

SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM LEVEL FACTORS AFFECTING BLACK AND LATINX STUDENT LEARNING

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Introduction

Black and Latinx students often face an education system that was designed without them in mind — one that can make them feel disconnected, excluded, and unwelcome. These feelings of alienation harm students' academic identity, engagement, and achievement.

But when schools center freedom, equity, and culturally relevant teaching, they can help students feel empowered, motivated, and capable of success.



The Problem

- Alienation is one of the biggest barriers to success for Black and Latinx students.
- Students often face:
 - Unchallenging, irrelevant curriculum
 - Few opportunities for advanced coursework
 - Harsh discipline policies like suspensions for minor issues
- Pressure to assimilate or hide their cultural identity

These experiences are not accidents — they are part of a system shaped by structural racism since Reconstruction, when white leaders controlled Black education to maintain inequality.

What is Academic Alienation?

It's when students feel:

- Disconnected from the curriculum
- Shut out from advanced opportunities
- Seen as a "problem" instead of a learner
- Pressured to give up their culture to succeed

Alienation can:

- Lower academic motivation
- Reduce sense of belonging
- Lead to school avoidance or dropping out
- Increase involvement with the justice system

What's Happening in Schools?

- **Advanced Coursework Gap:** Black & Latinx students are less likely to have access to calculus, physics, and other challenging courses — even when they attend schools that offer them.
- **Discipline Disparities:** Zero-tolerance policies remove students from class, erode teacher-student trust, and make school feel unsafe.
- **"Trickle-Down" Equity:** Many DEI initiatives benefit administrators and systems first, with little direct improvement for students.



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At CRESTSprogram, we provide training for parents, educators, and mental health professionals who recognize the need to place culture at the center of trauma-informed care.

Why This Matters

When Black and Latinx students develop a positive academic identity (seeing themselves as capable and smart), they are more likely to stay engaged and thrive. When schools ignore culture and punish expression, students may disengage, resist, or feel education isn't meant for them.

What Needs to Change

For Educators & School Leaders:

- Use emancipatory evaluation — research that centers student and community voices.
- Offer rigorous, engaging curriculum in every school.
- Replace exclusionary discipline with restorative practices that keep kids in class.
- Learn from African American Pedagogical Excellence (AAPE) — culturally rooted teaching strategies proven to work.

For Parents & Communities:

- Demand data collection that reflects community experiences.
- Speak up in school board meetings and parent groups.
- Share your vision of what excellent education should look like.
- Partner with researchers and educators to create culturally relevant solutions.



What Culturally Relevant Change Looks Like

Schools & Teachers

- Make curriculum challenging & meaningful
- End unnecessary suspensions
- Train teachers in justice-oriented practices
- Hire and support Black & Latinx educators Advocate for community-driven research

Parents & Communities

- Share expectations for quality education
- Partner with schools to demand fair policies
- Normalize conversations about cultural excellence
- Advocate for community-driven research

