

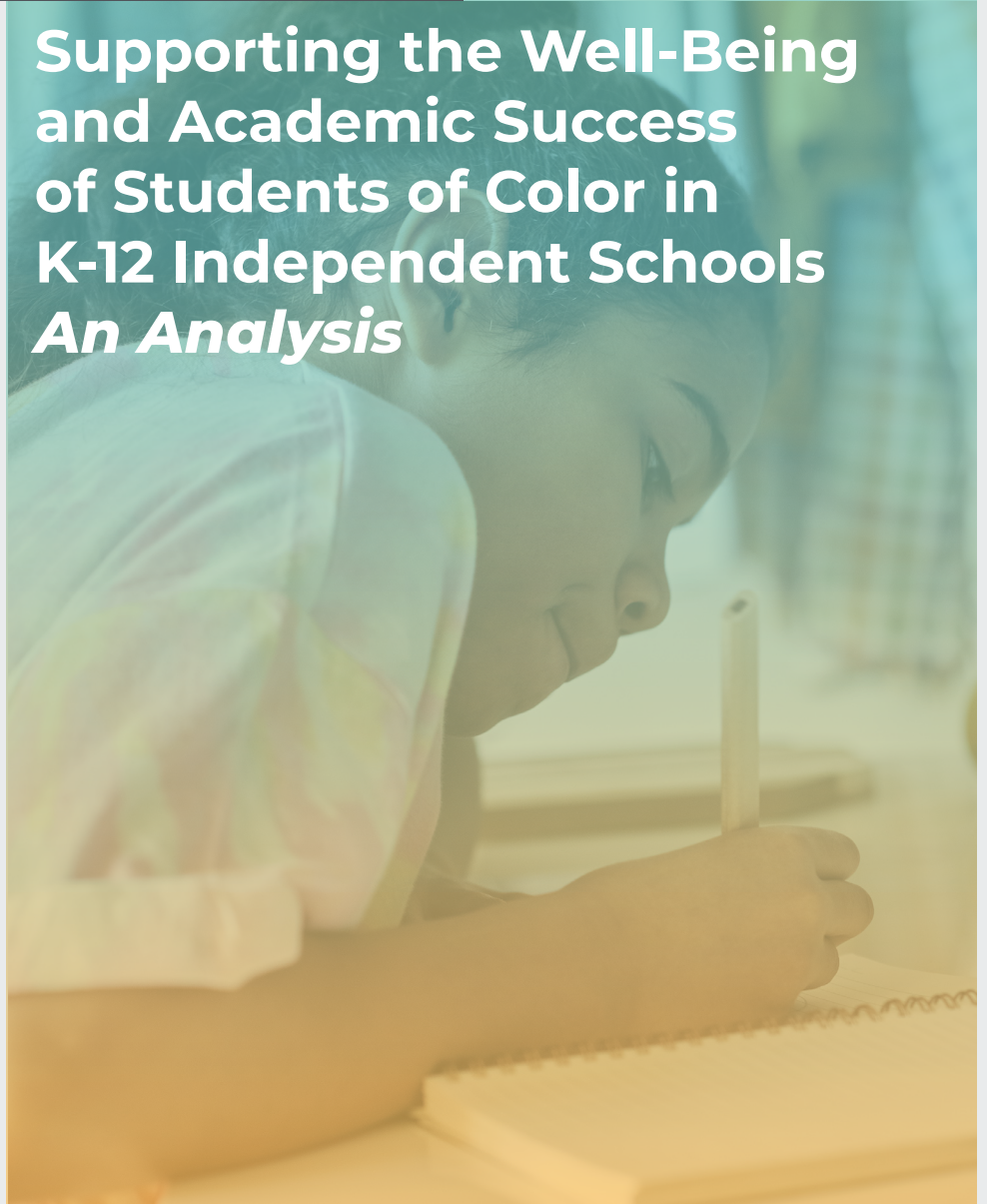
Independent School Alliance
Opening Doors to Great Futures



How to be an Anti-Racist Educator:

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**Supporting the Well-Being
and Academic Success
of Students of Color in
K-12 Independent Schools
*An Analysis***



Data Analysis

On August 26, 2020, the Independent School Alliance (the Alliance) along with The Steve Fund co-hosted a professional development workshop for independent school educators. Facilitated by Parastoo Massoumi, Consultant for the Steve Fund, and Rob Evans, Executive Director of the Alliance, this workshop aimed to lead participants to use an anti-racist lens to critically examine their school's climate, practices, and policies. With over 100 registered participants, the interest in "How to Be an Anti-Racist Educator and Support the Well-Being and Academic Success of Students of Color in K-12," signals a need for additional professional development opportunities in the future.

The purpose of this workshop was to center the voices and experiences of students by having participants explore the impact of racial trauma on the mental health and academic outcomes of Black and students of color. An underlying assumption is that Black and students of color who attend predominantly white independent schools "must navigate not only the academically, rigorous culture created at an independent school, but must also contend with the school experiences tied to the intersectional realities of their race, class, and gender location" (Evans, 2019).

Composite of Participants

The participants in this workshop included teachers, staff (admissions, college counseling, etc.), diversity practitioners, senior administration (Heads of School, division directors, chief operating officers, etc.), as well as region and state-wide independent school officials (see Table 1). Participants hailed from several major regions (see Figure 1) including 49% of participants from the Independent School Alliance (the Alliance) member schools.

