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ROADBLOCKS TO COLLEGE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL CALIFORNIA STUDENTS

John Rogers, Jeannie Oakes, Siomara Valladares, Veronica Terriquez

In May 2000, an unprecedented coalition of civil rights groups across California filed *Williams v. California* charging that more than a million students across the state – primarily low-income students of color and immigrant students – attended schools that “shocked the conscience.” The 2004 settlement of the *Williams* case established new systems aimed at ensuring all students access to trained teachers, textbooks, and facilities that meet health and safety standards (Oakes, 2004). While there has been some progress towards this goal over the past two years, many California students continue to lack fundamental educational opportunities (Allen, 2005).

Beyond the fundamental failures highlighted by *Williams*, many California schools lack a set of broader conditions necessary for fulfilling the state’s high educational aspirations. In short, California’s K-12 system erects serious roadblocks to college preparation. As we show in detail below, many California schools offer too few college preparatory classes, have too few qualified teachers to teach those classes, and don’t have enough counselors to guide students along the path through high school to college. These roadblocks to college loom larger for students living in low-income communities of color. Every California community feels the effect of the state’s educational crisis, but all communities don’t suffer equally. Schools with high concentrations of students of color, many of whom are poor and learning the English language, report the highest rates of unqualified teachers and shortages of college preparatory courses in the state.

Should policymakers be concerned that serious roadblocks exist that prevent many California students from attending four-year colleges? Does it matter to Californians that these roadblocks are not distributed “equitably” across California’s racial and income groups? Why might California want to ensure that all students receive a K-12 education that enables them to graduate ready to take advantage of a college curriculum and compete more fairly for enrollment in their preferred institutions of higher education? How might all Californians benefit from such an education system?

Some of the answers to these questions can be found in recent analyses linking college preparation to the future well-being of students and to society as a whole.¹ Today, college preparation readies young people for powerful adult roles in a knowledge-based society. Although providing such preparation only to a small fraction of the state’s K-12 students may have made sense in the 1960s, it does not make sense now.

- College preparation for all matches the needs of the emerging labor market and California’s need to remain competitive in a global marketplace.

- College preparation for all creates equal opportunity for all California communities to participate robustly in shaping California’s civic life, its arts, and its economy.
- College preparation for all embodies what the ‘best’ high schools in the most affluent communities do as a matter of course.

Other answers to questions about whether making college accessible to all is a worthy goal is found in the aspirations of students and their parents. Nine of every ten high school students across the United States intend to pursue postsecondary education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). That these high educational expectations are also held by parents from all racial and ethnic communities in California was revealed recently in a multi-lingual survey of African American, Latino, and Asian parents conducted by New American Media. Across ethnic groups, most parents of children in California public schools expect their children to obtain at least four-year college degrees, and less than 10% in each group expect their children’s education to end with high school (New America Media, 2006).

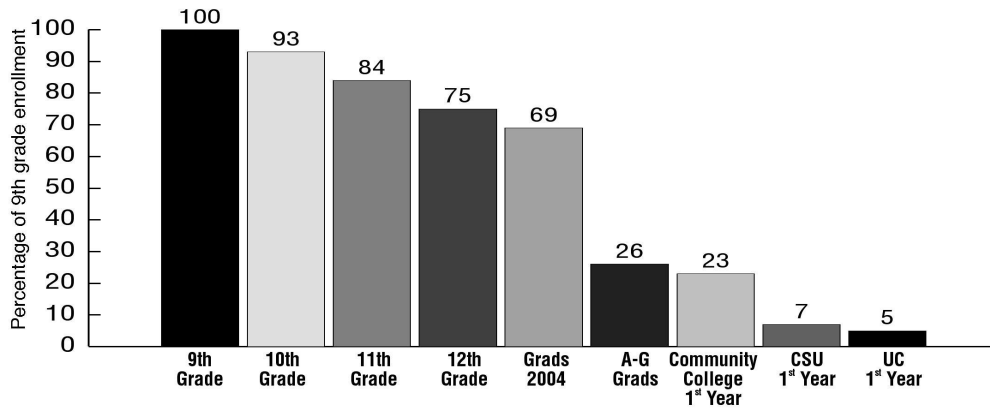
This chapter analyzes data from California’s K-12 and higher education systems to report on how well the state is meeting the college aspirations of students, parents, and the broader public.² The first section follows a cohort of California students from enrollment as college-hopeful 9th graders in Fall 2000 to enrollment in California’s higher education system in Fall 2004. The second section highlights a set of roadblocks in California’s high schools that undermine student progress to graduation and college enrollment. Section III reports on the distribution of these roadblocks across different geographic regions of California and the resulting uneven patterns of college-going. In Section IV, we offer evidence that California high schools serving the highest percentage of low-income students of color are the most likely to experience roadblocks. We conclude in Section V by pointing to the need for greater and more equitable investment in California’s high schools.³

