



# RACE, PLACE AND POLICY MATTER IN EDUCATION

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In the growing clamor for education reform in Michigan—by current state leaders and those who hope to be elected this fall—the inescapable truth of deep inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes for children based on race, ethnicity, place and income rarely takes center stage. While *all* children can learn and deserve a top-notch education, children of color and those living in low-income communities face barriers to educational success from cradle to career. Attempts to improve Michigan’s educational system without addressing those barriers will undoubtedly fail.

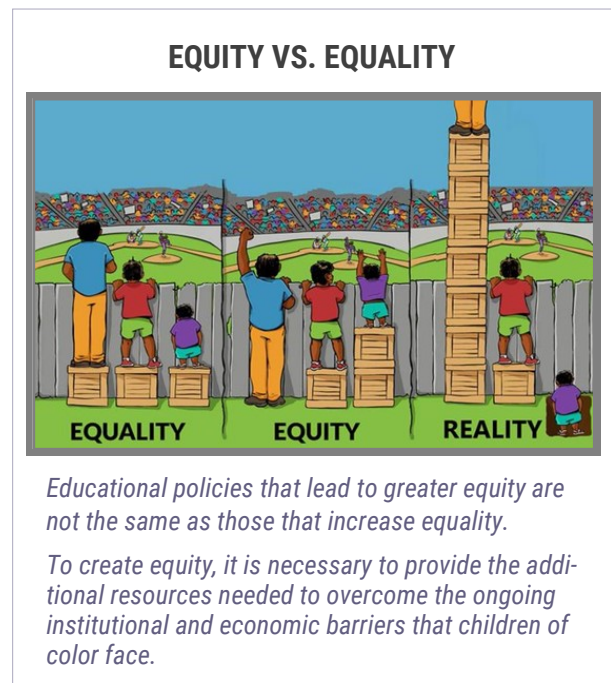
Educational disparities do not occur in a vacuum and can be traced to public policies that limit employment and housing options for many parents, fail to adequately recognize the added costs of teaching children who live in high-poverty neighborhoods, and view investments in teachers as a “diversion” of school funding away from children.

The results are unacceptable for Michigan’s children and the state’s economy. Children of color are less likely to be reading proficiently by third grade, are more likely to be retained in grade, change schools more frequently and miss more school. Ultimately, children of color and those from families with low incomes are less likely to graduate from high school or be college- and career-ready.

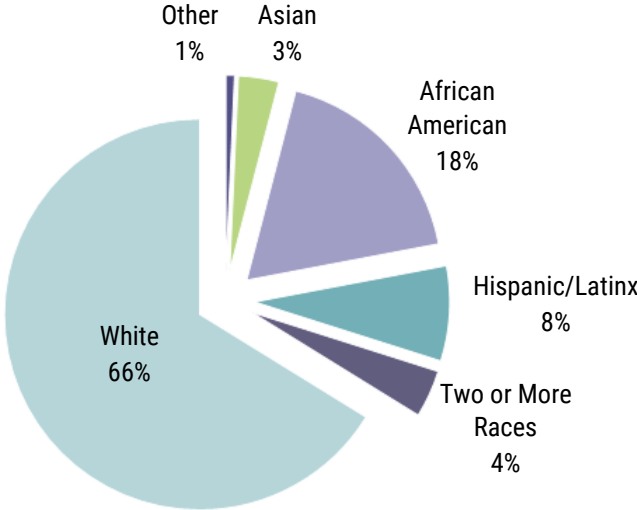
Michigan can and must do better. A high-quality education is a vital path to equity for children in Michigan and the foundation of economic growth—a path that has been unavailable to too many children of color.

## Michigan’s Students Are Increasingly Diverse

One-third of Michigan students are children of color, and the percentage of students of Latinx, Asian and multiracial heritage is growing. As a percentage of total students, White and African American children dropped slightly between the 2013-14 school year and 2017-18, as overall student enrollment fell. During that time, the percentage of total Michigan students that are of two or more races increased 38%, along with the percentage of Latinx (16%) and Asian (14%) students.



