

EDUCATION FOR ALL

AN UPDATE ON RACIAL EQUITY IN
MARION COUNTY

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Racial disparities in education outcomes, also known as achievement gaps, were meaningfully documented in the landmark 1966 report, “Equality of Educational Opportunity,” written by Johns Hopkins sociologist James Coleman. The Coleman Report found Black children were five grade levels behind their white peers in some cases, propelling national cries for action. **While much progress has been made in the last 56 years, achievement gaps remain – for both Black and Hispanic students.**

In Marion County, concerns about racial disparities in education have escalated in recent years. Groups from the [Indianapolis NAACP](#) to the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership/Indy Chamber “[Business Equity for Indy](#)” initiative to [our Foundation](#) have issued reports documenting these disparities and proposing solutions.

But for all the attention around these challenges, the problem is getting worse. New data indicate gaps in education outcomes between Black and Hispanic students and their white peers have widened, due in large part to the pandemic:



Results from Indiana’s [2022 ILEARN assessment](#) show the percentage of Marion County **Black and Hispanic students in grades 3-8 who achieve proficiency in English/language arts and math is approximately one quarter that of white and Asian students.**



Similarly, [2022 SAT data](#) reveal that in 11th grade, **white students in Marion County were approximately four times as likely to be proficient in math than Black and Hispanic students.**

When study after study and multiple state assessments demonstrate these gaps, one thing is clear: new approaches are urgently needed to meaningfully address racial disparities in education. Educators, employers, philanthropy, policymakers, the not-for-profit sector and other stakeholders must work together with focused intention to close gaps for Black and Hispanic students. If we don’t, all of Indiana will suffer.

Additional data points and recommendations can be found in the 2021 “[Education for All – An Audit of Racial Equity in Marion County](#)” report written by Ben Kleban, to whom much of the information in this report can be attributed. Additional information about education funding can be found in the 2020 report titled “[Ensuring All Students in Indiana Receive Their Fair Share of Funding.](#)”

The good news is research shows we can make genuine inroads to address racial disparities in education by:

- 01 IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**
- 02 CLOSING EQUITY GAPS IN K-12 EDUCATION FUNDING**
- 03 CLOSING K-12 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAPS**
- 04 IMPROVING COLLEGE READINESS AND INCREASING ENROLLMENT**
- 05 INCREASING COLLEGE COMPLETION RATES**

This report lays out specific, actionable steps stakeholders can take to help ensure Marion County becomes a place where all children, regardless of background, are provided an equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education that leads to a better quality of life for all.

01

IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Enrollment in a high-quality early learning program can have a lasting positive effect on students' education and life outcomes. However, nationally, the quality of early education programs attended by Black children is on average lower than that of programs attended by white children. There is evidence of this trend holding true in Indiana, but we need more data to understand the gaps.

INDIANA'S CURRENT PATHS TO QUALITY RATING SYSTEM



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Mandate participation in Indiana's Paths to Quality rating system, which is currently optional.

When a provider enrolls in the PTQ rating system, they are assigned the lowest rating by default and are incentivized to pursue improvements to achieve a higher rating. If we mandated all early childhood providers enroll in the system, parents would have more information when choosing a program for their children, and the system would benefit from improved transparency and quality.

Shift the state's PTQ system from a focus on program characteristics to a focus on the learning outcomes of each child.

Revising this rating system would ensure we are focused on measuring outcomes associated with kindergarten readiness, such as early literacy and numeracy, rather than inputs.

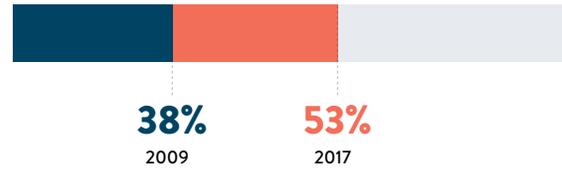
02

CLOSING EQUITY GAPS IN K-12 EDUCATION FUNDING

Indiana's public K-12 schools are funded through a combination of local, state and federal sources. The exception is public charter schools, which do not receive local dollars.

Changes to the state's funding formula have widened the funding gap between the wealthiest and poorest schools and districts from 38% to 53% over the past decade. In addition, per-pupil funding for students from low-income households has been reduced by 35% between 2015 and 2019.

FUNDING GAP BETWEEN WEALTHIEST AND POOREST SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS



REDUCTION
in per-pupil funding for students in low-income households between 2015 and 2019

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Differentiate state aid based on local wealth, recognizing that not all schools and districts have equal abilities to contribute.

