important to revisit every week or every month in order to refine your skills and to hone in on that as a reminder that this is an important piece of ensuring that every kid gets what they need.”

Dr. Sullivan highlighted the strong collaboration across the two counties and across organizations throughout the Inland Empire. Many of these non-profits and businesses are getting together to create equitable opportunities for students. Dr. Sullivan cited the increased awareness of inequities as well as a willingness to take action to address these inequities, as the catalyst for much of these recent gains.

## PROFILE

### YOUTH MENTORING ACTION NETWORK

**Representative:** Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan

**Position:** Co-Founder & Chief Visionary Officer

Youth Mentorship Action Network (YMAN) leverages the power of mentoring and the fight for equity and justice. Dr. Weiston-Serdan describes her organization's work as supporting and resourcing young people so that they can do the work they need to do. YMAN's work includes a hybrid one-to-one and group mentoring program which connects youth to elders that offer wisdom and support.

Dr. Weiston-Serdan noted, "I fell in love with mentoring because it was this idea that you can really connect for what could be a long-term relationship and it's a different type of exchange than what is happening in schools."

She continued, "A lot of what I've experienced in schools, it's schooling. It's just making sure that kids don't get into trouble and making sure they have basic concepts for what we think the workforce needs. I don't see a lot of innovation in schools. I'm not going to say that absolutely nothing is working. But I think that the antiquated model of what we call education just isn't it."

Dr. Weiston-Serdan believes that we need to rethink what education looks like, including re-imagining where education takes place. She stated, "I think until we take a fundamental look at education and our society and redefine it and it out what it's supposed to accomplish and for who I think it's going to be a stagnant institution." She suggested expanding learning sites to include community centers and giving young people more power about what they are learning. Instead of having businesses and places of employment dictating what education looks like, Dr. Weiston-Serdan suggested that schools take the lead and push the workforce to reflect what the youth envision for the next 10 years. She noted that this must be done with an equity lens, stating that "Investing in an education system that allows Black folks and brown folks and queer folks and poor folks to have a say in their education and freedom of imagination would really move the region toward equity."

When asked about the promising work in the region on education equity, Dr. Weiston-Serdan pointed to organizations like BLU Educational Foundation, specifically their work surrounding community engagement. She believes that civic engagement advocacy is essential for addressing the issues of equity in education. As she described, the communities affected need to be empowered to take control and become decision makers that are in charge of their own destiny, not only in terms of education, but in all aspects of their lives as well.

status is not a condition for enrollment in California K-12 schools, restrictions are in place at the community college and university level. Additionally, undocumented students may face barriers including anti-immigrant sentiment and other forms of discrimination while pursuing their education. In fact, research has revealed that undocumented students confront significant financial barriers, shoulder unique psychological and social burdens tied to their legal status, and often lack access to forms of social capital that facilitate educational success (Bjorklund 2018).

It's important to note that undocumented students bring a host of assets to educational institutions—including civic engagement and resilience—that are underutilized (Bjorklund 2018). Some research has found that despite the specific risk factors (e.g., elevated feelings of societal rejection, low parental education, and high employment hours during school) undocumented students who have high levels of personal and environmental protective factors (e.g., supportive parents, friends, and participation in school activities) report higher levels of academic success than students with similar risk factors and lower levels of personal and environmental resources (Perez 2009). Undocumented students are a resilient group that enrich our local educational landscape. Reforms are needed at all education levels to better address the inequities surrounding undocumented students in the education system.

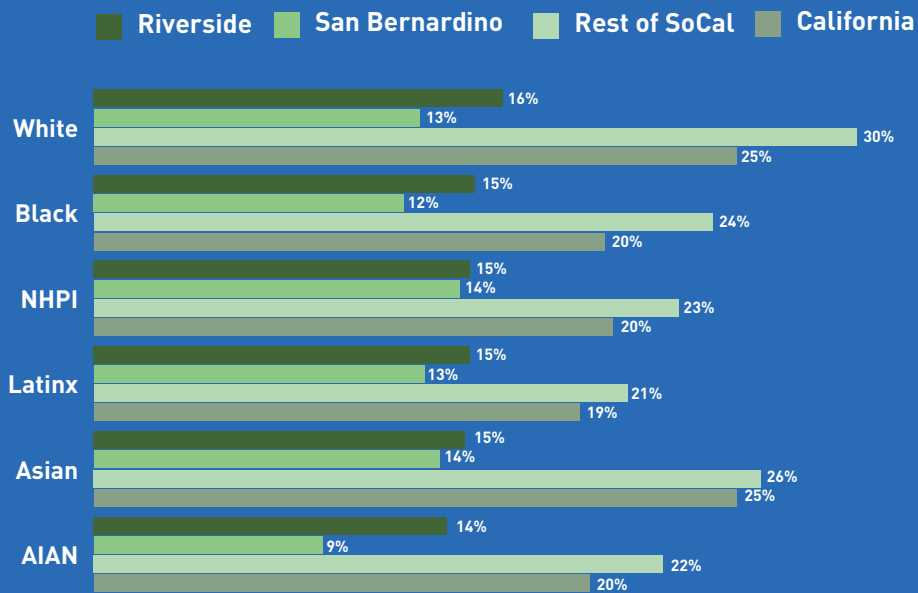
### Adult Education & Nontraditional Students

Another group of students to highlight when talking about equity in education are adult learners, sometimes referred to as non-traditional students in higher education. This is a diverse group of students that includes adults going back to school at varying levels to complete their degrees, or going to school for the first time. These students are an increasingly diverse and growing population. Often, they pursue further education due to the rapid pace of technological change, and the constantly shifting demands and competition in the workplace and labor market. Research has shown that there are real benefits for adult learners, who often gain economic and personal benefits when they pursue further education (Ritt 2008).

A key characteristic distinguishing nontraditional students from other college students is the high likelihood that they are juggling other life roles while attending school, including those of worker, spouse or partner, parent, caregiver, and community member. These roles may be assets, both through the social supports they provide and through the rich life experiences that may help adult learners make meaning of theoretical constructs that may be purely abstract to younger learners. Yet more often, these multiple roles present challenges in students' allocation of time for both academic study and participation in campus-based organizations and activities.

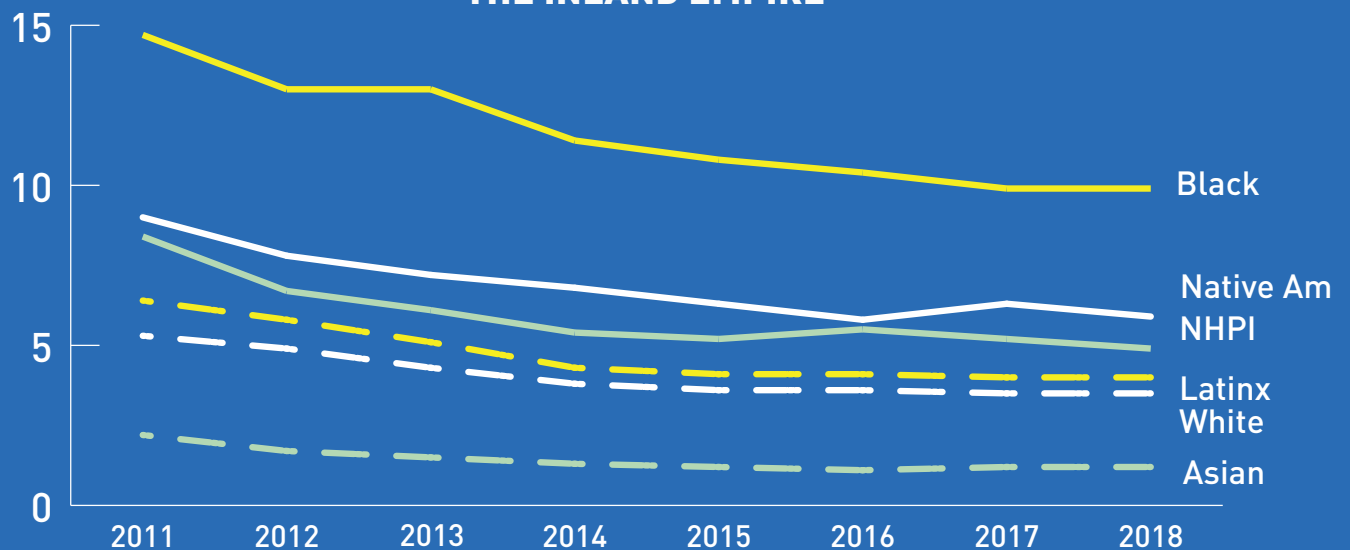
# Data Snapshot

## ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



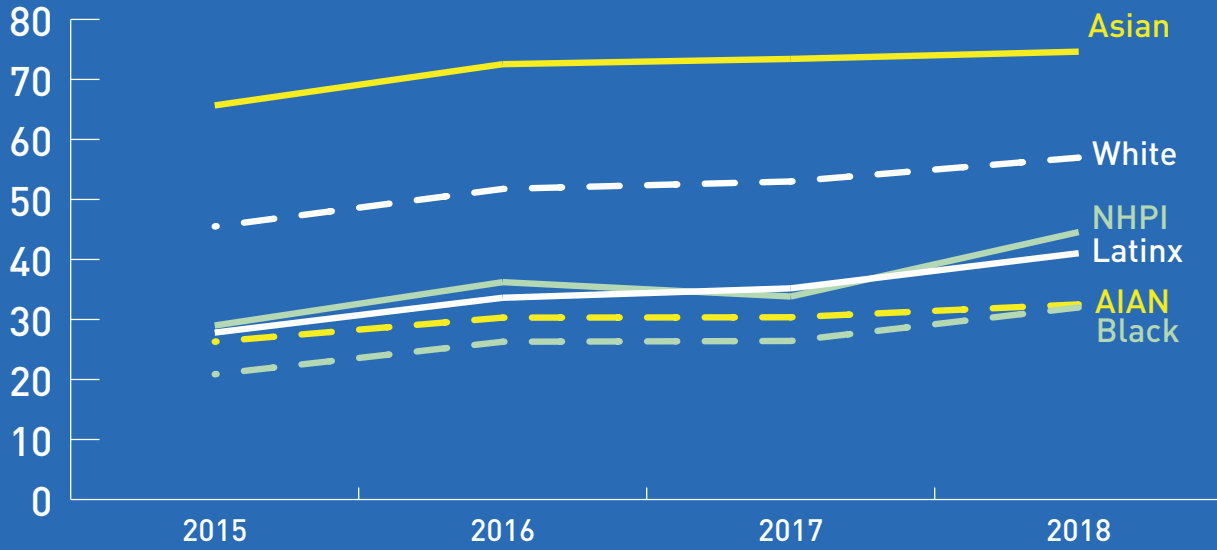
Source: California Child Care Resource & Referral Network (2017); California Department of Education (2016-2017); American Institutes For Research Early Learning Needs Assessment Tool (2016)

