



Equity Alliance for LA's Kids

The Equity Alliance for LA's Kids Policy Platform



Policy Priorities

Equitable and Full Funding

Strengthen and support equitable funding structures, such as the Student Equity Need Index, Community Schools Initiative, and Black Student Achievement Program

Culturally and Linguistically Affirming, Rigorous Learning

Support the assets and needs of diverse learners to close equity and opportunity gaps

Shared Power and Decision Making with Students, Families, and Community

Co-design and co-create solutions to ensure thriving students, families and communities

Safe, Inclusive, and Healing-Centered Learning Environments

Create and invest in school environments that promote mental and social-emotional wellness and belonging for students and families

Diverse, Supported, and Valued Educators and Staff

Recruit and retain diverse educators and staff who feel supported, affirmed, and valued, prioritizing high- and highest-need schools

Expanded Policy Platform

Equitable and Full Funding

Strengthen and support equitable funding structures, such as the Student Equity Need Index, Community Schools Initiative, and Black Student Achievement Program

Policy Recommendations

- Utilize the Student Equity Need Index (SENI) as the permanent and stable basis for targeting and allocating resources and funding streams within the district, ensuring the safeguarding of equity-focused programs and interventions during budget cuts.
- Ensure permanent and stable funding for equity-centered initiatives such as restorative justice practices, community schools, and the Black Student Achievement Program (BSAP), which benefit high- and highest-need students, as defined by SENI.
- Leverage the SENI, partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs), and other external entities to prioritize and offer support for high-need communities in providing accessible services that meet essential family needs, such as low-cost internet access, food security, affordable housing, financial literacy, etc.
- Protect carryover for all equity-based funding—including multi-year equity initiatives—such as the Black Student Achievement Plan (BSAP) and Student Equity Need Index, where high-need schools are prioritized for capacity building in budget decision-making while also held accountable for unspent funds.
- Invest in capacity building that ensures administrative leaders, staff, students, and families engaged in budgeting decisions are equipped with the skills, understanding, and data to strategically allocate resources.



Insights from Research and Community

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), though it has helped make progress in allocating funds based on equity across the state, still faces challenges around meaningfully engaging the community and dispersing funding to reach highest-need students within schools. In fact, evidence suggests that a significant portion of LCFF funding fails to reach the intended school sites and students; only about 55% of the supplemental and concentration funding generated by high-need students is spent at the schools they attend.¹

The Student Equity Need Index (SENI) is an equity tool co-created and implemented by LAUSD and the community as a strategic response to more deeply understand student need and facilitate equitable resource distribution at the school-site level. Championed by students, families, and community partners, SENI uniquely recognizes non-academic and community factors like disproportionate suspension rates, asthma, and proximity to gun violence—all unaccounted for in LCFF—in addition to its academic indicators. SENI not only offers an infrastructure that supports equity-based resource allocation, it also helps the district understand students' needs in a nuanced, holistic way that guides other resource decisions outside of SENI-specific funds. Further, SENI was developed in partnership with community stakeholders and is centered on a vision of shared decision-making, grounded in the unique needs of schools and their surrounding communities. Hence, the flexible dollars that SENI offers for schools are critical to meeting the needs of a school community's local context.²

The pursuit of educational equity demands a commitment to long-term stability in funding and resources, not only for SENI-allocated funding but for other equity-centered initiatives like BSAP and community schools. Research indicates that a 10% increase in per-pupil spending for children from low-income families throughout all 12 years leads to more years of completed education, higher wages, and a reduction in adult poverty.³ The impact, however, of these dollars is inextricably linked to the strength and efficacy of their implementation. This is why providing stable, ongoing adequate resources, accessible data, and capacity building for all stakeholders in the budgeting process is critical to ensuring that any funds are achieving their intended impact on students, particularly for high- and highest-need students.

¹ Julien Lafortune and R. Mehlotra, Targeted K–12 Funding and Student Outcomes (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2021).