Under the current funding system, all districts or schools receive the same amount of basic state funding, regardless of their ability to generate or access local property tax revenues.

Increase funding for students from low-income households and English language learners.

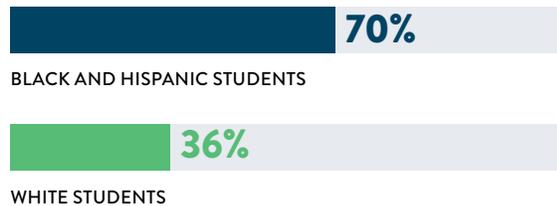
Indiana should change its funding formula to grant additional funds for students from low-income households and begin to include English language learners in the formula, ensuring higher levels of reliable funding for these students.

03

CLOSING K-12 ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Some of the aforementioned disparities in education outcomes between Black and Hispanic students and white students can be attributed to the lower likelihood Black and Hispanic children have of accessing the highest performing schools. Approximately 70% of all Black and Hispanic students in Marion County attend low-performing schools, compared to only 36% of white students.

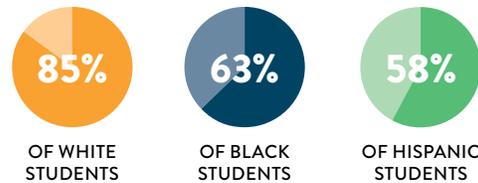
PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ATTENDING LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS



Learning interruptions caused by the pandemic also disproportionately affected Black and Hispanic students in Marion County. For these students, ILEARN proficiency rates dropped by 38% between 2019 and 2022. This is compared to a 12% decrease in the proficiency of white students.

While reading by third grade has proven to be a critical benchmark of long-term academic success, just 63% of Black and 58% of Hispanic third graders in Marion County were proficient readers on the 2022 IREAD-3 assessment, compared with 85% of white students.

STUDENTS SCORING AS PROFICIENT READERS ON THE 2022 IREAD-3 ASSESSMENT



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Increase racial diversity of teachers and administrators and develop programs to retain them.

According to a 2022 research summary from the Brookings Institution, not only do students of color who have teachers of color see significantly improved education outcomes, but white students who have teachers of color also see improvements in education outcomes.

Increase funding for teacher scholarship programs like the William A. Crawford Minority Teacher Scholarship and the Next Generation Hoosier Educators Scholarship.

This can help offset the cost of earning an education degree, increase the number of teachers in Indiana and grow the supply of diverse teacher candidates.

Enroll more Black and Hispanic students in advanced K-12 coursework.

Advanced learning opportunities in K-12 schools are linked to several benefits for students, including improved attendance and higher graduation rates, but white students in Marion County are three times more likely than Black students to be identified as “high ability,” qualifying them for gifted and talented programs.

04

IMPROVING COLLEGE READINESS AND INCREASING ENROLLMENT

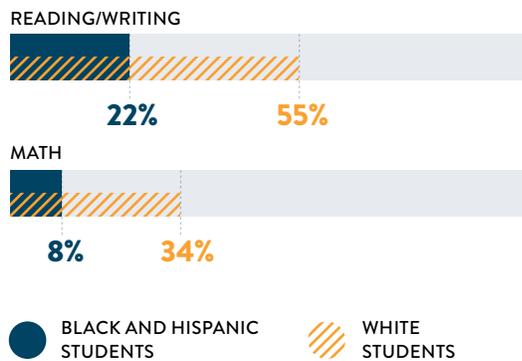
Indiana now requires all high school juniors to take the SAT, the college- and career-ready assessment created and administered by the College Board and taken by students nationwide. Unfortunately, Indiana's 2022 SAT results show substantial racial disparities. In Marion County, 22% of Black and Hispanic students achieved the reading/writing college-ready benchmark established by the College Board compared to 55% of white students. In math, 8% of Black students and 9% of Hispanic students scored at the college-ready benchmark, compared to 34% of white students.

These gaps in college and career readiness contribute to lower college enrollment rates for students of color when compared to white students: college enrollment rates among Marion County's 2020 high school graduates were 44% for Black students and 38% for Hispanic students vs. 56% for white students. And, while college enrollment is declining

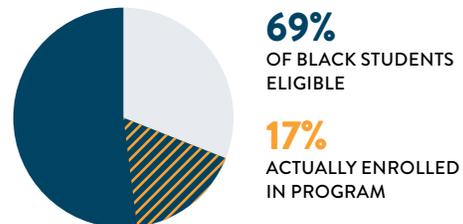
across the board, it's falling disproportionately among Black students. From 2017 to 2020, Black Marion County high school graduates saw a 24% decrease in college-going rates, while the percentage of Hispanic and white students headed straight to college decreased by about 10%.

