Unequal Access to Educational Opportunity in High School

A National Analysis of the Civil Rights Data Collection

JANUARY 2020

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RESEARCH for ACTION

Introduction

The United States is plagued by large disparities in life outcomes between racial and ethnic groups.[1] Researchers have documented how gaps in outcomes are related to gaps in access to opportunity, both in education and otherwise.[2] Yet, as documented in this report, too often schools still fail to provide equitable learning opportunities.

The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is administered biennially by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights. This data set provides dozens of indicators related to access to educational opportunity from virtually every public school in the nation. Many of the indicators are specific to students in grades 9-12.

Research for Action's new Educational Opportunity Dashboard uses the 2015-16 CRDC data to better understand where education policy may be driving or failing to reduce disparities in access to educational opportunity for students in high school. (See call-out box defining "access").

ACCESS: A First Step to Opportunity

In this study, high school students are presumed to have access to an educational opportunity if they merely attend a school that provides the opportunity. For example, if a student attends a school that offers an Advanced Placement course or attends a school with a low student/teacher ratio, that student is considered to have access to those indicators of opportunity. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the student is receiving the opportunity. The student may or may not be enrolled in an AP course or in a classroom with low student/teacher ratio.

Some Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) indicators are only available at this basic level of access to a school with opportunities. For consistency we examined all 14 indicators in this way. In addition, by examining this threshold question, we can narrow in on how well policymakers are taking the first step to providing adequate and equitable opportunities to all students regardless of race or poverty.

1 In 2017, Whites were more likely to be employed, less likely to be living in poverty, less likely to be incarcerated, and more likely to own their home than Blacks and Hispanics. Whites and Asians also receive college degrees at rates that far exceed those of Blacks and Hispanics. Those with at least a bachelor's degree earned approximately $22,200 more per year than individuals with a high school diploma or equivalent in 2017. U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2019). *Prisoners in 2017.* (DOJ Publication No. NCJ 252156). Washington DC: Retrieved from: https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p17.pdf.

2 Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must do to give every child an even chance.* Oxford University Press.

The Educational Opportunity Dashboard

To determine the extent to which high school students have access to schools that provide quality educational opportunities, we analyzed 14 CRDC indicators.[3] From these 14 indicators, we generated three composite indices of three broad domains of access to educational opportunity:

1. Access to Quality Educators Index
2. Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum Index
3. Access to Positive School Climate Index

The interactive Educational Opportunity Dashboard allows users to generate state rankings on each of the 14 indicators, by the three indices, and by an "Average Opportunity Score", which is an average of the three domain-specific index scores. States can also be ranked by the size of gaps between student race/ethnic and poverty subgroups.[4] Users can also separately examine the gaps between race/ethnic subgroups within the subsets of high-, mid-, and low-poverty high schools.

Report Overview and Key Findings

This report provides a summary of our analysis of the CRDC data on access to educational opportunities at the national level. We begin with a description of the 14 indicators and the three broader domains of access to educational opportunity. We then provide a demographic landscape of the student population included in this analysis. Finally, we discuss the race/ethnic- and income-based disparities in access within each domain, including an analysis of which indicators of these domains may be driving these disparities, and the degree to which race/ethnic disparities persist across levels of high-, mid-, and low-poverty high schools. Below are the key findings for the nation's high school students overall.

Key National Findings:

- Overall, White, Asian, and non-poor high school students have higher access to all three domains of educational opportunity: Access to Quality Educators, Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum, and Access to Positive School Climate.
- Black, Hispanic, and poor students have less access to quality educators and access to positive school climate. Black and poor students have less access to college and career readiness curriculum, though Hispanic high school students have similar access to college and career readiness curriculum as White students.
- High school students of all races in low-poverty schools have greater access to all three domains of access to educational opportunity.
- Black and Hispanic high school students are concentrated in high-poverty schools, while White students are concentrated in low-poverty schools.
- The concentration of Black and Hispanic students in high-poverty schools appears to be a primary factor driving gaps in access to educational opportunity between Black and White and Hispanic and White students. However, gaps by race/ethnicity exist across all levels of school poverty (i.e. within low-, mid-, and high-poverty schools). For example:
    - White students have greater access to quality educators than any other race/ethnic group at all levels of school poverty.
    - Gaps in access to college and career readiness curriculum exist between Black and White and Hispanic and White students in low-poverty schools, but Black and Hispanic students have either similar or greater access than White students in mid- and high-poverty schools. Asian students have the greatest access across all levels of school poverty.

3 This analysis is limited to high school students who attended a public school that served all grades 9-12. See technical appendix for a complete description of data and sample. https://www.researchforaction.org/educational-opportunity/methodology

4 For these analyses, students are categorized by income based on eligibility for free/reduced-price lunch (FRPL). Students are eligible for FRPL if their household income is 185% of the Federal Poverty Level or less or are categorically eligible based on participation in other assistance programs such as SNAP.

- Gaps in access to positive school climate exist between Black and White students in schools of all poverty levels. Notable disparities between Hispanic and White students are not present in mid- and low-poverty schools but a gap that favors Hispanic students is present in high-poverty schools. Asian students have the greatest access across all levels of school poverty.

Measures of Access to Educational Opportunity in High School

Below we discuss the importance of student access to each domain of educational opportunity and present the indicators used to construct the composite index for each.

