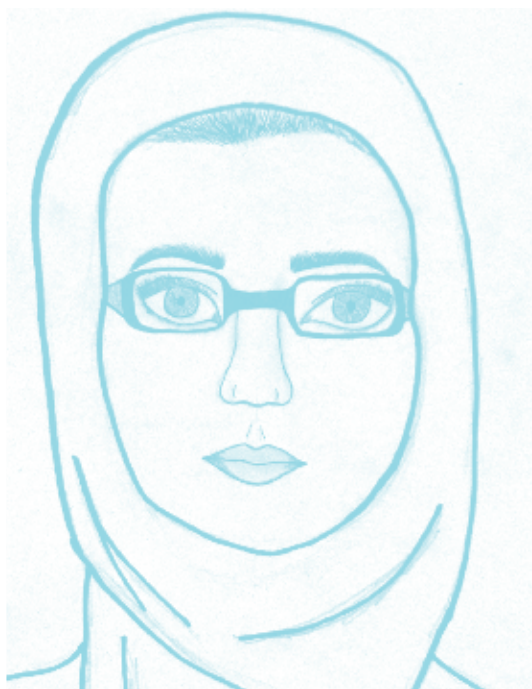
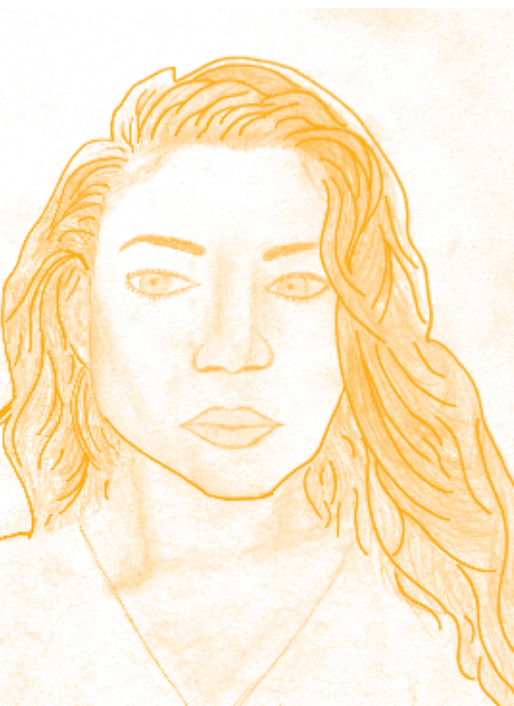
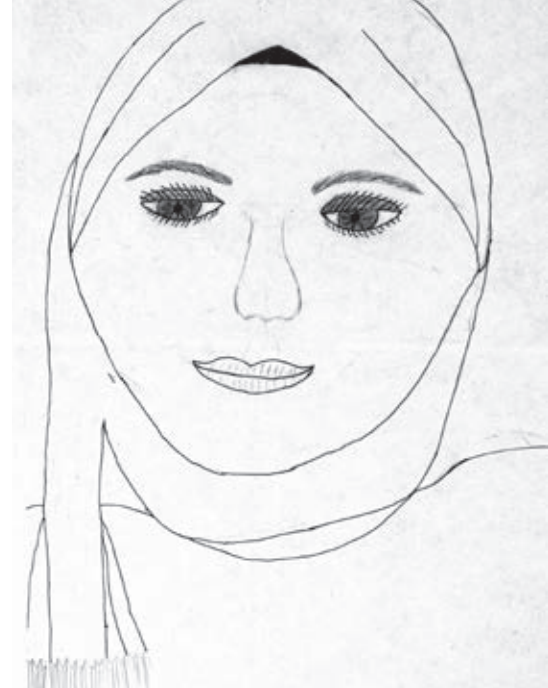


WE BELONG HERE



Eliminating Inequity in
Education for Immigrants and
Students of Color in Maine

ACLU
Maine



We Belong Here

BY EMMA FINDLEN LEBLANC, ACLU OF MAINE
SEPTEMBER 2017

Eliminating Inequity in
Education for Immigrants and
Students of Color in Maine

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ON THE COVER: WASHIMA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

This report explores the experiences of students in schools across Maine who have diverse racial, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. Drawing on interviews with over 115 people (students, parents, community leaders, educators, and administrators), we outline the discrimination faced by minority students in Maine.

We also describe the programs some schools have implemented to address inequality. Our focus is on successful programs from around the state that could be adopted more widely.

This report draws on interviews with over 115 students, parents and educators. We hope it will serve as a tool for communities to achieve greater equity in their schools.

Data is primarily drawn from four categories:

- School districts with the highest percentages of English Language Learner (ELL) and non-white students
- Schools that have seen the largest recent increases in these two categories
- Schools where students reached out to us to share their concerns
- Schools whose successful programs warrant special attention.

Those include Auburn, Bangor, Belfast, Biddeford, Calais, Gardiner, Gorham, Lewiston, MSAD 37 (Addison, Columbia, Columbia Falls, Harrington, and Milbridge), Portland, South Portland, and Westbrook.

Our research focused on immigrant students.

As a result, this report is primarily focused on students who experience discrimination because of their race, religion, national origin, or status as an English Language Learner.

However, the kinds of harassment and exclusion that immigrants and students of color face are also experienced by LGBTQ students, students with disabilities, and low-income students. Many of the best practices we identify here could also serve to improve the experiences of those students.

We hope this report will serve as a tool for students, families, and educators to achieve greater equity in their schools.

II. FINDINGS

Our research has uncovered harassment and discrimination in schools across the state and at all grade levels. Many students of color face a constant barrage of bullying, as well as unwelcoming school cultures.

Muslim students described other students pushing them in the hallways, calling them terrorists, and trying to pull off their headscarves. Students of color described white students telling them to “go back to Mexico” or threatening to have them deported. One black student described students she didn’t know reaching out and tugging her hair as she walked through school hallways. Hateful speech, including racial epithets and derogatory terms for immigrants and sexual minorities, is common.

Both open harassment and more subtle forms of bias are also exhibited by teachers and other staff. A Somali student described a teacher who would always give out bathroom passes to white students first. A black student talked about a math teacher who would always double check the answers he gave with a white student, but who wouldn’t do the same with white students’ answers.

Discrimination extends beyond the classroom, too. Several immigrant families described bus drivers who refused to pick up their children, or complained to school administrators that the immigrant children smelled bad and had bad attitudes. One mother described a school bus driver encouraging the other children to taunt her child.

A Muslim high school student was told by a soccer referee that she couldn’t play unless she removed her headscarf. Another Muslim student was told by the swim coach she couldn’t join the team because she wanted to wear leggings with her bathing suit. These actions are not only offensive; they also violate federal and state laws.

One of the most significant racial disparities in schools is discipline. Black students are more likely to experience in-school and out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, referrals to law enforcement, and corporal punishment than their white counterparts, for the same behaviors.

THE PREVALENCE OF DISCRIMINATION IN MAINE SCHOOLS IS NOT ONLY A MORAL ISSUE. IT IS ALSO A VIOLATION OF STATE AND FEDERAL LAW.

Students often feel that their concerns about harassment are not taken seriously. They say teachers and administrators treat each incident as an isolated episode, rather than as part of a broader, problematic school culture. Ultimately, these students conclude that the adults in their school don’t care about discrimination, and may even condone it. As one Muslim student explained, “A lot of us have lost trust in the school, because no one did anything. I used to go to them every day, but they never did anything.”

The prevalence of discrimination in Maine schools and the lack of sufficient anti-bullying policies are moral failures, and they are also violations of federal and state law. Under Maine law, “[a]ll students have the right to attend public schools that are safe, secure and peaceful environments.” Schools have a legal obligation to address discrimination based on national origin, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender. Those that fail to do so open themselves up to investigations to the Maine Human Rights Commission, lawsuits by students, and prosecution by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

We have structured the recommendations section of our report around programs focused on three areas: **educator and school community awareness; equity in access and outcomes; and parent and family outreach.** For each of these areas we outline the problem identified and describe some of the successful programs that Maine schools have implemented to address that problem.

Because some of the most problematic interactions arise out of ignorance, cultural competency trainings and workshops about race are vital to improving equity in schools.

Programs that we highlight include professional development workshops for teachers focused on the history of race in America and its implications for education; activities that build community among students with different backgrounds; story-telling projects; and efforts to collect and analyze data to better understand student resources and needs.

We also highlight programs that seek to correct the inequities experienced by students of color.

Those include academic support, alternative approaches to discipline, increasing diversity in the teaching workforce, and services to meet basic needs.

Finally, we highlight programs that empower immigrant parents and families.

Families are a crucial part of students' success in school. To best support their children, parents and guardians must be kept informed of school expectations, students' progress, and available resources. We describe best practices for engaging immigrant parents, including providing interpreters, offering information sessions geared toward immigrants, accommodating work schedules and transportation needs, and including them in school decision-making processes.

The discrimination documented in this report is

alarming. No person, and certainly no child, should feel as vulnerable, excluded, and victimized as many immigrant students in Maine described feeling on a regular basis.

But there is reason to hope. Our conversations with immigrant families were a reminder of the strength and resilience of young people, and the unceasing love and dedication of parents. We found passionate educators all over the state who are committed to improving their schools. They shared their challenges and successes in the hope that this report might be the foundation of a better experience for all students in Maine.

**THERE IS
REASON TO HOPE.
STUDENTS, PARENTS AND
EDUCATORS SHARED THEIR
STORIES WITH US IN THE
HOPE THAT WE CAN WORK
TOWARD A BETTER SCHOOL
EXPERIENCE FOR ALL YOUNG
PEOPLE IN MAINE.**

Abdi-K



INTRODUCTION

SCHOOLS PLAY A critical role in our society. They are tasked with educating the citizens of tomorrow, and cultivating in them our civic values. We entrust our schools with the great responsibility of protecting our children, among the most vulnerable members of our communities.

Historically, however, **America's schools have also played a central role in institutionalizing injustice and inequality**, through racial segregation, the exclusion of students with disabilities, and the marginalization of girls into non-academic tracks. In Maine, through the mid-20th century, French Canadian immigrant students were punished for speaking their language, and Wabanaki youth were forcibly removed from their families and placed in residential schools where many of them were abused. Only through persistent federal judicial and legislative intervention, including landmarks such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954),¹ Title IX of the Education Amendments Act,² the Equal Educational Opportunities Act,³ *Lau v. Nichols* (1974),⁴ the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act),⁵ and *Plyler v. Doe* (1982),⁶ have we begun to dismantle the discriminatory foundations of our educational system.

However, as this report shows, students in Maine continue to face harassment, exclusion, and

AS MAINE BECOMES INCREASINGLY MULTICULTURAL, ENSURING EQUITY IN OUR SCHOOLS MUST BE MADE A PRIORITY.

unequal opportunities because of race, religion, and national origin. As Maine becomes increasingly multicultural, ensuring equity in our schools must become a crucial priority. Maine schools have an ethical as well as legal obligation to guarantee the physical and emotional safety of all students and to provide equal access to educational opportunities.

This report seeks to capture the school experiences of Maine students of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Drawing on the testimonies of students, families, educators, and community leaders, we identify the challenges that minority students face in schools as well as the programs that schools

¹ 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

² 20 U.S.C. § 1681 et seq.

³ 20 U.S.C. § 1701 et seq.

⁴ 414 U.S. 563 (1974).

⁵ 42 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.

⁶ 457 U.S. 202 (1982).



have implemented to meet their needs.⁷ Our focus is on those successful programs that might be emulated more widely as best practices for serving immigrants and students of color in Maine.

This report is primarily concerned with students who are vulnerable to discrimination because of race, religion, or national origin. Our research focused on immigrants, who may or may not be English Language Learners (ELL), and whose vulnerability due to national origin and

immigration status also often – though not always – intersects with racial and religious difference. However, many of the challenges that these students face in school affect students outside of these more restricted categories as well. After all, students of color born in Maine suffer disproportionate discipline too, LGBTQ students and those with disabilities face harassment, and many non-immigrant white families experience food insecurity.

Thus, although the scope of this project was initially defined as immigrant youth, we have attempted to be as inclusive as possible, and the best practices we identify here have much wider-reaching implications for equity in Maine schools more generally.

⁷ We use the term “minority” intentionally here, despite a general wariness about its common misuse to describe people of color even in situations where they may be majorities, and its tendency to obscure their varieties of experience. In the Maine context, “minority” seems like the most efficiently inclusive term to describe students of color who may or may not be immigrants, immigrants who may or may not be students of color, ELL students who may or may not be immigrants and may or may not be white, and so on. The kinds of vulnerability with which we are concerned here are, in fact, associated not only with a specific race, religion, or national origin, but with the experience of those traits as a minority status. The association of “minority” with relative structural powerlessness is precisely the experience we intend to evoke. The experiences of sexual and gender identity minorities in Maine schools, for example, while not the explicit focus of this report, share much in common with those of racial and ethnic minority students.

WHAT DO WE MEAN WHEN WE TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY IN MAINE?

I. RECONSIDERING RACE IN MAINE

It has become commonplace to describe Maine as the whitest state in the nation, a designation that we occasionally trade with Vermont and West Virginia. According to the 2010 Census, 95.2 percent of Maine residents identify as white. That statistic, however, fails to convey significant variations and transformations in Maine's demographics, and has been misused by those who wish to erase the long history of non-white people in this state.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IS NOT NEW TO MAINE, EVEN IF MOST MAINERS CONSIDER WHITENESS A PART OF OUR COLLECTIVE IDENTITY.

Wabanaki tribes have lived in Maine for more than 10,000 years. While their population is much reduced due to centuries of state-sponsored violence against them, their history and the perseverance of their communities contradicts any notion of Maine as essentially or originally white. Conversations about diversity in Maine

usually reference growing immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeker populations, but racial and ethnic diversity in Maine is not limited to immigrants, and the pursuit of equity in education must also account for the experiences of Native American communities that continue to face overt racism, structural barriers, and the historical and ongoing traumas of genocide. While Native American students share certain disadvantages in the education system with non-Native students of color – such as disproportionate discipline, underrepresentation in school texts, a dearth of teachers from their community, a lack of cultural awareness, and insufficient family outreach – the legacy of state violence towards Native families shapes their school experience in unique and harmful ways. One of the limitations of this report is that its focus on immigrant youth precludes it from addressing in greater depth the experiences and needs of indigenous families in Maine. This is an essential topic for future research.