I. Pathways to College for the Class of 2004

The pathway to high-school graduation and college began in Fall of 2000 for the Class of 2004.⁴ That September, nearly a half million students enrolled as 9th graders in California public schools. Four years later, 69 of every 100 9th graders graduated high school. Twenty-six of every 100 graduated eligible for California’s four-year public universities. Twelve enrolled in California State University or University of California campuses. These figures represent the state-wide pathway for the Class of 2004. In a number of California high schools, the Class of 2004 shrunk much more, with graduation rates hovering around 50% and four-year college-going rates around 5%.⁵

California

Class of 2004: Pathway to College



Produced by [UCLA/IDEA](#) and [UC/ACCORD](#)

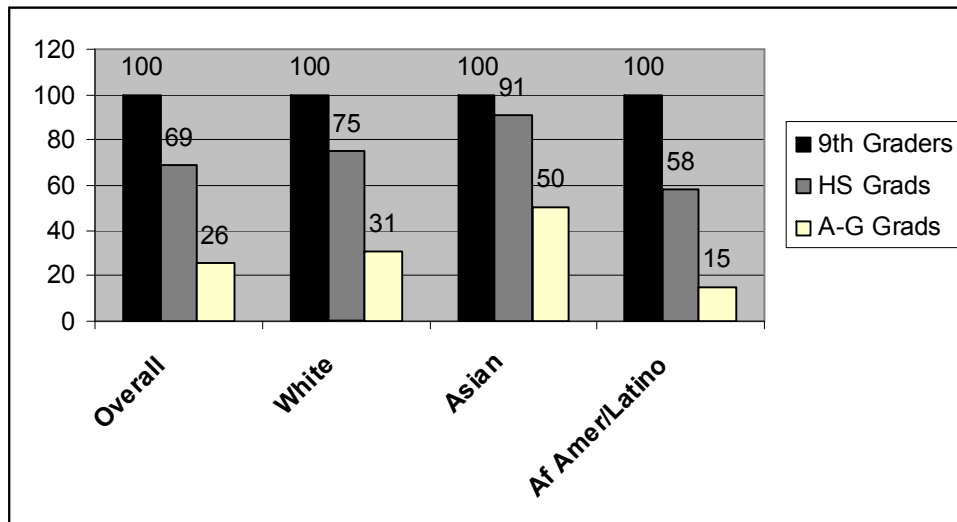
While a small percentage of the Class of 2004 matriculated in other four-year colleges or universities in California and other states, the vast majority of college-hopeful students who enrolled as 9th graders in Fall 2000 did not enter a four-year post-secondary institution in Fall 2004.⁶ A survey conducted by the College Board reveals that only 23% of the California students who made it to 12th grade, enrolled in a four-year college the next year. This figure places California near the bottom of all states in the percentage of high school seniors who enroll in four-year colleges. Only Mississippi sends fewer seniors.

Compared to high school seniors in New York and Massachusetts, California's seniors are half as likely to enroll in four-year colleges (College Board, 2006). In part, California's overall low rate of four-year college enrollment is a result of state policy. According to the state's 1960 master plan for higher education, California's vast system of community colleges should provide the first two years of college to many of the state's young people, who upon completion of their Associate's degree would transfer to four-year colleges (Regents of The University of California, 1960). Yet, accounting for community college enrollment does not significantly change California's national standing. California ranks 37th of all states in the percentage of 9th graders who enroll in 2- or 4-year colleges by age 19 (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2002).

The progress of the Class of 2004 differed significantly along lines of race. Overall, a little more than one fourth (26%) of 9th graders in the Class of 2004 graduated four years later having fulfilled the so-called A-G sequence of courses required for admission to the California State University and University of California campuses.

White students in the Class of 2004 completed the A-G sequence at twice the rate (31% to 15%) of African American and Latino students. Fully half of Asian American students in the class of 2004 completed the A-G sequence.

Progress to 4-Year College Eligibility



Source: CBEDS

II. Roadblocks on the Pathway to College

For California students to move on a pathway towards high-school graduation and college enrollment, they need access to a set of college preparation resources and opportunities. Specifically, they need access to: 1) a rigorous college preparatory curriculum; 2) educators who are trained in this curriculum; 3) counselors who provide guidance and information about college. California’s educational system provides fewer resources and opportunities than other states. Rigorous coursework is unevenly distributed across California’s schools. Further, almost all of California’s high schools offer students less access to qualified teachers and counselors than high schools across the nation.