The score for each composite index is an average of the scores of the included indicators.[5] As shown in the example below, if a composite index is comprised of three indicators and 92% of a state's high school students attend a school with access to Indicator 1, 89% attend a school with access to Indicator 2, and 86% attend a school with access to Indicator 3, then the composite index score for that state would be 89%, which is the average of the three indictor-level percentages.

$$\frac{(92\%\ \text{Access to Indicator 1}) + (89\%\ \text{Access to Indicator 2}) + (86\%\ \text{Access to Indicator 3})}{3} = 89\%\ \text{Composite Index Score}$$

Composite Index 1: Access to Quality Educators

Effective teachers can improve student attendance, achievement, and long-term outcomes.[6] Moreover, students taught by teachers with more experience, national board certification, or certification in the subject they teach achieve at higher levels.[7] Additionally, high school counselors have a positive effect on a range of student outcomes such as academic development, college and career readiness, and social/emotional development.[8]

Table 1 presents the definitions of the five indicators that comprise the Access to Quality Educators Index.

Table 1. Access to High Schools with Quality Educators: Indicators and Definitions

Index	Indicator	Definition
Access to Quality Educators	Access to Certified Teachers	Percentage of students who attend a high school in which all teachers have met all applicable state teacher certification requirements.
	Access to STEM Certified Teachers	Percentage of students who attend a school in which all science and math courses are taught by teachers certified in math and science.
	Access to Experienced Teachers	Percentage of students who attend a school in which the proportion of teachers with more than two years of experience is at or above the national median (90.9%).
	Access to Low Student/ Teacher Ratio	Percentage of students who attend a school with a student/ teacher ratio at or below the national median (14.4:1).
	Access to Low Student/ Counselor Ratio	Percentage of students who attend a school with a student/ counselor ratio at or below the recommended ratio (250:1).[9]

5 See technical appendix for a complete description of the data and method for constructing the composite indices. https://www.researchforaction.org/educational-opportunity/methodology

6 Gershenson, S. (2016). Linking teacher quality, student attendance, and student achievement. *Education Finance and Policy, 11*(2), 125.; Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., & Rockoff, J. E. (2014). Measuring the impacts of teachers II: Teacher value-added and student outcomes in adulthood. *American economic review, 104*(9), 2633-79.

7 Kini, T and Podolsky, A. (2016). Does Teaching Experience Increase Teacher Effectiveness? A Review of the Research. *Learning Policy Institute*; Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J. (2010). Teacher Credentials and Student Achievement in High School: A Cross-Subject Analysis with Student Fixed Effects. *The Journal of Human Resources, 45*(3), 655-681.; Papay, J. P., & Kraft, M. A. (2015). Productivity returns to experience in the teacher labor market: Methodological challenges and new evidence on long-term career improvement. *Journal of Public Economics, 130,* 105-119.

8 American School Counselor Association. (2019). *Empirical Research Studies Supporting the Value of School Counseling*. Alexandria VA: American School Counselor Association.

9 The American School Counselor Association recommends a student/counselor ratio of 250:1. American Counseling Association (2014). United States student-to-counselor ratio for elementary and secondary schools – 2011-2012 data years. Retrieved from https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/public-policy-faqs-and-documents/2013-counselor-tostudent-ratio-chart.pdf?sfvrsn=2

Composite Index 2: Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum

Enrollment in rigorous courses increases student achievement and the likelihood that a student will graduate from high school and go to college.[10] However, students of color are highly underrepresented in courses with more advanced curriculum.[11] This is often a function of tracking within schools.[12] Yet access to schools that even offer such curricular opportunities is a basic prerequisite and disparities in such access likely contributes to disparate enrollment.

Table 2 presents the definitions of the five indicators that comprise the Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum Index. Note that these indicators identify whether students attend a school that offers any courses in the respective subjects, but do not identify the number of courses offered or the student enrollment in these courses.

Table 2. Access to High Schools with College and Career Readiness Curriculum: Indicators and Definitions

Index	Indicator	Definition
Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum	Access to Advanced Math	Percentage of students who attend a school that offers Advanced Math (i.e., trigonometry, analytic geometry, probability and statistics, precalculus).
	Access to Calculus	Percentage of students who attend a school that offers Calculus.
	Access to Chemistry	Percentage of students who attend a school that offers Chemistry.
	Access to Physics	Percentage of students who attend a school that offers Physics.
	Access to AP	Percentage of students who attend a school that offers AP courses.

Composite Index 3: Access to Positive School Climate

School climate typically refers to relationships between students, their peers, and administrators and teachers.[13] Positive school climate is correlated with less chronic absenteeism and lower rates of student suspensions.[14] Students in schools with high levels of delinquent behavior are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior themselves.[15] Relationships with peers within a school can affect academic achievement and behavior. For example, moving to a school with higher suspension rates can reduce achievement or increase bad behavior,[16] and moving to a school with more high-achieving peers can have positive effects on academic achievement.[17]

Table 3 presents the definitions of four indicators that comprise the Access to Positive School Climate Index.

10 Long, M., Conger, D., & Iatarola, P. (2012). Effects of High School Course-Taking on Secondary and Postsecondary Success. *American Educational Research Journal, 49*(2), 285-322.
11 College Board. (2014). The 10th Annual AP Report to the Nation. Retrieved from https://research.collegeboard.org/programs/ap/data/nation
12 Tyson, K. (2011). *Integration interrupted: Tracking, black students, and acting white after brown.* New York: Oxford University Press.
13 Bryk, A. S. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from chicago.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
14 Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Alessandro, A. H. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, *83*(3), 357-385.
15 Billings, S. B., Deming, D. J., Ross, S. L. (2019). Partners in Crime. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 11*(1), 126-150.
16 Bacher-Hicks, A., Billings, S. B., & Deming, D. J. (2019). *The School to Prison Pipeline: Long-Run Impacts of School Suspensions on Adult Crime* (No. w26257). National Bureau of Economic Research.
17 Steinberg, M. P., & MacDonald, J. M. (2019). The effects of closing urban schools on students' academic and behavioral outcomes: Evidence from Philadelphia. *Economics of Education Review*, 69, 25-60.