Not all non-immigrant students of color are Native American either, and second-, third-, or 15th-generation Mainers of color are often overlooked in popular depictions that gloss Maine as the whitest state in the nation. There are African American families in Maine that can trace their ancestry back to slaves brought to this land before the American Revolution, and there are many more whose families migrated to Maine from the south in the decades following the end of slavery. While those families may be

exempt from certain elements of the immigrant school experience, such as ELL testing and interpretation services, African American students experience explicit racial harassment and the varieties of implicit bias that make them targets of disproportionate discipline in schools, damage their self-esteem, and often make them feel like they don't belong.

The white people who constitute the majority in Maine today are the descendants of immigrants. Many of their immigrant ancestors – including French Canadians, Irish, Italians, and Jews – were themselves considered non-white at the time of their immigration. Racial and ethnic diversity is not new to Maine, even if most Mainers consider whiteness a part of our collective identity.

II. IMMIGRANT YOUTH IN MAINE

In recent years, Maine has seen its immigrant population grow, and **there are now nearly 45,000 Mainers who were born outside of the United States.** While some areas of the state remain overwhelmingly white, other cities, neighborhoods, and schools are becoming highly racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse. In Lewiston, for example, nearly 10 percent of the population is Somali.¹ In Portland, 17 percent of the population identifies as non-white.²

Our schools are the vanguard of our diversity. Nearly 10 percent of Maine students identify as non-white,³ and as of the 2015-2016 school year, there were 7,181 students in Maine schools who

spoke a language other than English at home.⁴ Longley Elementary School in Lewiston is now 75.5 percent non-white, and Riverton Elementary School in Portland is 62 percent non-white.⁵

One of the unique characteristics of Maine's immigrant and ELL students is that they are so diverse. In the United States, more than 70 percent of ELL students are Spanish speakers, and Maine is one of only five states in the country where Spanish is not the most common language for ELL students. In Maine, Spanish speakers are only 10 percent of ELL students. The top three languages are Somali, Arabic, and then Spanish, and it is not uncommon in our most multicultural schools for a single classroom to contain students from several different countries who all speak different languages at home.

Diversity among Maine's immigrant youth does not simply mean that they come from different countries and speak different languages. Some immigrants come directly to Maine from their home countries or refugee camps, while others are secondary migrants who have moved to Maine from somewhere else in the U.S. Some immigrants are refugees who have fled violence and persecution in their home countries, while other families have come to the U.S. for personal or professional reasons. Some students arrive in Maine schools with very little English language facility, while others are fluent. Some ELL students are immigrants, while others were born in the U.S. but live in households where English is not the primary language spoken. **To speak of ELL students, immigrant students, or students of color interchangeably obscures profound differences in their experiences and needs,** and the more closely that schools attend to those differences the better they will serve their students.

¹ American Immigration Council, "New Americans in Maine: The Political and Economic Power of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians in the Pine Tree State," https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/new_americans_in_maine_2015.pdf

² U.S. Census Bureau, "Portland, Maine: Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin," <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml#> (2010).

³ Maine Department of Education, "Public School October 1st Attending Enrollment," <http://www.maine.gov/education/enroll/attending/statefallpub.htm>

⁴ Maine Department of Education, Data Warehouse, http://dw.education.maine.gov/DirectoryManager/WEB/Maine_report/DTHome.aspx

⁵ U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/DistrictSchoolSearch#schoolSearch>

Diana



That our state remains overwhelmingly white does not mean that we do not have an urgent problem with racial discrimination that demands collective action. In fact, the centrality of whiteness to Maine's cultural identity often exacerbates the obstacles that immigrants and other people of color face. There are special challenges associated with being non-white in one of the whitest states in the nation, from greater ignorance about multiculturalism to fewer specialized services. Being a less diverse, whiter state doesn't exempt our schools from the responsibility of grappling with race and racism; in fact, it demands a greater commitment.

**EVERY SCHOOL IS UNIQUE,
BUT THERE IS A GREAT DEAL
THAT SCHOOL STAFF CAN
LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER.
WE HOPE THE OBSERVATIONS
OFFERED HERE WILL FACILITATE
THOSE CONVERSATIONS AND
COLLABORATIONS.**

This report is based on over 115 interviews with parents, students, community leaders, and educators, including teachers, counselors, principals, and superintendents. No one understands the challenges that immigrant students of color face better than those students themselves, just as no one understands the support that teachers need better than teachers. Our goal here is to amplify their voices. We intend this report as a tool for educators, students, and families, to help them achieve greater equity in their schools.

Every school is unique. Their demographic trajectories are different, as are their curricula, program offerings, and budgets. The size of a school district as well as its proximity to urban centers affects the services it offers. But there is still a great deal that school staff can learn from each other, and we hope that the observations we offer here might facilitate those conversations and collaborations. Given that our research revealed consistent patterns of race-, religion-, and language-based exclusion and harassment across Maine schools, we highlight best practices from several different schools around the state so that educators might adapt them to meet their specific local needs.

We have identified two significant obstacles to equity for Maine's multilingual, multicultural, and non-white students that this report aims to rectify. **The first challenge is unawareness or denial among educators of discrimination in their schools.** For teachers and administrators, it can be disheartening to acknowledge the extent of the problem. And while most educators should be able to recognize explicit discrimination (the use of derogatory language or pulling headscarves, for example), identifying "implicit bias" (the unconscious beliefs and attitudes we all hold that influence the decisions we make) can be more difficult, especially without specific training. **The second problem is that even when school staff recognizes the problem of racial and other inequities, they have limited resources to address them and often don't know where to begin.**

This report seeks to address both of those challenges. First, it outlines the kinds of marginalization that minority students in Maine suffer, as they described their experiences to us. Then it presents best practices that students, families, and educators praised as successful, and that might be replicated elsewhere to eliminate illegal exclusion and discrimination in Maine schools.

OVERVIEW

OUR RESEARCH FOCUSED on those school districts with the highest percentages of ELL and non-white students, those that have seen the most significant recent increases in these two categories, schools where students reached out to us to share their concerns, and those whose successful programs warrant special attention. These include Auburn, Bangor, Belfast, Biddeford, Calais, Gardiner, Gorham, Lewiston, MSAD 37 (Addison, Columbia, Columbia Falls, Harrington, and Milbridge), Portland, South Portland, and Westbrook. Although we identify specific schools in our discussion of successful programs, we have decided not to name school districts in our overview of discrimination in order to protect the anonymity of the students who spoke with us and

to underline the representative rather than exceptional nature of the cases we highlight.

While this report should be of particular relevance to those aforementioned districts from which we draw the bulk of our qualitative data, our findings are applicable to many other communities across the state. **As the experiences of cities like Lewiston and Biddeford attest, demographic change often happens quickly in Maine.** As costs of living continue to rise, the search for affordable housing and employment opportunities attracts immigrants to new cities, which are overwhelmingly white and working-class. Given that rectifying inequality is often as much about changing attitudes, eliminating bias, and



EVEN PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SCHOOLS HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN ACHIEVING GREATER EQUITY IN MAINE SCHOOLS.

educating the community as it is about specific programming for immigrant students, even predominantly white schools have an important role to play in achieving greater equity in Maine's schools.

We also found that some schools with smaller percentages of ELL and immigrant students had more severe problems with harassment and fewer established programs to serve those vulnerable students. Schools with less diversity tended to have more deeply entrenched assumptions about what constitutes “normal,” which were experienced as exclusionary by students who fell outside of that definition, whether because of race, religion, national origin, poverty, disability, or sexual orientation. **Schools do not need to wait for a sudden or massive influx of immigrants to begin considering their obligations to minority students.**¹

Maine has often failed to be proactive with its immigrant communities. Within many schools

there are teachers and administrators who have fully embraced their immigrant students and work diligently to understand and meet their needs. However, they too often lack institutional support for their work towards inclusivity, or are even penalized for their actions. Teachers and principals who speak up about the racism that they witness, and encourage their schools to reflect more honestly and openly on those topics, are accused of stirring up controversy or being too political. Even well-meaning and empathetic educators may shy away from confronting bias head-on out of fear of conflict. But passivity sends a dangerous message to students, and fails to model the integrity that we seek to instill in them. It also tells students of color that they don't matter enough to be worth the trouble, and violates schools' obligation to provide an education that is free of discrimination, as discussed below.

Those districts most actively committed to serving their diverse student bodies still have a long way to go to ensure equity in both access and outcomes, and should guard against complacency. Those schools that have neglected to confront bias and harassment now risk approaching a crisis. We highlight effective programs here not to imply that a few successes are sufficient, but to show that change is possible and to offer models of how to achieve it.

¹ *The Department of Education's implementing regulations for Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 state that a school receiving federal funds that has in the past discriminated on the basis of race, color or national origin "must take affirmative action to overcome the effects of prior discrimination," 34 C.F.R. § 100.3(b)(6)(i), and, even when such school has not in the past discriminated, it "may take affirmative action to overcome the effects of conditions which resulted in limiting participation by persons of a particular race, color, or national origin," id. § 100.3(b)(6)(ii).*

EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF HARASSMENT, EXCLUSION, AND INEQUITY

OUR RESEARCH HAS uncovered pervasive harassment and discrimination in schools across the state and at all levels. Many students of color face a constant everyday barrage of race-based bullying and intolerant, xenophobic school cultures.

I. HARASSMENT IN THE HALLWAYS

Muslim students described other students pushing them in the hallways, calling them terrorists, addressing them as “ISIS” and trying to pull off their headscarves. **Many students of color described white students telling them to “go back to Mexico” or threatening to have them deported.** One Latina teacher reported that a student threatened to have her deported if she gave him a bad grade. A female Muslim student said that she wanted to wear a headscarf to school but she was scared that she would be completely socially isolated if she did. A black student described students she didn’t know reaching out and stroking, poking, and tugging her hair as she walked through school hallways.

Hate speech, including racial epithets and derogatory terms for immigrants and sexual minorities, is common in conversation and is regularly scrawled in bathroom stalls and posted on social media.¹ “Gay” and “retarded” are ubiquitous insults. In one incident, several white

¹ Maine’s anti-bullying laws address speech that is distinct from students’ First Amendment rights to express their religious, political and philosophical views. The statutory definition of bullying may be found at 20-A M.R.S. § 6554(2)(B).

“Every day I think about transferring.”

“They make us ashamed to be multilingual.”

“I would come late to school all the time. Or I didn’t come at all. I didn’t try. I didn’t think any of my teachers cared about me.”

“I dropped out two years ago. No one wanted me there. I asked for help. I came after school. But they never helped me. I want to get my education, just not here.”

students surrounded a black student to tease her about liking Kool-Aid, a racist stereotype of African Americans. At another high school, a group of white, male student athletes bragged to a female black student that they could call themselves “niggers” because they were good at sports, daring her to challenge them. A Chinese student described classmates teasing her about eating cats. A Vietnamese student said that white students regularly run up to her and yell in her face, “Ching! Chong!”

Even at schools that were otherwise described as welcoming and tolerant, ELL students described their frustration at always being seen as stupid because they don’t speak English perfectly. As one Somali high school senior put it, “I speak seven languages! I’m not stupid. I just

don't speak English yet." A Caribbean immigrant at another high school admitted, "I don't think people would ever expect me to be smart." She explained that her accent and her skin color were the problem.

Bias and harassment extend even to elementary schools, despite common assumptions shared with us by several white teachers and parents that young children don't see race. When we asked a group of eight- to 11-year-olds the reasons why students at their school were bullied, they told us "race, gender, and different religions," and elaborated several examples.

Researchers have found that children absorb cultural stereotypes about race and develop their own racial prejudices between ages five and seven, and begin to identify themselves as part of a specific group even earlier.²

II. UNEQUAL TREATMENT FROM TEACHERS

Both explicit harassment and more insidious forms of bias are not restricted to students but are also exhibited by teachers and other staff. A Somali student described a pattern in his class in which he would raise his hand to ask for permission to go to the bathroom and the teacher would prohibit him from leaving, but then later allow a white student to go. When the student asked again, the teacher would tell him that too many people had already gone. Other black students at the same high school affirmed they had experienced similar treatment. They said that teachers told them, "You people don't really have to go. You just want to hang out with your friends in the halls."

Students at some schools described the informal segregation of their classrooms, with teachers devoting more instructional time to the white student section. In one math class, when black

students answered a question the teacher would make sure to double check the answer with a white student, but when a white student answered the question she wouldn't check. When several students were discussing a list of the world's richest people, which included Carlos Slim Helú, a Mexican man, their teacher interrupted to tell them he was probably a drug boss.³ **Students were afraid to stand up to the teacher because he was known for being a bully who had once harassed a transgender student by using her birth name over and over again** in class until she left in tears, humiliated.

A Chinese father recounted the time he picked up his son at elementary school and the teacher told him to go back to his country. A Somali father said that when he approached his son's elementary school teacher to discuss his recent struggles with homework, the woman responded, "I don't want to see you." Another immigrant parent reported that after he brought his concerns to his child's teacher, his child started receiving drastically lower grades even though the quality of her work hadn't changed. The father understood this as retaliation for speaking up.

After a cultural training for teachers about Islam in one school district, teachers joked to one another, "But they didn't even mention ISIS!"

Even students who had been exempt from the most obvious, egregious cases of discrimination said that they had had certain teachers who made them feel unwelcome, that mostly ignored them in class, or who seemed to always scold them for talking too loudly even if others were talking too. One 15-year-old from Jamaica said that her teachers always seem surprised that she does so well academically, and their compliments about her achievements are often

² Dean Cristol and Belinda Gimbert, "Racial Perceptions of Young Children: A Review of Literature Post-1999," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 36, no. 2 (2008): 201 -207.

