

**BLACK EDUCATION  
RESEARCH COLLECTIVE**

TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

# **The Black Studies Curriculum: An Educational Necessity for New York City Public Schools**

A majority of Black voters in New York City say the new Black Studies Curriculum is an essential way to improve education for all students in NYC





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## **Acknowledgments**

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## **About the Black Education Research Collective**

The Black Education Research Collective (BERC) is a collective of scholars committed to improving the nature and quality of Black education through culturally sensitive research and evaluation, research-practice partnerships, and critical policy analysis. Visit our website at [www.blackedresearch.org](http://www.blackedresearch.org).

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# Overview

In September of 2021, the New York City Council funded its first ever PK-12 Black Studies Curriculum in order to ensure that the histories, culture, and contributions of peoples of African descent would be integrated into existing K-12 schools and classrooms. The initiative, known as the Education Equity Action Plan (EEAP), was the result of years of organizing and advocacy by communication organizations in New York City, and was formally launched in September, 2021.

EEAP Coalition partners supporting the initiative included: leadership from the New York City Council and the Council's Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus (BLAC); the Black Education Research Collective (BERC) at Teachers College, Columbia University; in partnership with the NYC Department of Education.

In order to assess community perspectives and attitudes related to the curriculum and issues of educational equity more broadly, the Black Education Research Collective (BERC) at Teachers College, Columbia University, partnered with brilliant corners to conduct an opinion poll capturing Black community perspectives and attitudes concerning public education in New York City and plans to incorporate Black studies into New York City public schools.

This report presents key themes and takeaways from the opinion poll, which focused on capturing the views, attitudes, and assessment of Black residents of NY, which is often either underrepresented or misrepresented in education research and the crafting of policy solutions.



L to R: Chancellor Lester W. Young, Jr. (NY Board of Regents), Chancellor David Banks (NYC DOE), and Professor Sonya Douglass (BERC, TC) discussing educational equity in New York on January 27, 2022 at Teachers College, Columbia University.

## The Education Landscape: Looking at Equity in New York City

During the 2021-22 academic school year, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) served 1,058,888 students in grades PK-12. Of these students, roughly 14.7 percent are white, 24.4 percent are black, 16.6 percent are Asian, and 41.1 percent are Latinx/Hispanic. Roughly, 82% (869, 397) of the total student population (1,058,888) are students of color.<sup>1</sup>

Across the 1,859 schools in New York city's five boroughs (Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island), there are approximately 75,000 teachers employed: 56% of teachers are White, while 42% of teachers identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Black, Hispanic, or Multiple Races.<sup>2</sup>

As the largest school district in the U.S., and arguably the most diverse and segregated, issues of educational equity, opportunity, and justice are critically important when considering the education landscape of schools in NYC and how it impacts the experiences of students and their academic outcomes. Respondents were asked to provide answers to additional considerations of the education landscape in NYC, including: (a) School priorities; (b) Critical Race Theory (CRT), Race and History; and, (c) the new Black Studies Curriculum (BSC).

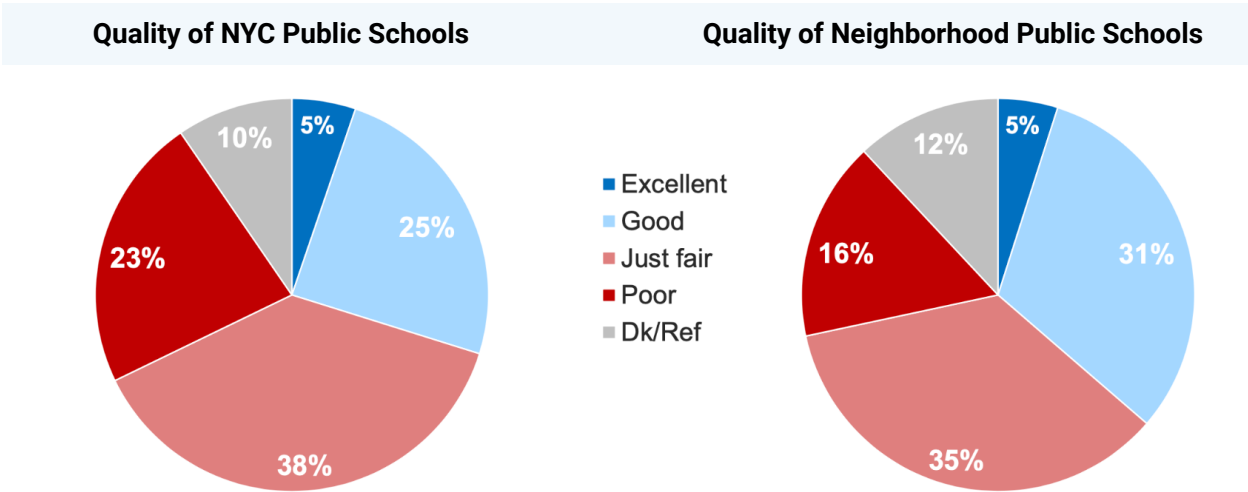
<sup>1</sup> DOE Data at a Glance - <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/about-us/reports/doe-data-at-a-glance>

