

The 2020 Vision and the Berkeley Schools

The Problem: Berkeley Unified School District has one of the highest racial/ethnic achievement gaps in California. This doesn't mean that our public schools are of poor quality; rather, it indicates that opportunities for excellence are available to some, but not others. But this challenge goes well beyond just academics.

Why? The stark reality in Berkeley: Our low-achieving students are predominantly African-American and Latino/Hispanic. These children and their families also show the highest indicators of poor health and well-being. Research shows that good health and academic success are interdependent. In Berkeley, data shows a strong connection between low test scores and poor health indicators like low birth weight, asthma, crime and premature death rates. Unfortunately, these correlations fall largely along racial/ethnic lines.

We see in years of data that 'students of color', not just those living in poverty but even those with more privileged backgrounds, are statistically more likely to face academic, behavioral and disciplinary challenges than their white peers. You can find current and past student data on the Berkeley Unified website.

What we're doing about it

2020 Vision initiative began with a campaign by United in Action, a community-driven multi-ethnic coalition, to eliminate inequities in educational opportunities in Berkeley public schools. It is a citywide movement to ensure academic success and well-being for all children and youth growing up in Berkeley, supported by many players: the City of Berkeley, Berkeley Unified School District, Berkeley Public Schools Fund, UC Berkeley, and many faith-based and nonprofits in the Berkeley Community. The 2020 Vision has since become part of the District itself as part of an internal structuring in the summer of 2014. The 2020 Vision goal remains the same: to lift every Berkeley student to be at or above grade level by the year 2020.

Now in our 3rd phase of the 2020 Vision, BUSD is investigating the implications of Institutional Racism and how that affects our students' ability to learn and our ability to create positive learning environments free of bias and assumption. Mandatory staff trainings in Cultural Competency have begun and new intervention programs, policies and general practices has become part of everyday life at all school sites. But this is just the start...

We identified key measurable indicators evidenced to impact the racial disproportionality of academic achievement among Berkeley students. Based on national research and best practices, the indicators are:

- Kindergarten Readiness (access to preschool or transitional pre-K programs)
- **Reading Proficiency by 3rd Grade**
- Student Attendance – why [attendance matters](#) for all grades
- Student Engagement
- **Successful Completion of Algebra I by 9th grade**
- College and Career readiness
- Alternatives to Suspension & Positive Intervention

How can Volunteers Help?

Based on the 2020 data, it is apparent that elementary literacy and middle school math are two crucial areas where students are falling behind. Teachers have many learner levels in one class and it's difficult to 'differentiate' for all students during the same lesson, much less provide individualized support to all students each class period. This is where volunteers like you are so important! Your individualized attention and support can make all the difference.

Why the 3rd grade Literacy benchmark?

- One in six children who are not reading proficiently in the third grade do not graduate from high school on time, a rate four times greater than that for proficient readers.

The four most persistent problems that young readers often encounter:

1. Comprehension
2. Accuracy
3. Fluency
4. Limited English language development

Strategies on enhancing a student's comprehension skills:

➤ Prediction

- Prediction is the act of taking what you know about the text you are reading (or about to read), coupling it with what you know about the genre and any background knowledge you may have about the story or subject, to think what the book is about, or what might happen next.
 - If the student has not read the book, model how you preview a text. Read the title, study the cover picture, examine any text features and illustrations. Making your thinking visible to the student by saying aloud what you notice.
 - If the student is in the middle of the book, have them retell briefly what has happened so far. Then you can ask them what they think will happen next, and why they think that. If the student is having trouble, help them come up with a prediction.
 - As you read, stop, notice and discuss when the student's (or your own) predictions have been confirmed or not.

➤ Questioning

- All students can benefit from sharing and having authentic conversations with more experienced readers about their wonderings. Continually asking questions from the text, searching for answers, and revising questions if necessary helps students engage more deeply with what they are reading.
 - Have the student read for 1-3 minutes. As the student reads, notice those questions and answers that authentically arise for **you**. You may want to stop the reading at intervals and quickly verbalize these if the student does not seem to be productively engaged in this process.
 - Ask the student to share questions and answers after reading. Also offer your own. Have a genuine conversation about the questions, answers and wonderings you share.
 - Have the student read for another five minutes. Then ask the student to share questions and answers aloud. If the student has difficulty coming up with questions, repeat the first step.

➤ Retelling

- Retelling a story can be challenging for students. They often have a difficult time pulling out and correctly sequencing the main ideas of what they have read.
 - Tell the student that after reading a book, or a section of a book, he or she will be asked to retell and order main ideas. Close attention to key text elements such as characters, setting, problems, emotions and solutions will help organize student thinking.

Strategies on enhancing a student's accuracy skills:

- Your student needs to recognize words automatically and if they are having difficulty to just read words, chances are she or he does not understand what is going on in the story. Here are some possible responses you can use to correct an error.
 - "Try that sentence again"
 - "That's a tricky word. Do you know what it is?"
 - "Try reading it slow to try and figure out this word"

Strategies on enhancing a student's fluency skills:

- Fluency is much more than fast reading. We want our students to be expressive readers and maintain appropriate syntax.
 - Echo reading and paired reading

- You read a short passage or section using appropriate phrasing. Then the student echoes you, re-reading the same passage. After a few minutes, transition into paired reading, where you both read the same text aloud together.
- To maintain appropriate syntax, we encourage you to use the following phrases with a student:
 - “Read to the comma, then pause.”
 - “Read to the period, then pause.”
- Other useful phrases
 - “Can you read that to me so it sounds like talking?”
 - “Can you read to me so that your voice matches the feeling of the text?”
 - “Can you read to me so I can hear how the character is feeling?”
 - “Read that part like dialogue.”
 - “Read that part like narration.”

Strategies on enhancing a student’s skills who are English language learners:

- Be aware that ELL students may not have some of the language structures and vocabulary necessary to comprehend the text. With that, it is our responsibility to assist them in developing the necessary skills for success.
 - If a student says something that is grammatically incorrect, repeat their comment or question using correct grammar; then have them repeat the phrase correctly to you. The goal is to shape the child’s use of language through conversation without saying “That’s wrong.”
 - For picture books, look at the pictures in the book without reading the text. Ask the student: “What do you think might happen/ is happening here?” At this time you can use some of the language from the story in you conversation that might be difficult for the child when they read.

Why the 8th grade Math benchmark?

- Seventh grade is the turning point where students go from learning simple math problems to much higher level algebra. Those students who don’t have algebra mastered by the end of middle school are at a significant disadvantage, and have been shown to do much more poorly in high school math.

Strategies:

- Adding and subtracting integers
- The Gradual Release Model:
 - Ultimately students should be able to reason math problems for themselves, so volunteers should encourage independence. It’s not about getting the assignment done, it’s about helping them to understand the material so they’ll be able to do it on their own
 - As a volunteer, your job is to help your student *learn*. So be sure not to feed them the answers.
 - At the same time, try to strike a balance. You want to help the student become independent but don’t want to drag the process out. Students still need to get their homework done!
- Working with shy students:
 - Just because a student isn’t vocal about needing help doesn’t necessarily mean they understand the assignment- they could be shy. As a volunteer you should feel free to take initiative and offer students help in a positive way.
- Tutoring tips:
 - Circulate the room: don’t spend your time hovering over one single student. Walk around and get to know the rest of the class!
 - Follow the school’s curriculum and the teacher’s method of teaching while tutoring. You don’t want to confuse the student further with new strategies, or teach them methods that their class has yet to cover.
 - Improve your teaching ability by observing the teacher while they give the lesson. This will put you on the same page with the rest of the students, and be a good refresher course for you, too!