The Writers

Lead Writer and Editor: Michelle Patterson
Contributing Writers: Ashia Barnes, Trina Nurse, Shawnia Yon, George Patterson
Developed through the Equity Data Unification Think Tank
Convened by Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U)
© 2026 Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U). All rights reserved.

Community Brief Version

Seeing the System

Why National Education Data Matter for Students and Communities

A Community Brief Emerging from the Equity Data Unification Think Tank
Convened by Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U)

Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U) is a national network of educators, researchers, and community leaders committed to advancing educational equity through research, policy dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. The Equity Data Unification Think Tank brought together educators, researchers, and policy leaders to examine how national education data systems help the country understand educational opportunity and student outcomes.

The Big Question

Across the country, communities are asking a simple but profound question: **Are our schools providing fair access to opportunity for every student?**

Answering that question requires more than individual stories or local observations. It requires reliable information that allows the nation to see patterns across thousands of schools and communities.

National education data systems make this possible. They allow educators, researchers, policymakers, and families to understand where students are thriving, where disparities persist, and whether policies are improving opportunities for young people.

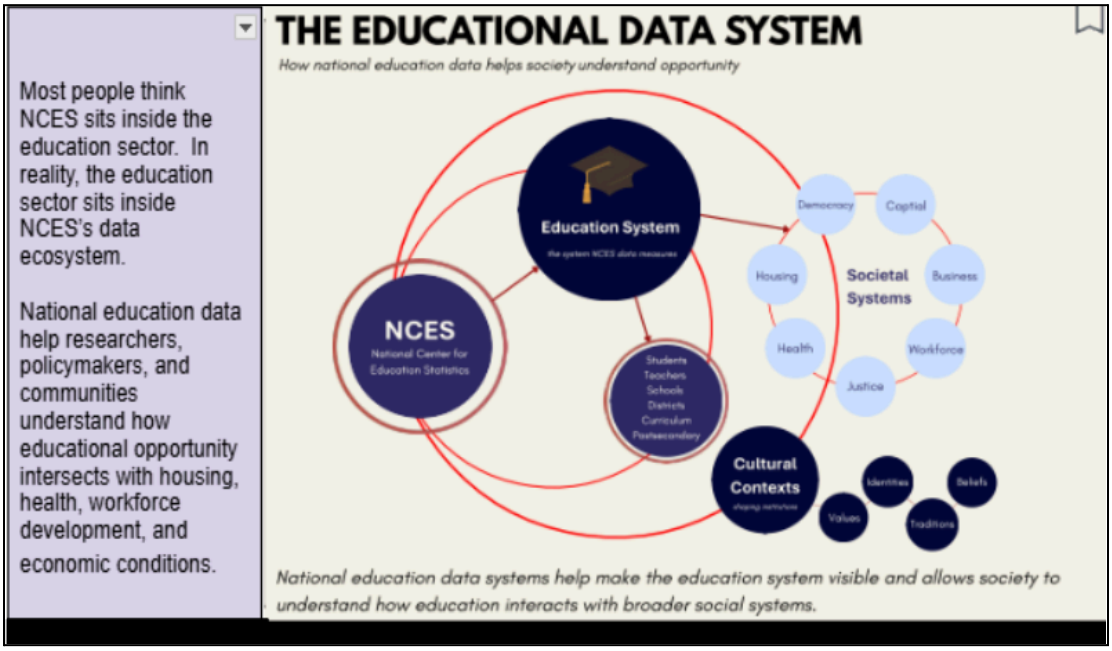
When these systems are strong, the country can see the full picture of educational opportunity. When they weaken, inequities become harder to detect and harder to address.

Without reliable national data, it becomes much harder to understand what students across the country are experiencing and what changes may be needed to improve educational opportunity.

How the Education Data System Works

The Education Data Ecosystem

Figure 1. The Education Data Ecosystem



National education datasets coordinated through NCES help researchers, policymakers, and educators understand patterns of opportunity and outcomes across the U.S. education system.

Many of the nation's education datasets are coordinated through the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the federal agency responsible for collecting and organizing education data across the United States. National education data systems allow researchers, policymakers, and educators to examine patterns across thousands of communities rather than isolated school systems.

