Chapter 23  Policies Addressing Separate and Unequal Education

**Expand Access to Career Technical Education for Descendants**

Discriminatory policies have created persisting inequalities in educational attainment and employment for African Americans. The Center for American Progress, for instance, notes that schools have historically tracked African American students into low-quality vocational programs “as an extension of Jim Crow-era segregation.” High quality Career Technical Education (CTE) programs—which combine academic education with occupational training to prepare students for careers in current or emerging professions—offer an essential tool to remedy this persisting discrimination.

To address the ongoing effects of racial discrimination and inequality in employment, education, and wealth, the Task Force recommends: (1) collecting and disaggregating data about CTE enrollment in California by race; (2) funding and requiring all California public high schools and colleges to offer students access to at least one CTE program; and (3) creating a competitive grant program to increase enrollment of descendants in STEM-related CTE programs (such as green technology) at the high school and college levels.

For the competitive grants to increase enrollment of descendants, these funds could support programs implementing strategies that the Urban Institute has recommended for increasing Black enrollment in CTE programs, including outreach, mentorship, equity-focused training for instructors, and providing potential students with access to adequate technology and software to access online CTE courses. As with other educational grants, the CDE would administer and award grants on a competitive basis to school districts, county superintendents of schools, direct-funded charter schools, and community colleges to increase descendant participation in STEM-related CTE programs, including electrical engineering, information technology, renewable energy, green technology, advanced manufacturing, health care, or cybersecurity.

**Improve Access to Public Schools**

As set forth in the Task Force’s first recommendation to address the harms identified in Chapter 6, the state must increase funding to ensure that schools serving descendants provide the best possible public education available in the state. But in addition to quality schools, African Americans have long been denied access to schools of their choice. As detailed in Chapter 6, enslavement, segregation, redlining, and neighborhood gerrymandering have denied African American families meaningful and equitable access to a variety of high-quality schools.

Thus, the Task Force recommends that the Legislature improve school access by: (1) requiring school districts to prioritize creating and supporting new public schools (including magnet schools and community college campuses) in African American communities, with substantial weight given to input from those communities and descendants in particular; and (2) requiring districts to permit students to transfer to public schools of their choice within their district or between neighboring districts if doing so would not maintain or exacerbate racial segregation (i.e., if the transfer would improve racial or socioeconomic diversity), while funding free public transportation for students who participate in this school transfer program and ensuring funding to offset the loss in per-pupil funding in districts from which those students transfer.
The first element of this proposal addresses how, through historic and ongoing discrimination, the state has failed to fund, staff, or support public schools in African American communities to the same degree it has done so for white communities. Requiring school districts to prioritize the creation and funding of new schools in African American communities would also address the ways in which redlining and neighborhood gerrymandering have at times created artificial political boundaries that excluded African American families from nearby schools that they otherwise would have attended.

The second element of this proposal similarly addresses how redlining and neighborhood gerrymandering have created artificial district lines that can exclude African American families from nearby schools—as well as the ways in which schools can apply the discretionary inter-district transfer process in an inequitable manner with respect to African American families and their children.

The second element of this proposal would also improve school access for African Americans, especially families including descendants of individuals enslaved in the United States, by building on the model of the Berkeley Unified School District’s (BUSD) intra-district public elementary school admissions process to create an equitable model for intra- and inter-district transfers. Under the BUSD system, parents complete a parent preference form in which parents rank the elementary schools they wish their child to attend. BUSD assigns students based on their parents’ preferences but assignments are made within the constraints of six priority categories. Within a given priority category, BUSD uses diversity categories to assign students to each school to avoid segregation and ensure that the student body at each elementary school reflects the racial and socioeconomic diversity of the total school population in the attendance zone.

Whereas the BUSD system is a system for intra-district transfers (i.e., within the same district), the Task Force’s recommendation is for a model that permits inter-district transfers (between neighboring districts), to create an equitable system for transfers within and between neighboring school districts.

If this recommendation is implemented, the Task Force also recommends that the Legislature implement budgetary provisions to provide funding to offset any loss in per-pupil funding that may occur if a student transfers to another school within their district or to one in a neighboring district, to ensure that improved school access does not come at the cost of school quality if students and their families choose to transfer to other schools within their district or neighboring ones.

While the focus of this recommendation is on addressing the historic and ongoing exclusion of descendants and other African American families from a range of school options, a 2009 study of the BUSD school transfer policy concluded that its model also resulted in racial “integration across the district” being “fairly high[,]” and that “BUSD has substantially integrated schools ... within the confines of the Supreme Court’s guidance on voluntary integration plans[,]” A subsequent study, examining “Berkeley-style geographic integration plans in the nation’s 10 largest metropolitan districts,” found that “the majority of schools in the study sample would experience gains in diversity,” and that such school district plans could have the effect of reducing segregation in elementary schools, small schools, and schools in relatively more segregated districts with less diverse neighborhoods.

**Fund Free Tuition to California Public Colleges and Universities**

Colleges play a critical role in the socioeconomic mobility of Californians. But the costs of attending college have grown exponentially over the last several decades, and that rising cost excludes many African Americans from the promise of higher education, reinforcing the ongoing history of discrimination in education. Thus, the Task Force recommends that the Legislature fund California public colleges and universities to ensure free tuition for all California residents determined, by the Task Force, to be eligible for monetary reparations.