



KIDS FORWARD



Race to Equity 10-Year Report: Dane County

EDUCATION

Full report at kidsforward.org/race-to-equity.

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This research was funded by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Inc., and we thank them for their support; however, the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author(s) alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

METHODOLOGY & APPROACH

Quantitative data has been weaponized against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) for centuries and used “to reinforce oppressive systems that result in divestment and often inappropriate and harmful policies.”¹ The Race to Equity 10 Year report strives to capture both quantitative and qualitative data in a way that

is community centered and driven. It is not Kids Forward’s intention to, and we strongly caution readers against, perpetuating harmful data practices which result in the erasure of Black voices, ignored lived experience, and harm against BIPOC communities.

“Our experience is data. It’s just as important.”

- Alia Stevenson, Health, Racial & Social Justice Change Agent

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data for these report chapters are primarily publicly available data from government sources, such as the U.S. Census (American Communities Survey 5-Year estimates) and various Dane County departments and Wisconsin state agencies, with some data provided directly to Kids Forward. The years of data shown had been chosen to primarily present a recent pre-pandemic snapshot of experiences in Dane County, as well as a historical context for some indicators. Where appropriate and available for analysis, early pandemic data is provided, such as 2020-21 academic data. Data for Black residents² will often be presented for comparison with data for white residents (where possible, white residents

who are not also Latiné.³) Data comparisons by race are used to highlight whether there are racial disparities, not to suggest that white residents’ experiences are the standard. How race and ethnicity is defined for each indicator is controlled by each data source, and therefore cannot be standardized across all indicators. For additional comparisons, state and national level data may also be shown along with data for Dane County. Comparisons across state and national data allow us to understand how experiences in Dane County may or may not be unique. Details for each indicator, as well as data sources, are outlined in the endnotes.

Qualitative Data

Through interviews and focus groups, current and former Dane County residents described their social reality in their own words. This qualitative data qualified the quantitative data, helping to make sense of how different Dane County residents experience racial disparities. Qualitative data was collected by Kids Forward staff via (1) 28 semi-structured individual interviews from October 2019 to September 2023 that were conducted in person, over the phone, or virtually and (2) one

focus group in September 2023. Participants brought a wealth of lived expertise as community health workers, doulas, non-profit CEOs, attorneys, parents, program managers, school principals, and more to the interviews. Interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and story banked. Qualitative data is presented as quotes throughout this chapter. Pseudonyms were used to maintain participant anonymity when appropriate and/or requested.

INTRODUCTION

When early care and education (ECE) is accessible, affordable and culturally relevant, it provides a space for children to learn and develop during their most formative years. Kindergarten is too late to catch learning and development disparities, which begin long before K-12 education. Unfortunately, the ECE infrastructure as we know it has been broken for far too long. The business model is unsustainable and harmful to children who need high-quality care while their parents work or attend school.

ECE in Dane County is wildly unaffordable for Dane County's Black households, costing those earning the median income more than one third of their pay. Simultaneously, child care providers operate on razor thin profit margins, because their revenue is almost completely dependent on caregivers' ability to pay tuition. Even though revenue is stretched to cover staff low wages, ECE worker wages are still far lower than competing industries. Substantial, sustainable investment is needed in Dane County's ECE infrastructure.

Dane County public school districts—most rated as meeting or exceeding expectations according to the Wisconsin Department of Instruction—are failing to meet the needs of their Black students. Due to funding challenges, most school districts in Dane County report experiencing staff shortages, overcrowded classes, non-competitive staff salaries, overdue renovations, and a lack of available mental health services for students.

Dane County public schools have a persistent history of suspending more Black students than white students despite their substantially smaller population. Unfortunately, many Black students in Dane County and nationwide are experiencing adultification and push out. As a result, Black students are perceived as less innocent, older, and stronger than they are. Adultification is particularly dangerous because it puts Black children at risk of biased treatment from adults. Without a commitment to addressing the many ways in which anti-Blackness and racism lead to harm in schools, Black students and those with disabilities are most harmed.

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

When early care and education (ECE) is accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant, it provides a space for children to learn and develop during their most formative years. Research on the first three to five years of a child's life consistently shows that nurturing, language-rich environments, and supportive adults during early childhood shape future academic and life success.^{4,5} A child's first five years of life are described as a period of rapid development where children's brains are most

flexible and quickly growing.⁶ Kindergarten is too late. Research also shows that learning and development disparities begin long before K-12 education, when they are usually recognized and discussed.⁷ Because Black women have consistently been more likely to be involved in the formal labor force than women of all other ethnicities,⁸ high-quality ECE is paramount for Black children and families.

“Investing in early childhood, to me, [you get] the biggest bang for your buck in terms of parenting and family stability.”
- Black Dane County woman, non-profit leader

Child Care Availability

Dane County's supply of regulated ECE is insufficient to meet the needs of families. A 2019 analysis estimated that there were 27,830 children in Dane County who needed child care, but there was a supply of only 19,750 regulated child care slots.⁹ This lack of supply of regulated child care slots represents a gap of about a third of the potential need (32.5%). The child care availability gap in Dane County was similar to the gap identified statewide of 31.2%.¹⁰ The economic burden of this child care availability gap on households, businesses, and tax revenues in Dane County was estimated to be between \$218.4 million dollars and \$330.8 million dollars every year.¹¹ While the potential need may be an overestimate due to unregulated care arrangements with friends and family, more child care providers are needed to support working families in Dane County, especially those with non-standard work hours.

When choosing child care providers, Black families reported that providers within their communities who offer their children a smaller setting, a nurturing environment, and individual attention were key indicators of quality.¹² These values make regulated home-based child care providers (often referred to as family providers to distinguish them from group child care center settings) an essential and attractive resource for many Black families. A 2020 analysis found that family child care providers had more racially diverse staff/owners than center-based child care settings,¹³ but the number of these family child care providers dropped by 68% over the past decade.¹⁴ An investment in the stability and wages of home-based child care providers is, therefore, an investment in Black children and families, families with low incomes, and those with non-standard work hours.

Cost of Care

ECE remains inaccessible and unaffordable for many families, too often costing low- and moderate-income families more than 20% of their annual income.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the ECE infrastructure as we know it has been broken for far too long and contributes greatly to economic insecurity and challenges in the workforce.¹⁶ The cost of ECE is a significant barrier for low- and moderate-income households. One reason for the high cost of ECE is that due to staff-to-child ratios (requirements on how many staff are needed in each classroom for different ages), tuition may not cover the true cost of care.¹⁷ Providers understand that child care is a major expense for families, but operate on razor thin profit margins, unable to raise tuition in an effort to avoid pricing many families out.

Black families with low and moderate incomes in Dane County are especially burdened by the cost of child care. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ECE is considered affordable when it costs families no more than 7% of their annual income. On average, child care costs are over one third (35.9%) of median income for Dane County's Black households, but only one sixth (16.9%) of median income for Dane County's white households.¹⁸ For an infant, child care costs are on average nearly half (48.0%) of median income for Dane County's Black households, and about one fifth (22.7%) of median income for Dane County's white households.

Early Care & Education Wages

ECE professionals have one of the most important roles in young children's lives, but wages for this sector do not reflect the essential nature of this work. The Wisconsin Early Childhood Association (WECA) asserts that ECE professionals are "woefully underpaid" and often lack essential benefits like health insurance. Wages for child care workers, when ranked against all occupations by annual pay, are nearly in the bottom percentile.¹⁹ The median hourly wage for ECE professionals in 2021 in Madison was \$11.48 an hour, \$13.63 an hour in South Central Wisconsin's rural areas, and \$11.57 an hour statewide.²⁰ For home-based ECE providers

in Wisconsin, the median hourly wage was just \$7.46 in 2020, barely over the federal minimum wage.²¹ Employment in ECE has been called a "pathway to poverty," pushing many early educators to rely on public support programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or "food stamps") or Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF).²² Despite these low wages, ECE teachers are likely to be highly educated and/or highly skilled.²³

DANE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

District Rankings

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) releases yearly report cards which rank school districts based on four areas: student achievement, academic growth, target group outcomes, and post-secondary preparation. Most Dane County school districts are meeting or exceeding DPI's expectations;²⁴ however, experiences for Black students do not seem aligned with these high rankings.

