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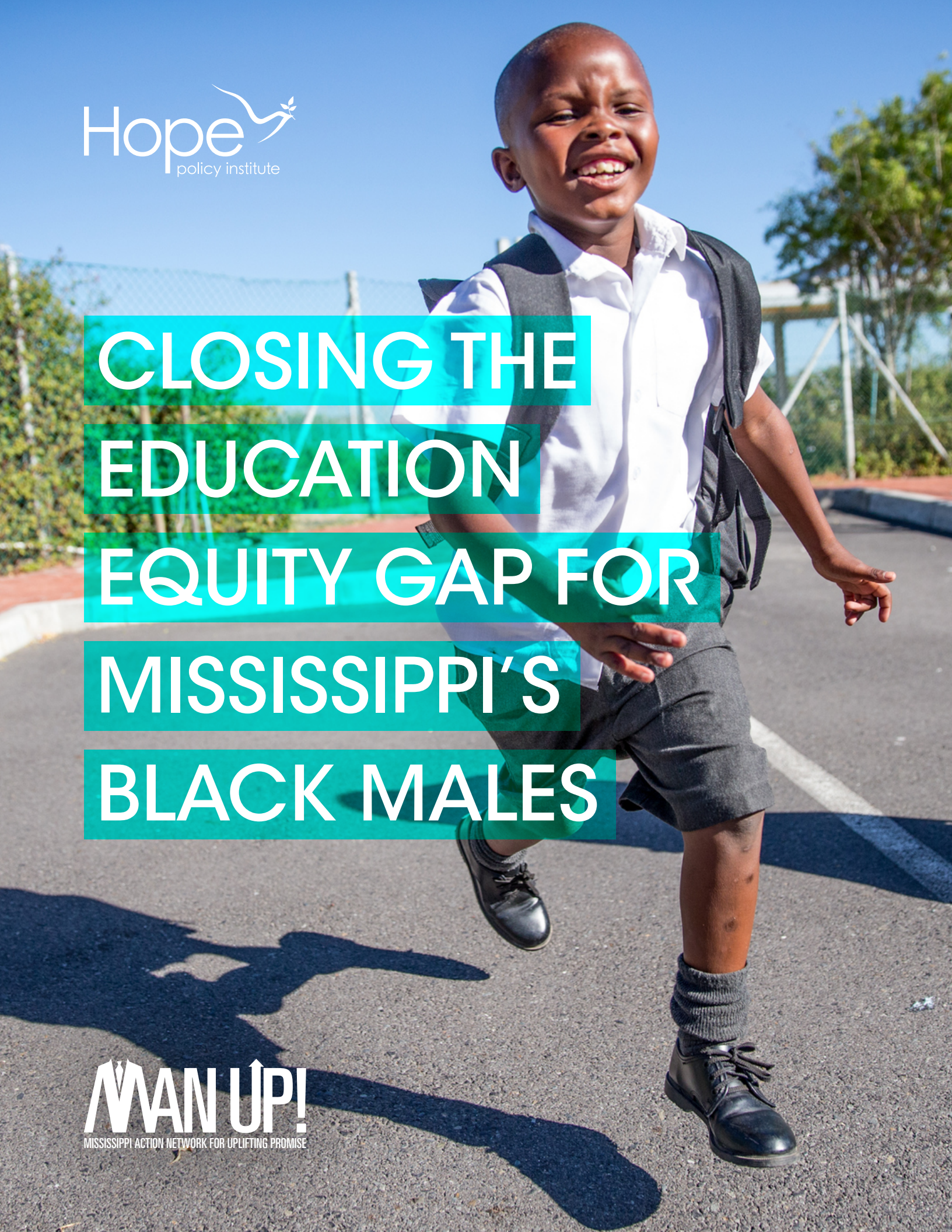
CLOSING THE EDUCATION EQUITY GAP FOR MISSISSIPPI'S BLACK MALES



MAN UP!
MISSISSIPPI ACTION NETWORK FOR UPLIFTING PROMISE

Hope Enterprise Corporation

HOPE (Hope Enterprise Corporation and Hope Credit Union) is a community development financial institution, community development intermediary and policy institute that provides affordable financial services; leverages private, public and philanthropic resources; and engages in policy analysis in order to fulfill its mission of strengthening communities, building assets, and improving lives in economically distressed parts of the Mid South. Since 1994, HOPE has generated over $2 billion in financing and related services for the unbanked and underbanked, entrepreneurs, homeowners, nonprofit organizations, healthcare providers and other community development purposes.

Collectively, these projects have benefitted more than 1 million individuals throughout Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee.

Acknowledgments

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To download a copy of Closing the Education Equity Gap for Mississippi's Black Males, visit ***hopepolicy.org***.

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CLOSING THE EDUCATION EQUITY GAP FOR MISSISSIPPI'S BLACK MALES

Introduction

Creating opportunities for young men and boys of color to reach their full potential helps to advance individual opportunity, family sustainability, community prosperity, and Mississippi's overall economic competitiveness. One way to support the development of young men and boys of color involves creating safe and enriching school climates that fulfill the socio-emotional needs of students while offering a reprieve from external burdens. Focusing on school climate, which reflects school life and norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures, for young men and boys of color provides an opportunity to influence student success and longer-term economic security.

