



ENDING MASS INCARCERATION

PIPELINE TO POSSIBILITIES SERIES



SPRING SESSION 2

Inequitable Access to Opportunity and the School-to-Prison Pipeline **TOOLKIT**

Pipeline to Possibilities: School-to-Prison Pipeline

VIRTUAL SESSION 2 TOOLKIT

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School-to-Prison Pipeline: Inequitable Access to Opportunities

School plays an instrumental role in the life outcomes of students, and over the course of history, policing of bodies has been used as a means of social control. The “school-to-prison pipeline” refers to the widespread trend of schools adopting “zero tolerance” disciplinary practices—out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and arrests—that drive students from the education system into the juvenile justice system. In addition to funneling students into the system of mass incarceration, this also hurts their opportunities to learn and contributes to educational inequities, as almost 70% of those who are incarcerated never graduated high school. [EMI Resource Toolkit](#)

Structural and systemic racism is about not only inequality of how we allocate resources and dollars, but in a racialized manner — the belief that there is something inherently “smarter” or “not smarter” in people based on their race. We must deal with the institutional biases inherent in our schools, which lower the expectations for students of color. These lowered expectations lead to dead end options for students and without real opportunities to access and succeed in college and career. High school dropouts are [63% more likely to end up incarcerated than college graduates](#), drawing a clear connection between equitable access to college and career readiness and the school-to-prison pipeline. Additionally, “dropping out of high school is associated with a [nine-year dip in life expectancy](#), and even decades after release from prison, 75% of ex-inmates remain in the bottom 20% of income distribution.” We must upend the school-to-prison pipeline, and rather create a pathway to possibilities.

To advocate for change, we will focus on one of the key feeders to the school-to-prison pipeline: the inequitable educational opportunities that students of color are confronted with throughout the K-12 system.

Pathway to Possibilities:

STUDENTS EXPECT SCHOOL TO PREPARE THEM FOR LIFE AFTER GRADUATION

Of high schoolers surveyed across 5 school districts, 94% reported that they want to attend college and 70% of those students aspired to a career for which they needed at least a college degree. – [The Opportunity Myth](#)

While college is not the only path to success, our students envision themselves as able to continue their education beyond high school. However, our current method of discounting some kids and lifting up others, saying only certain students are “college material” is not in line with how students view themselves. Not everyone has to go to college, but adults should not be making that decision for students – each student should have

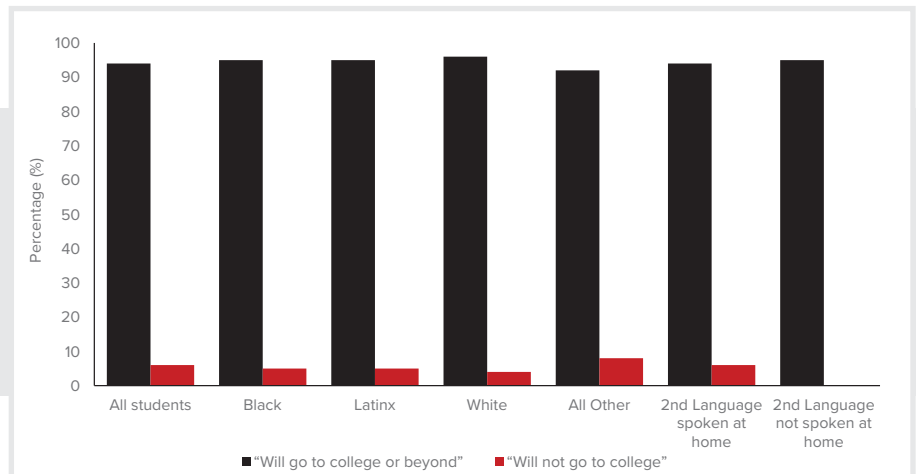
the information and preparation to make the best choice for their own postsecondary journey.