<sup>2</sup> 2019-2020 School Year Local Law 226 Report for the Demographics of School Staff - Ethnicity <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Education/2019-2020-School-Year-Local-Law-226-Report-for-the/2iq5-6hqv>

Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4 below illustrate how Black voters perceived the quality of schools, teachers, and the impacts of virtual learning on the educational opportunities of children in NYC.

Figure 1 shows that, in general, respondents rated the quality of local neighborhood public schools higher than public schools citywide. Among those who rated local schools better than citywide schools were non-parents and those who had not been to college.

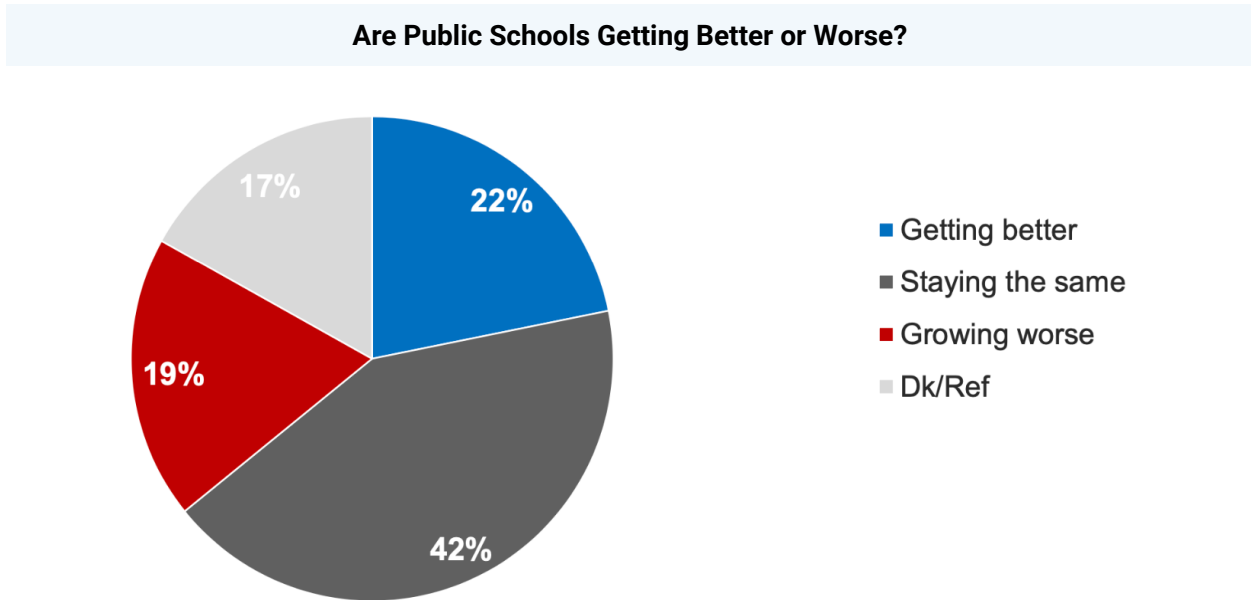
**Figure 1**



When responding to the question of whether public schools were getting better or worse, Figure 2 shows that 19% of respondents indicated that public schools were getting worse, 17% said they were unsure, 22% indicated that public schools were getting better, and 42% indicated that public schools were staying the same.