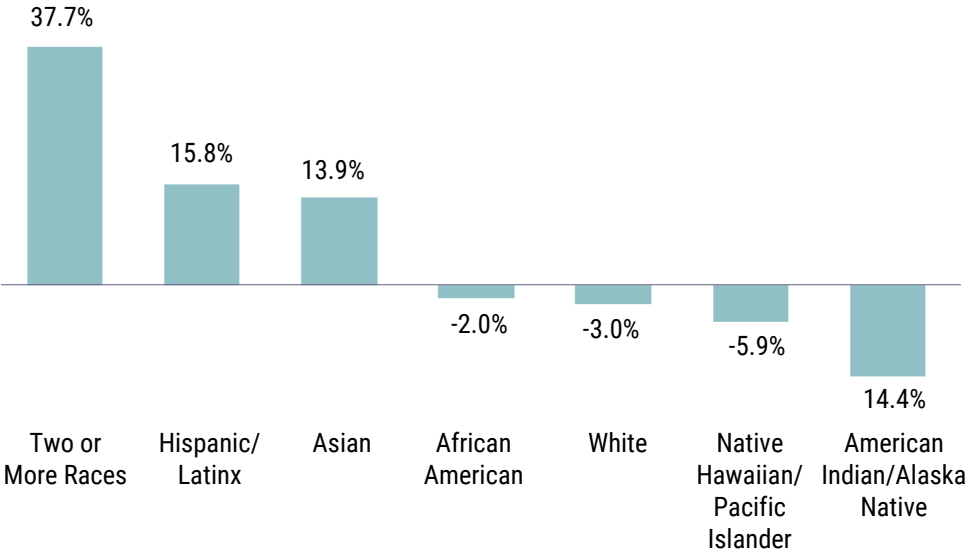
One of Every Three Michigan Students Are Children of Color (2017-18)



Source: MI School Data

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The Percentage of Students from Latinx, Asian and Multi-Racial Heritage is Growing  
*Percent change in the share of students from each racial group and ethnicity from 2013-14 to 2017-18*



Source: MI School Data

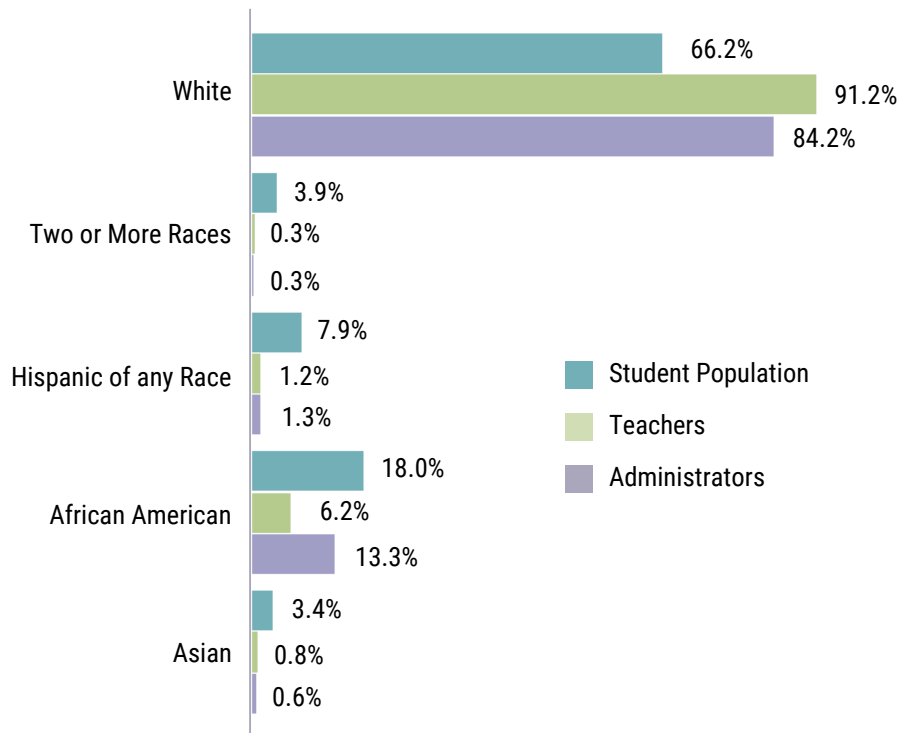
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## Teachers in Michigan Public Schools Are Less Diverse Than Their Students