Access to a Rigorous College Preparatory Curriculum

California high schools offer a wide array of courses, only some of which fulfill the A-G requirements necessary for four-year colleges. High schools in which less than 67% of all courses offered are college prep courses do not have enough of these courses for all students to enroll in a college prep program. Realistically, however, high schools need to make sure that an even larger percentage of their courses qualify if they are to ensure that every student can take 15 A-G classes over their four years in high school.

Nevertheless, across the state, less than half (45%) of comprehensive high schools meet the minimum threshold of 67% A-G classes.

Access to Teachers Prepared to Teach the College Prep Curriculum

California's high school teaching force has neither the time, nor the preparation to provide most students' with the high quality instruction they need as they prepare for college. California has the highest ratio of high school students to teachers of any state. On average, California provides one high school teacher for every 21 students. This figure is 40% higher than the national average of one teacher for every 15 high school students. Almost all (91%) of California's high schools have more students per teacher than the national average.

The problems posed by large student-to-teacher ratios are compounded by terrible shortages of qualified teachers. More than 25% of California high schools routinely assign improperly trained teachers to college preparatory courses. At these schools, more than 20% of the college preparatory classes are taught by teachers without the appropriate subject matter qualifications. The mis-assignment of teachers is most common in college prep math classes. Across California, 33% of high schools routinely assign teachers without qualification in mathematics to teach college prep math classes.

Access to Counselors

To fulfill and sustain their college aspirations, students and families need access to information and support throughout their high school years. Yet, California ranks last among the states in the provision of counselors that can cultivate a college-going culture on high school campuses and connect students with the additional academic and social support they need for college preparation. On average, high school counselors across the nation work with 284 students. Notably, 92% of California high schools have too few counselors to reach this national average. Across the state, the average high school counselor load is 506, nearly double the average nationally (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003).

Roadblocks Converge

Schools that lack the basic opportunities generally have the poorest record of student academic success. Shortages in any area make it difficult to meet core academic standards or enable 9th graders to move successfully through high school to graduation and college enrollment. Schools with any one of these coursework, teacher, or counselor roadblocks may have a serious problem providing students with an adequate and fair level of education, when compared to other California schools or with schools in other states. Schools with all of these roadblocks have severe problems meeting the public's expectations for achievement, graduation, college preparation, and college enrollment.

One in eight California high schools experienced all of the coursework, teacher, and counselor roadblocks. That is, these schools offered insufficient college prep

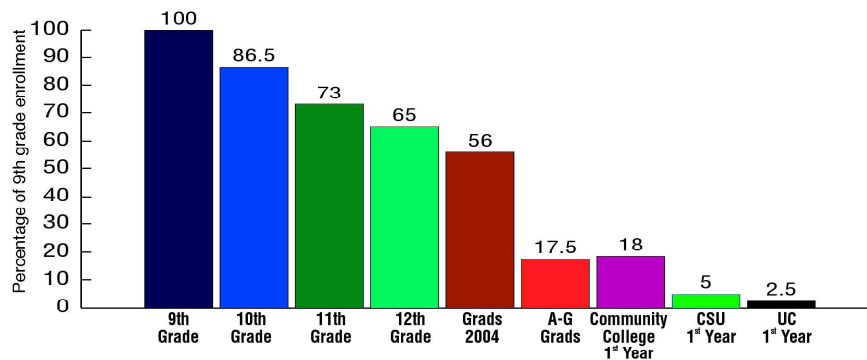
courses, provided fewer high school teachers per student than the national average, experienced severe shortages of college prep teachers and college prep math teachers, and provided fewer counselors per student than the national average. The 122 California high schools that experienced all of these roadblocks enrolled 61,190 9th graders in Fall 2000.

High schools where all of these roadblocks converge found it difficult to enable students to achieve even minimum standards. These schools were 3½ times (37% compared to 10%) as likely as other high schools to be placed in “Program Improvement” due to their failure to meet the No Child Left Behind achievement standards for at least two consecutive years. Similarly, these schools were 2½ times (51% compared to 20%) as likely as other California high schools to experience extremely high rates of failure on the California High School Exit Exam.