**Figure 2**



**Table 1**  
Perceptions of School Quality Getting Better or Worse

	Total	Parents	<50 women	Non-college	College	Celebrate	Question	Schools Positive	Schools Negative
Getting Better	22%	24%	17%	23%	21%	28%	19%	41%	12%
Staying the Same	42%	43%	42%	43%	43%	40%	46%	42%	51%
Growing Worse	19%	20%	24%	19%	18%	16%	21%	6%	31%
Don't Know/Refused	17%	12%	17%	15%	17%	16%	14%	12%	6%

Interestingly, as Table 1 shows, of the 19% of respondents who indicated that public schools were getting worse, 31% of them also had negative views of their neighborhood public schools. This suggests the importance of neighborhood public schools when it comes to perceptions about the overall quality of public schools in general.

Figure 3 illustrates the perceptions of respondents with regard to school teachers in New York City. Public school parents were most likely to rate public school teachers as excellent or good (60%), while 46% of charter school parents and 44% of private school parents rated public school teachers as just fair or poor.

**Figure 3**

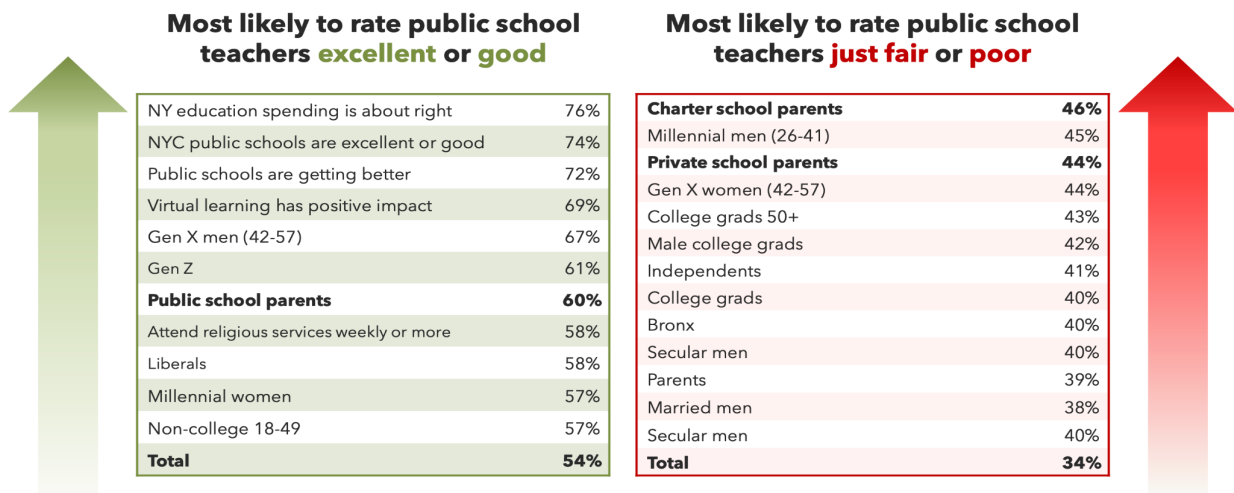
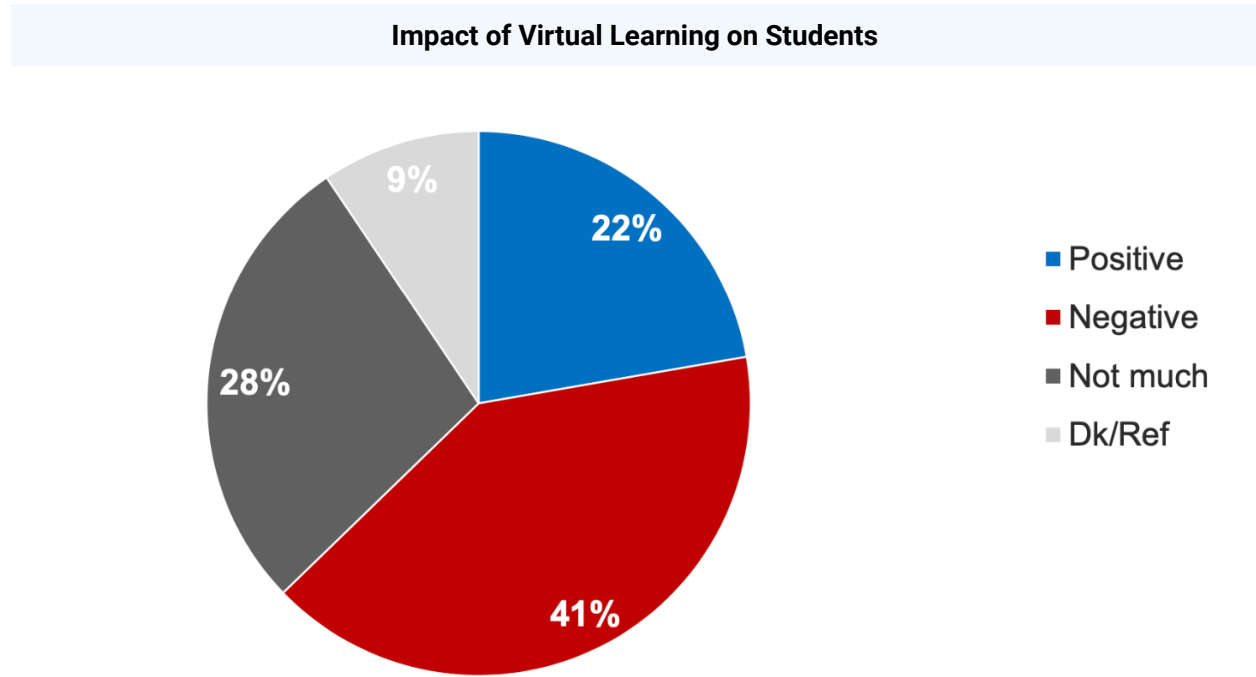