These systems connect information from thousands of schools and districts and make it possible to examine patterns at a national level rather than relying only on isolated local experiences.

By examining patterns across communities, the country can better understand how educational opportunity is distributed and where improvements are needed.

How Education Data Connect to Community Change

Community members often notice changes happening around them and ask important questions: Why are some neighborhoods gaining new businesses while others are not? Why do some communities see more school resources, while others struggle? Why do housing patterns, insurance decisions, and economic investment seem to shift in ways that affect schools and families differently?

Education data help communities investigate these kinds of questions. Patterns in schooling are often connected to broader systems that shape opportunity, including housing patterns, workforce development, health access, transportation, and local economic investment.

When national education datasets are examined alongside other public data, researchers and policymakers can better understand how these systems interact. For example, patterns in school funding, discipline practices, graduation rates, and access to advanced coursework can reflect broader community conditions and policy decisions.

This is why national education data matter beyond the classroom. They help communities understand not only what is happening inside schools, but also how schools connect to wider social and economic systems that shape opportunity.

Local information alone often cannot reveal these broader patterns. A single district may see changes in enrollment, discipline, graduation rates, or course access but may not know whether those changes are unique or part of a larger national trend. National datasets allow researchers and communities to compare patterns across thousands of districts. By looking across many communities at once, national education data make it possible to see connections between schooling, neighborhood conditions, economic investment, and opportunity that would otherwise remain hidden.

What National Education Data Actually Do

National education datasets help answer important questions such as:

- Are students in different communities receiving equal educational opportunities?
- Do students have access to advanced coursework and college preparation programs?
- Are discipline policies affecting some students more than others?
- Are education policies improving outcomes over time?

By examining trends across thousands of school systems, national datasets allow educators and policymakers to identify patterns that may not be visible within a single district or state.

What to Look For in Your Community

Education data can help families and community members ask important questions about how schools are serving students. Many of these questions can be explored using publicly available data, including your district's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) profile.

Here are a few things you can look for:

---

1. Differences Across Student Groups

- Are students from different racial or ethnic groups experiencing school differently?
- Do suspension rates vary across groups?
- Are some students more likely to be placed in special education or advanced courses?

These patterns can help identify where opportunities may not be distributed equitably.

---

2. Access to Opportunities

- Do all students have access to advanced coursework, such as honors or college-level classes?
- Are enrichment programs, extracurricular activities, and academic supports available to all students?

Access to these opportunities often shapes long-term outcomes for students.

---

3. Trends Over Time

- Are outcomes improving, staying the same, or declining?
- Are gaps between student groups getting smaller or larger?

Looking at trends over time helps communities understand whether progress is being made.

---

4. Comparisons Beyond a Single School

- How does your school or district compare to others with similar student populations?
- Are there differences across neighborhoods or districts?

National and state data help place local experiences in a broader context.

5. Questions About Transparency

- Is this information easy to find and understand?
- Are data available for different student groups?
- Are there areas where information is missing?

When data are difficult to access or incomplete, it can be harder for communities to understand what is happening in their schools.