High schools that experienced all of the coursework, teacher, and counselor roadblocks performed far worse than the rest of the schools in the state in preparing their 9th graders for graduation and college. At each successive stage of development, fewer students from schools experiencing multiple roadblocks move forward on the pathway to college. For example, only 56% of the 9th grade cohort in these schools graduated high school compared with 71% of all other schools in the state. Similarly, only 7% of the 9th grade cohort in these schools matriculated in California State University or University of California campuses compared to 13% for all other schools in the state.

California Pathway to College

Schools with all counselors, teachers, and coursework roadblocks

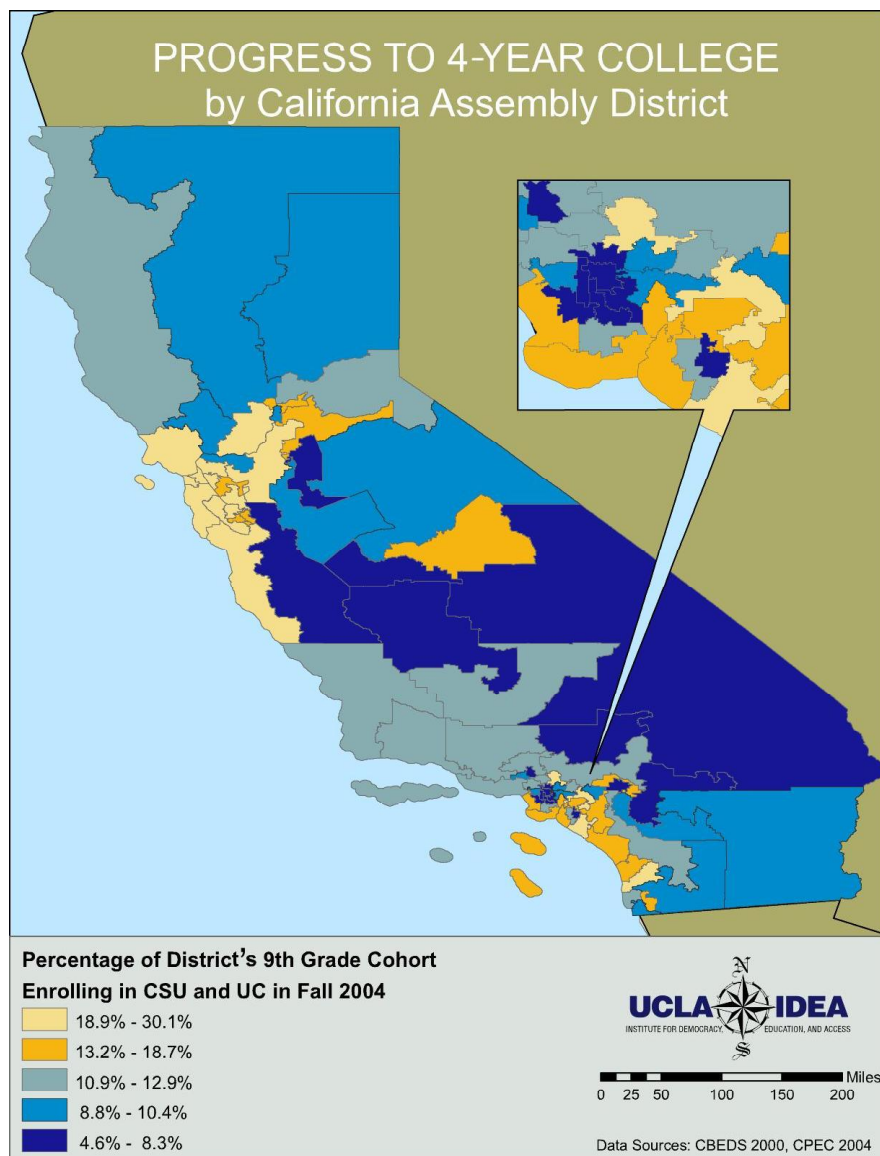


III. Regional Differences in Roadblocks and Progress to College

All groups of California students experience these statewide problems. White students, students of color, low-income students, and middle-class students achieve less academically than their counterparts in most other states.⁷ All of these groups also are

provided with fewer opportunities. However, California high schools differ in their ability to support 9th graders on the pathway to graduation and college enrollment. Some are far more likely than others to have severe shortages of college preparatory courses and properly trained teachers for these courses. These disparities play out on several levels, one of which is geographic.

To analyze geographic differences in opportunities, we compared progress to college and college opportunities across California's 80 Assembly districts. Each district encompasses roughly equal numbers of residents. They vary widely, however, in the college opportunities their high schools provide and in the rates which 9th graders enroll in California's public universities four years later.