Table 1
Participants in the Workshop

Position Title	Member School	Non-Member School/Org	Percentage of Total Participants
Teacher (K-12, librarian, learning specialists)	21	15	32%
Staff (Admissions, Counselors)	24	15	35%
DEI Practitioner	6	6	11%
Senior Administration (HOS, division directors)	7	15	20%
Independent School Officials	N/A	3	<3%

Table 1

Participants in the Workshop

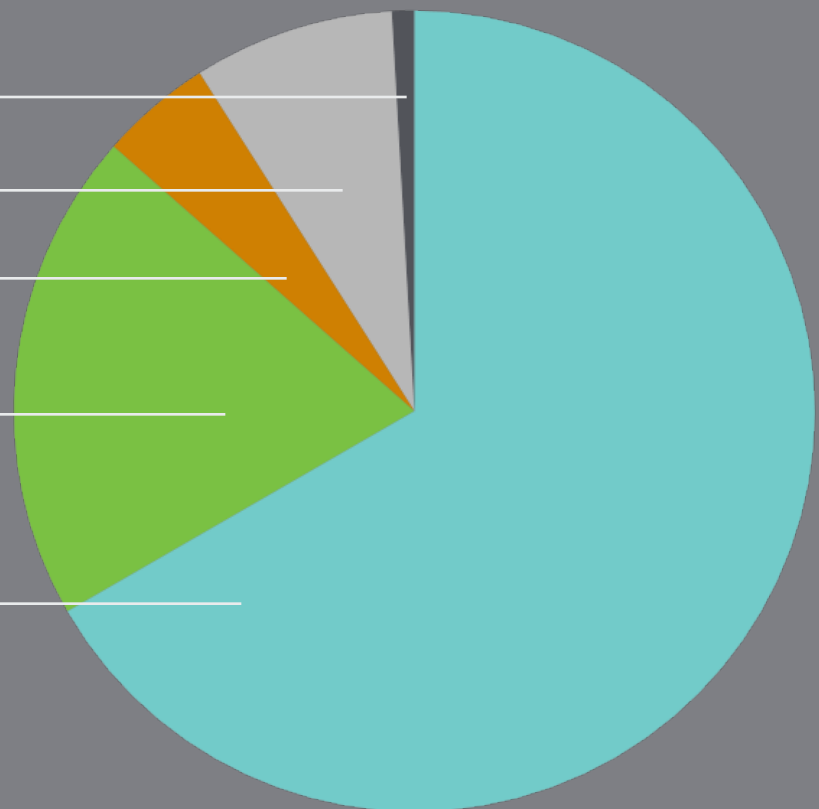
Greater Santa Barbara
0.9%

Orange County
8.1%

Greater San Diego Area
4.5%

Northern California
19.8%

Greater Los Angeles
66.7%



Motivating Factors for Participation

The motivating factors from participants to register for this workshop provide us with a better sense of the current state of independent schools for Black and students of color as viewed by teachers, staff, senior administration, and regional and statewide officials. Participants responded to the following prompt: Describe an experience you had or witnessed in the last academic year at your school that was racially charged (e.g. a conversation that came up in the classroom, a lesson you taught, a policy implemented in your school, peer-to-peer interactions). The responses revealed several overarching themes that connected the state of racialized experiences in independent schools:

Motivating Factors for Participation

1. Experiences of Black and students of color vastly differed from those of white students in regard to teachers and administration. Black and students of color experienced lack of academic and emotional support, lowered expectations from their majority white teachers, schools with little to no diversity, exclusion from social events both on and off campus, and were ostracized by teachers for their cultural differences.

2. Racist incidences were a happenstance for Black and students of color. These include incidences and usage of the n-word; microaggressions of excessive touching of hair, being called a different name, and questions about ethnicity; and negative experiences as relayed by alums using the @Blackat handle on Instagram.

3. Both the curriculum and programming for school-wide activities highlighted a lack of representation and a deficit of diverse voices and experiences (e.g. no programming for Black History Month).

4. Faculty were discouraged by administration to engage in conversations or outward displays of support for the Black Lives Matter movement, faculty were admonished by administration for championing diversity, administration excluded Black and faculty of color from email correspondence, and white teachers touting “colorblindness” and exhibiting a perceived lack of empathy for the experiences of students of color.

5. An increase in applicants’ desire for more diversity has placed significant pressure on Admissions Departments. Similarly, participants reported a hyperfocus on Black and students of color for admissions advertisements citing tokenization.

Conclusion

The responses provide a necessary context for how faculty, staff, administration and DEI practitioners view the experiences of Black and students of color in independent schools. Moreover, the effects of racism, particularly as more schools move toward an anti-racist framework, must continue to be explored, particularly in response to Black and students of color as their experiences are often overlooked.

Given the trends in the participants' motivating factors to attend the workshop, recommendations for future programming include a focus and engagement on:

- > *An exploration of the racial climate of predominantly white independent schools*
- > *Recruiting and hiring of Black, Indigenous, and faculty of color*
- > *Cultural proficiency, empathy, and sensitivity training for white faculty*
- > *Increasing the diversity of the student and parent body*
- > *Creating safe spaces for Black and students of color to aid in positive racial identity formation*

Additionally, it would be of interest to provide participants with both a pre- and post- survey to garner information about their knowledge base after each workshop. It is imperative to look more critically at independent schools to identify the normative cultural values that contribute to the often negative experiences of Black and students of color.

Citation:

Evans, Tina B., "We Wear the Mask: Stories of the Black Girl Middle School Experience in Predominantly White, Elite, Independent Schools" (2019). LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations. 893.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd/893>