Multiple indicators of educational success, ranging from advanced coursework enrollment to poverty and assessment performance, show that males of color are less academically prepared and successful than their peers. Low educational achievement limits the ability of males of color to access higher education opportunities. This, in turn, limits access to high-paying jobs with which to support themselves and their families financially and negatively affects wealth-building potential and future self-sufficiency. In Mississippi, limiting factors are most acutely felt by Black residents, who represent the overwhelming majority of residents of color in the state (91.5%), and particularly Black males who experience compounding disparities in educational, health, economic and quality of life outcomes.[1]

Understanding the complex factors that influence opportunity and uneven quality of life outcomes for men of color is particularly important in Mississippi given its diverse population. One in six (17.6%) Mississippi residents is a Black man, yet life outcomes for Black men, in Mississippi and elsewhere in the United States, are discouraging.[2] Improving these outcomes and closing the educational achievement gap requires systems, programs and policies grounded in data and research that support young Black men and boys.

This report, supported by the Mississippi Action Network for Uplifting Promise (M.A.N. U.P.!), which includes Tougaloo College, Hope Policy Institute, One Voice and the Southern Poverty Law Center, examines education outcomes for Mississippi's Black males. M.A.N. U.P.! recognizes that there are multiple factors that influence the outcomes of young men and boys of color in Mississippi. Among these factors, school climate is especially salient, considering its wide implications for students' future success.

Understanding the depths of disparities makes advocacy for policies and programs that combat inequities more effective. It is the intention that the data presented in this report will highlight the long-term challenges related to educational achievement in Mississippi while creating a call to action for communities to work with school districts in developing more supportive school climates that will help to eliminate educational disparities.

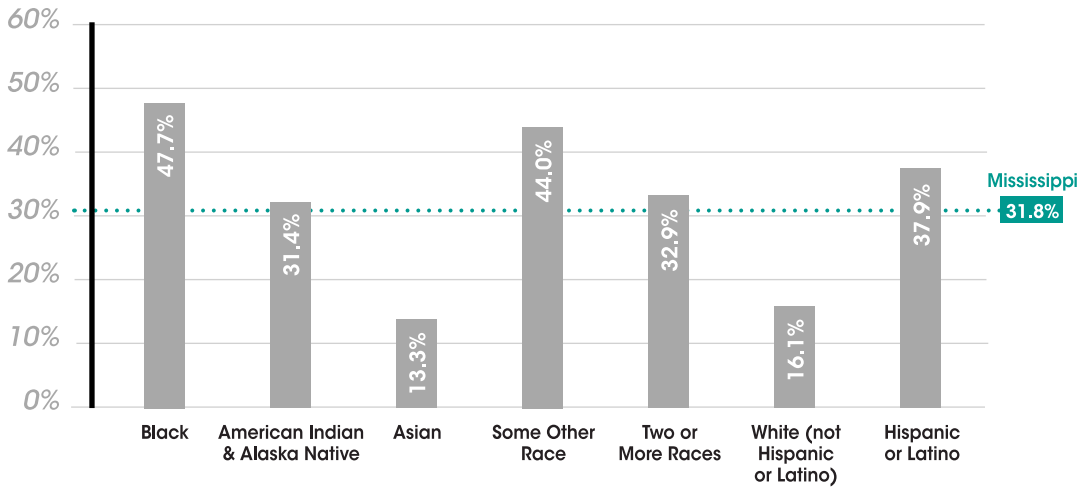
CHILD POVERTY IN MISSISSIPPI

Families living in long-term poverty experience a range of complex challenges that limit opportunity. The Mid South region (Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi) is home to a quarter of the nation's persistently impoverished counties – counties where the poverty level has exceeded 20 percent for at least three decades. Mississippi is one of two states where more than half of the counties or parishes are in persistent poverty. Of the 48 persistently impoverished counties in Mississippi, 23 are majority-Black. [3]

The relationship between poverty and student educational outcomes is well documented. People who experience the conditions of poverty, especially consistently throughout the formative years of childhood, are more likely to be negatively cognitively affected. Children living in poverty often score lower on measures of verbal ability and standardized tests of IQ and are also more likely to repeat grades and drop out of high school.[4] Understanding the influence of poverty on Mississippi children is vitally important in creating opportunities for increased educational success.

Nearly half a million students attend pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade at Mississippi public schools every year.[5] White and Black students make up the overwhelming majority of public school students. Hispanics are the quickest growing student minority group in Mississippi, representing three percent of enrollment. Two-thirds of Mississippi public school enrollees are economically disadvantaged, qualifying for free and reduced lunch or other public assistance.[6]

Figure 1.
MISSISSIPPI MALE CHILD POVERTY RATES BY RACE
Source: *U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.*



Mississippi has the highest rates of overall poverty (22.5%) and child poverty (31.8%) in the nation, and Black residents and children fare even worse. In 2015, nearly 77,000 (47.7%) young Black men and boys lived in poverty in Mississippi, experiencing the daily stresses of a household that struggles to provide basic needs like food, shelter, transportation and health care (Figure 1).[7] As young Black men and boys in Mississippi are much more likely to experience poverty, they are at higher risk for suffering the negative effects of poverty on their academic success. Developing interventions to help students overcome these obstacles is critical to their academic and developmental well-being.

OF THE 48 PERSISTENTLY IMPOVERISHED COUNTIES IN MISSISSIPPI, 23 ARE MAJORITY-BLACK.

