



The Education Trust

**THE STATE OF EDUCATION FOR**  
**AFRICAN AMERICAN**  
**STUDENTS**

# THE STATE OF EDUCATION FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS



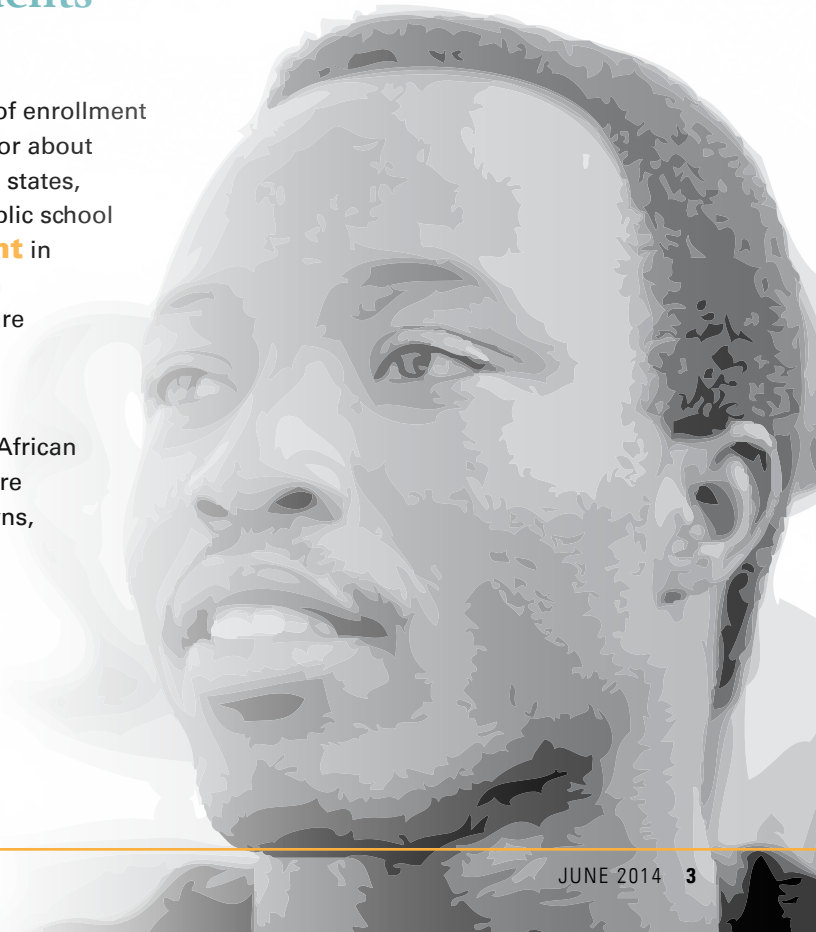
**Over the past few decades, African American students across the nation have made real gains in academic achievement. Yet, too many African American students still are not getting the quality education they need and deserve, and the performance of African American students lags far behind that of white students. These gaps in achievement are driven by gaps in opportunity – African American students receive fewer of the within-school resources and experiences that are known to contribute to academic achievement.**

**In this brief, we've gathered the best available national data on African American student achievement and attainment in both K-12 and higher education, as well as on the unequal opportunities that contribute to these outcomes. We hope that these data will be used to spark conversation – and more important, action – about how to accelerate improvement and raise achievement for African American students across the nation.**

## Where do African American students attend school?

African American students make up a substantial proportion of enrollment nationwide. About 15 percent of all public school students — or about **7.9 million** students — are African American. And in some states, African American students make up a far larger portion of public school enrollment: **Half** of students in Mississippi and **45 percent** in Louisiana are African American. About a **third** of students in Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, and South Carolina are African American.

Opportunity and achievement for African American students matter for all types of communities and schools. While many African American students, **46 percent**, attend urban schools, more than half, **54 percent**, now attend schools in suburbs, towns, or rural areas. And while about **half** of African American students attend schools where the majority of students are African American, **26 percent** attend schools where most students are white.