Table 3. Access to High Schools with Positive School Climate: Indicators and Definitions

Index	Indicator	Definition
Access to Positive School Climate	Access to Low Suspension Rate	Percentage of students who attend a school with a suspension rate that is at or below the national median (5%).
	Access to Low Chronic Absenteeism Rate	Percentage of students who attend a school with a chronic absenteeism rate that is at or below the national median (17.4%).
	Access to Teacher Chronic Absenteeism Rate	Percentage of students who attend a school with a teacher chronic absenteeism rate that is at or below the national median (21%).
	Access to Low Grade Retention Rate	Percentage of students who attend a school with a grade retention rate that is at or below the national median (1.1%).

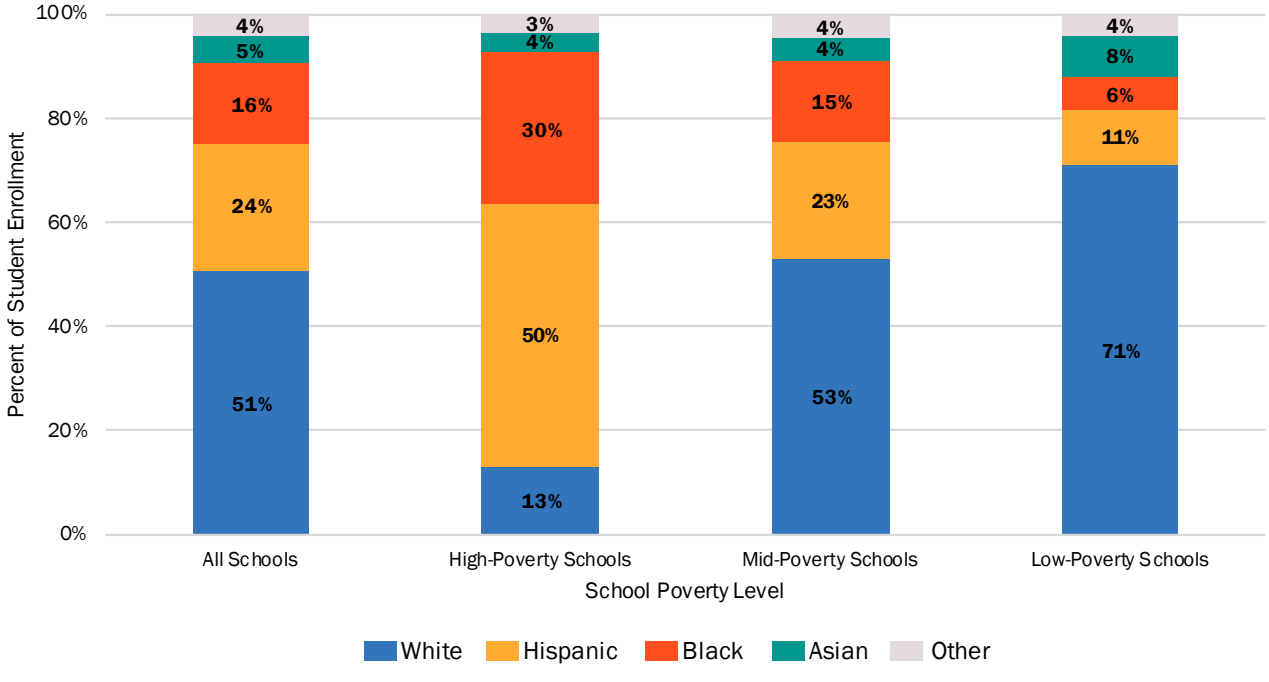
National High School Student Demographics

This section describes the 2015-16 race/ethnic and poverty demographics of the high school student population overall and by level of school poverty. Overall 14 million students attend public high schools in the United States.[18] About half of this student population is White, 24% is Black, 16% is Hispanic, 5% is Asian, and 4% belong to other race/ethnic groups. Additionally, 46% of these students are eligible for free/reduced-price lunch (FRPL).

Following the U.S. Department of Education's definition, high-poverty schools are those with at least 75% of students eligible for FRPL; mid-poverty schools are those with between 25% to 75% of students eligible for FRPL; and low-poverty schools are those with 25% or fewer students eligible for FRPL.[19]

Figure 1 compares the student racial/ethnic composition in schools overall to that of high-, mid-, and low-poverty schools.

Figure 1. Student Race/Ethnicity Composition by School Poverty: Nation 2015-16.



18 This analysis is limited to high school students who attended a public school that served grades 9-12. See technical appendix for a complete description of data and sample. https://www.researchforaction.org/educational-opportunity/methodology

19 *The Condition of Education 2019* (NCES 2019-144). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Black and Hispanic students are concentrated in high-poverty schools; White and Asian students are concentrated in low-poverty schools.

- The demographics of mid-poverty schools largely mirror the demographics of the overall student population.
- In high-poverty schools, the percentages of Black and Hispanic students are two times greater than in the overall student population, while the percentage of White students is only one-fourth of that in the overall student population.
- In low-poverty schools, the percentage of White students is 20% points higher and the percentage of Asian students is 3% points higher than the percentages of White and Asian students in the overall population.