The reality, however, is that our current schooling system does not prepare the vast majority of our students of color to choose their own pathway to possibility. Instead, their path is determined for them in the face of inequitable preparation:

- Low rates of literacy
- Assignments that are not grade-level or do not prepare students for their college and career aspirations
- Teachers with low expectations, lack of teachers of color.

High School Students Surveyed

Seventy percent of high schoolers aspire to careers that require at least a college degree.



Literacy and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Inequitable access to educational opportunities begins early with literacy instruction and continues throughout students’ K-12 educational experience. It leaves many ill-prepared for college and career despite the goals they have for themselves. “About 16% of children who are not reading proficiently by the end of third grade do not graduate from high school, a rate four times greater than that for proficient readers. The link between reading problems and incarceration has been known for decades.” – [At a Loss for Words](#)

The connection between criminal justice involvement and literacy rates can be seen prior to adulthood, as 85% of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally low literate. In addition, more than 60% of all prison inmates are functionally illiterate. Penal institution records show that inmates have only a 16% chance of

returning to prison if they receive literacy support, as opposed to 70% who receive none. – [Begin to Read](#)

A 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) study found that in the two lowest categories of literacy proficiency, “below basic” and “basic,” there are significant racial and ethnic disparities. “Incarcerated Black and Hispanic adults had lower levels of literacy than whites; and incarcerated white adults had lower literacy than non-incarcerated white adults. This is unsurprising. What is notable, however, is that the study also found that Black and Hispanic non-incarcerated adults have lower literacy scores than white adults outside or inside of prison. This data is strong evidence that the U.S. educational system may be failing people along racial lines.” – [PrisonPolicy.org](#)

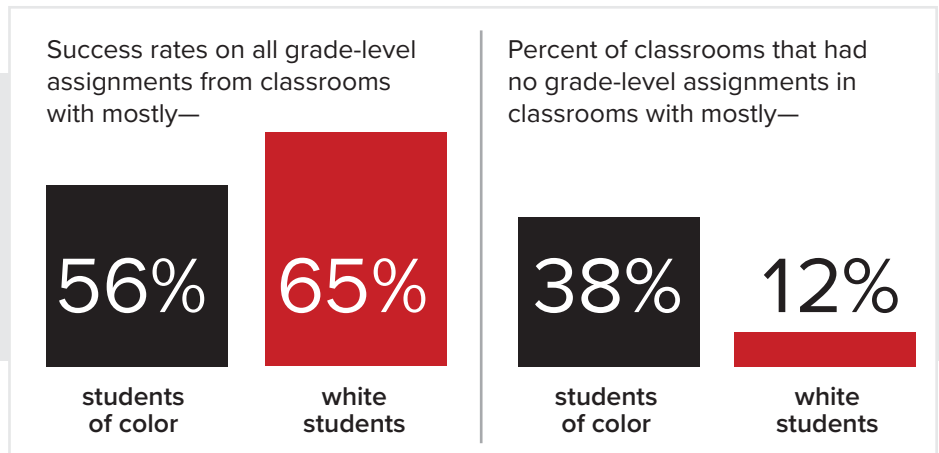
Promises not Kept: the School-to-Prison Pipeline

“In short, students and their families have been deeply misled. We talk about school as a series of small opportunities for students—to show up, work hard, earn good grades—that add up to much bigger ones later in life. When students don’t find the opportunities they were promised on the other side of the graduation stage, we assume they or their families must have done something to blow their big chance, or that they were simply reaching too high.” – [The Opportunity Myth](#)

their assignments 71% of the time, and more than half brought home As and Bs. Yet students only demonstrated mastery of grade-level standards on their assignments—a benchmark for being on track for the lives most of them want as adults— 17% of the time.” In many cases, students were given assignments that were below the standard set by the state for their grade. As you see in the figure below, many students of color were denied the option to even attempt grade-level work.