STATE & NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

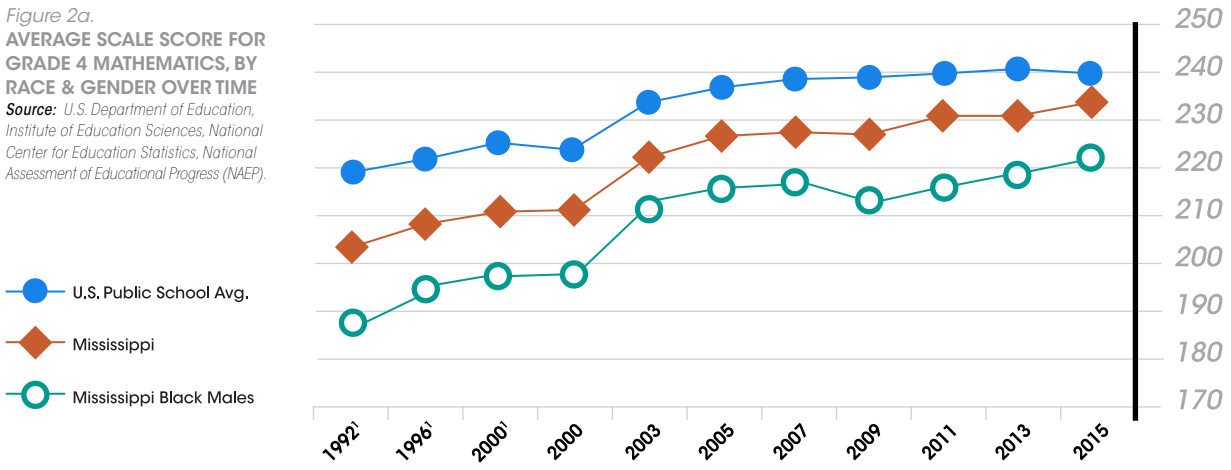
Low assessment performance at an early age can have far-reaching effects. Standardized tests remain the preferred performance metric of school districts and state departments of education, despite debate about inherent racial bias.[8] Poor performance on state and national assessments implies that students are underprepared to handle grade-level subjects and that advancing to new subjects could be a struggle. Students who fall behind early are at risk of falling further behind or dropping out, diminishing the likelihood of postsecondary enrollment and completion, which affects income potential and makes economic security more difficult to obtain.

National Assessment of Educational Progress

In 4th and 8th grades, students across the country take the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to gauge reading and math proficiency. Through uniform testing across the nation, NAEP provides insight into whether students have mastery of grade-level concepts in core subjects like reading and mathematics. Mississippi routinely scores below the U.S. average in NAEP, and reading and math scores for Black males are consistently lower than both the national average and state averages (Figures 2a-2d). The NAEP score gap between Mississippi Black males and state and national averages persists from the test's inception until today.[9]

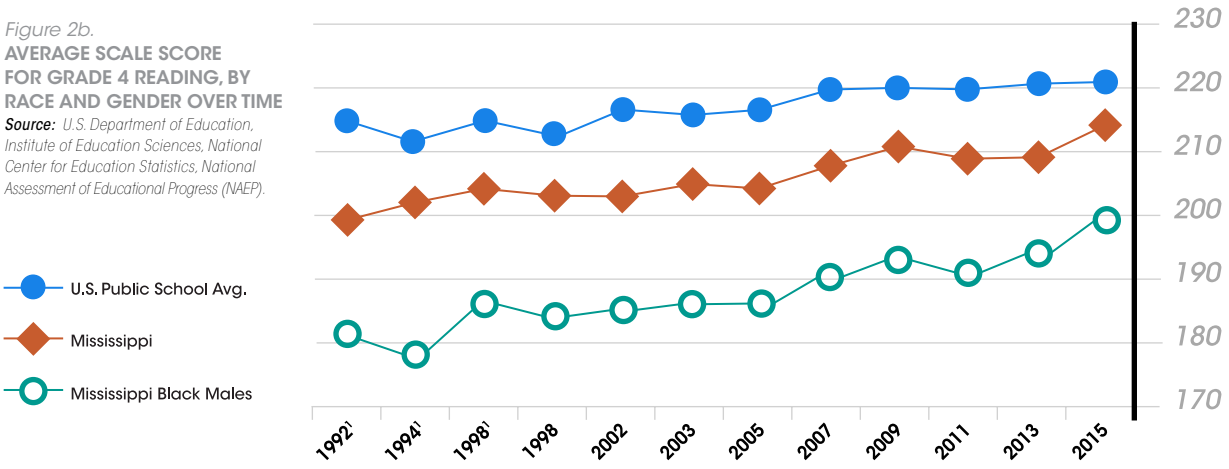
BLACK MALE TEST SCORES CONTINUE TO LAG STATE & NATIONAL AVERAGES IN ALL SUBJECTS.

Figure 2a.
AVERAGE SCALE SCORE FOR GRADE 4 MATHEMATICS, BY RACE & GENDER OVER TIME
Source: *U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).*



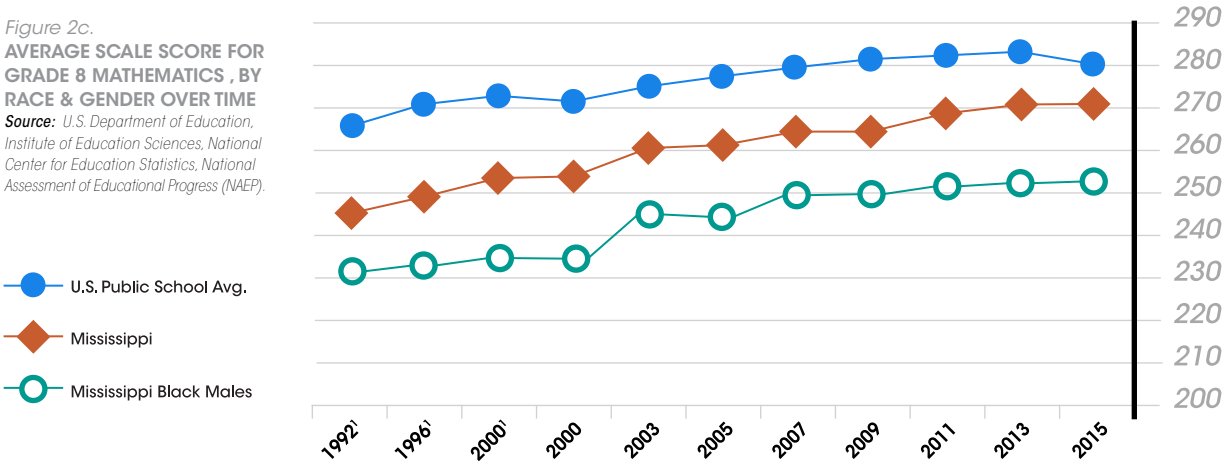
†Indicates no accommodations were given.

