



Little Rock, AR

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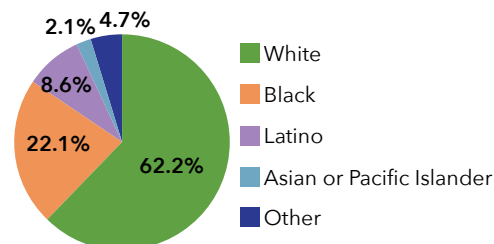
Little Rock, the capital city of Arkansas, is located at the geographic heart of the state on the Arkansas River, and has a population of approximately 200,000.¹ The city's riverside location contributed to its early growth as a major commercial hub. This growth stagnated after Arkansas ceded from the Union just prior to the Civil War, but was resuscitated with the development of transcontinental rail lines during Reconstruction (1865-1877). Today, the local economy relies on the river, where the Port of Little Rock and the McClellan-Kerr Navigation System facilitate regional and national commerce, as well as jobs in the service, retail, and industrial sectors.²

Arkansas has some of the highest income inequality in the country; incomes of the top 5% of households are nearly 15 times as high as the bottom 20% and five times as high as the middle 20%.³ Additionally, the population is significantly segregated by income and to an even larger degree by race.⁴ Black children in Little Rock are almost four times as likely as the city's White children to be living below the poverty line. The outcomes for health illustrate further disparities among youth. Rates of infant mortality in Little Rock are nearly three times as high for Black youth (12.3) as they are for Whites (4.8); and Black youth mortality (54.5) is double that of Whites (26.2).

In 2012-2013, the Little Rock School District served nearly 24,000 students at 48 schools, including four pre-schools, 26 elementary schools, seven middle schools, five high schools, and six academy and non-traditional schools. At the time, the district was comprised predominantly of Black (67%) and Latino students (11%); White students made up only 19% of the overall student population, despite the city's population being majority White.⁵ 9.5% of students are limited English proficient, and over 60% come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Little Rock has had a long, complicated history in the movement towards education equity, receiving national attention for the resistance to school integration

37%
of supports measured through Index

Racial/Ethnic Composition: 2014



U.S. Census Bureau; NHGIS; Woods & Poole Economics, Inc.
Policy Link/PERE National Equity Atlas, nationalequityatlas.org

sixty years ago requiring National Guard troops to protect nine Black students striving to attend a newly-integrated, White-only school.⁶ In 1982, the Little Rock School District filed a lawsuit arguing that two nearby districts were attracting the White students and concentrating Black students within Little Rock, leading three schools in those districts to be placed under court supervision until 2007 for being unconstitutionally segregated.⁷

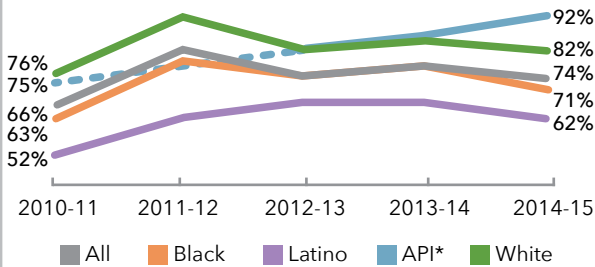
In early 2015, the Arkansas State Board of Education “dissolved Little Rock’s democratically elected local school board, the most racially inclusive and representative of its majority-black constituency in nearly a decade. In making the decision, the state overruled widespread public outcry to take control of the largest school district in the state.” Since the takeover, the state has passed Act 930, which bestows the state education administrator with greater oversight powers, raising concerns from parents over local control and the emergence of charter schools.⁸

THERMOMETER INDICATORS



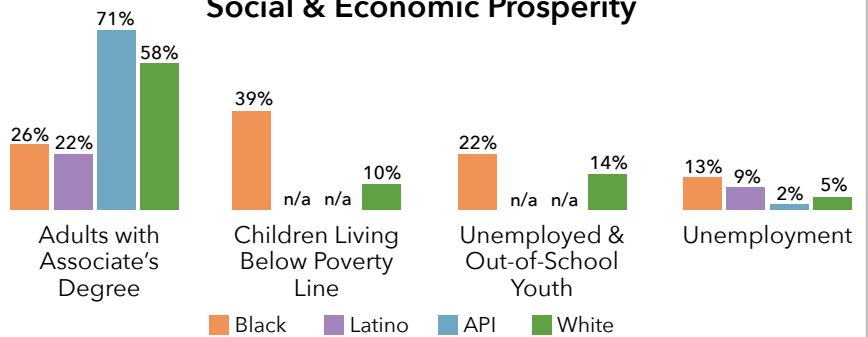
Current conditions for childhood success

