CCSA California Charter Schools Association

CHARTING THE COURSE TO EQUITY:

K-12 leaders of color and student success

introduction

California is among the most racially diverse states in the US, yet educational leadership positions at K-12 public schools tend to be disproportionately white. In California, 60% of all public-school students are of color, while only 20% of administrators are of color (CDE, 2019). Not only are racially and ethnically diverse leaders important in showing children of color what is possible, but numerous national research studies have shown the impact that teachers and leaders of color have on increasing academic achievement and decreasing disciplinary actions for all students.

findings

The California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) analyzed the relationship between having a leader of color and school-level outcomes in California's public schools during the 2017-2018 academic year. This analysis, reviewed by several third-party quantitative researchers, focused on both charter and traditional public schools in California with the goal of promoting success throughout all of California's public schools. We therefore are referring to the full landscape of traditional public schools and charter public schools when we say, "public schools." Leaders of color are defined as African American and Latinx in this study.

KEY FINDINGS

On average, students at schools with a leader of color scored significantly higher on state tests, especially at high schools.

On average, twelfth grade students at schools with a leader of color graduate significantly more prepared for college and career.

On average, students, especially African American students and high school students, with a leader of color were significantly less likely to be suspended.

call to action

In an effort to contribute to more equitable outcomes for K-12 public school students and to close the racial diversity gap in educational leadership in California, we call upon institutions of higher learning, researchers, civil rights organizations, education advocacy organizations, and practitioners to do the following:

- Conduct research on culturally responsive school leadership approaches by leaders of color to surface specific contributing factors that lead to successful academic and school climate outcomes. Research should also highlight the barriers that need to be removed to encourage people of color to enter and remain in the field.

- Move from theory to action by seeking partnerships across the state to enhance existing educational leadership programs in the preparing, supporting, and retaining of K-12 school leaders of color.

- Identify and amplify exemplary local examples of schools that embody the findings of this study as evidenced by their successful recruitment, retention, and promotion of leaders of color, while increasing educational and school climate outcomes for all students.

- Collectively leverage stakeholder voices (i.e. parents, teachers, administrators, community members) to highlight the academic and school climate impact of African American and Latinx educational leaders, identify ways to increase racial diversity in K-12 schools and support existing initiatives to further this goal.

These findings and the development of this framework are an important first step for our coalition. Over the next 12-16 months, we will work toward translating this framework into measurable goals.

coalition partners

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dear reader

California is among the most racially diverse states yet it has the largest minority student to minority teacher gap in the country (Brown, C. & Boser, U., 2017). The teacher pipeline fuels the administrator pipeline, so as a result, those in educational leadership positions at California schools tend to be disproportionately white. While race is not a qualification for leadership, racial diversity matters.

National studies have shown how racial diversity positively impacts school climate, academic outcomes, college going rates and student discipline. This study takes a closer look at the role racially diverse leadership plays in California, specifically exploring how public K-12 African American and Latinx leadership benefit all students.

There is much to be said about the tangible and intangible value educators of color bring into the lives of all students. This study illuminates their results, and begs the questions:

- Why have we not yet bridged this racial diversity gap between students and education leaders?
- How exactly are these outcomes achieved?
- What are the tangibles and intangibles that lead to these outcomes, specifically?
- How might these promising practices be shared more broadly to improve outcomes for all students?

As you review these findings, you are invited to join us in exploring how to answer these critical questions and determining who should be engaged in the conversation to move the community toward action. Resolving these questions will require the support of all of us. This study shows us a glimpse of our destination. Our mandate is to chart the course forward to achieve equitable outcomes for California's public school students.

Sincerely,

LAURA J. MCGOWAN-ROBINSON, ED.D.
Chief Operating Officer, California Charter Schools Association

acknowledgements

We cannot express enough thanks for the continued support and partnership of the researchers and practitioners here in conducting this critical work to ensure all students, regardless of where they live, their race, income or their educational needs, have access to a quality education.

executive summary

The California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) analyzed the descriptive relationship between having African American and Latinx school leaders in California's public schools and various school-level outcomes. The results suggest that, on average, students (especially students of color) at public schools, (which includes both public charter schools and traditional public schools) with a leader of color performed better on state tests, were better prepared for college/career, and were less likely to be suspended.