³ Carlos Slim Helú, an engineer by training, got his start as an investor in the stock market, and later made his fortune in manufacturing, telecommunications, and natural resource extraction. He has never been associated with the illegal drug trade.

unintentionally insulting. For example, **one teacher praised her work and exclaimed, “You’re not supposed to be smart!”** Other students complained that if they approached their teachers to ask for help, the teachers would suggest that their class was probably too hard for them and they should drop it.

Students of color were particularly discouraged by what they saw as their teachers’ passivity in the face of blatant racist aggression. When they described students mocking their accents or calling them “niggers,” they often emphasized that, “the teacher was standing right there.” They were perplexed and angry that **the adults in a position of power to stand up for students and correct bullies’ behavior seemed not to care.**

Immigrant families also described the implicit biases of well-meaning school staff. One mother reported that school officials tried to change her child’s ADHD medications without consulting her, assuming that she was too ignorant to adequately address her child’s health. Somali parents said that if teachers notice any scrapes or bruises on Somali girls they assume abuse, because they think that in Somali culture girls aren’t allowed to play outside so there’s no other explanation. African families, especially, asserted that school officials are quick to assume that they are abusing their children and to call Child Protective Services, which can be incredibly disruptive and legally disastrous for those families.

III. DISCRIMINATION BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Discrimination extends beyond the classroom too. Several immigrant families described problems with school bus drivers who refused to pick up their children or complained to school administrators that the immigrant children smelled bad and had bad attitudes. **One mother described a school bus driver ridiculing her child, and encouraging the other children to taunt him too.** Parents report that black students

are disciplined more harshly for infractions on the school bus like moving around or talking loudly, including lengthy bus suspensions that make it difficult for working parents to get their kids to school. In the cafeteria, many schools remain largely segregated, and students described stricter enforcement of rules and more monitors on the non-white side of the room.

At the first soccer game of the season, one Muslim high school student from the Middle East was told by a referee that she would not be allowed to play unless she removed her headscarf. Another Muslim student said that the swim coach told her she couldn’t join the swim team because she wanted to wear leggings with her bathing suit for religious reasons. **A black student was discouraged from joining a student organization that involved matching outfits because her hair wouldn’t match.** Those forms of exclusion are not only insensitive; they also violate federal and state laws.⁴

IV. STRUCTURES OF INEQUALITY

Discrimination is not only interpersonal, but also structural, and many standard school policies, practices, and attitudes disproportionately harm students of color.

A. ELL Programming

Maine state regulations concerning English Language Learning (ELL), for example, can lead to an inferior education for ELL students, in

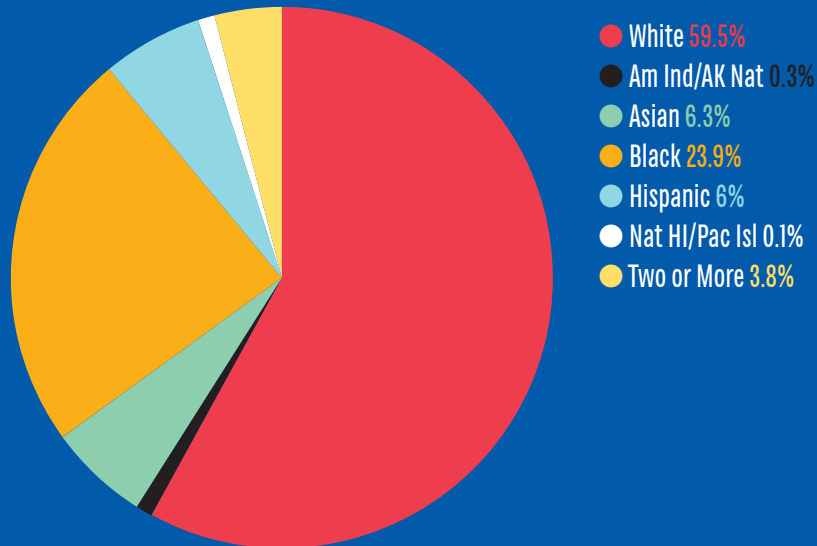
⁴ See, e.g., 42 U.S.C. 2000d (“No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”); 5 M.R.S.A. § 4602(3)(A) (“It is unlawful educational discrimination in violation of this Act, on the basis of national origin or race, to “[e]xclude a person from participation in, deny a person the benefits of, or subject a person to, discrimination in any ... extracurricular ... program or activity”); see also 20-A M.R.S.A. § 6554 (prohibiting “[i]nterfering with the student’s ... ability to participate in or benefit from the services, activities or privileges provided by a school” based on “a student’s actual or perceived race; color; religion; national origin; ancestry or ethnicity” among other traits).

Discipline Data (Portland, 2013)

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, Educational Equity Report, <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=26849&syk=7&pid=2270&sr=1&Report=7>

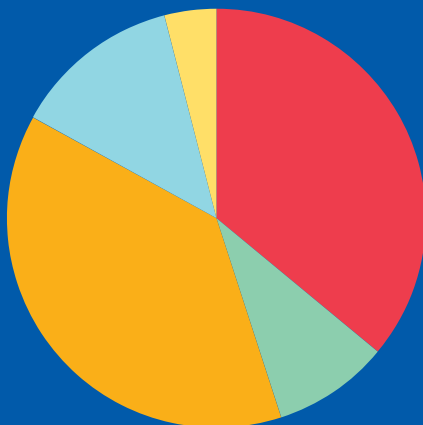
District Enrollment

n=6,964



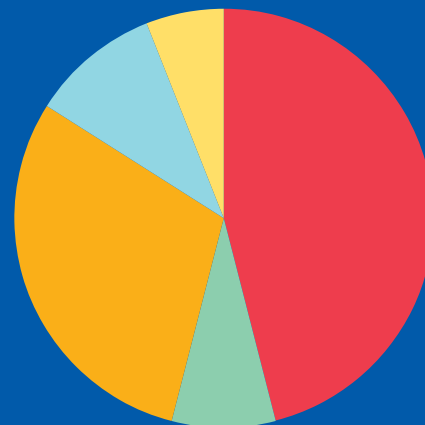
In-School Suspensions

n=110



Out-of-School Suspensions

n=331

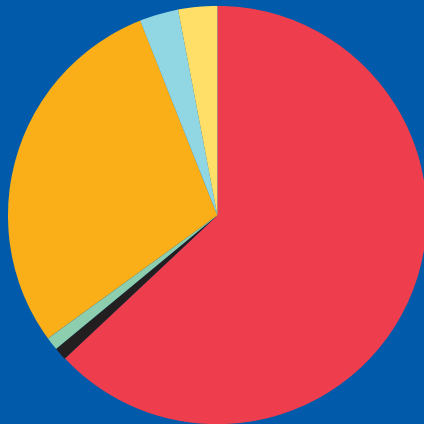


Discipline Data (Lewiston, 2013)

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, Educational Equity Report, <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=26842&syk=7&pid=736&Report=7>

District Enrollment

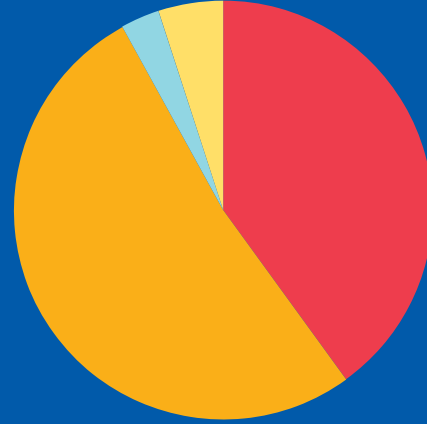
n=5,145



White 63.4%
Am Ind/AK Nat 0.8%
Asian 1%
Black 29.1%
Hispanic 3%
Nat HI/Pac Isl 0%
Two or More 2.8%

In-School Suspensions

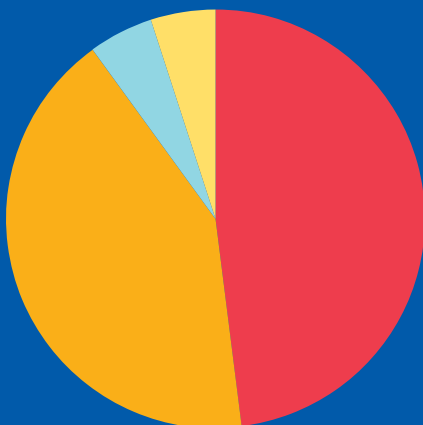
n=439



White 39.9%
Am Ind/AK Nat 0%
Asian 0%
Black 51.7%
Hispanic 3.6%
Nat HI/Pac Isl 0%
Two or More 4.8%

Out-of-School Suspensions

n=391



White 47.8%
Am Ind/AK Nat 0%
Asian 0%
Black 42.5%
Hispanic 5.1%
Nat HI/Pac Isl 0%
Two or More 4.6%

Expulsions

n=14



White 42.9%
Am Ind/AK Nat 0%
Asian 0%
Black 42.9%
Hispanic 14.3%
Nat HI/Pac Isl 0%
Two or More 0%

violation of *Lau v. Nichols* and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974.⁵ Students are identified as ELL based on a survey, which asks about the languages spoken in a student's home, and a placement test.

School districts in Maine have different strategies for teaching ELL students; some districts supplement mainstream classroom learning with tailored English language instruction, while others segregate ELL students in special classrooms where they take the majority of their subject matter classes with fellow ELL students. ELL students are retested every year to determine whether they will remain in the ELL program. However, the standards to exit ELL are extremely high – until recently, Maine was the only state that required a perfect score – and many immigrant families describe frustration that their children get stuck in ELL classes due to these unreasonable testing standards and a lack of transparency about their rights.^{6, 7}

In some districts, students can earn only limited credits towards graduation for ELL classes, which means that after years of hard work they might be no closer to getting their diploma. It is an extremely discouraging experience for them.

Many ELL students describe a profound sense of isolation, as ELL classrooms are often tucked away in basements or in separate buildings, offering ELL students few opportunities to

interact with mainstream students.⁸ As one Iraqi high school student explained, “I didn’t really feel like I was part of the school until I got out of ELL.” Another Iraqi high school student said that she felt so stigmatized as a multilingual student that she stopped speaking Arabic altogether, which caused a great deal of tension with her parents.

B. Discipline

One of the most significant racial disparities in schools is discipline. Across the U.S., black students are suspended and expelled at three times the rate of white students. Although they represent only 16 percent of student enrollment, they constitute 27 percent of students referred to law enforcement.⁹ In Maine, the numbers are smaller but the discrepancies are just as meaningful. Only 3.1 percent of Maine public school students are black, yet black students experienced 6.2 percent of in-school expulsions, 6.3 percent out-of-school suspensions, 6.5 percent of referrals to law enforcement, 8 percent of expulsions under zero tolerance policies, and 18 percent of corporal punishments in school.¹⁰

Black, male students described their sense that teachers were quicker to discipline them than

⁵ 20 U.S.C. § 1703(f) (“No State shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, by ... the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs.”)

⁶ Zachary L. Heiden and Emma LeBlanc, ACLU of Maine Comments on Maine’s State Education Plan Initial Draft, letter to Acting Commissioner Robert G. Hasson, Jr., March 30, 2017.

⁷ For example, schools often fail to notify immigrant families that parents have the right to remove their children from ELL programming, or to decline to enroll their child in ELL altogether. 20 U.S.C. §§ 6312 (g) (1)(A)(viii), 7012(a)(8).

⁸ *Schools should take care that their ELL programs are administered in the least segregated way possible.* “Some examples of when the Departments [of Education and Justice] have found compliance issues involving segregation include when school districts: (1) fail to give segregated EL students access to their grade-level curriculum, special education, or extracurricular activities; (2) segregate EL students for both academic and non-academic subjects, such as recess, physical education, art, and music; (3) maintain students in a language assistance program longer than necessary to achieve the district’s goals for the program; and (4) place EL students in more segregated newcomer programs due to perceived behavior problems or perceived special needs.” “Dear Colleague” Letter: Guidance to Ensure English Learner Students Have Equal Access to a High-Quality Education, U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Off. for Civ. Rts. & U.S. Dep’t of Justice, Civ. Rts. Div. (Jan. 7, 2015), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2013 Civil Rights Data Collection, <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

their white peers for any perceived disturbance or disobedience in class. Black girls also reported that their teachers often disciplined them for “bad attitudes,” even if they were aware of traumas in students’ lives, such as the recent death of a parent. Many students of color offered examples of disparate discipline in their schools, as when a white student and a black student were both suspended after fighting, but the black student’s suspension was two weeks longer. Those experiences are commonplace. When students confront educators about those

STUDENTS OFTEN FEEL THAT THEIR CONCERNS ARE NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY, OR EVEN THAT ADMINISTRATORS CONDONE THE DISCRIMINATION THEY EXPERIENCE.

disparities, they are sometimes disciplined further, and administrators usually say that there are “different circumstances” for each student that they can’t explain because of student privacy rights. Students are left feeling like their discipline is arbitrary and unfair. Most schools’ disciplinary procedures give administrators a great deal of discretion, which makes students of color vulnerable to intentional or inadvertent prejudice.

C. Lack of Staff Diversity

Lack of racial and ethnic diversity among Maine’s educator workforce contributes to a sense of marginalization and alienation for students of color and further exacerbates racial inequities in academic achievement. Research shows that students of color perform better academically

when they have teachers who look like them.¹¹ Researchers have found that students of color who have teachers of color are more confident and motivated at school,¹² have lower drop-out rates,¹³ and are absent less often.¹⁴ Students also have higher aspirations for themselves when they see people that look like them in positions of authority.¹⁵

Teachers of color are also beneficial for white students. As the Supreme Court has said, “[t]he classroom is peculiarly the marketplace of ideas. The Nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth out of a multitude of tongues, rather than through any kind of authoritative selection.”¹⁶ Teachers of color help erode harmful stereotypes about racial inferiority,¹⁷ ultimately better preparing students to live in our increasingly diverse world.

D. Ignored Concerns

Students often feel that their concerns about harassment are not taken seriously, and that each incident is treated as an isolated episode,

¹¹ Thomas S. Dee, *Teachers’ Race and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010).