5-year Graduation Rates



*Data was not available for API for 2011-12 SY

Social & Economic Prosperity

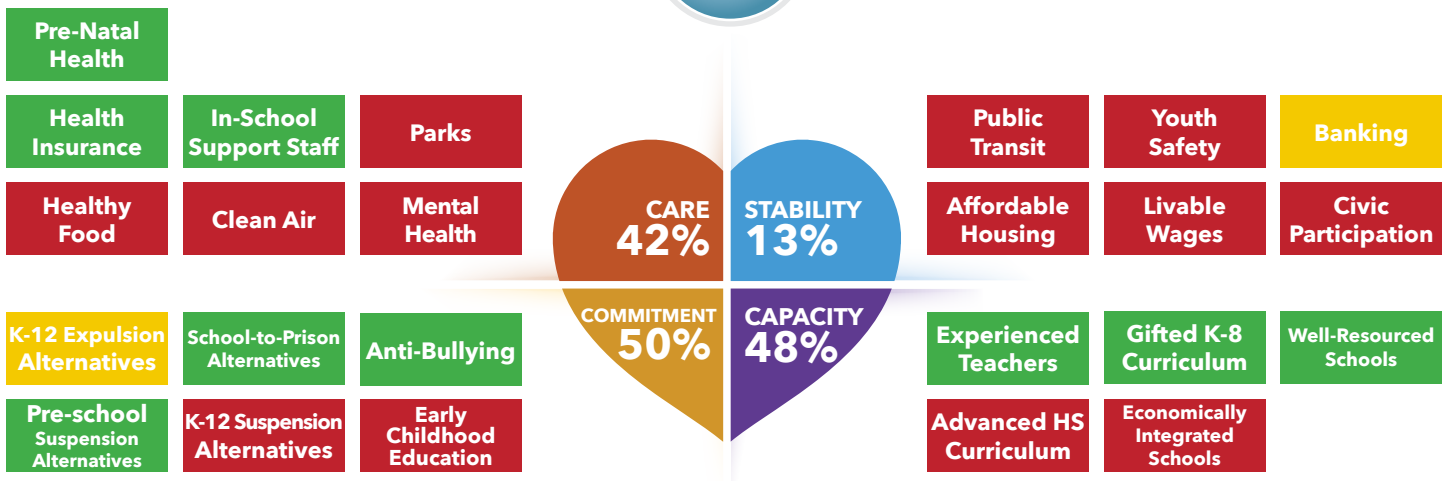


Note: n/a indicates not available

THERMOSTAT INDICATORS



Access to supports that provide all children the opportunity to learn



State of Healthy Living and Learning in Little Rock

Little Rock has 37% of the supports measured through the Index. In terms of learning environments, Little Rock has the strongest level of Capacity measured, with the highest teacher salaries among the 10 cities once adjusted for cost of living (which we are using as a proxy for school resourcing), and relatively high teacher experience with 91% having at least two years of experience. K-8 schools largely offer gifted coursework for students, though there is room to increase access to rigorous curriculum in high schools. While 94% of students attend a school that offers AP/IB, only 29% of students are enrolled in at least one AP/IB class. Little Rock has the lowest levels of support in community Stability compared to the other 10 cities. While Little Rock has relatively lower housing cost burden compared to others (47% of renters spend more than 30% of income on housing), it is still considerably high-

er than the minimum benchmark for points, and is paired with the lowest rates in access to transportation and fair wage employment. Specifically, only 66% of the population lives in proximity to public transit, with Black, Latino and American Indian populations significantly more likely to live far from public transport compared to White populations. Additionally, 31% of Latino and 15% of Black people working full-time have salaries below 200% of the federal poverty line, compared to only 5% of White people. This is exacerbated by the fact that Little Rock had one of the lowest voter turn-outs compared to the other 10 cities in the 2016 general election (66% of registered voters), indicating that elected officials likely do not represent the needs and interests of all children and families.

