

# BLACK STUDENTS

in “The Condition of  
Education 2020”

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# Introduction

On May 25, 2020, a Black father, George Floyd, died tragically in a case that bears all the marks of police brutality. Floyd has been described as a loving father of two girls who wanted to better his life and become a better father. His wish represents the desires of millions of American parents: to get out of poverty and be able to help their children get a high-quality education.

A high-quality education for every student is a pivotal goal that public schools are pursuing. However, the recently released congressionally mandated annual report—the *Condition of Education 2020*—painted an unsettling national picture of the state of education for Black students. The report, prepared by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), aims to use data to help policymakers and the public to monitor educational progress of all students from prekindergarten through postsecondary education in the U.S.

The Center for Public Education (CPE) selected relevant data from this report to help school leaders not only monitor the educational progress of Black students, but also rethink what public schools can do better for Black students. We follow the NCES report in using the term Black or African American — “a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Used interchangeably with the shortened term Black.”

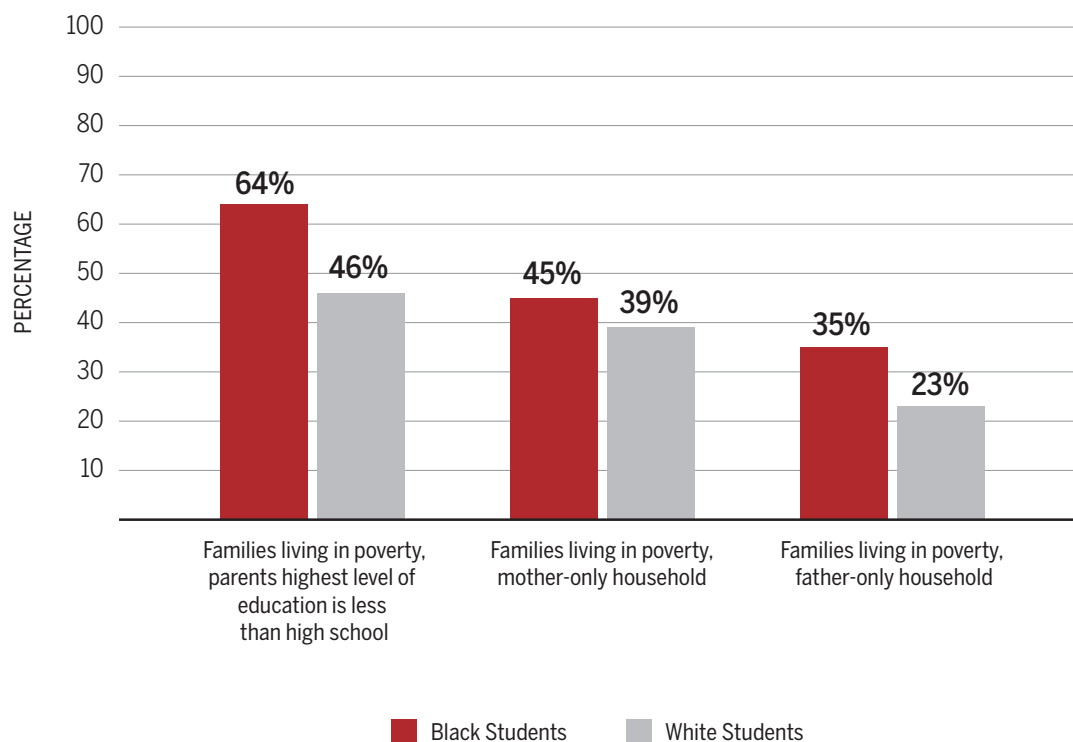
## **The poverty rate is still the highest for Black students**

In 2018, nearly one-third of Black students and their families lived in poverty (32%), compared with 10% of white students in families living in poverty. The percentage of Black students who lived in households where the highest level of education attained by either parent was a bachelor’s degree or higher was 27%, compared with 69% of Asian students and 53% of white students.