Figure 3 illustrates a difference between public school parents and charter school parents when it comes to the perception of school teachers in New York City. The perceptions of charter school parents with regard to public school teachers is a common perception amongst many proponents of school choice and school vouchers.

Figure 4 shows the impact of virtual learning on students. These responses corroborate what has been said by many, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, and even today: remote (virtual) learning poses numerous challenges for Black students, especially those who lack access to technology in their homes.

Figure 4

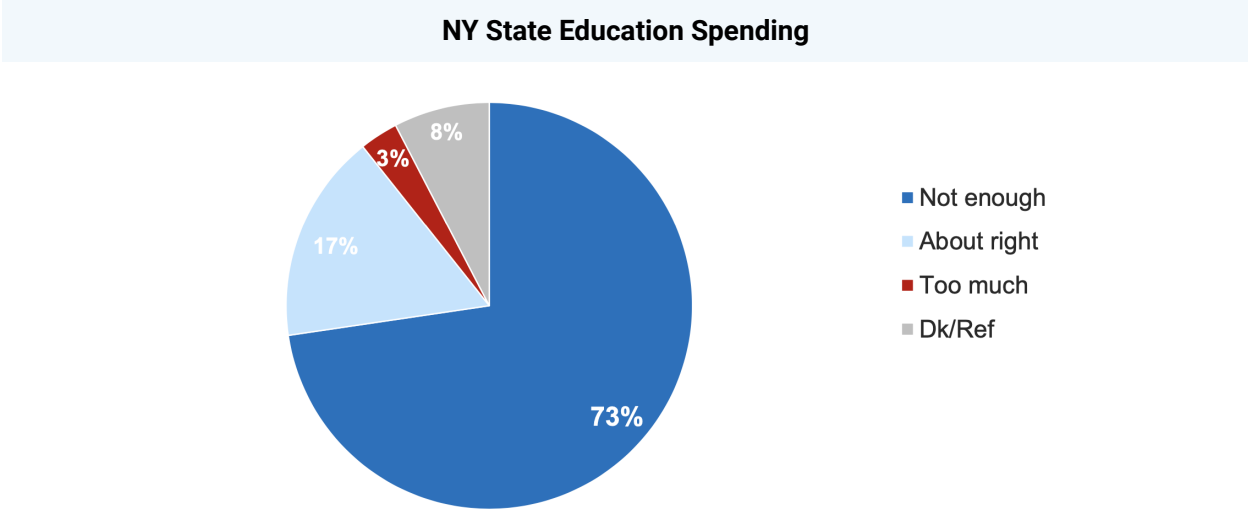


The negative impact of virtual learning on students represented in Figure 4 illustrates what we learned from a teacher in New York City, who shared reflections on the impacts of virtual learning during the pandemic. They suggested that there is a lot of stress on students, and even more stress when you have to stay at home. They shared that the majority of their students wanted to go back to school because they missed the contact with their friends and said they were not learning as much staying at home. According to the teacher, with virtual learning, you cannot account for student learning as you would in a classroom because of a lack of human interaction.