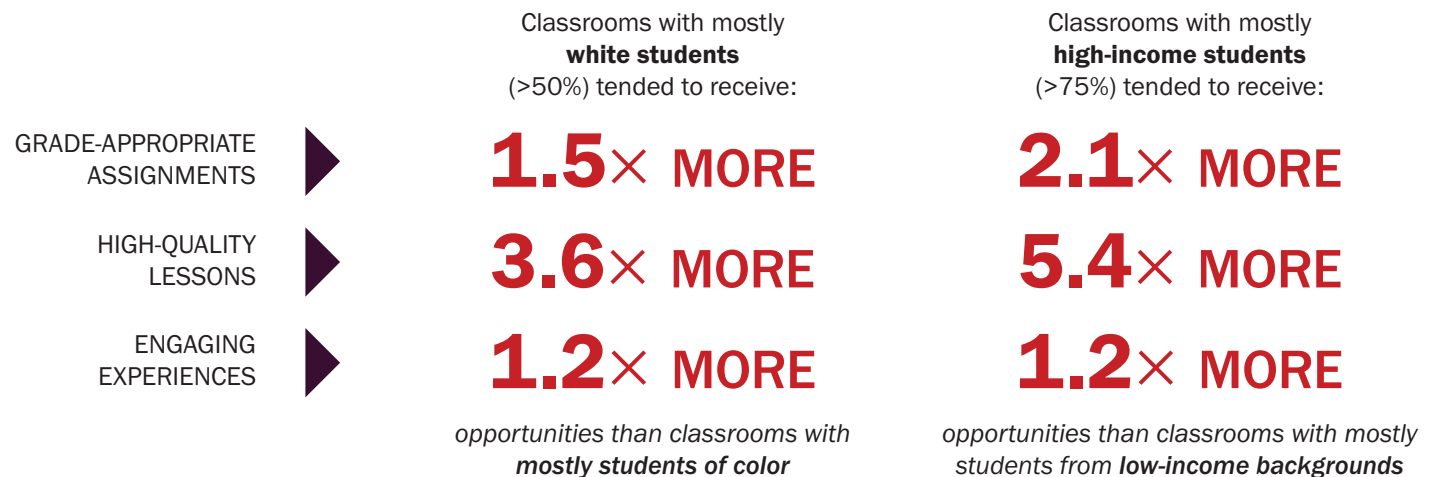
In over 1,000 classes observed across five diverse school districts, students “met the demands of

All students tended to succeed on grade-level work, but many students of color were denied any opportunity to even try it. Success rates on grade-level work were similar, but 4 out of 10 classrooms with a majority of students of color never received a single grade-level assignment.



While schools could provide access to all students to achieve their dreams of postsecondary success, the current education system instead prevents access to equitable opportunities early and often. “Students of color, those from low-income families, English language learners, and students with mild to moderate disabilities have even less access to [grade-appropriate] resources than their peers.” – [The Opportunity Myth](#) These students are systematically denied chances to complete grade-level work by institutions that they are required to attend, thus hindering the access to college and pursuit of their goals, as represented in the figure below.

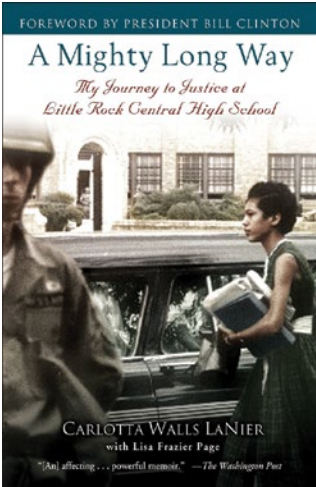
Classrooms serving mostly students of color or low-income students typically had vastly fewer opportunities.



To provide a more detailed example, the images below demonstrate how vastly different the assignments and expectations can be for students in the same grade level. These are examples from eighth grade classrooms — as students in one case were asked to write an informational essay about *A Mighty Long Way*, using their critical thinking skills. Students in the second classroom were asked to complete multiple choice vocabulary questions and fill in the missing vowels to a word, based on a fifth-grade level reading text.