Though the majority of public school districts in Dane County meet or exceed DPI expectations according to the report card

standards, they have also been experiencing challenges with ongoing operational expenses due to state-imposed funding limits (despite one-time COVID relief funding).²⁵ Districts reported needing additional funding to remedy issues such as severe staff shortages, overcrowded classes, non-competitive staff salaries, needed renovations, and a lack of available mental health services for students. Dane County school districts, and those statewide, have begun to rely on voter referendums to secure urgently needed funding.

“Our students of color are not meeting standards and proficiency levels, yet, [school districts] are still meeting standards. How?... What are the metrics? We are not meeting the expectations as a school since we’re not doing justice for our kids, especially our students of color.”

- Kyree Brooks

Staff

Hiring and retaining Black teachers is important for Black student success. Over the past decade, about 10% of students in Dane County public schools have been Black,²⁶ but just 4% of Dane County’s public school district employees are Black.²⁷ Researchers describe schools nationwide as a demographic mismatch for Black students, where nearly half of students are of color, but less than a quarter of teachers are people of color.²⁸ Further, research has shown that this demographic mismatch can drive inequality in educational outcomes.²⁹

Students must have teachers who look like,

understand, and believe in them. Teacher expectations of students can become self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, researchers found that Black teachers are more likely than white teachers to strongly endorse Black students, raising their chances of completing college.³⁰ Having a Black teacher for one year in elementary school has been shown to raise long-term educational attainment for Black boys, especially those from low-income households, including increasing rates of high school graduation and college enrollment.³¹

Teacher experience matters greatly for student success as well. Teachers in Dane County

Public Schools averaged 14 total years of experience and were paid an average salary of \$56,376 in 2021-2022 (but salaries ranged as low as \$39,164 and as high as \$81,488).³² In recent years, DPI has begun to identify schools that have high percentages of inexperienced teachers (or ineffective and out-of-field teachers³³) in schools that disproportionately

serve students of color. In the 2018-2019 school year, 17 schools in Dane County were identified as having this issue (out of 169 total schools), 17 in 2019-2020, and 16 in 2020-2021.³⁴ Often, the same schools were identified year after year and are also the same schools that disproportionately serve students of color.

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS

Standardized tests have been instruments of racism and bias since their inception.³⁵ The universal accuracy and reliability of standardized tests for all students is widely debated. Since they are designed as a measurement tool for student competency, standardized tests should be analyzed with the understanding that because they are written with underlying biases, they themselves have acted as a barrier to Black student proficiency. Standardized test scores have penalized schools that serve Black, Brown, and low-income students, and disproportionately misplaced Black children into special education.³⁶

We both acknowledge the limitations of standardized assessments themselves, and stress that their results show that Wisconsin is failing to educate and prepare Black children for the world and the workforce.

Despite these limitations, the standardization of these assessments can allow us to track changes over time, and to make local and state comparisons.³⁷ The annual standardized assessments used in the state of Wisconsin have changed over the years, and proficiency results should be interpreted with the understanding that changes over time may be a result of the use of different assessment tools.³⁸ The number of students who are expected to participate in these exams but who are opted out of participation by parents and guardians can also influence the representativeness of results from these assessments. In the absence of more years of representative data that can create a fuller picture of the ways students' lives and learning may have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, we include assessment data up through the 2018-2019 in this section.

“Some of those white teachers don’t want to be called racist. So sometimes that response is: I’m not going to hold *that* kid to the standard that I should, that I would expect, ordinarily. So I think we need to hold the bar higher, because *our* kids are going to rise or fall to the expectations that we put out there for them.”
- Black Dane County mother

Fourth Grade English Language Arts (Reading) Proficiency

Some parents, educators and scholars suggest that the use of phonics instruction,³⁹ the presence of culturally relevant teaching and books,⁴⁰ and even stress and trauma⁴¹ are some of the factors that impact children's ability to read by fourth grade. According to the Kids Count Data Center, proficiency in reading by the end of fourth grade is a crucial marker

in a child's educational development.⁴² Reading is crucial not just for English Language Arts (ELA), but also for success in other subjects. Beginning in fourth grade, children use reading to learn other subjects; therefore, mastery of reading becomes a critical component in their ability to keep up academically.⁴³

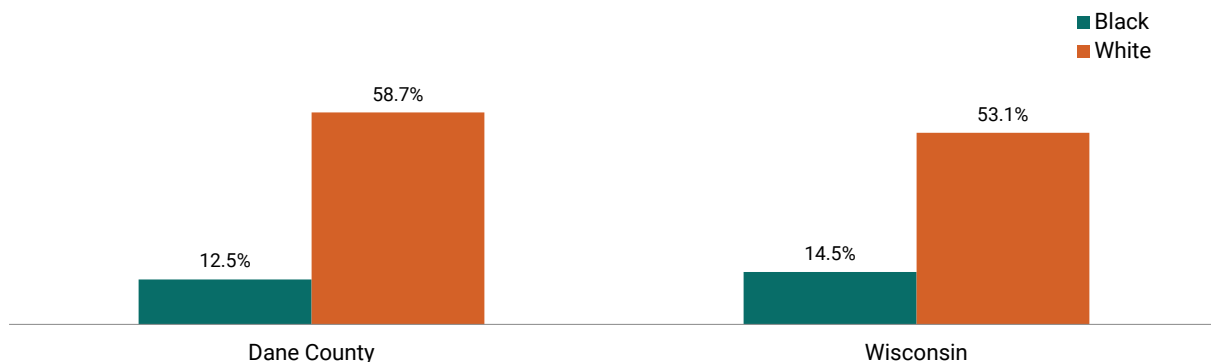
"It's hard to learn when you're dealing with trauma. We're still going to need to work on that if we actually want to improve grade school reading scores... They're dealing with a ton of stuff."

- Black Dane County man, educator

An average of 12.5% of Black fourth graders in Dane County scored at or above proficient in English Language Arts⁴⁴ during the three years

prior to COVID-19 (2016-2017 to 2018-2019), compared to an average of 58.7% of white fourth graders in Dane County.^{45, 46}

Average Fourth Grade English Language Arts Proficiency, 2016-2017 to 2018-2019

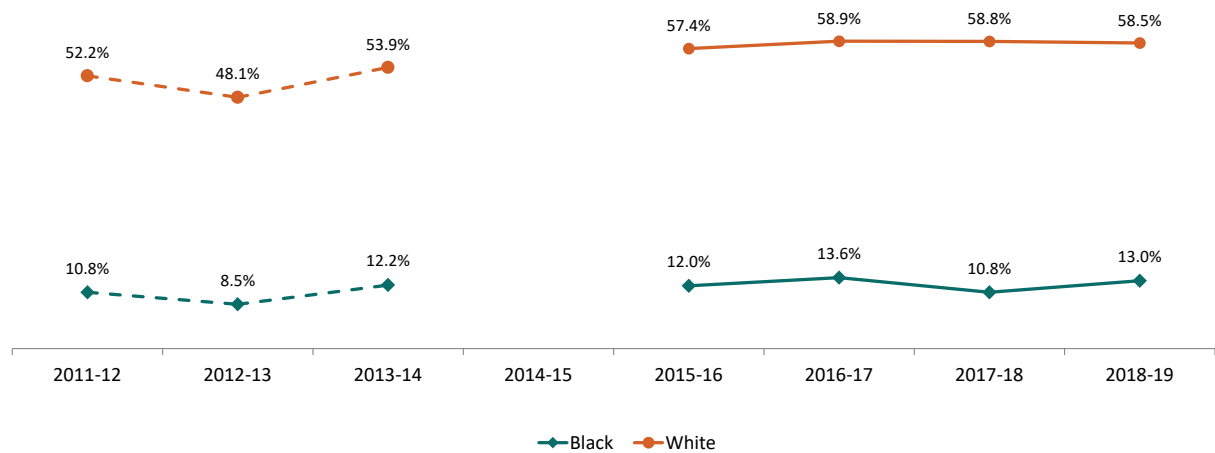


Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.

The racial disparities in ELA proficiency statewide was also quite severe, but not as extreme as in Dane County from 2016-2017 to 2018-2019.⁴⁷ Average English Language Arts proficiency levels were lower in Dane County (12.5%) than in Wisconsin (14.5%) among Black fourth graders on average across the three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁸ However, among white fourth graders, average

proficiency levels on these assessments in the three years prior to the pandemic were higher in Dane County (58.7%) than in Wisconsin (53.1%). Racial disparities in English Language Arts proficiency levels on statewide assessments between Black and white fourth graders have remained large and persisted over many years in both Dane County and Wisconsin.