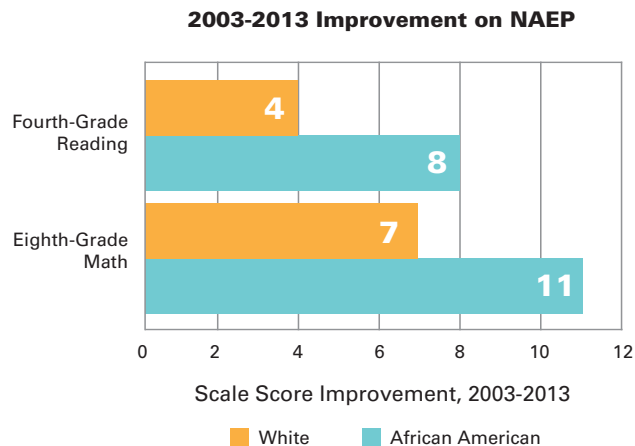


# Is performance for African American students improving in key academic subjects?

In both fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math, performance among African American students has **risen dramatically** in recent years, and gaps between African American and white students have narrowed. It's important, of course, to look at student performance across subjects and grades, but these two measures are especially critical. Research shows that without solid reading skills honed in elementary school and a firm grasp of math by the end of middle school, it is difficult for students to do well going forward.



Between 2003 and 2013, scale scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) rose **faster** for African American students than for white students in both fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math.

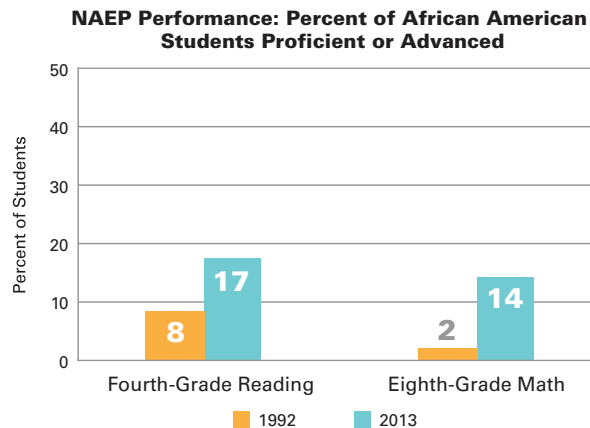
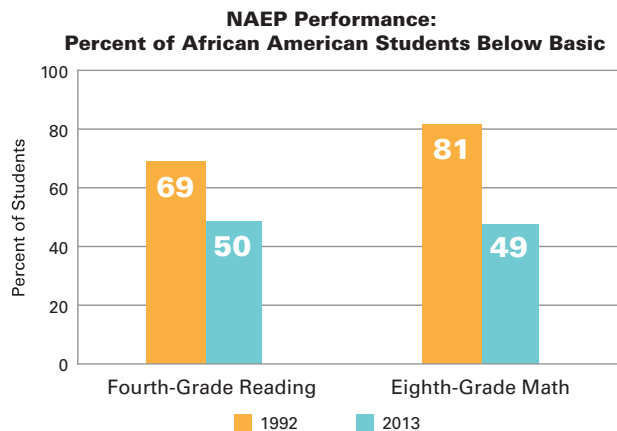


And these gains reflect real improvement in skills and knowledge. Over the past two decades, the percentage of African American eighth-graders who lacked even basic math skills on NAEP has fallen from **81 percent** to **less than half**. Students at that level struggle with things like applying arithmetic operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) and with using diagrams, charts, and graphs to help solve problems.

In fourth-grade reading, the percentage of African American students without even basic skills — those who have

trouble locating information in a passage, identifying the main idea of a text, or interpreting what a word means — has fallen from **69 percent** to **50 percent**.

During the same time period, the percentage of African American students performing at a proficient or advanced level more than **doubled** in fourth-grade reading and has increased **sevenfold** in eighth-grade math. Far too few African American students are performing at these levels — but the changes represent marked improvement over past performance.



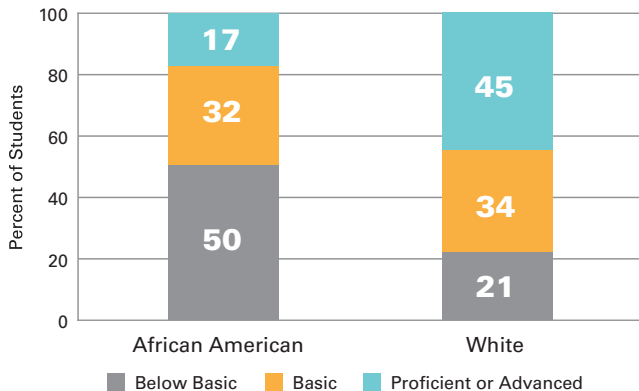
# Are schools performing well enough for African American students?