National Disparities in Access to Educational Opportunity in High Schools

Analysis of the CRDC data reveals unequal access to all three domains of educational opportunity by both race/ethnicity and poverty. First, within each domain, we compare disparities in access between student groups defined by race/ethnicity and FRPL status. In this analysis, we also examine the specific indicators that may be driving these disparities. Then, we examine whether race/ethnic-based disparities in access persist within high-, mid-, and low-poverty schools.

1. Access to Quality Educators

As described above, the Access to Quality Educators Index is calculated by averaging the percentages of students who attend schools with each of the following five school-level indicators: certified teachers, teachers certified in STEM, experienced teachers, a low student/teacher ratio, and a low student/counselor ratio.

Disparities in Access to Quality Educators

Below we describe gaps in access to quality educators by student race/ethnicity and FRPL status. Table 4 presents the Access to Quality Educators Index scores and the percentage of students with access to each of the individual indicators by student race/ethnicity and FRPL status.

Table 4. Percentage of Students by Race/Ethnicity and FRPL Status with Access to Quality Educators: Nation 2015-16.

	All	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	FRPL	Non-FRPL
Access to Quality Educators Index	44%	48%	38%	38%	43%	41%	46%
- Certified Teachers	66%	72%	52%	62%	63%	62%	69%
- Teachers Certified in STEM	54%	60%	45%	48%	53%	50%	57%
- Experienced Teachers	50%	56%	40%	42%	53%	45%	54%
- Low Student/Teacher Ratio	28%	32%	30%	20%	20%	28%	28%
- Low Student/Counselor Ratio	21%	22%	21%	18%	24%	20%	22%

Red = Worse Access than All Students, Yellow = Access within ±1% Point of All Students, Green = Better Access than All Students

Higher percentages of White and non-FRPL students have access to quality educators. The percentage of White students attending schools with quality educators is 10% points higher than that of both Black and Hispanic students. Although smaller, gaps are also present between White and Asian and FRPL and non-FRPL students.

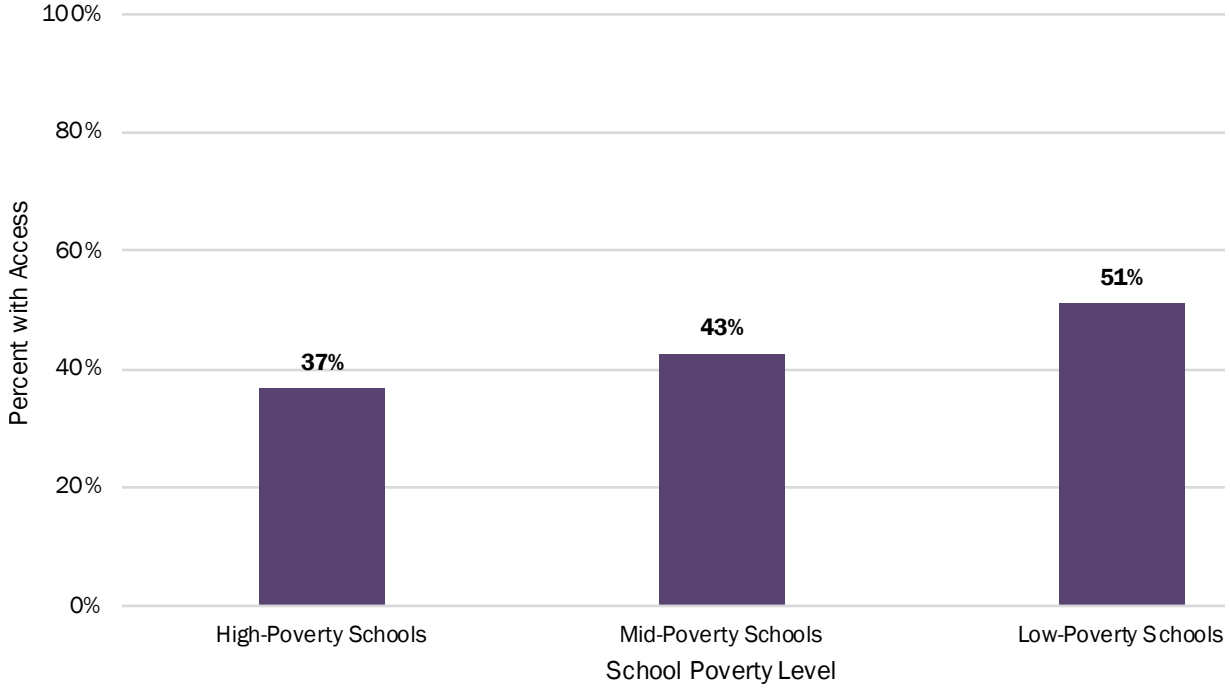
The largest disparities are in access to certified teachers, teachers certified in STEM, and experienced teachers. Compared to White students, the percentage of students attending a school in which all teachers are certified is 20% points lower for Black students, 10% points lower for Hispanic students, and 9% points lower for Asian students. Compared to White students, the percentage of students attending a school where all math and science courses are taught by teachers certified in math and science is 15% points lower for Black students, 12% points lower for Hispanic students, and 7% points lower for Asian students. Finally, compared to White students, the percentage of students who attend a school with experienced educators is 16% points lower for Black students, 14% points lower for Hispanic students, and 3% points lower for Asian students. On each indicator, smaller gaps are found between FRPL and non-FRPL students than between race/ethnic subgroups.

Gaps in access to low student/counselor ratio are small. The largest gap is between Asian and Hispanic students at 6%.

Do Race/Ethnic Gaps in Access to Quality Educators Persist Across Levels of School Poverty?

Figure 2 presents the Access to Quality Educators Index scores within low-, mid-, and high-poverty schools.

