

Exploring the Intersectionality of Race and Dyslexia for Black Children

AIMS Institute Symposium
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by Resha Conroy



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Mission:

To eliminate the amplified inequities for Black children experiencing unaddressed Dyslexia and related learning disabilities.



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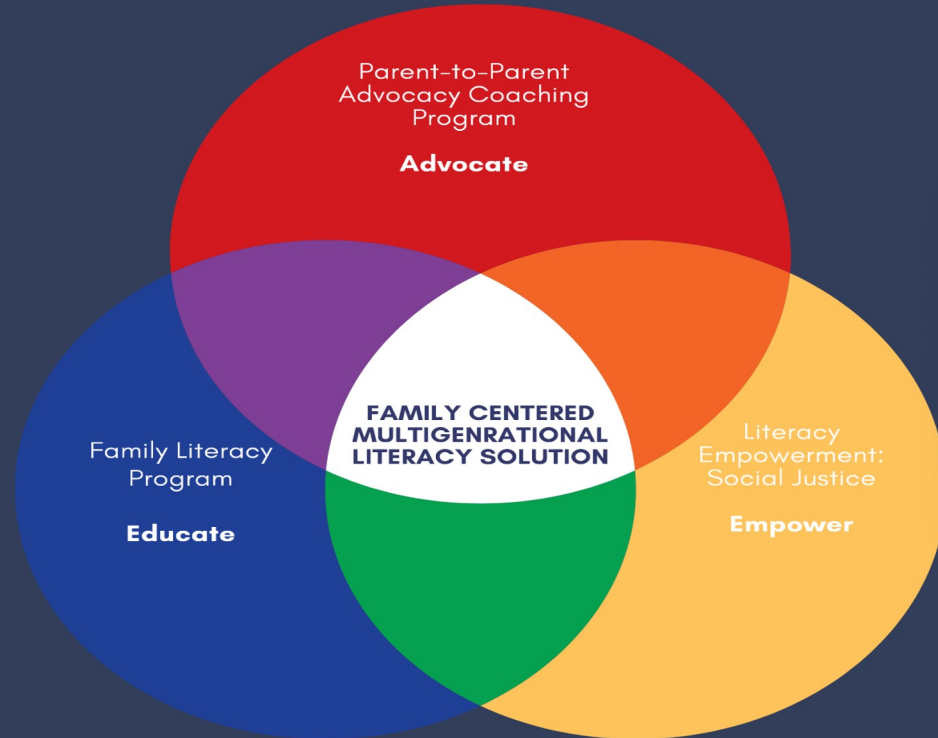


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A Family Centered Multigenerational Literacy Solution

Families are a pivotal part of learning communities and must be empowered for meaningful change to occur. Solutions must occur at a level that engages families and addresses the intergenerational impact of systemic inequities due to the legacy of anti-literacy in Black communities. This model can be replicated in communities allowing for far-reaching impact.

Dyslexia is a language-based reading dis/order often misdiagnosed and underdiagnosed, especially in Black communities. The solutions that address Dyslexia also address literacy, which allows us to focus on improving literacy outcomes for all learners.



Overview

- ❖ National Literacy Crisis & Race
- ❖ Intersectionality of Race and Dyslexia for Black Children
- ❖ Barriers to Diagnosis
- ❖ Access to Intervention
- ❖ Call to Action
- ❖ Questions & Answers