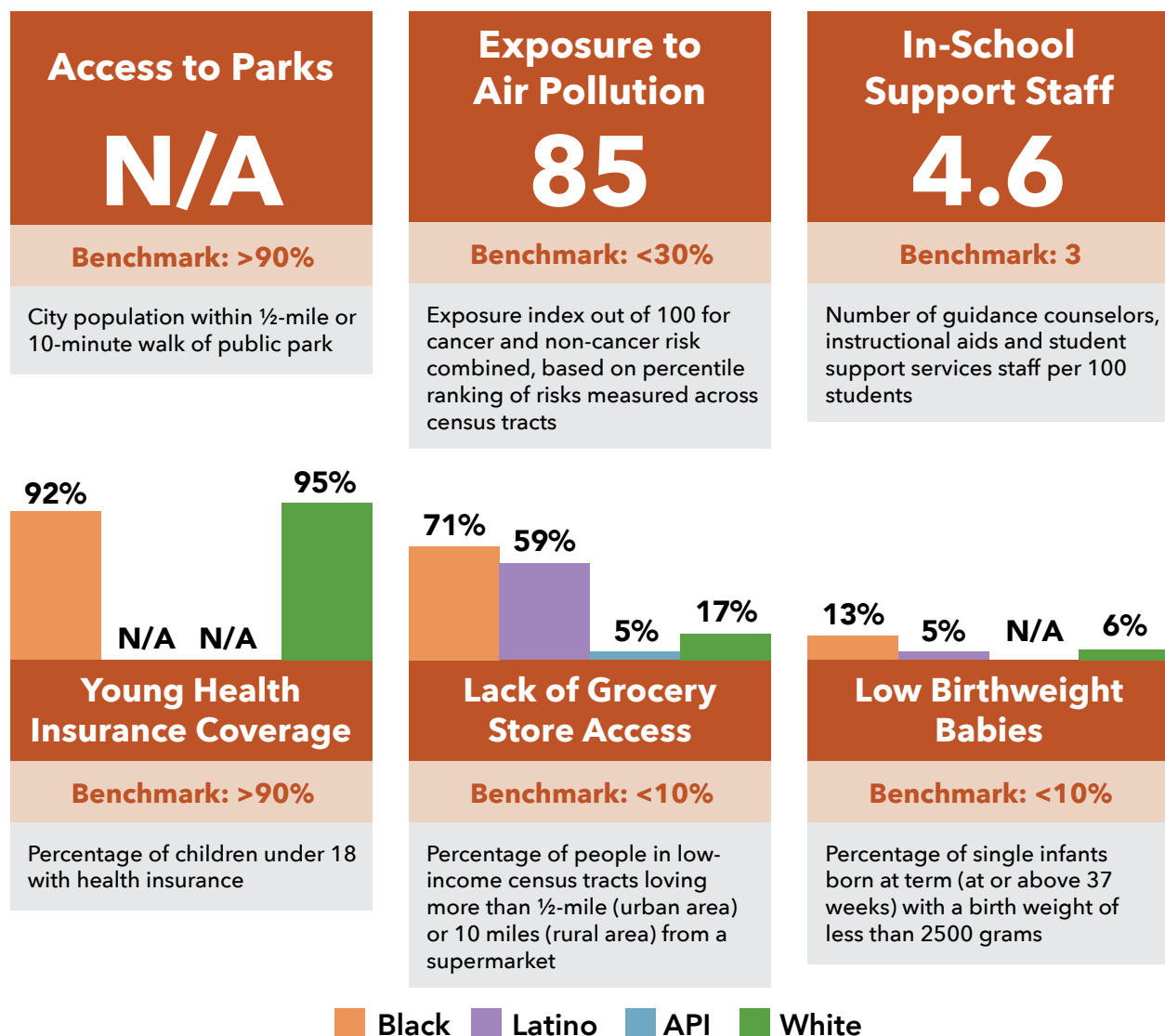
CARE

Little Rock has 42% of the supports measured for *Care*, including access to health insurance, pre-natal care, healthy foods, parks, clean air, and in-school mental and physical health services.