¹² Anna Egalite and Brian Kisida, “The Effects of Teacher Match on Academic Perceptions and Attitudes,” Working Paper, <https://ced.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Egalite-and-Kisida-RMET-Working-Paper-Feb-2017.pdf>.

¹³ Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara F. Lucas, “Diversifying the Teacher Workforce: A Retrospective and Prospective Analysis,” *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* 103 (2004), 70–104; Ronald Ehrenberg and Dominic J. Brewer, “Do School and Teacher Characteristics Matter? Evidence from High School and Beyond,” *Economics and Education Review* 13, no. 1 (1993): 1–17.

¹⁴ Villegas and Lucas, “Diversifying”; George Farkas, Robert P. Grobe, Daniel Sheehan, and Yuan Shuan, “Cultural Resources and School Success: Gender, Ethnicity, and Poverty Groups Within an Urban School District,” *American Sociological Review* 55 (1990): 127–142.

¹⁵ Egalite and Kisida, “Teacher Match.”

¹⁶ *Keyishian v. Bd. of Regents of University of State of N.Y.*, 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967) (quotations omitted).

¹⁷ Villegas and Lucas, “Diversifying”; Margaret M. Waters, “An Agenda for Educating Black Teachers,” *The Educational Forum* 53, no. 3 (1989): 267–279.

rather than a manifestation of a broader, problematic school culture. Ultimately, these students conclude that their administrators condone the discrimination they suffer. As one Muslim student explained, “A lot of us have lost trust in the school, because no one did anything. I used to go to them every day, but they never did anything.” One high school teacher, exasperated with unresponsive administrators at her school, told us, “A child should be safe in school. There’s so much bullying that goes on here, but they just overlook it. They’d need to do paperwork, and that would look bad. So it just goes on and on and on.”

V. THE CONSEQUENCES OF HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

Racism produces self-doubt and self-hatred, and the harmful consequences of low self-esteem for teenagers are well-documented.¹⁸ One Chinese student described the kinds of jokes she hears her classmates make about Asians, mocking their accents and appearance. She said that she hears comments like that on a weekly or even daily basis. But, she added, the student at her school who says the most racist things about Asian students is actually Chinese. Then she explained, “People make fun of themselves so it won’t hurt as bad when other people make fun of them.” W.E.B. Du Bois captured the violence of this internalized racism more than a hundred years ago in *The Souls of Black Folk*, explaining the burden for black people of their “double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at

“I DON’T
THINK IT WILL
GET BETTER,
SO I TRY NOT TO
THINK ABOUT IT
AT ALL.”

one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”¹⁹

The relentless, everyday pressures of bullying and bias wear upon students, eroding their expectations of what a safe, supportive school could even look like for them. Students often described to us the kinds of incidents detailed above and then shrugged, explaining, “It’s just normal,” or, “I’m so used to it.” One student explained, “I just try not to let it get into my head, I don’t want to be afraid all time.” Over and over again they told us, “I don’t think it will get better, so I try not to think about it at all.”²⁰

¹⁸ Studies have shown that low-self esteem during adolescence is correlated with long-term negative consequences including worse economic outcomes, more criminal behaviors, and worse mental and physical health during adulthood. See Kali H. Trzesniewski, M. Brent Donnellan, Terrie E. Moffitt, Richard W. Robbins, Richie Poulton, and Avshalom Caspi, “Low Self-Esteem During Adolescence Predicts Poor Health, Criminal Behaviour and Limited Economic Prospects during Adulthood,” *Developmental Psychology* 42, no. 2 (2006): 381–390; and Andrea E. Steiger, Mathias Allemand, Mathias; Richard W. Robins, and Helmut A. Fend, “Low and Decreasing Self-Esteem During Adolescence Predict Adult Depression Two Decades Later,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 106, no. 2 (2014): 325–338.

¹⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1903).

²⁰ A national Newsweek poll that found that 82 percent of American teenagers think that racial discrimination will be a problem for their generation, and 91 percent of black teenagers think racial discrimination won’t go away – up from 33 percent in 1966. See Abigail Jones, “What do American Teens Want? Less Racism,” *Newsweek* (May 12, 2016), <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/05/27/american-teenagers-race-458942.html>.

Learning Experience

Navigating Race and Bias in High School Humor

During senior prank week at one southern Maine high school, students decided to hire a Mariachi band to follow the school principal around during the day to annoy him. When that plan fell through, students decided to dress up as a Mariachi band themselves. They bought cheap sombreros and plastic ponchos, and drew on exaggerated, stereotypical Mexican moustaches.

When they showed up at school, blasting music and dancing in the hallways, the principal decided that the best way to hurry them along would be to lead them through the hallways and then right back out the door. What students and teachers saw, however, was their principal at the head of a group of students engaging in what was at best an insensitive joke about another culture and at worst a symbol of the marginalization of Mexican people, who are regularly demeaned in popular culture. They were hurt by the students' actions, and even more so by what they saw as their principal's approval of them.

Heightened tensions about U.S. immigration policies, a recent spike in hate speech and hate crimes targeting Latinos, and an incident at this high school earlier in the year, in which a student delivered the morning announcements in a fake Mexican accent, formed the background to this event. Despite administrators' assurances that the participants were "good kids" and well intentioned, the broader context amplified the significance of the prank, and made it part of a pattern of intolerance.

One teacher decided to use this incident as a teaching opportunity. She explained to her students the discomfort that some of their peers had shared with her privately, and why the message of the prank seemed so unsettling, especially to immigrant students. She also gave her students more historical context for understanding race and racism in America. One of the organizers of the prank was in her class, and she reevaluated her actions that day. The student said that one of the things she realized is that her own intentions weren't the issue, it was how her actions affected others, and she hadn't been thoughtful enough about that. In the end, she apologized to several offended members of the school community, which they appreciated.

However, students continue to lament that their administrators did not speak out about the prank, or organize a school-wide discussion like the one the teacher organized for her class. "Good kids" with good intentions can still do harm, and we need to take students seriously when they identify speech as hurtful to them. Adolescents test boundaries, and they often use humor to push to the edge of the acceptable. We will never fully eliminate offensive jokes or pranks. What we can do, however, is use them as opportunities to teach students about the history of race, sex, and disability in America, about privilege, about the power of speech, and about responsibility to community.

DISCRIMINATION AND THE LAW

Schools have a responsibility under state and federal law to address discrimination on the basis of national origin, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or other identifiable class.

The ubiquity of bias-based bullying and the dearth of sufficient, effective anti-bullying policies across Maine schools are **not only moral failures but also stark violations of federal and state statute**. Schools that do not actively work to investigate and eradicate bullying, and to redress hostile school cultures, open themselves up to investigations by the Maine Human Rights Commission,¹ private lawsuits by students,² and enforcement actions by the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice.³

I. MAINE LAW

“All students have the right to attend public schools that are safe, secure and peaceful environments.”⁴

In 2005, and updated in 2011, the Maine Education and School Statute was amended to require school boards to establish policies and procedures to address bullying and harassment.⁵ In 2012, the State of Maine passed an anti-bullying law requiring all public schools to have a policy against

bullying and harassment, including cyberbullying that impacts students while at school.⁶

II. FEDERAL LAW

It is unlawful to “[e]xclude a person from participation in, deny a person the benefits of, or subject a person to, discrimination in any academic, extracurricular, research, occupational training or other program or activity” based on sex, physical or mental disability, national origin or race, or sexual orientation.⁷

Schools violate federal civil rights law when harassment of a student who is a member of a protected class “is sufficiently serious that it creates a hostile environment and such harassment is encouraged, tolerated, not adequately addressed, or ignored by school authorities.”⁸

Schools must have a clear, public, and enforced policy for the prevention of harassment as well as a procedure for complaints,⁹ and must investigate misconduct “regardless of whether a student has complained, asked the school to take action, or identified the harassment as a form of discrimination.”¹⁰

¹ See 05-071 Me Code R. 4-A § 03.

² See, e.g., *Nabozny v. Podelsny*, 92 F.3d 446 (7th Cir. 1996) (affirming denial of summary judgment against plaintiff’s claims school’s response to harassment based on sexual orientation violated Equal Protection Clause); No. 3:10-cv-01172, 2012 WL 2049173, at *9 (D. Or. June 6, 2012) (allowing plaintiff’s Title VI claims for harassment based on race to proceed, noting “school districts that do nothing to remedy harassment and districts that persist in the same attempts at remediation despite actual knowledge of their ineffectiveness, both demonstrate ‘deliberate indifference’”); *Doe v. Galster*, No. 09-C-1089, 2011 WL 2784159 (E.D. Wisc. Jul. 14, 2011) (denying motion to dismiss on plaintiff’s Title IX, Title VI and equal protection claims based on race, gender and national origin).

³ See 42 U.S.C. § 2000b; 34 C.F.R. §§ 100.7(c), 100.8, 104.61, 106.71.

⁴ 20-A M.R.S.A. § 6554(a).

⁵ 20-A M.R.S.A. §1001(15)(H).

⁶ 20-A M.R.S.A. § 6554(a).

⁷ See 42 U.S.C. § 2000d (“No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”); 29 U.S.C. § 794 (prohibiting discrimination against otherwise qualified person on the basis of disability); 42 U.S.C. § 12131 (same); 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a) (“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance”); 5 M.R.S. § 4602(3)(A).

⁸ U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Off. for Civ. Rts. & U.S. Dep’t of Justice, Civ. Rts. Div., “Dear Colleague” Letter: Harassment and Bullying, (Oct. 26, 2010), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.pdf>.

⁹ 28 C.F.R. § 35.107(b); 34 C.F.R. § 104.7(b); 34 C.F.R. § 106.8(b).

¹⁰ “Dear Colleague” Letter: Harassment and Bullying at 3.

STRATEGIES FOR SERVING MINORITY STUDENTS

THE CHALLENGES FACED by immigrant students and students of color are varied, from disproportionate discipline to insufficient translation services for parents with limited English proficiency.

The programs that schools have implemented to meet their needs are diverse too, including academic support, curricular reforms, and restorative justice initiatives. Although we attempt to detail here a representative sample of the range of successful initiatives that we encountered, our account is not comprehensive. The limited scope of this project mandates that we focus on several illustrative examples, while simply acknowledging that there are a great number of creative, effective projects undertaken by educators every day to serve their most vulnerable students that we cannot fully honor here.

Based on the most pervasive challenges and pressing needs reported by students, parents, and educators, we have structured this section of our report around three thematic clusters of programs: educator and school community awareness, equity in access and outcomes, and parent and family outreach. For each of those areas we outline the need that we identified and describe some of the successful programs that Maine schools have implemented to meet that need.

I. EDUCATOR AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY AWARENESS

Meeting the needs of Maine's diverse multicultural and minority students begins with understanding them. **Some of the most contentious and alienating interactions arise**

"Kids in my class are always pulling their eyes back and yelling in fake Chinese."

"The only time we hear about Somalia is pirates. The only thing we learn about black people is slavery."

"Most of what we read is written by white authors. It's even worse in history. We only learn the white narrative. The Middle East and Africa are totally dehumanized."

"They don't know the difference between terrorist and Muslim."

"People always say, 'you're so angry' just because I'm black. Then I have to not be angry, just to prove a point."

out of misunderstandings and ignorance.

Muslim girls described their frustration at always having to explain why they choose to wear headscarves, and why it doesn't mean they are oppressed. When one immigrant student was feeling homesick, other students teased her, asking, "If your country is so great, then why did you come here?" Teachers reported fatigue among their immigrant students who must constantly explain and defend themselves.

Greater awareness is important not only for students but also for other members of the school community, including teachers, counselors, principals, and school board members. One high school teacher said that as

Zainab





the refugee population at his school began to rise, he observed hostility towards the new students from several other teachers. They grumbled about families coming to take American jobs or live off welfare, and they seemed intolerant towards students who were struggling to adjust to their new school life. It was only after a workshop for staff put on by Catholic Charities, which explained the refugee experience in greater detail, that those teachers started to show more empathy towards their new students. Some of them remarked during the workshop that **they hadn't realized the kinds of conditions that refugees faced in their home countries, or how arduous the process of resettlement to the U.S. could be.** Without cultural awareness training, teachers, students, and other school community members can fall back on harmful stereotypes and misinformation.

Empathetic teachers are students' greatest advocates, but they often require a more comprehensive perspective on students' lives to succeed in that role. Many teachers in Maine

have done a great deal of self-education about refugees and immigrants, events in students' home countries, their cultures, their languages, and their religions, but schools have a responsibility to support them in those efforts and to engage even those teachers who are more reluctant about diversity. Students deserve to be able to trust that their teachers will understand and respect them.¹

Outreach to school boards can be especially important, as they play an important role in determining the culture of a school and in allocating resources for vulnerable students. School boards wield enormous power: under

¹ *The National Education Association (NEA) itself has elaborated at length on the importance of cultural competency, pointing out that culture affects learning and processing of information, and that cultural competency assists teachers in meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act that all students make adequate yearly academic progress. See An NEA Policy Brief Promoting Educators' Cultural Competence To Better Serve Culturally Diverse Students, National Education Association (2008), http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB13_CulturalCompetence08.pdf.*

Maine law, they are tasked with adopting policies, selecting the superintendent, presiding over students' expulsion hearings, approving educational materials used in classrooms, and adopting student codes of conduct and disciplinary policies.² However, unlike teachers and principals, whose daily engagements at school offer them a more complete picture of immigrant students and their needs, school board members are usually removed from the everyday operations of the school. They are often alumni of the schools that they now oversee, and may struggle to reconcile their memories of their own school experiences with changing demographics and the demands of inclusivity. Parents were discouraged that some of the most explicitly xenophobic and prejudiced comments they heard were expressed by school board members, some of whom proposed that ELL students should be banned from school until they learned English and expressed disgust about religious accommodations. Because of their tremendous authority over schools, **efforts to educate school board members about immigrant students would be particularly valuable.**

Awareness is only the first step towards justice. Honoring student rights to equity in education requires meaningful structural change, not only empathy. However, empathy and understanding are a strong and often necessary foundation upon which to begin to collectively build a more just and equitable educational system.