Research shows that African American primary-school students matched to same-race teachers perform better on standardized tests and are more favorably perceived by their teachers. In addition, assigning African American boys to an African American teacher in the third, fourth or fifth grades significantly reduces the probability that they will ultimately drop out of high school—particularly for boys with the most economic disadvantages.<sup>1</sup>

Despite growing evidence that children of color thrive when they have teachers and role models whom they can identify with racially and ethnically, Michigan teachers do not reflect the student body. While 1 of every 3 Michigan students is a child of color, more than 90% of teachers and 80% of school administrators are White. And the diversity of Michigan’s teaching workforce has not grown over the last decade, with the percentage of African American teachers actually declining.

Michigan Teachers Are Not as Diverse as Their Students (2017-18)



Source: MI School Data

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In addition to the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among teachers, the segregation of teachers and students is a concern. Schools serving larger numbers of students of color tend to have more diverse workforces, while in schools with predominately White children and youths, students can have little exposure to teachers of color—despite the benefits of diversity for children of *all* racial and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> The segregation of

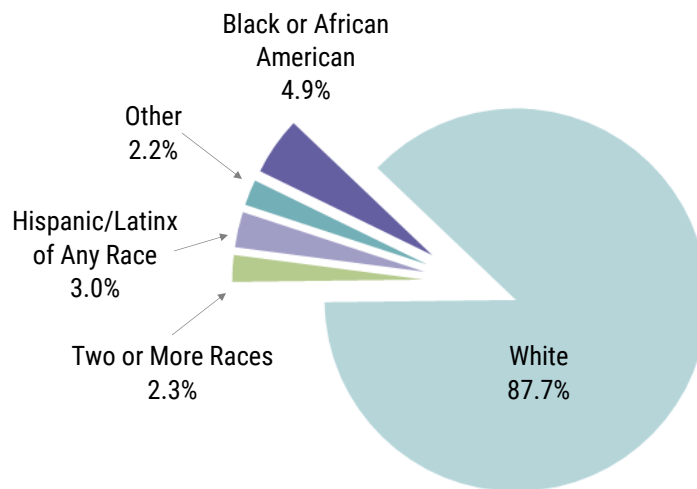
students and teachers has a backstory that includes a history of public policies that have limited employment and housing options for parents, and created greater income inequality and housing segregation. Unfortunately, children of color have borne the brunt of many of these policies.

Attracting more people of color to the teaching profession is a challenge given the overall decline in the number of college students that see teaching as an attractive and viable profession. Enrollment in Michigan teacher preparation programs fell from 11,287 in the 2013-14 academic year to only 7,868 in 2015-16, a decline of more than 30% in just two years.<sup>3</sup> Prospective new teachers are disproportionately White, representing 88% of college students enrolled in teacher preparation programs in 2015-16.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to problems recruiting new teachers, there is evidence that turnover rates are higher for teachers from some racial and ethnic groups—in part because of the difficult working conditions in their often high-poverty urban schools, including stagnating salaries, more costly healthcare benefits, and the challenges of teaching children with high needs in older school buildings that are in need of repair or lack safe drinking water. In addition to these barriers, teachers report leaving the field because they don't have enough influence in school decision-making and lack personal autonomy in their classrooms.<sup>5</sup>

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### Too Few Students of Color Enrolled in Teacher Preparation Programs in Michigan (2015-16)



Source: Trend in Teacher Preparation Program Enrollment, State Enrollment Information for Michigan, U.S Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Higher Education Act Title II Reporting System (2017)

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### The Barriers to Equity in Education

Poverty and economic inequities create significant barriers to educational achievement that cannot be overcome by focusing solely on what happens in the classroom. Public policies that push children into poverty, limit access to preconception and prenatal care,

or contribute to healthy food deserts also create inequities in educational achievement. And, because differences in economic opportunity are at the core of racial and ethnic inequities, children of color are more likely to be left behind.