These improvements are encouraging. However, too few African American students demonstrate the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in school and in life. And despite gap-narrowing, African American students still lag far behind their white peers on NAEP.

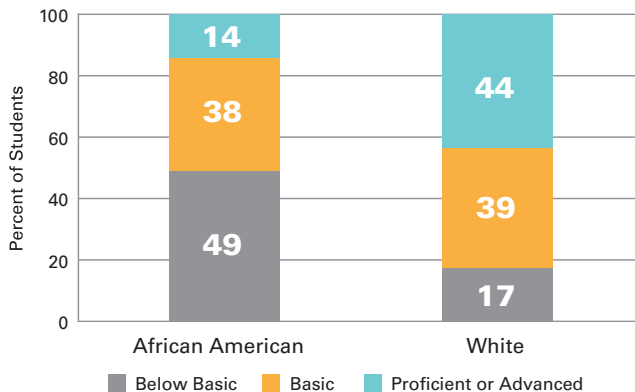


In both fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math, African American students are about **two and a half** times as likely as white students to lack basic skills and only about **one-third** as likely to be proficient or advanced.

**2013 Performance: Fourth-Grade Reading**



**2013 Performance: Eighth-Grade Math**



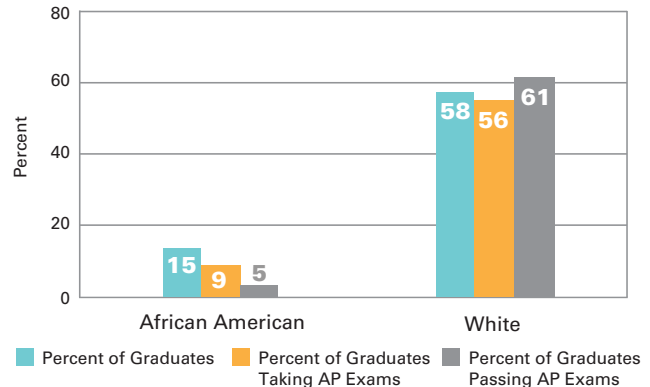
# Are schools preparing African American students for college and careers?

African American students are increasingly taking the steps necessary for success after high school. Over the past five years, the number of African American high school graduates taking the ACT rose by **22 percent**, and the number taking the SAT rose by **12 percent**. What's more, the number of African American graduates taking at least one AP exam **more than tripled** between 2002 and 2012, outpacing the growth in the number of African American graduates.

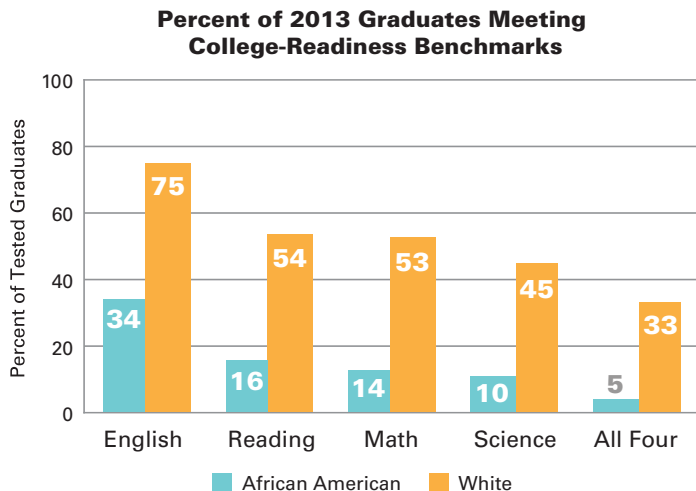


But despite these gains, there's still a long way to go. African American students remain underrepresented among AP test-takers: **15 percent** of graduates in the class of 2013 were African American, but African American students made up only **9 percent** of those who took AP tests. And even fewer — **5 percent** — of those who passed an AP exam were African American.