A. Portland Public Schools Professional Development

One of the most ambitious and powerful initiatives for teachers to learn about race, equity, and power in America, especially as it affects the school experience, is a workshop for Portland teachers taught by Julia Hazel and Fiona Hopper. The 12-week workshop, which has now been offered twice, is part of Portland Public Schools'

professional development program, in which teachers teach each other, supported by a salary structure that rewards participation. The workshop focuses on the history of race in the United States, especially the violence inflicted on Native American and African American communities. The course asks participants to reflect on white privilege, its influence on the school system, and how they might transform their own teaching to strip their classrooms and curricula of racial and class inequities that they might not have been aware of.

The faculty participants in the workshop described the experience as transformative. They said it was incredibly challenging, forcing them to confront tough truths about injustice and inequality in America, but that those reflections ultimately led them to revise their approaches to teaching. One middle school teacher explained,

STUDENTS
DESERVE TO BE
ABLE TO TRUST
THAT THEIR
TEACHERS WILL
UNDERSTAND
AND RESPECT
THEM.

² 20-A M.R.S.A. § 1001.

“What the class did for me, it organizes the story of race in America, in a way that deepens the impact on us as students and teachers in terms of understanding how much this affects everything in our society today.” Another participant explained, “What I’ve taken away from it personally is that I am a white male, and I knew before that people like me were the ones in power all throughout history, but I really feel like wow, this is a profound responsibility that I have,

THE STUDENTS WERE HUNGRY TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE, AND APPRECIATED THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CURRENT EVENTS.

and I need to consider how this impacts me and every student that walks through my door.” An elementary school teacher said that the class has made him more vigilant about his curriculum, especially in selecting history texts and structuring social studies discussions.

Each teacher in the workshop chose an independent project to develop. David Hilton, a teacher at Lyman Moore Middle School, did his project on the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in Maine’s teaching workforce. He explained:

The reflective process in class sharpened for me the distinction between the demographics of our student population and our teaching population, and how important that is. This disparity between the kids and the teachers is pronounced. It feels really connected to our long history of segregation in so many ways in our country. It feels like a barrier

for the kids that are coming here from other countries that are trying to succeed but just don’t have role models. One of the things we did was review the Hudson Foundation report and one of the quotes was from a middle school kid who said, “I want to be a teacher but there are no black teachers here.”³ That’s not entirely true, but it’s pretty close to true, and I can see how it would feel true to a kid. And I have kids like that, that I know could be really great teachers, and I don’t know that anyone has told them that. And I imagine that if we can nurture them and open the pathway for them, give them resources and scholarships, they could be great teachers. And then I think their parents would be like, “oh, people from our community can become teachers,” and families will want to come into open houses more, come into conferences more. It will feel less like there’s a school, with this invisible barrier around it, and there’s the rest of the community that’s totally different.

Hilton presented his research to his fellow workshop participants, and he also committed to trying to change that discrepancy between teachers and students. He approached administrators in his district, and he is now working with several other committed educators to improve diversity in the teaching workforce, focusing especially on the development of “grow your own” programs, which identify promising students of color within a district and support them to become teachers in that district.

After participating in the workshop, David Briley, a second and third grade teacher at Reiche Community School, decided to start a civil rights team at his school. One of the events that the civil rights team is planning is a multicultural potluck for families. Briley explained that although the school has hosted similar potlucks in the past, there was never much student voice involved in

³ Hudson Foundation, “Breaking Down the Barriers for Immigrant Youth” (2013), <http://www.hudsonfoundationmaine.org/pdf/Breaking-Down-Barriers-web.pdf>.

planning. Now, students have become leaders of the event, and have organized various activities for families, including civil rights and multicultural bingo. Through the civil rights team students have also pushed to be involved in the welcoming process for new students at the school to make sure that everyone feels welcome.

Briley said that the workshop also motivated him to emphasize the immigrant experience and the history of the Wabanaki in his social studies curriculum. He wants his students to consider how the actions of the past affect the actions of today.

At Lincoln Middle School, ELL teacher Jane Armstrong and social studies teacher Julie Shepherd collaborated to create a unit on the history of race in America for their students,

which they now teach together. They described their students as hungry to have these conversations, and appreciative of the opportunity to learn more about the historical context of current events involving race. One student wanted to know why that was the first time any adult had talked to them about those issues that were so central to their lives.

B. Slim Peace

The Portland professional development workshop on race was particularly powerful because participants became advocates for change in their own schools, and went on to teach others. Schools have also implemented programs that allow students to teach one another about their cultures, and in doing so to build relationships across their differences. Students at South

What is the Civil Rights Team Project?

The Civil Rights Team Project was created by the Office of the Attorney General in order to educate students about civil rights and empower them to protect those rights in their school communities. The project was created to support the Maine Civil Rights Act, as initial enforcement of the act revealed that many bias-related incidents occur in schools.

According to the Office of the Attorney General, the Civil Rights Team Project “focuses on changing the culture and climate in our schools to one that will actively prevent bias-based behaviors, including violations of the Maine Civil Rights Act. Youth are central to this process; real change in our schools must respect and include student voices.”

Civil rights teams are based in schools, and consist of a group of students, overseen by a faculty advisor, who gather regularly to organize events related to civil rights in their schools, often focused on community education. There is no set format for the teams, and their activities may involve poster campaigns, art events, and guest speakers. Civil rights teams are often the leading voices for change in their schools, and they can be an effective way of empowering student voices.

Portland High School, for example, were particularly excited about the Slim Peace program at their school. The program was modeled on a group of Arab and Jewish women in Israel that met weekly to get fit and make friendships across profound cultural and political divides. The South Portland High School iteration was focused on girls' health, self-esteem, and body image, and used activities around those issues – such as biweekly hip hop dance classes – to build bonds between students who otherwise may not have interacted much within the school. Participants in the program, which intentionally included non-immigrant students and immigrants from several different countries, met every week to cook, dance, and learn about themselves. One participant reflected on how much she learned about different religions, and she said that she hopes to travel around the world one day. Slim Peace helped spark in her a new interest in her peers, as she was no longer intimidated by their differences.

Students said they were grateful for the opportunity to get to know each other, and they value the friendships they made in Slim Peace. One student explained, “If you need someone you can talk to, you always know they’re there.”

Slim Peace not only helped students learn about each other's cultures and make new friends, but also empowered immigrant students who felt alienated and insecure at school. One immigrant student explained:

I'm definitely more confident now. I'm not as afraid to speak and share things about myself. I had so much confidence at home, but when I came to this country I was shy. Slim Peace helped me see we're not all different, it's just based on physical differences. It gave me confidence in myself and made it easier to speak in class when teachers ask questions.

Slim Peace also gave this student the confidence to try out for sports teams, and she is now involved in several extracurricular activities.

C. The Pigeon Project

At Biddeford High School, students on the civil rights team extolled the workshop they did with local artist Orson Horschler, who goes by Pigeon. Pigeon visited eight Maine schools this year to work with civil rights teams to create portrait-based murals celebrating the diversity of their schools. Pigeon's work with students emerged from his broader portrait project challenging assumptions about what it means to be a “Mainer,” and inspiring more inclusive standards of belonging.

During the day-long workshops that Pigeon facilitated for civil rights teams, **pairs of students painted portraits of each other, an exercise intended to force them to really look at one another**, seeing past the stereotypes to appreciate each other's individuality. The murals are displayed prominently at each school. At the end of the workshop, students talked to the broader school community about what they had learned. Student participants said that Pigeon helped them learn to pause and suspend their assumptions when they meet people. They've come to appreciate how much people have in common, no matter their race or culture. Several students said that the workshops helped build their confidence to be themselves, whether that means wearing a headscarf to school despite the risks of social isolation, or accepting their bodies and standing up to bullies.

D. Diversity Days

Many schools host Diversity Days or Diversity Weeks, and these can be valuable opportunities to celebrate multiculturalism and educate the school community. A South Portland High School student said that she really appreciated the student panel during Diversity Week at her school, and that hearing about the hardships that refugees suffered in their home countries gave her a new perspective. Other South Portland High School students were more cautious in their optimism – citing students who yawned

theatrically or made jokes during the student panel – but thought that the overall impact was empowering for minority students.

E. Sharing Stories

Several schools have created opportunities for immigrant students to share their stories with the community, often in collaboration with the Telling Room, a Portland-based nonprofit. Many **students recalled the experience of crafting and sharing their stories as empowering**, and family members said they were proud of their children's performances. School board members in South Portland were visibly moved when a middle school student from the Democratic Republic of Congo shared her experience learning English while living in a homeless shelter upon her arrival in the United States.

Stories are a powerful tool for inspiring empathy. However, the burden of educating adults in the school community should not always fall to students. To the extent that students relish those opportunities to lift their voices and share who they are, spaces should be made available for them to do so. But there is also a great deal of work that staff can do to educate themselves without having to rely on their students to teach them.

F. Attending to Data

The most attentive teachers constantly review their own assumptions about students' experiences and resources. One teacher explained that she always privately surveys her students to find out if they have access to computers and the Internet at home, because she knows that many of them do not. She is careful to structure her assignments in ways that do not privilege students with access to technology that others don't have. When she shared her insight with the principal, he was dismissive at first, insisting that "everyone has Internet now." Those kinds of assumptions are alienating to students, and can have deleterious consequences for their academic achievement.

"The principal came over to our table in the cafeteria. There were nine people and he said one had to leave. Then he went over to a white table with all the athletes and they had ten or twelve people. He told them, 'I'll let it slide, this time.' It's always like that."

"Maybe they don't really want me to succeed."

"I'm in AP [Advanced Placement] classes. There's not really any diversity there. Everyone else is white. It makes me feel like maybe I'm not smart enough, maybe it's all a lie. You start questioning yourself."

"If you try to take an AP class and you struggle and you tell the counselor, she tells you to drop it. That's it. She doesn't try to help. They don't think you're smart enough to be in class. They never encourage you to succeed."

Reliable and transparent data can help schools identify vulnerable students, keep track of their needs, and monitor their own progress serving them. Portland's Multilingual and Multicultural Center analyzes data on attendance and punctuality, graduation rates, discipline, and placement in advanced classes in order to identify inequities. In Lewiston, parent advocates have requested more regular reporting of data on discipline in order to monitor racial discrepancies. Information empowers educators and families to make positive change.

II. EQUITY IN ACCESS AND OUTCOMES

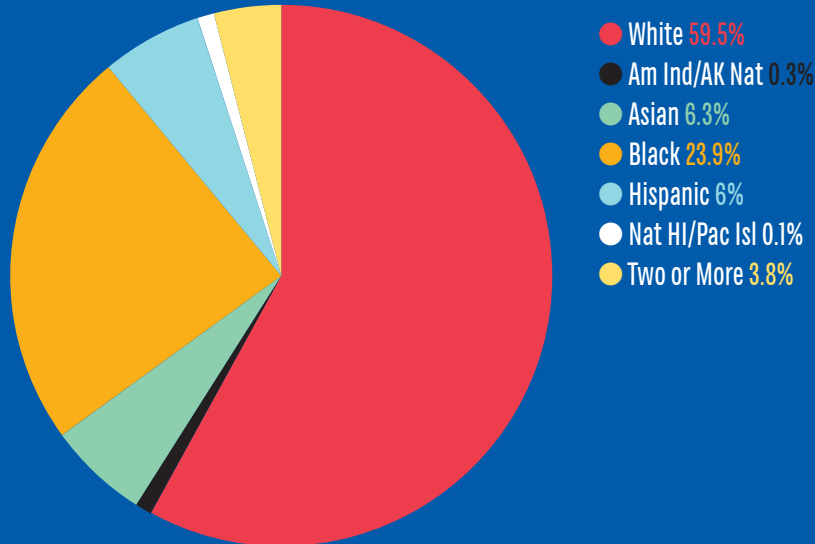
One of the essential principles of equity in education, and a dominant one in civil rights law over the past several decades, is the right of all students to receive a comparable, decent education, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or national origin. In *Brown v. Board of Education*, the

Academic Equity: Portland Public Schools (2013)

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, Educational Equity Report, <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=26842&syk=7&pid=736&Report=7>

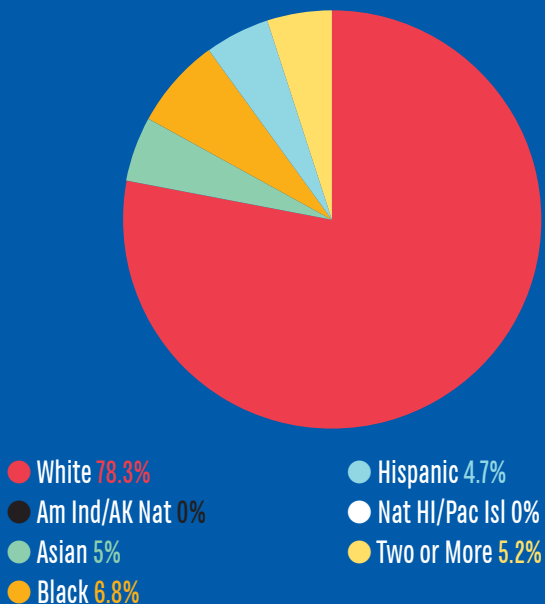
District Enrollment

n=6,964



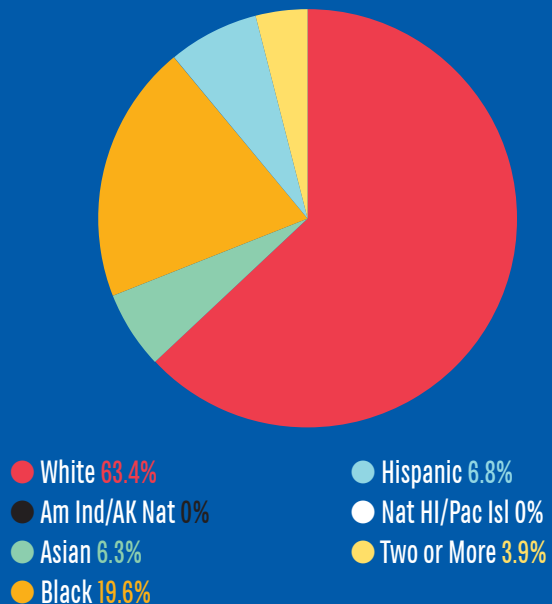
Gifted & Talented Enrollment

n=443



Alegebra 1 Enrollment in 7th or 8th

n=336



Supreme Court famously declared that, “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”⁴ In *Lau v. Nichols*, which established the rights of students with limited English proficiency, the court maintained that “there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.”⁵ The color of one’s skin or the language one speaks cannot condemn one to an inferior education. Protecting equal rights doesn’t mean treating everyone the same either; rather, it demands that schools actively pursue policies to meet the specific needs of vulnerable classes.