## SUSPENSION RATE PER 100 STUDENTS BY RACE IN THE INLAND EMPIRE



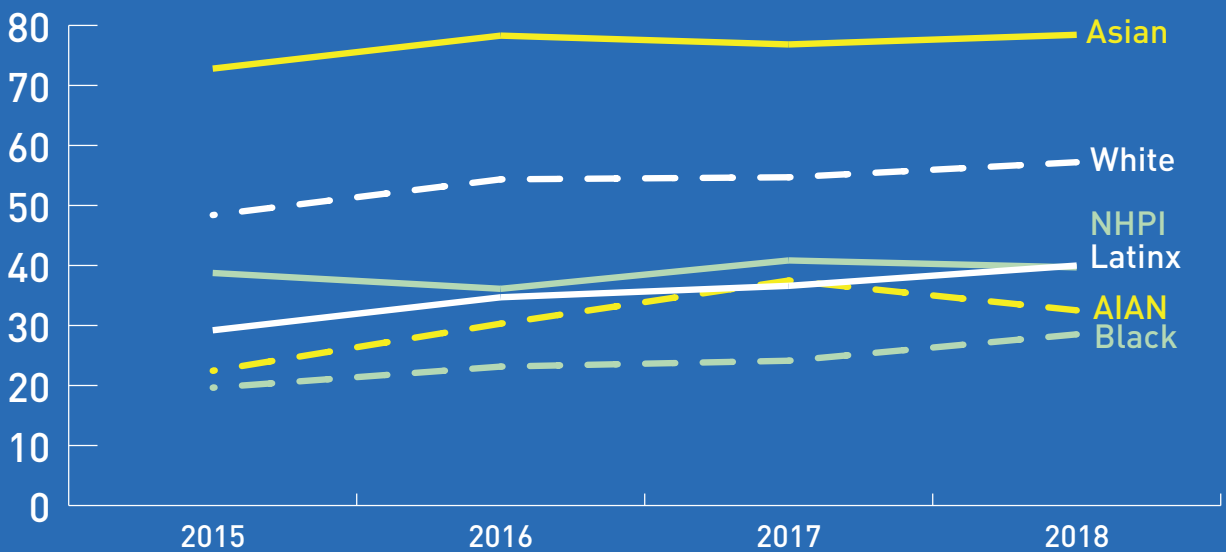
Source: Suspension Data, California Department of Education 2011-2018

### ELA TEST SCORE BY RACE IN THE INLAND EMPIRE



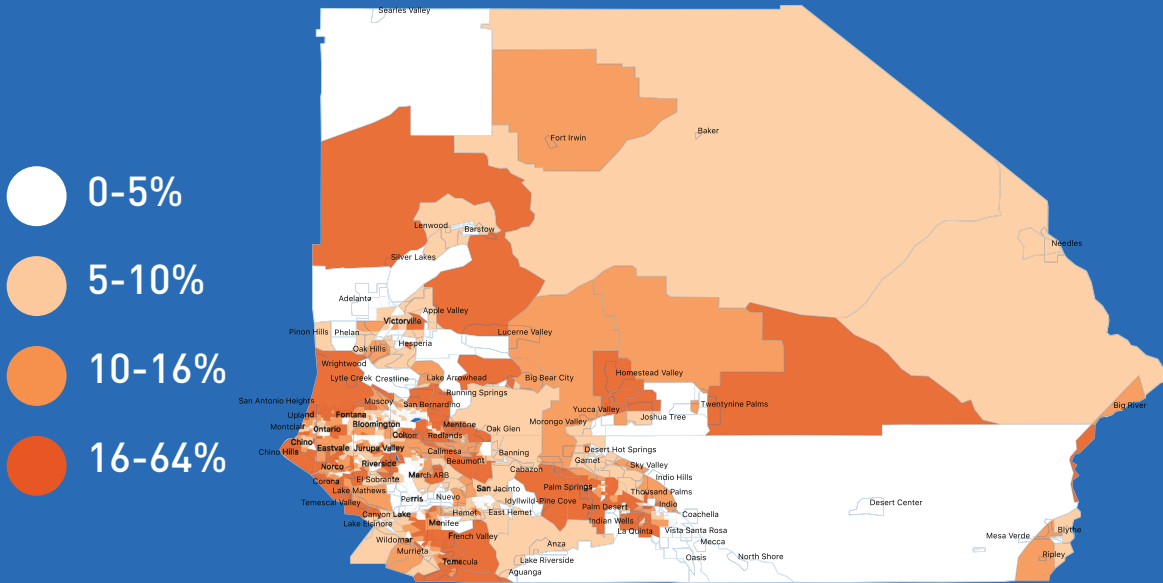
Source: California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress & ELPAC 2015-18

### MATH TEST SCORE BY RACE IN THE INLAND EMPIRE



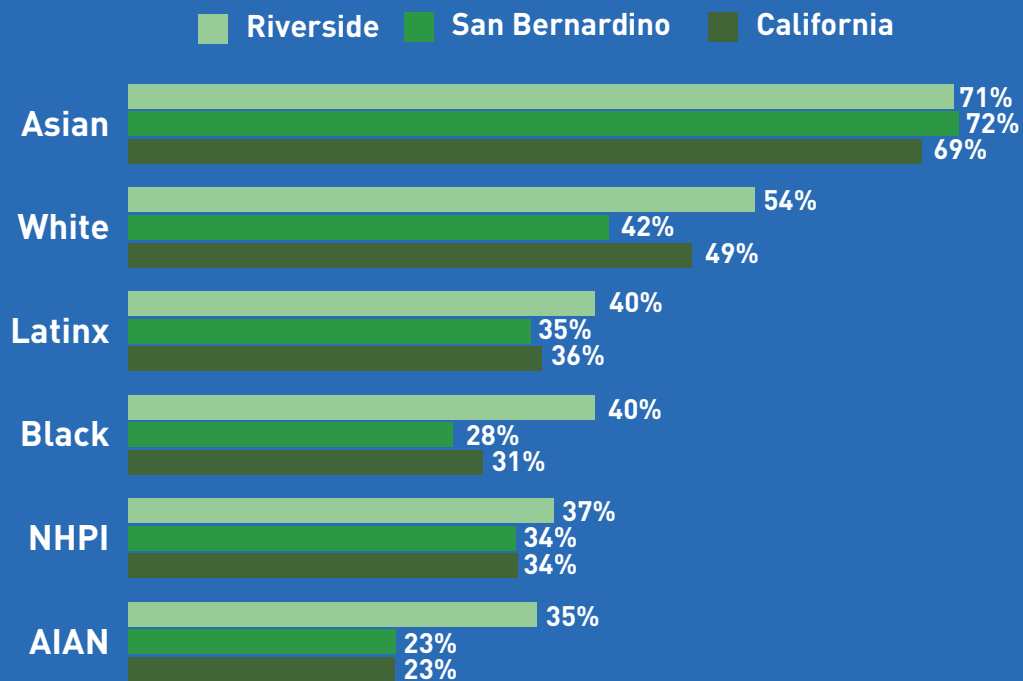
Source: California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress & ELPAC 2015-18

## BACHELORS DEGREE ATTAINMENT BY CENSUS TRACT



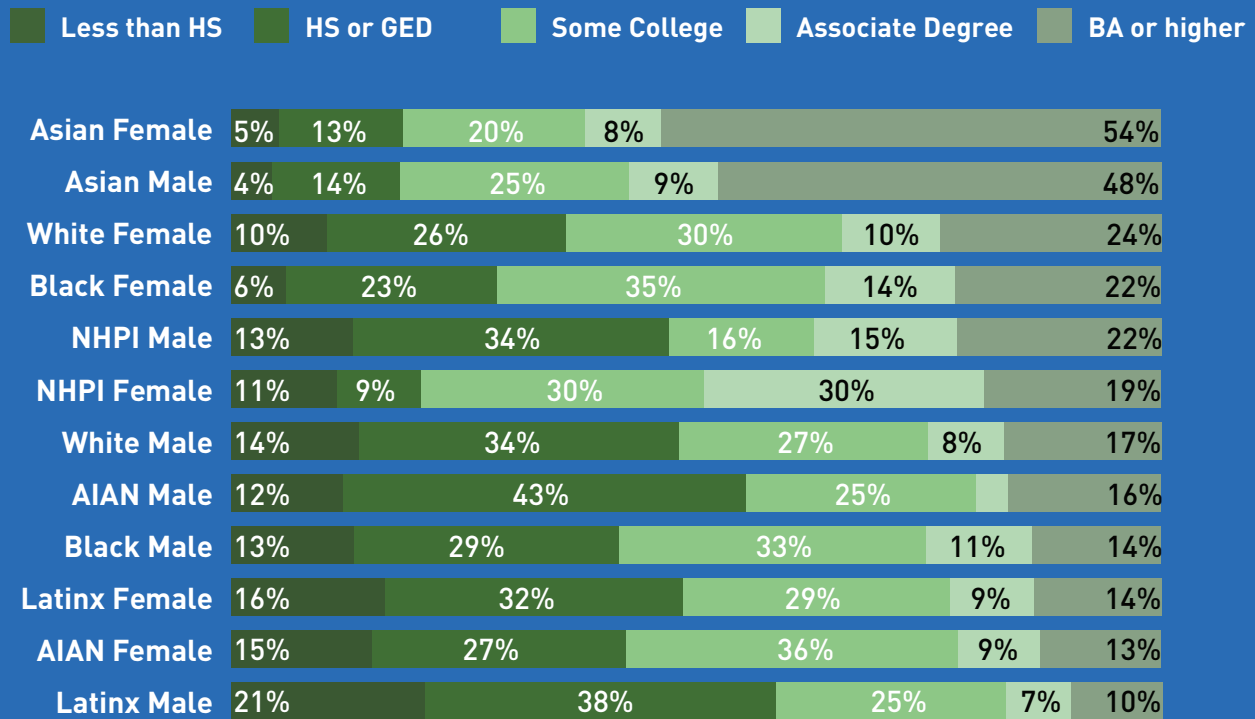
Source: American Community Survey 2018 5-YR PUMS