Figure 1 shows that among Black students from families living in poverty,

1. 64% have parents whose education level is less than high school.
2. 45% live in mother-only households.
3. 35% live in father-only households.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Black students from families living in poverty, by parents’ education level or family structure: 2018**



Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>

**A lack of home internet access has become a learning barrier for Black students**

In 2018, 90% of Black students had home internet access. However, this percentage was lower than their peers who were Asian (98%) and white (96%).

1. Among Black 3- to 18-year-olds, 11% had home internet access only through a smartphone, compared with only 2% among Asian and 3% among white students.
2. Among Black students without home internet access, 39% said that it was because internet access was too expensive, suggesting that their families could not afford it. This percentage for Black students was much higher than that for white students.

**A large percentage of Black students attend high-poverty schools**

In fall 2017, of the 50.7 million students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, 7.7 million were Black. Only 7% of Black students attended low-poverty schools, compared with 39% Asian and 31% white students.

1. 45% of Black students attended high-poverty schools, compared with 8% of white students.
2. About 25% of Black students were enrolled in public schools that were predominantly Black.

**More Black students with disabilities receive services for emotional disturbances**

In the 2018-19 school year, 16% of Black students were served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), compared with 14% of white students. Of all students served under IDEA, 5% received services for emotional disturbances, but 7% of Black students served received services for emotional disturbances.

Research shows that Black students may be disproportionately represented in educational programs for students meeting eligibility criteria for emotional disturbance. “Although special education services are designed to improve student outcomes, the provision of services may result in social stigma, removal from the general education setting, and inadequate learning opportunities” (McKenna, 2013).

It should be noted that among Black students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school in school year 2017-18, only two-thirds graduated with a regular high school diploma, which was the lowest rate compared with students of other racial/ethnic groups. However, it is unclear whether there is a connection between overrepresentation in this disability category and the overall educational attainments of Black students.

**The disproportion between Black students and Black teachers has not been improved**

In 2017-18, only 7% of public school teachers and 11% of public school principals were Black. Yet, more than 15% of Black students attended public schools (Table 1). At the same time, while the average salaries for Black teachers were lower than those of their white colleagues, the average salaries for Black principals were higher than their white peers. One reason for this difference is that most Black principals work in urban schools.

1. The average salaries for Hispanic (\$58,300) and white (\$57,900) teachers were higher than those for Black teachers (\$56,500).
2. The average salaries were higher for Asian (\$125,400) and Hispanic (\$105,100) principals than for Black (\$101,100), white (\$99,400), and American Indian/Alaska Native (\$86,700) principals.

**Table 1. Percentage of public-school students, teachers, principals & average salary for public school teachers and principals, Black vs. white: 2018**

	BLACK	WHITE
Public school students	15%	48%
Public school teachers	7%	79%
Public school principals	11%	78%
Average salary for public school teachers	\$56,500	\$57,900
Average salary for public school principals	\$101,100	\$99,400

Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>

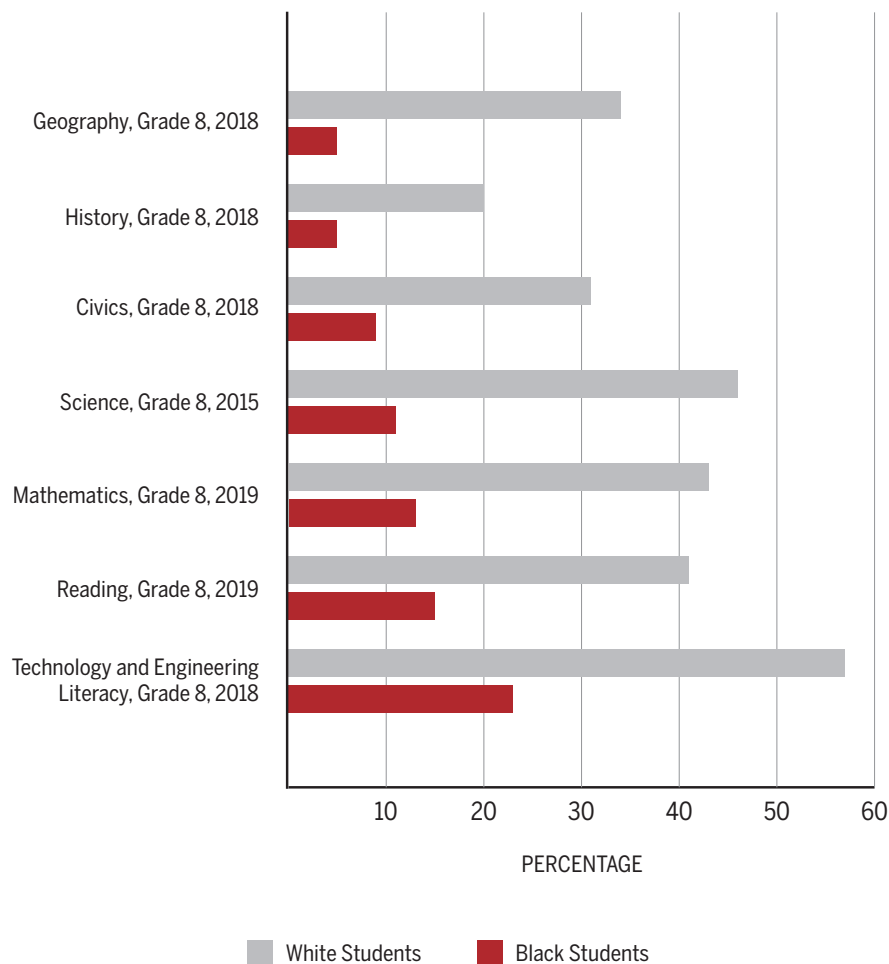
**The achievement gap between Black and white students has not been closed**

The long-term trend shows that the achievement gap between Black and white students has narrowed. However, the progress is minimal, and the gap is still there. The National Report Card (NAEP) shows that from 1992 through 2019, the average reading and math scores for Black fourth-, eighth-, and 12th graders had always been lower than those of their white peers.

Figure 3 shows that in the recent national assessments in all eighth-grade subjects, Black students still fell behind. For instance,

1. Only nine out of 100 Black students performed at or above the NAEP proficient level in civics.
2. Only 13 out of 100 Black students performed at or above the NAEP proficient level in math.
3. Only 15 out of 100 Black students performed at or above the NAEP proficient level in reading.

**Figure 3. Percentage of eighth-grade students who performed at or above the proficient level, by subjects, Black vs. white students**



Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/?src=ft>

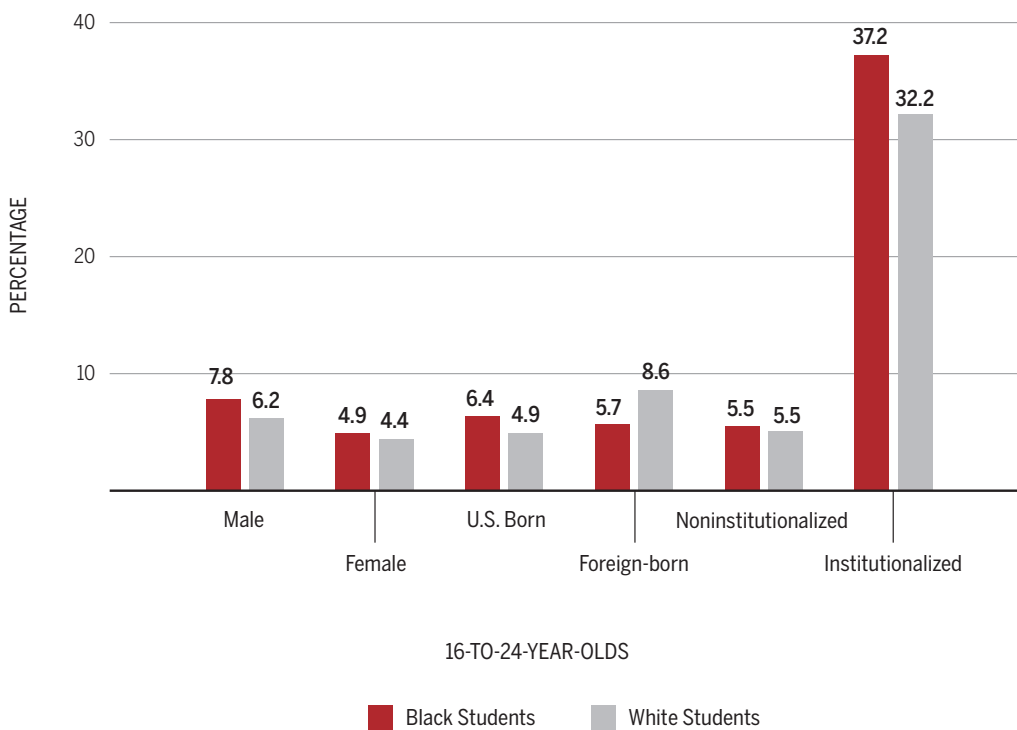
**School dropout rate remains high among Black students**