Despite that clear legal principle, the U.S. has not yet achieved parity in education. Across the country, black, Latino, and Native American students score lower on standardized tests than their white peers,⁶ have less access to advanced classes,⁷ have higher rates of chronic absenteeism,⁸ and are taught by less experienced and effective teachers.⁹ The reasons for those enduring inequities are manifold, and include the widespread segregation of black students in underperforming schools (itself related to

“SEPARATE EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES ARE INHERENTLY UNEQUAL.”

(*BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION*, 1954)

discriminatory housing policies),¹⁰ and the well-documented “stereotype threat,” which translates lower expectations for students of certain racial categories into lower results.¹¹

In Maine, available data suggest similar trends. On statewide assessments for all grades in 2015-2016, 73 percent of black students performed below or well below state expectations in English, compared to 48 percent of white students; 83 percent of black students scored below the threshold for math compared to 61 percent of white students; and 69 percent of black students failed to meet the standard in

⁴ 347 U.S. at 495.

⁵ 414 U.S. at 566.

⁶ National Center for Education Statistics, “SAT Scores” [2016], <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=171>.

⁷ Civil Rights Data Collection, “Data Snapshot: College and Career Readiness,” <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-college-and-career-readiness-snapshot.pdf>.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, “Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation’s Schools” [2016], <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html>.

⁹ John B. Diamond, “Still Separate and Unequal: Examining Race, Opportunity, and School Achievement in ‘Integrated’ Suburbs,” *Journal of Negro Education* 75, no. 3 (2006): 495-505; Charles T. Clotfelter, Helen F. Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor, “Who Teaches Whom? Race and the Distribution of Novice Teachers,” *Economics of Education Review* 24, no. 4 (2005): 377-392.

¹⁰ Richard Rothstein, “The Racial Achievement Gap, Segregated Schools, and Segregated Neighborhoods – A Constitutional Insult,” *Race and Social Problems* 6, no. 4 (2014), <http://www.epi.org/publication/the-racial-achievement-gap-segregated-schools-and-segregated-neighborhoods-a-constitutional-insult/> Rothstein argues convincingly that residential segregation should be considered *de jure* rather than *de facto*, given the twentieth-century history of explicitly segregative housing policies that continue to inhibit integration today. By extension, we might also consider school segregation *de jure*, as residential segregation is the primary reason for school segregation.

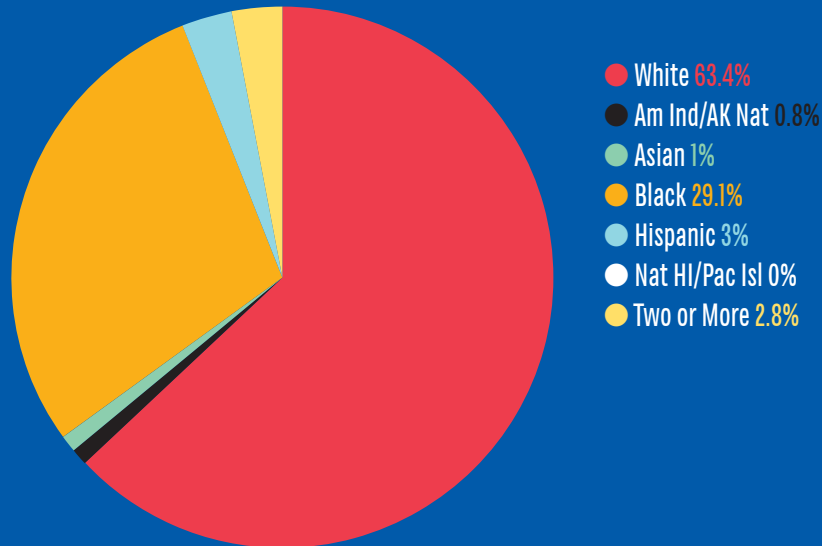
¹¹ Claude M. Steele, “Thin Ice: Stereotype Threat and Black College Students,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 284, no. 3:47: 50-54, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/08/thin-ice-stereotype-threat-and-black-college-students/304663/>.

Academic Equity: Lewiston Public Schools (2013)

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, Educational Equity Report, <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=26842&syk=7&pid=736&Report=7>

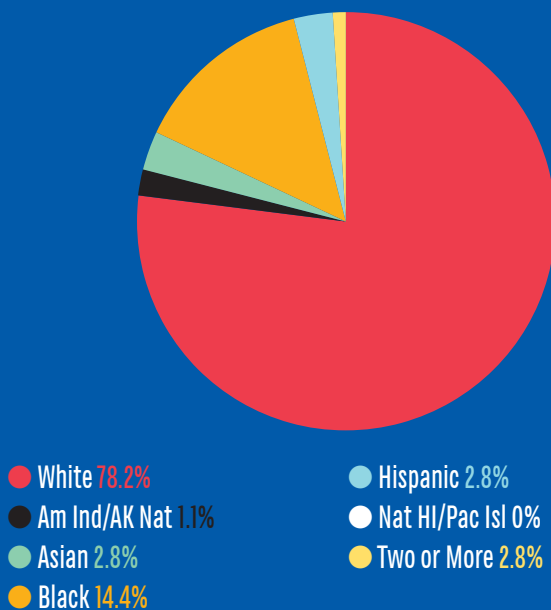
District Enrollment

n=5,145



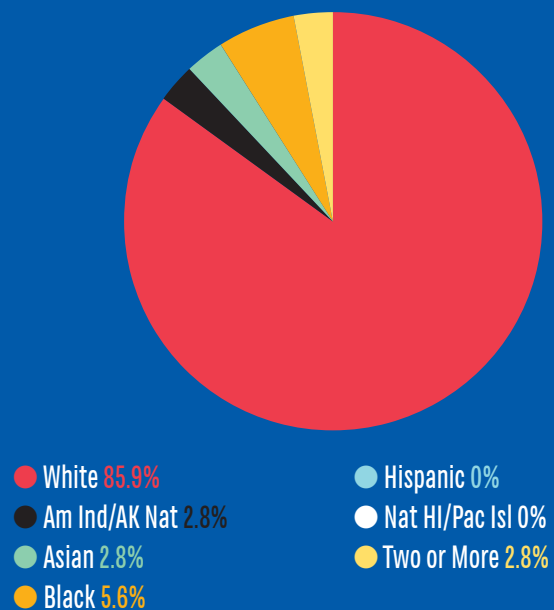
Gifted & Talented Enrollment

n=353



Algebra 1 Enrollment in 7th or 8th

n=71



science compared to 38 percent of white students.¹² In Portland, which encompasses more students of color than any other district in the state, white students make up more than 78 percent of students enrolled in Gifted and Talent programs, and 81 percent of those in Advanced Placement classes, even though they constitute only 59.5 percent of total district enrollment. In Lewiston, which is 63 percent white, white students are 78 percent of those enrolled in Gifted and Talent programs, and 83 percent of those in Advanced Placement.

A. Make It Happen!

There are a variety of programs that schools have implemented, often in collaboration with local nonprofits and community volunteers, that attempt to close the achievement gap for students of color by providing academic support and enrichment. One of the most beloved programs for students in Maine is *Make It Happen!*, available in several Portland schools. *Make It Happen!* offers academic support to any student in need, and has proven an invaluable resource especially for immigrant and ELL students. Volunteer tutors and a school coordinator staff the *Make It Happen!* classroom in each school, and **students are free to stop by throughout the day or after school for extra help in any subject.** As one senior explained to us, “I wouldn’t be here without *Make It Happen!* Now I’m graduating and going to college. Because they believed in me. This program is so important for us.” Another student described *Make It Happen!* as a safe place in the school, somewhere he knew he wouldn’t be judged or forced to explain himself. *Make It Happen!* also supports students through the college application process, with extra writing help and information sessions about local universities. The program encourages community service,

and helps students find opportunities to pursue their passions in ways that also give back to the community. As such, *Make It Happen!* not only promotes academic success for immigrant students, but also fosters the self-confidence that equips them to thrive in and out of school.

B. 21st Century Leadership

In Lewiston, the 21st Century Leadership program, which specifically targets first- and second-generation immigrant students, offers a similar style of academic support. It also provides supplementary enrichment activities, from robotics to Zumba. Student participants in the program decided that they wanted to gain work experience, so **the program has evolved to include a community service component as well.** One group of high school students taught a soccer class for children at the Lewiston YMCA. Another group identified a need for more children’s books featuring kids of color, so they researched diversity in children’s literature, organized public readings for kids at several locations around Lewiston, and then sent each child home with their own book. High school students also read out loud to younger elementary students each week, which helps build their own confidence and readings skills.

C. Rise and Shine

The Rise and Shine program at Portland’s East End Community School includes the entire student body, not only immigrants, but it is worth highlighting here as an example both of how student empowerment in general can serve to improve equity, and of how a school identified a structural obstacle to student success and worked not only to remove that obstacle but to transform it into an asset. The East End school serves a diverse population, with high numbers of low-income, homeless, immigrant, and ELL students. The school especially struggled with high absenteeism rates, and educators came to realize that the 35-minute gap between when the busses dropped students off and when classes

¹² Maine Department of Education, *Maine Assessment and Accountability Reporting System* at <https://lms.backpack.education/public/maine>.

began was a problem. There was inadequate supervision and engagement, and students were getting into fights or leaving school.

The school responded by dedicating that time to enrichment activities, establishing the Rise and Shine program. **Every morning students attend one of a variety of workshops offered by teachers and volunteers from the community,** which include everything from bird watching and

PROGRAMS THAT EMPOWER IMMIGRANT STUDENTS CAN ALSO SERVE A VALUABLE PURPOSE FOR NON-IMMIGRANTS.

puppetry to video animation and knitting. These are not classes, and students receive no grades. They choose their workshops based on their personal preferences. The Rise and Shine program gives them an opportunity to explore new activities and interests. Educators emphasize that the program allows students to build relationships of trust with adults in their community, helps build their confidence, offers a positive experience to transition students in the morning from often unstable home lives into the school day, and helps integrate ELL students into the school community, as language abilities are not an obstacle to participation. Students look forward to school in the morning. Principal Marcia Gendron recounts the story of a parent who called to explain that her child would have to miss class for a dentist appointment in the morning, but he refused to miss Rise and Shine.

D. Meeting Basic Needs

Many programs to empower immigrant students and families also serve non-immigrant students. School programs to meet basic needs may be particularly valuable for refugees, who often arrive in this country with limited resources and few structures of support, but those programs provide a vital service to low-income and homeless students too. Milbridge Elementary School, which has high numbers of Latino students as well as migrant farm families and low-income white students, is particularly thoughtful and deliberate in its efforts to ensure students' basic needs are met. **Ever-evolving services include a well-stocked and accessible food pantry, pencil pouches containing sanitary products for girls, a closet full of clothes including warm winter gear, and showers.** Farmer Mike brings free fresh produce to the school that all students are encouraged to take home regardless of need, which not only helps dismantle the stigma for low-income students around taking free food, but also serves to promote healthy eating habits for all students.

Milbridge Elementary School also plans to install laundry facilities in the building for students who do not have access to laundry at home. Educators' sensitivity to the specific ways in which poverty affects their students' everyday lives led them to realize that as students were reaching puberty they were becoming increasingly self-conscious about their bodily appearance and odors, and providing showers and laundry would help eliminate class inequity around bodies.

E. Restorative Justice

Restorative justice replaces rote punishment with an opportunity for the offender to make amends. It focuses on accountability and repairing the harm done. The restorative justice process usually involves a discussion circle in which students responsible for an offense, those who were directly or indirectly harmed by their



actions, supporters of all affected parties, and facilitators share their perspectives on the harm that occurred and collaboratively decide on the necessary steps to repair that harm.

In light of data proving that **traditional school discipline is often ineffective or even counterproductive**, Maine schools are increasingly piloting restorative justice programs based on highly successful restorative initiatives in other states. Forty students from Bonny Eagle, Gorham, Westbrook, and Windham high schools recently spent two days training in restorative practices, and each of those schools is in the process of instituting their own restorative justice program, to be led by the newly trained students. In response to disparate discipline in Lewiston, where black students are nearly three times as likely to receive an in-school suspension as their white classmates,¹³ high school students in the

21st Century Leadership program are currently advocating for a restorative justice program.

While it is too early to fully assess the effectiveness of the emerging restorative justice programs in Maine schools, and it remains imperative to guard against racial discrepancies between students channeled into restorative justice and those sent to the criminal justice system, the initial responses from students and educators have been positive.

In May, there was an incident at Westbrook High School in which a student reported that she saw three students arriving on campus with a gun, two of whom were African American. The school went into lockdown, and tensions were high as a search ensued for those students. The gun turned out to be fake, but many members of the school community were upset, including the accused students, who believed that their race was a factor in the severity of the school's response.

¹³ U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2013 Civil Rights Data Collection, <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.

The school decided to organize a restorative circle for affected members of the school community to share their narratives of the event. The accused students spoke first, giving them a chance to explain their side of the story. Then one of their mothers spoke, describing her fear of what might happen to her sons when they went to turn themselves in, and reflecting on the broader context of being young, male, and black in America. An Iraqi student spoke of the wartime violence she experienced at her school in Iraq, and how upsetting the lockdown was for her, given her previous trauma. Ultimately, the restorative circle empowered voices that are often marginalized in school disciplinary processes, and it allowed this community to begin to heal.