Little Rock has one the highest levels of in-school support staff among the ten cities studied, and has adopted a wide range of programs and school-based models to address health and nutrition outcomes in the city. In particular, the Love Your School Anti-Obesity Initiative started in 2013 has created space within the school day for common-core aligned nutrition curriculum, introduced Cooking Matters programming for parents, and created school gardens for hands on learning about healthy food.⁹

The data suggests that there are still gaps in community-based supports that can contribute to health and other related outcomes. For example, access to grocery stores is particularly low

for low-income individuals, affecting ability to attain healthy, affordable food. Specifically, 41% of low income individuals do not live in proximity to a grocery store – though Black and Latino individuals are impacted significantly more than White individuals (71% and 59% of Black and Latino low-income individuals respectively lack access to grocery stores compared to 17% of low income White individuals). There is also notable racial differences in low birthweight babies, which could suggest differences in access to pre-natal healthcare and education. Healthy physical environments are also important to community health outcomes – Little Rock has one of the highest levels of air pollution exposure among the 10 studied, and data was not available on public park access, so it did not earn points for either indicator.

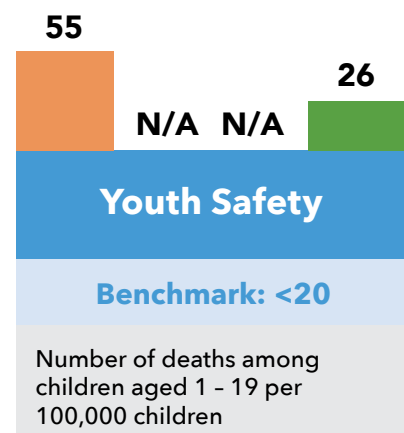
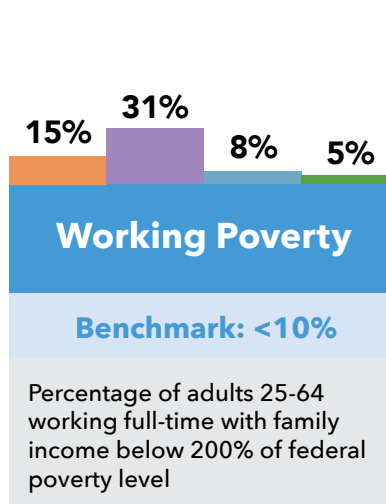
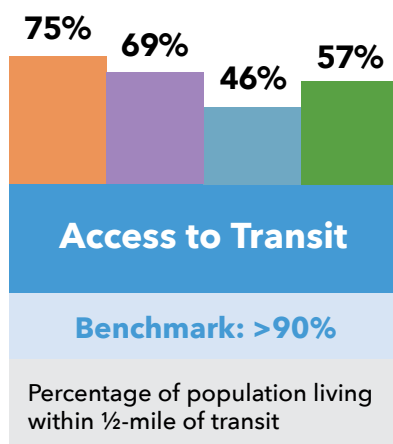
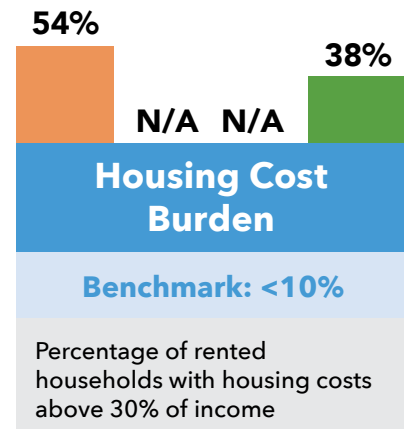
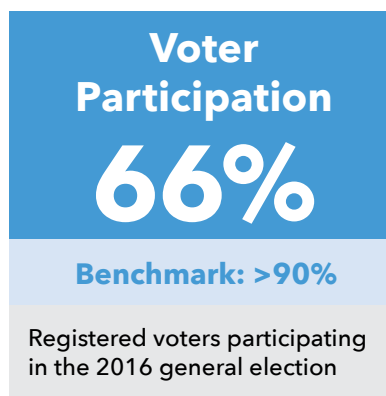
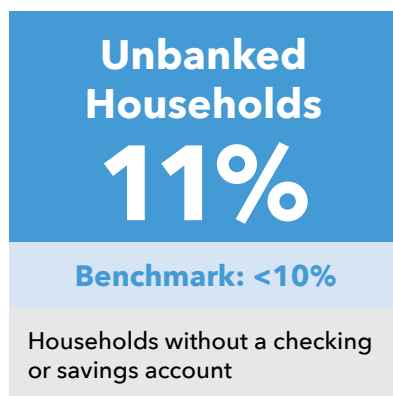


STABILITY

Little Rock has 13% of the supports needed to provide children with *Stability*, measured by housing affordability, transit access, child safety, civic engagement, working poverty and financial security.