Trends in Dane County Fourth Grade English Language Arts Proficiency



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students. Dashes indicate data from the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam, solid line indicates data from the Forward Exam.



Overall, Black students in Dane County are less likely to score at proficient levels in English Language Arts or other reading assessments than their peers statewide and nationally. At a national level, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessments, given every other year, showed that 14% of Black fourth graders and 44% of white fourth

graders in the U.S. scored at proficient levels in reading in 2019.⁴⁹ Further, Wisconsin had the largest Black-white disparity for reading scores of any state in the nation in 2019 on this test.⁵⁰ While different assessments produce different results, these data help provide a general context for Dane County's assessment results in comparison with the rest of the country.

Eighth Grade Math Proficiency

In addition to the importance of math in maintaining a household, youth will enter a rapidly changing workforce where technology and math skills are highly sought after. Math proficiency correlates to increase both the

likelihood of college completion and higher earnings over time. The attainment of math skills are linked more towards students' attitude towards math, which is heavily connected to their relationships with teachers

and the school environment. Research has shown that a combination of perceptions of belonging,⁵¹ the classroom disciplinary environment,⁵² course sequencing,⁵³ and culturally relevant lessons⁵⁴ are particularly important for math skill attainment among Black students.

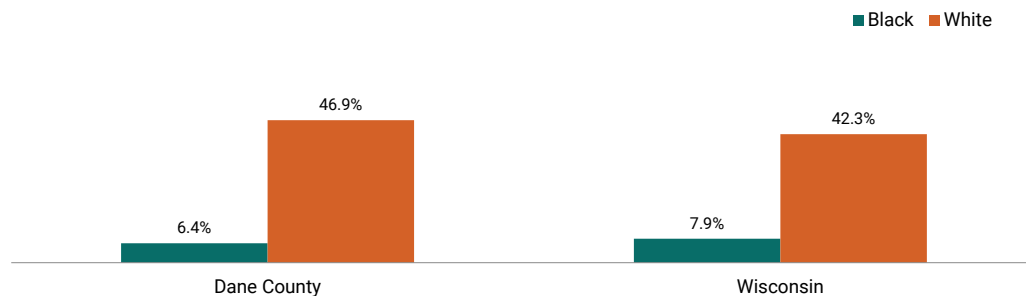
As math proficiency levels in Dane County

were slowly increasing since 2016-2017 among Black eighth graders, they were slowly decreasing among white eighth graders. An average of 6.4% of Black eighth graders in Dane County scored proficient at math levels during the three years prior to COVID-19 (2016-2017 to 2018-2019), compared to an average of 46.9% of white eighth graders in Dane County.⁵⁵

“There’s not enough programming to keep kids engaged and get them prepared, and that’s when I see kids getting into trouble. In the school-based systems, I’d like to see how they can expand more to cater to the kids instead of making the kids cater to the system.”

- Black Dane County community leader

Average Eighth Grade Math Proficiency, 2016-2017 to 2018-2019



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.



Across the three years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, average math proficiency levels were slightly lower among Black eighth graders in Dane County (6.4%) than in Wisconsin (7.9%) on these tests.⁵⁶ However, among white eighth graders, average math proficiency levels were higher in Dane County

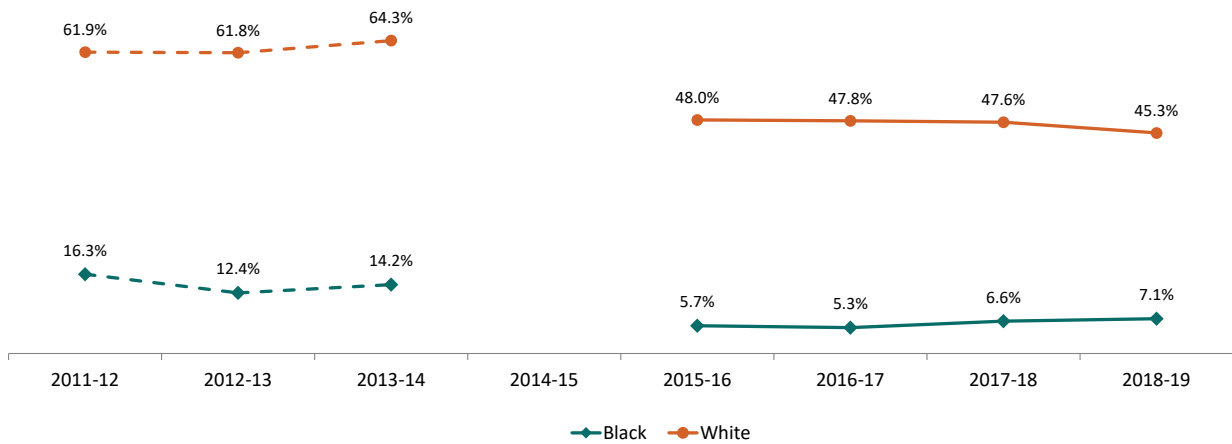
(46.9%) than Wisconsin (42.3%) during the same period. As with English Language Arts, racial disparities in math proficiency levels on statewide assessments between Black and white eighth graders have remained large and persisted over many years in both Dane County and Wisconsin.



Mentoring Positives

Mentoring Positives is committed to building strong, trusting relationships, positives attitudes, and life skills in youth through mentoring, athletics and social entrepreneurship. Proud residents of the Darbo-Worthington Neighborhood on Madison's east side, Mentoring Positives hosts the MP Leader Academy which is "based on the philosophy that 'The Hook is the Key': engage youth with activities they love, encourage them to show compassion and build positive relationships with others, then practice leadership skills and display their continued social and emotional learning." Mentoring Positives also hosts MP University targeted to youth who are involved, or are on the verge of involvement, with the juvenile justice system. Through MP University youth participants are exposed to the Developmental Assets curriculum which helps them develop "a strong sense of self through social/emotional learning, building resiliency and encouraging good decision-making." What began as an east-side gardening project where youth participants gardened tomatoes and peppers to create salsa, turned into "Off the Block" salsa. This salsa helped to develop participant's social entrepreneurship ventures, keep them "off the block" and engaged in meaningful activities, and led to a partnership with UW Extension where youth participants developed "[Off the Block Pizza](#)." Support Mentoring Positives by donating at mentoringpositives.org/donate and ordering "Off the Block" pizza and salsa at offtheblock.store.

Trends in Dane County Eighth Grade Math Proficiency



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students. Dashes indicate data from the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam, solid line indicates data from the Forward Exam.



Black students in Dane County are substantially less likely to score proficient in eighth grade math than their white peers statewide and nationally. At a national level, 14% of Black eighth graders and 44% of white eighth graders scored at proficient levels in math in 2019 on the National Assessment

of Educational Progress assessments.⁵⁷ Further, Wisconsin had the largest Black-white disparity for math scores of any state in the nation in 2019.⁵⁸

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Pupil Services

Emotional and mental health issues, as well as school climate issues, can create substantial barriers to learning. In recent years, students in Dane County schools, like many across Wisconsin and across the U.S., have been struggling with the conflict of increased needs for mental health care and limited access to mental health services. Pupil services are the counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers who provide the interventions and services necessary to support overall student development. According to the Wisconsin Department of Instruction, pupil services are in schools to support students' academic,

career, and personal / social areas, as well as to address barriers to learning.⁵⁹

Profession	Recommended Staff-to-Student Ratios ⁶⁰
School Counselors	250:1
School Nurses	According to health & safety needs of the school
School Psychologists	500:1
School Social Workers	250:1

Similar to the importance of Black teachers, experiencing support from Black pupil services staff is valuable for Black students. In the 2021-2022 school year, 3 of the 16 school districts in Dane County employed Black staff in pupil services roles. Collectively, there were around 11 full-time (FTE) pupil services employees (11.2 FTE positions), which was 1.8% of the total FTE positions for school districts in Dane County.⁶¹ School counselors are necessary to help address students' mental health and emotional needs, and studies have found that these staff can have a positive impact on attendance, graduation, and school discipline outcomes.⁶² Dane County school districts have not provided

students with the ratio of school counselors recommended by DPI and professional organizations. In 2020-2021, Dane County school districts had a ratio of 467 students for every 1 school counselor, almost double the number of students per counselor in the recommended ratio.⁶³

In Wisconsin, the school counselor ratio was better than in Dane County (387 students for every 1 school counselor) in 2020-2021, but still far from the recommendation.⁶⁴ In Wisconsin high schools serving predominantly students of color, access to school counselors was found to be more limited than in schools predominantly serving white students in 2015-2016.⁶⁵

“We want social workers, counselors, teachers, nurses and other school personnel that are actually in the school to like help advocate for the kid.