Assignment quality varied widely. Some students — like the eighth graders in this language arts class — did have the opportunity to grapple with high-quality assignments.

These eighth-grade students read *A Mighty Long Way* and wrote an informational essay analyzing historical events, getting the chance to fully meet the depth of multiple standards and learn relevant content.



Education

GRADE 8: MODULE 3B: UNIT 2: LESSON 16

Informational Essay Prompt and New York State Grades 6–8 Expository Writing Evaluation Rubric

Name: _____

Date: _____


Prompt: In the events surrounding the Little Rock Nine and the struggle to integrate Central High, the press played a newly powerful role. In what ways did it serve to illuminate events for a national audience, and it what ways did it give an incomplete or even inaccurate picture of events?

But eighth graders in another language arts class — in the same district — did not have that same chance.

After reading a fifth-grade level text, students completed multiple-choice vocabulary questions and filled in missing vowels in words, which is not aligned to any eighth-grade literacy standard.

The “Billion Oyster Project” Brings Life Back to NYC Waters

Gazing at Manhattan’s East River, you will see huge cargo ships, ferries, and barges. You’ll see a stream of cars and trains zooming over the city’s bridges. It’s hard to imagine that this river was once an unspoiled marine habitat. Years of industrial development have taken a toll. Much of the natural ecosystem here was lost or damaged. But today, with the help of the Billion Oyster Project and lots of New York City students, that’s starting to change.



OYSTER BOATS, NEW YORK.

Long ago, oysters thrived in the waters around NYC. Have you ever heard of Pearl Street in downtown Manhattan? That street was named for all the oysters that swarmed the nearby river. But as NYC became a shipping hub, the rivers became polluted. The oyster population nearly disappeared. This impacted the whole ecosystem, because oysters were a key ingredient.

As oysters eat, they filter the water supply by removing nitrogen. We see great biodiversity around oyster reefs, because the oysters’ filtering ability attracts life. Around NYC’s oyster reefs, there were large habitats of fish and marine creatures. Even whales were a common sight here. Oyster reefs also helped to buffer Manhattan from erosion. They limited the damage from storms and waves. As NYC’s oysters died off, so did many other creatures, and so did the protective quality of the reefs. This was a big loss for the city.

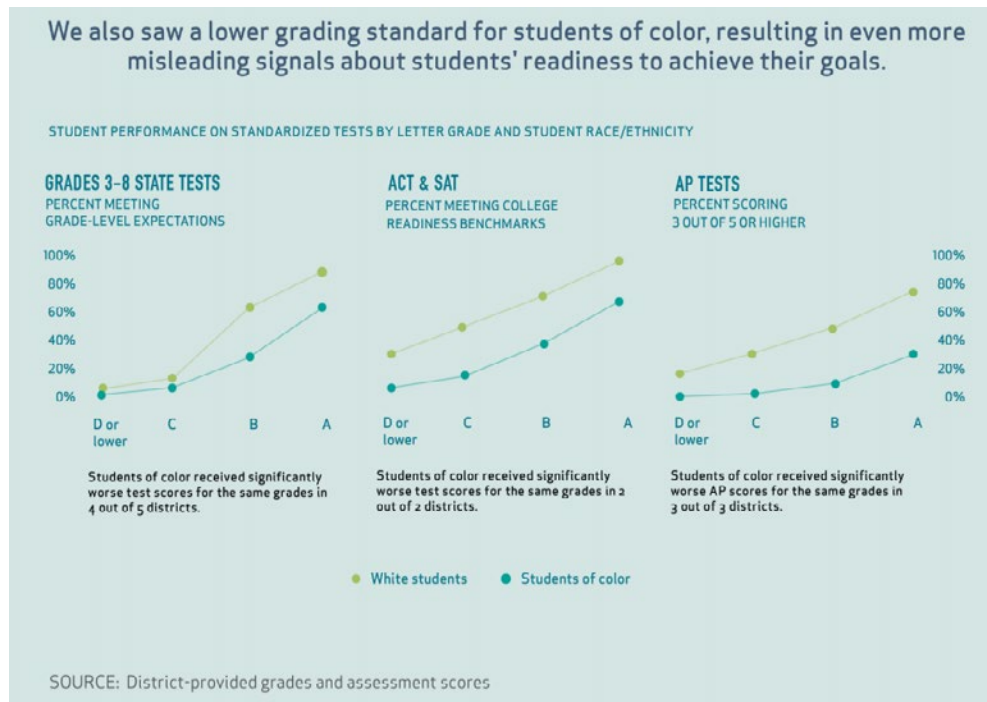
The Billion Oyster Project has set out to address this loss. The project works to bring oysters back to NYC’s waters. The project began with students at New York Harbor School. It has since expanded to include many schools in the city. Thousands of NYC students have participated in reef construction and oyster planting. So far, over 26 million oysters have been planted in the waters around NYC. And it’s working! With the oysters, many more fish and marine creatures have returned as well. Even whales have been spotted again.