The instability measured through these indicators is strongly linked with an enduring struggle with poverty in the state and across the South. Families in Little Rock are facing challenges to make ends meet, with high levels of working poverty, housing cost burden and low access to transportation. Overall, 11% of the population working full time bring in incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. Latino families in particular are dramatically affected by low wages, with 31% of full-time Latino workers earning income less than 200% of the federal poverty line. Low wages are exacerbated by high housing cost burden (renters paying more than 30% of income for housing), which affects nearly half the population of renters. Black renters are more deeply affected by high housing cost burden compared to White renters, and the history of discrimina-

tory housing policies in Little Rock and across the country has left a legacy of racial inequity in homeownership and intergenerational wealth that have never been appropriately corrected and therefore continues to affect community stability today. In addition to housing discrimination, public transportation has historically been designed to support neighborhood segregation, and in Little Rock access to public transportation is low making it difficult to access different neighborhoods without a car. These factors likely contribute to issues of community safety, where rates of death among young people are incredibly high compared to most other cities studied. Death among White youth is notably higher than any other city studied, though Black youth in Little Rock are dying at double the rate of their White counter-parts. The incredibly low levels of community supports for Stability in Little Rock are likely affecting school outcomes significantly and creating environments in which youth do not have a fair and substantive opportunity to learn.



Black Latino API White

COMMITMENT

Little Rock has 50% of the supports needed to demonstrate *Commitment*, as measured by access to early childhood education, positive discipline practices, anti-bullying efforts and ending policies that create a school-to-prison pipeline.

While the use of expulsion appears to be low, use of suspension is the highest of the cities studied, with one third of all students receiving at least one suspension in the 2013-14 school year, which can reduce those students' time in classrooms and set them on a track to failing classes and at risk of drop out. Black students in particular are suspended at astronomically high rates – 43% of Black students received at least one suspension. According to Arkansas Advocates, Arkansas school districts have great flexibility in school discipline strategies, and opportunities are available at the district and state level to shift from punitive discipline to restorative justice practices.¹⁰

Since many cities report zero instances of school bullying, it is a positive sign to see that Little Rock does have a number of bullying and harassment allegations because it indicates an ability for students to raise and report these negative experiences. However, more data is needed to better understand how these issues are addressed and how well the school system is doing at creating an inclusive culture free of bullying. On the other hand, the school district did not report any instances of students being referred to law enforcement. It is unclear if this is due to failure to report or a positive practice.

Lastly, early childhood education participation is relatively high compared to other cities across the country at 61%, but given the importance of ECE participation in students' long-term performance we see 90% as an ideal benchmark, which is still considerably higher than rates Little Rock achieves today.

School Bullying Reports

79

Benchmark: >0

Number of bullying or harassment allegations on basis of sex, race, color, national origin or disability among all K-12 students

Preschool Suspensions

0

Benchmark: <10

Number of preschool children receiving at least 1 out-of-school suspension

Students Referred to Law Enforcement

0

Reported

Benchmark: <50

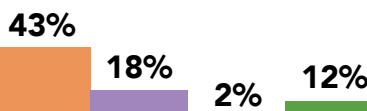
Number of children receiving at least 1 referral to law enforcement