For this analysis, we wanted to focus on all charter and traditional public schools in California to align with CCSA's mission to promote success throughout all of California's public schools. We therefore are referring to the full landscape of traditional public schools and charter schools when we say "public schools." For the purposes of this report, only full-time African American or Latinx administrators are considered "leaders of color."

Specifically, this report finds that in California's public schools in 2018:

1 ON AVERAGE
students at schools with a leader of color scored significantly better on state tests, especially at high schools.

2 ON AVERAGE
students at schools with a leader of color graduated significantly more prepared for college and career.

3 ON AVERAGE
students, especially African American students, were suspended at significantly lower rates at schools with a leader of color.

Introduction

In California, about 60% of public-school students are African American or Latinx, referred to in this paper as "students of color" (CDE, 2019). However, California public school teachers and administrators do not mirror this diverse student body. In 2018, only 20% of public schools in California had an African American or Latinx leader. This is concerning, as research has shown that leaders of color improve outcomes for minority students (Magdaleno, 2006; Tillman, 2004). At CCSA, we have a team dedicated to eliminating the diversity gap between students and school leaders in California. While we intuitively know this work to be vital, we sought out to better understand how schools with leaders of color can increase student achievement, college/career readiness, and school climate. Specifically, we asked the following research questions:

1 Do students at schools with a leader of color perform better on state tests?

2 Are students at schools with a leader of color better prepared for college/career?

3 Are schools with a leader of color less likely to suspend students, especially students of color?

methodology

To answer these questions, we used 2018 California Department of Education (CDE) Staffing Data, 2018 CAASPP performance data, 2018 California Dashboard data, and 2018 CDE data on school characteristics of all traditional public schools and charter schools in California. We used linear regressions to analyze the association between having a leader of color and various school-level outcomes in 2017-18. We considered full-time African American or Latinx administrators "leaders of color", and in cases where there were multiple full-time administrators, required that all leaders were African American or Latinx. Finally, we wanted to focus on all public schools in California (both traditional public schools and public charter schools) to align with CCSA's mission to promote success throughout all of California's public schools and therefore did not separate out public charter from traditional public schools. This also allowed us to maintain a large sample of over 8,000 schools.

When controlling for school-level characteristics that influence performance, we included the following variables: charter status, parent education, demographics, student mobility, number of years the school has been open, grades served, and urbanicity. We also controlled for teacher effects by including the average age of teachers at a school, the percentage of teachers with a master's degree, and average years of teaching experience. See Appendix I for an overview of the limitations to this methodology.

background

In 2017-18, 20% (1,805) of California traditional public schools, and 20% (199) of California's public charter schools had a leader of color. This has remained relatively constant over the past five years. Schools with a leader of color serve, on average, more low-income and minority students than schools without a leader of color (Figure 1). Therefore, when evaluating how schools with a leader of color perform on outcomes like state tests, it is important to control for factors such as student demographics that are known to be associated with school performance. For example, Figure 1 shows that schools with a leader of color have higher African American, Latinx, English Learner, and Low-Income student enrollment and fewer White and Asian students. These student demographic characteristics are correlated with test scores, so it is important to note these differences when studying the academic performance of schools with a leader of color.