Figure 2b.
AVERAGE SCALE SCORE FOR GRADE 4 READING, BY RACE AND GENDER OVER TIME
Source: *U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).*



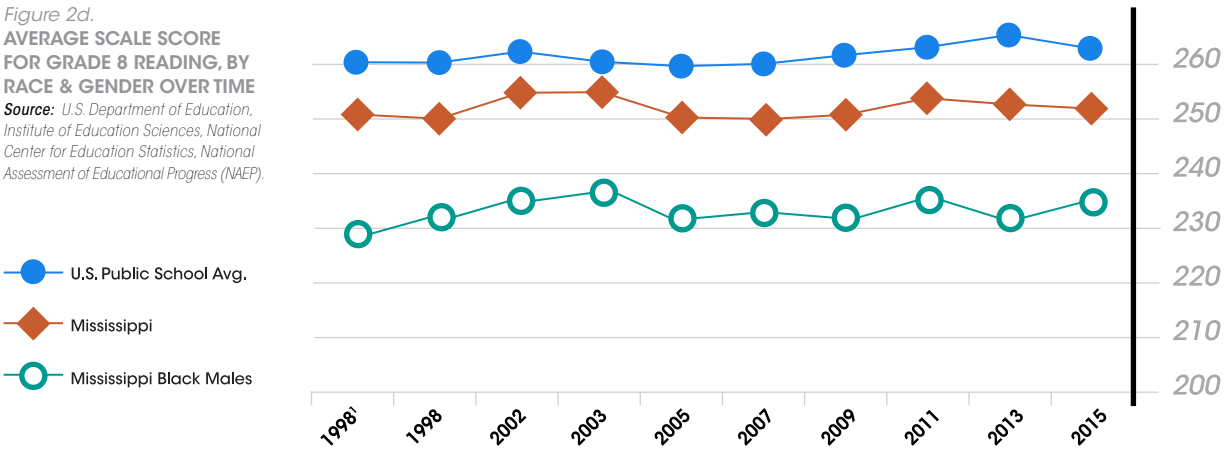
¹Indicates no accommodations were given.

Figure 2c.
AVERAGE SCALE SCORE FOR GRADE 8 MATHEMATICS , BY RACE & GENDER OVER TIME
Source: *U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).*



¹Indicates no accommodations were given.

Figure 2d.
AVERAGE SCALE SCORE FOR GRADE 8 READING, BY RACE & GENDER OVER TIME
Source: *U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).*



¹Indicates no accommodations were given.

MS ROUTINELY SCORES BELOW THE U.S. AVERAGE IN NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS.

State-Level Assessments

One state-level measure of subject mastery is the end-of-year assessment in English and mathematics, the Mississippi Curriculum Test 2nd edition (MCT2). The MCT2 is administered to all public school students from 3rd through 12th grade and scored at four tiers (Advanced, Proficient, Basic and Minimal proficiency).

Mississippi's Black students are least likely to score in the top two performance tiers (Proficient and Advanced) on 3rd through 8th grade MCT2 assessments, 9th through 12th grade MCT2 assessments, and Subject Area Testing Program, Second Edition (SATP2, which tests proficiency in Biology I and U.S. History I) of all racial and ethnic groups reported.[10] Increasing performance by eliminating the score gap between White and Black students could diminish disparities in graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment and even future earnings.[11]

COLLEGE READINESS: ADVANCED PLACEMENT, THE ACT & REMEDIAL COURSEWORK

Ensuring that students exiting secondary school are college or career ready is essential to fostering success later in life. Academic rigor in high school helps ensure that students who wish to continue their education can enter two- or four-year institutions ready to successfully complete entry-level coursework, without need for remediation.

Advanced Placement

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are one way that students can obtain credit for postsecondary classes at relatively low cost before enrolling in a two- or four-year college and incurring college-level costs. Earning AP credit also reduces the number of classes students are required to take to complete their college degrees. Finally, AP classes signal to postsecondary institutions that students are proactively involved in furthering their education, prepared for college-level coursework, and are motivated, desirable students for admission. Because Black male students are less likely to enroll in AP classes and score well on the corresponding exams, they are less likely than their peers to experience these benefits.

