Cincinnati

&

The State of Black Students and Higher Education

Photo credit: Tanner Daniels

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Note: The contents of the report do not represent the University of Cincinnati. The views/analyses are the author's own.

About the Author

Antar A. Tichavakunda, PhD is an assistant professor of education at the University of Cincinnati. He studies the sociology of race and higher education and is especially interested in studying Black students' lives at predominantly White institutions of higher education. He looks forward to doing more work with different education stakeholders in the Southwest Ohio Region to support Black students' educational outcomes.

The Lab for Educational, Equity, and Opportunity (LEEO)

Our mission is to conduct and disseminate research that will guide transformative actions of schools, institutions, cities, and communities in providing equitable educational opportunities to their citizens. Our work is rooted in ideals of equity, inclusiveness, and social justice, reflecting our common purpose to inform how practitioners, researchers, and policy experts consider and address challenges in K-20 education. We are committed to bringing interdisciplinary perspectives to the many factors that contribute to student success, and providing a platform for discourse and advocacy.

Setting the Stage

I write this report in Spring 2021—during a global pandemic, only months after a televised insurrection in the nation's capital, and less than a year after the onslaught of anti-Black racial violence and extrajudicial police killings of Black people during the summer of 2020. In different ways, the events I've listed are racialized in very clear ways. The time is now to commit to racial justice. Yet, of course, the time should always be now for a commitment to Black life.

It is in this spirit that I write this report. What began as a way for me to get a better lay of the land for higher education and the Black community in Southwest Ohio has turned into what I hope will be a call to Cincinnati to better support its Black community. As this report will show, we are not where we once were, but we have a ways to go.

The words of James Baldwin continue to ring true: **"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."** The same can be said of the state of higher education for the Black community in Cincinnati. **This report is the first step—facing the facts of how Cincinnati is underserving its Black community.**

Cincinnati at a Glance

Cincinnati has a unique relationship with its Black residents. Cincinnati was a main "junction" on the Underground Railroad. Black people attempting to escape chattel slavery often called the Ohio River, "River Jordan," with hopes that life in Cincinnati and other northern cities would be their promised land.

In 2021, can the Queen City be considered the promised land it was thought to be for Black residents? At 42.3%, [1] Black people are the second largest group in the city. Cincinnati, however, is known for its troubled race relations. Inequality manifests in different ways. Black unemployment in the Cincinnati metro area, for example, hovers around 17%, [2] over three times as high as their White counterparts. We have yet to see the extent of the impact of how the COVID-19 pandemic has widened this gap. Higher education success, while not the answer by itself, is another indicator of equality.

Higher education can be a pathway to self-actualization, economic security, and a path to the middle-class or higher. A college education is vital to the health and future of any community—from the Black community, specifically, to the Cincinnati community, more generally. So how is the city of Cincinnati serving its Black residents in their pathways to higher education?

Only 15.7% of Black Cincinnati residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. In fact, Black Cincinnatians trail their Latinx, Asian/Asian American, and White counterparts in terms of a bachelor's degree attainment or higher.[3] Considering the large proportion of Black Cincinnati residents, this low percentage is a problem. Part of the problem, perhaps, is that we have not kept up with the numbers. This report does part of that work and is a glimpse of the State of Blacks in Higher Education in Cincinnati.

To be clear, this report is not a simple critique of Cincinnati Public Schools or universities in the area. We support and appreciate the hard-working teachers, staff, faculty, and administrators that prioritize and contribute to Black students' education. Yet, Cincinnati has some work to do. Black students deserve better.

Cincinnati Educational Attainment— Bachelor's Degree or Higher	
Race	**% of population**
Black	**15.7%**
Latinx	38%
Asian/Asian American	75.3%
White	57.7%

This Report is NOT the whole story

While we hope this report sparks change, this report is nowhere near exhaustive. Here are some questions we want you to consider in reading this paper:

Whose Voices are in this Report?

This report does not have any qualitative data. By that we mean we did not interview the key players in high schools and higher education. The voices of students, parents, teachers, school leaders, and policymakers are not in this report, but their voices must be elevated in the fight for racial justice and in future research.

What are the Limits of the Metrics we Use?

We highlight graduation rates, Advanced Placement exams, and Ohio Department of Education Report Cards. Are these the best metrics to determine success? No. These metrics only present a limited view, but it does provide a starting point of conversation and future research.

Whose Fault is it?