These NYC waterways and harbors will always be some of the world’s busiest. But with the help of the Billion Oyster Project, the dynamic natural world that once thrived here is beginning to return and to coexist more peacefully with the ferries, barges, cars and trains.

Sample question from this assignment:

Add vowels (a, e, i, o, u) to complete the words from the reading.
It’s hard to imagine that this river was once an unspoiled marine H_B_T_T.

Lowering expectations and failing to give students of color the opportunities to complete grade-level work continues to push students off of the pathway to possibilities, which makes it more likely that they will not meet college and career readiness standards and are more at risk of entering the school-to-prison pipeline. Over time, this pattern results in students meeting their classroom expectations while NOT meeting state level and college-ready measurements through no fault of their own, as represented in the figure below. These systematic roadblocks directly obstruct many students of color from the pathways they are trying to follow in pursuit of their dreams, pushing equitable access to college opportunities farther into the distance.



From TNTP 2018 report [The Opportunity Myth](#)

Along similar lines, of the students of color who graduate high school, only 40% graduate “college ready.” Students who do not meet college readiness test scores are forced into remedial college courses. Remedial classes do not give students college credit, but do cost the critical resources of money and time. Making the problem even worse, failing these classes can land students on academic and financial aid probation, leaving them more likely to drop out of college burdened with debt and with a reinforcement of the narrative that they were never “college material.” [Education Reform Now](#) found that students placed into remedial classes at community college are 12% more likely to drop out, and at four year universities, 74% more likely to drop out.



From TNTP 2018 report [The Opportunity Myth](#)

Expectations and Outcomes are Linked

One contributing factor to the lack of high-quality, grade-appropriate assignments is that in many cases, teachers do not expect their students to complete work at that level.

These low expectations are predominantly represented in classes with majority low-income and Black/Latinx students.



From TNTP 2018 report [The Opportunity Myth](#)



“Among classrooms where students were at least 75% Black or at least 75% Latinx, 66% of teachers who were the same race or ethnicity as the majority of their students had high expectations. In classrooms with similar student demographics but with teachers who were a different race or ethnicity than the majority of the class, just 35% of teachers reported high expectations (see figure below). Those results held true when we controlled for students’ prior achievement.” – [The Opportunity Myth](#)



While 53% of students in the United States identify as people of color, 80% of teachers are white. And 40% of schools don't have a single teacher of color. However, Black and Latinx students who had a teacher of their same racial or ethnic background were 19% more likely to feel engaged, compared to students who did not have that experience. – [Broken Pipeline](#) There remains critical need to diversify the teaching force to better meet the needs of all of our students.

that Black students who had a single Black teacher were 13% more likely to enroll in college. With two Black teachers, that number jumped to 32%. For Black boys, the impact is even more powerful. Having a Black teacher cut high school dropout rates by 39% for Black boys from low-income families, the study found.” This goes beyond students working with teachers who look like them, though the [research](#) says that does matter. Compared to their White counterparts, Black teachers have [higher expectations](#) for Black students. They're also less likely to perceive Black students as disruptive, inattentive, or unable to do homework, [research shows.](#)” – [Why Teachers of Color Matter](#)

A more diverse teaching force can have life-changing results to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and support students on the pathway to possibilities of their chosen college or career. “A 2018 study found

What Can We Do to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Create Pathways to Possibilities?