² Susana Bonis and Stephanie Benson, "EQUITY IS JUSTICE," Boyle Heights BHC – Briefs, [April 2024], <https://bonisbriefs.projectla.app/?p=72>.

³ Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson and Claudia L. Persico. "The Effects of School Spending on Educational and Economic Outcomes: Evidence from School Finance Reforms." *Econometric Modeling: Microeconomic Studies of Health* (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1093/QJE/QJV036>.

Culturally and Linguistically Affirming, Rigorous Learning

Support the assets and needs of diverse learners to close equity and opportunity gaps

Policy Recommendations

- Create and sustain inclusive, culturally, and linguistically affirming learning environments that uphold academic excellence to accommodate the unique and diverse needs of all children, especially those who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, foster, unhoused, LGBTQIA+, low-income, children of color, special needs, and other historically underserved communities.
- Prioritize personalized, developmentally and/or academically appropriate, joyful, and engaging, high-quality instruction for all children with educational practices and frameworks that center socio-emotional learning and support trusting, nurturing relationships.
- Invest in equitable access to enriching experiences and opportunities that integrate positive cultural representation and foster college and career readiness, allocating adequate resources for schools to ensure effective implementation.



Invest in Early Care and Education (ECE)

- Emphasize a holistic, whole child approach—rooted in the healthy functioning of their family and community—that includes supportive learning material connected to children’s experiences, home languages, cultural backgrounds, and community, with specific attention to play-based learning that includes STEM and early literacy and is optimal for children’s growth and development.
- Ensure the principles of the California English Learner (EL) Roadmap policy are integrated into the district’s early childhood programs and allocate funding with an emphasis on supporting and expanding culturally and linguistically affirming dual language and multilingual immersion programs for young children, starting from early childhood.

Invest in Early Care and Education (ECE) (cont.)

- Engage in authentic conversations and build partnerships with community-based organizations and home-based child care providers within LAUSD regions that provide early childhood programs to enhance mixed-delivery Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) programs and wraparound care for families that can effectively support children's home languages and cultures.

Ensure Black Students Thrive Through Targeted Supports

- Ensure ample, sustained investments in a high-quality, culturally relevant education, expanded one-on-one academic assistance, and exposure to diverse settings and professionals to broaden their networks and interests through programs such as the Black Student Achievement Plan (BSAP).

Provide Targeted and Intentional Supports for English Learners (EL) and Dual Language Learners (DLL)

- In alignment with the [California English Learner Roadmap Policy](#), provide resources and support to teachers/staff on culturally and linguistically affirming pedagogy and strategies that ensure access to the full curriculum for all children. Particularly for ELs and DLLs in high- and highest-need schools, this includes integrated, standards-based learning built around themes that foster content learning and language acquisition.
- Support school leaders, educators, and staff to strengthen their approaches to developing authentic relationships as equal partners that leverage ongoing, two-way, multilingual communication with families, including access to translated materials and resources in the home languages of families served.



Insights from Research and Community

In today's increasingly diverse educational landscape, the demand for culturally and linguistically affirming education has emerged as too critical to ignore. Research finds that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated educational disparities by widening pre-existing academic gaps, especially among low-income communities and communities of color.⁴ In California, nearly a third of the state's student population did not even have proper wifi or digital access, with the majority of those impacted being Black and Latinx, affecting their opportunities to fully participate in education.⁵ In 2023, 30% of Black students and 36% of Latinx students met or exceeded ELA standards, compared to 60% of White students and 75% of Asian students.⁶ As demographic shifts transform the student population in California, the state and LAUSD face a dire need to adapt and respond to the diverse backgrounds and academic needs of its learners. A notable example of culturally and linguistically affirming curriculum the district should adopt is outlined in LAUSD's Black Student Achievement Plan. Designed to foster engaging and personalized lessons for diverse learners, it holds the promising potential to not only enhance academic performance but affirm students' identity and ensure their representation throughout their learning experience.⁷