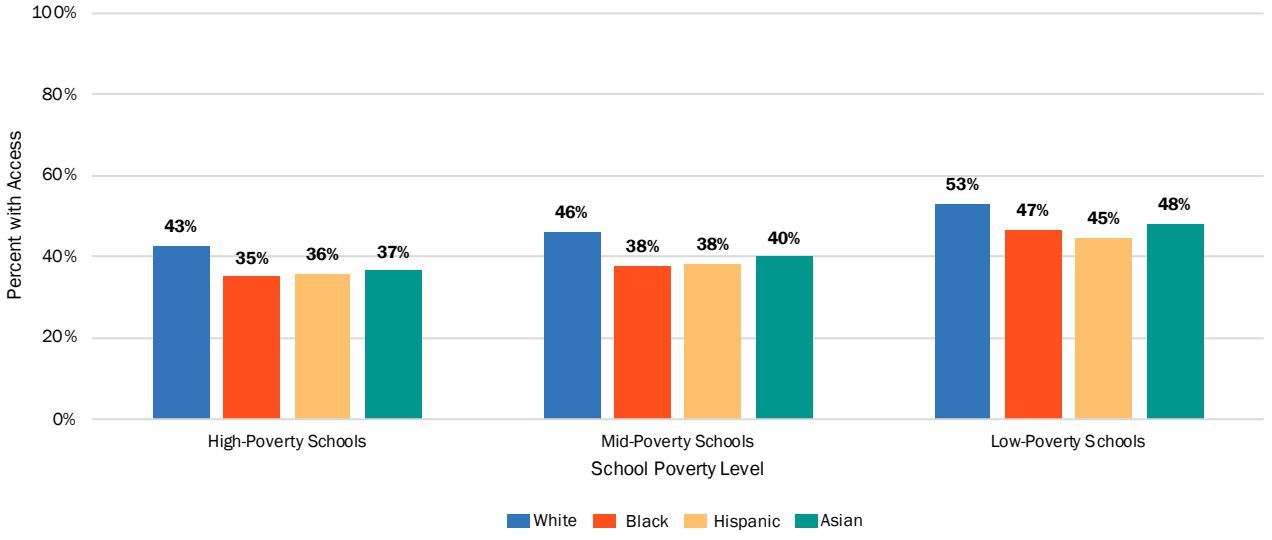
Figure 2. Percentage of Students with Access to Quality Educators by School Poverty: Nation 2015-16.



Students in high-poverty schools have the least access to quality educators. Compared to students in low-poverty schools, the percentage of students who have access to quality educators is 8% points lower in mid-poverty schools and 14% points lower in high-poverty schools.

Figure 3 presents Access to Quality Educators Index scores by student race/ethnicity within high-, mid-, and low-poverty schools.

Figure 3. Percentage of Students with Access to Quality Educators by Student Race/Ethnicity and School Poverty: Nation 2015-16.



At all levels of school poverty, White students have greater access to quality educators than any other race/ethnic group. Within high-poverty schools, the percentage of students with access to quality educators is 8% points lower for Black students, 7% points lower for Hispanic students, and 6% lower for Asian students compared to White Students. Similar gaps are found in mid- and low-poverty schools.

2. Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum

As explained above, the Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum Index is calculated by averaging the percentages of students who attend schools that provide each of the following five school-level indicators: advanced mathematics, advanced placement, calculus, chemistry, and physics.

Disparities in Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum

Below we describe gaps in access to college and career readiness curriculum by student race/ethnicity and FRPL status. Table 5 presents the Access to College and Career Readiness Index scores and the percentage of students with access to each of the individual indicators by student race/ethnicity and FRPL status.

Table 5. Percentage of Students by Race/Ethnicity and FRPL Status with Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum: Nation 2015-16.

	All	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	FRPL	Non-FRPL
Access to College & Career Readiness Curriculum Index	91%	91%	87%	91%	96%	88%	93%
- **Advanced Math**	92%	93%	90%	91%	96%	90%	93%
- **Advanced Placement**	89%	88%	87%	90%	96%	87%	91%
- **Calculus**	86%	87%	78%	87%	92%	82%	89%
- **Chemistry**	97%	97%	96%	96%	99%	96%	98%
- **Physics**	90%	92%	84%	90%	96%	87%	93%

Red = Worse Access than All Students, Yellow = Access within ±1% Point of All Students, Green = Better Access than All Students

Most students attend schools that provide basic access to college and career readiness curriculum. As Table 5 indicates, over 90% of all students attend schools that provide college and career readiness curriculum.

Overall, Asian students and non-FRPL students have higher access to college and career readiness curriculum. Black students have less access to college and career readiness curriculum. Both White and