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National Literacy Crisis

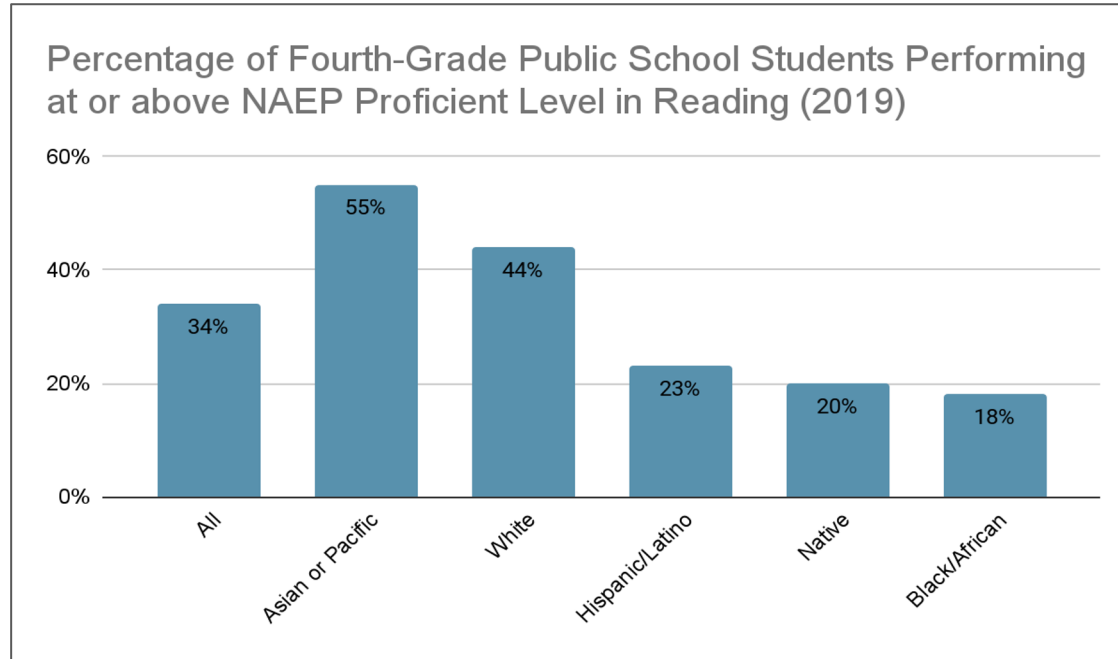
“In 2019, the percentage of fourth-grade public school students performing at or above the *NAEP Proficient* level in reading was **34 percent nationally.**”

<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/states/achievement/?grade=4>



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National Literacy Crisis and Race



Data retrieved from: <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5126-fourth-graders-who-scored-below-proficient-reading-level-by-race?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/1729,871,573,36,867,38,18,16/10,168,9,12,185,107/11557>



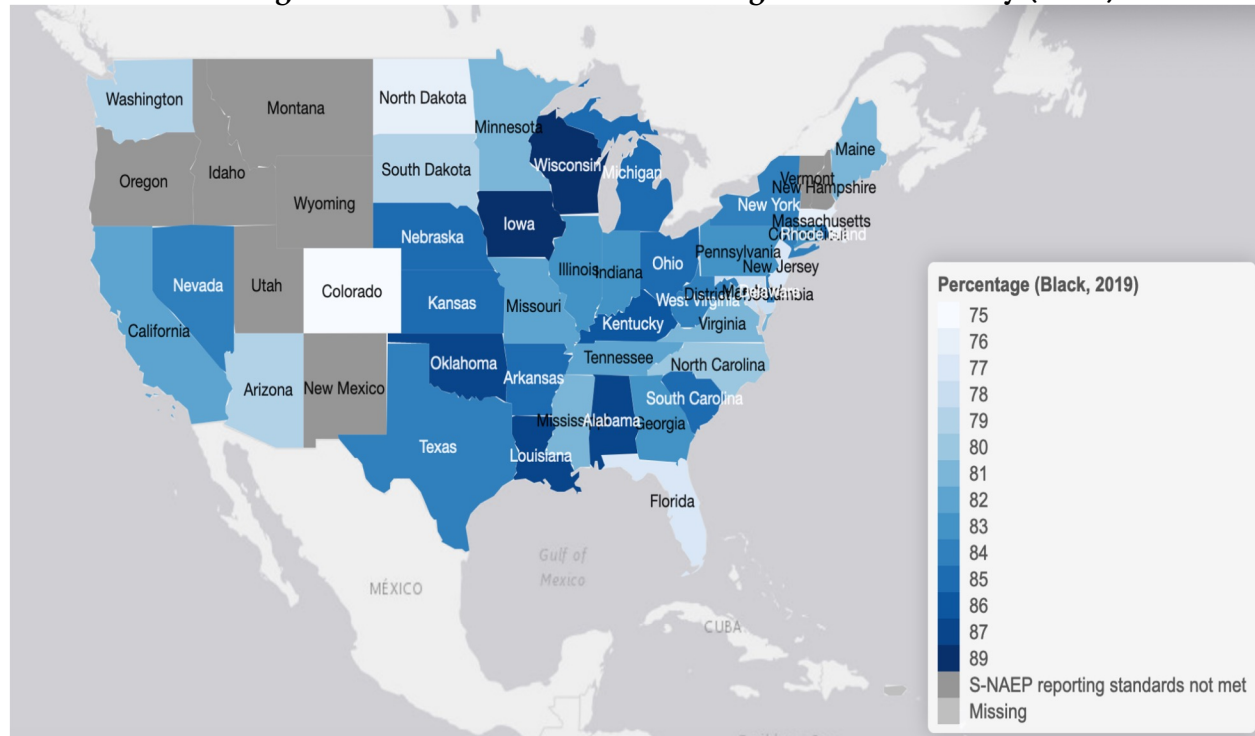
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National Literacy Crisis and Race