Right? NOT just call the police.”

- Black mother, non-profit leader

Black Girl Magic Educational Services

Black Girl Magic Educational Services Inc. celebrates and inspires intelligent Black girls. In 2018, the first Black Girl Magic Educational Conference hosted 80 Black students in partnership with Natural Circles of Support. The conference offered participants “inspirational guest speakers, dynamic breakout sessions, a lively DJ, fitness classes and many more activities that affirm the girls’ sense of pride in their culture and confidence in their intelligence, culture and abilities.” The annual Black Girl Magic Conference has grown substantially since 2018, now hosting over 600 girls. Black Girl Magic also offers year-long programming in partnership with local organizations including swimming lessons at the YMCA, affinity groups within schools, Melanated Mindfulness Summer Camp, family enrichment events, monthly Black Girl Magic Saturdays, a Youth Advisory Board, and more. Support Black Girl Magic programming at www.bgmesinc.com.

High School Youth Mental Health

Unlike generations before them, Generation Z (Gen Z) members (ages 15-21) are more aware and open to discussing mental health, making them more likely to report their mental health concerns and less likely to report very good or excellent mental health.⁶⁶ Gen Z's openness to discussing mental health uniquely positions them to be able to talk about stress and how to manage it. Gen Z members report being

stressed about issues such as personal debt, housing instability, and not getting enough to eat.⁶⁷ The stigma around mental health issues has not completely faded, though, and racial bias still prevents Black teenagers from receiving the treatment they need. Research shows that teens of color experiencing anxiety and depression are often misdiagnosed as "disruptive".⁶⁸

"So when [schools] got rid of the school social workers and cut funding for school psychologists and school support staff, behavioral issues that had previously been school issues—because schools had their own interventions and ways of dealing with them and staff to respond to them—these became police issues."
- Black Dane County father

In addition to the social isolation of 2020 that separated youth from social ties, over a quarter million children in the U.S. lost their primary caregiver due to COVID-19⁶⁹ and continue to cope with grief. Despite the apparent need, very few high school students in Dane County reported receiving mental health services in school during 2021: only about 5% of Black high school students (and 3% of their white peers).⁷⁰

A 2021 survey in Dane County⁷¹ found that:

- 35% of Black high school students and 40% of their white peers reported that they often or always experienced anxiety⁷² (an increase from 28% of Black high school students and 35% of their white peers in 2018⁷³);
- anxiety rates are high for Black high school girls; almost half of this group reports

often or always experiencing anxiety;⁷⁴

- 39% of Black high school students reported symptoms of depression in 2021, compared to 30% of their white peers⁷⁵ (an increase from 31% of Black high school students and 24% of their white peers in 2018⁷⁶);
- alarmingly, in 2021, 1 in 5 Black high school students and 1 in 5 white high school students in Dane County reported that they had thought seriously about dying by suicide in the past year;⁷⁷
- 5% of Black high school students and 4% of white high school students in Dane County reported having attempted suicide in the past year (some more than once).⁷⁸

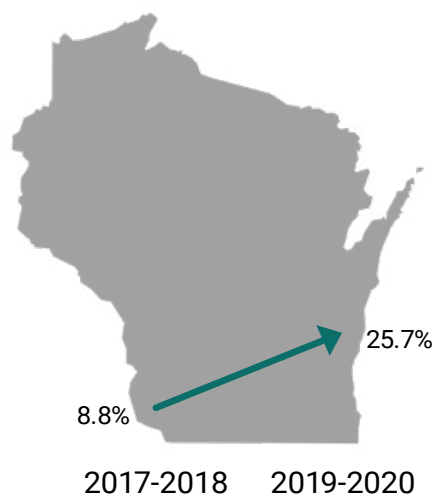
“Equity also means repaying a debt and not trying to close an achievement gap. Because, you know, when you think about achievement gap, you’re reinforcing the hierarchy of white supremacy because you’re comparing students of color to white students as if they were the standard or the bar.”

- Black man, school administrator

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated youth mental health issues. Statewide, youth mental health diagnoses increased, especially among Black youth. In 2017–2018, 8.8% of Wisconsin’s Black youth between the ages of 3-17 reported having ever been diagnosed with or reported experiencing anxiety or depression by a doctor or healthcare provider.⁷⁹ By 2019-2020, this had risen to 25.7%, over 1 in 4. Among white youth in

Wisconsin, 11.1% reported being diagnosed with anxiety or depression in 2017-2018 (higher than the percentage among Black youth at that time), increasing to 15.1% in 2019-2020 (substantially lower than the percentage among Black youth). Due to potential limitations in access to mental health services across the state, these data may be underestimating the levels of depression and anxiety Wisconsin’s youth are facing.

Anxiety and Depression Among Black Youth in Wisconsin



Source: Child Trends analysis of data from the US Department of Health and Human Services
Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné people.

“It goes right back to our staff. We cannot blame our kids for feeling the way that they feel. It’s all about school practice and adult practice at the end of the day... It’s really about the way we bring ourselves to work.”

- Kyree Brooks

HIGH SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

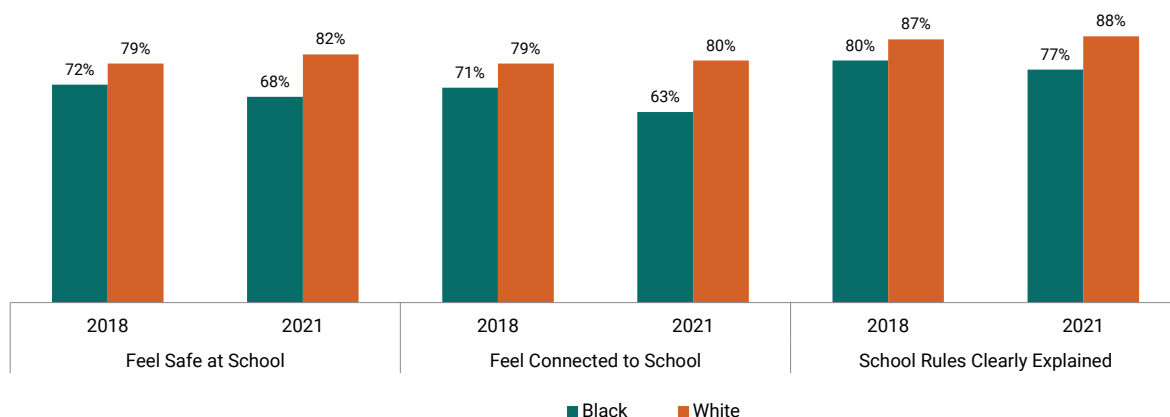
Safety

When students feel a connection with their teacher and peers and have a clear understanding of expectations, they are more likely to perceive their school as a safe, healthy learning environment. Black high school students are feeling less safe in school in Dane County over time. In 2018, 72% of Black high school students agreed they felt safe at their school (compared to 79% of their white peers), and 71% of Black high school students reported feeling connected to school (compared to 79% of their white peers).⁸⁰ In 2021, 68% of Black high school students agreed that they felt safe at their school

(compared to 82% of their white peers), and 63% reported feeling connected to school (compared to 80% of their white peers).⁸¹

Black students are less likely than white students to report clarity in the rules and expectations in their schools, and this gap has increased over time. In 2018, 80% of Black high school students in Dane County thought the rules and expectations were clearly explained at their school (compared to 87% of their white peers), and in 2021, 77% of Black high school students thought the rules and expectations were clearly explained at their school (compared to 88% of their white peers).⁸²

Safety, Connection, and Rules Clarity Among Dane County High School Youth



Source: Dane County Youth Commission

Notes: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.