**AP Participation and Success in the Class of 2013**

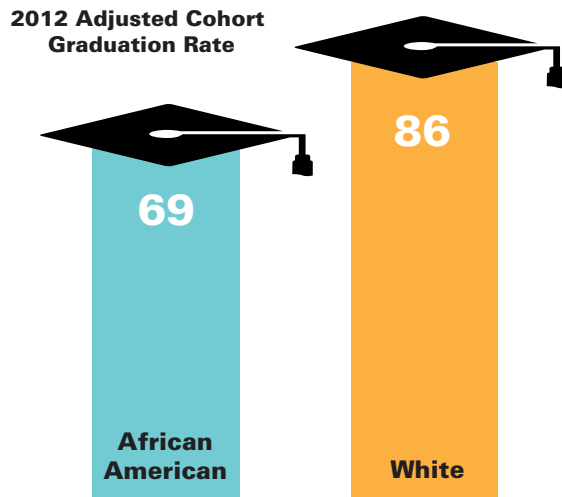


And just taking these types of assessments doesn't mean that students are prepared. Few African American graduates who took the ACT met any of its college-readiness benchmarks, which are intended to show whether students have a good chance of succeeding in first-year college courses. Just **1 in 20** African American graduates met all four college-readiness benchmarks, compared with **1 in 3** white graduates who did so.



## Are African American students graduating ready for the next step?

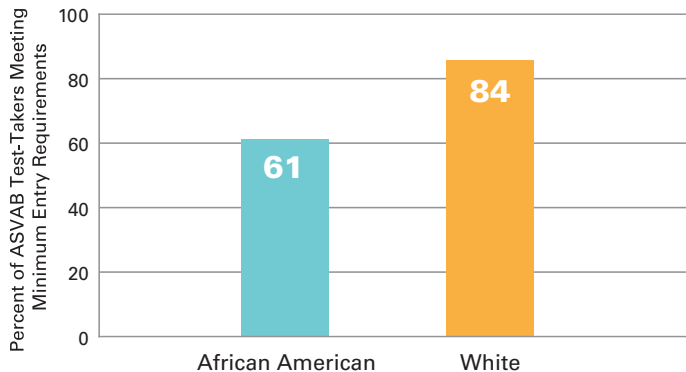
Far too many African American students leave high school without a diploma. Nationwide, just over **2 in 3** African American students graduated from high school on time in 2012. That's compared with **86 percent** of white students.





And those who graduate are not necessarily ready for adult life. For example, only about **60 percent** of young African American graduates who were interested in joining the U.S. Army met minimum academic standards.

**Percent Meeting Minimum Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery Requirements**

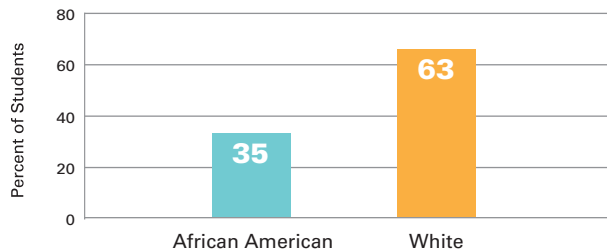


## Do African American students have adequate opportunities to learn?

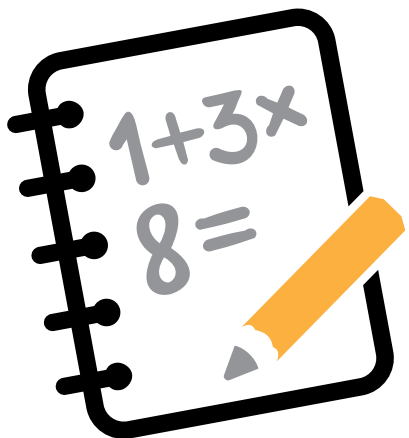
Gaps exist before children enter school, but inequitable and insufficient opportunities to learn exacerbate the gaps between African American students and their white peers and contribute to African American students' low performance.

For example, only **35 percent** of African American students who had high math performance in fifth grade were enrolled in at least Algebra I in eighth grade, compared with **more than 60 percent** of white fifth-graders with high math performance.

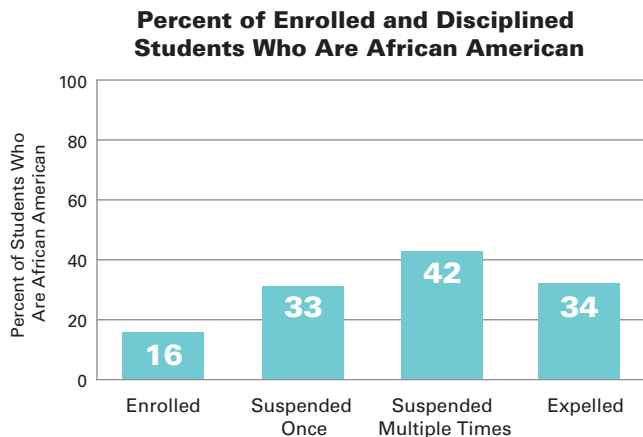
**High-Performing Fifth-Graders' Enrollment in Algebra I or Higher in Eighth Grade**



This trend continues into high school. Among African American students with high potential for success in AP math courses, only **3 in 10** took any such course. The same is true in science. Part of this is because **15 percent** of African American high school students attend schools that don't offer at least one AP course in each of the four core subjects: math, English, science, and social studies.