The inequities are consistent across the United States.

| State | Percentage of Black fourth graders reading below proficiency |
|------------|--|
| California | 82% |
| Iowa | 89% |
| Texas | 84% |
| New York | 84% |
| Georgia | 83% |

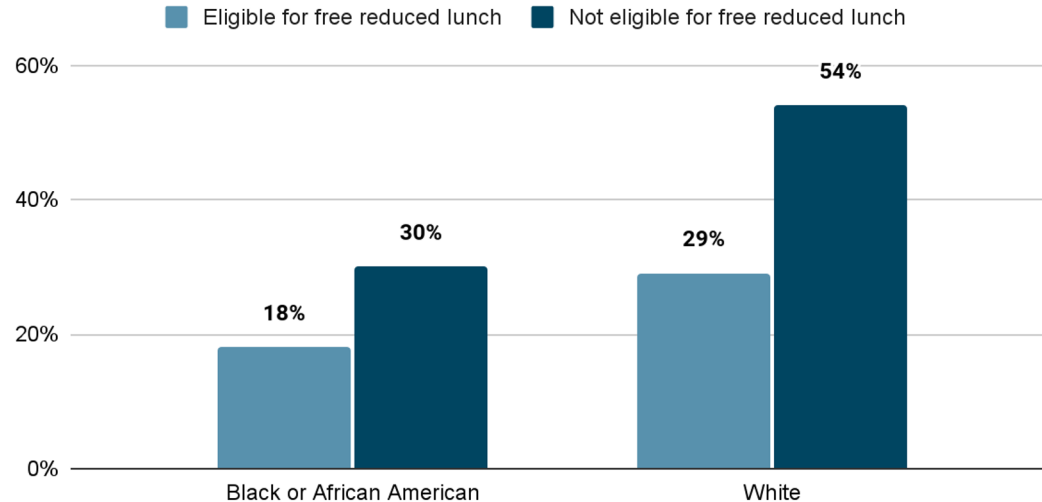
Percentage of Black Fourth Graders Reading Below Proficiency (2019)



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National Literacy Crisis and Race

Controlling for SES: Fourth Graders Scoring at or above Proficiency in Reading (2019)



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National Literacy Crisis and Race

- ❖ Black children with dyslexia are underdiagnosed and misdiagnosed.
 - ❖ Black and Hispanic students were less likely than Caucasian students to be classified with dyslexia even after controlling for literacy skills and free/reduced lunch status.
- When behavioral characteristics of dyslexia were identified through universal screening: 6% of Caucasian students and 3% for African American students were estimated to be classified with dyslexia.

(Odegard et. al, 2020)



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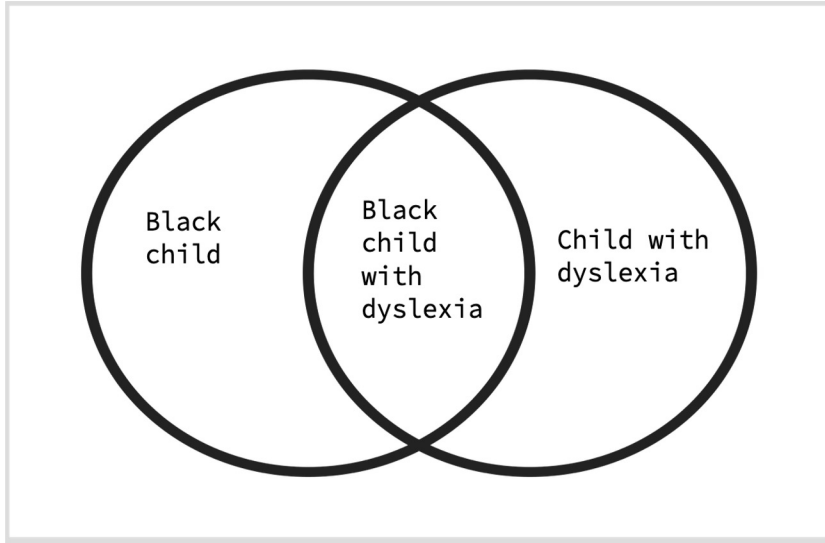
“It [dyslexia] crosses racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines, and with proper instruction and accommodations it can be remediated.”

- Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity



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Race and Dyslexia



Due to systemic **racism** and **ableism**, Black children with dyslexia are erased and excluded, leaving them invisible, and potentially creating a **single axis social justice literacy movement**.

A single axis movement denies or neglects the complexity of an issue when individuals have multiple social identities that have historically been marginalized (Coles and Pasek, 2020).



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Intersectionality of Race and Dyslexia for Black Children

1619 - 1865:

Period of Enslavement of
Africans/African Americans
Anti-literacy Laws

1865 - 1954:

Jim Crow and Segregation

Post 1954:

The measure of systemic racism is
in the outcome of policies and
practices. Systemic racism fuels
and supports implicit bias.

Implicit bias related to race and ethnicity is the psychological residue of persistent structural racism (Dhaliwal, et.al., 2020).



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Barriers to Diagnosis

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) defines dyslexia “... as a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin... **unexpected** in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction.”

“For an educator to suspect dyslexia, the educator must first expect that a child can be taught to read” (Conroy, 2021).



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- *“My child was called lazy.”*
→ Black children are 3x more likely to be viewed as lazy by white teachers.
- *“It’s okay if his reading is on the low end of average.”*
→ Black children are 2x more likely to be viewed as unintelligent by white teachers.
- *“His behavior is aggressive.”*
→ Black children are 2x more likely to be viewed as violence prone by white teachers

(Priest et al., 2018)



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Barriers to Diagnosis

Stereotypical Attributes and Implicit Bias

- ❖ Implicit bias impacts both academic and behavioral expectations.
- ❖ Implicit bias undervalues and excludes Black families.
- ❖ Implicit bias translates to achievement disparities. Achievement disparities are related to discipline disparities. There is a positive association between Black-White achievement disparities and Black-White discipline disparities even after controlling for confounding factors (demographics, income, access to PreK) (Pearman et al., 2013)



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Access to Intervention

Structured Literacy Deserts

are geographic locations where evidence based reading intervention is difficult to obtain or nonexistent.



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Access to Intervention

The Bronx: A Structured Literacy Desert

| New York City | | | | | |
|--|--------|-----------|----------|--------|---------------|
| Race and Hispanic Origin | Bronx | Manhattan | Brooklyn | Queens | Staten Island |
| Black or African American alone, percent(a) | 43.60% | 24.30% | 33.80% | 20.70% | 11.60% |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent(a) | 2.90% | 0.40% | 0.90% | 1.30% | 0.70% |
| Asian alone, percent(a) | 4.60% | 14.10% | 12.70% | 26.90% | 10.90% |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent(a) | 0.40% | 0.10% | 0.10% | 0.20% | 0.10% |
| Two or More Races, percent | 3.80% | 3.60% | 2.70% | 3.00% | 2.20% |
| Hispanic or Latino, percent(b) | 56.40% | 29.10% | 18.90% | 28.20% | 18.60% |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent | 9.00% | 32.10% | 36.80% | 24.90% | 59.60% |

Data retrieved from

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/richmondcountynynewyork,queenscountynynewyork,kingscountynynewyork,bronxcountynynewyork,newyorkcitynewyork/PST045221>

- ❖ The **Bronx** is the only borough in New York City without a public, charter or private school for students with language based learning disabilities.
- ❖ There are few structured literacy interventionist, teachers, or tutors identified using the most common search options.



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Call to Action

- ❖ Individuals with dyslexia face increased rates of mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression (Willcutt, and Gaffney-Brown 2004)
- ❖ Individuals with dyslexia are overrepresented within the homeless population, within a range from 46% to 52% (Barwick & Siegel, 1996; Olise, 2010; Patterson et al., 2012)
- ❖ A study of Texas prisoners in 2000 found that 48 percent were dyslexic and two-thirds struggled with reading comprehension (Moody et. al., 2000)



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“Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.”

- Frederick Douglass



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Call to Action

Address Implicit Bias:

- Intellectual and cultural humility as a foundation for researchers, educators, advocates, and practitioners
- Understand how the effects of systemic racism shape our beliefs, practices, and actions



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Call to Action

Diagnosis:

- Screen every child
- Raise awareness that dyslexia exists in all populations
- Eliminate the impact of implicit bias on screening and diagnosis through professional development
- Universal screeners and assessments that reflect cultural and linguistic varieties



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Call to Action

Intervention:

- Structured Literacy at Tier One
- Access to intervention with an initial focus on “Structured Literacy Deserts”
- Intervention targeted at students with late diagnosis



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Thank you

Questions?

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