There was an improvement in perceptions of fairness among students, however. In 2018, 40% of Black high school students in Dane County reported they did not believe that teachers and other adults treated students

fairly (as well as 28% of their white peers).⁸³ In 2021, 33% of Black high school students and 24% of their white peers reported they did not believe that teachers and other adults treated students fairly.⁸⁴

Belonging

Perceptions of closeness to people at school had worsened for Black and white students. In 2018, 64% of Black high school students in Dane County and 75% of their white peers agreed that they felt close to people at their school.⁸⁵ In 2021, perceptions of closeness

decreased to only 52% of Black high school students and 66% of their white peers.⁸⁶ Additionally, 69% of Black high school students and 79% of their white peers agreed in both 2018 and 2021 that they felt they belong at their school.⁸⁷

“Earlier intervention would be the most ideal, enough resources to put in place to help. The school piece is so huge. Schools are such a huge part of a kid’s life. [Kids should be able to] experience all the stability, connections, and engagement that being in school [should come with]... because once kids get disengaged, we see what happens. There is a ripple effect down the road for everything.”
- Black Dane County community leader

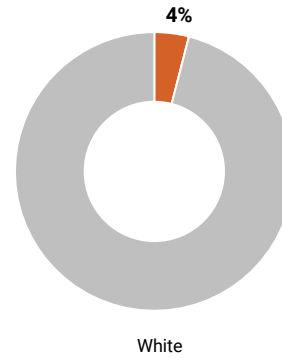
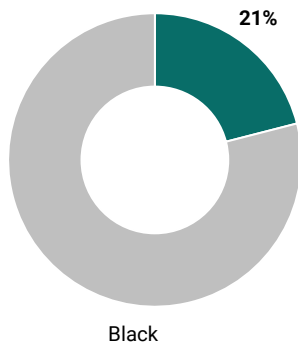
RETENTION, SUSPENSION, & GRADUATION

School Mobility

Stable housing is one of the most important resources that students need to succeed in school. Improving housing stability benefits children. Student stability is directly tied to the financial and social-emotional stability of their parents. Depending on the timing, frequency, and age of children during a move, students who switch schools may experience declines in social-emotional and cognitive functioning. These effects are compounded for low-income families who are likely to move more frequently.

A 2018 survey found that about 1 in 5 (21%) Black high school students in Dane County reported that they had to change schools in the past 12 months because their family moved (compared to only 4% of their white peers).⁸⁸ Data show that most families moving locally do so for housing-related reasons.⁸⁹ Black students are likely more mobile in Dane County due to the disproportionate impact of high housing costs.

Dane County High School Students Who Changed Schools Due to Moving, 2018



Source: Dane County Youth Commission
Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.

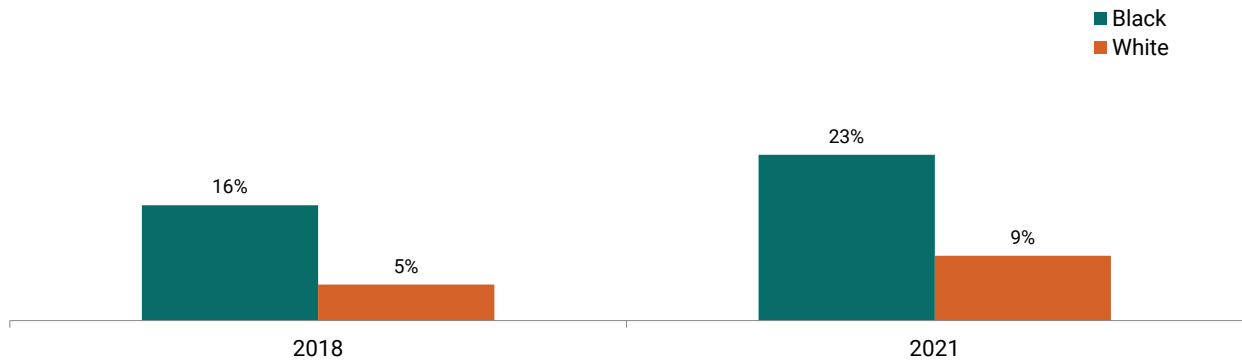


Attendance

Students' commitment to school is the most important indicator of absenteeism.⁹⁰ Students who miss a substantial number of school days tend to struggle more academically. At the same time, student commitment is strongly dictated by the school environment.⁹¹ A positive school climate has been shown to both reduce absenteeism and promote academic success.⁹²

Dane County students, Black and white, may be increasingly disengaged as shown through self-reported instances of skipping class. In 2018, 16% of Black high school students in Dane County and 5% of their white peers reported skipping class 3 or more times in the past month.⁹³ In 2021, this increased to 23% of Black students and 9% of their white peers.⁹⁴

Dane County High School Youth Reporting Skipping Class 3 or More Times in Past Month



Source: Dane County Youth Commission
Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.



Out-of-School Suspension

Dane County public schools have a persistent history of suspending more Black students than white students despite their substantially smaller population. In the Madison Metropolitan School district, this disparity is most severely felt by students with disabilities, who were at least 3 times more likely to be suspended despite their small population within schools.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, many Black students in Dane County and nationwide are experiencing adultification and push out. Adultification, according to the Center for Policing Equity, is rooted in the fact that Black children, especially Black girls, and those with disabilities, do not get the luxury

of having their innocence presumed and protected by the majority-white society they live in.⁹⁶ Adultification shows up when Black children are viewed as older and stronger than they are. The adultification of Black girls causes adults to view them as less innocent. Adultification is particularly dangerous because it puts Black children at risk of biased treatment from adults. Push out describes the disproportionate tendency of schools to suspend, restrain, and punish Black students, especially Black girls, in discriminatory, disparate, punitive, and unfair ways in schools.⁹⁷

“The thing about Black sons is that they aren’t allowed to mess up. I don’t want to have to raise a perfect kid. Freedom is being able to mess up and be protected or get a second, third, forth, or fifth chance.”
- Black Dane County mother

Discipline data is not the same as student behavior data. It is reflective of the decisions educators and administrators make, not necessarily an objective record of events happening in schools. Despite their much smaller population, Black students experienced higher numbers of out-of-school suspensions in Dane County than

white students experienced, for many years. Across the three years prior to COVID-19, Black students in Dane County experienced an annual average of 1,971 out-of-school suspensions, compared to an annual average of 1,281 out-of-school suspensions among white students.⁹⁸

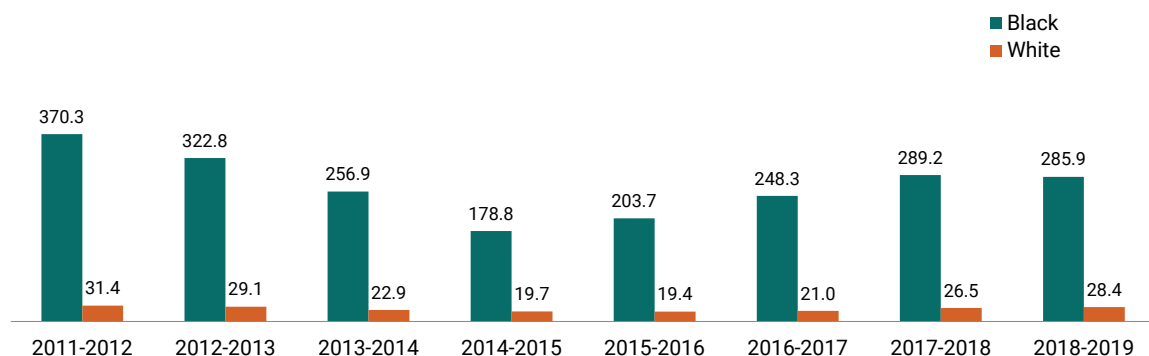
“Normal child development and teen behavior is criminalized [in Dane County Schools]. When you factor in discipline, disparity, and implicit bias, it’s perception, it’s discretionary, feeling disrespected. These experiences of disrespect then become criminalized...now it’s not just out-of-school suspensions. The stakes are increased - we’re talking about referrals to law enforcement, arrest, court, getting dragged out in handcuffs... When we look historically at the rise of police presence in schools, it correlates with the reduction in school budgets and school services.”

- Black Dane County father

While out-of-school suspension rates⁹⁹ among Black students in Dane County decreased from 2011-2012 to 2014-2015, these rates began to increase again from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018.¹⁰⁰ In the three years prior to COVID-19, Black students in Dane County experienced an average of 275 out-of-school suspensions per 1,000 students each year, compared to an average of 25 out-of-school suspensions per 1,000 white students each year.¹⁰¹

Racial disparities in out-of-school suspension rates between Black and white students in Dane County had been large and persistent for many years. From the 2011-2012 school year to the 2018-2019 school year, out-of-school suspension rates experienced by Black students in Dane County were between 9 times higher to nearly 12 times higher than out-of-school suspension rates experienced by white students.¹⁰²

Out-of School Suspension Rates per 1,000 Students: Dane County



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.