## 2018 A-G COMPLETION RATE BY RACE AND GEOGRAPHY



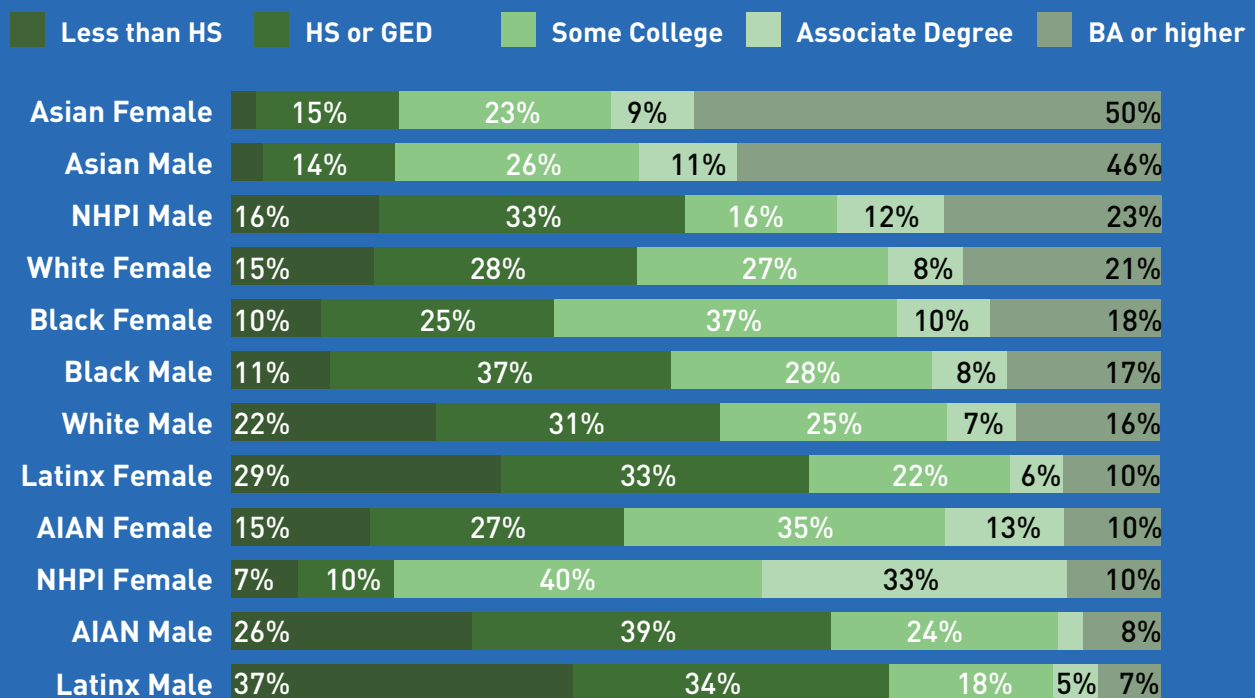
Source: Four-year cohort graduation data, California Department of Education 2018

### EDUCATION ATTAINMENT: AGE 25-34 BY RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE INLAND EMPIRE, 2018



Source: American Community Survey 2018 5-YR PUMS

### EDUCATION ATTAINMENT: AGE 25-34 BY RACE AND ETHNICITY IN THE INLAND EMPIRE, 2008



Source: American Community Survey 2008 5-YR PUMS

FOR MORE DATA AND INFORMATION, VISIT [SOCIALINNOVATION.UCR.EDU/RESEARCH](https://socialinnovation.ucr.edu/research)

With these challenges in mind, it is important that we consider the experiences of adult learners when talking about equity in education. Extra supports and resources are needed for this diverse group of students, who bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom at all education levels.

## EQUITY DATA

To better understand the data presented in this report, it is essential that we first analyze the population the education system serves. The following indicators begin by looking at early childhood education and high school aged students. According to the American Community Survey (here after ACS), there are about 4.6 million residents in the Inland Empire, and roughly 1 million are school age children. Looking at children ages 5-18, the Latinx community is the majority in the region at 65 percent.

White children are the second highest percentage at 22.3 percent, followed by Blacks (6.7%), and Asians (5.4%).

There is a large body of research that notes the importance of representation in education, meaning children learning and connecting with teachers and administrators that look like them and come from similar backgrounds.

As the data will show, more work needs to be done in terms of building a more diverse education workforce in the region.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Contemporary research has shown that investments in early education—particularly among disadvantaged children—improves not only cognitive abilities, but also critical behavioral traits like sociability, motivation, and

self-esteem. Early childhood education is instrumental in childhood development and can have extensive long-term impacts on a child's life including future earnings and health.

To better understand access to early childhood education in the Inland Empire, we analyzed racial data calculated by the Advancement Project of California by region. The chart on pg. 11 depicts enrollment in licensed early childhood education programs per 100 children ages 0-5 by race. Accessible is defined as enrollment in a child's home zip code. Compared to other regions, the Inland Empire has lower rates of access, but the largest disparity is between Riverside and San Bernardino counties, with San Bernardino having less access overall. In fact, for all races those living in San Bernardino County have less access to early childhood education. This is true especially for Black and Native American students. For example, only 9 out of every 100 Native Americans in San Bernardino County have access to early childhood education verses 14 out of 100 in Riverside County. It is important to note that this analysis does not take into account the cost of these childcare

## PROFILE

### BIG BROTHERS BIG SISTERS

**Representative:** Jennifer O'Farrell

**Position:** Executive Director

Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Inland Empire is a social impact organization focused on providing youth mentorship and igniting youth potential. Through their programs, they aim to decrease the number of disconnected youth. Executive Director, Jennifer O'Farrell, noted that their 1-to-1 mentorship is a social emotional model designed to aid in personal growth and foster educational achievement and career success. As Jennifer stated, mentorship is necessary for marginalized youth of color to have an even playing field and is the key to expanding their access to resources through their mentor's social capital.

In terms of bright spots in the region, Jennifer pointed to the increase in collaboration between higher education and K-12 institutions over the last 5 years. She suggests that the foundational building blocks for this collaboration are in place, but continued nurturing is needed to better serve the region's students. Additionally, Jennifer praised the Inland Empire as a region of grit and resilience.

When asked about what areas need improvement in terms of education equity, Jennifer highlighted several areas that she saw, from the service provider perspective. Jennifer identified the need for new funding formulas to more equitably distribute resources, as she stated "zip codes should not define opportunity." Additionally, she highlighted the need for more central coordination, on multiple levels. As Jennifer noted, central coordination can maximize and streamline resource services, which can ultimately transform neighborhoods and schools.

Similarly if there was centralized coordination, Jennifer was curious about shared data collection, response efforts towards shared data and results thanks to collective responses.

Jennifer also pointed out the need for more proactive student recruitment in pre-school and TK levels. As she stated, "research clearly demonstrates the effectiveness and advantage preschool education is. What if we recruited parents/guardians to enroll their preschooler rather than waiting for them to enroll?"

Jennifer also noted the strong and urgent need for a more holistic approach to education; one that serves the whole child, not just their academics. To achieve the goal of educational equity, not just in traditional academic indicators, but also in socioemotional, whole child learning, Jennifer believes these gaps will have to be addressed.

## PROFILE

### CAMPAIGN FOR COLLEGE OPPORTUNITY

**Representative:** Sara Mooney

**Position:** Regional Affairs Director

The Campaign for College Opportunity has focused on increasing college access and success for California students for over 16 years. The Campaign works toward ensuring that higher education programs are more efficient, more equitable, and more effective when it comes to access and success. The organization uses three main strategies to achieve their mission, including policy advocacy, research, and outreach.

Sara highlighted the energy around partnerships and collaboration in the Inland Empire and the dedication to understanding the role of racial justice in education. Although there are more nonprofits in the Los Angeles region compared with the Inland Empire, Sara believes that the incredible organizations working on multiple aspects of education are helping to build momentum in the region.

Sara mentioned that although there have been educational successes throughout the IE in recent years, there remain areas that need to be addressed, including the lack of college counselors and A-G courses in high schools throughout the region. At the college and university levels, performance has not always been consistent and many local institutions remain impacted. "One consistent thread," describes Sara, "is that all of the educational systems are failing Black students. This is important to address, particularly given how many Black residents got to the IE after getting displaced from Los Angeles."

When asked about bright spots in the region, Sara highlighted the community-based work of Congregations Organized for Prophetic Engagement (COPE) that incorporates a faith-based, grassroots approach as well as cultivating strong relationships with policy-makers. She also cited the work of BLU Educational Foundation for their transformative work in education, Promise Scholars based in Ontario for their comprehensive K-12 pipeline approach, and Growing Inland Achievement that has unified institutions in the region around data, best practices, and equity.