61%

Early Childhood Education Participation

Benchmark: >90%

Percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in school



School Suspensions

Benchmark: <10%

Percentage of K-12 students receiving at least 1 suspension

10

Total School Expulsions

Benchmark: <10

Total number of K-12 students expelled & percent by racial group

Black Latino API White

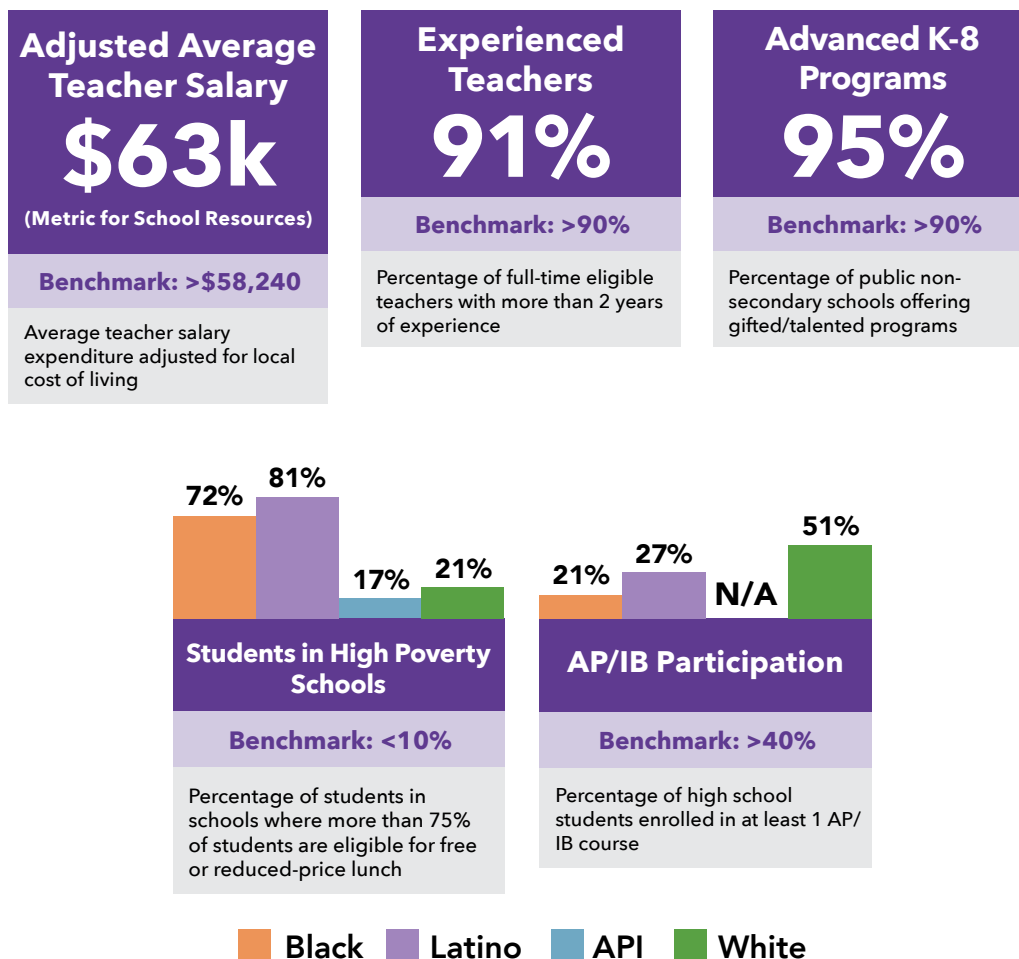
CAPACITY

Little Rock has 48% of the supports for *Capacity*, measured by access to challenging curricula and experienced teachers and integrated, well-resourced schools. Among the cities studied, Little Rock scored highest on *Capacity*. One of the city's greatest assets in this arena is the school district's strong compensation for teachers, at \$60,000 on average, equating to an average \$63,000 nationally when adjusted for cost of living. This high rate is likely due to a combination of factors, including: length of teaching career and relatively high entry wage offered within the district.

K-8 schools largely offer gifted/talented programming for students and the vast majority of High School student (94%) go to a school that offers AP/IB. Still, there are considerable gaps in enrollment in AP/IB courses based on race, with only 21% of Black High School students and 27% of Latino students enrolled in at least 1 AP/IB course compared to 51% of White students. Challenging curricula are linked with postsecondary success, and are critical to ensure that all students that have the potential to succeed in an advanced class are enrolled. Research by College Board found universally that there were large gaps in students of color that have the aptitude to succeed in advanced courses based on PSAT scores and the number that are enrolled, suggest-

ing that the gap is not about ability but rather not having the encouragement and mentorship to enroll in more rigorous courses.

As with other cities, Little Rock also needs to address high levels of economic and racial segregation in schools to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn. Overall, 62% of students attend high poverty schools where 75% or more of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. When disaggregated by race, the majority of Black and Latino students attend high poverty schools (72% and 81% respectively) while a minority of Asian and White students are affected by this. Poverty affects childhood trauma and toxic stress, which can affect students' physical, mental and behavioral health, and require individualized supports to ensure those children have the opportunity to learn. When schools have a mix of students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, teachers and administrators can more easily address the individual needs of students experiencing poverty, but schools where the vast majority of students are experiencing poverty often do not have the time and resources required to meet the needs of those students, and as a result students in those schools do not have a fair and equal opportunity to learn.





LOVING CITIES CALL TO ACTION

Across the country, we see powerful examples of organizations and community members taking steps to provide systems of supports that give all children an opportunity to learn. While each city may identify their own priorities, there are four key things that all cities can do to strengthen their system of supports. These are outlined below along with promising models and approaches to learn and build from.