While LAUSD has initiated several efforts through targeted programs like BSAP, Humanizing Education for Equitable Transformation (HEET), and others to narrow gaps, more must be done to eliminate the educational disparities that persist and have not yet narrowed significantly, especially for Black students. Many of the initiatives, while well-intentioned, do not substantially benefit Black students because the allocated funds do not consistently reach Black students directly but are rather spread out across all student populations. To enhance their efforts, LAUSD should refine the targeted support to ensure that they directly benefit Black students and genuinely address any opportunity gaps. Moreover, the district must ensure that quality educational experiences and support for Black students is embedded across all strategies, not limited to targeted initiatives alone. This entails adding and integrating funds—in lieu of a

⁴ J.P. Bishop and Tyrone C. Howard, *When the Lights are Turned On: Documenting the Impact of COVID-19 on California's Education Landscape* (Los Angeles: Center for the Transformation of Schools, School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, 2024).

⁵ John B. Horrigan, "Students of Color Caught in the Homework Gap," Alliance for Excellent Education, National Indian Education Association, National Urban League, UnidosUS, 2020, accessed September 30, 2020.

⁶ Carolyn Jones and Erica Yee, "California Student Test Scores," CalMatters, October 2023, accessed [March 24, 2024], <https://calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2023/10/california-student-test-scores/>.

⁷ T. Dumas et al., *Bright Spots: Schools and Organizations Cultivating Excellence in Los Angeles Black Youth* (Los Angeles: Center for the Transformation of Schools, School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, 2022).

Insights from Research and Community (cont.)

cycle of discontinuing or replacing funds, so that LAUSD can better move the needle on Black student success.

A studied approach to mitigating educational disparities also involves establishing a foundation for lifelong learning from the early years, which is why Early Care and Education (ECE) is a critical area for investment and attention in this platform. Participation in high-quality, full-day ECE leads to statistically significant reductions in special education placement, grade retention, and leads to increases in graduation rates.⁸ High-quality ECE also has a positive correlation to children's language mastery, socio-emotional development, mathematical competencies, and increases chances for academic success in later life.⁹

Another promising strategy for supporting high-need schools and high-need student learning is investing in transformative experiences and curriculum that integrate positive cultural representation to motivate students to sustained academic success. This was reflected in the comments of Black and Latinx students from high-need schools surveyed to inform this platform. We convened with students and families from South and East Los Angeles, and they uplifted culturally affirming curriculum as their top priority. The importance of developing and implementing a culturally and linguistically affirming curriculum cannot be overstated. A curriculum that does not reflect the identities of its students contributes to feelings of alienation and disengagement, ultimately undermining the potential for academic success. Studies prove that inclusive practices and curriculum more often lead to higher engagement, self-esteem, sense of belonging, and academic achievement among Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students.¹⁰

“The school doesn't get the funding it need based off the area where the school is located. Many people think Latinx students can't be creative and open their hearts and minds to new experiences.”

-Senior, Manual Arts High School

⁸ D. C. McCoy et al., "Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes," *Educational Researcher* 46, no. 8 (2017): 474-487, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X17737739>.

⁹ H. Melnick et al., *Understanding California's Early Care and Education System* (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2017).

¹⁰ Moin Syed, Margarita Azmitia, and Catherine R. Cooper, "Identity and Academic Success among Underrepresented Ethnic Minorities: An Interdisciplinary Review and Integration," *Journal of Social Issues* 67, no. 3 (2011): 442-468.

Shared Power and Decision Making with Students, Families, and Community

Co-design and co-create solutions to ensure thriving students, families and communities

Policy Recommendations

- Promote meaningful opportunities, structures, and systems that empower students, families, and communities to have shared power and authority to impact decision-making at school and district levels and engage in co-designing solutions that ensure student and community well-being and success.
- Enhance data transparency and accessibility related to budgeting and resource allocation, such as SENI and BSAP funds, that allow for meaningful shared decision-making with students, families, and community (including through structures like the Local School Leadership Council or other shared decision-making teams that should be reflective of the student body).
- Develop and maintain authentic, culturally and linguistically affirming communication and partnerships with families and community members as equal partners—including cross-communication between school/district committees—that directly involve them in supporting students within their learning environments.
- Expand relationship-centered practices to all learning sites so that they can become transformative, racially just, relationship-centered learning environments, which includes but is not limited to community schools. These include leveraging empathy-building and deep listening practices, adequately investing in relationship-building structures and capacity-building long-term, and elevating and valuing youth, family, and community voices.¹¹