African American students also are highly likely to be disciplined in ways that take them out of the classroom. Although African American students made up **16 percent** of students in the 2012 Civil Rights Data Collection, they made up **33 percent** of students suspended once, **42 percent** of students suspended more than once, and **34 percent** of students expelled.



# Are African American students going to college? And where?

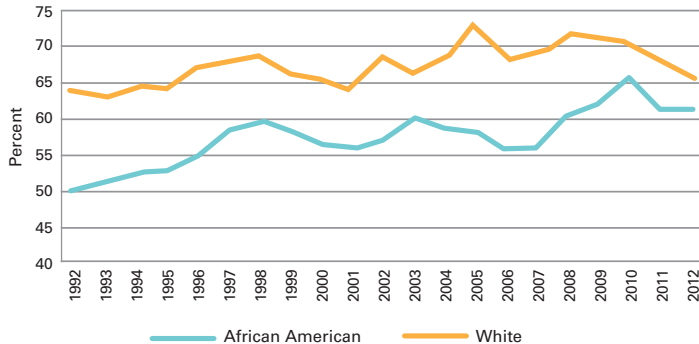
Overall, African American students are enrolling in college in larger numbers. African American high school graduates enrolled in college the following fall increased, from **57 percent** in 2002 to **62 percent** in 2012. African American students made up **15 percent** of all undergraduates in 2012 compared with **12 percent** 10 years ago. These are impressive gains, but African

American students are still attending college at **lower** rates than their white peers.

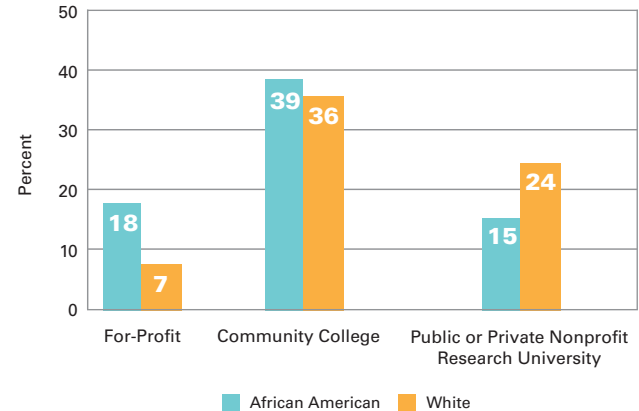
African American students are also **more likely** than white students to begin college in either a for-profit or community college, where their chances of earning a degree are lower.

## Immediate College-Going, 1992-2012

Percentage of High School Graduates Enrolled in College the Fall After Graduation

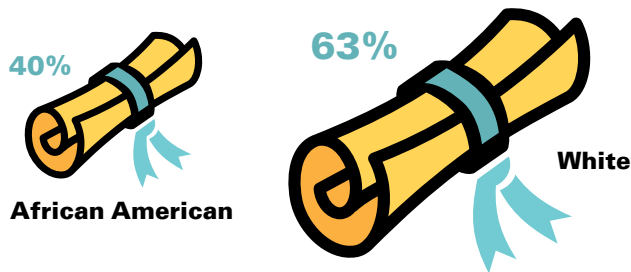


## College Enrollment by Race and Sector, Fall 2012



# Are African American students graduating from college?

While access to higher education for African American students has been increasing, gaps in degree completion persist. Consider six-year graduation rates at four-year colleges:



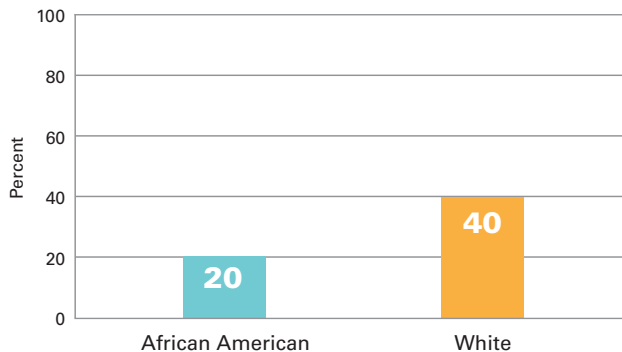
At community colleges, **13 percent** of African American students earn an associate degree or certificate within three years compared with **24 percent** of white students.