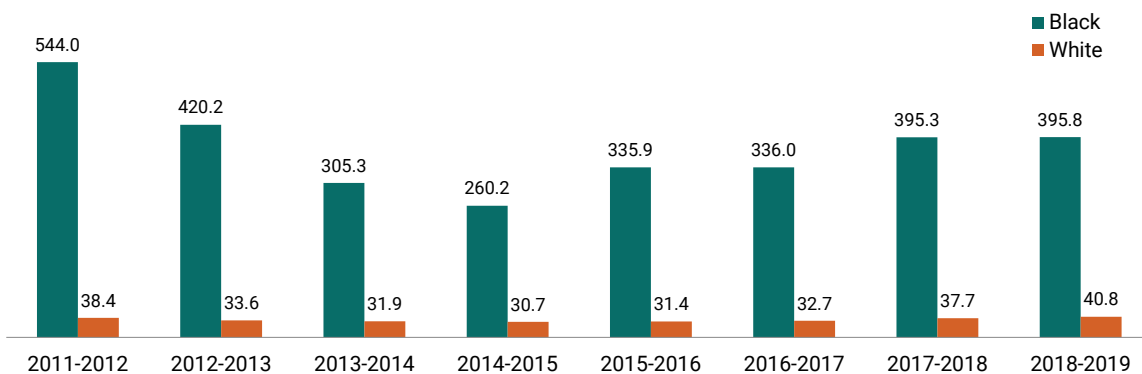
“Zero tolerance and equity don’t go together.”
- Black Dane County man

Out-of-school suspension rates (per 1,000 students) for Black and white students remained consistently lower in Dane County than out-of-school suspension rates in Wisconsin and nationwide, over many years.¹⁰³ In the three years prior to COVID-19, Black students in Dane County experienced an

average of 375 out-of-school suspensions per 1,000 students each year, compared to an average of 37 out-of-school suspensions per 1,000 white students each year.¹⁰⁴ The rate of out-of-school suspensions in the U.S. in 2017-2018 was 369 per 1,000 Black students, and 317 per 1,000 white students.¹⁰⁵

“[Restorative justice] helps create a mind shift for, for staff. I feel like it impacts [students] by them feeling a sense of belonging in school. I have a huge white population in, in my school, right? [Black students] don’t necessarily walk around the hallway and see themselves. So we have to create that. My staff members, we have to create that and we have to model it with each other first in professional development. Then, we have to make sure that it gets to our students. We have to resemble that for our kids too. Modeling is a huge practice.”
- Kyree Brooks

Out-of School Suspension Rates per 1,000 Students: Wisconsin



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.

On-Time Graduation

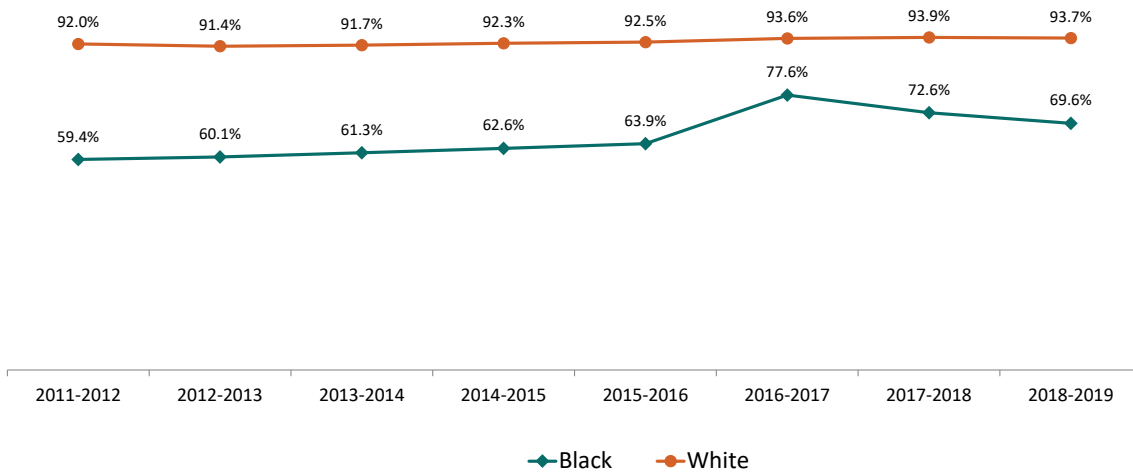
All things considered, Dane County public schools have not created a school environment to ensure that racial disparities in on-time graduation are eliminated. Barriers to on-time graduation certainly exist within school policies and climates which push Black students out of the classroom. Simultaneously, Black children's needs aren't being met holistically. On-time graduation rates are the percentage of students graduating in 4

years with a regular diploma, along with their 9th grade cohort, out of the total number of students in their 9th grade cohort.¹⁰⁶ On-time graduation rates among Black students began to trend upward between 2011-2012 and 2016-2017.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, rates began to decrease again between 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. Among white students in Dane County, on-time graduation rates were consistently high since 2012-2013.

Boys and Girls Club of Dane County (BGC)

The Boys and Girls Club of Dane County is a leader in youth development programs and strives to “improve the well being of youth, families, and communities through innovation and collaboration, ensuring high-quality programming and services.” Through a high-intensity in-school and out-of-school partnership with Madison Metropolitan School District, the AVID/TOPS program supports students who are typically underrepresented on college campuses to “develop the writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading skills needed to be college and career ready.” AVID/TOPS works in partnership with teachers, leading students through collaborative, experiential learning. According to BGC CEO Michael Johnson, the most recent AVID/TOPS program participants had 100% college acceptance rates and contributed to the largest Black freshman class at UW Madison. The Boys and Girls Club of Dane County, in partnership with the Madison Area Builders Association, opened the McKenzie Regional Workforce Center in July of 2023. The workforce center, a first-of-its kind project for the BGC, “aims to train and connect a new generation of young people to the skilled trades.” The Skilled Trades Training Program will support youth interested in careers such as HVAC technicians, electricians, plumbers, and carpenters. Support the work of the Boys and Girls Club of Dane County at bgcdc.org.

Trends in Percentage of Dane County Students Graduating in Four Years



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
 Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.



Black students in both Dane County and Wisconsin graduate on time less than Black students nationally. Inversely, white students in both Dane County and Wisconsin graduate on time more than white students nationally. In Dane County, the average on-time graduation rate among Black students in the three years prior to COVID-19 was 73.2% (and 93.7%

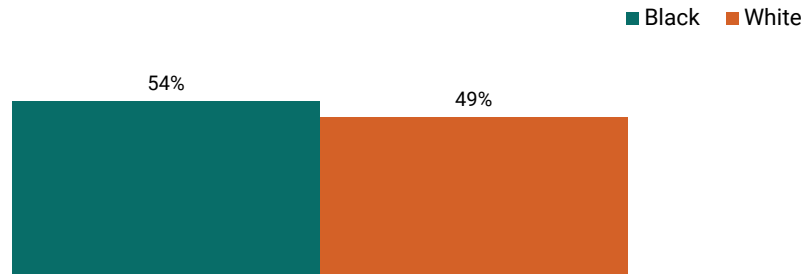
among white students).¹⁰⁸ In Wisconsin, the average on-time graduation rate among Black students in the three years prior to COVID-19 was 73.5% (and 94.1% among white students).¹⁰⁹ Nationally, the on-time graduation rate among Black students was 80% in 2018-2019 (compared to a rate of 89% among their white peers).¹¹⁰

Loss Due to COVID-19

While learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic is essential to capture, it is important to acknowledge the depth at which Black children were experiencing additional challenges, including grief from losing loved ones, and trauma in response to the countless murders of Black people at the hands of police and racist vigilantes. Simply naming the learning loss children experienced during this period diminishes the true scale of the need for both educational and emotional interventions in response to the events of 2020 and 2021. Dane County school districts received more than a hundred million in federal pandemic relief dollars.