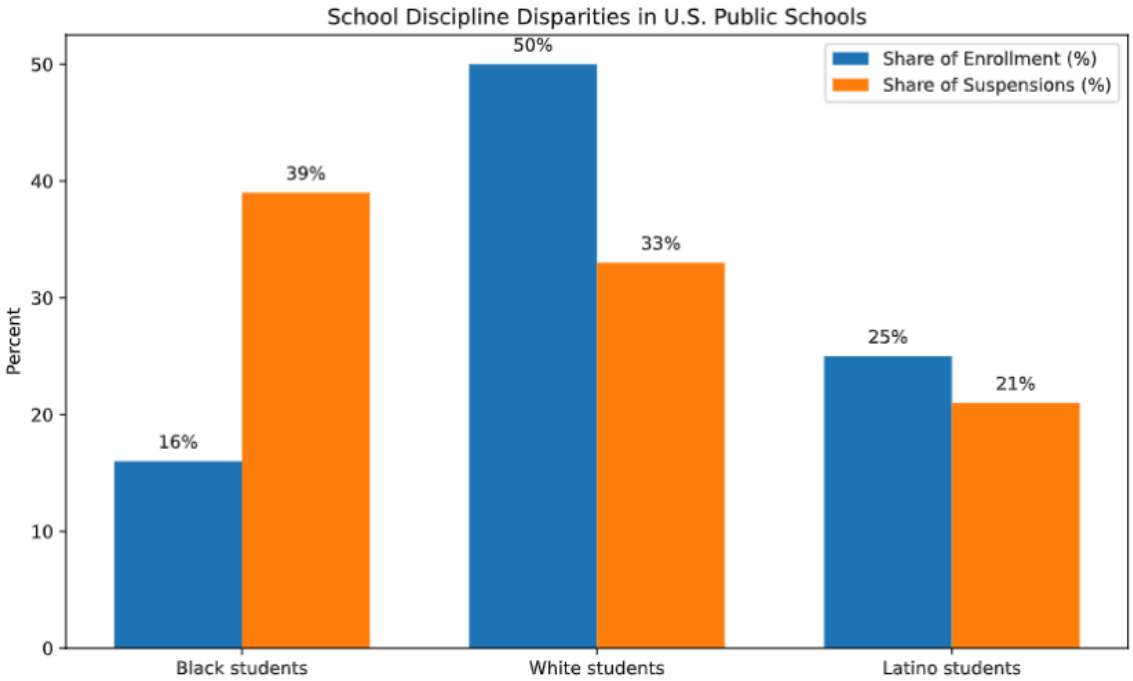
Why This Matters

These questions help families and communities better understand how schools are serving students and where additional support or changes may be needed.

Education data are not just numbers—they help make patterns visible so communities can ask informed questions and advocate for improvement.

What the Data Have Revealed

Figure 2. Example of National Discipline Disparities



Example: School Discipline Disparities in U.S. Public Schools

Student Group	Share of Enrollment	Share of Suspensions
Black students	~16%	~40%
White students	~50%	~33%
Latino students	~25%	~21%

Source: U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection; U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2018). K–12 Education: Discipline Disparities for Black Students, Boys, and Students with Disabilities (GAO-18-258), using 2013–14 Civil Rights Data Collection data. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-258>

Patterns such as these became visible because national datasets allow researchers to examine discipline outcomes across thousands of school districts simultaneously.

National datasets have also helped researchers identify gaps in:

- Access to advanced coursework
- Graduation rates across demographic groups
- Special education placement patterns

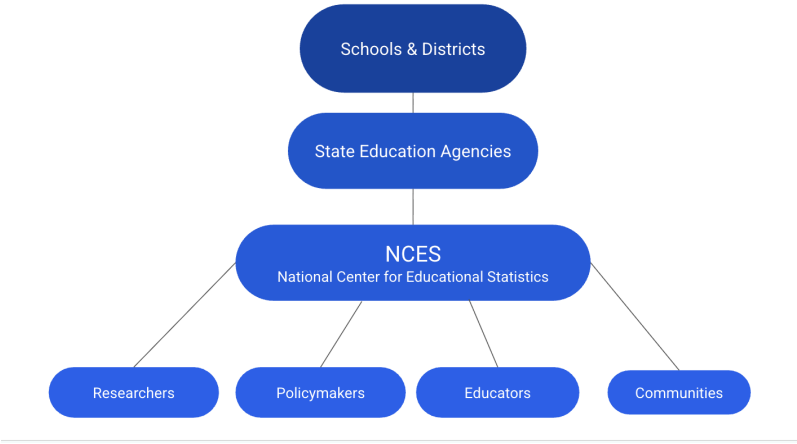
These patterns have informed civil rights enforcement, policy reform, and public dialogue about educational equity.

Without comparable national datasets, identifying these patterns consistently across the country would be extremely difficult.

Where the Data Come From

How National Education Data Flow in the United States

Figure 3. How National Education Data Flow



Education data are collected from schools and districts across the country and reported through state education agencies. These data are then compiled and organized at the national level, allowing researchers and policymakers to study patterns across the United States.

This process allows information from thousands of communities to contribute to a national understanding of educational opportunity.

Why This Matters for Students

Students experience the consequences of education policy decisions every day.

Access to experienced teachers, rigorous coursework, safe school environments, and strong academic programs all shape students' educational opportunities. National education data systems help communities understand whether these opportunities are available to all students.