Figure 1:
2017-2018
Student Test-Taker
Characteristics

■ Schools with
   a Leader
   of Color
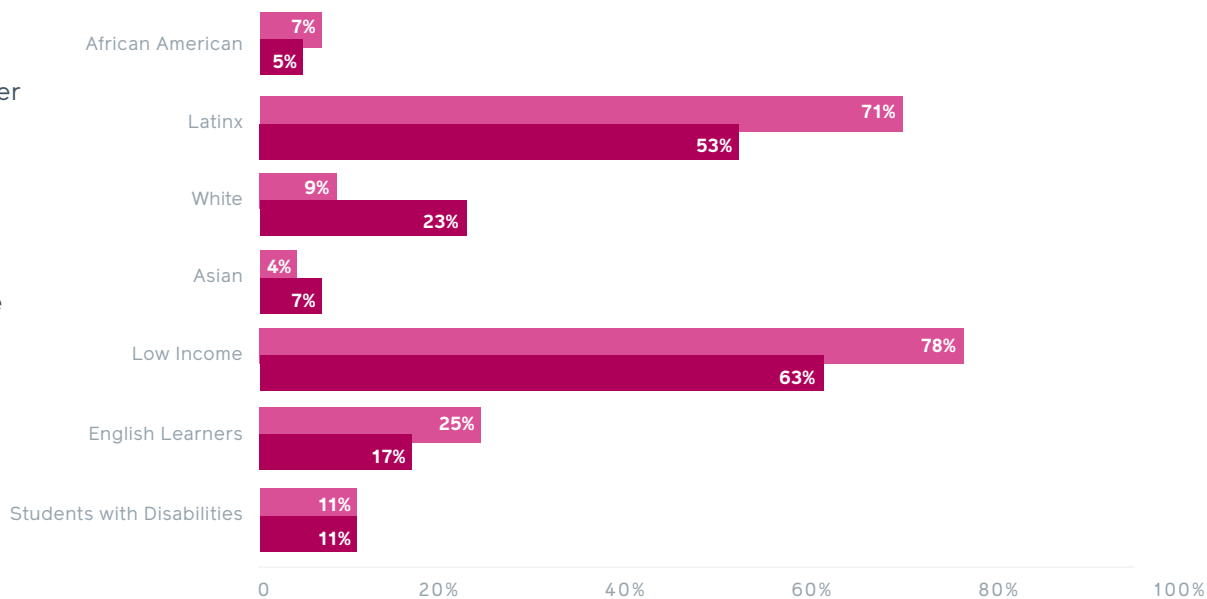
■ State Average

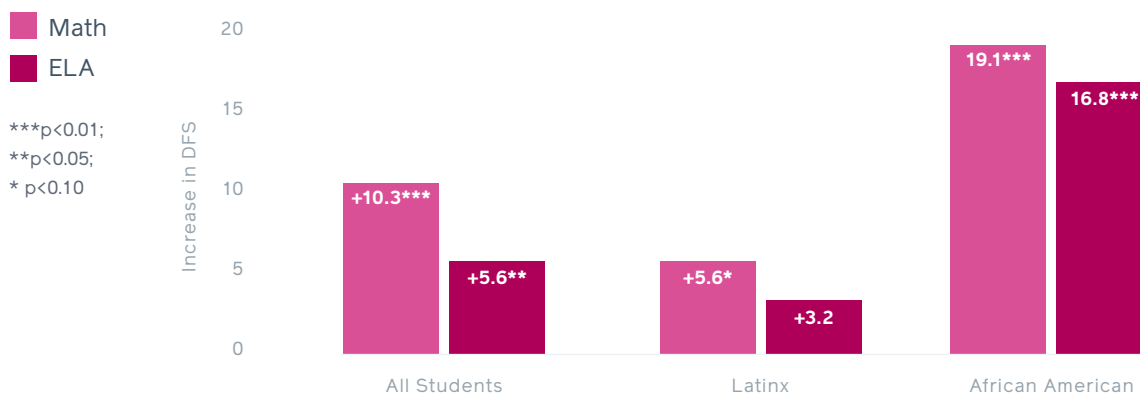| Characteristic	Schools with a Leader of Color	State Average
African American	7%	5%
Latinx	71%	53%
White	9%	23%
Asian	4%	7%
Low Income	78%	63%
English Learners	25%	17%
Students with Disabilities	11%	11%

results

On average, students at schools with a leader of color scored significantly better on state tests, especially at high schools.