Our instinct is find someone to blame for educational issues. That's the easy thing to do—but it's often the wrong thing to do. So we want to say very clearly that we do not find fault in one single group. We support teachers going above and beyond for their students. We support students achieving in spite of the obstacles they face. We support school leaders doing the best they can. This is a systemic issue. But we have to name the problems before we can solve them.

High Schools and College Readiness

This section provides a snapshot of Black achievement in Cincinnati public schools. There's much more to college readiness and academic preparation than Advanced Placement (AP) exams. This paper does not engage with career readiness or career-prep programs. Decisions should not be made solely on the availability and passage rates of AP exams alone. However, the availability and efficiency of AP classes as well as graduation rates do tell a story about access and equity to college readiness.

Black students

make up **63%** of Cincinnati Public Schools

Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS), serving nearly 36,000 students, is the third largest district in the state of Ohio. Black students make up 63.2% of CPS. This section highlights the data available for CPS' high schools.

How are Black Students Doing with Advanced Placement Exams?

School	Black %	# of AP Courses (2015)	# of Black students passing AP Exam (2015)	Black students taking AP Exams (2015)
Aiken	80%	8	0	59
Clark Montessori	51.2%	3	4	21
Woodward	91.10%	5	0	20
Withrow	74.50%	3	0	35
Western Hills	73.2%	4	0	23
Walnut Hills	23.7%	37	122	220
Virtual	62.4%	3	0	0
Robert A. Taft	92.5%	6	0	47
Shroder Paideia	90.60%	7	0	110
Oyler	44.1%	4	0	19
Hughes STEM	88.6%	9	0	62
Gamble	74.1%	5	0	10
Dater	56.6%	8	8	60
Riverview East Academy	52.60%	3	0	0

Data presented in this section was retrieved from
https://ocrdata.ed.gov/DistrictSchoolSearch?ds=1#schoolSearch

The percentages of the Black population are based off of 2019-2020 data

In the **majority** of Cincinnati Public high schools, **no Black student passed** a single **AP exam.**

KEY STATS

It is important to note that the data presented here, while the most updated public data on AP exam taking/results, is from 2015. AP passage rates, hopefully, have since increased, yet such data is not available.

In **11** high schools in CPS, **no Black students** reported passing an AP exam.

Walnut Hills—the school serving the **smallest** percentage of Black students—has the **most** resources to support AP exam testing and passage rates:

* In CPS, 91% of the Black students earning a qualifying score on an AP exam attended the same school--Walnut Hills.
* Roughly a third of AP classes are housed at Walnut Hills

Ohio School Report Card
2018-2019
Grades from the Ohio Department of Education

School	Black %	4-yr Grad Rate	Achievement Grade		Prepared for Success Grade
Aiken	80%	85.5%	D	F	F
Clark Montessori	51.2%	92%	A	D	C
Woodward	91.10%	69.10%	F	F	F
Withrow	74.50%	87.4%	C	F	F
Western Hills	73.2%	73.4%	F	F	F
Walnut Hills	23.7%	99.7%	A	B	A
Virtual	62.4%	30.7%	F	F	F
Robert A. Taft	92.5%	72.3%	F	F	F
Shroder Paideia	90.60%	85.6%	B	F	F
SCPA	56.6%	99.1%	A	D	D
Oyler	44.1%	67.7%	F	D	D
Hughes STEM	88.6%	82.5%	D	F	F
Dater	56.6%	79.4%	D	F	F
Riverview East Academy	52.60%	59.2%	F	F	F

Notes:
 Report Cards/Grades were not given for the 2019-2020 year because of the pandemic.

Data retrieved from https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/home

College Readiness and Persistence Metrics

School	Black %	% of Grads Entering College within 2 years (2017 class)	% of Grads who complete college w/in 6 years (2013 class)	% of 2018 & 2019 Classes with an AP Exam Score of 3>
Aiken	80%	47.6%	7.3%	0.9%
Clark Montessori	51.2%	78%	56%	23.5%
Woodward	91.10%	31.1%	4.1%	0.6%
Withrow	74.50%	41.5%	12.7%	0.6%
Western Hills	73.2%	36.1%	5.2%	1.1%
Walnut Hills	23.7%	91.6%	64.2%	78.8%
Virtual	62.4%	13.9%	2.6%	0.9%
Robert A. Taft	92.5%	42.1%	2.7%	1%
Shroder Paideia	90.60%	62.4%	14.5%	1.8%
SCPA	56.6%	78.2%	43.2%	30.5%
Oyler	44.1%	19.3%	8.3%	0.8%
Hughes STEM	88.6%	43.4%	9.2%	5.1%
Gamble	74.1%	56.3%	15.4%	7.4%
Dater	56.6%	51.1%	7.9%	9.4%
Riverview East Academy	52.60%	33.3%	14.6%	2%

Note:

Data was retrieved from https://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/home

The **majority** of Cincinnati Public high schools (**12**), received a **D** or an **F** in the Ohio School Report Card's "**Prepared for Success**" metric.