Of those students who initially enrolled at any two-year college with the intent to transfer, white students are **twice as likely** as African American students (22 versus 11 percent) to transfer to a four-year institution within three years.

As a result, only **20 percent** of African American students ages 25 to 29 held at least a bachelor's in 2013, compared with **40 percent** of their white peers.

**Bachelor's Degree Attainment of Young Adults (Ages 25-29), 2013**

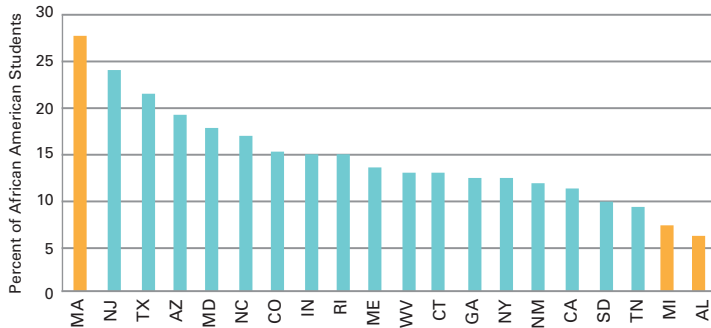


# Are some states, districts, schools, and higher education institutions doing better than others for African American students?

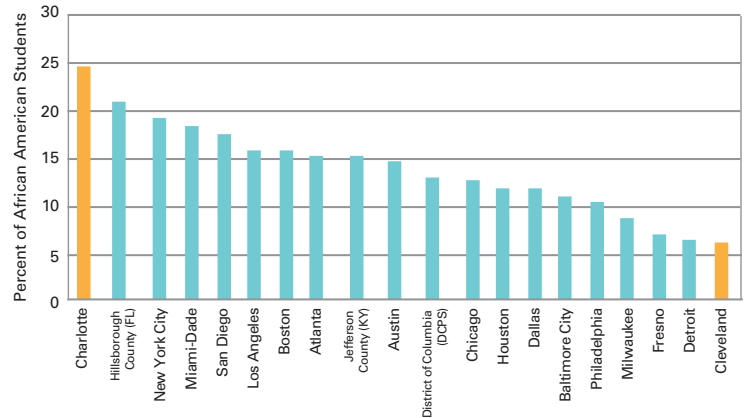
No state is performing as well as it should be for African American students, but wide variations in performance across states show that what states do matters. For example, on NAEP, African American eighth-graders in Massachusetts are **four times** as likely to be proficient in math as their peers in Michigan and Alabama.

The same variation exists across districts. **Twenty-five percent** of African American fourth-graders in Charlotte, North Carolina, read at a proficient or advanced level, compared with just **6 percent** in Cleveland.

**Percent of African American Eighth-Graders Proficient or Advanced in Math on NAEP**



**Percent of African American Eighth-Graders Proficient or Advanced in Math on NAEP TUDA**



And some schools across the nation are educating African American students to high levels of achievement. At George Hall Elementary School in Mobile, Alabama — where 99 percent of students are African American — **94 percent** of the African American fifth-graders *exceeded* state math standards, and **73 percent** did so in reading. Statewide, **less than half** of African American fifth-graders and about **70 percent** of white fifth-graders exceed reading and math standards.

At Arcadia Elementary School in Olympia Fields, Illinois, 9 in 10 students are African American. **Seventy-nine percent** of the school's African American third-grade students met or exceeded state reading and math standards — compared with **41 percent** of African American third-graders statewide who met or exceeded state reading standards and just **31 percent** who met or exceeded state math standards.

And at Elmont Memorial High School in Elmont, New York, three-quarters of students are African American — and **94 percent** of black students in the class of 2012 graduated on time. That's compared with about **60 percent** statewide. Moreover, for the class of 2013, **98 percent** of African American students at Elmont met state standards in secondary-level English and

math, compared with roughly **70 percent** of their counterparts statewide.



