



EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY GAPS IN K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS

August 30, 2017

The U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR), recently released a report titled, *“A First Look: Key Data Highlights on Equity and Opportunity Gaps in our Nation’s Public Schools”*. This report chronicles disparities and opportunity gaps in all public schools and school districts in the United States using data from 2013-2014. While the United States has some of the more innovative and successful schools worldwide, access to those resources and student success is varied among racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. Those disparities also tend to impact American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children at inequitable rates.

Access to and success in education are affected by many factors, with AI/AN children encountering considerable barriers compared to other racial/ethnic groups. For example, among boys in grades K-12, 11% of AI/AN students received one or more out-of-school suspensions. This rate rises to 22% for AI/AN boys with IDEA* covered disabilities. This stands in stark contrast to NHW boys, where only 5% of non-Hispanic White (NHW) boys received suspensions, and only 10% of NHW boys with IDEA disabilities.¹ Another major contributor to the achievement gap is chronic absenteeism, which is defined as missing 10% or more of school days in a year, or as missing 15 or more school days.¹ While the federal government does not require schools to report chronic absenteeism, from the data available, 26% of AI/AN of high school students were chronically absent compared to the 19% overall rate. For elementary students, the rate of chronic absenteeism is nearly double that of their NHW classmates.²

**Are you aware of any
discrimination in a
school near you?**

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Rights at the Department
of Education to file a
Complaint

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Additionally, AI/AN students are also more likely to attend schools with teachers who lack experience and required teaching certifications, which can contribute to widening achievement gaps.³ Some 7% of AI/AN children attended schools where more than 20% of the teachers are beginning their teaching career.¹ For another 16,000 AIAN students, 20% of their teachers have yet to complete all the teaching certifications and licensures required by the state.

All these disparities in educational access and success has sparked a renewed commitment to reform the education system in the U.S. The Department of Education began investing in services to prevent expulsions and suspensions in early learning in 2014, and Congress passed legislation that would require states to expand the information they report to include student discipline and absenteeism in 2015. With minority children continually making up larger portions of K-12 students (expected to reach 56% in 2024), current inequality in discipline use, unqualified staff, and chronic absenteeism will become unavoidable issues, making it imperative for us to find solutions to the underlying roots of inequity now.

These findings demand a re-examination of the American education system to ensure equal access to quality education for every student, regardless of race/ethnicity, age, gender or ability. The full report from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights can be found [here](#).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which covers 13 conditions.

References

1. King J, Lhamon C. 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection A First Look. Washington, D.C.; 2016. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>.
2. Balfanz R, Byrnes V. The Importance of Being There: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation’s Public Schools. 2012. http://new.every1graduates.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/FINALChronicAbsenteeismReport_May16.pdf. Accessed August 29, 2017.
3. Peske HG, Haycock K. Teaching Inequality How Poor and Minority Students Are Shortchanged on Teacher Quality. 2006. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED494820.pdf>. Accessed August 30, 2017.



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