F. School Staff Diversity

Students of color talked to us about the importance to them of having teachers and administrators of their racial or ethnic background. Students at Deering High School in Portland expressed their appreciation and admiration for their assistant principal, Dr. Abdullahi Ahmed, who is himself a black, Muslim, multilingual immigrant. Black students at Deering, and especially Somali students, said that when they are struggling in class, dealing with problems at home, or frustrated about a racist incident at school, they seek out Dr. Ahmed. They feel like he'll understand what they're going through and won't judge them. But Dr. Ahmed is the exception. The teaching workforce in Maine remains 97 percent white,¹⁴ and **many students of color go through their entire school careers without ever having a teacher of color.**¹⁵

¹⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, "Total Number of Public School Teachers and Percentage Distribution of School Teachers, by Race/Ethnicity and State: 2011–12," https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2013314_t1s_001.asp.

¹⁵ Zachary L. Heiden, Courtney Beer, Christopher M. Northrup, and Atlee Reilly, *Race and Disability Accommodation by Lewiston School District letter to Superintendent William Webster*, February 7, 2017, https://www.aclumaine.org/sites/default/files/letter_lewiston_school_department.pdf

School hiring policies differ greatly from district to district and transparency in that process can help eliminate employment discrimination.¹⁶ Establishing clear criteria by which teaching applicants are assessed eliminates more subjective reasoning such as "collegiality" or "likeability," which are potentially discriminatory evaluations because they are often influenced by unconscious bias. Empowering different groups within the school community to have a voice in hiring – including teachers, students, and parents – also helps temper the biases that can emerge when too much discretion is granted to a few individuals in positions of power. Schools should advertise for teaching positions in ways that ensure the greatest diversity of the applicant pool and Maine should commit to longer term, structural solutions, such as the grow-your-own programs that David Hilton advocates, as well as streamlined routes to certification for immigrants who were teachers in their home countries and better incentives to attract teachers of color to Maine.

¹⁶ *To the extent that school staff in Maine is not diverse, schools would do well to review the federal requirements in hiring to make sure that they are in compliance. See, e.g., 20 U.S.C. § 1703(d) (forbidding "discrimination by an educational agency on the basis of race, color, or national origin in the employment, employment conditions, or assignment to schools of its faculty or staff"); see also 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(a) ("It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer ... to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin...."). Schools should examine their hiring criteria to ensure that they do not inadvertently disadvantage any protected class. 29 C.F.R. § 1607.3(A) ("The use of any selection procedure which has an adverse impact on the hiring, promotion, or other employment or membership opportunities of members of any race, sex, or ethnic group will be considered to be discriminatory"). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 "prohibits not only intentional discrimination, but also practices that appear to be neutral, but that limit employment opportunities for some racial groups and are not based on business need." Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) – Enforcement Guidance – Race and Color Fact Sheet, Empl. Prac. Guide P 5196 (C.C.H.), 2006 WL 8262969 (Apr. 19, 2016).*

Lessons from Narraguagus High School

A couple of years ago, administrators at Narraguagus High School in Harrington were approached by a researcher who wanted to better understand bullying and school culture in Maine. They gave him permission to conduct focus groups with students about their experiences. The school staff were shocked when he shared his results. Female students described being groped in the hallways, gay students were harassed, and racial minorities were scared. Vulnerable students at Narraguagus High School didn't feel safe, and their teachers had had no idea.

But in just two years, the culture of Narraguagus High School has changed dramatically. Ongoing workshops for students, a very active civil rights team, supportive teachers, and administrators' strong public commitment to inclusivity have made a difference here. Educators and students acknowledge that there's still work to do, and that there may always be work to do, but they have committed to changing their school culture and they've made great strides. Here are a few of the hard-won lessons they've learned:

- As principal Lucille Willey said, "Violence doesn't start with a knife, it starts with language." Jokes that target people because of attributes like sexual orientation or race are not innocuous. They lay the groundwork for a culture of intolerance that can culminate in much greater physical violence.
- Everyone wants to think: "we don't have those problems here." That's rarely true. But kids who are targeted by bullies are often those who are vulnerable and thus least likely to go to an adult for support. It's important to recognize that adults don't always know what's going on, and to empower student voices.
- Coalitions make change. Narraguagus civil rights team members credit their success to their diversity. Their group includes white students and students of color, LGBTQ students and heterosexual, cisgender ones, athletes and the more academically inclined, outgoing school leaders and introverts, and their cooperation communicates to the school community that they are united in their commitment to inclusivity. As one student in South Portland explained, "The popular students have a bigger voice. If they say a racist remark, it catches on." When those popular students stand up against racism or sexism, that attitude catches on too.
- Civil rights can be fun. For example, students at Narraguagus hosted a "Scaring Away Bias" event at Halloween, in which students dressed as zombies and monsters wore stickers that said, "I'm scaring away hate," or "I'm scaring away homophobia," or any other bias that students chose.
- When teachers confront students about intolerant speech, they should do so publicly. It's important for other students to hear that message, and for vulnerable students to see that their teachers support them.
- Alumni can be great allies, especially in efforts to gain the support of school boards and parents for civil rights work in the school. At Narraguagus, alumni spoke out about suffering in silence when they were students, and how meaningful it would have been to them to have the kinds of support that exist at the school now.
- As Principal Willey said, "There are other ways to take care of discipline issues. More often than not, punishment isn't the answer. These kids are hurting so bad." Her style of discipline is trauma-informed and ultimately restorative, rather than simply punitive. Principal Willey wants students to learn from their mistakes. Mutual trust and respect are central.

G. Symbols of Inclusivity

Small but consistent public gestures towards inclusivity can also make a difference. For example, many schools with large immigrant populations have posted welcoming messages prominently in their lobbies in all the different languages of their students. Others display flags from the different countries from which their students originate, or display a map with pins marking countries of origin and of heritage. As Westbrook High School principal Kelli Deveau explained, “I want every parent dropping their child off to see their flag or their language and know that their child will be safe and appreciated here.” Researchers have found that school connectedness, defined as **“the extent to which students feel accepted, valued, respected, and included in the school,”** significantly affects student mental health,¹⁷ and everyday symbols of that acceptance and respect across cultural difference are important. However, if other aspects of the school experience undermine the values indicated by those symbols, they can quickly be transformed into a mockery.

H. Cultivating a Culture of Inclusivity

Equity and inclusivity involve finding ways to celebrate rather than stigmatize difference, and for schools to communicate to immigrant families that they are welcome, safe, and valued. The role of schools is not only to impart academic knowledge, but also to cultivate the self-respect, self-confidence, and self-esteem that students need to thrive. Programs both to educate the school community about multiculturalism and to support the academic success of minority students contribute to an inclusive school culture. School initiatives to build bridges across difference, such as Slim Peace and Rise and Shine, and those that cultivate school pride in diversity, like the

¹⁷ Ian M. Shochet, Mark R. Dadds, David Ham, and Roslyn Montague, “School Connectedness Is an Underemphasized Parameter in Adolescent Mental Health: Results of a Community Prediction Study,” *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* 35, no. 2 (2006): 170–179.

“The school just ignores us. They don’t respect us. We’ve been telling them about these problems every year, every year, but they don’t do anything. They think we don’t matter.”

“They just go through the motions. They don’t really want us to show up at school and be involved.”

Pigeon project or flag displays, can transform school cultures.

Cultivating a culture of inclusivity may be the hardest aspect of achieving equity in schools, for it demands vigilance, diligence, and courage. Inclusivity cannot be achieved solely through a couple of workshops and a civil rights team; it requires thoughtful, ongoing engagement on difficult topics. However, **any acceptance of intolerance puts the safety of all students at risk.** In the process of documenting the discrimination experienced by students of color, we also uncovered stories of students spitting on students with disabilities, calling gay students “faggots,” calling transgender students “abominations,” and grabbing girls’ bodies in school hallways. Schools need to address specific forms of discrimination by dismantling structural barriers to success and countering harmful stereotypes, but they must also work holistically to transform hostile and intolerant school cultures.

III. PARENT AND FAMILY OUTREACH

Educators know that families are a crucial part of students’ success in school. Parents, grandparents, siblings, and guardians can be students’ greatest advocates, role models, and mentors, whose support at home offers a crucial complement to school instruction. To successfully empower families to support their children, it’s important to keep them informed of

school expectations, students' progress, and available resources. For parents, clear and sustained communication from schools is necessary to building a relationship of trust. They must know that their child will be safe and that their needs will be met. **The American educational system can be especially confusing and opaque for immigrant parents**, and schools must consider not only their linguistic needs but also cultural barriers. Native American families, whose communities were subjected to forced residential schools, may require much greater outreach from schools to rebuild trust. Coordination between parents and teachers can help ensure consistency and mutual understanding regarding any behavioral issues, and parents can help teachers appreciate other challenges in a student's life that might affect their academic performance.

In our research, school administrators and teachers often lamented that they struggled to get parents, and especially immigrant parents, involved in their children's education. They explained that although their schools hosted various events for immigrant parents, they didn't show up. The conclusion those educators drew was that parents are disinterested. However, the parents that we interviewed are deeply committed to their children's educational success, and they want a greater voice in their education. But they didn't believe there were opportunities for them to be involved.

For example, Portland's Deering High School is 41 percent non-white,¹⁸ but when they held an open house, educators and community members observed that there were very few non-white parents in attendance. They reached out to local immigrant community organizations to try to figure out why. They learned that very few immigrant parents had even known about the

open house. Some did understand that there was an event, but they had no idea what an "open house" was. Grace Valenzuela, Director of the Multilingual and Multicultural Center for Portland Public Schools, explained that open houses and parent teacher organizations are particularly American practices, and that many immigrants in Maine come from countries without similar conventions and where parents are prohibited any voice in their children's education. By reflecting on the failed open house experience, Portland Public Schools came to realize that effective school outreach to immigrant parents doesn't simply announce the existence of certain events

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or organizations, but works to convey precisely what they are and why they matter, and to do so in parents' native languages.

Furthermore, many parents explained that they were unable to attend the Deering High School open house because they had to work. **School events are often planned around standard middle-class, nine-to-five work schedules in ways that can be exclusionary** for families that work night shifts or multiple jobs. Other immigrant parents reported that they didn't attend the open house at Deering because they didn't speak English, and believed (correctly) that there would not be interpreters available for them. In the absence of interpreters, parents with limited English proficiency tend to rely on

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2013 Civil Rights Data Collection, <https://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.

their children to interpret for them, which can be a stressful experience for parents, who feel helpless and dependent. It can also contribute to children's sense of being overburdened.

A. Language Access

Since language access can be one of the biggest obstacles for immigrant families who want to take a more active role in their children's education, **the consistent provision of professional interpreters is crucial to successful parent outreach.** Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act require that schools ensure equal participation by students in instructional programs, regardless of their own language barriers or those of their parents.¹⁹ The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education specify:

School districts and SEAs [state educational agencies] have an obligation to ensure meaningful communication with LEP [limited English proficiency] parents in a language they can understand and to adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district or SEA that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents. At the school and district levels, this essential information includes but is not limited to information regarding: language assistance programs, special education and related services, IEP [individualized education program] meetings, grievance procedures, notices of nondiscrimination, student discipline policies and procedures, registration and enrollment, report cards, requests for parent permission for student participation in district or school activities, parent-teacher conferences, parent handbooks, gifted and talented programs, magnet and charter schools, and any other school and program choice options.

Schools are also legally required to provide

¹⁹ Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, "Joint Dear Colleague Letter - English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents" (January 7, 2015), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>.

qualified, competent interpreters for parents with limited English proficiency at school events such as parent-teacher conferences, disciplinary proceedings, and career fairs.²⁰

The language access system in Portland is particularly well developed and efficient, which is important in such a big and diverse school district. Essential documents are automatically translated for all the major languages in the district,²¹ including Acholi, Arabic, French, Khmer, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Additionally, all school staff have access to the language access online help desk system. Modeled after IT online help desks, the program allows staff to place requests for interpretation through the online system, specifying the language needed and any other important details. The requests go directly to the appropriate Parent Community Specialist based on the specified language, and all requests receive a response within 48 hours. Parent Community Specialists are interpreters, but their role is conceived of much more broadly, as facilitators whose biculturalism complements their bilingualism to help parents and teachers navigate conversations across cultural differences. Teachers are also trained in how to work successfully with interpreters.

B. Events for Immigrant Families

Programs and events specifically tailored to immigrant families can be useful. One example of this is the college night that Westbrook High School hosted for English Language Learners and their families. The event was publicized widely and in multiple languages, and Arabic and French interpreters were provided.

The moderators of the event carefully explained the eccentricities of the American higher

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Portland defines major languages as those for which there are at least fifty students.

Excerpts from Portland Empowered's Parent and Family Engagement Manifesto

As the parents, students, and community members who make up Portland Empowered, we are committed to ensuring that Portland's public high schools engage parents and communities in a way that...

- Values face to face relationships.
- Creates safe spaces where everyone is welcome and valued as an expert.
- Requires parents, schools and communities to work together to improve results.
- Works hard to include the whole range of voices in decision-making processes.
- Is accessible to parent and community leaders from diverse backgrounds.
- Has sufficient resources devoted to it.

education system that parents may not have encountered in their home countries, such as the differences between public and private institutions, community colleges and universities, and in-state and out-of-state tuition. They also addressed the different kinds of financial aid available to students depending on their immigration status, which is crucial information for immigrant families making decisions about college that is not always included in standard college application resources.

Turnout was good, and parents were engaged and asked lots of questions. Families said that they appreciated the school's effort at inclusivity, and they felt much more confident about their understanding of the college application process.

On other occasions, Westbrook High has held events at the apartment complex where many new immigrant families live, to make it easier for families with limited transportation to attend.

Yussuf



Another example is a special orientation for immigrant families hosted by Portland Public Schools when new students enroll in the district, which helps eliminate a great deal of confusion early on.