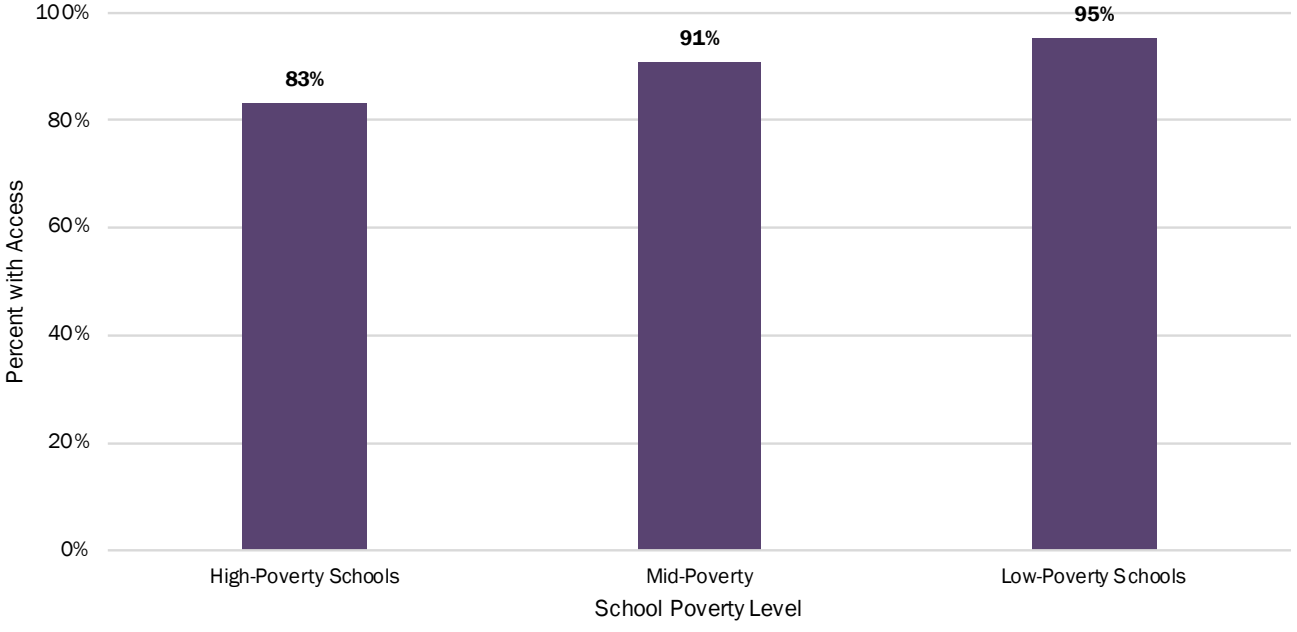
Hispanic students have similar levels of access as the student population overall. The percentage of FRPL students attending schools with college and career readiness curriculum is 5% points lower than that of non-FRPL students.

The largest disparities between White and Black students are in access to the more rigorous math and science courses – calculus and physics. Compared to White students, the percentage of Black students who attend a school that offers calculus is 9% points lower. The percentage of Black students who attend a school that offers physics is 8% points lower than White students. These two indicators also are main contributors to disparities in access between FRPL and non-FRPL students.

Do Race/Ethnic Gaps in Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum Persist Across Levels of School Poverty?

Figure 4 presents the Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum Index scores within low-, mid-, and high-poverty schools.

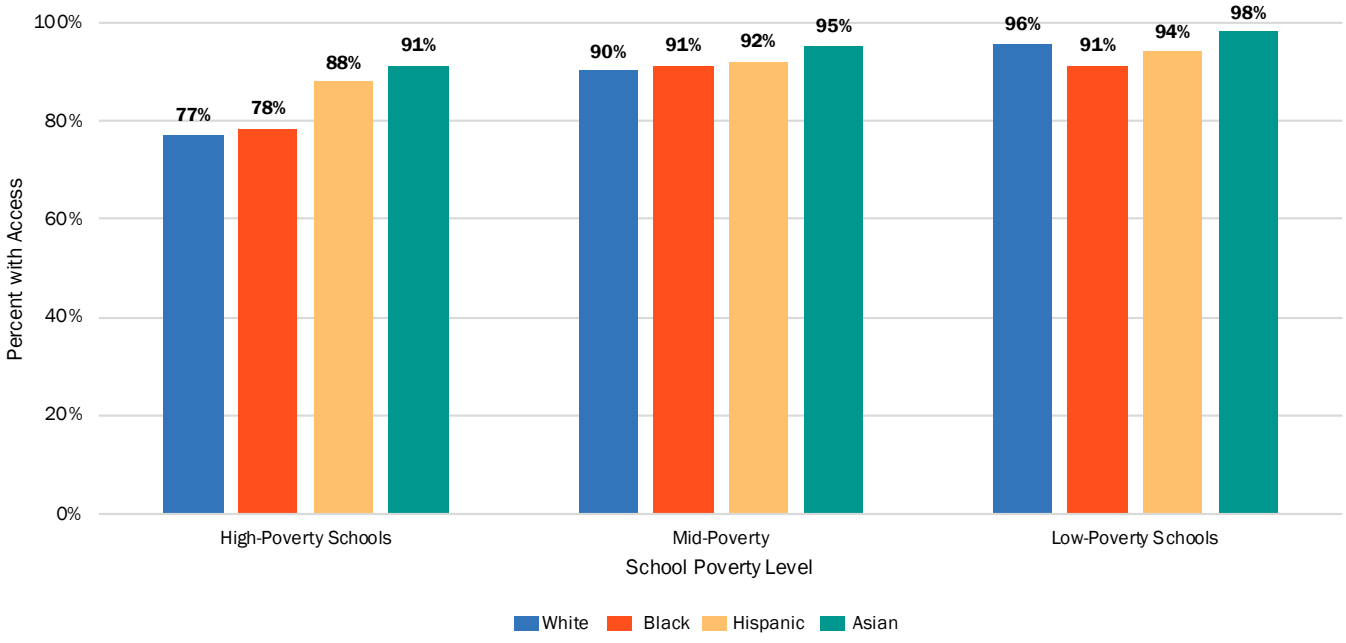
Figure 4. Percentage of Students with Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum by School Poverty: Nation 2015-16.



Students in high-poverty schools have the lowest access to college and career readiness curriculum. Compared to students in low-poverty schools, the percentage of students who have access to college and career readiness curriculum is 4% points lower in mid-poverty schools and 12% points lower in high-poverty schools.