KEY STATS

In **8** CPS high schools**, less than 10%** of their prospective graduate populations **finished college in 6 years**.

In **5** CPS high schools, **50% or more** students **enrolled in higher education within two years** after high school graduation.

On the Ohio School Report Card, **10** schools received an **F** and **2** schools received a **D** for the **Prepared for Success** metric. The Ohio School Report Card describes this metric as follows: "*Whether training in a technical field or preparing for work or college, the Prepared for Success component looks at how well prepared Ohio's students are for all future opportunities.*"

Regional Public Universities and Community Colleges

Schools such as the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash and Cincinnati State Technical and Community College play an important role in the state of higher education. An associate's degree or certificate from Blue Ash and Cincinnati State can serve as a vehicle to change, advance, or start a career. They also can provide the foundation to transfer to a four-year university.

More affordable than other institutions with less rigid admissions standards, these schools provide greater access to higher education for underrepresented groups such as adult learners, racial minorities, and first generation students.

UC Blue Ash and Cincinnati State, in some ways, serve students who need the most support. How do Black students do at these schools?

Regional Public Universities and Community Colleges Cont'd.

University of Cincinnati Blue Ash

UC Blue Ash (2013 Cohort)	
Race	Grad. Rate
Asian/Asian American	18%
Latinx	23%
White	18%
Black	5%

In Fall 2018, **21%** of the UC Blue Ash student population identified as **Black** or **African American**.

NOTE: This does not include people who may have transferred out

Data retrieved from IPEDS NCES

Regional Public Universities and Community Colleges Cont'd.

Cincinnati State Technical & Community College

Cincinnati State Graduation Rate (2016 Cohort)	
Race	Grad. Rate
Asian/Asian American	24%
Latinx	29%
White	20%
Black	6%

In Fall 2018, **23%** of the Cincinnati State Technical and Community College student population identified as **Black** or **African American**.

NOTE: This does not include people who may have transferred out

Data retrieved from IPEDS NCES

Regional Public Universities and Community Colleges:

KEY STATS-

- **The Black graduation rate at UC Blue Ash is 5%.**

- **The Black graduation rate at Cincinnati State is 6%.**

- **The Latinx, Asian/Asian American, and White graduation rates at both Cincinnati State AND UC Blue Ash are more than 3 times higher than Black students' graduation rates at the both schools.**

Summary

These numbers do not tell the whole story of how Cincinnati State and UC Blue Ash serve Black students. For example, we do not have numbers on how many Black students transferred to other institutions. However, these graduation rates are telling. At both institutions, Black students trail their Asian/Asian American, Latinx, and White counterparts in graduation rates. The majority of Black students enrolled in classes at these schools are stopping without completing a certificate or earning an associate's degree, potentially taking on more debt without a degree to show for it.

Four-Year Colleges and Universities

Students have a number of options to choose from in the Cincinnati-metro area for four-year colleges and universities. Students might take a number of pathways to personal satisfaction and economic security. Four-year institutions of higher education, however, remain among the surest routes to middle-class status.

Here, we highlight statistics concerning Black students' 5-year graduation rates and their enrollment rates at **6** area schools to get a better understanding of the state of Black students in higher education in the southwest Ohio region.

