

OUR DREAMS WON'T BE DEFERRED: Reclaiming Progress for Black Men and Boys in an Age of Retreat



EDUCATION

Education should serve as a gateway to opportunity.

Yet for many Black boys, schools remain environments of marginalization rather than empowerment. Despite the landmark We Dream a World (WDAW) report in 2010, which exposed stark disparities in education, discipline, and access to quality learning, little has changed. From early childhood to postsecondary education, Black boys face systemic inequities that stifle their academic potential. Predominantly Black schools are underfunded, employ fewer certified teachers, and offer limited advanced coursework. Racial bias in school discipline continues to disproportionately criminalize Black boys, feeding the school-to-prison pipeline.

Even after **Brown v. Board of Education** aimed to end segregation, **de facto segregation** persists through redlining, school zoning, and inequitable funding models. These policies continue to deprive Black students of well-resourced schools and affirming learning environments. Recent policy shifts have given states more authority over educational accountability. However, the lack of standardized, disaggregated data by both race and gender obscures a full understanding of Black boys' experiences in education.

Meaningful progress requires more than marginal reform—it calls for a systemic overhaul. **Policies and practices that dehumanize Black boys must be replaced with those that affirm their dignity, cultural identity, and right to succeed.** Until then, the promise of education will remain unfulfilled for too many.

Areas of Progress

Over the past 15 years, targeted investments and increased awareness of educational disparities have led to measurable improvements for Black students overall.

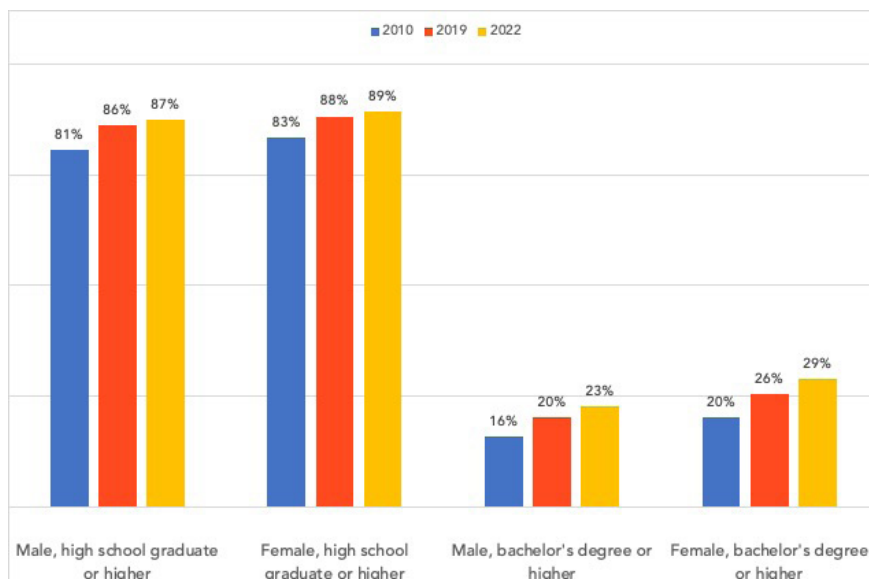
High school completion: The graduation rate for Black males has increased significantly. U.S. Census Bureau data show that high school completion among Black males aged 25 and older rose from 82% in 2010 to 88.5% in 2022.

College degree attainment: College degree attainment for Black males grew from 16% in 2010 to 22.7% in 2022, according to Census Bureau data.

Early education access: Enrollment in early education has expanded, with 48% of Black 3- to 4-year-olds enrolled in early education programs.

Afterschool program engagement: Participation in afterschool programs rose from 14% in 2009 to 18% in 2020, reflecting greater engagement in critical early learning and enrichment opportunities.

Black male educational attainment has been climbing since 2010.



Rising Education Attainment Among Black Americans (2010–2022)

Areas of Concern

Despite these gains, **structural inequities continue to obstruct the academic success of Black boys at every stage of education.** Many of the same barriers identified in the original 2010 We Dream a World report persist, and in some cases, have deepened.

Early education equity: While Black children are the most likely to be enrolled in public preschool, they are the least likely to attend high-quality programs, limiting school readiness and early development.

Literacy and numeracy gaps: By fourth grade, only 11.8% of Black boys achieve reading proficiency. By eighth grade, more than half (53.7%) score Below Basic in reading. Black boys remain underrepresented in gifted and talented programs and overrepresented in special education placements.

Ongoing academic challenges: Black students continue to grapple with post-pandemic learning loss and elevated rates of chronic absenteeism. In 2022, 39% of Black students were chronically absent — 40% higher than white students — exacerbating achievement gaps and complicating long-term recovery.

Discipline disparities: Although there have been some reforms in school discipline, Black boys, who make up only 7.7% of public school enrollment, account for 18% of expulsions. They are still twice as likely as white boys to face suspension or expulsion.

College enrollment and completion: Undergraduate enrollment for Black men has dropped by 22% since 2019. Among those who do enroll, 44% leave college without earning a degree.

A CALL TO ACTION

Education is a key pathway to empowerment, yet systemic inequities continue to limit opportunities for Black boys. Addressing these disparities requires sustained investment, policy change, and community-driven solutions.

- **Ensure equitable school funding and resource allocation.**
- **Expand access to high-quality early childhood education.**
- **Support holistic student development.**
- **Invest in culturally responsive teaching and teacher diversity.**
- **Disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.**
- **Support alternative learning models.**
- **Support family engagement.**
- **Strengthen postsecondary access and completion.**



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This summary has been shortened for brevity. Full citations and expanded analysis are available in the complete report.