Students at schools with a leader of color scored, on average, 2.1 scale score points higher on Distance from Standard (DFS)[1] on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) in 2018. This difference was even more pronounced in Math, where, on average, students at schools with a leader of color scored 2.8 points higher on DFS. In particular, African American students' scored statistically significantly higher (2.7 points) on average when they attended a school with a leader of color. The boost in test scores was even more noticeable in High Schools, where, on average, students scored 10.3 points higher in Math and 5.6 points higher in ELA (Figure 2). The difference was even more noticeable for African American students at high schools who scored, on average, 19.1 points higher in Math and 16.8 points higher in ELA when they attended a school with a leader of color, and these findings met the highest threshold of statistical significance (99% confidence).

Figure 2: Estimated Effects of Leaders of Color at High Schools on 2018 Distance from Standard (DFS)

Math
ELA

***$p<0.01$;
**$p<0.05$;
* $p<0.10$

Increase in DFS

All Students: +10.3*** (Math), +5.6** (ELA)
Latinx: +5.6* (Math), +3.2 (ELA)
African American: 19.1*** (Math), 16.8*** (ELA)

[1] This refers to an average of English Language Arts (ELA) DFS and Math DFS.

results

FINDING 2

On average, students at schools with a leader of color graduated significantly more prepared for college and career.

When looking at post-secondary readiness, leaders of color were associated with a 3.9 percentage point increase in the percentage of students that are considered "prepared" on the state's 2018 College/Career Indicator (CCI) and a 6.1 percentage point increase in the percent of students graduating in 2018 with "C's" or better in their college preparation "a-g" courses. These differences are both statistically significant at the highest threshold (the 99% confidence level).

Figure 3:
Estimated Effects of Leaders of Color on 2018 Post-Secondary Readiness

A-G Rate	College/Career Indicator
+6.1%***	+3.9%***

***p<0.01; **p<0.05; * p<0.10
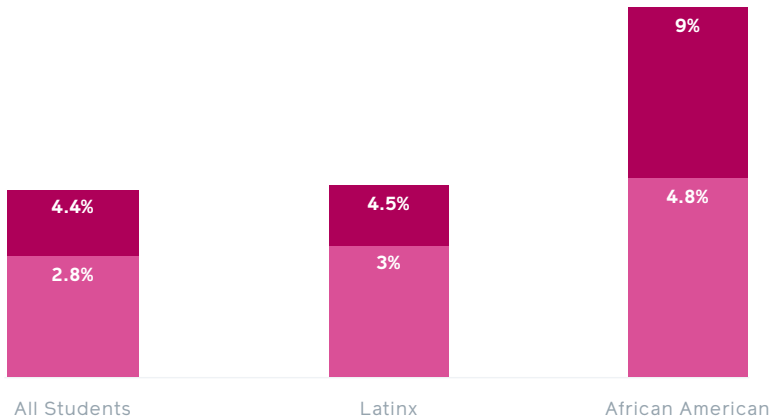
FINDING 3

On average, students, especially African American students, were suspended at significantly lower rates at schools with a leader of color.

We know from previous research that teachers of color are more likely to discourage the use of zero-tolerance discipline policies that disproportionately impact African American students (Monroe, 2008). We, therefore, wanted to know whether schools with leaders of color also suspend students at lower rates. We found that African American students at schools with a leader of color were 1.7 percentage points less likely to be suspended in 2018. The largest difference was at high schools, where leaders of color were associated with, on average, a 1.6 percentage point decrease in the suspension rate for all students and a 4.2 percentage point decrease for African American students (Figure 4). In other words, if a high school had a leader of color, its African American students were 4.2 percentage points less likely to be suspended, (which is substantial, given that the average African American suspension rate in 2018 was 9.4%).

results

Figure 4:
Estimate of 2018 Suspension Rates at Public High Schools with a Leader of Color Compared to State Average for Non-DASS High Schools

■ Schools with a Leader of Color *(n=269)*

■ State HS Average *(n=1,371)*

	All Students	Latinx	African American
Schools with a Leader of Color	2.8%	3%	4.8%
State HS Average	4.4%	4.5%	9%