Both Black (54%) and white (49%) Dane County students reported feeling that they fell behind in school during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹¹ The Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University calculated estimates of lost learning time for reading and math in various school districts, based on performance levels prior to COVID-19, the length of time the school district operated remotely or in a hybrid format, and the characteristics of students in the district. According to these estimates, Dane County school districts lost an average of 10.9 weeks of math learning and 5.8 weeks of reading instruction.¹¹²

Dane County High School Youth Reporting They Fell Behind in School, 2021



Source: Dane County Youth Commission

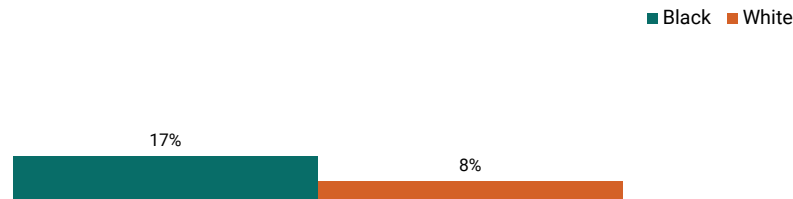
Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.



Students that receive certain legally mandated accommodations as outlined in their Individualized Education Program (IEP) may have been disproportionately affected by

learning loss. This disproportionate loss may be due to the fact that IEP services could not be provided appropriately and equivalently during virtual learning.¹¹³

Dane County High School Youth Reporting Having an Individualized Education Program (IEP), 2021



Source: Dane County Youth Commission

Note: Data for racial groups do not include Latiné students.



HIGHER EDUCATION

College & Graduate Degree Attainment

Dane County is home to the oldest and largest land grant institution in the state, the University of Wisconsin - Madison, as well as Edgewood College and Madison College. Dane County's

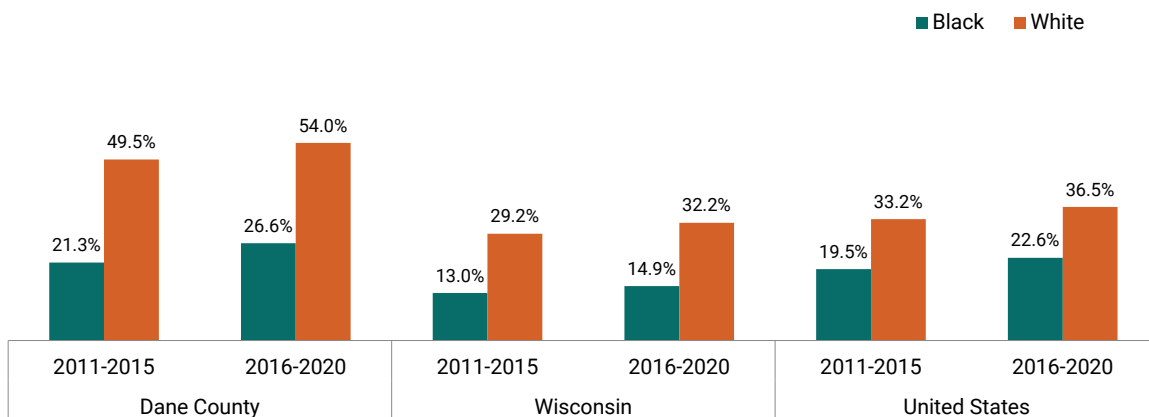
residents are the most highly educated in the state, with 53.0% of its residents completing at least some college, according to 2017-2021 estimates.¹¹⁴

“Madison is one of the few places that I have lived where you literally almost need a doctorate in order to be taken seriously...You have to like literally jump through hoops to prove who you are and what you can do.”
- Black Dane County woman

The percentage of Black residents of Dane County with a college or graduate degree grew from over 1 in 5 in 2011-2015 (21.3%) to over 1 in 4 in 2016-2020 (26.6%).¹¹⁵ The percentage of white residents of Dane County with a college or graduate degree (around 1 in 2) grew at a similar pace during this time. Of note, these rates may be a result of residents

who migrated into Dane County rather than native residents. In Dane County, a greater percentage of both Black and white residents had completed a bachelor's degree or higher level of education compared to statewide levels, and the Dane County educational attainment levels were more similar to national levels.

Percentage of People with Bachelor's Degree or Higher Level of Education



Source: US Census Bureau

Notes: Data for white people do not include Latiné people; data for Black people may include Latiné people.



In a place with residents as highly educated as those in Dane County, education has not prevented Black residents from experiencing some of the most profound racial disparities in the nation. In fact, more educated Black residents are likely facing additional barriers to things such as homeownership¹¹⁶ and starting a family¹¹⁷ because of rising student loan debt for Black borrowers. Racial disparities in the percentage of Black and white residents earning college and graduate degrees were

similar in Dane County and Wisconsin. The percentage of Black residents completing higher education degrees was less than half the percentage of white residents completing higher education degrees, in both Dane County and Wisconsin.¹¹⁸ This gap persisted from 2011-2015 to 2016-2020, though both Black and white residents are increasingly more educated. Nationally, the racial disparity in people earning college and graduate degrees was slightly smaller.



Race to Equity: Dane County 2023

Education

RECOMMENDATIONS

Trends in this data make it clear that policy makers, advocates, funders, direct service organizations, education system leaders, practitioners, and Black community members with lived expertise should collaborate to develop and implement effective local and statewide solutions.

Local

- Expand youth mental health services to ensure that pupil support staff-to-student ratios in Dane County public schools meet at least the recommended levels.
- Increase teacher wages to at least \$65,000 across Dane County school districts.

County

- In partnership with Black family child care providers, fund the development and maintenance of a shared services network to decrease barriers to child care access and increase affordability for Black families.
- Remove any and all police officers from Dane County public schools.
- Implement restorative justice and social, emotional learning practices in all Dane County public schools.
- Complete a racial equity analysis of all behavior education plans and include students and caretakers in the preparation, analysis, evaluation, and recommendation development processes. Embed restorative justice practices into every school district.
- Increase the number of Black Dane County students participating in college preparatory activities such as AVID/TOPS, Pre-College Enrichment Program for Learning Excellence (PEOPLE), dual enrollment, etc.
- Create partnerships with local colleges and universities to increase and retain the number of Black teachers in Dane County by developing a teacher pipeline program which provides current and prospective teachers college tuition incentives, culturally relevant mentorship,¹¹⁹ continuing education opportunities, and professional development.

Recommendations, continued

Statewide

- Provide general purpose revenue through Child Care Counts to address the impending financial cliff facing providers in 2025, and commit to sustainable funding levels for future generations.
- Increase Wisconsin Shares child care subsidy reimbursement rates.
- Decrease barriers to accessing child care assistance, such as the requirement that applicants be employed prior to receiving assistance.
- Increase funding for K-12 public schools statewide.