Four-Year Colleges and Universities
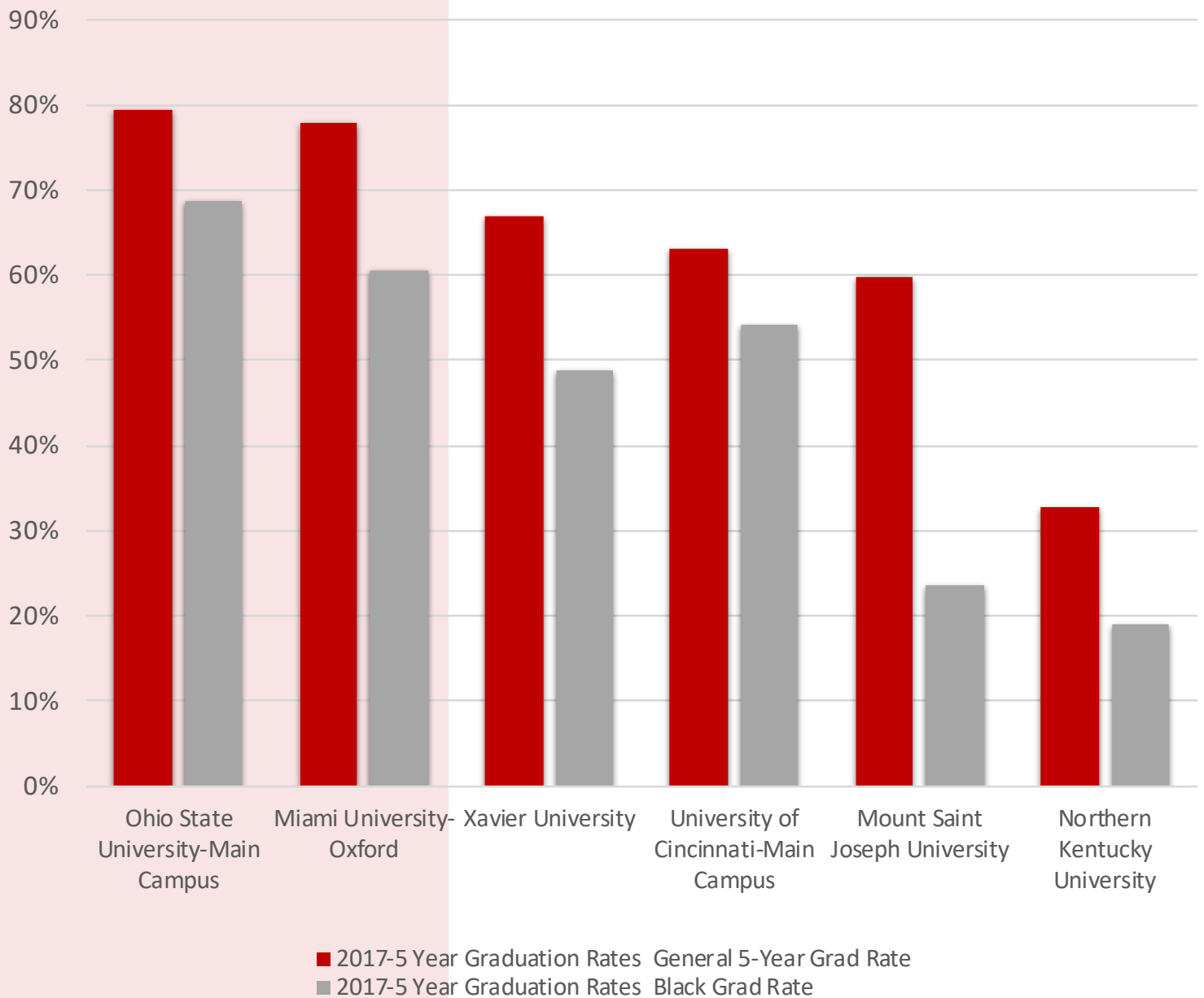
Black Student Representation					
	Year				
College	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
NKU	6.2%	6.7%	7%	7%	7.1%
Mt. St. Joseph	6.9%	8.8%	9.3%	9.9%	10.2%
UC	7.1%	7%	6.8%	6.9%	6.9%
Xavier	8. 2%	8.8%	9.1%	9.3%	8.9%
Miami	4%	3.6%	3.1%	2.9%	3.1%
OSU	6.1%	5.8%	5.5%	5.4%	5.3%

NOTE: Data in this section was drawn from from
http://www.collegeresults.org/

Graduation Rates

90%	
80%	
70%	
60%	
50%	
40%	
30%	
20%	
10%	
0%	

Ohio State University-Main Campus | Miami University-Oxford | Xavier University | University of Cincinnati-Main Campus | Mount Saint Joseph University | Northern Kentucky University

■ 2017-5 Year Graduation Rates General 5-Year Grad Rate
■ 2017-5 Year Graduation Rates Black Grad Rate

NOTE:
Data was collected in 2017 and represents students graduating from the class of 2011

Data in this section was retrieved from
http://www.collegeresults.org/

Graduation Rates

College	Average 5-Year Grad Rate	Black Grad Rate
Ohio State University	79.5%	68.6%
Miami University-Oxford	77.9%	60.6%
Xavier University	67.6%	48.8%
University of Cincinnati-Main Campus	63.1%	54.3%
Mount Saint Joseph University	59.7%	23.5%
Northern Kentucky University	32.7%	19.1%

At **every** institution, the **Black graduation rate trails** the **average** graduation rate.

