



**SEEN AND
AFFIRMED:**

**WHAT
BLACK
EDUCATORS
AND
STUDENTS
NEED
TO
THRIVE**

The Black Educators Advocates Network is an advocacy initiative focused on transforming the environment, practices, and policies that affect the educational experience of Black educators, administrators, students, and parents. BEAN was born out of necessity. It was founded by Black educators who recognized the desperate need for an educational experience that considers and centers around Black students. BEAN is committed to transforming the learning environment for all students of color. We do our work through community building, research and discovery, and bold advocacy.

WHO WE ARE

INTRODUCTION

In response to widespread systemic racism, including racial injustices in our police system, Black educators are working together to address the racial inequities in our schools against Black teachers, students, administrators, and other staff. There are too few schools closing the opportunity gap for Black students in Los Angeles County. And, there are not enough Black educators and administrators, even though studies clearly show that all students benefit from having educators and school leaders of color. We interviewed school

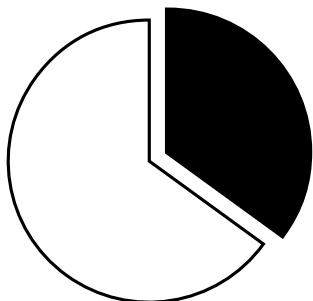
leaders that are closing opportunity gaps for low-income African American students to learn what they are doing to support Black educators and students. We created this tool to highlight and share some of their best practices. We hope this will be used as a conversation starter on how all schools and school systems can create conditions for Black educators to thrive and how to embed transformational teaching practices that affirm and are centered around Black students.

How can schools support Black educators and students to thrive?

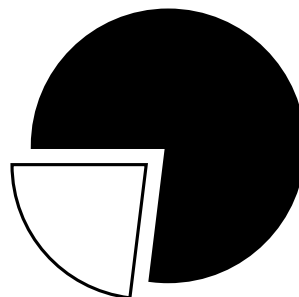
- Build an anti-racist, culturally responsive, and inclusive school environment.
- Hire staff that look like students, provide spaces for Black educators to be heard and affirmed, and create opportunities for Black educators to lead.
- Engage parents as co-educators, create opportunities for Black students to build community, embed culture in everything, and establish high expectations for Black students and give them rigorous content.



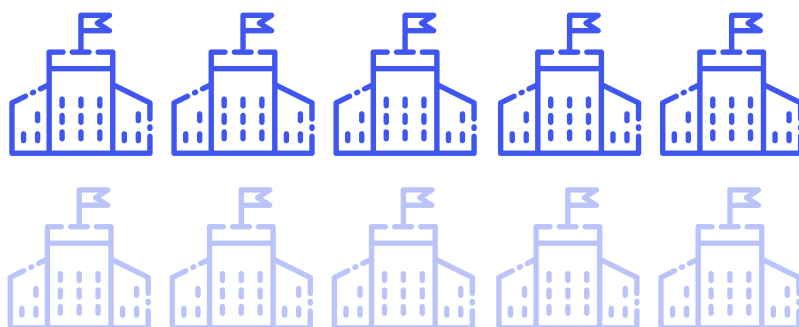
MORE THAN 78,000 BLACK STUDENTS ARE IN SCHOOLS WITH NO BLACK TEACHERS



Only **35% of teachers** are teachers of color...



...while **77% of students** are students of color.



More than half of schools in California don't have a Black teacher.

Source: Education Trust-West, Teachers of Color in California TK-12 Public Schools, 2019.

Black educators are essential to the success of all students, but we don't have enough of them. The research is clear that a diverse staff of teachers benefits all students, and students who have a teacher who looks like them do better in school¹. Black students who have a Black teacher before fourth grade are more

likely to graduate high school and go to college². They also have higher levels of math achievement³ and are less likely to be suspended⁴. One study also shows that students of all racial/ethnic backgrounds feel more supported, learn better and are more engaged when they have Black teachers⁵.

HOW TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE BLACK STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS CAN THRIVE

What is an anti-racist, culturally responsive, and inclusive school environment?

Interviewed principals resoundingly agreed that creating an anti-racist, culturally responsive, and inclusive school environment is a critical, foundational step. That said, participants had varying ideas of how to create this environment and were at different stages of implementing such an environment. Future work should focus on what an anti-racist, culturally responsive school looks like, while paying attention to the school context. Research on culturally responsive school leadership affirms the importance of training and developing culturally responsive teachers and promoting a culturally affirming and inclusive school culture⁶.

Several schools acknowledged they need to do more work to ensure their Black teachers and students feel heard and affirmed. For example, one school leader shared that some teachers understand the implicit biases they have and how it

affects their interactions with Black students, while others do not. Teachers don't always write objective comments about students' progress and behavior. As a result, this school leader stopped giving those teacher comments to the students' next teacher to avoid any pre-judgements and biases. The few schools that have started more explicit conversations about racism and implicit biases only started that work in the past year or two. For instance, one school asked questions like, "What do you see when that Black boy walks into your classroom? What do you see and expect?" The principal said these conversations are provoking staff to think more critically about their biases. However, he/she also reported that a lot of staff were initially resistant and upset.