Sara underscores the diversity in residents as well as rural and urban areas throughout the region which are both a strength of the region and factors that can make it challenging for community-based organizations to reach all IE residents. "I hope that funders can come in to support the organizations that work with the residents and empower them with proper resources to actualize their own hopes for their communities. I'm hopeful that given the high need, folks with resources can be responsive to those needs," said Sara. In particular, she pointed to a lack of resources for undocumented and Black residents in the area that need to be addressed.

programs. We expect these access disparities to be even larger when considering the cost of early childhood education.

The impacts from COVID-19 have created additional strain in the early childhood education system, highlighting and exacerbating these inequities. The pandemic not only suspended normal childhood activities such as attending school, interacting with extended family and friends, playing outdoors, and exploring nature but also disrupted the consequent socio-emotional benefits that result from a child's engagement in these experiences.

### Test Scores

Another metric to consider in terms of equity in education is test scores. The data noted on pg. 11 show the percentage of 3rd graders by race that score proficient or better in both math and English language arts, according to the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress.

For each region that was analyzed, Asian and White students had the highest percentage. Taken in aggregate, while LA County and Orange County generally outperform the I.E., the region's scores are roughly equivalent to the state averages. In fact, Black and Native American students in the Inland Empire have higher rates than at the state level, when considering race. While this is positive, a clear racial disparity exists in all regions with Black and Native American students having the lowest rates in each region. For example, in the Inland Empire 29% of Black 3rd graders scored proficient or better in math versus 58% of Whites and 76.5% of Asians.

When analyzing these scores over time, the data show that for all racial groups scores have been gradually increasing since 2015. In all groups, English scores have been increasing at a higher rate than math, which has seen a slight increase over time. Although all group test scores are generally increasing, a clear racial disparity still exists. Over time this gap has not increased, but has stayed constant.

### Language Access & Dual Language Learners

The Inland Empire is culturally and linguistically diverse, and schools in the region reflect this. Adequate language access is essential for students at all education levels. There can be significant impacts on a student's ability to learn if they are taught in a language they are not comfortable with. It is important to note that schools must, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ensure that students who are learning English have equal opportunity to progress academically. Title IV states there be no discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in the operation of any federally assisted programs.



Census data (IPUMS, 2018) shows that the most common language spoken among English learner children in the Inland Empire is Spanish. In fact, English learner children in the I.E. speak Spanish at higher rates than in the rest of Southern California and at the state level. This data suggests that many younger children in the I.E. are dual language learners or DLLs. Dual Language Learners (DLLs) are children, generally between the ages of 0-8, who are in the process of learning English while still learning their home language. These children represent a large and growing share of the early childhood population in the United States (Rodriguez 2020). Research suggests that high-quality early childhood education is particularly beneficial for DLLs' early literacy, numeracy skills, and English language development (Choi 2020). Early childhood education provides young dual language learners with early exposure to the English language, access to a rich literacy environment, and opportunities to develop their language skills through conversation and play with peers and teachers.

Researchers have found that while children from all backgrounds benefit from early education, those who don't speak English at home begin the year with lower skills than their English-speaking peers, but learn at a faster rate and make large gains throughout the year (Choi 2020). Yet the challenges families face accessing care are compounded by cultural and linguistic barriers, especially as dual language learners become an increasing portion of the population.

The educational opportunities and outcomes for DLLs in immigrant households—a group that researchers Michael Gottfried and Hui Yon Kim define as “first generation children born outside of the U.S. or second-generation children of foreign-born parents”—are often shaped by “risk factors,” including lower socioeconomic status, levels of parental education, and English proficiency. Similarly, Lynn Karoly and Gabriella Gonzalez suggest in a 2011 article that immigrant families face multiple barriers accessing high-quality early care including affordability, language, and informational gaps that make it difficult for immigrant families to know about all available options.

Educators, administrators, and policymakers can work with families to lower these barriers and build bridges to increase access to early care. This includes creating bilingual early education programs that support families' native languages and acquisition of English. Several studies document the preference of some immigrant families' to enroll their children in bilingual early care settings where providers speak the child's first language to help maintain cultural connections and facilitate easier communication between providers and families. Child care providers should reflect the home cultures and

## PROFILE

### YOUTH ACTION PROJECT

**Representative:** Tremaine Mitchell

**Position:** Executive Director

Youth Action Project (YAP) provides youth and young adults with the opportunity to develop skills and habits to help them achieve social and economic success. With a focus on academic support and workforce preparation, YAP runs creative after school programs in San Bernardino Unified high schools and also provides support focused on math, English Language Arts, life skills, and social emotional skills that include services that support college and career pathways. “Today, issues of equity are at the forefront more than ever,” said Tremaine. She sees a genuine desire to address issues of equity, confront them, and provide better opportunities for students in the region. Tremaine acknowledged that young people have been the driving force for many of these changes, as she noted “Young people are no longer accepting the status quo.”

Tremaine pointed out that at all education levels, there are inequities for low-income and students of color as indicated by the data and additional supports are needed for students. For example, Tremaine noted that at the community college level, students can face many barriers including homelessness and the high cost of tuition, fees, and books.

Tremaine believes that the first step in developing investment strategies includes acknowledging that disparities exist as there is still resistance about supporting certain groups of students. Also, continued learning and unlearning need to happen to develop progressive policies. Another important step is engaging communities in the decision-making process, as Tremaine described.

Tremaine is hopeful about many programs and organizations that have been focusing on education in the IE. As she noted, “the work of IE RISE is bringing together many different stakeholders and is generating lots of excitement about the possibilities of the type of impact these collaborations can bring to the region.” Tremaine also flagged the great work of the Black Equity Initiative as a bright spot in the region.

Tremaine is optimistic, but realistic about the nature of educational equity work. As she described, “These issues are the forefront at the moment, but lots of effort is needed to keep it that way in order to see it through to completion and create policies that are providing new supports to students and families. As outside service providers, being part of that process and partnering with K-12 and college education systems are important to make sure that students are getting the access they need.”

speak the home languages of children and families help support the healthy development of children by offering continuity between the child's home and child care setting.

## POST-ELEMENTARY CONCERNS

This next section will deal with post-elementary educational equity concerns including metrics like: school discipline, representation, A-G completion rates, and college enrollment.

### School Discipline

A large body of research shows that Black or African-American children tend to receive more disciplinary infractions than children from other racial groups (Rocque & Paternoster 2011; Rocque 2010; Skiba et al. 2011). Even when controlling for classroom factors, school factors, and student behavior, Black children still receive disproportionate rates of discipline, and especially Black males.

Additionally, school-level characteristics, like the percentage of Black students, are related to overall discipline levels. These findings suggest one explanation for why minority students fare less well and are more likely to disengage from schools at a younger age than whites (Rocque & Paternoster 2011). In fact, studies have found that this racial disparity in discipline begins early, even at the elementary school level (Smolkowski 2016). Higher rates of school discipline are often associated with negative outcomes later in a child's life, including being more likely to be incarcerated (Rocque & Paternoster 2011). Research has defined this concept as the "school to prison pipeline" in which minors and young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds become incarcerated, due to increasingly harsh school and municipal policies. Researchers have credited factors such as school disturbance laws, zero tolerance policies and practices, and an increase in police in schools in creating the pipeline (Heitzeg 2009).

According to data from the California Department of Education, Black students in every region that was analyzed have the highest rates of suspensions per 100 students, followed by Native American students. This rate includes students suspended for any reason, including willful defiance, in or out of school. The rate uses the unduplicated count of students suspended and cumulative enrollment for charter and non-charter schools.

Between the two counties, Black students in San Bernardino County have the highest rates of suspension at 10.9 students per 100 students. In comparison, Whites in the same region have a rate of 4.1 students

per 100, and Asians students have a rate of 1. Almost all racial groups have lower suspension rates in Riverside County. Compared to the state average, students in the Inland Empire see slightly higher rates of suspension, except for Native Americans which have lower than state average suspensions rates in both Riverside and San Bernardino County.

Since 2011, suspension rates have generally declined for all racial groups in all regions that were analyzed. In the Inland Empire, Black students saw the largest decrease in rates over time, but still have the highest rates by far, as all other groups also saw a decline.

### Representation in Schools

There is a large body of research that notes the importance of representation in terms of teachers and students of color (Grissom, Rodriguez, and Kern 2017; Roch, Mahmoud, Edwards 2018). Having more diverse teachers not only benefits students of color but all students as well. Additionally, communities of color often feel alienated from their school because they do not see themselves represented. Having a representative staff of teachers and administrators can help build community ties and foster a sense of belonging for students.

When analyzing data from the California Department of Education, we find that White teachers have more of the same race by far in the Inland Empire, rest of Southern California, and statewide. While these data are different from proportional representation, the racial disparities are extreme considering the demographics of each region. For example, there are 15.9 White teachers per 100 White students and just 1.7 Latinx teachers per 100 Latinx students in the Inland Empire. This is particularly concerning given that the Latinx community makes up the majority of the student population in the region.

In every region we analyzed, White teachers were the most common. These regions include not only the Inland Empire, but Orange County, LA County, the rest of Southern California and at the state level. Another interesting finding is the number of Native American teachers are also high in many of these regions. We posit that the high number of Native American teachers are probably due to the availability of Native teachers on tribal lands, although more research should be done to confirm this.

### Representation on School Boards

When looking at representation at the school board level, research has found that members of a certain race are more likely to address issues related to their race, additionally this has an impact on hiring more diverse

teachers, which studies have also found to have positive impacts on educational outcomes, especially for students of color (Silvia 2019; Ross, Rouse, and Bratton 2010; Meier and Stewart 1991).

As schools grow in diversity, it becomes even more important that school boards reflect that diversity. School boards with members of diverse backgrounds, experiences, gender, and cultures can benefit from a variety of perspectives. Having access to these varied viewpoints is valuable when considering the important decisions that the school board may make regarding education and policy issues.