At **each school**, when compared with their White, Asian/Asian American, and Latinx, counterparts, the **Black 5-yr graduation rate was the lowest.**

KEY STATS

- With the exception of Mt. St. Joseph, at no point, between 2013 and 2017, did any institution have greater than a 10% Black undergraduate student population.

- The Black graduation rate at the University of Cincinnati increased by over 10% between 2013 and 2017.

- Between 2013 and 2017, the University of Cincinnati and Mt. St. Joseph are the only institutions to have an increase in the Black graduation rate.

- **At every institution, the Black graduation rate trails the average graduation rate.**

- **At each school, when compared with their White, Asian/Asian American, and Latinx, counterparts, the Black 5-yr graduation rate was the lowest.**

Making Sense of This Report

First, we hope that readers do not walk away from this data "blaming the victim" or suggesting that it is Black students' fault for their educational outcomes. That would be wrongheaded and racist. Rather, we want to point attention to the systems and structures that result in such educational outcomes.

We can only tell a part of the story of Black students in four-year institutions of higher education. While Black students' numbers and graduation rates are increasing across some institutions, what type of experience do they have? Are they feeling supported? Do they experience the campus racial climate in a positive manner? How many of their professors look like them? The previous section, and this report, we hope, will provide us more lines of inquiry to pursue and innovative ways to support Black students in higher education.

This report should be read as another voice contributing in the ongoing conversation of equity for Black students in Cincinnati. Many of the key figures highlight stark racial disparities that we should be troubled by and take seriously. The numbers here only provide a slice of the portrait of Blacks in Higher Education using specific metrics. However, the metrics we do provide should encourage action and further research.

We caution readers not to place blame on a particular education sector, teachers, leadership, community, school systems, or Black students themselves. Educational inequity is a multifaceted issue. Food insecurity, homelessness, neighborhood disinvestment, residential segregation, income inequality, and other structural manifestations of anti-blackness, for example, all play a role in Black students' educational trajectories. Further**, this is not a critique of Black Cincinnatians**—it is a critique of structures and systems that are failing them.

Our report pushes the Cincinnati community to ask not what else Black students can do, but rather, what can the city of Cincinnati, universities, Cincinnati Public Schools, and others do to better serve Black students?

What Can We Do?
Next Steps

Updated and Disaggregated Data

Making positive change for Black Cincinnatian's higher education outcomes first requires facing and acknowledging the state of higher education for Black Cincinnatians. The data we have here is helpful, but is not the most updated. Systems and schools might take greater initiative to track data of their own and make this data available for stakeholders. Disaggregating data is also important. **Graduation rates tell us one thing, but we need to be specific and identify what *Black* graduation rates are in order to make progress and identify disparities.** Investing in an annual report highlighting metrics in relation to Black education would be a useful start.

Systematic Support

Black Cincinnatians need specific, systematic, and structured support. **An initiative or program directed at "urban" or "low income" residents is not the same as an initiative built for Black Cincinnatians.** Policymakers, scholars, teachers, students, and community members might convene to come up with lasting programs built to aid in the success of Black Cincinnatians in higher education. Systematic support, however, will also benefit residents of all races. For example, increased support and funding for more college counselors in Cincinnati Public Schools will benefit not only Black students, but all public school students.

Identify and Support Partnerships

A number of organizations are working towards supporting Black students' pursuits of higher education. By identifying community organizations and forming partnerships, Cincinnati stakeholders might work together to better the state of higher education for Black Cincinnatians. Another potentially useful partnership would be between scholars/researchers and Cincinnati Public Schools as well as area universities. To what extent are school districts and universities tapping into the expertise of education scholars in their own backyard?

Regional University and School District Collaboration

Institutions often act in silos. A boundary exists between higher education and K-12 school districts. What would a united front or consortium of representatives came together with the sole purpose of coming up with innovative strategies and making strategic investments to support Black Cincinnatians and higher education success? We need action. We need material investment in Black students' education. The city of Cincinnati cannot afford to wait any longer.

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

1 Data retrieved from the following page in reference to Hamilton County
 https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/cincinnaticityohio/RHI225217#RHI225217
2 https://www.gcfdn.org/Portals/0/All-In_Cincinnati_Final%20Report.pdf
3 2019 ACS 1 year Estimates Subject Tables - Table ID S1501

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