Figure 5 presents Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum Index scores by student race/ethnicity within high-, mid-, and low-poverty schools.

Figure 5. Percentage of Students with Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum by Student Race/Ethnicity and School Poverty: Nation 2015-16.



Gaps between Black and White students are only notable in low-poverty schools. In low-poverty schools, the percentage of Black students that have access to college and career readiness curriculum is 5% points lower than White students. Access to college and career readiness curriculum is similar for Black and White students in mid- and high-poverty schools.

Notable disparities in access between Hispanic and White students are not found in mid- and low-poverty schools. However, there is a 11%-point gap that favors Hispanic students in high-poverty schools.

Asian students have the greatest access across all levels of school poverty. Over 90% have access to college and career readiness curriculum within high-, mid-, and low-poverty schools.

3. Access to Positive School Climate

The Access to Positive School Climate Index is calculated by averaging the percentages of students who attend schools with each of the following four school-level indicators: low suspension rate, low grade retention rate, low student chronic absenteeism, and low teacher chronic absenteeism.

Disparities in Access to Positive School Climate

Below we describe gaps in access to positive school climate by student race/ethnicity and FRPL status. Table 6 presents the Access to Positive School Climate Index scores and the percentage of students with access to each of the individual indicators by student race/ethnicity and FRPL status.

Table 6. Percentage of Students by Race/Ethnicity and FRPL States with Access to Positive School Climate: Nation 2015-16.

	All	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	FRPL	Non-FRPL
Access to Positive School Climate Index	44%	48%	31%	43%	55%	38%	49%
- Low Suspension	47%	51%	27%	46%	65%	37%	55%
- Low Grade Retention	43%	49%	25%	42%	52%	38%	48%
- Low Student Absenteeism	48%	52%	36%	45%	62%	40%	55%
- Low Teacher Absenteeism	39%	39%	35%	39%	39%	38%	39%

Red = Worse Access than All Students, Yellow = Access within ±1% Point of All Students, Green = Better Access than All Students

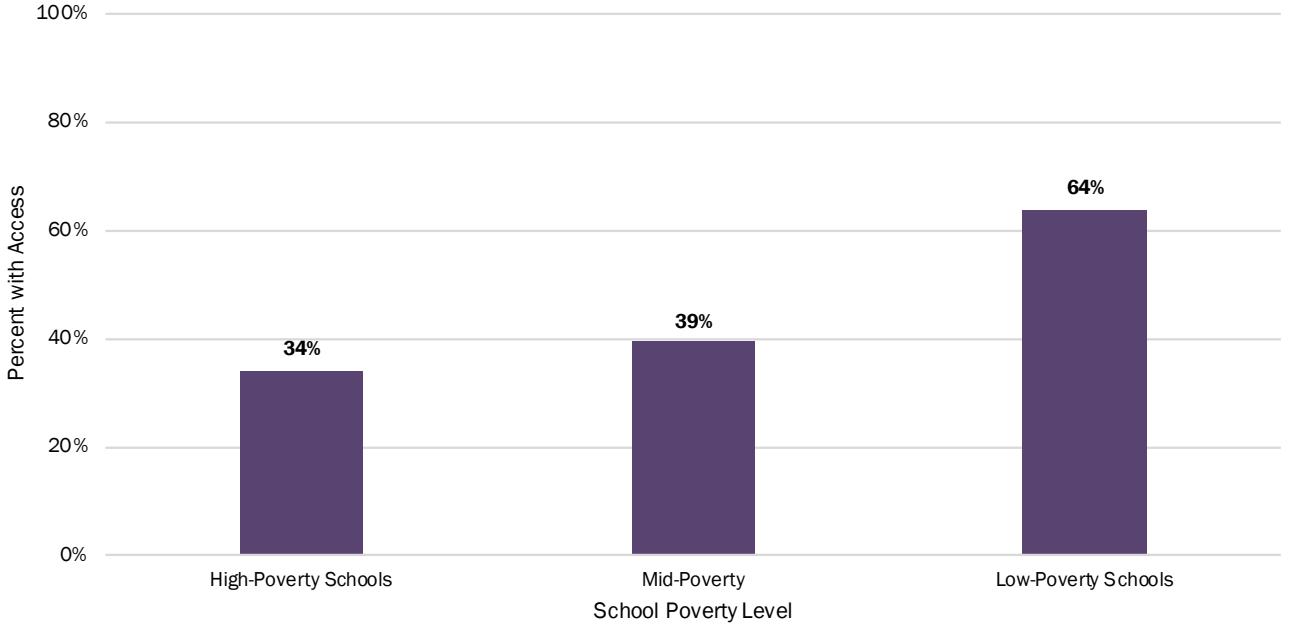
Overall, White, Asian, and non-FRPL students have higher access to positive school climate. Compared to White students, the percentage of students who attend a school with a positive school climate is 17% points lower for Black students, and 5% points lower for Hispanic students. Asian students have the highest access to positive school climate. Additionally, the percentage of FRPL students who attend a school with positive school climate is 11% points lower compared non-FRPL students.

Discrepancies in access to schools with low suspension rates, low grade retention, and low student absenteeism rates are the largest contributors to Black/White and Hispanic/White gaps in access to positive school climate. Gaps for these three indicators range from 16-24% between Black and White students and range from 5-7% between Hispanic and White students. These three indicators are also the main contributors to disparities in access between FRPL and non-FRPL students, with gaps ranging from 10-18%.

Do Race/Ethnic Gaps in Access to Positive School Climate Persist Across Levels of School Poverty?

