

Racial/Ethnic Differences in School Performance, Engagement, Safety, & Supports

Factsheet 8 reported that both standardized test scores and CHKS well-being indicators were lower in California secondary schools with predominately Latino and African-American/Latino enrollment compared to predominately White schools, even after controlling for other school characteristics. The current factsheet describes how 17 school-based CHKS indicators covering academic performance, engagement, developmental supports, safety, and harassment differed significantly across eight racial/ethnic groups of secondary students. Overall, White and Asian students reported the most positive outcomes. African American and Latino students had the least positive outcomes across indicators of school performance, engagement, and safety. Latinos were the lowest of all groups in school developmental supports; African-Americans, in school connectedness and safety. African-Americans, American Indian, Pacific Islander, and Multi-ethnic students — but not Latinos — were very high on the harassment indicators. Underlying the achievement gap, there are also gaps in school engagement, safety, and supports that need to be addressed.

Sample Characteristics and Measures

The data were derived from all school districts that administered the CHKS between fall 2006 and spring 2008. The sample consisted of 325,954 students in 7th grade and 561,317 students in 9th and 11th grades in about 800 school districts. Based on self-report (“How do you describe yourself?”), students were categorized into eight racial/ethnic groups: the six most common groups in the state (Whites, Latinos, African-Americans, Asians, American Indians, and Pacific Islanders), those who selected any other category, and a Multi-ethnic group. The groups are non-exclusive: respondents

who selected more than one were counted in each selected group as well as Multi-ethnic. In 7th grade, the sample percentages were: 36% Latino, 20% White, 11% Other, 10% Asian and Multi-ethnic, 7% African American, 4% American Indian, and 3% Pacific Islanders. In 9/11th grades, the percentages were very similar, except a higher proportion of Whites (25%). Table 1 defines each of the CHKS measures, all of which assess attitudes toward, or behaviors and experiences at, school.

Results

Table 2 summarizes the results by group, highlighting the most positive and most negative percentages. If there is only one percentage point separating the two highest or lowest percentages, both are highlighted. There were statistically significant differences across groups for all 17 indicators. Over one-third of indicators had differences of 12-30 percentage points; most others were at least seven points. The biggest differences were for class grades, school connectedness, perceived safety, experiencing sexual harassment, and seeing someone with a weapon. The smallest was for having high levels of opportunities for meaningful participation.

Confirming the achievement gap observed in test scores, the percentage of students self-reporting “mostly receiving” grades of Bs and above was 18 and 20 points lower among African-Americans and Latinos, respectively, than Whites in 7th grade, and 16- and 21 points lower in high school. American Indian rates were 11 and 14 points lower. Moreover, for all three of these minority groups, differences with Asians were about 10 points greater.

Asians consistently had the most positive results.

Overall, Asians had the most positive results for 10-11 (depending on grade level) of the 17 indicators, including class grades, attendance, and most safety indicators and types of harassment (verbal or physical). They had only slightly lower levels of school connectedness than Whites. A notable exception to these otherwise positive results is their relatively high percentages for experiencing harassment because of race, ethnicity, or national origin (highest of all groups in high school) and low caring adult relationships.

Whites had more positive results than all other non-Asian groups.

Whites had the most positive results across all groups for 7 indicators in each school level, including school connectedness, perceived safety, and developmental supports. They were second only to Asians in school grades. Looking at the differences between percentages for Whites and the poorest percentages reported by the other groups, all differences were statistically significant except for the two verbal harassment indicators of mean rumors and being made of for looks/speech.

- For six indicators, there was a difference of 10-20 points, in order of magnitude: grades, connectedness, physical fighting, perceived safety, seeing a weapon at school (7th only), and harassment because of race/ethnicity.
- For eight indicators, they were about 5-9 points more positive: truancy, caring relationships, high expectations, meaningful participation (9/11th only), any harassment, being threatened with weapon, sexual harassment, and being pushed/shoved (7th only).

African American and Latino students tended to have the least-positive percentages in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups, but with some notable differences between them.

African American and/or Latino students had the poorest outcomes for nine of the ten indicators of school performance, engagement, developmental supports, and safety, with the number of lowest percentages about the same for each. (The one exception was fear of being beaten up.) African-Americans also led in negative experiences with harassment.

Thus, overall, African-American students had the poorest well-being of any group.