¹¹L. H. Hernández and E. Rivero, "Striving for Relationship-Centered Schools: Insights from a Community-Based Transformation Campaign," Learning Policy Institute, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.54300/621.856>.

Insights from Research and Community

“I wish my school had more funding for teachers. They deserve everything they need because they are the backbone of our schools. They do what they can with what they have.”

-Junior, George Washington Preparatory High School

When students, families, educators, and community partners act as equal partners, they can collectively transform the learning experiences of students and foster an environment where they can thrive. Data from our convenings with youth and parents in South and East LA reveal the clear advantages of an inclusive decision-making process. Some parents, in particular, shared a deep interest in knowing more about how funding is dispersed for programs like SENI, noting that being left out of deliberation caused them to lose faith in education systems altogether.

Authentic, shared decision-making requires intentional structures, processes, resources, and capacity building, all built upon a foundation of trusting relationships. Collaborating with community-based organizations (CBOs) that have established deep and meaningful relationships within the community is crucial. These organizations have a proven track record of serving and building trust with the communities, facilitating engagement between the district and its diverse constituents.

Another key step is to ensure that shared decision-making teams actually reflect those who are most directly impacted (e.g., BSAP schools should have a team made up predominantly of Black students and parents) and hold actual decision-making power (versus being merely “consulted”) to make budget and resource allocation decisions. Youth and families noted that too often those with authority to enact policies have no meaningful connection to their respective communities, and students should have more decision-making power within the schools they attend. Further, data that can help inform decision-making—such as budget data related to SENI or other equity investments—should be transparent and accessible, with capacity building offered to ensure all stakeholders can effectively leverage the data. By honoring the wisdom and lived experiences of students, families, and community partners to make decisions in partnership with educators, LAUSD can create an exceptional learning experience for students that actually reflects their collective aspirations and needs.

Safe, Inclusive, and Healing-Centered Learning Environments

Create and invest in learning environments that promote mental and social-emotional wellness and belonging for students and families

Policy Recommendations

- Ensure that learning environments are safe, healing-centered, and inclusive for all students by leveraging restorative practices, eliminating the use of school hardening practices and school police, and prioritizing students' well-being and sense of belonging, as modeled through approaches such as racially just, relationship-centered community schools.
- Ensure adequate and timely access to free, specialized, trauma-informed, and healing-centered supports and services through fully supported and trained in-house and external staff (e.g., one-on-one counseling with district psychiatric social workers or non-district mental health providers, weekly group therapy, etc.) for LAUSD students, families, and staff.
- Remove barriers within the school procurement process to build upon strategic partnerships with community-based organizations and establish data-sharing practices among wellness providers and city and county entities to ensure accessible and effective implementation of services and greater coordination among schools and wellness supports.¹²
- Commit to expanding clean, ADA-compliant green spaces in schools, fostering environments that promote health and wellness, and encouraging active engagement and participation in the school community.
- Ensure equitable access to adequate facilities that are developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers within LAUSD regions.



¹²One promising initiative fostering data sharing is the [Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health Data xChange](#).

Insights from Research and Community

Every learning environment should be a place where all children experience safety, affirmation, and belonging. Creating a safe learning environment for students attending high-need and highest-need schools involves both the physical, built environment and the socio-emotional well-being and mental health of students. One student from South LA shared, “Another way I think my school can be improved is helping with the surrounding environment. Keeping it clean and respectful so that way all are safe.”