When we divide the 80 Assembly districts into quintiles based on the progress of 9th graders to four-year college enrollment, we find

- Students in the top quintile of legislative districts are 3 times as likely to enroll in California’s public four-year colleges as students in the bottom quintile;
- High schools in the bottom quintile are more than twice as likely to have shortages of college preparatory courses and college preparatory teachers as were schools in the top quintile.

College Going in Assembly Districts (16 districts = 20%)	% in graders colleges	9th enroll 4-yr	% schools with college teacher shortage	high with prep	% schools with college math teacher shortage	high with prep	% schools with college course shortage	high with prep
Highest Quintile	22		18		32		27	
2nd Quintile	15		13		25		38	
3rd Quintile	12		34		34		61	
4th Quintile	10		37		44		61	
Bottom Quintile	7		40		48		76	

IV. Differences in Racial Demography, Roadblocks, and Pathways

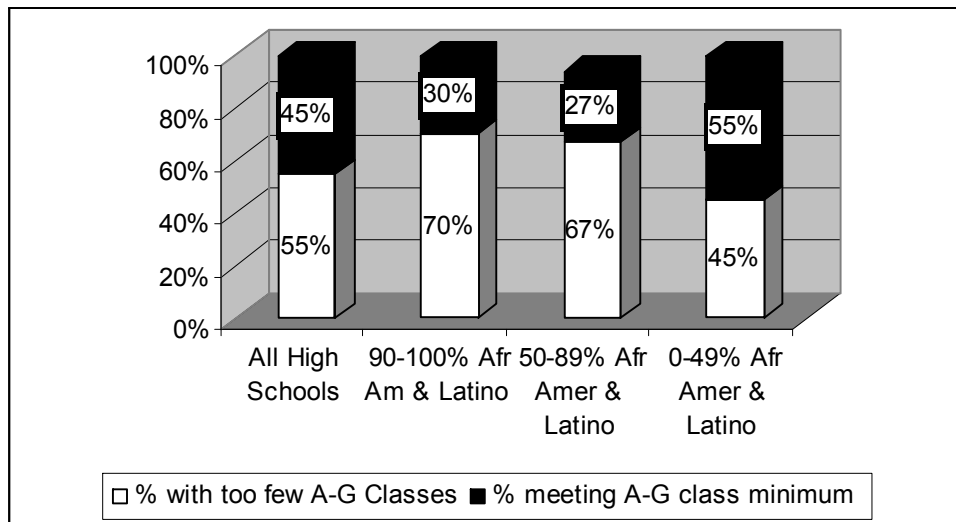
California is one of the three most segregated states for Chicano/Latino and African American students (Orfield and Less, 2006). About one third of California’s public schools are majority white and one fourth are what the Harvard Civil Rights Project refers to as “intensely segregated minority schools” – schools that enroll more than 90% students of color. Seventy-three percent of California’s Chicano/Latino students (519,533) attend schools where the majority of students are African American and Chicano/Latino, as do 66% of the state’s African American students (91,905). In contrast, 80% of white students (487,699) and 69% of Asians (154,678) attend schools with white and Asian majorities.

Notably, the differences between these two groups of schools have profound consequences for the state’s lowest income children. Although high schools with 90-100% African Americans and Chicano/Latinos comprise only 8% of the state’s high schools, they include 41% of the state’s highest poverty schools, those where more than 80% of the students participate in the federal subsidized program for poor children. In contrast, majority white and Asian schools, which comprise 58% of all California high schools, includes 92% of the state’s wealthiest schools, those where 20% or fewer of the students participate in the subsidized lunch program.

Disparities in Access to College Preparatory Courses

We noted above that half of all California high schools do not offer enough A-G courses for all students to enroll in a college preparatory curriculum. Shortages of college preparatory classes are much more likely in schools where African American and Latino students are in the majority. Only 30% of schools enrolling 90-100% African American and Latino students and 33% of schools enrolling 50-89% from these groups have sufficient college preparatory offerings. In contrast, more than half (55%) of the schools where whites and Asians are the majority offer at least the minimum of 67% A-G classes.