**41%**  
of survey respondents  
see virtual learning as  
having a negative impact  
on students.

Figure 5 looks at the question of spending. When asked if New York State is spending enough on education, there was a broad consensus among Black voters in NYC that it is not.

Figure 5



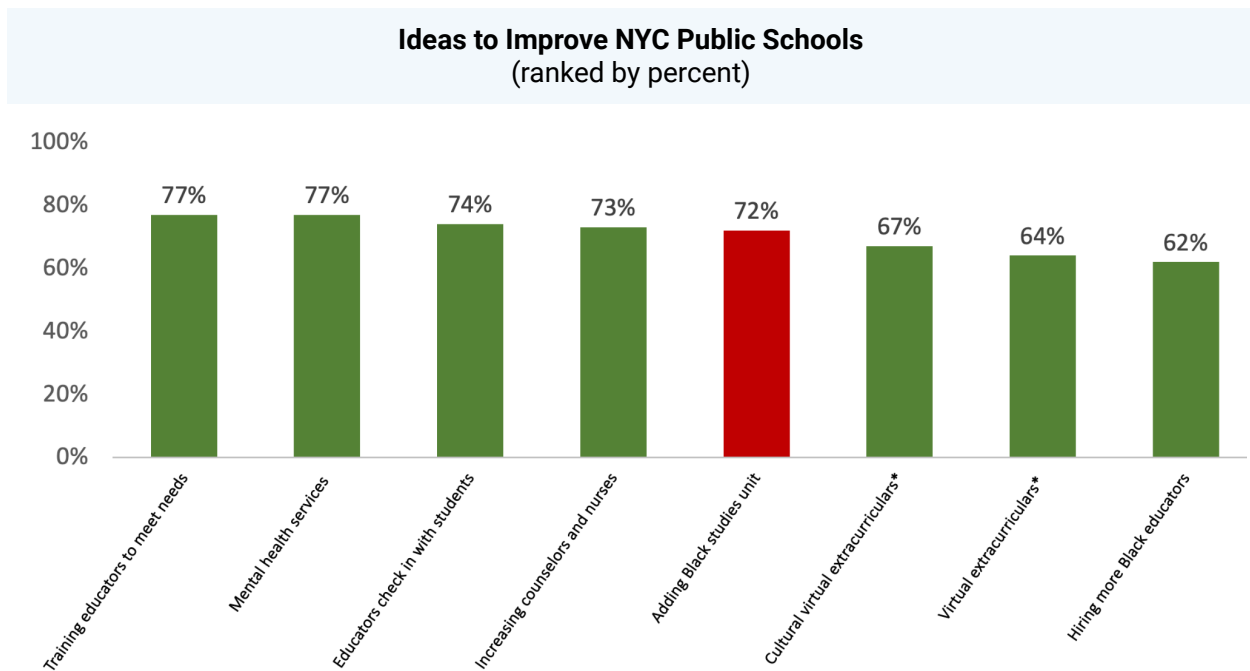
Survey respondents were asked to provide answers to additional considerations of the education landscape in NYC, including: (a) School priorities; (b) Critical Race Theory (CRT), Race and History; and, (c) the new Black Studies Curriculum (BSC).

### School Priorities

Survey respondents were asked to rank their ideas about school priorities on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being extremely important. The majority of respondents indicated that adding Black studies to the existing curriculum was a top priority for improving NYC public schools. Other priorities included increasing teacher pay, increasing culturally responsive mental health services, improving school buildings with up to date resources, and reducing class sizes (See Figure 6).

**72%**  
of survey respondents  
indicated support for Black  
Studies Curriculum.

**Figure 6**



\***Cultural virtual extracurriculars** means expanding virtual extracurricular enrichment opportunities for students to learn more about cultural subjects like Black history outside of the classroom.

\***Virtual extracurriculars** is meant in the general sense, expanding virtual extracurricular enrichment opportunities for students to learn more about various subjects outside of the classroom.

This overwhelming support reflects and corroborates what we have learned in talking with people throughout NYC, which is that a Black Studies Curriculum is an important form of culturally responsive education that is currently lacking in NYC schools.

The next series of questions respondents were asked to reflect on relate to Critical Race Theory (CRT).