Students at Arcadia Elementary in Olympia Fields, Illinois.

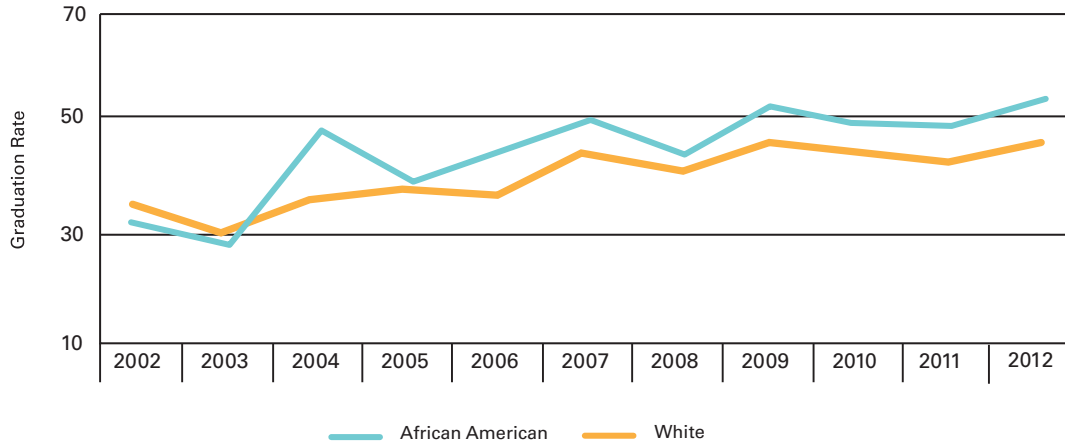


Classroom instruction at Elmont Memorial High School in Elmont, New York.

Similar examples exist in higher education, where some colleges are successfully graduating increasing percentages of African American students. At Northeastern University in Boston, for example, the African American student graduation rate was **62.3 percent** in 2012, representing a **20.2 percentage**

point jump since 2002. Other schools have eliminated completion gaps between groups of students. Georgia State University has graduated black students at **similar or higher** rates than white students for almost a decade, all while consistently raising graduation rates for both groups.

**Six-Year Graduation Rates, Georgia State University**



**African American students can achieve at the high levels that prepare them for full, successful lives. To help them get there, we need to give them a fair chance to succeed.**

# Data Sources

## Where do African American students attend school?

- **Enrollment:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “Public Elementary and Secondary School Student Enrollment and Staff Counts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2010-11,” Table 2 (Washington, D.C.: April 2012), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012327.pdf>.
- **Locale:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “Digest of Education Statistics: 2012,” Table 112 (Washington, D.C.: December 2013), <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/index.asp>.
- **Racial/ethnic concentration:** U.S. Department of Education, “Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups,” Table 74 (Washington, D.C.: July 2010), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010015>.

## Is performance for African American students improving in key academic subjects?

- **NAEP results:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Main NAEP Data Explorer, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>.

## Are schools performing well enough for African American students?

- **NAEP results:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Main NAEP Data Explorer, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>.

## Are schools preparing African American students for college and careers?

- **ACT participation:** ACT, “The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013: National” (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, 2013), <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/cccr13/pdf/CCCR13-NationalReadinessRpt.pdf>.
- **SAT participation:** College Board, “2013 College-Bound Seniors: Total Group Profile Report” (Washington, DC: College Board, 2013), <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/research/2013/TotalGroup-2013.pdf>; College Board, “2009 College-Bound Seniors: Total Group Profile Report,” (Washington, D.C.: College Board, 2009), <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/cbs-2009-national-TOTAL-GROUP.pdf>.
- **AP participation:** College Board, “The 9th Annual AP Report to the Nation” (Washington, D.C.: College Board, 2013), <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/ap/rtn/9th-annual/9th-annual-ap-report-single-page.pdf>;



College Board, “The 7th Annual AP Report to the Nation” (Washington, D.C.: College Board, 2011), [http://apreport.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/downloads/pdfs/AP\\_RTN\\_2011.pdf](http://apreport.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/downloads/pdfs/AP_RTN_2011.pdf).

- **AP underrepresentation:** College Board, “The 10th Annual AP Report to the Nation” (Washington, D.C.: College Board, 2014), <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/ap/rtn/10th-annual/10th-annual-ap-report-to-the-nation-single-page.pdf>.
- **ACT college readiness:** ACT, “The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013: National” (Iowa City, Iowa: ACT, 2013), <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/cccr13/pdf/CCCR13-NationalReadinessRpt.pdf>. College readiness benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject-area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75 percent chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses.