Racial Disparities in Access to Schools with Enough College Preparatory Classes (2004-2005)

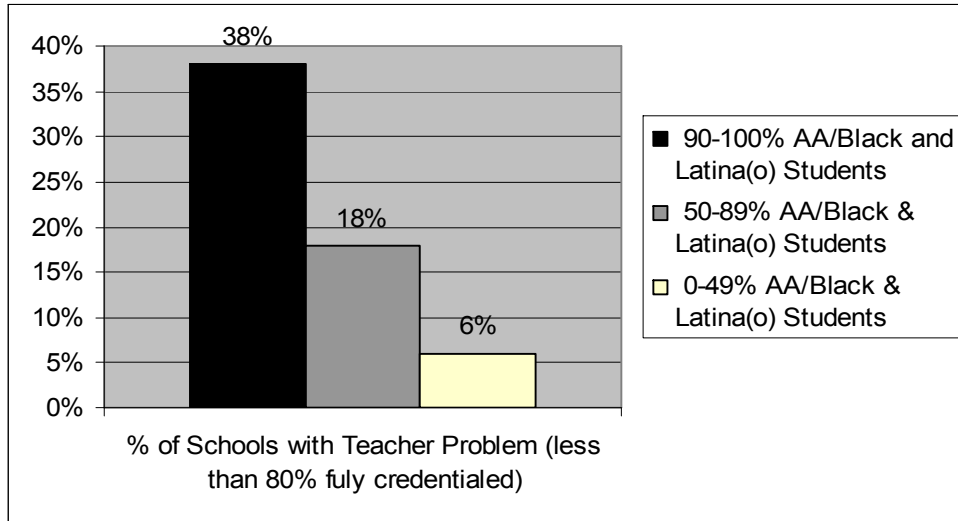


Source: CBEDS

Disparities in Access to Teachers

Students attending high schools enrolling 90-100% African American and Latino students are more likely than students in majority white schools to have teachers who are not fully qualified. High schools enrolling 90-100% African American and Latino students are almost 8 times as likely as majority white schools to have significant shortages of fully qualified teachers. We characterize schools with less than 80% of its faculty fully certified as having significant teacher shortages, both because of the impact on individual students of being taught by less qualified instructors, but also because research has found that faculty certification rates of less 80% is associated with school-wide problems, such as a lack of sufficient mentors for novice teachers and increased rates of teacher turnover (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

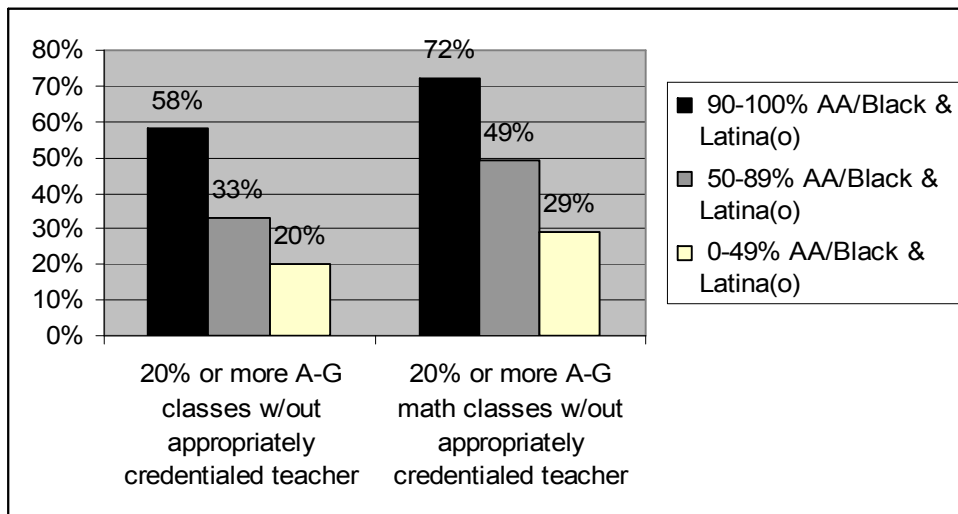
**Racial Disparities in Access to Fully Qualified Teachers
(2004-2005)**



Source: CBEDS

More than 25% of all California high schools routinely assign improperly trained teachers to college preparatory courses. However, this problem occurs far more frequently in schools enrolling 90-100% African American and Latino students. Such schools are almost 3 times as likely as majority white schools to have significant percentages of “mis-assigned” teachers teaching A-G courses.

**Disparities in A-G Classes Taught by Teachers Certified in the Subject Matter of the Class
(2004-2005)**



California's teacher mis-assignment problem is most severe in A-G mathematics classes. Here, too, we see significant teacher mis-assignments far more often in schools enrolling 90-100% African American and Latino students. These schools are about 2½ times as likely as majority white schools to have more than 20% of their A-G mathematics classes taught by teachers lacking full math certification.