In 2019, CSI hand collected data from school board websites to analyze the race and gender of each school board member in the Inland Empire. In both counties the school boards are overwhelmingly White, making up almost 70 percent of school board members. In contrast, the residential population of Whites in the I.E. is about 30 percent. In contrast, the Latinx community makes up around 65 percent of school aged children, and only about 27 percent of all school board members are Latinx. For Blacks and Asians the percentages are even lower, in the single digits. For example, in Riverside County only 0.76 percent of school board members are Black, this percentage rises to 2.5 in San Bernardino County.

When analyzing gender the data show that women in San Bernardino County are actually the majority on school boards. When we break that some data down by race, we find that the majority of these women board members are White. For example, there are no Black women on school boards in Riverside, and only one Black woman in San Bernardino County that sits on a school board as of 2019. Similar to teacher representation, the data show that the Latinx community is also underrepresented on school boards in the two counties.

### Student Homelessness

In California, the state's public universities serve a student population that is about half low-income, who must compete for housing in some of the most expensive neighborhoods in the nation.<sup>5</sup> While California provides more financial aid for non-tuition expenses than other states, the grants have failed to keep up with the state's rising cost of living. One in ten California State University students say they have been homeless at some point in the past year, according to campus surveys.<sup>6</sup> Among community college students in Los Angeles, the figure is one in five.

Already converting double rooms to triples to increase capacity, some campuses have also begun acting as social service agencies, setting up a patchwork of programs that includes giving students emergency grants for rent

## PROFILE REACH OUT

**Representative:** Dr. Yara Williams  
**Position:** Director of Health Workforce

As an intermediary organization, Reach Out follows a collective impact model and partners with K-12 schools, higher education, departments of public and behavioral health, and employers. Reach Out focuses on three main areas including youth and family wellness, community coalitions and healthy cities initiatives, and health workforce development. Dr. Williams' focus on workforce development operates a youth drop-in center to provide a safe and supportive space for youth, and partnerships with schools to offer work-based learning opportunities. Much of her work focuses on health career pathway programs that allow students to expand their learning outside of classrooms through job shadows, internships, and site visits.

When asked about what is working well in the region in terms of education, Dr. Williams highlighted the collaboration between various education, nonprofit, and business leaders in the region. She also highlighted the investments from local businesses to engage youth and education stakeholders that have been willing to be responsive to the needs of our employers, whether that means more soft skills training for students or opportunities for certain certifications.

Dr. Williams called attention to the need for more pathways to the workforce and colleges beginning in elementary and middle schools. As Dr. Williams describes, at the college level there has been a shortage of clinical sites for students earning degrees to receive their training. The limited seats for students is exacerbated by the current healthcare workforce shortage, she noted.

Dr. Williams underscored the need to continue to focus on diversifying our workforce. "We really try to ensure that students have equitable opportunities to explore the field and gain those experiences. However, challenges to reaching students in remote parts of the region and calls for more funding to ensure all students have those same opportunities to get the education and training to earn a living wage." she stated.

Additionally, Dr. Williams pointed out the shift toward apprenticeship programs. Although some programs are already well-developed in certain industries, she hopes they will grow in the healthcare field as well. As she stated, "That is what needs to grow, it's the future of workforce."

## PROFILE

### CLAY COUNSELING SOLUTIONS

**Representative:** Dr. April Clay

**Position:** CEO

Clay Counseling Solutions provides culturally competent counseling services to schools, families and individuals throughout the Inland Empire. CEO, Dr. April Clay, noted they do this through a variety of ways including school-based services including restorative circles, staff training, classes for parents, groups, workshops and assemblies.

Dr. Clay also reiterated the importance of providing evidence-based counseling services. CCS understands that student well-being is not just about physical health, but mental health needs, including the effects of racial discrimination. Dr. Clay also noted their particular focus on restorative based services.

The population CCS serves are dealing with a lot of trauma. There is a lack of behavioral support in the school system and children could be misdiagnosed with conditions like ADHD because of cultural misunderstandings. Dr. Clay mentioned that they provide homeless services as well.

Dr. Clay noted that although COVID-19 has had an immense negative impact on the Inland Empire, but an unintended benefit has been that school districts are now forced to address the tech divide, especially in terms of remote learning. While it has been a challenge, Dr. Clay cited that local leaders and community partners are taking charge and working more closely together around these issues. COVID-19 has created the space for educational innovation.

When asked about what is not working well in the region, Dr. Clay flagged the communication between school and home as a huge concern. She noted that the relationships between parents and schools needs to be built up more. There should be specific efforts to get parents more involved.

Another issue flagged by Dr. Clay was the need for cultural competency in schools. She noted that oftentimes the institution of education will look down on diversity. For example, different ways of thinking and diverse languages like “Black English” and “Spanglish”.

Dr. Clay mentioned that despite these challenges, her outlook for the future of our region is positive. She cites an increase in collaboration across different sectors and an increase around conversations about equity in education. Dr. Clay stated that she would love to see schools become true centers of community. They should be the foundation of the community, not only for children, but to encourage and facilitate community growth and togetherness.

payment, and reserving some dorm beds for homeless students. Bills under consideration in the California Legislature aim to increase the supply of student housing, reduce its cost and boost aid. Yet they likely will prove insufficient to solve what experts say is the extreme end of a nationwide student housing crisis, and this does not even account for the possible lasting effects of COVID-19 on the population.

Data from the California Department of Education show that Black and Latinx students in the Inland Empire have the highest rates of student homelessness. These figures include students at all levels. Of the regions that were analyzed, Orange County has the highest rates, most likely due to high housing costs. Among the two counties, San Bernardino County has significantly higher rates of student homelessness than Riverside County. When breaking down the data further by race, the data show that San Bernardino County Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Blacks have the highest rates of student homelessness in the Inland Empire. For example, 7.5 percent of Native American students in San Bernardino County have experienced homelessness over the 2018-2019 school year.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

It is also important to analyze educational attainment by race and gender, when considering equity. Educational attainment has a number of downstream benefits that may lead to improved health, including a higher income, lower odds of being unemployed or having a job that does not provide health insurance, various social and psychological benefits that arise from the social environment at school, and the cognitive and social skills that are acquired in high school and college (Behrman and Nevzer 1997).

According to data analyzed from IPUMS, Asian men and women have the highest educational attainment in the Inland Empire. For example, 54 percent of Asian women in the I.E. have a bachelor’s degree or higher. White women (24%) and Black women (22%) have similar rates. Both Black men and women have highest amount of some college meaning that they complete some college but have not graduated with a 4 year degree. This data point is backed up by some of our interviews in which participants noted that often Black men and women get stuck at this level and face additional barriers when pursuing their associates degree and higher education. Since 2008, there has been some positive movement for Black women in terms of more pursuing higher education and a lower percentage in the “some college” category.

## High School Graduation Rates

The Inland Empire has a total high school graduation rate of 87%, which is higher than the state average of 84%. Riverside County (90%) has a higher graduation rate than San Bernardino County (85%). In fact, San Bernardino County has lower graduation rates for every race in comparison to Riverside County. Among races in the I.E. Native Americans have the lowest high school graduation rate at 78%, followed by Black students at 82%. In all regions, the highest graduation rates are Asians.

### **A through G Completion Rates**

The University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) require entering freshmen to complete certain courses in high school, commonly known as the “A-G requirements” because of the letter each subject area is assigned. Students must earn a minimum of a “C” grade in the A-G courses in order for the course to count towards meeting the requirement. To be eligible for admission to a University of California campus, students must also earn a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or better in these courses.

According to data analyzed from the California Department of Education, in all regions that were analyzed women have higher rates of A-G completion than men. When breaking down the data further by race, the data show that Asians and Whites tend to have the highest rates, while Native Americans and Blacks have the lowest. Black students in Riverside County have higher rates than the state average, while Black students in San Bernardino County are trailing the state average.

### **College Enrollment**

According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (IPEDS database), the overall college enrollment rate in the Inland Empire is 49.9 percent. This percentage includes those who graduated high school and enrolled in some kind of higher education within 12 months, averaged over 2014-2018. It is important to note that this is merely the rate of enrollment, not college completion. Out of all the regions analyzed, the I.E. has the lowest college enrollment rate. Comparatively, Ventura County has the highest rate at 65.7 percent.

### **Community College Completion**

When analyzing college completion rates by race the data show a clear disparity between the I.E. and the statewide average. Some of the completion rates by race are half, or almost half, of the state level. For example, Black students in the I.E. have a college completion rate of 13%, versus a 30% completion rate statewide. The racial disparities within the Inland Empire appear to mirror the state rates, except for NHPI’s who have the highest completion rates at the state level.

### **College Transfer**

Transferring from a community college to a university can have many benefits for students. Community colleges can act as a stepping stone to pursue higher education. Additionally, they cost less money and are more flexible for students that also work full-time and may have a variety of other obligations. The transfer pathway between colleges and 4-year universities is particularly important because it often serves lower-income and students from underserved communities. Although there are strong transfer pathways in the Inland Empire, more attention needs to be paid to invest in these pipelines of education.

We analyzed data from the California Community College Chancellor’s Office to determine the transfer rates, by race, from community colleges to 4-year universities. The data was collected for 2, 4, and 6 year transfer rates. Racial disparities appear to increase at the 4 year and 6 year transfer levels. By race, the lowest 4 year transfer rates are Latinos at 12 percent. Comparatively, Latinos have a 16 percent 4-year transfer rate at the state level.

### **Time to Degree Completion**

Another important indicator is the time to degree completion rate. This rate is the percentage of students, by race, that graduated from a 4-year university at the 4th, 5th, and 6th+ year marks. For context, undergraduate degrees are obtained through 4-year programs. Some factors that may contribute to a student taking longer may be a lack of school funding, taking a part-time course load due to other obligations, and struggling academically to meet the degree requirements.