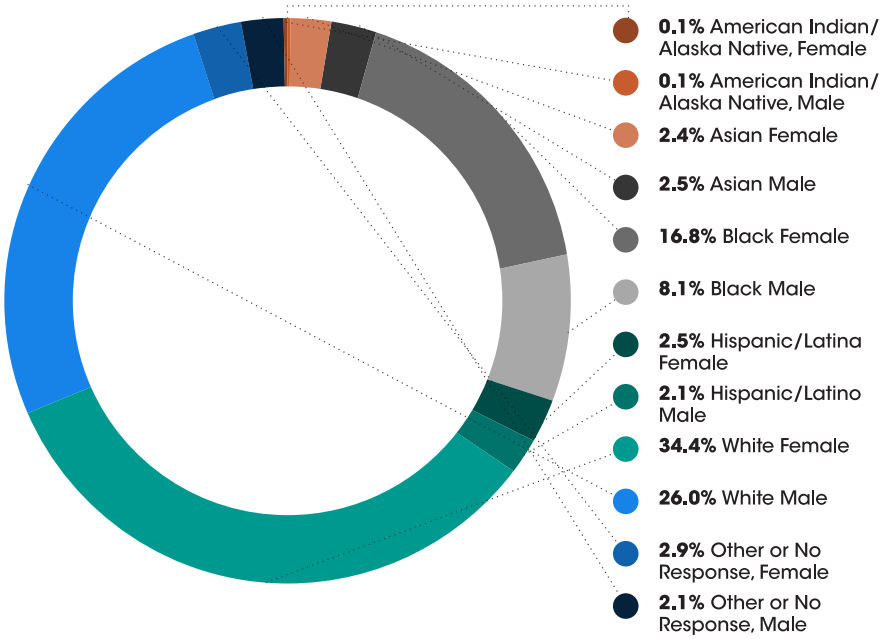
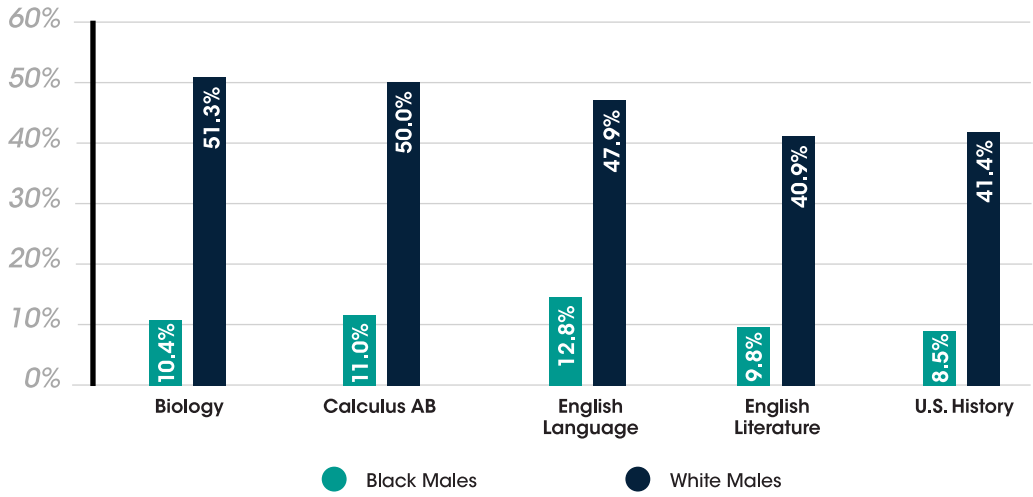


Figure 3.
MISSISSIPI STUDENTS TAKING ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) EXAMS IN 2016, BY RACE & GENDER
Source: *The College Board, AP Program Participation Data 2016. State Reports – Mississippi.*

Many high schools offer AP courses to high-performing students as one way to earn college credit before enrolling in postsecondary school. Students enrolled in AP classes must take an end-of-the-year assessment and score high enough to receive college credit. Generally, a score of three (on a scale of one to five) is sufficient, but some colleges may require a higher score.

The number of Black males taking AP exams is disproportionate to their enrollment (Figure 3), considering that one in every four (25.1%) public school students in Mississippi is a Black male.[12,13] This disparity is caused in part by the lack of access to AP courses in districts with more concentrated Black enrollment. In the 2014-2015 school year, the top ten performing school districts had significantly more AP course offerings than did the bottom ten performing districts, which enroll significant numbers of minority and low-income students.The higher-income, majority-White top ten districts enrolled nine times as many students in one or more AP courses, 30 times as many in AP math courses, 12 times as many in AP science courses, and nearly ten times as many students in one or more AP "Other" courses (e.g., AP U.S. History, AP Government, etc.) than did the bottom ten performing districts.[14]

Figure 4.
PERCENT OF MISSISSIPPI STUDENTS SCORING A 3 OR HIGHER ON AP EXAMS IN 2016, BY RACE & GENDER
Source: *The College Board, (2017). AP Program Participation and Performance Data 2016. State Reports – Mississippi.*



When Black students do take AP coursework and exams, they are less likely to achieve a score of three or higher than are White students. Figure 4 shows five common AP courses and the percentage of male Mississippi students passing with a score of three or above in 2016. Mississippi's Black male students are at a double disadvantage with AP courses: they are less likely to have access to AP classes in their districts, and, when they do participate, they are less likely to receive scores high enough to earn college credit. [15]

The American College Testing (ACT) Assessment

The American College Testing (ACT) assessment is one tool high schools and universities use to test student readiness for college coursework. Colleges use ACT scores as a metric to decide whether students will require remediation in key subjects, like math and English, before they advance to college-level coursework. Finally, ACT scores are one criterion used to determine eligibility for state financial aid programs. While each financial aid program has a different ACT cutoff, a lower score means a student is less likely to receive state-funded financial support for college.

The ACT measures college readiness in four subjects – mathematics, English, reading, and science – on a scale from one to 36. In Mississippi, just 11 percent of the high school class of 2016 met college-readiness benchmarks in all four subjects. Nationally, 26 percent of students met all benchmarks. Mississippi ACT scores indicate that many Black students are not graduating from high school with the necessary skills to succeed in college.[16]

Black students in Mississippi are more likely to score below college-readiness benchmarks than national and in-state peers. The Mississippi average composite score in 2016 was 18.4, with White students scoring an average of 20.4 and Black students scoring an average of 16.1. Mississippi's Black students are also less likely to meet or exceed college-readiness benchmarks than their peers of any racial or ethnic group. While over a quarter (26.0%) of Black students met the English benchmark, only six percent met the mathematics and science benchmarks, 11 percent met the reading benchmark, and just four percent met all four college-readiness benchmarks.[17]

Remedial Coursework

Preparing young Mississippians to enter the postsecondary education system – whether via credentialing programs, community colleges, or four-year institutions – promises the competency and ingenuity of the future state workforce. Mississippi's Black students are more likely to enter college underprepared for postsecondary-level coursework and concepts.[18] This lack of preparation means students need to enroll in special "remedial classes," which are intended to get students up-to-speed. While remedial courses can help students acclimate to college-level coursework, they also extend the length of time a student must spend enrolled, which incurs additional costs. Too often, when students get discouraged by remedial courses and the long stretch of regular coursework still ahead, they drop out, left without the degree they need to be competitive in the workforce but with student loans, which still require repayment.