Nationwide, the overall dropout rate decreased from 9.7% in 2006 to 5.3% in 2018. During this time, the dropout rate for Black students decreased from 11.5% to 6.4%. Nevertheless, the dropout rate for Black students remained higher than that for white students (4.2%). Additionally, 22% of Black 18- to 24-year-olds were neither enrolled in school nor working, which was much higher than the percentage of all U.S. 18- to 24-year-olds youth (14%).

Figure 2 shows that among 16- to 24-year-olds,

1. Nearly eight out of 100 Black males dropped out of school.
2. About six out of 100 U.S.-born Black students dropped out of school.
3. About 37 out of 100 institutionalized (such as in correctional or health care facilities) Black students dropped out of school.

**Figure 2. Dropout rates of 16- to 24-year-olds, by some characteristics, Black vs. U.S.: 2018**



Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>

### **Graduation rates and college enrollment rates remain low for Black students**

In the school year 2017-18, the national adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for public high school students was 85%. However, the ACGR for Black students was 79%, below the U.S. average.

1. The graduation rates for Black students ranged from 67% in the District of Columbia to 88% in Alabama.
2. Arkansas, West Virginia, Texas, and Alabama were the only four states in which the graduation rates for Black students were higher than the U.S. average.

From 2000 to 2018, college enrollment rates among 18- to 24-year-olds increased for those who were Black (from 31% to 37%). Among Black males, college enrollment rates were higher in 2018 (33%) than in 2000 (25%). However, among Black females, the rate in 2018 was not measurably different from the rate in 2000.

Of the 16.6 million undergraduate students enrolled in fall 2018, 2.1 million were Black. Although there were 101 degree-granting, four-year Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and two-year HBCUs in operation—51 were public institutions and 50 were private nonprofit institutions—the number of Black students majoring in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is still low.

In 2017-18,

1. 13% of Black students obtained bachelor’s degrees conferred in a STEM field.
2. 7% of Black students obtained associate degrees conferred in a STEM field.
3. 6% of Black students obtained master’s degrees conferred in a STEM field.
4. 5% of Black students obtained doctorates conferred in a STEM field.

### **Black students in the *Condition of Education 2020***

Millions of Black parents expect public schools to help their children to achieve their potential. Millions of Black students depend on public education to pursue their happiness. We tried to find a significant improvement for Black students in the *Condition of Education 2020*. Yet, what the data demonstrates is disappointing and discouraging.

1. The poverty rate is still the highest for Black students.
2. A lack of home internet access has become a learning barrier for Black students.
3. A high percentage of Black students attend high-poverty schools.
4. More Black students with disabilities receive services for emotional disturbances.
5. The disproportion between Black students and Black teachers has not been improved.
6. The achievement gap between Black and white students has not been closed.



7. School dropout rates remain high among Black students.
8. Graduation rates and college enrollment rates remain low among Black students.

In brief, this annual report mandated by the U.S. Congress suggests that changing the condition of education for Black students requires the true commitment of every policymaker, school leader, and educator. As Justice Clarence Thomas remarked, “It takes a person with a mission to succeed.”

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