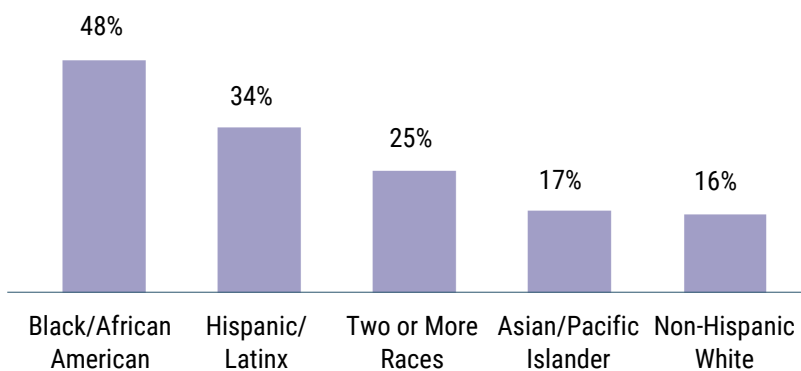
**Access to high-quality early education and care is limited.**

The state’s youngest children are more likely to live in poverty, with much higher rates for children of color. Nearly half of the state’s youngest African American children, and more than one-third of Latinx children age 0-5, live in poverty.

There is little doubt that exposure to poverty in the earliest years of life can affect children’s long-term development and educational success. In Michigan, children of color are more likely to be born too early, die in the first year of life, have poor nutrition, suffer from untreated health conditions and live in homes and neighborhoods where they are exposed to environmental toxins.

Scientists agree that the very architecture of children’s brains is developing during the first years of life in ways that can affect cognitive and emotional development and ultimately success in school. Particularly startling is research showing that the conditions of poverty during the earliest days and years of life can alter children’s brain development in ways that account for up to 20% of the achievement gap between children from families with high- and low-incomes. Sadly, that gap in brain development continues into adulthood.<sup>6</sup>

**Young Children of Color Are Much More Likely to Live in Poverty**  
**2016 Poverty Rate for Children Ages 0 to 5**



Source: Kids Count Data Center

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High-quality early education and care services can reduce the negative impact of poverty on educational attainment, yet Michigan’s investments in supports for families with very young children have fallen short. For example, in 2019, Michigan will make its first ever state investment in the Early On program—the state’s effort to identify and serve infants and toddlers with developmental delays—but the \$5 million allocated falls far short of the estimated need of over \$60 million.

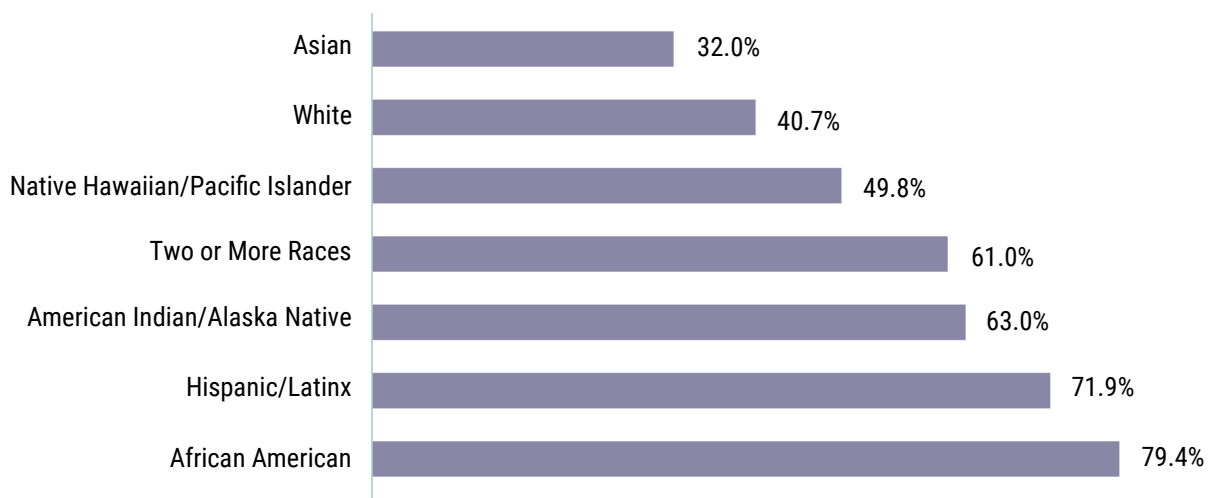
Further, although Michigan has made strides in expanding its preschool program for four-year-olds from families with low incomes, there is much more work to be done to ensure that parents have access to high-quality child care. With the second lowest income eligibility level in the country, and child care provider payments that fall significantly below market rates, few families with low wages can receive assistance or afford high-quality child care. In 2008, over 50,000 Michigan families and 98,000 young children had access to child care because of a state subsidy; so far in 2018, fewer than 20,000 families and 34,000 children have benefited.