We analyzed graduation data from both UC Riverside and Cal State San Bernardino, to determine how long it took to complete a 4 year degree, by race. At UCR, 74.6 percent of all students graduate by their 5th year. Comparatively, 79.4 percent of Asian students and 67.1 percent of Black students graduate by their 5th year. As CSUSB the overall rates are lower, but racial disparities still persist with Black students having the lowest completion rates for each of the years.

### **Earnings by Educational Attainment**

Educational attainment bears a significant relationship to earnings and income, and data from the American Community Survey reveal stark racial differences in educational attainment among women in the Inland Empire, and varying gender disparities in educational attainment within each group.

Asian American men and women in the Inland Empire are those most likely to have a bachelor’s degree or higher (48% and 47%, respectively), followed by White

men (30%) and White women (27%). Four-year college attainment in the region is similar for Black women (25%), but it is much lower for Latinas (11%) and Native American women (10%). Importantly, the gender gap in education is reversed among Black and Hispanic residents, where women are more likely to have completed a college degree than their male counterparts.

Finally, higher education reduces the earnings gap between women of color and White men in the region, but it does not eliminate them. Even among college-educated females, White women only earn 75% of White men with comparable education, and the figures are even lower for Asian American and Black Women (71% each), and lowest for Latinas at 58%. These data point to a troubling set of racial disparities in earnings, even among women with college degrees

### **Unemployment by Educational Attainment**

The COVID-19 induced recession has so far been more dramatic than the Great Recession. Employment fell more rapidly and unemployment rose quicker than at any point during the Great Recession.

According to current labor market data from Burning Glass Technologies, workers without a BA have seen the largest fall in employment. Whereas workers with a BA in the IE have seen some recovery in employment, workers without a BA have seen little recovery since the height of the pandemic in June. Thus the fall in unemployment among workers without a BA is likely due to workers dropping out of the labor market.

The most affected major industries have been Accommodation and Food Services, Other Services, and manufacturing. Each of which have seen steeper declines in employment than the industries have seen nationwide. Construction, Education, and Transportation have so far grown or been unaffected.

## **EDUCATION AND THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19**

While we still do not know the full consequences and impacts of COVID-19 on education, new challenges and barriers have already emerged. The school closures and remote learning that stemmed from the pandemic shined a bright light on the inequities in the current education system. Researchers report that students will see economic and social impacts from the pandemic for years to come, the full scope of which is still yet to be seen. A recent report found that the average K-12 student could lose \$61,000 to \$82,000 in lifetime earnings due to the pandemic and, on its current trajectory, these losses are likely to be even higher (Dorn et. al 2020). Losses are expected to be even greater for Black,

Latinx and low-income students, widening the existing achievement gaps by 15%-20% (Dorn et. al 2020).

As current research has shown, some racial and ethnic groups are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> Inequities in the social determinants of health, such as poverty and healthcare access, affecting these groups are interrelated and influence a wide range of health and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. These higher infection rates ultimately will impact the learning of the children in these families.

Two of the biggest issues that have been magnified by the pandemic are the inequalities surrounding remote learning and the technological divide. As we know, social distancing is not the same for everyone—for students and adults alike. For some children staying home could mean an increased risk of abuse and violence, others may be home alone, since their caregivers might not have the privilege of jobs that keep them safely inside. Additionally, the lack of technology resources, especially for low-income and rural children, has made this remote learning even more difficult for certain students. While some school districts are providing children with resources like tablets, there are still far too many students without the necessary tools for distance learning, including reliable Internet service. These disparities in both social and economic resources during the pandemic will have affects for years to come in both K-12 and higher education.

## **THEMES FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

The section below details the common themes and findings from the 13 in-depth interviews that were conducted for this report. We spoke to a wide range of education stakeholders working at the ground level with community. Their insights and experience provide a local and comprehensive perspective on the current state of education equity in the region.

One of the positive aspects of education in the IE that was highlighted across each of the interviews includes the high levels of collaboration and strength of educational partnerships. Specifically, collaboration between K-12 and higher education and between educational institutions and nonprofit organizations. Participants described high levels of excitement and energy around these partnerships, particularly in light of the COVID-19 crisis and the movement for racial justice which has renewed the need for conversations about how to support our most marginalized students, including low-income and BIPOC students.

Participants highlighted several areas of improvement including the need for more diversity among teachers,

school administration, and curriculum. Early childhood education was another area that participants noted additional support is needed with more proactive outreach measures and parent advocacy, particularly for low-income families of color. Elementary and middle schools are often lacking the crucial socio-emotional component to their education from counselors and other staff. Participants flagged that more training for staff and stronger articulation between middle schools and high schools would make the transition smoother.

Interviewees also highlighted that high school students would benefit from more exposure to career tracks and job exploration in their Career and Technical Education programs. Eliminating tracking systems that disproportionately impact students of color, expanding access and support for A-G completion and increasing funding for counselors are all key priorities as well. Finally, addressing the digital divide is more crucial than ever considering the COVID-related distance learning taking place across the state.

At the community college level, participants noted the uneven student outcomes. More consistency across the institutions would benefit students. More support for transfer students and improved transfer/career pathways are needed at the community college level. In the adult school system, eliminating duplicity in the various pathways would create a more streamlined system. Implementing a cohort model of education and making the institution more student-centered would improve adult school.

Finally, investments in nonprofits and other systems that support the whole child are key in improving education in the IE. Although community-based organizations have addressed many of the immediate needs of students and their families, systemic change also needs to include decision-makers at all levels. Addressing the issues of students in rural communities and investing and building parent leadership are important investments as well. Including student voices at all levels of decision-making is crucial in empowering youth in their own education and ensuring that policies are directly benefiting students and their communities.

## PROMISING PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

While this report does highlight the needs and gaps in education, it is also important to note the programs and initiatives that are working well. This section shines a spotlight on both state and local level promising programs and initiatives in education equity.

## PROFILE

### ACLU OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

**Representative:** Victor Leung

**Position:** Deputy Litigation Director/Senior Staff Attorney

The ACLU works in courts, legislatures, and communities to protect constitutional and civil rights on behalf of people of color and other underserved groups. Their work spans multiple areas, including a robust education equity program that aims to ensure that all students have access to the highest quality education. Although the ACLU has been serving the entire Southern California region for decades, they opened up an Inland Empire-specific office in San Bernardino in 2014 with a focus on education, among other issues.

Victor touted the strong community-based organizations in the Inland Empire. “There are many organizations that are doing excellent work in the community, but they run up against challenging school districts,” said Victor.

Victor believes that although there have been significant gains in educational equity in the region, the ACLU has focused on school funding issues, including ensuring that the counties and school districts implement the Local Control Funding Formulas (LCFF) equitably and transparently. Recently, the ACLU, in partnership with local community-based organizations, has been at the forefront of a recent complaint which alleges that the San Bernardino County Office of Education violated of their obligations under the LCFF, resulting in millions of dollars that were earmarked for high-needs students of color being misspent.

Victor stressed the need for the culture of schools to change. “There are a lot of good people doing some amazing work, but they’re not in positions of leadership. We need to empower communities more and address the disconnect between schools and families,” said Victor. He also believes that our schools need to be decriminalized and that districts should spend money on students instead of law enforcement or school hardening measures. Victor also noted that students with disabilities are underserved statewide and districts do not have enough resources to provide the services they need.

There are many community-based organizations, parent organizations, and faith-based organizations in the region that have been working on educational equity “The culture is shifting slowly,” said Victor, “there are more opportunities for community-based organizations to engage in effective campaigns.” Despite the trauma stemming from criminalization and racism in the education system and the effects of the pandemic, Victor remains optimistic for the future of education in the region.

## PROFILE

### ALIANZA COACHELLA VALLEY

**Representative:** Patricia S. Carrillo  
**Position:** Project Manager

Alianza is a nonprofit organization based in the Eastern Coachella Valley. The organization's mission is to transform the socioeconomic conditions of the Coachella Valley using the collective impact model and guided by diversity, equity, and inclusion. Alianza works on multiple programs and campaigns, including the environmental justice campaign which focuses on air and water quality and pushes for investment and policy change. The community justice campaign is advocating for the implementation of restorative justice protocols, accountability on their local control funding, and providing training and tools for staff and students to have stronger relationships leading to student empowerment. Finally, the Youth Organizing Council supports local youth leadership development and community engagement.

Program Manager, Patricia, highlighted the strong representation and diversity of school teachers, staff, and administrators in the region. "Many of our staff members grew up in the area, they're able to have that connection with the students," said Patricia. She also emphasized that Coachella area schools are offering many more resources to students, including extracurricular activities, field trips, and college exploration programs.

Patricia believes that there continues to be a need for restorative justice practices at all levels of education as well as the need for more equitable funding for students across the board, including English Language Learners (ELL) and foster students. Patricia expressed the need for more resources to be allocated to mental and socio-emotional health, as well as lower counselor-to-student ratios and the removal of school resource officers from campuses, "We need to be focused on equitable funding for student resources and not use so many school resources for security." Patricia also believes that all stakeholders should be represented and at the table for key decision-making processes.

Patricia has a hopeful outlook for the future of education equity in the region. She envisions a community in which all stakeholders have a seat at the table at all levels of government. She hopes to continue to see residents feel empowered to make changes in their own communities and an educational system with full transparency. As Patricia expressed, "Changing even one person's life can have a domino effect."

## State Level Programs & Initiatives

Aligned with contemporary research on access to early childhood education (ECE), legislators and educators also recognize the need for ECE. Spending on three publicly funded preschool programs, California State Preschool Program (CSPP), Head Start, and Transitional Kindergarten, account for over half of public expenditures on child care and development in California. This is important because in California, 77 percent of working-age parents and caregivers of preschool-aged children are employed at least part time, and this number increases to 86 percent for single-parent families (Thorman & Danielson 2019). Although progress towards enrolling children into a ECE program has progressed, these programs still lack the capacity to enroll all eligible children, typically with enrollment trends reflective of social and economic disparities. In the governor's current recommended budget proposal, he seeks to increase access to preschool. Additionally, the governor has appointed 20 diverse education experts and practitioners to the state's new Early Childhood Policy Council. Chaired by California's Surgeon General, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, this council was created to address demographic, economic, and geographic barriers to education access and address existing concerns in regards to the Master Plan for Early Learning and Care and the Assembly Blue Ribbon Commission by reviewing and updating their final reports.<sup>8</sup> The council hopes to oversee the Governor's \$2 billion budget allocation to foster healthy development and learning.