“At every level of the education sector, from classrooms to statehouses, from schools of education to nonprofit offices, adults make daily choices that perpetuate a cycle of inequity and mediocrity in our schools. Consciously or not, we choose to let many students do work that’s far below their grade level. We choose to leave teachers without the skills and support they need to give all their students access to high-quality academic experiences. We choose to act on assumptions about what students want and need out of school, without really listening to them and their families. We choose, in essence, which

students are more deserving of reaching their goals. Yet our research also makes clear that gaps in students’ school experiences and outcomes are not inevitable. We could make different choices — choices that could make a real difference in the short term, without an infusion of new funding, as well as those that will lay the groundwork for deeper structural change. These are the kinds of choices that could make the difference between students realizing their dreams, or leaving them unfulfilled. We could choose, in other words, to upend the opportunity myth.” *The Opportunity Myth*

Say This, Not That

We were challenged by our presenters to see how markers of capitalism and incarceration / punishment live inside the way we talk about school and students. Below are a few ways we can shift how we talk about students and school.

When we hear these terms:	Instead, we want to say:
college and career readiness	opportunities for students
school-to-prison pipeline	the interconnectedness of carceral sites, or the discipline-policing pipeline
teachers with high expectations	warm demanders/warm supporters
school discipline	school policing

Read below for some ways we can support students and families in widening the pipeline to possibilities, to provide students of color with equitable access to follow their college and career dreams.

Teach, Preach

Ways Clergy can Support Their Congregations

- Survey your congregants to learn from students and families about their experience with inequitable access to literacy, academic opportunities, teachers of color, and teachers with high expectations.
- Help shift the narrative from “some students aren’t college material” to “all students should be equipped with the data and preparation to make the choice for themselves.” Consider writing an op-ed and provide your theological perspective.

See clergy examples from previous EMI Toolkits. <https://emi.odyssey-impact.org/>

Act

Direct Service and Advocacy

DIRECT SERVICE AND PROGRAMMING

On the pathway to possibilities, all students should have access to strong literacy instruction, grade-appropriate assignments that put them on the path to college, and teachers with high expectations. Places of worship and their members are in relationship with students and families in their membership, as well as in the larger community. See below for a few examples of direct service actions that you can take to support students and families.

STEP 1: Talk to your Community to Learn About the Challenges They Face and Ask for School District Data

- Congregation and Community-based research:
 - Learn how this affects your school districts, visit schools, and talk with district and school-based staff
 - Invite students and families to talk with you about the challenges they face, and what equitable access to college and career preparation would look like to them
 - Talk to current or potential teachers about the challenges they face and supports they need to be hired and to remain in the teaching profession
 - To better understand your local school district, here are some specific data points you can ask for: demographic data on teacher race and ethnicity and student race and ethnicity, by district and by school.
 - Have community discussions about the data including students.

STEP 2: Align your Programming to Support What's Happening in Your Community

Create congregational or community programs to encourage literacy among students and families

- Increase access to a variety of reading materials for students and families in your community at your place of worship, by partnering with local literacy organizations, and/or by building a [Little Free Library](#)
- Encourage [student and family reading communities](#) through Reading Buddies, who share what they're reading and why they enjoy it
- Host virtual or in-person Read-Ins and Author Talks

Support children and families as they learn to read

- Work with your district to train your congregation's volunteers on research-based reading techniques, to support students outside of school
- Incorporate literacy best-practices into your summer and after school programs for students and families
- Partner with organizations to provide research-based literacy support to students For example: The Oakland REACH [Virtual Family Hub](#)

Host Career Panels and Mentorships

- Host Career Panels and Mentorships through your congregations
- Partner with local community organizations that introduce middle and high school students to learn about career pathways while supporting students to enroll in college, like [Bridge Year](#) and [Genesys Works](#)

STEP 3: Advocate for Change

Below are a few recommendations of what to advocate for in your community.