When strong data systems exist, educators and policymakers can identify areas where students need additional support and work toward improving educational conditions. National education data also help policymakers understand where support and resources are needed most across schools and communities.

When those systems weaken, it becomes harder to understand whether policies are helping students succeed.

What Is at Stake

National education data systems function as part of the country's public infrastructure for understanding educational opportunity.

These systems allow educators, communities, and policymakers to see where progress is being made and where challenges remain.

When national data systems remain strong and accessible, communities can identify problems, evaluate policies, and work toward improving outcomes for students.

When these systems become weaker or less accessible, it becomes harder to understand whether students across the country are receiving fair access to educational opportunity.

Participants in the Equity Data Unification Think Tank also discussed how safeguarding national education data may require collaboration across multiple parts of society. Federal statistical agencies collect and organize national datasets, universities analyze and interpret those data, and community organizations help ensure that the meaning of those patterns remains visible to the public.

What Communities and Leaders Can Do

Communities, educators, researchers, and policymakers all have a role to play in maintaining strong education data systems.

Key priorities include:

Protect national education data systems. Reliable datasets help the country understand educational conditions across states and communities.

Ensure transparency and accessibility. Education data should remain available to educators, researchers, and communities seeking to improve educational opportunities.

Use data to improve student outcomes. Strong data systems allow policymakers and educators to evaluate programs and identify strategies that help students succeed.

Strengthen collaboration around education data
Federal statistical agencies, universities—including Historically Black Colleges and Universities working alongside other institutions—and community organizations each contribute important perspectives that help ensure education data remain visible, understandable, and meaningful for the public.

Why This Conversation Matters

Education data systems help the country understand whether students are receiving fair access to opportunity.

When the systems that allow us to see educational patterns remain strong, communities and policymakers are better equipped to support the success of all students.

Maintaining these systems ensures that decisions about education policy can be informed by evidence, transparency, and a shared commitment to improving opportunities for every student.

NCES Briefs — Participant Acknowledgments

A Brief Emerging from the Equity Data Unification Think Tank

Convened by Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U)

Black EdFluencers-United is a national network of educators, researchers, and community leaders committed to advancing educational equity through research, policy dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving. BE-U convenes cross-sector conversations that bring together practitioners, scholars, and policymakers to examine critical issues affecting educational opportunity.

The Equity Data Unification Think Tank convened the following educators, researchers, and policy leaders over a series of sessions to examine how national education data systems support transparency, accountability, and equity in education.

Participant	Organization / Affiliation
Kim Adams	NYCPS; Education Consultant
Erica Addy	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); National Association of University Women (NAUW); Sigma Gamma Rho
Jolie Allen	Student
Dr. Shannah Henderson Amare	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Black Caucus, Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (BCCSA)
Darlyne Aristide	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); SHSA Society of Haitian Supervisors CSA-NYC; NYC Public Schools
Renee Bacchus	Education Administrator
Rita Baffour	Assistant Principal
Naisha Baidy	Educate Humanity; Founder
Ashia Barnes	Delta Sigma Theta, Sorority Incorporated / Relay Graduate School Alum
Arthur Bates	DOE; Educator
Rev. Linda Barnett	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Black Caucus, Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (BCCSA)
Yolande Beckles	Black Family University; Executive Director
Dr. Shango Blake	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U), President; QCPTA; NABSE
Ashley Blakely	Black Ed-Fluencers United; BCCSA; OWECSA
Crystal Bonds	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Changing Minds, Inc.; Alpha Kappa Alpha, Inc.
Kuzaliwa Campbell	BE-U Member
Melissa Cisco	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Alpha Kappa Alpha, Inc.
Timothy Clark, M.Ed.	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U)
Will Cooper	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Black Caucus, Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (BCCSA)
Jim Coughlin	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U)
Maryse Crevecoeur	NYC Public Schools
Shakima Davis	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); NYCPS District 29