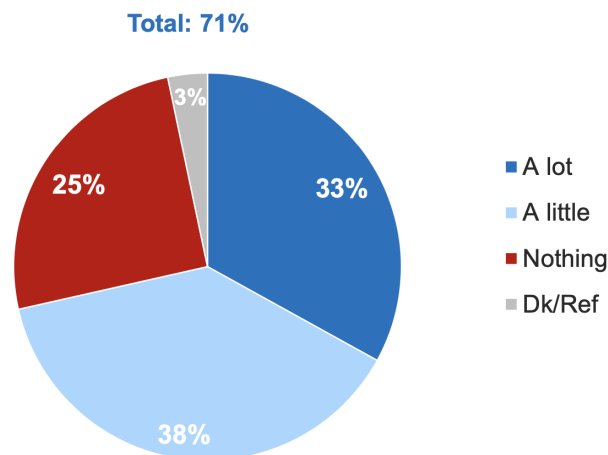
Photo by Gordon Parks. Airline Terminal, Atlanta, Georgia, 1956 (Source: Gordon Parks Foundation)

## Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Teaching “Race”

Survey respondents were asked about their knowledge of Critical Race Theory (CRT) – whether they had seen, heard, or read about it. Over a third of respondents indicated they were aware of CRT (See Figure 7). They were then asked if they had a favorable or unfavorable impression of CRT. Among those who were aware of CRT, a majority responded that they had a favorable impression of CRT (See Figure 8). Even among non-college voters and those who said that the role of history is to celebrate the past instead of to question the past, a majority were favorable towards CRT.

Figure 7

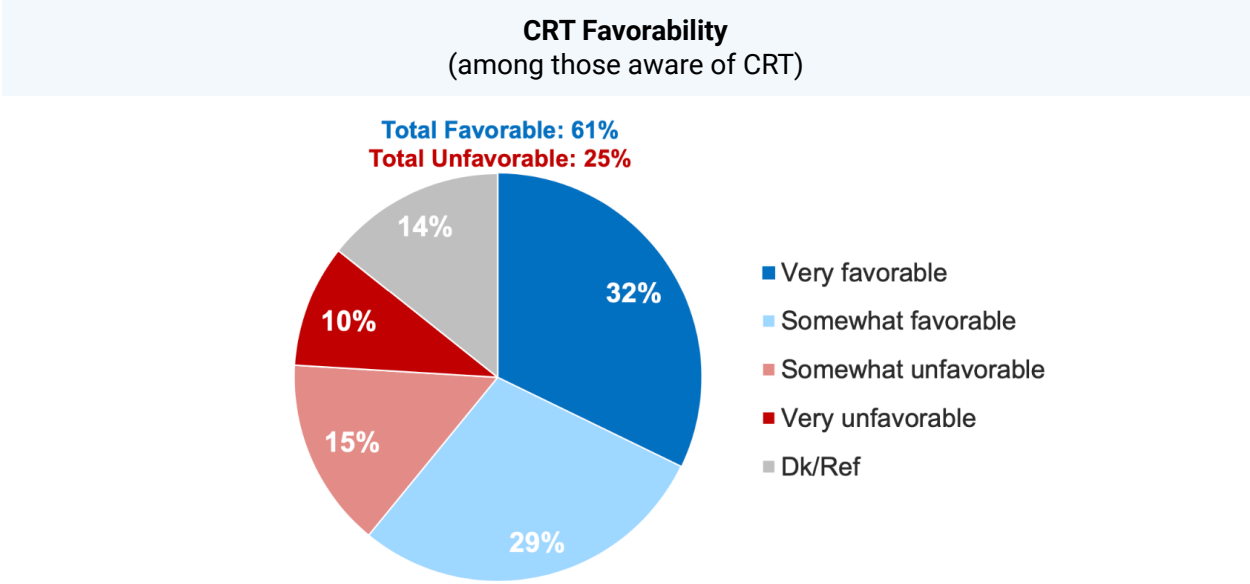
### Seen, Heard, or Read about CRT



On the issue of whether CRT should be taught in public schools, survey respondents were either supportive or undecided. However, among those who were aware of CRT, respondents were more supportive of including CRT in the school curriculum (See Figure 9).