Availability of early childhood education in the Inland Empire continues to receive attention from policy experts and local leaders. Assembly member Eloise Gómez Reyes, who represents San Bernardino County, was recently named co-chair of the Assembly Early Learning and Care Working Group. The first of its kind in California, this working group brings legislators together to discuss early learning related issues (Lozano 2020). Similar to her colleague, Assembly member Sabrina Cervantes, who represents Riverside County, recently advocated for a \$6 million allocation to Norco college to build an Early Childhood Education Center.<sup>9</sup> This center will serve as the only new center along the I-15 corridor. Efforts by local Assembly members coincide with additional strides to improve educational attainment, particularly by the San Bernardino Superintendent of Schools, who was awarded a grant by California Department of Education. This grant aims to increase enrollment and address educational problems for students with disabilities and other exceptional needs. The Riverside County Superintendents of Schools continue to work towards providing additional enrollment in their ECE unit, but also recognize the demand for child care exceeds the supply, there they are heavily committed to the Child Care Initiative Project.<sup>10</sup>



According to the California Department of Education, in California, around half of the 6 million students enrolled in K-12 public schools are economically disadvantaged students and about 1 in 5 are English learners. To address the specific needs for more marginalized school districts, California created the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in order to strategically increase funding for marginalized students (Hill et. al 2020). In 2013, the LCFF replaced the old K-12 funding system, which operated for 40 years, in order to revamp how finances were allocated to schools. Currently, the LCFF provides uniform grade span grants in place of other complicated grants under the old system. When first implemented, the state acknowledge it would take eight years for the new LCFF program to be fully funded and as of 2018, they have met their target funding goal.<sup>11</sup>

State policies continue to address education problems as a pinnacle aspect of California's future. Closing the achievement gap and college readiness is recognized as top priorities by both the Governor and other state officials. To address the racial disparity of school suspensions, the Governor signed a law to prohibit elementary and middle school aged children for being suspended and sent home for willful defiance and instead offer in-school suspension. Because the term "willful defiance" is vague and broad, it contributed to the increase of suspensions. This new law seeks to reduce the number of suspensions, especially for African American and Latinx children, in order to improve the school climate. Data is not available yet to analyze whether or not this action in fact led to more equitable suspension rates for students of color.

Some schools, such as Hemet Unified in Riverside County, have adopted practices to tackle behavioral and emotional needs for students that may contribute to suspensions. Hermit Unified implemented on-campus counseling and health services and has seen a 50 percent fall of willful defiance suspensions.<sup>12</sup>

Higher education continues to have the attention of the state. A new council formed to address low college graduation rates, specifically in the Central Valley and the Inland Empire. The Council for Postsecondary Education is comprised on education experts and seeks to find new innovative ideas to increase college completion.<sup>13</sup>

In an effort to improve affordability of college, in 2019, the Governor signed new legislation to provide two free years of community college to first-time full-time students. This initiative aimed at tackling both college financial concerns, but also to increase the community college transfer pipeline.<sup>14</sup> This step is aligned with existing research that indicates community college transfers are essential to improving degree completion, mainly because California is heavily reliant on community colleges

## PROFILE

### CONGREGATIONS ORGANIZED FOR PROPHETIC ENGAGEMENT

**Representative:** Felicia Jones, Jewel Patterson  
**Position:** Associate Director, Youth Organizer

The mission of COPE is to build the capacity of clergy community members, including students, parents, and grassroots leaders to revitalize the communities where they live, work, and worship. They focus on the intersection of education, healthy, criminal justice, and now housing with a strong focus on education equity as a deterrent to mass incarceration.

Jewel described the IE as a place with strong relationships between nonprofits, elected officials, and community members, "Leaders are dedicated to education equity, they're willing to go an extra mile for the partners they've forged through relationships and collaborations," said Jewel. Felicia echoed the sentiment and added that systems leaders have been very accessible to community. Additionally, restorative justice practices have been implemented successfully in some elementary schools in the region. Both Felicia and Jewel highlighted the disproportionate underachievement for students color and the work that needs to be done to address the instructional needs of students with cultural competency at all levels. A key area of concern includes the history of funneling students through the school-to-prison pipeline. "We have spent more on policing them than providing access to student supports to address their academic challenges and preparing them for college," said Felicia.

Felicia and Jewel noted that students need support inside and outside the classroom. They believe that more investment in counselors for both academic and social emotional support, investments in academic support in the classroom including aides, and more extracurricular activities and outside engagement to keep students connected to the learning process are all crucial. "Investing in after school and in-school clubs are important so that students can feel a part of something," said Jewel.

When asked about bright spots in the region, they pointed to the San Bernardino's district-wide Equity and Targeted Student Achievement Department, which is charged with addressing academic equity needs of students of color. The department also launched an African American Student Learners Initiative that includes a pilot teacher development program, and seeks to achieve parity in programs with low African-American student representation, and creating a platform for African American parents.

For both Felicia and Jewel, education equity in the IE rests on engaging and empowering students in their own education. As Jewel described, "Students are ready for this, the current climate has created the conditions to push the envelope for education equity in schools."

as the first point into secondary education (Jackson et al. 2014). Although transferring colleges can be a confusing process, college readiness programs such as “promise programs” and the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) have showed to be successful efforts to increasing the number of degree earning students (Jackson et al. 2014).

### Local Programs & Initiatives

Although higher education is a concern at the state level investment from the state into higher education has declined over time and has shifted financial responsibility to individual public universities resulting in increased tuition and delayed infrastructure programs. This has contributed to current trends of completion. There are local efforts aimed at tackling the completion gap for students in the Inland Empire. For example, BLU Educational Foundation works with communities who face limited income challenges through their College Exodus Project (CEP) by assisting students through their undergraduate and graduate journey. Additionally, Growing Inland Achievement, a regional network of education, civic, and business partners, focus their efforts on improving graduation rates by facilitating innovative social and institutional change.

Although gaps in education still persist, there are intentional conversations around racial equity happening at the local level. Community leaders, educators, and students are fostering meaningful conversations and actions to address inequitable education outcomes. Steps are being taken to address school suspensions, college readiness, and testing for the most marginalized communities and some elected officials have committed to addressing these concerns. After listening to community members in the wake of racial political protests, San Bernardino County became the first county in California to declare racism a public health emergency and are taking steps to end inequality in the delivery of public services.<sup>15</sup> Riverside County shortly followed and have also called for racism to be declared a public health emergency. In an unanimous decision, the Board of Supervisors stated “systemic racism causes persistent racial discrimination in housing, education, employment, transportation, and criminal justice.” They hope to continue to address educational inequities by “enhancing public education to increase understanding and awareness of systemic inequality and its impact (Riverside County Joint Information Center).

Local education boards are following suit by actively working to address more specific concerns of education disparities. For example, Riverside County recently held the Excellence Through Equity Conference which was designed to provide educators with information to

deepen their understanding on equity issues facing the region. Educators were provided resources with hopes to begin eliminating achievement gaps (White 2020). San Bernardino County are taking similar steps with their Watershed Moment Webinar hosted by the Superintendent of Schools. Educators, law enforcement, and school safety officers convened following the aftermath of worldwide protests, to address systemic inequities, such as school disciplinary practices. Additionally, they hosted the Family and Community Engagement Summit, which was designed to strengthen communities in education by preparing students for college and career readiness with a focus on equity and access for every student.<sup>16</sup>

As flagged several times in this report, for real systemic change a collaborative effort is needed between parents, schools, administrators, community, and local government. In particular, leaders like Dr. Judy White, the Riverside County Superintendent of Schools, have helped to highlight equity in education as an issue and have pushed the county to be more intentional and action oriented. She spoke at the Power of Equity in Education Symposium in Bakersfield in 2019, highlighting the importance of equity. In a statement released by Dr. White she noted, “It is imperative that we muster the courage to stand up for equity in our systems. We need to engage in courageous conversations that lead to accountability and change in our schools and communities.”<sup>17</sup> Diverse administrative leaders, like Dr. White are needed now more than ever to combat growing inequalities and the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The largest asset spurring these recent achievements are the community themselves, through collaboration with organizations like the ones profiled in this report. Change at the local government level is being driving by their demands and ability to hold their representatives accountable. As the community has increased input and control over the education system, this will only serve to move the Inland Empire further towards achieving true equity in education for all residents.

## POLICY OPTIONS

While there are many policy options that would improve education equity in the region, this report focuses on three broad categories: (1) increasing diversity in teachers, administration, and other school leaders, (2) encouraging and improving access to programs like ethnic studies so that all children learn about the challenges and achievements of people of color, and (3) increasing funding for underserved schools and districts.

## Increasing Diversity

One of the main ways in which educational equity in the Inland Empire could be advanced is through undertaking efforts to increase the diversity of those working in education themselves, at all levels of the educational system, to ensure that educators more closely resemble the populations they serve. There are two levels of the educational system in particular where increased diversity in staff would have pronounced effects on students and reduce disparity in outcomes, at opposite ends of the educational system. At the most immediate level, increasing the diversity of front line educators that directly interact with students, such as teachers and principals, would produce positive impacts for students. Having culturally competent staff, particularly when it comes to students with behavioral challenges or, issues with English as a second language, has been shown to lead to better outcomes for minority students.