The economic disadvantages faced by children of color continue as they enter kindergarten and beyond, yet schools have insufficient resources to help students overcome the obstacles that have resulted in an achievement gap.

Students of color are much more likely to be economically disadvantaged, with nearly 8 of every 10 African American students living in families with low incomes or other major risk factors, along with nearly 3 of every 4 Latinx students.<sup>7</sup> Despite the well-established connection between the conditions of poverty and educational achievement, the number of children able to receive basic income support in Michigan has fallen sharply, and Michigan has not fully funded its At-Risk School Aid program, which supports children in high-poverty schools.

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### Percent of Michigan Students Who Are Economically Disadvantaged (2017-18)



Source: MI School Data

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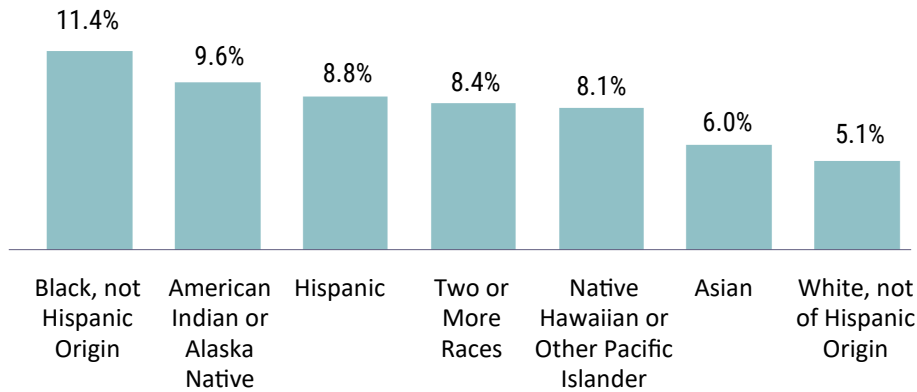
**Children of color are more likely to change schools during the year, often affecting their academic growth and achievement.**

Parents with low incomes are more likely to encounter housing problems that force them to move frequently and can disrupt their children's education by requiring them to change schools mid-year. Overall, 10.2% of economically disadvantaged students changed schools during the 2016-17 school year, compared to 3.4% of children whose families were not economically disadvantaged. A closer look shows that race and ethnicity make a difference, with more than 1 in 10 African American students changing schools, compared to only 5% of White students.

**Students of color are more likely to have chronic school absences that can disrupt their educations.**

Children who are chronically absent from school struggle to keep up with their peers beginning in the earliest years and into adulthood. Children who miss too much school

**Student Mobility Rate in Michigan (2016-17)**  
*Percent of Students Who Changed Schools During Year*



Source: MI School Data

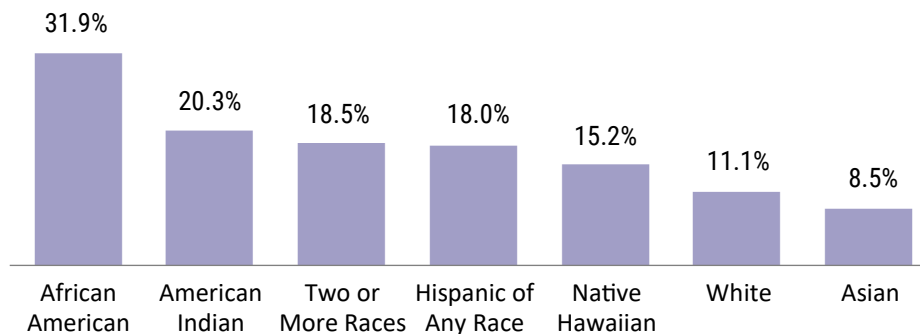
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during preschool, kindergarten and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by third grade. Older students who miss school are more likely to drop out, which greatly diminishes their chances of success in the workplace.<sup>8</sup>