Schools that create inclusive, safe, and caring spaces for students prioritize restorative practices over traditional disciplinary measures and policing.¹³ Research suggests that school policing often reproduces racial inequalities on campuses and ultimately does not address the root causes of safety issues in schools, especially as school police intervene in scenarios they are unqualified to address, such as students experiencing trauma or mental illness.¹⁴ Since mental health problems are among the most common disabling health conditions in children and research lists them as a primary reason for chronic absenteeism,¹⁵ approaches to making schools more welcoming and healing must be trauma-informed and are best addressed by mental health providers, school nurses, and community-based organizations. Data supports that in-house mental health delivery helps address behavioral health conditions that inhibit students’ abilities to succeed academically and improve their sense of connectedness to school.¹⁶ Studies found that sending high-need students to trained in-house staff resulted in a significant reduction in disciplinary referrals (95%), impacting academic performance by increasing attendance rates and GPA over time.¹⁷ By providing spaces that promote inclusivity and safety, schools can significantly impact students' abilities to learn and thrive, underscoring the importance of a holistic approach to education that values mental and socio-emotional wellness as much as academic success.



¹³Elianny C. Edwards and Earl J. Edwards, "Beyond Policing: Understanding Threats to School Safety and Who Can Really Help," *Leadership and Policy in Schools* (2024): 1-20.

¹⁴Terry Allen and Pedro Noguera, "A Web of Punishment: Examining Black Student Interactions with School Police in Los Angeles," *Educational Researcher* (2023): 0013189X221095547.

¹⁵David Lawrence, Vaile Dawson, Stephen Houghton, Ben Goodsell, and Michael G. Sawyer, "Impact of Mental Disorders on Attendance at School," *Australian Journal of Education* 63, no. 1 (2019): 5-21.

¹⁶Caryssa Lim et al., "School Attendance Following Receipt of Care From a School-Based Health Center," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 73, no. 6 (2023): 1125-1131.

¹⁷Sarah Cusworth Walker et al., "Impact of School-Based Health Center Use on Academic Outcomes," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 46, no. 3 (2010): 251-257.

Diverse, Supported, and Valued Educators and Staff

Recruit and retain diverse educators and staff who feel supported, affirmed, and valued, prioritizing high- and highest-need schools.

Policy Recommendations

- Recruit and retain staff of color, reflective of student diversity in high- and highest-need schools—limiting hiring at low-need schools until highest need schools are staffed—by providing candidates with above-and-beyond onboarding supports, offering equity-based, comprehensive compensation and incentives, ensuring targeted resources to support staff in equity-focused programs like BSAP, and defining clear accountability measures with the Superintendent to monitor progress.¹⁸
- Provide differentiated, trauma-informed, and relevant professional development that includes training on culturally affirming and anti-racist practices, equipping educators and school staff with supports such as coaching and sustained funding to ensure ongoing, effective implementation.
- Engage the whole school community in recruitment by utilizing student and family feedback and leverage data that prioritizes underrepresented educator demographic groups for continuous improvement on recruitment, support, and retention efforts aimed to improve workforce diversity.¹⁹
- Transform working conditions for highly qualified, diverse staff through various affirming approaches that uphold every staff member’s well-being, such as opportunities for collaboration, mentoring relationships between teachers, trainings, career pathways, responsive wellness programs addressing mental health, and financial aid for essential needs (e.g., housing, transportation costs, etc.).



¹⁸ Desiree Carver-Thomas et al., "Teacher Shortages during the Pandemic: How California Districts Are Responding," Learning Policy Institute, 2022.

¹⁹ Dominique Garrett-Scott et al., "California Educator Diversity Road Map: Community-Informed Policy Strategies," *Education Trust-West*, 2023.

Invest and Support Early Educators

- Ensure educators in early care and education programs at LAUSD reflect the diversity of children and communities they serve and/or are supported to build cultural and linguistic competence to effectively support the needs of diverse students, including Dual Language Learners (DLLs).
- Ensure there are resources to allow for educators in early care and education programs at LAUSD to receive professional learning opportunities (e.g. peer learning opportunities, coaching, training) alongside educators in Kindergarten through early elementary grades, to support alignment and articulation from early childhood through early elementary.