- African-Americans were much more negative than Latinos for school connectedness and, to a lesser extent, safety. Only about one-third felt highly connected to school, compared to about half of Whites. They had the poorest group rates for three of the four safety indicators (perceived safety, been in a physical fight, seen someone with a weapon). Only about one half felt safe, compared to 63%-65% of Whites. On the other hand, they had the lowest percentages for fear of being beaten up.
- Latino students were the lowest of groups for receiving grades of Bs or better and experiencing all three school developmental supports. Only 30-31% were high in caring adult relationships, about 10 points lower than Whites, and only 51% in 7th grade and 43% in high school reported high expectations, 7-8 points lower than Whites.
- The two groups differed markedly in their harassment-related data. African-Americans were much more likely than Latinos to report harassment (any and race/ethnicity) and they had among the highest percentages in for being threatened with a weapon, being made fun of for their looks, and experiencing a sexual joke. One quarter reported being harassed for the race/ethnicity. In contrast, and in one of the most positive findings for Latinos, they had lowest percentages of all minority groups for any harassment and for harassment for race/ethnicity in 7th and close to it in 9th/11th.

American Indians and Pacific Islanders tended to have the highest rates across harassment indicators, and Pacific Islanders consistently have poorer well-being than Asians.

American Indians had the highest number of negative outcomes in high school (9 out of 17), all but one (truancy) in the areas of safety and harassment. To a lesser extent, the same pattern was evident among 7th graders, but they only had the lowest rates for three indicators of harassment. Pacific Islanders had poorer results than Asians across indicators. They stand out in reporting very high rates for harassment. In 7th grade,

they had the highest rates in 5 of 7 harassment indicators and in both grades they were the highest for fearing a beating. They were twice as likely as Asians to report being threatened/injured with a weapon at school.

Multi-ethnic and Others fell in the mid-range, but Multi-ethnic are particularly at risk of verbal harassment. Youth categorized as Other and Multi-ethnic tended to report similar results. Percentages for Multi-ethnic were close to or slightly better than Latinos. However, they were more likely than Latinos or the Other category to report any harassment, racial/ethnic harassment, and most forms of verbal harassment.

Discussion and Conclusion

These CHKS results self-reported by students not only confirm the achievement gap found in test-scores but they demonstrate that underlying it there is also in their schools an Engagement Gap, a Safety Gap, and a Developmental Supports Gap. White and Asian students reported much better grades and higher percentages on most CHKS school-related well-being indicators that research has related to performance than the non-Asian, non-White minority groups. This was particularly the case in regard to African-Americans and Latinos. This suggests that efforts to close the state's persistent achievement gap should include improvements in school climates to make them more engaging, safe, and supportive and reduce the level of harassment non-White students experience.

The findings also indicate differences among minority groups that may warrant attention as part of CTAG efforts.

- *African American* students were the lowest in school connectedness, attendance, and safety, and compared to Latinos, were much more likely to report being harassed.
- *Latinos* similarly were also particularly low for grades, school attendance, and perceived school safety, but where they stand out is in being the lowest group on all three of the school developmental supports. On a more positive note, Latinos had the lowest percentages among non-White groups for any harassment

and harassment because of race/ethnicity, whereas African Americans had among the highest.

- Although the results for Asians are very positive, this was not the case for *Pacific Islanders*, illustrating the importance of looking at subgroup differences among the diverse population of Asian/Pacific Islanders. This is especially true in regard to harassment, for which Pacific Islanders were consistently high.
- Why *Asians* reported high rates of racial/ethnic harassment but the lowest rates across each type of physical or verbal harassment warrants investigation. Their relatively low percentages for caring relationships and high expectations may be related to cultural differences in interpreting the meaning of caring relationships.¹
- Finally, attention needs to be directed toward the growing segment of *Multi-ethnic* youth, which was ten percent of the sample and reported among the highest rates on the harassment indicators, along with American Indians, Pacific Islanders, and African Americans.

As shown in Factsheet #10, youth who experience harassment are characterized by poorer rates than non-harassed youth across the same CHKS well-being indicators analyzed in this report, especially students harassed for their race/ethnicity or other bias-related reasons. Thus, the poorer well-being of minority groups in this study may be in part tied to their harassment experiences. The difference between Latinos and African-Americans in harassment may reflect that Latinos are more likely to attend schools with high percentages of Latino teachers and students, whereas African-Americans attend schools with greater diversity, often in which they are the minority.