Michigan's state plan under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes chronic absenteeism rates as a factor in measuring school quality. During the 2016-17 school year, nearly 16% of all students were chronically absent, but rates are higher for many children of color, with nearly one-third of African American children missing 10% or more of scheduled school days.

There are many reasons that children are frequently absent from school, including chronic illnesses like asthma, mental health problems, homelessness or frequent moves, unreliable transportation, discipline issues, bullying and fear of violence. Many of these barriers to school attendance are related to the struggles with daily living that flow from systemic barriers to economic success faced by too many families of color, as well as the disproportionate impact of school discipline policies on students of color.

**Percent of Michigan Students Chronically Absent**  
*Missing 10% or More of 2016-17 School Days*



Source: MI School Data

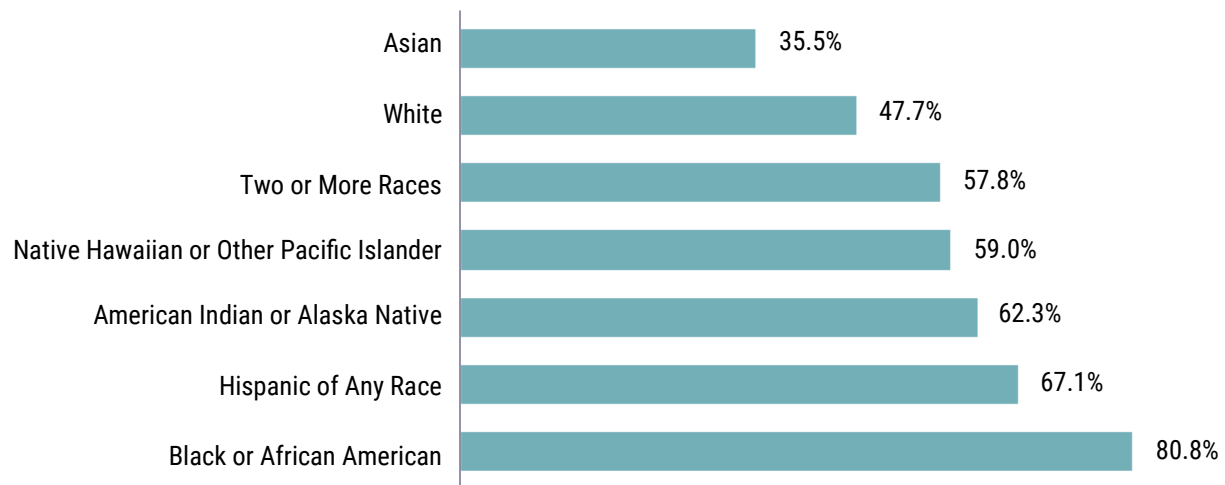
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## The Consequences of Cumulative Educational Inequities

### Differences in educational achievement are evident by fourth grade.

More than 8 of every 10 African American students and two-thirds of Latinx students are not proficient in English/Language Arts by the end of third grade based on the state's most recent standardized test. The stakes of failing to read proficiently by third grade have risen as Michigan prepares to implement a new law in 2020 that will make it more difficult for students to progress to fourth grade if they are not reading at grade level.

### Children of Color More Likely to Attend High-Poverty Schools Resulting in Inequities in Third-Grade Reading *Percent 3rd Graders NOT Proficient in English Language Arts (M-STEP 2017-18)*

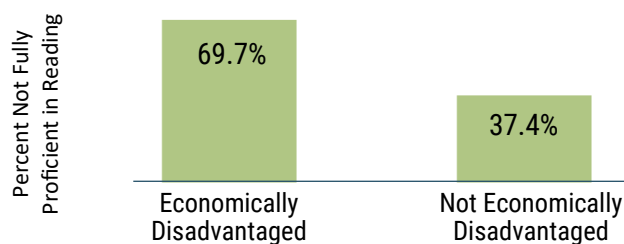


Source: MI School Data

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Children from families that struggle financially are also less likely to be proficient readers. Economically disadvantaged children are nearly twice as likely to not be reading proficiently by the end of third grade—a reality that decreases the likelihood of school success and sets the stage for another generation of young people who cannot find a foothold in the workforce.