At the opposite end of the educational system, increased diversity is needed at the policy level of local educational systems. Specifically, the school boards of local educational systems more closely reflecting both the student population and the population of the area that they serve, would likely have positive effects upon educational equity in the area. Although both the population of the Inland Empire in general and the student population in area school systems are diverse, and are on track to become more diverse, the demographics of local school boards are increasingly unreflective of the area as a whole. This is likely due to the fact that the elections in which members of school boards are selected have low turnout, and the electorate in these elections tend to be disproportionately older and whiter than the general population or even the general electorate, often due to lower participation in local elections.

The potential solutions to the lack of diversity at both ends of the educational system are connected to each other. More diverse school boards have been linked to more diverse educational staff populations in school districts. By improving representation in school boards, there will be more pressure from the top for school districts to have staff that better reflect the communities that they serve.

## Ethnic Studies & Cultural Competency

Just as the staff should better reflect the diversity of the community, so too should the curriculum be cognizant of the educational needs of students and communities in which they are embedded. Offering more ethnic studies courses, at both the secondary and post-secondary level, and developing a robust ethnic studies pool of educators and trainers are both neces-

## PROFILE

### AUTISM SOCIETY INLAND EMPIRE

**Representative:** Beth Burt

**Position:** Executive Director

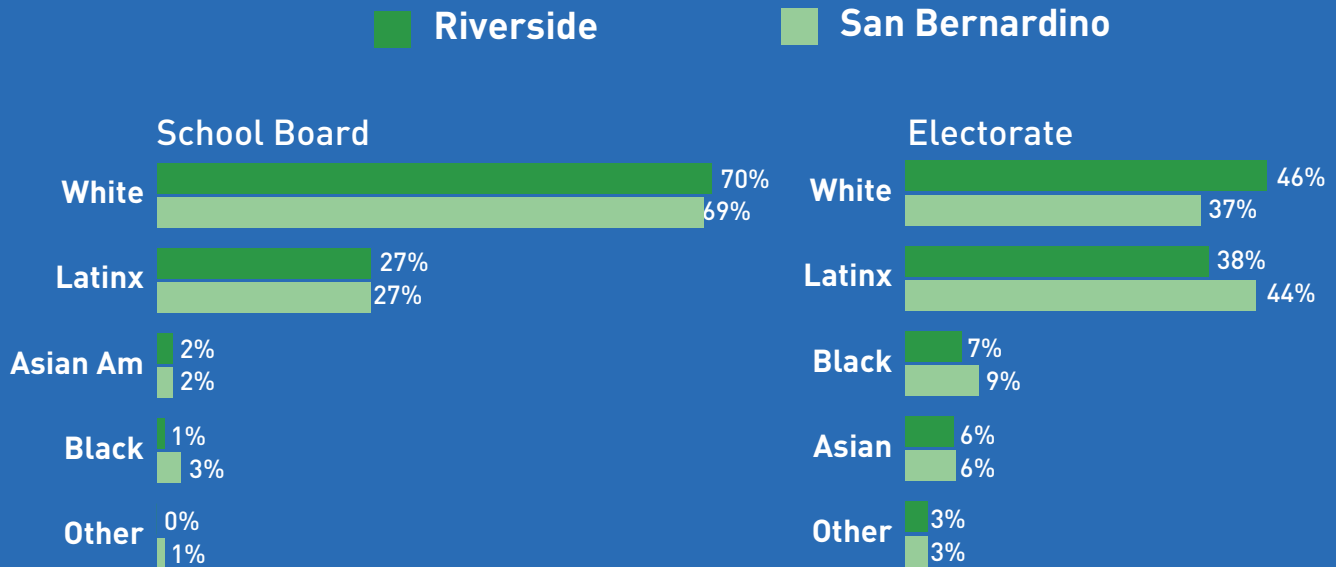
Autism Society Inland Empire is the local chapter of the Autism Society of America. This grassroots organization aims to improve the lives all who are affected by autism, as explained by Executive Director Beth Burt. According to recent survey data, there are more than 15,000 individuals with autism in the Inland Empire and another 60,000 family members of those individuals. Autism Society Inland Empire works to empower those individuals and families through education, workforce development, resource support, social opportunities, and much more.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly hard on those with disabilities, as Beth noted. Beyond the increased risk of contracting COVID-19, those with autism and other intellectual disabilities are facing an uphill battle in terms of the recent impacts to the education system. According to data from the Autism Society of California, 1 in 4 students with disabilities will not wear a mask for an extended period of time, and 1 in 3 do not understand the concept of social distancing. Additionally, many medical therapies have gone remote or have stopped all together. As Beth described these therapies work in tandem together with education. Furthermore, those with autism are seeing their routines completely changed, which can be particularly upsetting and has led to an increase in aggressive behaviors.

Beth did state that before COVID-19 the school districts in the Inland Empire had done a good job of reaching out to special education parents, but due to the recent strains in the education system the communication has not been as consistent.

When asked about what future investments are needed, Beth cited that beyond the immediate equity needs surrounding the pandemic, schools need to better prepare special education students for employment and independence. She cited that those with autism and other developmental disabilities have about a 96 percent unemployment rate in California. Often, Beth described, that these children will age out of workforce programs and are not able to get to the next step of actual employment. Beth also mentioned the importance of the diversity of skills and needs of those with autism and developmental disabilities. Beth believes that there cannot be a one size fits all solution, there needs to be an individually tailored holistic approach to educating students with disabilities for the workforce.

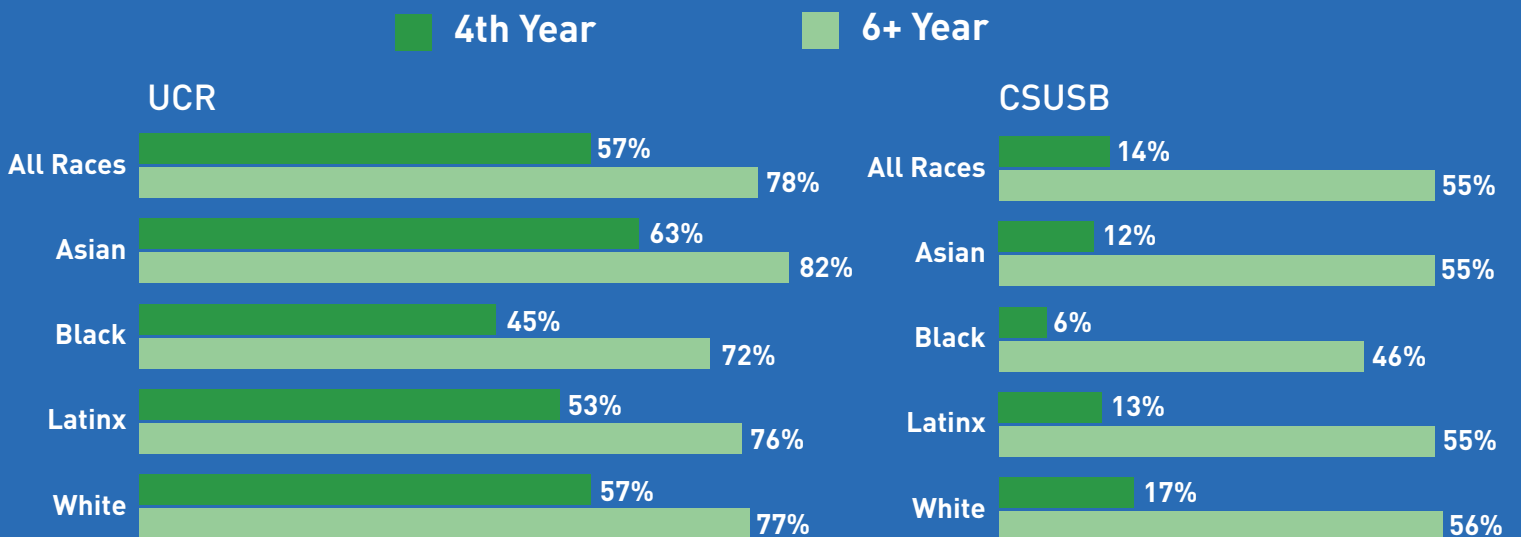
## COMPOSITION OF SCHOOL BOARD AND ELECTORATE IN THE INLAND EMPIRE BY RACE



Source: Center for Social Innovation, UCR, 2019

Source: American Community Survey 2018 5-YR PUMS

## TIME TO UNDERGRAD DEGREE COMPLETION



Source: UCR & CSUSB, 2013 Cohort

sary steps towards this. As the state university system has also recently implemented an ethnic studies requirement, integrating this subject into secondary education would also better prepare students academically for higher education.

### School Funding & Investment

There are several ways in which the funding streams for underserved/high need schools need to be improved. The LCFF system has potential to lay the foundations of a more equitable education future for both the state in general and the Inland Empire particularly, but will only meaningfully improve outcomes and further overall equity if transparently and equitably are implemented.

In terms of transparency, while LCFF funding is by statute only required to be made public at the district level, district leaders should be encouraged to go a step further and produce transparent breakdowns of where the funding is going broken down not just by district, but by individual school. This will reduce the information asymmetry between school district officials and parents and other community partners, and allow them to participate in the process as more informed stakeholders. This also ties into the need to increase diversity at the school board level, as more transparent and easily accessible explanations of school funding will make greater participation and mobilization in school board elections more likely, as stakeholders such as parents are hopefully more clearly able to see the impact of policy on how well-resourced their schools are.

### Future Action & IE RISE

In order to address these issues, deep systemic change is needed in the education system. The only way forward is through collaborative collective action between parents, students, the community, local nonprofits, schools and school districts, and local government. The Inland Empire Roadmap for an Inclusive and Sustainable Economy (IE RISE), is one of the major avenues in which this work can proceed.<sup>18</sup> IE RISE is a multi-year, cross-sector effort that is supported by a mix of philanthropic investments and in-kind contributions of time and effort from institutional allies and partners in community organizations, government, industry, and academia. Through the education track of IE RISE, the community can provide a roadmap and a standard for the region. Once this plan is in place, the community can hold officials and organizations accountable to these standards.

## ENDNOTES

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