While Indiana's 21st Century Scholars program is impressive in its track record of mitigating this enrollment gap, evidence suggests students of color may be underrepresented in the program. Between 2017 and 2019, 69% of Black students met the income eligibility criteria for 21st Century Scholars, but only 17% of Black students were Scholars. Additionally, research shows those who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid are twice as likely to enroll in college as those who do not, and those who receive grant aid also are more likely to enroll in college.

STUDENTS ACHIEVING THE COLLEGE-READY BENCHMARK SCORE ON THE 2022 SAT



21ST CENTURY SCHOLARS



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Require FAFSA completion as a prerequisite for graduating high school.

Louisiana did just that, and their FAFSA completion rate is 77%, the highest in the nation and nearly 40 percentage points higher than Marion County's rate of 37.9%. This led to the Louisiana Class of 2018 achieving the highest college enrollment rate for all student groups in the state's history.

Automatically enroll eligible students in the 21st Century Scholars program.

Additionally, provide financial literacy and program enrollment support for students and their families in partnership with trusted community organizations that have established relationships with low-income households.

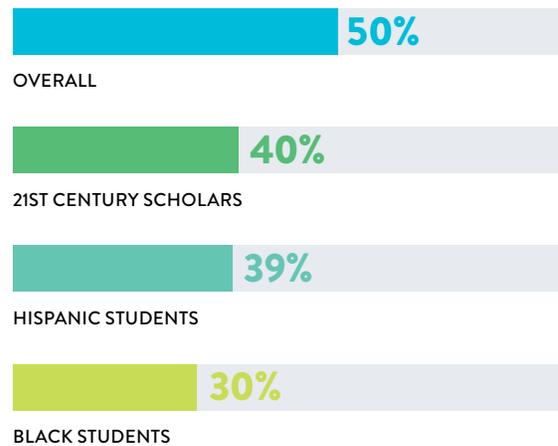
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INCREASING COLLEGE COMPLETION RATES

Once in college, Black and Hispanic students are considerably less likely to meet “early success criteria” (do not require remediation in their first year of college; complete all coursework attempted in their freshman year; persist to sophomore year) than their white and Asian peers. This leads to continued disparities in college completion rates. Statewide, only 30% of Black students and 39% of Hispanic students graduate from a four-year college in four years, compared to the overall on-time completion rate of 50%. Additionally, while 21st Century Scholars complete college at a higher rate than their non-Scholar peers, the rate – 40% – is low. This shows getting to college doesn’t always equal success.

Research has found that financial obstacles – such as an unexpected bill or the need to support family members – are major contributors to low college completion rates, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds. One proven solution to address this is ‘micro grants,’ small amounts of emergency funding to help low-income students cover expenses, which have been shown to have a dramatic impact on college persistence rates. Additionally, programs that pair intensive in-college supports such as tutoring, coaching and mentoring, along with financial aid, have been successful in improving persistence and college completion.

ON-TIME COMPLETION RATES FOR FOUR-YEAR DEGREES



RECOMMENDATION FOR IMPROVEMENT:

Increase the support provided by colleges to low-income students.

This could include direct coaching, mentorship and academic support, as well as micro grant programs to provide emergency financial support.

WE MUST ACT NOW

Racial disparities in education outcomes are at crisis levels in Marion County. We must address them now or risk the problem escalating to a point of no return. It is incumbent upon all sectors – public, private and not-for-profit – to work together to ensure every single Indianapolis student receives the high-quality education they deserve.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLOSING INDIANA'S EDUCATION ACHIEVEMENT GAPS:

01 

Mandate participation in Indiana's Paths to Quality rating system for early childhood providers.

02 

Shift the state's Paths to Quality system to focus on learning outcomes.

03 

Differentiate state aid in the K-12 funding formula based on local wealth.

04 

Increase K-12 funding for students from low-income households and for English language learner students.

05 

Increase racial diversity of teachers and administrators and improve staff retention rates.

06 

Increase state funding for teacher scholarship programs to mitigate teacher shortages and enhance diversity in the teacher workforce.

07 

Enroll more Black and Hispanic students in advanced K-12 coursework.

08 

Require FAFSA completion as a prerequisite for graduating from high school.

09 

Automatically enroll eligible students in the 21st Century Scholars program.

10 

Increase wraparound support provided by colleges to students from low-income households and to Black and Hispanic students.