FEDERAL policies to support:

- Diversify the education profession at all levels by recruiting, hiring and retaining more staff of color
 - Sign on to support the [drive for 1 million teachers of color](#)
- Call your state legislator to support the [Paths to Tutor Act](#), to get students back on track for college and career preparation
- [All schools should have a library](#) staffed with a librarian
- All students should have access to literacy specialists to provide targeted, research-based literacy support
- Make college preparation and high expectations [the norm for all students](#), to provide equitable opportunities regardless of race or socioeconomic status
- Examine college readiness measurements (AP, SAT, ACT, state level tests like Texas' TSI) and their inequitable impact on holding students of color from college success
 - [California Community Colleges formally shift away from placement exams](#)
 - [FairTest.org](#)
- Provide built-in support for college classes and eliminate remedial, non-credit courses
 - [Tennessee: Evidence of Remediation Success with Corequisite Courses](#)
 - [Florida Eliminated Remedial College Courses](#)
 - [Texas Requires Credit-Bearing Remediation](#)
 - [Texas Success Initiative Program](#)

STATE policies to advocate for:

- All students should have access to effective, research-based literacy instruction and early interventions
- Enact policies to recruit and hire staff of color at all level state department of education, district, and school positions
 - Require that teacher preparation programs set goals for recruiting and retaining students of color, and report their progress annually
 - Eliminate teacher and leader certification requirements that are not clearly connected to positive student outcomes
 - Consider financial incentives like loan forgiveness or stipends for entering and remaining in the teaching profession
- Prioritize policies aimed to retain staff of color at all levels: state department of education, district, and school positions
 - Survey teachers on the reasons they might stay or leave a position, and provide support to retain more teachers based on the survey results
 - Provide mentorship for teachers, to increase connections and sense of belonging
 - Create and refine school leader pipelines
- Train staff on race and bias in recruitment, hiring, and evaluation practices
- Train school-based staff on race and bias in instructional and disciplinary practices

SCHOOL DISTRICT changes to advocate for:

- Prioritize effective, research-based literacy instruction for all students
- Implement early screening for dyslexia starting with students in Kindergarten, to begin targeted interventions as soon as possible
- Complete, share the results of, and act on equity audits of the diversity of staff at all levels and student access to instructional materials
- Recruit, hire, and retain more teachers of color
 - Black students are more likely to graduate with at least one Black teacher
- Survey students and families about their access to equitable academic opportunities
 - Share the survey results to drive further discussion and action
- **Put a high priority on increasing all students' access to grade-appropriate, college preparatory assignments**
 - Provide students in college prep courses with "built-in, co-requisite support"
- Focus on "high-quality student-teacher relationships"
 - Relationships Check survey
 - Train school-based staff on race and bias in instructional and disciplinary practices

Sample Op-Ed

Here is a sample Op-Ed supporting the hiring of more teachers of color, which you can adjust with statistics from your community.

Hiring more teachers of color is one of the most important steps we can take to make public education more equitable. Research shows how much of a difference it could make for all students, but especially for students of color: Students with same race as their teacher are more likely to complete high school and go to college, less likely to be suspended, and more likely to be referred to gifted and talented programs. Yet across the country, while more than half of students in the United States identify as people of color, 80 percent of teachers are white.

It's a complex problem with many causes, from [certification rules that prioritize test scores over teaching ability](#), to latent bias in district recruitment and hiring processes, to [school cultures that too often fail to help teachers of color build long careers](#) in the classroom. But one institution has largely escaped scrutiny in this conversation: teacher preparation programs. These programs train our current and future teaching workforce, and effectively decide what it will look like. If they don't train enough teachers of color, school systems won't have enough to hire. And right now, they produce teachers who are overwhelmingly white. In other words, the teacher diversity gap will persist until we close the teacher prep diversity gap.

