

DOCUMENTARY VIEWING GUIDE



Documentary link: <https://tinyurl.com/RELdocumentary>

About the documentary

Along their path toward educational success, Black students face circumstances and challenges that may impact their ability to reach their full potential. Research shows that Black students are less likely to have access to high-level mathematics and science courses, more likely to face harsher school discipline, and more likely to attend schools with higher concentrations of inexperienced teachers compared to their peers.¹ This video highlights a few strategies that are being implemented in schools in Wisconsin to improve the educational outcomes among Black students. These practices include high expectations, strong student–teacher relationships, and mentoring programs and have been identified as promising from a systematic literature review that Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest conducted in 2018.²

Schools Featured: Julian Thomas Elementary School and Mitchell Elementary and Middle School

Intended audience

REL Midwest created this video as a tool for teachers, school leaders, and state and local education agency staff to learn about evidence-based approaches that support the improvement of educational outcomes among Black students. The documentary focuses on examples from Wisconsin, but the information and evidence shared in this video offer important lessons for people and groups based outside the state. REL Midwest encourages viewers to watch the video and use the following questions as a starting point for a discussion on ways to improve the educational outcomes for Black students.

“Wisconsin does have a rich cultural and racial diversity; that’s who we are, but how it shows up in education—we can do better.”

– Dr. Chrishirella Sutton, Manager,
Office of Family & Community
Engagement Racine Unified School
District, Racine, Wisconsin

Please let us know how you used these materials! Send an email to relmidwest@air.org.

1 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection. (2016). *Key highlights on equity and opportunity gaps in our nation’s public schools*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/2013-14-first-look.pdf>

2 Same, M. R., Guarino, N. I., Pardo, M., Benson, D., Fagan, K., & Lindsay, J. (2018). *Evidence-supported interventions associated with Black students’ educational outcomes: Findings from a systematic review of research*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED581117>

? Discussion questions

- What approaches are you currently using to support Black students' education in your state, district, or school?
- What concepts or themes from the documentary resonate with you?
- What were your reactions to the approaches and research evidence presented in the documentary?
- In what ways does your state, district, or school encourage strong student–teacher relationships?
- What opportunities exist in your state, district, or school for students to create strong relationships with teachers?
- What are the ways in which you can communicate high expectations to students?
- Does your state, district, or school offer a mentoring program? If not, would you consider starting one? If yes, what works well and what could be improved about the program?
- What challenges do you see in implementing the strategies shown in the video (high expectations, strong student–teacher relationships, and mentoring programs)? What are possible ways to overcome these challenges?
- How does your district or school leadership support initiatives that promote cultural responsiveness and relationship building, such as Natural Circles of Support?
- What systems are in place to continuously evaluate progress and areas for improvement in efforts by your state, district, or school to support Black students?

About REL Midwest

REL Midwest is part of a network of 10 regional educational laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. REL Midwest works in partnership with practitioners in seven Midwest states to conduct applied research and provide training, coaching, and technical support to create a more evidence-based education system. Please visit the REL Midwest website to learn more: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/default.aspx>

Additional resources

Featured in the video

[REL Midwest's Literature Review](#)—This literature review focuses on the promising practices that increase the academic success of Black students.

[REL Midwest's Achievement Gap Research Alliance \(MAGRA\)](#)—MAGRA works to support the use of research in state and local decisionmaking to significantly and meaningfully improve opportunities for Black students.

[Natural Circles of Support](#)—This approach draws on the strengths of students of color to address racial and other disparities.

Wisconsin resources

[Promoting Excellence for All](#)—This resource provides information and strategies used in Wisconsin to increase achievement among students of color.

[Minority Student Achievement Network \(MSAN\)](#)—MSAN is a national coalition of school districts that works to understand and eliminate achievement gaps in schools.

[Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center](#)—This center provides technical assistance and training to promote equitable education opportunities.

[Wisconsin Response to Intervention \(RtI\) Center](#)—This center assists schools and districts in making informed decisions to increase the success of all students through multilevel systems of supports, with a particular focus on traditionally underserved student populations. To support educators’ understanding of Black and African-American cultures, the RtI Center also provides a [list of resources and learning experiences](#).

[Disproportionality Technical Assistance Network](#)—This network is a multi-tiered system that works to improve supports to address racial disparities in special education.

National resources

[Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\)](#)—PBIS is an evidence-based, multi-tiered behavioral intervention that increases academic and social-emotional outcomes for students.

[National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments](#)—This center offers information and technical assistance to states, districts, and institutions to improve student supports and academic achievement.

[National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement](#)—This professional association works to advance policies and practices for family, school, and community engagement to improve student achievement.

Other resources

[Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Project, University of Washington](#)—This research project aims to increase understanding of how schools and districts recognize and use parental experience and leadership to improve student achievement.

[The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools](#)—This center works to build the New York State School District capacity to understand the root cause and address the disproportionate assignment of groups in special education.

[The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children](#) by Gloria Ladson-Billings—This book describes examples of effective teaching, specifically highlighting culturally responsive practices.