Endnotes

- 1 Coalition of Communities of Color, "Research and Data Justice", <https://www.coalitioncommunitiescolor.org/-why-research-data-justice>
- 2 In this report, we use the racial and ethnic descriptors "Black" and "African American" interchangeably, often following the practices of our principal source materials (such as U.S. Census data and data from various Wisconsin state agencies). While identity descriptors can be fluid, our decision was to use the language that we thought best contributed to clarity and readability and that referenced the range of preferences within communities. Blackness is not a monolith and the terminology we use attempts to describe the complex, diasporic experience of Black residents. We ask our readers not to draw any conclusions based on our use of any particular term at any particular time.
- 3 In this report, we use Latiné as a gender-neutral racial and ethnic form of the word Latino. The objective of the term Latiné is to remove gender from the word Latino in a similar way as many gender-neutral Spanish words, such as "estudiante". While identity descriptors can be fluid, our decision was to use a term that best contributed to clarity and readability while respecting the Spanish language, and the range of preferences within communities. We ask our readers not to draw any conclusions based on our use of any particular term at any particular time.
- 4 Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, "The Nature and Impact of Early Achievement Skills, Attention Skills, and Behavior Problems," in *Whither Opportunity: Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances*, ed. Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson (New York: Russell Sage, 2011), 47–69.
- 5 "Issue Brief: Early Childhood Development and the State Systems That Support It: An Introduction for Policymakers," The Hunt Institute, 2020, <https://hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Early-Childhood-Issue-Brief.pdf>.
- 6 "Brain Development," First Five Years Fund, accessed 2023, <https://www.ffyf.org/why-it-matters/brain-development/>.
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- 8 The Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, "Labor Force Participation Rate by Sex, Race and Hispanic Ethnicity 1948-2015 Annual Averages," published May 27, 2016, updated November 13, 2022, <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/women.s.bureau.department.of.labor/viz/LaborforceparticipationratebysexraceandHispanicethnicity1948-2015annualaverages/LFPRbysexraceandHispanicethnicity1948-2015>.
- 9 Need for child care indicated that children were under the age of 6 and all parents were in the labor force. Bipartisan Policy Center, Child Care Gaps Assessment interactive map, <https://childcaregap.org/>.
- 10 Bipartisan Policy Center, "Child Care Gaps in 2019: Wisconsin," <https://childcaregap.org/assets/onePagers/Wisconsin.pdf>.
- 11 Bipartisan Policy Center, Child Care Gaps Assessment interactive map, <https://childcaregap.org/>.
- 12 Kids Forward, "Updates on Racial Equity Analyses in Wisconsin Shares and YoungStar," January 2022, https://kidsforward.org/assets/ECEReport_Jan2022.pdf.
- 13 Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, "The State of Wisconsin's Early Care and Education Workforce," 2021, <https://wisconsin-earlychildhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/WECA-Workforce-Recommendations-Brief-2021.pdf>.
- 14 The date the data was last updated on the data source's website was noted as 2/7/2022, but specific years for the percentage change in family care providers were not provided. Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, Preschool Development Grant Sandbox, Accessibility, Affordability, Quality, and Workforce Data Dashboard, <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/pdg/sandbox/data2>.
- 15 First Five Years Fund, "Over Half of Families are Spending More Than 20% of Income on Child Care", June 29, 2022, <https://www.ffyf.org/over-half-of-families-are-spending-more-than-20-on-child-care/>
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- 18 Silver Lynx Consulting analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-year estimates, Table S1903, https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?t=Income%20and%20Poverty&g=0100000US_0400000US55_0500000US55025&tid=ACST5Y2020.S1903; Amy K. Glasmeier, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "Living Wage Calculator," 2022, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/55025>; and the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, Preschool Development Grant Sandbox, Accessibility, Affordability, Quality, and Workforce Data Dashboard, <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/pdg/sandbox/data2>.
- 19 C. McLean, L. J. E. Austin, M. Whitebook, and K. L. Olson, Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley (2021), <https://csce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/report-pdf/>.
- 20 Data is for childcare workers, from May of 2021. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Query System, May, 2021, <https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/home>.
- 21 University of Wisconsin - Madison and Institute for Research on Poverty, "Wisconsin's Early Care and Education Workforce: Executive Summary," 2021, <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/childcare/pdf/pdg/wi-ec-workforce-executive-summary.pdf>.
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- 24 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, "School and District Report Cards," <https://apps2.dpi.wi.gov/reportcards/home>.

- 25 Scott Girard, "Dane County School Referendums All Pass," *The Capital Times*, November 9, 2022, https://captimes.com/news/education/dane-county-school-referendums-all-pass/article_f379e3db-4133-5515-89cc-3bf4ed75907a.html.
- 26 Data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on enrollment was provided to Kids Forward through a data request, and may not match data shown on public dashboards such as WISEdash or in other reports or datasets on similar topics. Data shown reflect only students in public schools, unless otherwise specified. DPI data for Dane County includes the following school districts: Belleville, Wisconsin Heights, Cambridge, Deerfield Community, De Forest Area, Madison Metropolitan, Marshall, McFarland, Middleton-Cross Plains Area, Monona Grove, Mount Horeb Area, Oregon, Stoughton Area, Sun Prairie Area, Verona Area, and Waunakee Community. Data for Black and white students do not include Latiné students. This is the case for all data provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. More information about race and ethnicity in this data can be found here: <https://dpi.wi.gov/wise/data-elements/race>. The proportion of white students in Dane County public schools has been decreasing over the past several years, though this pattern is slow and occurring through very small changes each year. Enrollment in private schools was not available disaggregated by race. Silver Lynx Consulting analysis of data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.
- 27 Data are for the hiring agency, not the working agency. The Belleville and Wisconsin Heights school districts did not have Black employees in these data. These position classifications include administration, pupil services, teachers, aides / paraprofessionals, and others. Because these data are for all these position classifications, not just teachers, it is likely that the percentage of Black teachers, specifically, is lower. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Staff by Ethnicity and Gender Report dashboard, 2021-2022 <https://publicstaffreports.dpi.wi.gov/PubStaffReport/Public/PublicReport/taffByEthnicityAndGenderReport>.
- 28 J. A. Grissom, E. C. Kern, and L. A. Rodriguez, "The 'Representative Bureaucracy' in Education: Educator Workforce Diversity, Policy Outputs, and Outcomes for Disadvantaged Students," *Educational Researcher* 44, no. 3 (2015): 185-192, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X15580102>.
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- 30 Nicholas W. Papageorge, Seth Gershenson, and Kyung Min Kang, "Teacher Expectations Matter," *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 102, no.2, (2020): 234-251.
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- 33 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, "2019-20 ESSA Staff Report," <https://dpi.wi.gov/wi-equity-plan>. Inexperience in these data was defined as teachers, school administration, and other staff who had less than three years of experience in their subject area or position, and out-of-field was defined as teachers who had a current teaching license but were in a teaching assignment outside of their license area.
- 34 The data source does not specify how many schools disproportionately serve students of color in Dane County. Further information about the inequitable distribution of teachers can be found here: <https://dpi.wi.gov/wi-equity-plan>. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Public Inequitable Distribution of Teacher Report dashboard, 2021-2022, <https://publicstaffreports.dpi.wi.gov/PubStaffReport/Public/PublicReport/InequitableDistributionOfTeacherReport>.
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- 36 John Rosales and Tim Walker, "The Racist Beginnings of Standardized Testing" *neaToday*, March 20, 2021, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/racist-beginnings-standardized-testing>
- 37 Data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) on statewide assessments was provided to Kids Forward through a data request, and may not match data shown on public dashboards such as WISEdash or in other reports or datasets on similar topics. Data shown reflect only students in public schools, unless otherwise specified. DPI data for Dane County includes the following school districts: Belleville, Wisconsin Heights, Cambridge, Deerfield Community, De Forest Area, Madison Metropolitan, Marshall, McFarland, Middleton-Cross Plains Area, Monona Grove, Mount Horeb Area, Oregon, Stoughton Area, Sun Prairie Area, Verona Area, and Waunakee Community.
- 38 The statewide assessment was the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE) in 2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014; it was the Badger Exam in 2014-2015; and it has been the Forward Exam since 2015-2016. Data from the 2014-2015 Badger Exam were substantially different from previous and later assessment tools, and these data are not presented in this report.
- 39 Alan Borsuk, "A Bipartisan Consensus Could be Growing on How to Teach Reading Statewide," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/education/2023/02/28/wisconsin-legislators-meet-to-consider-science-of-reading-approach/69951132007/> and Sarah Schwartz, "Why Putting the 'Science of Reading' into Practice is so Challenging," *Education Week* (July 20, 2022), <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/why-putting-the-science-of-reading-into-practice-is-so-challenging/2022/07>.
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Including students expected to take statewide assessments but who did not actually take them in the denominator is how the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction calculates proficiency. Increasing numbers of students expected to take statewide assessments are being opted out by parents and guardians, which is impacting the representativeness of the test results. More about student assessments and how levels of proficiency are set from test scores can be found here: <https://dpi.wi.gov/assessment>.

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Consulting analysis of data from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

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Acknowledgements

This report is the product of the contributions of many Dane County community members, Kids Forward staff members, and consultants.

Cartecia Lawrence authored, developed the strategic antiracist vision, interviewed community members, and generated the arguments of this report. Silver Lynx Consulting co-authored the report and led the quantitative data collection. Michele Mackey provided antiracist insight and advice to focus the messaging and recommendations. William Parke-Sutherland provided invaluable thought partnership, recommendations, and editorial support. Emily Miota provided essential communications and layout support. The multiracial Kids Forward team - Liliana Barrera, Nicole Hoffmann, Amanda Martinez, and Daithi Wolfe - provided thoughtful suggestions and reviews.

Christin Gates Calloway provided evaluation and qualitative data support. Nina Collective provided invaluable outreach and community engagement support.

To our interviewees and external reviewers whose experiences and insights contributed to the formulation of this report, thank you for trusting Kids Forward with your stories and feedback.



An initiative of Kids Forward, Race to Equity is a comprehensive approach to reducing racial disparities through community engagement, research and advocacy.

Kids Forward inspires action and promotes access to opportunity for every kid, every family, and every community in Wisconsin, notably children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity. We envision a Wisconsin where every child thrives.

For the full report, visit kidsforward.org/race-to-equity.