At Mississippi two-year colleges, just one in five (19.0%) students enrolled in remediation graduates on-time, while one in four (23.0%) students enrolled in remediation at four-year colleges graduates on-time.[19] Mississippi's Black students are more likely to need remedial courses at two- and four-year colleges than are White students, which negatively affects already lower completion rates (Figure 5).[20]

Institution Type	Black Students	White Students
Two-Year Community College	74.85%	50.83%
Four-Year Public University	49.14%	10.61%

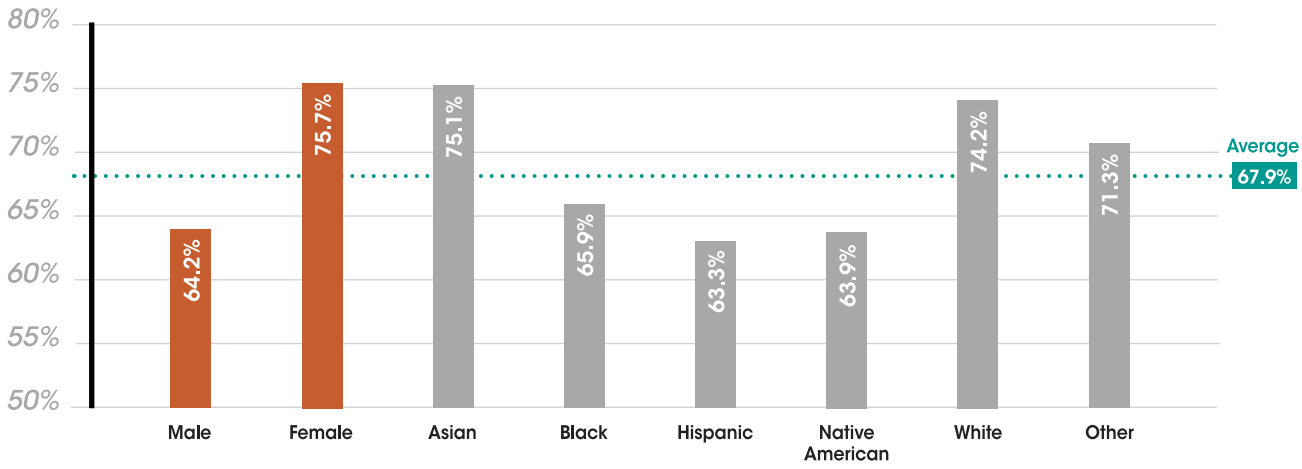
Figure 5.
FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN ENROLLED IN REMEDIAL COURSEWORK BY RACE, 2015
Source: *Mississippi Lifetracks – Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Reporting Service.*

Many students who begin college in remedial courses never go on to complete these required courses or their degrees. In Mississippi, less than a quarter (23.4%) of Black students in remediation at two-year colleges complete their requirements within two years, compared to one in three White students (35.7%) and three in ten overall (29.3%).[21] For Black males, who are already less likely to excel academically and progress into higher education, the added financial burden and time commitment of remedial coursework creates another stumbling block to completion.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

When students do not complete a high school diploma or equivalency, it limits their chances of going to college, future job opportunities and economic security. In Mississippi, more than one in five (22.2%) men who did not receive a high school diploma or equivalency lived in poverty in 2015.[22] Low high school completion rates shape the competitiveness of the Mississippi workforce – adults who do not complete high school struggle with financial instability caused by lower earnings and job insecurity.

Figure 6.
MISSISSIPPI 4-YEAR GRADUATION RATES, 2015
Source: *Mississippi Lifetracks – Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Reporting Service.*



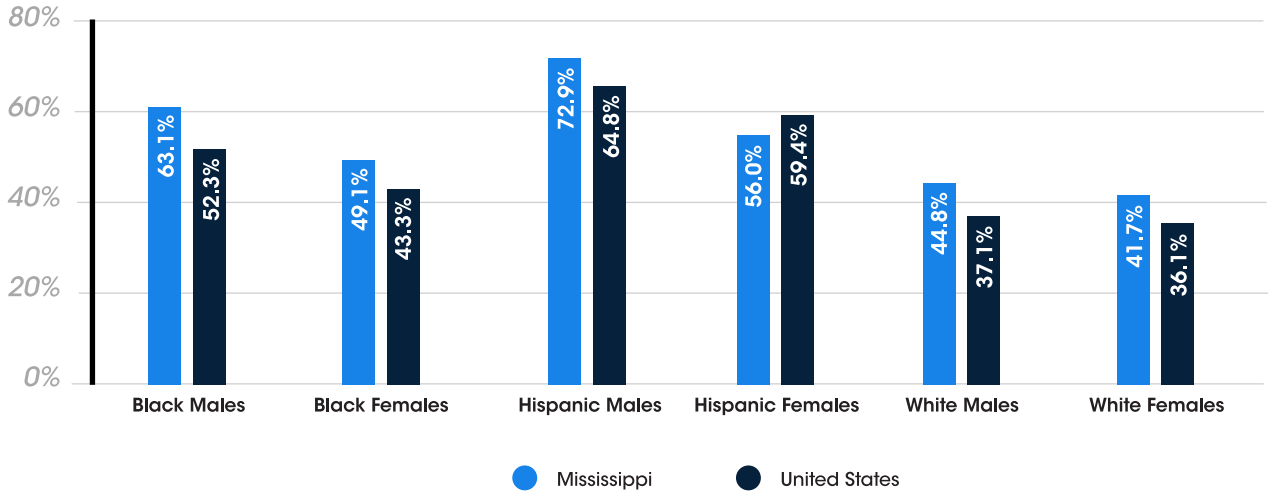
The likelihood of on-time graduation varies by both gender and race (Figure 6). Just one in two (51.4%) Black males graduates from high school within four years in Mississippi, while three in five Hispanic (60.5%) and White males (63.4%) graduate on-time.[23] Hispanic students of any gender are least likely to graduate on-time (63.3%) in Mississippi, closely followed by Native American (63.9%) and Black (65.9%) students of any gender and male students of any race (64.2%).[24]