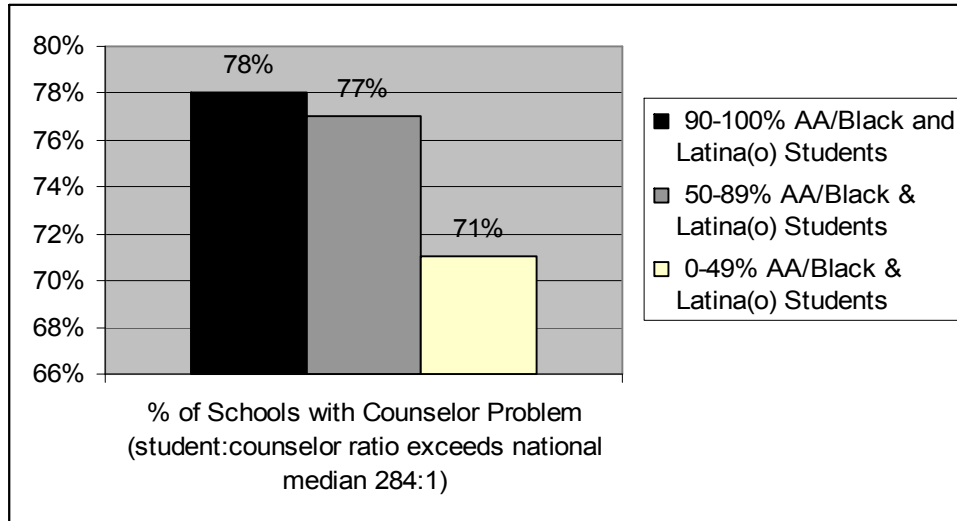
Disparities in Access to College Information and Guidance

African-Americans and Latinos, and low-income students more generally, often struggle to get the essential information and assistance all students need to move on a successful pathway through high school and on to college. (McDonough, 2006). Part of the reason for this is that many low-income parents don't understand the differences among the various classes that are offered by high schools. They also don't know what these differences mean for their children's chances after high school (Guitan and Oakes, 1995, Useem, 1992).

Recent studies paint a dire picture of the quality of admissions knowledge of students and their families. These studies note that access to college information is highly inequitable. Few students and family members know what courses are required for admission to public colleges. Most are confused about the expectations of college-level work. Most overestimate tuition especially at less-selective four-year and community colleges.⁸ Finally, most are unaware of college placement exam content (Venezia and Kirst, 2002). Moreover, African American and Latino students' college preparation is also constrained by a lack of trained professionals to advise them. Without sufficient information and guidance, less-well off families and students must depend on their informal information sources which are often less than accurate.

We reported earlier that the California's average ratio of counselors to students is 506, compared to the national ratio of 284 students for every high school counselor. As with the essential college preparation conditions described above, however, access to counselors is not equitably distributed among the state's high schools. Although the vast majority of all California schools have student-to-counselor ratios that exceed the national average, that problem affects intensively segregated and majority African American and Latino schools at a disproportionate rate.

**Disparities in Access to Counselors in California Schools
Differing in Racial Composition
(2004-2005)**



Source: CBEDS

Disparities Converge in Intensely Segregated Minority Schools

The coursework, teacher, and counselor roadblocks are most likely to converge in intensely segregated minority schools. These schools are four times as likely (24% to 6%) as majority white schools to experience all the roadblocks. As we have argued above, schools with any of these problems face serious challenges in trying to enable students to move on a pathway to graduation and college enrollment. When the problems converge, schools lack the core conditions necessary to promote success for most students.

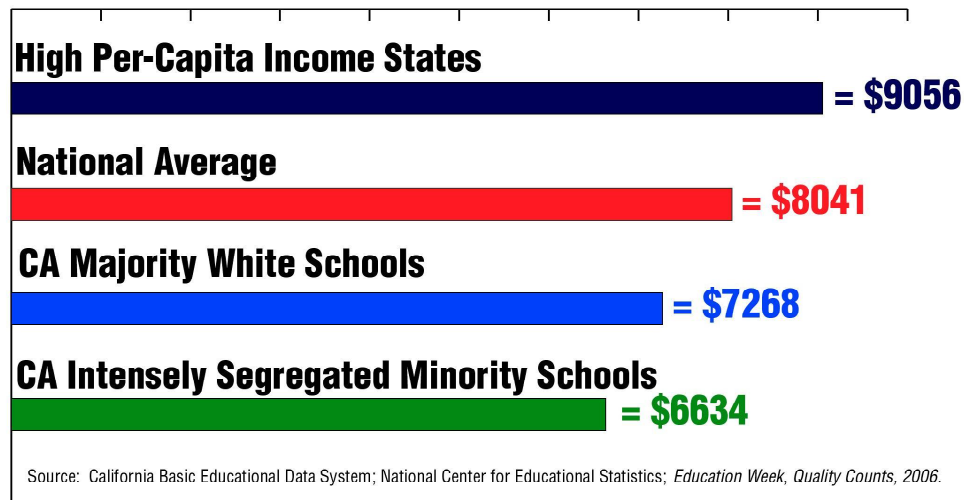
V. Investing in Education to Remove the Roadblocks