Figure 5:
Estimated Effects of Leaders of Color on 2018 Suspension Rates at Public High Schools

All Students	Latinx	African American
-1.6%***	1.5%***	4.2%***

***p<0.01; **p<0.05; * p<0.10

conclusion

The findings in this study indicate that schools benefit from having a leader of color. Schools with leaders of color tend to have, on average, higher test scores, increased college/career readiness, and fewer suspensions than schools without a leader of color. This is especially true for African American students and at high schools. Given these findings, we recommend that policymakers, philanthropic organizations, charter and school districts prioritize increasing the number of leaders of color in both California's traditional public schools and public charter schools, especially at the high school level. We also recommend that additional research investigate how leaders of color increase student achievement.

references

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appendix

It is important to note a few methodological limitations that may have limited the validity and reliability of the findings. First, many analyses were limited by small sample sizes. For example, when looking at African American students' performance or performance at High Schools, the sample sizes decreased substantially. Second, several results in this study were statistically significant but were limited in their predictive power. For example, while the a–g completion rate was significantly higher at schools with a leader of color, the r-squared value, which measures how much of the variation can be explained by the model, was only 49%. Finally, as with all regressions, the results of this study would be biased if any variables omitted from the analysis that impact school performance were correlated with whether a school has a leader of color.

Appendix II:
Regressions Predicting
Distance from Standard
(DFS) Outcomes
*See Appendix VI for a
list of control variables*

	ALL SCHOOLS			HIGH SCHOOLS		
	All	African American	Latinx	All	African American	Latinx
Leader of Color	2.1***	2.7*	1.2*	7.9***	16.8**	3.2
N	7,783	3,126	7,653	1,091	436	1,063
R-Sq.	.78	.54	.59	.78	.48	.52

***p<0.01; **p<0.05, *p<0.10

Appendix III:
Regressions Predicting
Post-Secondary Outcomes

	ALL SCHOOLS	
	CCI	A–G Rate
Leader of Color	3.9***	.06***
N	1,218	1,263
R-Sq.	.63	.49

***p<0.01; **p<0.05, *p<0.10

appendix

	ALL SCHOOLS			HIGH SCHOOLS		
	All	African American	Latinx	All	African American	Latinx
Leader of Color	-.007***	-.017***	-.006***	-.016***	-.04***	-.015***
N R-Sq.	7,730 .42	4,670 .31	7,721 .40	1,075 .27	825 .22	1,075 .20

***p<0.01; **p<0.05, *p<0.10

Average parent education comes from CALPADS and is a numeric variable (1-5) that represents parents' highest level of education, ranging from "not a high school graduate" to "graduate degree or higher"

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Charter Status	7,940	.11	.31	0	1
Average Parent Education	7,839	2.9	.84	1	5
African American Test-Takers (%)	7,944	.05	.10	0	.97
Latinx Test-Takers (%)	7,944	.55	.29	0	1
White Test-Takers (%)	7,944	.23	.24	0	.97
Asian Test-Takers (%)	7,944	.08	.14	0	.97
English Learner Test-Takers (%)	7,944	.18	.16	0	.97
Low-Income Test-Takers (%)	7,944	.63	.28	0	1
Students with Disabilities (%)	7,944	.11	.06	0	1
2017 Continuously Enrolled (%)	7,888	.94	.06	.13	1
Number Years Open	7,944	30.5	11.7	1	38
Elementary	7,944	.68	.47	0	1
Middle	7,944	.17	.38	0	1
High	7,944	.16	.36	0	1
Elem-high	7,944	.03	.18	0	1
Average Teacher Age	7,943	44.1	4.4	24.1	61.5
Average Years Teaching Experience	7,943	13.9	4.3	1	31.8
Teachers with Master's (%)	7,943	.40	.21	0	1
Rural	7,944	.08	.26	0	1
Suburban/Town	7,944	.49	.50	0	1
Urban	7,944	.41	.49	0	1