Figure 6 presents scores on the overall Access to Positive School Climate Index within low-, mid-, and high-poverty schools.

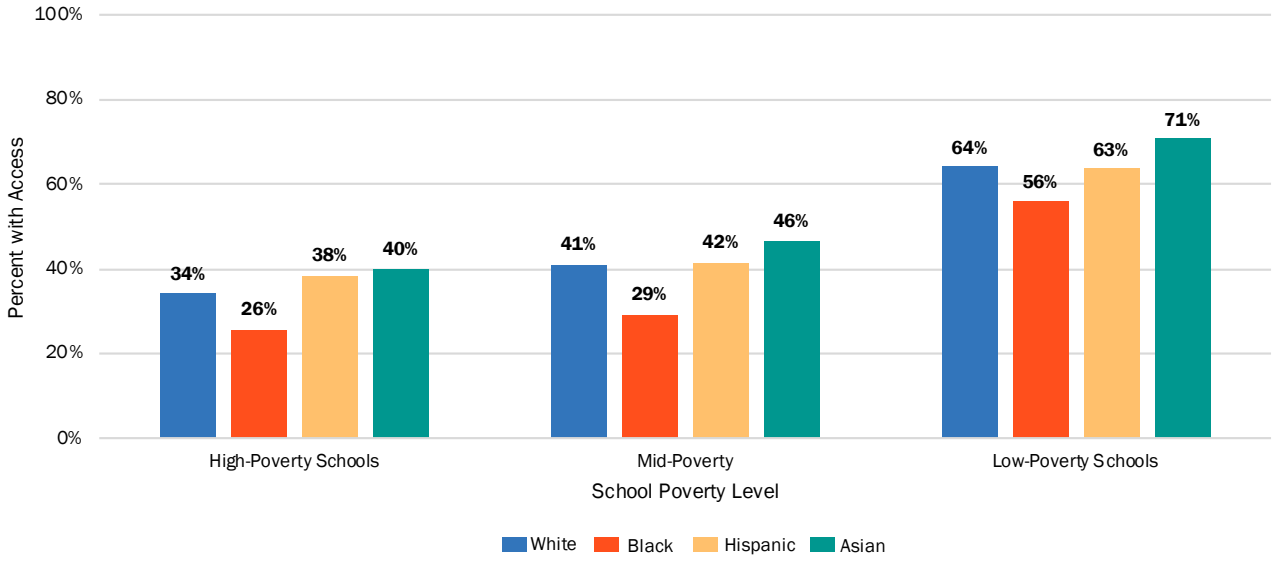
Figure 6. Percentage of Students with Access to College and Career Readiness Curriculum by School Poverty: Nation 2015-16.



A dramatically higher percentage of students attending low-poverty schools have access to positive school climate. Compared to students in low-poverty schools, the percentage of students who have access to positive school climate is 25% points lower in mid-poverty schools and 30% points lower in high-poverty schools.

Figure 7 presents scores on the Access to Positive School Climate Index by student race/ethnicity within high-, mid-, and low-poverty schools.

Figure 7. Percentage of High School Students with Access to Positive School Climate by Student Race/Ethnicity and School Poverty: Nation 2015-16.



Gaps between Black and White students in Access to Positive School Climate are present across schools of all poverty levels. There is an 8%-point gap in high-poverty schools, a 12%-point gap in mid-poverty schools, and a 9%-point gap in low-poverty schools.

Notable disparities in Access to Positive School Climate between Hispanic and White students are not found in mid- and low-poverty schools. However, there is a 4%-point gap that favors Hispanic students found in high-poverty schools.

Asian students have the greatest Access across all levels of school poverty. While this is only marginally true in high-poverty schools, greater access among Asian students is more pronounced in mid- and low-poverty schools.

Conclusion

The findings in this report reveal stark inequities in access to high schools that provide high-quality educational opportunities. Overall, White students, Asian students, and non-poor students attend schools that provide more opportunities than Black students, Hispanic students, and students in poverty. And while Black and Hispanic students are highly concentrated in high-poverty schools which provide lower access to educational opportunities, race/ethnic disparities often exist even within subsets of schools with the same concentrations of either high, moderate, or low levels of poverty. This suggests that race/ethnicity and poverty have confounding effects on disparities in students' access to educational opportunity.

Importantly, this analysis is limited to a basic threshold question of *access*—does a student simply attend a high school that even offers high quality educational opportunities? This country is beset by a range of inequities that determine where students attend school and the quality of those schools. Housing segregation, income inequality, inadequate and inequitable school funding and a range of other factors contribute to the quality of the schools that students attend.

Policymakers at the local, state and national levels must take note: they have the capacity to address the significant disparities in access to quality education described in this report. For American schools to narrow rather than widen gaps academic achievement and other life outcomes, then policymakers must ensure that race/ethnicity and income do not continue to dictate disparate access to high-quality educational opportunities.

About Research for Action

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit education research organization. We seek to use research as the basis for the improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes for traditionally underserved children and students. Our work is designed to strengthen early education, public schools and postsecondary institutions; provide research-based recommendations to policymakers, practitioners, and the public; and enrich civic and community dialogue. For more information, please visit our website at www.researchforaction.org.

Acknowledgments

Support for the Educational Opportunity Dashboard and this national report was provided by **The Heinz Endowments** and **the William Penn Foundation**. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders. Thank you to the many members of the RFA team who contributed to this project, including: Anna Shaw-Amoah, Samantha Slade, and Kate Shaw. Development of the Dashboard was led by Anna Shaw-Amoah and data analysis was led by Jason Fontana.