External factors beyond students' control help determine high school completion rates. One of these factors, school funding, is particularly relevant in Mississippi where the public school funding mechanism, Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP), has been fully funded only twice since its implementation in 1997.[25] Research shows that higher per-pupil spending is associated with higher student outcomes, including graduation rates.[26] Reimagining the state budget to reflect K-12 education as a priority could improve academic outcomes and build the foundation for an educated, economically secure adult workforce in Mississippi.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT, COMPLETION & DEGREE CONFERRENCE

Mississippi's Black men are less likely than their peers to pursue postsecondary coursework or to receive college degrees. This disparity means that fewer Mississippi residents have college degrees, which impacts the competitiveness of the state workforce. Not having a college credential also shapes potential earnings of Black men, as well as their employability. Adults without a college credential are more likely to experience job loss and to have jobs without quality benefits, leaving them vulnerable to financial insecurity.

Figure 7.
ADULTS WITH NO FORMAL EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL
Source: *U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.*



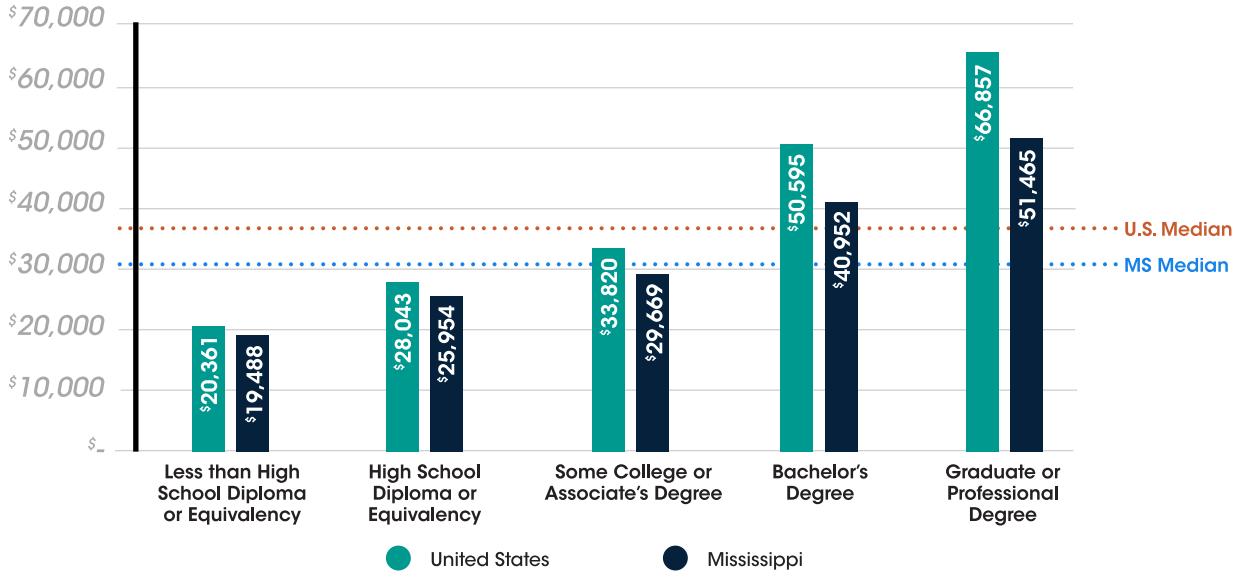
Black men in Mississippi are less likely to pursue education beyond high school than are Black men nationally; in 2015, three in five (63.1%) Mississippi Black men had no formal education beyond a high school equivalency. In comparison, one in two (52.3%) U.S. Black men and over two in five (44.8%) Mississippi White men had no formal education after high school (Figure 7).[27]

Postsecondary Enrollment

Earning a postsecondary credential is a decisive step toward higher earnings, job stability and financial security. With every additional level of education completed, the likelihood of unemployment decreases and median earnings increase (Figure 8).[28] Beyond the economic benefits, college enrollment and completion contribute to important health outcomes like decreasing the likelihood of smoking and death from heart disease.[29] Because Black males are less likely to attend college, they are also less likely to experience the ensuing benefits associated with a postsecondary education. Continuing education beyond a high school equivalency is an investment in the future and a guard against the structural inequities that vulnerable groups like women and people of color confront.

MISSISSIPPI'S BLACK MEN ARE LESS LIKELY THAN THEIR PEERS TO PURSUE POSTSECONDARY COURSEWORK OR TO RECEIVE COLLEGE DEGREES.