Insights from Research and Community

Historically, strong identity and self-efficacy outcomes correlate with students having teachers who reflect their own racial and cultural backgrounds.²⁰ Notably, Black principals and Black teachers positively impact Black student academic performance and experiences, including reading, math, attendance rates, enrollment in advanced courses and gifted programs, and lower dropout and suspension rates.²¹ Why? Students thrive when teacher expectations are set high. However, white teachers tend to set higher expectations for white students compared to Black students. This gap often stems from implicit biases, which students often notice, and can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy where low expectations negatively affect student achievement.²² While the teaching workforce in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) diverges from the national trend by being predominantly Latinx, challenges persist in ensuring positive interactions and educational outcomes for students of color, including Black students.

Efforts to recruit, retain, and support diverse educators are critical to ensure all students—particularly high-need students—have access to staff that reflect their identities. According to statewide data, more than two-thirds (68%) of Black educators reported that their school did not provide groups, spaces, or resources that made them feel seen or heard.²³ Data from our youth and family convening echoed the positive

²⁰ Seth Gershenson et al., "The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 14, no. 4 (2022): 300-342.

²¹ C. Lindsay and C. M. Hart, "Exposure to Same-Race Teachers and Student Disciplinary Outcomes for Black Students in North Carolina," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 39, no. 3 (2017): 485-510.

²² Nicholas W. Papageorge, Seth Gershenson, and Kyung Min Kang, "Teacher Expectations Matter," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 102, no. 2 (2020): 234-51.

²³ Black Educator Advocates Network, "What Schools Must Do to Retain Black Educators: Findings from the Inaugural California Black Educator Survey, Fall 2023," accessed [Feb 24], [<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64cbd84fba7961119870722b/t/65a0c3d662b64d1ea5fd97d1/705034717179/What+Schools+Must+Do+To+Retain+Black+ed.pdf>].

Insights from Research and Community (cont.)

impact on students when their teachers either look like them or possess knowledge and acceptance of their respective cultures. It is imperative that intentional recruitment and retention strategies are prioritized and sustained, such as policies like LAUSD's resolution, "Black Student Excellence through Educator Diversity, Preparation and Retention." These approaches bring diverse educators and staff to high-need areas, ultimately helping to address educational disparities.

LAUSD must take a comprehensive approach to supporting and retaining a diverse workforce. First, offering competitive compensation, benefits, and targeted resources that promote staff wellness are key strategies to recruit a diverse staff.²⁴ Second, total buy-in and participation in staff training centered on culturally and linguistically affirming practices contribute to constructing an inclusive learning and working environment.²⁵ Lastly, educators in ECE programs play a crucial role in the early development of children, particularly in fostering cultural and linguistic competencies and high expectations. Addressing wage disparities and providing comprehensive support for ECE providers are imperative for attracting and retaining high-quality staff. By advocating for improved working conditions and funding mechanisms to address historical wage disparities, we strive to elevate the status and support for ECE providers.

“I feel like the funding would better our school, to show that people care about us having a chance at life, and we can beat the stereotypes. Prove that we are more than what they think of us.”

-Junior, George Washington Preparatory High School

²⁴ Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, "Closing the Equity Gap in School Staffing: How LA Unified Can Address Teacher Shortages for Students of Color and High-Need Schools." (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2023).

²⁵ Rebecca A. Cruz et al., "An Examination of Teachers' Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy," *Teacher Education and Special Education* 43, no. 3 (2020): 197-214.



The Equity Alliance for LA's Kids is made up of organizations that understand the need to push for comprehensive change in order to address the systems that uphold the legacy of white supremacy through institutionalized racism. The fight for racial justice is one that exists beyond, but includes, the fight for education. At no time has the education system ever served the unique needs of non-white and non-affluent communities but historically marginalized communities have taken up the fight to push for a vision that has created opportunities that move us forward to a racially just and equitable system that addresses current and long-standing gaps.



www.equityallianceforlaskids.org