### Children Who Are Economically Disadvantaged Are Nearly Twice as Likely to Not Be Proficient Readers by Third Grade (M-STEP 2017-18)



Source: MI School Data

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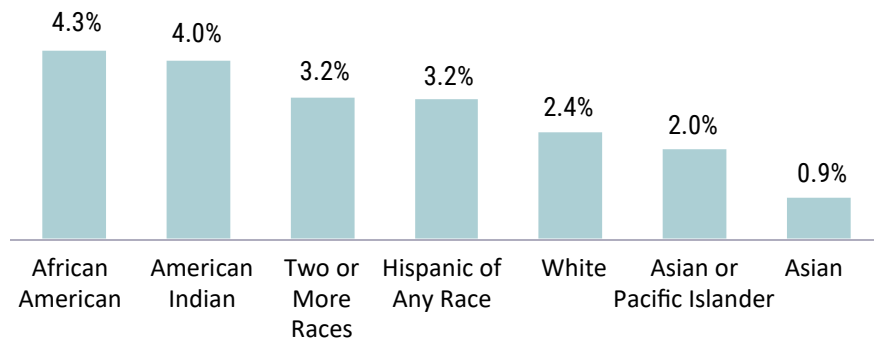
### More students of color are retained in grade.

Given the increased likelihood that children will be retained in grade in Michigan when the new “Read by Grade Three Law” takes effect, it is important to understand which children are most likely to be affected by the law and target intensive services to those children, including family supports, high-quality early childhood services, and additional instructional time and tutoring in the early grades. Currently, African American children are nearly twice as likely to be retained in grade as their White peers. With 8 of every 10 African American third-graders and two-thirds of Latinx children not reading proficiently by third grade, it is clear that children of color are at much higher risk under Michigan’s “Read by Grade Three Law”.

### Fewer children of color are completing high school, cutting short their chances of a higher education or a job leading to economic security.

In the 2016-17 school year, high school dropout rates in Michigan for African American, Latinx and American Indian students were twice the rate for White students. Also struggling to complete high school are students who are homeless, children with disabilities, English language learners and students who are economically disadvantaged.

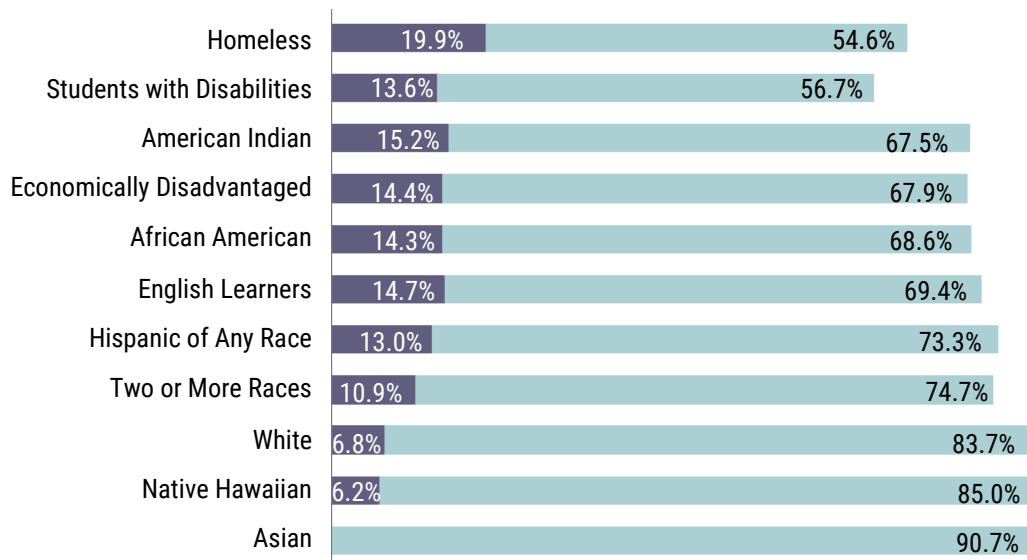
Percent of Michigan Students Retained in Grade  
2016-17 School Year