This is a real problem here in [INSERT STATE]. According to [recent research](#) from education nonprofit TNTP, while [INSERT %] of public school students in [STATE] are white, [INSERT%] of people enrolled in [STATE'S] teacher preparation programs are white — a [INSERT%] gap.

More locally, [INSERT PROGRAM]'s teacher preparation program is [INSERT%] white. This is unacceptable.

To address this, here are some steps [INSERT PROGRAM] and other teacher preparation programs can take:

- **Develop recruiting strategies and admissions requirements that increase diversity.** Admissions requirements can help teacher preparation programs identify which candidates are likely to be successful teachers. But they also can be biased. Programs should analyze their admissions data to identify and eliminate any requirements — such as standardized test scores or minimum GPA — that disproportionately exclude candidates of color and lack proven connection to success in the classroom. Programs can also increase their diversity through intentional strategies that better connect their communities to education and career opportunities. They could build partnerships with local organizations to help recruit talent—for example, by working with high schools with high numbers of graduates of color to build a pipeline for recruitment.
 - **Consider financial incentives.** Finances can be a barrier for prospective teachers of color. In addition to tuition, teacher candidates are responsible for paying for certification, testing, transportation to schools, and other costs. Financial incentives can help to make teaching a more viable career for candidates of color, especially when paired with mentoring and other support during the first year in the classroom.
- To be clear, teacher preparation programs aren't solely responsible for the shortage of teachers of color. But to address this problem, all parties involved — from the state and federal government, to teacher preparation programs, to districts — need to commit to and be held accountable for doing better. I hope that this issue gets the attention it should — our students deserve nothing less.
- **Set and prioritize goals around recruiting candidates of color.** The first and most important thing programs can do to improve diversity is something they can do tomorrow: commit to making diversity a top priority. Leaders of programs should be transparent with their entire institution about their goals, and reflect on structures and processes throughout the organization that are helping and hindering diversity.

References for Further Reading

There are a number of resources, organizations, and individuals working to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline and provide more equitable academic opportunities to students of color. Below are links to some additional readings and toolkits for further education, ideating, and collaborating on joining the fight to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and provide pathways to possibilities.

Increasing Opportunities

- [Keeping Young People Out of Prison and in the Classroom](#)
- [Why we need to stop calling it the achievement gap](#)
- [Achievement gap or Opportunity Gap](#)
- TNTP [Opportunity Myth](#)
- The Opportunity Myth [Parent Guide](#)
- Children's Defense Fund [Freedom Schools](#)

Literacy

- [What the Words Say](#)
- The Oakland REACH [Virtual Family Hub best practices](#)
- [Decoding Dyslexia](#)
- [Blueprint Nashville](#)
- [Get Georgia Reading](#)
- [25 Ways Schools Can Promote Literacy](#)

Hiring and Retaining More Teachers of Color

- TNTP [Broken Pipeline](#)
- Learning Policy Institute [Diversifying the Teaching Profession](#)
- [The Long Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers](#)

Increasing Access to College and Career

- [Why are many students with 'A' averages being barred from college-level classes?](#)
- [I'm not a college admissions risk; I'm an opportunity](#)
- [FairTest Fact Sheets](#)
- Complete College America – [Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere](#)
- [BridgeYear](#) Career Test Drives
- Common App [Your Path to College](#)
- The College Board [Big Future](#)
- [YearUp](#) Career Preparation
- [NPower](#) Career Preparation
- [iMentor](#) College Prep Support through Mentorship
- [Achieve Atlanta](#) College Access and Success
- [College Possible](#) Near-Peer Mentors



ENDING MASS INCARCERATION

PIPELINE TO POSSIBILITIES SERIES

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