¹ Hanson, T., & Kim, J.-O. (2007). *Measuring resilience and youth development: The psychometric properties of the Healthy Kids Survey*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

Table 1. Explanation of CHKS Measures

School Performance	The percentage of students that self-reported they usually received grades of mostly Bs or better.
School Engagement	The percentages reporting: (1) low levels of <i>truancy</i> (skipped school or cut classes two or fewer times in the past 12 months); and (2) high levels of school <i>connectedness</i> , based on a five-item scale that is highly correlated with school attendance, performance, and health-related behaviors.
School Developmental Supports	Students experience at school high levels of three fundamental supports: (1) <i>caring relationships</i> with an adults at school; (2) <i>high expectations</i> messages; and (3) opportunities for <i>meaningful participation</i> . These three supports or protective factors, each measured by a three-item scale, have been found to be associated with better academic, social, and health outcomes.
School Safety	Students at school: (1) did <i>not</i> feel <i>safe</i> or <i>very safe</i> (perceived safety); (2) had been afraid of being <i>beaten up</i> ; (3) had been in a <i>physical fight</i> ; and (4) had <i>seen someone with a weapon</i> . All measure except perceived safety were for the 12 months prior to the survey.
Harassment at School	Seven indicators of harassment or victimization on school property in the past 12 months were assessed: (1) <i>any harassment</i> ; (2) <i>harassed because of race, ethnicity, or national origin</i> ; (3) been <i>threatened/injured with a weapon</i> ; (4) been <i>pushed, shoved, slapped, hit, or kicked</i> by someone “not kidding around”; (5) had <i>mean rumors</i> or lies told about them; (6) <i>made fun of</i> because of looks or speech; and (7) experienced <i>sexual jokes</i> , comments, or gestures.

Table 2. Summary of School Performance, Engagement, Supports, Safety, & Harassment Indicators by Race/Ethnicity

	7th Grade								9th/11th Grades							
	W %	AS %	PI %	AI %	AA %	L %	O %	M %	W %	AS %	PI %	AI %	AA %	L %	O %	M %
School Performance and Engagement (+)																
Grades mostly Bs and above	74	82	70	61	56	54	63	69	65	75	62	55	49	44	56	59
Truant only two times or less*	93	95	90	90	88	89	91	91	76	82	73	72	72	71	76	73
School connectedness — High	53	51	46	43	34	42	46	76	47	42	40	36	31	37	37	40
Developmental Supports at School (+)																
Caring adult relationship — High	40	33	32	36	35	31	35	35	39	30	32	36	35	30	34	36
High expectations — High	59	55	55	54	55	51	55	56	50	44	46	46	47	43	45	48
Opportunities for meaningful participation — High	17	16	16	16	17	13	16	16	17	15	17	15	16	12	15	15
School Safety (-)																
Didn't feel very safe or safe at school	35	36	40	43	48	46	40	43	37	40	42	37	51	47	46	45
Been afraid of being beaten up*	29	29	33	30	24	30	29	29	18	17	21	20	17	18	19	19
Been in a physical fight*	24	22	33	34	41	33	29	30	17	14	21	25	28	23	22	21
Seen someone with a weapon*	28	25	38	36	41	41	33	35	26	22	31	35	35	34	31	32
Harassment on School Property* (-)																
Any harassment	46	47	51	49	48	41	45	50	35	35	39	42	37	32	40	40
Harassed because of race, ethnicity, national origin	17	27	29	23	26	18	19	23	13	23	22	20	23	17	20	20
Been threatened/injured with a weapon	9	8	16	15	17	12	11	13	7	5	9	13	13	9	10	9
Had mean rumors/lies told about you	31	26	32	33	30	27	30	32	25	20	28	29	25	22	26	28
Made fun of because of looks or way talk	31	27	31	32	31	27	31	32	25	22	26	28	28	21	26	28
Had sexual joke, comment, gesture made to you	33	26	36	36	38	31	33	38	41	31	42	46	43	33	40	46
Been pushed, hit, kicked (not kidding around)	29	27	31	35	30	30	32	32	15	12	18	19	16	15	17	16

Key: W = White, AS = Asian, PI = Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiians, AI = American Indian/Native American, AA = African-American, L = Latino/a, O = Other, M = Multi-ethnic; (+)The higher the percentage, the more positive the result, (-)=The lower the percentage, the more positive the result; *In the 12 months prior to the survey

- Most positive results
- Most negative results

Differences of only one percentage point are considered equivalent results. Differences of 2.5 percentage points are statistically significant at the .05 level.

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