Source: MI School Data

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### Graduation and Dropout Rates Vary by Race, Ethnicity, Economics, Primary Language and Disability\* Four-Year Graduation/Dropout Rates, 2016-17



\*This is a four-year graduation rate; some students are off-track but continuing toward their diplomas so won't show up as having graduated or dropped out.  
Source: MI School Data

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## Policies Needed to Promote Equity in Education in Michigan

Current state budgets and public policies don't adequately address the costs associated with educating children in high-poverty schools in Michigan. For example, providing the same per-pupil funding to all schools across the state would increase equality in educational financing, but would not create equity by helping children overcome the accumulated obstacles that have resulted in an achievement gap. To achieve equity, state funding must fully recognize the higher costs of educating children in high-poverty schools, as well as address the barriers children of color encounter from the time of their birth.

### Recommendations for moving forward:

- **Consider the impact of potential budget and policy decisions on children of color and low-income communities.** A [first step](#) is to incorporate an analysis of the impact of budget and policy options on children of color, their families and their communities.
- **Invest in efforts to reduce poverty and ameliorate the impact of poverty on learning.** Given the strong relationship between economic disadvantage and school success, Michigan must more intentionally address the causes of poverty, and provide for the basic [income](#), [food](#) and [housing](#) needs of children living in poverty. In addition, parents must be given the tools they need to [succeed in the workforce](#) and access [post-secondary education](#).
- **Expand access to high-quality early learning and care programs.** With the significant increase in federal funding for child care that became available this year, Michigan has an opportunity to ensure that [more families can find high-quality child care](#) for their children. Among the changes needed are an expansion of income eligibility for child care; more adequate payment rates for child care providers; and targeted efforts to expand the supply of high quality child care for infants and toddlers, families needing third-shift or off-hours care, and children with special needs.
- **Increase supports for early literacy.** To improve third-grade reading for children of color or those in low-income communities, Michigan must increase access to [high-quality early childhood education](#) and care programs, expand home visiting and [early identification systems](#), and provide more intensive reading supports and instruction in the early grades.
- **Provide K-12 public schools the resources required to address the educational needs of children of color and those living with families with low incomes.** [Michigan's school funding formula and categorical funding](#) should target schools and students most affected by poverty and policies that have reduced their educational opportunities, including children of color and children from economically disadvantaged families. Included are full funding of the [At-Risk School Aid program](#) and a per-pupil formula that is weighted to provide the greatest assistance for children and schools that are struggling academically.

## Endnotes

1. Gershenson, S.; Hart, C, Lindsay, C.; and Papageorge, N., The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers, IZA—Institute of Labor Economics (March 2017).
2. Hansen, M. and Quintero, D., *Teachers in the US are even more segregated than students*, Teacher Diversity in America, Brown Center on Education Policy, Brookings (August 15, 2018).
3. Trend in Teacher Preparation Program Enrollment, State Enrollment Information for Michigan, U.S Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Higher Education Act Title II Reporting System (2017).
4. Trend in Teacher Preparation Program Enrollment, State Enrollment Information for Michigan, U.S Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Higher Education Act Title II Reporting System (2017).
5. Ingersoll, R., and May, H., *The Minority Teacher Shortage: Fact or Fable?*, Education Week (September 1, 2011).
6. Kwon, D., *Poverty Disturbs Children's Brain Development and Academic Performance*, Scientific American (July 22, 2015).
7. Students are considered economically disadvantaged if they are eligible for free or reduced-price meals (family income of 185% of poverty or less), are in households receiving food (Food Assistance Program) or cash assistance (Family Independence Program), are homeless, migrant or in foster care.
8. *Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's School: An unprecedented look at a hidden educational crisis*, U.S. Department of Education (October 27, 2016).