BEST PRACTICES FOR BLACK EDUCATORS TO THRIVE

1

Be intentional about hiring staff that look like students

Only half of the schools we interviewed have Black educators on staff. And most of those only have 1- 2 Black teachers, or a small proportion compared to the number of Black students. Of the schools that do have Black educators or other teachers of color, principals said they have made it a priority to hire staff that look like their students. One principal of a school where 30% of teachers are Black, exceeding the state average, said he has been intentional in his hiring because he knows his students will do better. The research confirms this-- BIPOC students (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) have better academic outcomes, lower suspension and drop-out rates when they are in schools led by administrators of color⁷. All school leaders we interviewed affirmed this as important for students' sense of belonging and their overall academic achievement.

2

Provide spaces and opportunities for Black educators to be heard and affirmed

Black educators have grown accustomed to not being heard and navigating spaces where they have experienced discrimination. This is why school leaders shared the importance of allowing Black educators to share their experiences with racism and discrimination and offer safe spaces to do so. This includes groups where Black educators can connect and talk with one another. One principal created a Black Educators Affinity Group where educators were free to acknowledge how critical they are to Black students and were allowed to discover avenues to build more representation across all of their leadership teams. Within the affinity group, Black educators were affirmed and introduced to future leadership opportunities, pro-Black programming, and Black curriculum.

3

Create opportunities for Black teachers to lead

School leaders should support Black educators' professional development and career goals. When Black teachers are provided opportunities to lead, their talent and expertise is validated. School leaders should empower Black educators to share their best practices. It is also important to give teachers a voice in decision-making. For example, one high school provides a variety of professional development workshop models led by their school's resident experts. This empowers educators to lead and share their best practices.

BEST PRACTICES FOR BLACK STUDENTS TO THRIVE

1

Engage parents, especially during distance learning, as they are functionally co-educators in their homes

Engaging parents has become even more important now that students are engaging in school remotely from home. Some leaders shared how teachers at their school reach out individually to parents to get to know families and the needs of their students. For example, one school leader hosted a series of parent focus groups after the murder of George Floyd. The school leader wanted to make sure parents knew there was a space on campus for them to talk about these critical issues.

2

Create opportunities for students to build community and support each other

All interviewees emphasized the importance of building a school environment where students feel they are part of a family or team. Several school leaders shared how they are providing spaces for students to connect and build community with one other. This helps students feel more engaged in learning, and more comfortable with and connected to their peers. For example, a few schools instituted a peer mentorship program to connect younger students with older peers so they can provide advice and guidance. At one high school, older students in 11th and 12th grade serve as peer mentors to entering 9th grade students. Another school provides smaller culturally-based support groups, or assigns all students to smaller cohorts of 12-15 so they can collaborate and connect as a team. Relationships and community are especially critical now when students feel more isolated learning from home.

3

Embed culture in everything

Defining culture and how to embed it into day-to-day school activities looked different at each school. Some schools have introduced racially inclusive curriculum and they examine the content they use to ensure it is culturally representative. At other schools, they define the school culture in ways that are representative of the students' culture. For example, at one school they embed ancestral traditions into school cultural activities and use "collectivism" as a driving value. One elementary school encourages student engagement and collaboration in ways that are culturally affirming for students. At another elementary school, educators are very intentional about creating a classroom environment where students feel comfortable talking and actively engaging with one another.

The principal explains, “I don’t want to walk into a silent classroom unless you’re taking a test. I want there to be noise. I want kids to call out. I want kids to be engaged and active. Teachers don’t cut off student conversations just because they want silence. They practice having something important to say to students that will help them move their work forward and then let them get back to talking and engaging with one another.”

4

Establish high expectations for Black students and provide access to rigorous content

School leaders emphasized the importance of holding high expectations for all students and especially for Black students. They also shared the importance of providing Black students with rigorous coursework and grade-level content. Research shows that when students have access to rigorous grade-level assignments and teachers who believe they can meet grade-level standards, they do better in school⁸. For example, a school leader at one high school establishes high expectations by cultivating a college-going environment from the day students start school. At one elementary school, the principal shared that they couple grade-level content with progress monitoring to ensure they meet their students where they are at in order to get them where they need to be.



“I try to make sure whatever steps we take, we take it with the lens and understanding that the system doesn’t support the students that we serve. The system as it is. So we have to be creative. We have to listen to our community. We have to be in true partnership with our community. And we have to know and love our community.”

Black school leader

“I think we should stop prescribing blanket solutions for all Black students as if there is one thing that you do to help this community. There was a need to listen to the students, because quite often adults are focused on what we think we need to do and ignoring what students believe they need to grow. Intentional listening within the context of the lesson, happens when on the playground, passing in hallways, it’s important to listen.”

Black school leader



METHODOLOGY

In order to identify schools that are responsive to the needs of Black students, we referred to the 2020 Top Public Schools report published by Innovate Public Schools and USC⁹. This report identified 278 schools in Los Angeles County closing the opportunity gap for low-income students of color - 35 of those schools were closing the gap specifically for low-income African American students¹⁰. We conducted interviews with 10 school leaders from the list of Top Public Schools for low-income African American students. Our sample includes a range of type (charter and district) and grade level served (elementary, middle and high)¹¹. We also interviewed four former educators and school leaders who work in the K-12 public education field in other capacities, such as nonprofit organizations or consulting.

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10. Top Public Schools are schools that are beating the statewide average for low-income African American and/or Latino students in one or more factors including math and reading scores, college eligibility, and suspension rates. To qualify for our list, schools must also serve a representative proportion of low-income African American or Latino students.
11. We interviewed school leaders from 2 public charter schools and 8 traditional public schools. This included 6 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 2 high schools. Districts represented include: Culver City Unified, Hawthorne, Lawndale, Long Beach Unified, and Los Angeles Unified.

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