

White, Asian students have better access to rigorous classes, report says

Justin Murphy

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New York's students of color have drastically lesser access to advanced coursework than their white peers, according to a new report, with those in Rochester faring even worse.

Some of the data, provided mostly by the state Education Department, is startling. White students in the suburbs, for instance, are 29 times more likely to be enrolled in calculus than black students in the Rochester City School District.

The data was compiled by The Education Trust New York on behalf of the New York Equity Coalition. It illuminates the disparities between districts and also within districts, where white and Asian students generally enroll in advanced and "gatekeeper" courses — those that are crucial to graduating — at much higher rates than black and Latino students.

As one student at a high-performing Rochester school said, according to the report: "When I started taking AP classes in the 11th grade, I met a whole new group of kids. It was like I was going to a new school. There were not many black and Hispanic kids."

Within RCSD, white students are nearly five times more likely than black students to be enrolled in Advanced Placement math or science classes.

Elsewhere in Monroe County, white students are twice as likely as black students to be enrolled in AP math or science classes.

Some other statistics from the report:

■ Only 25 percent of high schools in RCSD offer calculus compared with 92 percent of suburban high schools.

■ Across New York, white students are twice as likely to take physics or computer science, three times more likely to take an advanced foreign language and four times more likely to take Earth Science in middle school, compared with black students.

■ More than one in three black students in New York attend a high school without any calculus courses, compared to one in 20 white students.

■ Even in schools that offer calculus, black students are much less likely to enroll in the course.

Black and Latino students are much more likely to attend a school with little access to guidance counselors.

Access for Latino students is generally similar as that for black students, while Asian students often have even greater access to high-quality courses than white students.

"In order to achieve equitable outcomes ... New Yorkers must insist on equitable access to rigorous instruction, support from strong educators, and enrollment in the full range of courses that lead to college and career preparedness for all students," the authors wrote.

The report makes five recommendations:

■ Enhance transparency regarding equitable access to rigorous courses.

- Require that families receive better information and expand access to school counselors and other resources.
- Establish a default course sequence in which all students are automatically enrolled.
- Expand access to AP and other advanced courses and connections with colleges and potential employers.
- Add a fourth year of math to the state graduation requirement.

JMURPHY7@Gannett.com