

# How can we increase quality educational opportunities for Black students? Consider conducting a gap analysis

Increasing high-quality educational opportunities for Black students is a priority for educators, schools, and districts. Yet practice doesn't always align with what research has shown to be effective. The Midwest Achievement Gap Research Alliance (MAGRA), which conducts and supports the use of research on increasing educational outcomes among Black students in Wisconsin, conducted a **gap analysis** with Regional Education Laboratory (REL) Midwest to explore the alignment between current practices and practices that research suggests are most likely to be effective. A gap analysis can be conducted for any group experiencing an opportunity gap. It consists of a **policy and practice scan** and a **research review**. These can be done in parallel, sequentially, or iteratively.

## Policy and Practice Scan

**Take stock** of what your school or district is doing to increase educational outcomes among Black students.

1. **Talk to a knowledgeable and diverse group of people** (including teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and students) to gain a holistic picture of efforts to increase educational outcomes among Black students. Possible key questions:
  - What are the different types of policies, programs, and practices that aim to reduce barriers to high quality learning opportunities and increase outcomes among Black students in your school or district? Is there any evidence to suggest these policies, programs, and practices are effective?
  - What challenges has your school or district faced to increase outcomes among Black students?
  - What existing assets can your school or district use to increase access to high quality educational opportunities for Black students?
2. **Search your school or district websites** for policies, programs, and practices aimed at increasing educational outcomes among Black students.
3. **Create a list of the practices** you found and existing assets identified in step 1, including perceived impact and evidence of impact.



**1:** Ensure there is representation across different identities (e.g., gender, race, disability) and roles.



**2:** Search multiple terms, such as “Black student achievement,” “achievement gap,” “equity,” and “opportunity gap.”



**3:** Think about how leadership, policy, finance, and research may influence these efforts.

## Research Review

**Review existing research** to get a sense of the evidence base for practices aimed at increasing educational outcomes among Black students.<sup>1</sup>

1. **Search these Institute of Education Sciences (IES) resources:**
  - [Education Resources Information Center \(ERIC\)](#) is a database of educational studies and reports.
  - The [What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\)](#) reviews research on different programs and practices to inform evidence-based decisions.
  - [Regional Educational Laboratory \(REL\) Midwest](#) works with regional stakeholders to support research usage in state- and local-level decision making.
    - REL Midwest conducted a [systematic literature review](#) of evidence-supported interventions associated with Black students' educational outcomes.
2. **List the policies, programs, and practices** identified through the research review. Consider whether the study was conducted with students and schools similar to yours.



**Check out this IES video** for more information on searching ERIC.



**Watch this video** for more information about conducting a WWC search.

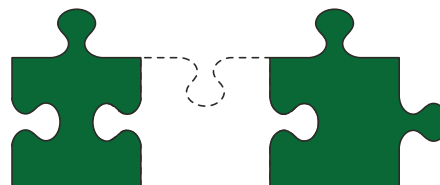
The REL program's free **Ask-A-REL** service provides annotated bibliographies to answer education research questions, including those relevant to the achievement gap.

You can submit a **question** or **view archived responses**.



## Gap Analysis

Compare what you learned from the policy and practice scan and research review to help identify appropriate practices for increasing educational outcomes among Black students in your school or district.




**Examine the similarities and differences between your scan and review. Consider:**

- What policies, programs, and practices is your school or district implementing that is supported by the research evidence?
- If research evidence does not support current policies, programs, and practices, are there local efforts under way to determine their effectiveness? Can you demonstrate a clear rationale for why they still should be implemented?
- What policies, programs, and practices did you find in the research review that are not being implemented by your school or district? Are there challenges that may prevent you from implementing these policies, programs, or practices?
- How do the students in your school or district compare to the students in the studies you found in the research review? How might differences in your student population affect implementation?

**Identify the policies, programs, and practices you want to try. Plan how to implement them and measure progress toward increasing educational outcomes among Black students.**

**When planning, consider:**

- What practices is your school or district using that can be built upon (e.g., using formative assessments)?
- What did you uncover in the research review that could work for your school or district?
- Who can you engage as critical allies in this work? What opportunities exist for collaboration?
- Are there structures in place (e.g., school improvement plans) that can support the implementation of evidence-based practices?



Recognize that the **absence of evidence does not mean a program or practice is not promising or effective**. Lack of evidence could suggest more research is needed.

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<sup>1</sup>For a full list of resources, please visit <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/blogs/educational-opportunities-black-students-gap-analysis.aspx>.