### Are African American students graduating ready for the next step?

- **Graduation rates:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “Public High School Four-Year On-Time Graduation Rates and Event Dropout Rates: School Years 2010-11 and 2011-12: First Look” (Washington, D.C.), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014391.pdf>.

- **ASVAB results:** Christina Theokas, “Shut Out of the Military: Today’s High School Education Doesn’t Mean You’re Ready for Today’s Army” (Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, December 2010), [http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/ASVAB\\_4.pdf](http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/ASVAB_4.pdf).

### Do African American students have adequate opportunities to learn?

- **Algebra I enrollment:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “Eighth-Grade Algebra: Findings from the Eighth-Grade Round of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K)” (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2010), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010016.pdf>.
- **AP potential:** College Board, “The 9th Annual AP Report to the Nation” (Washington, D.C.: College Board, 2013), <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/ap/rtn/9th-annual/9th-annual-ap-report-single-page.pdf>; College Board, “The 10th Annual AP Report to the Nation” (Washington, D.C.: College Board, 2014), <http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/ap/rtn/10th-annual/10th-annual-ap-report-to-the-nation-single-page.pdf>.

- **AP offerings:** Christina Theokas and Reid Saaris, “Finding America’s Missing AP and IB Students” (Washington, D.C.:The Education Trust, June 2013), [http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Missing\\_Students.pdf](http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Missing_Students.pdf).
- **Discipline:** U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, “Civil Rights Data Collection: Snapshot: School Discipline” (Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Education, 2014), <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>.

### Are African American students going to college? And where?

- **Enrollment at 4-year colleges:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “The Digest of Education Statistics 2013,” Table 306.10 (Washington, D.C.: 2014), [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_306.10.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_306.10.asp); U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “The Digest of Education Statistics 2004,” Table 206 (Washington, D.C.: 2005), [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/tables/dt04\\_206.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/tables/dt04_206.asp).
- **Immediate college-going:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “The Digest of Education Statistics 2013,” (Table 302.20), [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_302.20.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_302.20.asp).

- **Enrollment by sector:** Education Trust Analysis of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall enrollment, Fall 2012 (by race) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics), <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>.

### Are African American students graduating from college?

- **6-year and 3-year graduation rates:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2012; Financial Statistics, Fiscal Year 2012; Graduation Rates, Selected Cohorts, 2004-09; and Employees in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2012, First Look” (Washington, D.C.: December 2013), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013183.pdf>.
- **Transfer rates:** Education Trust Analysis of Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS), 04:09 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education).
- **Attainment rates:** U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey 2013, Detailed Tables, Educational Attainment in the United States 2013.

## Are some states, districts, schools, and higher education institutions doing better than others for African American students?

- **Percent proficient/advanced on NAEP by state and by district:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Main NAEP Data Explorer, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>. Only selected states are shown on the chart.
- **George Hall Elementary School demographics:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2010-11.
- **George Hall Elementary School performance:** Alabama State Department of Education, Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT) Results, <http://www03.alsde.edu/Accountability/Accountability.asp>.
- **Arcadia Elementary School demographics and performance:** Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Report Card, <http://iirc.niu.edu/default.aspx>.
- **Elmont Memorial High School demographics and performance:** New York State Education Department, 2012, New York State Report Cards, <https://reportcards.nysed.gov/index.php>.
- **Elmont Memorial High School graduation rate:** New York State Education Department, 2013, Graduation Rate Data, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/pressRelease/20130617/home.html>.
- **Northeastern University:** Joseph Yeado, “Intentionally Successful: Improving Minority Student College Graduation Rates” (Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, July 2013), [http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Intentionally\\_Successful.pdf](http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Intentionally_Successful.pdf). College Results Online, <http://www.collegeresults.org>.
- **Georgia State University:** Mary Nguyen, Erin Ward Bibo, and Jennifer Engle, “Advancing to Completion: Increasing degree attainment by improving graduation rates and closing gaps for African-American students” (Washington, D.C.: The Education Trust, September 2012), [http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Advancing\\_Hisp.pdf](http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Advancing_Hisp.pdf). College Results Online, <http://www.collegeresults.org>.

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