While any effort to lay out a comprehensive response to the roadblocks we describe above is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is clear that one essential step lies with greater investment in California’s K-12 education system. California’s shortages of teachers and counselors are directly attributable to the state’s low level of educational spending. Educational expenditures in California have fallen in relationship to the rest of the nation since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 (Carroll et al. 2005, pp. 55-6). Nearly all California students (94%) attend high schools that spend less per student than the national average. After adjusting for regional cost of living differences, California ranks 43rd among the states in spending per student. California spends 84% of the national average. But the national average is not a particularly apt comparison for California, which is a fairly wealthy state. Currently, California ranks 11th of all states in

per-capita income (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005). California spends only 75% of the average per-pupil expenditures in the other 10 high per-capita income states.

The inadequacies in California's education funding system are felt most acutely in intensely segregated minority schools. These schools, on average, reside in districts where average expenditures are substantially below the state average. The combined effect of the overall scarcity and the uneven distribution of dollars leads to grossly unequal college preparatory opportunities.

Unequal Per-Pupil Expenditures



The lack of college opportunities in California does not affect all students equally. Many California families supplement the limited school-provided college-preparation resources and opportunities with out-of-school support, including tutoring, supplemental academic classes, college counseling, preparation for college entrance tests, and more. Many college-educated households have the knowledge and resources within their own families. Others purchase services from private providers (McDonough, 1994; McDonough, Kom, Yamasaki, 1997). This tendency of California families to use the private sector as a primary resource to support college-going is a fairly new phenomena. In previous decades, these services were more often provided within the public school system.

That some families have access to out-of-school supports, however, does not relieve the educational system from its obligation to provide a level of resources and opportunities required by students who have no access to such supplemental support. Many California families have neither the experience nor the resources to supplement what is provided at school. These families tend to be those in which children will be the first to attend college; families with moderate-to-low incomes; immigrant families; and

others without educational support networks. As we have shown, the inadequacies in the college preparation opportunities that schools provide and disparities in families' access to outside resources converge in ways that disproportionately limit college access for the state's Latino and African American students.

California has a strong interest in providing all students with the conditions necessary to promote high school graduation and college enrollment. The state's economic and civic health requires a robust college-educated population. The vast majority of students and parents expect California's schools to advance this goal. Yet, California lags behind almost all other states in promoting student progress to four-year colleges. For California to achieve its goals, new policies will be needed to ensure that college opportunities are provided in all the state's high schools.

Endnotes

¹ See generally: Achieve and National Governors Association, *America's High Schools: The Front Line in the Battle for Our Economic Future*, 2005; American College Testing Program, *Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different?* (Iowa City, IA: ACT, 2006); Anthony Carnevale and Donna Desrochers, *Standards for What?: The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform* (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2003); Henry Brady, Mike Hout, & Jon Stiles, *Return on Investment: Educational Choices and Demographic Change in California's Future* (University of California Berkeley Survey Research Center, 2005) (<http://paa2006.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=61682>).

² For an extended description of all data sources used in this chapter, see (Rogers et al. 2006, pp. 15-18).

³ This chapter draws upon two reports from UCLA's Institute for Democracy Education and Access and UC ACCORD, (Rogers et al. 2006; Oakes et al. 2006).

⁴ We focus on the Class of 2004 because this is the last class for which we have complete and publicly available data on graduation and college enrollment.

⁵ To access information on any California public high school, go to www.EdOpp.org.

⁶ There is no systematic data on enrollment of California high school students in private colleges and universities in California or private and public universities in other states.

⁷ A recent analysis by EdTrust West shows that California's white 8th graders don't rank very high compared to white 8th graders nationwide. For example, on the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress reading assessment, California's white 8th graders performed better than their white peers in only four states: West Virginia, Nevada, Hawaii, and Alabama. Online at http://www2.edtrust.org/NR/rdonlyres/C2BE0ABF-4A99-43CA-ACE2-7C0408DE8607/0/ETW2005NAEPreportfinal_red.pdf

⁸ Moreover, a 2003 study by the U.S. Department of Education (Horn, Chen, and Chapman) found that only 18% of all high school students and 30% of parents have accurate information on college costs.

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