1. Increase Adoption of Models for Delivering a System of **CARE** to all Children and Families

To address childhood trauma and other mental and physical health needs, cities need to equip each and every public school to be a hub for assessing and meeting healthcare and other resource needs. Models like **Communities in Schools** and **City Connects** equip schools with staff and tools to provide a system for addressing individual student and family needs at scale. For more information on CIS's model go to: www.communitiesinschools.org/our-model/.

For more information on City Connects model go to: www.bc.edu/bc-web/schools/lsoe/sites/cityconnects/our-approach.html.

In addition to school models that refer students to providers, **School-Based Health Alliance** is a network of local, state and national nonprofits working to “complement the work of school nurses by providing a readily accessible referral site for students who are without a medical home or in need of more comprehensive services such as primary, mental, oral, or vision health care.”¹¹

SBHA and its state affiliates help schools establish and effectively run school-based health centers. For more information on SBHA affiliates, go to www.sbh4all.org/about/state-affiliates/.

2. Elevate Policies and Practices That Integrate Communities and Schools to Increase Community **STABILITY** and Equitable Allocation of Community Resources

To address community and school segregation, we need to build mainstream understanding of the history of policies in the U.S. that created segregation and wealth inequity and come to terms with the damage those policies continue to have on communities today. In his book *The Color of Law*, Richard Rothstein recognizes that we as a society have largely “forgotten the history of how our government segregated America,” and schools widely teach curricula that has been

white-washed, failing to educate the public on our history of oppression and de jure racial segregation.

The Color of Law outlines several examples of affirming policies that could be adopted if there were greater political will to reverse the damage of past policies and supports rooted in racism. One key policy change communities can adopt is inclusionary zoning policy, which can “require housing developers to set aside

a portion of the homes they build at below-market rates, and reserve the right for the public housing commission to purchase one-third of those units to operate as subsidized public housing.”¹²

Reforming the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program can also lead to greater community integration.

Increasing subsidies to be on par with housing costs in more affluent neighborhoods and increasing the number of vouchers allocated to serve all families that have been damaged by historically racist policies would be a large step in beginning to heal and repair communities.

3. Increase **COMMITMENT** to All Children Through Increased Early Childhood Education Opportunities and Greater Training for Teachers and Administrators in Anti-Racist Practices and a Culture of Inclusion and Healing

Federal programs that provide access to early childhood education need increased funding to meet the scale of need that exists.

Racial opportunity gaps are not just about gaps in access to resources; they also result from unintentional differences in the ways adults and other students treat children of color.

These “invisible forces” are hard to measure, but are becoming clearer through research from groups like GLSEN and Georgetown Law Center that put data to the implicit biases and harassment that students, teachers, administrators and other adults within the system inflict against girls and boys of color. For recommendations on practices for increasing inclusion and reducing bullying in schools see GLSEN’s report at: www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/TeasingtoTortment%202015%20FINAL%20PDF%5B1%5D_0.pdf

For recommendations on policies and practices to address bullying without using zero tolerance approaches that are more harmful than helpful to school safety and culture, go to www.schottfoundation.org/resources/two-wrongs-dont-make-right-why-zero-tolerance-not-solution-bullying.

The Communities for Just Schools Fund (CJSF) is a leader in strengthening the organizing infrastructure in local communities by giving grants to local and regional groups that organize young people, parents and caregivers, educators and other community members to advocate on behalf of students impacted by exclusionary school discipline practices. For individuals and foundations interested in contributing to local organizing, CJSF shares several ways to get involved: www.cjsfund.org/get-involved

4. Deepen Public and Private Commitment to Increasing **CAPACITY** of Public Schools

According to research by the Education Law Center and Rutgers Graduate School of Education, states are largely failing to invest adequately and fairly to provide all students with the resources and supports that they need to succeed.

For data and resources to advocate for fair school funding, go to: www.schoolfundingfairness.org/is-school-funding-fair

Endnotes

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- 10 Derlikowski, J. (2013, February). Keeping kids in class: Fixing racial disparities in school discipline. Arkansas Advocates for Children & Families. Retrieved from <http://www.aradvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/Keeping-Kids-In-Class-February-2013.pdf>.
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- 12 Rothstein, R. (2017 May). *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*.