C. Empowering Marginalized Parent Voices

Successful communication between schools and parents involves not only conveying information to parents but also listening to their voices and structurally empowering their participation in conversations around school policies and programs. Too often schools treat the challenge of communicating more effectively with immigrant parents as a problem of relaying information. However, **understanding and serving immigrant students better necessitates more actively involving their parents.**

One model of a more meaningful parent-school partnership is that of Portland Empowered, established to give parents and students more of a voice in their education. Portland Empowered's Parent and Family Engagement Manifesto, which sets out guiding principles for including a broader range of voices in school decision-making processes, reducing barriers to participation in these conversations, and engaging those whose voices have been historically left out, is a standard to which all Maine schools should aspire. At the regular discussion nights that Portland Empowered hosts for families and school staff, conversations at each table are conducted in families' native languages, and interpretation is into English for those who need it, reversing the usual power dynamic. Like many of the most successful programs we've highlighted here, Portland Empowered is not solely an immigrant organization, and its broader inclusivity of all those families who feel traditionally excluded from a voice in their children's education contributes to its credibility and authority.

Somali parents and community leaders in Lewiston are currently advocating for a similar

parent and community advisory committee for their school district. In places with larger immigrant populations, like Portland and Lewiston, preexisting ethnic-based community organizations are a valuable resource for reaching out to immigrant parents. In Milbridge, where the majority of ELL students are the children of Spanish-speaking farm workers, the ELL teacher is also the board chair of *Mano en Mano*, a local advocacy organization. In districts with more recent or smaller immigrant communities, inclusivity may require direct and ongoing conversations with parents to better understand the obstacles to their participation in parent teacher organizations and representation on school boards, and to determine how to empower their voices.

Inclusivity also means educating parents about their rights to speak up. Parents have the right to refuse to put their children into or pull them out of ELL programs,²² refuse special education for their children,²³ review their children's school records upon request and to challenge them if they are incorrect,²⁴ be part of any group that determines whether their child has a disability that makes their child eligible for special education services,²⁵ and challenge the school's identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child or IEP (individualized education program) if the parent does not agree.²⁶ **Immigrants who come from authoritarian countries may not fully understand their right to have a say in their children's education.** In our interviews with recent refugees from Iraq and Syria, for example, they often seemed confounded by our questions about their children's challenges in school, saying, "Well, you just have to put up with it."

²² 20 U.S.C. §§ 6312 (g)(1)(A)(viii), 7012(a)(8).

²³ 20 U.S.C. § 1414(a)(1)(D)(ii).

²⁴ 20 U.S.C. § 1232g.

²⁵ 20 U.S.C. § 1414(b)(4)(A).

²⁶ 20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(6).

FURTHER LESSONS FOR SUCCESS

OUR ASPIRATION in this report has been to focus on concrete and specific programs that have proven successful in meeting student needs in Maine, rather than abstract and hypothetical ideals. However, **there are certain guiding principles and themes that run throughout those effective initiatives that are worth highlighting** here, as schools may find manifold creative ways of integrating them into their existing practices.

I. TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT

Students need to feel like they matter. Research has shown that adolescents need to have a sense that people are invested in them, and that they make a difference to the world around them.¹ Many immigrant students experience a great deal of transition and disruption in their lives. Their journeys to America may take them through refugee camps or several other countries. As their families get settled in the U.S., and attempt to secure employment and housing, they may move to different states or cities, and change schools several times. Household composition may change too, as family members may be forced to immigrate at different times. However, close and trusting relationships with committed teachers can help minimize disruption to students' sense of mattering. Studies have found that positive, trusting relationships with teachers can actually mitigate the negative effects of harassment on immigrant students' self-esteem. Teachers are thus central to immigrant students' wellbeing.

However, teachers' ability to fulfill the role of mentor and advocate is undermined by the excessive demands placed upon them, which pressure so many to leave the field.

In many Maine schools, teacher turnover is incredibly high. Administrators at Kaler Elementary School in South Portland – which serves high numbers of low-income and high-needs students – said that there are regularly years in which half of all the school's teachers leave. When the principal surveyed the 40 percent of fifth graders that had been at Kaler since kindergarten, she found that not one had a teacher that had been at the school their entire time there. There are many reasons why teachers may leave a specific school, or may quit the profession altogether, but they often do so because they are completely overburdened. One teacher described to us the extreme efforts she went to in order to acquire a wheelchair for a non-ambulatory refugee student who was otherwise unable to attend school. An ELL teacher said that she spent \$1,500 of her own savings this year on her students in order to help them meet their basic needs for food and clean clothing. **When social services fail to support immigrant students, their teachers are the ones who pick up the slack.** Teaching is a demanding and exhausting enough profession without the added responsibilities of trying to meet students' complete mental and physical needs. In order to support immigrant students, homeless students, students of color, students with disabilities, and all of our most vulnerable students, our schools and the municipalities that fund them must offer meaningful material support to teachers.

¹ Gregory C. Elliott, *Family Matters: The Importance of Mattering to Family in Adolescence* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

II. GOOD LEADERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Principals and assistant principals set an important standard for the school community. Teachers, coaches, and students often take their cues about school culture and acceptable behavior from their principals, in ways that administrators likely don't even realize. **By being strong and unapologetic in their public support for vulnerable students, by modeling inclusivity and respect for diversity, and by exhibiting open-mindedness, they show other members of the community the behaviors that they expect.**

Teachers similarly set the tone in their classrooms, and students are adept at perceiving which teachers will hold them accountable for intolerant behaviors and which ones prefer to look the other way. Older students, captains of sports teams, and other student leaders are role models for their peers, and their comportment can make the difference between a supportive and safe school culture and one that is threatening for minorities. The responsibility of those in leadership positions within a school is great, but so is their potential to make meaningful social change.

III. PAYING ATTENTION TO INTERSECTIONALITY

If we are going to pursue equity in our schools, we must pay special attention to those students who are vulnerable for multiple reasons. Intersectionality refers to the ways in which different forms of disadvantage complicate and exacerbate each other. **Vulnerability is more than the sum of its parts: to be poor and black is not simply to experience the challenges of being poor and those of being black.**² ELL students may face certain obstacles in school, and so may students with learning disabilities. ELL students with learning disabilities will likely find their

² Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989):139-167; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1993):1241-1299.

challenges compounded. They may be forced to navigate new and complex hurdles, such as a lack of adequate disability screening procedures in their native language. We must be particularly sensitive to the potential for discrimination against these students.

IV. BEWARE OF RACIALLY SEGREGATED SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Despite the official desegregation of American primary and secondary schools initiated by *Brown v. Board of Education*, research has found that schools in the U.S. continue to be segregated by race and class, and trends suggest that segregation is now

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rising. According to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study of data from the Department of Education, "from school years 2000-01 to 2013-14 (the most recent data available), the percentage of all K-12 public schools that had high percentages of poor and Black or Hispanic students grew from 9 to 16 percent."³ At those schools, "75 to 100 percent of the students were Black or Hispanic and eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—a commonly used indicator of poverty."

Segregated schools are correlated with negative outcomes for students, including lower academic

³ United States Government Accountability Office, "Better Use of Information Could Help Agencies Identify Disparities and Address Racial Discrimination" (April 2016), <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/676745.pdf>

achievement and worse mental health.⁴ The GAO study found that schools with the highest concentrations of black and Latino students “offered disproportionately fewer math, science, and college preparatory courses and had disproportionately higher rates of students who were held back in 9th grade, suspended, or expelled.”

Segregated schools not only harm students of color. “[T]here is also a mounting body of evidence indicating that desegregated schools are linked to profound benefits for all children,” including advanced critical thinking skills, better capacity to communicate and make friends across racial lines, and greater resistance to stereotypes.

Although school segregation is not as entrenched in Maine as it is in several other states, some school districts are starting to see stark discrepancies emerge.⁵ In South Portland, for example, there are five elementary schools. Two of them are more than 30 percent non-white, while two of them are only 11 and 10 percent non-white. In Lewiston, Longley Elementary school is 64 percent ELL, while Farwell Elementary school is only 6.8 percent. These emerging discrepancies within districts indicate a pernicious trend towards growing school segregation, which will only exacerbate racial inequalities in our education system. A 2014 report notes that **in Maine, “without policies to harness racial change to create positive and successful diverse learning environments, segregation is likely to increase.”**⁶ In order to halt the growing segregation of our schools, districts should be thoughtful and intentional in their student assignment policies, and need to think beyond simply geography.

⁴ Kirsten Kainz and Yi Pan, “Segregated School Effects on First Grade Reading Gains: Using Propensity Score Matching to Disentangle Effects for African-American, Latino, and European-American Students,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2014): 531-537.

⁵ Jennifer B. Ayscue and Shoshee Jau, with Greg Flaxman, John Kucsera, and Genevieve Siegel, *Diversity in the Distance: The Onset of Racial Change in Northern New England Schools (The Civil Rights Project/Projecto Derechos Civiles, 2014)*.

⁶ Ayscue et al.

CONCLUSION

We believe the structural and personal discrimination that this report documents is alarming, and we hope it will disrupt any complacency about the state of our schools. No person, and certainly no child, should feel as vulnerable, excluded, and victimized as many immigrant students in Maine described themselves as feeling.

“Central both to the idea of the rule of law and to our own Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection is the principle that government and each of its parts remain open on impartial terms to all.”¹ This constitutionally-guaranteed equality is a right that our schools have failed to deliver.

But there is reason to hope. Our conversations with immigrant families were a reminder of the strength and resilience of young people, and the unceasing love and dedication of parents. We found passionate educators all over the state who are committed to improving their schools, and who shared their challenges with us in the hope that this report might be the foundation of increased collaboration, increased innovation, and increased equity.

¹ *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 633 (1996).

Recommended Reading

These texts were recommended to us by teachers and administrators who have found them useful in transforming the way they approach education.

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates

Fires In The Bathroom: Advice for Teachers from High School Students by Kathleen Cushman

How to R.E.A.C.H. Youth Today by Manny Scott

Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools by Laurie Olsen

Refugee and Immigrant Students: Achieving Equity in Education by Florence E. McCarthy and Margaret H. Vickers

Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It by Eric Jensen

The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future by Linda Darling-Hammond

The Students Are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract by Theodore R.Sizer and Nancy Faust Sizer

Waking Up White: and Finding Myself in the Story of Race by Debby Irving

We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools by Gary Howard

White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son by Tim Wise

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With special thanks to the Rocking Moon Foundation for its generous support of this project.

We want to acknowledge those educators who participated in this research, not only for their work in pursuit of equity, but also for allowing us access to their schools and classrooms so that we could witness firsthand their successes and challenges.

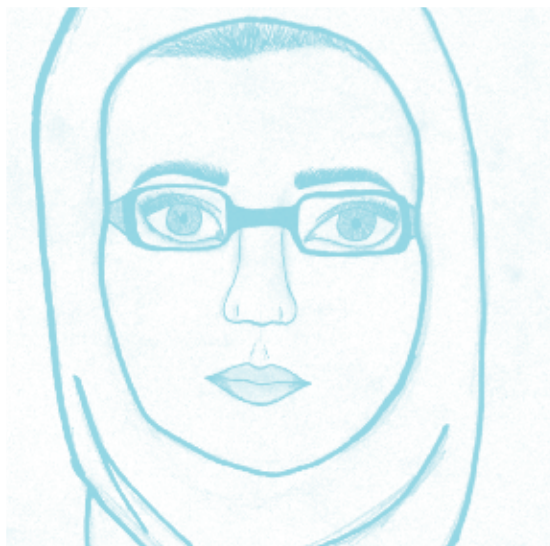
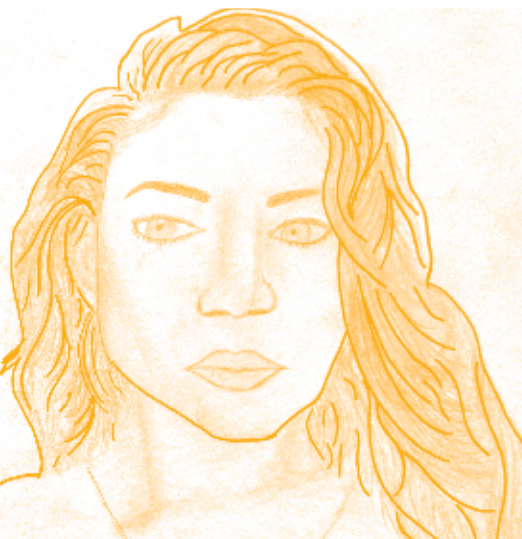
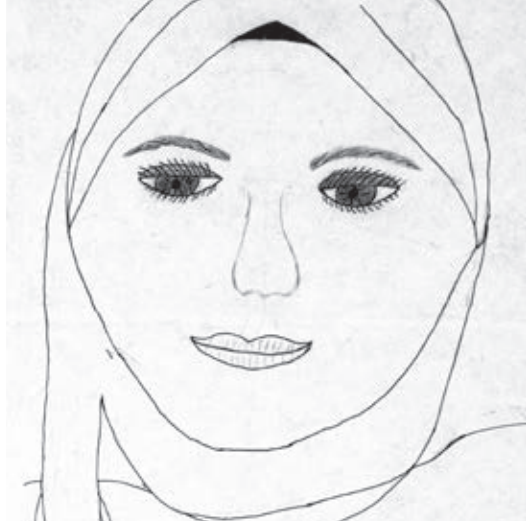
We are grateful as well to the parents and community leaders who spoke candidly to us of their hopes and concerns.

We especially want to thank all of the students who shared their stories with us. For many of them, participating in this research meant reflecting on difficult experiences, and risking the disapproval of school staff and community members for speaking out about the injustices they've suffered. We appreciate and admire their courage.

We hope that this report does justice to their stories.

PHOTO CREDITS:

EMMA LEBLANC, ACLU OF MAINE (COVER, PP. 7, 12, 27, 46)
BIDDEFORD HS AND WESTBROOK HS CIVIL RIGHTS TEAMS, WITH PIGEON (INSIDE COVER)
COURTESY OF RISE AND SHINE PROGRAM (PP. 28, 39)
COURTESY OF MAKE IT HAPPEN! PROGRAM (P. 9)



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