Figure 8.
EARNINGS BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR POPULATION OVER 25
Source: *U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.*



In the 2014 fall semester, Black students represented two in five (39.6%) Mississippi community college enrollees and one in three (34.6%) four-year public university enrollees.[30] While Black students make up a substantial portion of our two- and four-year college populations, Black students remain underrepresented relative to population size: two in five (40.8%) college-age adults are Black, more than the portion of enrolled Black students at four-year institutions and approximately equal to the portion at two-year colleges.[31]

College Completion

Earning a college degree has numerous benefits for Mississippi residents: graduates enjoy higher wages, greater job stability and benefits, and improved health outcomes. When a large number of students who start college do not complete their degrees, it is a loss to the state, the economy and the students themselves. Students who do not finish a degree program are more likely to default on student loans and struggle to find good paying jobs – both serious threats to future economic security.[32]

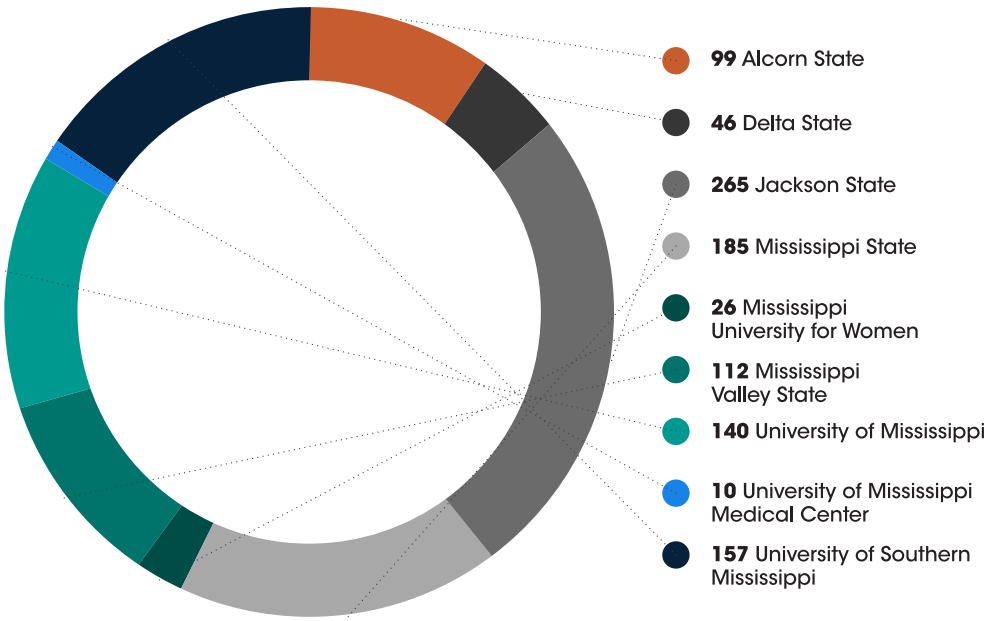
Even when students are able to enroll in postsecondary institutions, keeping pace and finishing academic requirements in the standard time frame can pose a challenge. At all levels of postsecondary education – ranging from one- to two-year certificate training programs to four-year bachelor's curricula – fewer than half of enrolled students complete on-time. On-time completion is especially an issue for Black students, who complete at lower than average rates at all postsecondary levels.[33]

Another way to measure completion is to look at the portion of students graduating within 150 percent of the normal time (i.e., three years for an associate's degree or six years for a bachelor's degree), which captures a larger cohort of students who may have lagged for various reasons. Even by this measure, less than half of Black full-time students complete on-time in Mississippi. Black students' completion rates for certificate programs (45.7%) are higher than for four-year degrees, whether at research institutions (35.4%) or non-flagship universities (27.6%). Completion rates for Black full-time students are lowest at two-year colleges, where only one in five (18.6%) completes in 150 percent of the normal time.[34] Low completion rates signal that improvements can be made in how Mississippi prepares and supports students at every step on their path to a credential.

Degree Conferrence

Both low enrollment and low completion rates can explain relatively low levels of degree conferrence to Black men in Mississippi. In 2016, 1,040 Black men earned a bachelor's degree from a Mississippi four-year public university. Jackson State University graduated the largest number of Black men, followed by Mississippi State University (Figure 9).[35] Black men are underrepresented among students receiving bachelor's degrees: just one in 12 (8.3%) bachelor's degrees awarded in 2016 went to Black men, while they represent one in five (20.1%) college-age adults in Mississippi.[36] Underrepresentation in this arena is particular to Black men: Black women represent one in five (22.0%) college-age Mississippians and one in five (20.2%) bachelor's degree recipients, receiving 2,527 degrees conferred by Mississippi public universities in 2016.[37, 38]

Figure 9.
BACHELOR'S DEGREES AWARDED TO BLACK MEN BY MISSISSIPPI 4-YEAR PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN 2016
Source: *Mississippi IHL. "Degrees Awarded by Institution." Institutional Research Office of Strategic Data Management.*



WHEN A LARGE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO START COLLEGE DO NOT COMPLETE THEIR DEGREES, IT IS A LOSS TO THE STATE, THE ECONOMY AND THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES.

GREATER ACHIEVEMENT & EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

Increasing the educational attainment of Black men and boys in Mississippi is a heavy lift, considering the historical and systemic challenges that permeate the state and nation. Working to improve educational outcomes among these groups first requires an understanding of their unique obstacles through research and data. With data-driven strategies, local and early interventions on the behalf of men and boys of color can foster their success. Holistic support from collaborative partners, like M.A.N. U.P.!, builds the foundation for Black men and boys' advancement in spite of the varied, entrenched and often generational barriers they face. Providing safe and nurturing school environments that foster the academic development of students is a pivotal step to ensure that young men and boys achieve educational and economic success later in life.

The findings presented in this report, while not comprehensive, serve as a starting point in developing evidence-based programs and data-driven policy to improve educational outcomes for Black males in Mississippi. Achieving this goal will require a comprehensive approach that builds upon programmatic and public policy innovation, an ambitious pursuit, which will ultimately create a Mississippi where all people prosper.

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