Dr. Nyree Dawn Dixon	New York City Public Schools University of Pennsylvania Alumni New York Academy of Public Schools New York State Association for Women in Administration Women of Color Education Collaborative Black Edfluencers
Michelle Cheney Donaldson, MPA, MS	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Greater New York Chapter of The Links; Changing Norms LLC
Dr. Donna Elam	Elam Leadership Institute
Dr. Erica Ford	LIFE Camp, Inc.
Kenyatta Funderburk	Career Visions Ltd.
Buny Garcia	Yonkers Public Schools; Assistant Principal
Icema Gibbs	JetBlue
Ken Granderson	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); BlackFacts.com; NAACP
Tanesha Grant	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Parents Supporting Parents NYC, Inc.
Dr. Linda Green	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Hearts, Minds & Dreams Educational Consultants
Rose Guerrier	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Episcopal Health Services
Dr. Keturah Hardy	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); MBK/MSK
Dr. Denise Harper-Richardson	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Association of Black Educators of New York (ABENY)
Candace Hatfield	NYC DOE; Teacher Leader
Cassandra Jackson	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Roosevelt Public Schools
Sophia James, M.S.	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U) Policy Committee; NYCPS
Cynthia Felix Jeffers	NYCPS; Educational Administrator
Dianne Jerome	REAL Wellness Inc.; Director of Partner Wellness
Dr. Courtney Johnson	EVY Learning Institute; National Association for the Education of Young Children; Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.
Johanna Josaphat	NYC Public Schools; The Urban Assembly Unison School
David King	The Apollo Theater
Sheryl Leverett	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); NAACP Jamaica Branch; NCNW – Queens County Section
Darien Mason	Parent
Shari Monah	NYC Public Schools; BCCSA
Anya Munce	NYCPS; Deputy Superintendent
Linda Newton	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U)
Wynta Nivens	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Black Caucus, Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (BCCSA)
Dr. Trina Nurse, M.Ed., MSW	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); NYC Public Schools; Columbia University; Teachers College, Columbia University; LCLAA Westchester
Dr. Sharon Odwin	New York School Board; Mayoral PEP Member
Nancy Paredes	National Association of University Women; Financial Secretary
George Patterson	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); NYC Public Schools; My Brother's Keeper–My Sister's Keeper
Michelle Patterson	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); NYC Public Schools; BCCSA; Brooklyn NAACP; ABENY; NABSE
Mia Peebles	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U);
Yvrose Pierre	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); SHSA Society of Haitian Supervisors CSA-NYC; NYC Public Schools
Aaron Ramsey	Paraprofessional

Karen Reid	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); National Association of University Women (NAUW)
Sharon Rencher	New York City Public Schools Executive Director
Kenney Robinson	Hunter College School of Education
Peter Robinson	WorkUrban, Founder; BlackSpace Urbanist Collective, Board Member; AIA NY | Center for Architecture, Chair; Medgar Evers College Preparatory School, Board of Advisors
Jonelle Rocke	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Generation Wealth
Joshua Rosen	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U)
Kaya Royal	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); The Royal Foundation
Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz	Teachers College, Columbia University; Professor
Lynette Shelborne-Barfield	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); NAACP Far Rockaway; Alpha Kappa Alpha, Inc.
Nina Simone	New Settlement
Keshia Souffrant	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); BCCSA; NYC Public Schools
Adrian Straker, MS Ed	NABSE (National Alliance of Black School Educators), Board Member; Northwestern University Black Alumni President; Association of Black Sociologists
Simone Swaby	NYC Public Schools; Teachers College, Columbia University
Paula Thomas	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); UFT – Officer
Mawulekumi A. Tokponwey, MA	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Erasmus Hall H.S. Alumni Association Executive Board; The Margaret Wade-Lewis Center for Black History and Culture Executive Board President; BK Black Unicorn Productions, LLC Owner/CEO
Ebony Tyler	Liberated Success, Inc.; Executive Director
Diandra Verwayne	NYC DOE DECE; Instructional Coordinator
Javon Walker	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); NYCPS
Tyona Washington	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); NYCPS; BCCSA
Lakeasha Williams	Brickhouse Unlimited Inc.; Leadership Coach
Sharmayne Witherspoon	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Black Caucus, Council of School Supervisors & Administrators (BCCSA)
Shawnia Yon	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); Prep For Excellence LLC
Hon. Stefani L. Zinerman	Black EdFluencers-United (BE-U); New York State Assemblymember