In total, 71% of respondents indicated that they had seen, heard or read about CRT. This includes those who said they knew a lot about CRT (33%) and those who said they knew a little about CRT (38%). As reflected in Figure 8, among those who indicated that they had seen, heard or read about CRT, the majority responded favorably to CRT in general, suggesting its importance as a subject to be taught in schools.

**Figure 8**



Those who were most likely to feel very favorable towards CRT were college graduates and public school parents, while those who were most likely to feel unfavorable towards CRT were charter school parents and those with a high school education or less.

As Table 2 shows, at 55%, even among non-college voters and those who said that history’s role is to celebrate the past instead of to question it (51%), a majority indicated that they were favorable towards CRT, further suggesting its importance in schools.

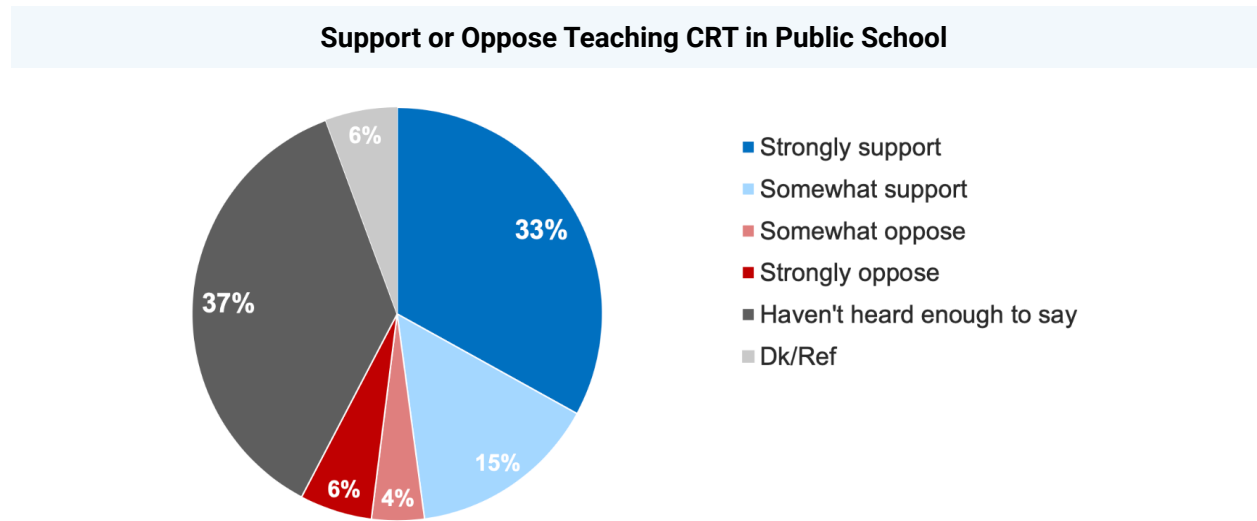
**Table 2**  
Critical Race Theory (CRT) Favorability

	Total	Parents	<50 women	Non-college	College	Celebrate	Question	Schools Positive	Schools Negative
Total Favorable	61%	61%	62%	55%	72%	51%	67%	66%	60%
Total Unfavorable	25%	27%	25%	29%	18%	32%	21%	17%	25%
Very Favorable	32%	36%	32%	27%	42%	18%	41%	41%	34%
Somewhat Favorable	29%	26%	30%	29%	30%	33%	26%	25%	26%
Somewhat Unfavorable	15%	15%	16%	18%	12%	20%	13%	9%	11%
Very Unfavorable	10%	12%	9%	12%	6%	13%	8%	7%	14%
Don't Know/Refused	14%	12%	13%	15%	10%	17%	12%	17%	15%

Among those respondents who had recently heard, seen, and/or read about CRT, they were even more supportive of CRT, suggesting that it should be taught in schools. Figure 9 shows the answers respondents provided to the question of whether CRT should be included in the school curriculum. On this issue, as Figure 9 shows, respondents indicated that they were either supportive or undecided.



**Figure 9**



Total support among respondents for including CRT in the curriculum indicates a percentage of 48%, which includes those who expressed strong support at 33% and those who were somewhat supportive at 15%. It is also important to note the total percentage of respondents who indicated that they were undecided (43%).

Building on questions related to CRT, Figure 10 shows the percentage of answers given by respondents to the question of how important it is for public school students to learn about white supremacy and racism, and its impacts in the United States?

Figure 10

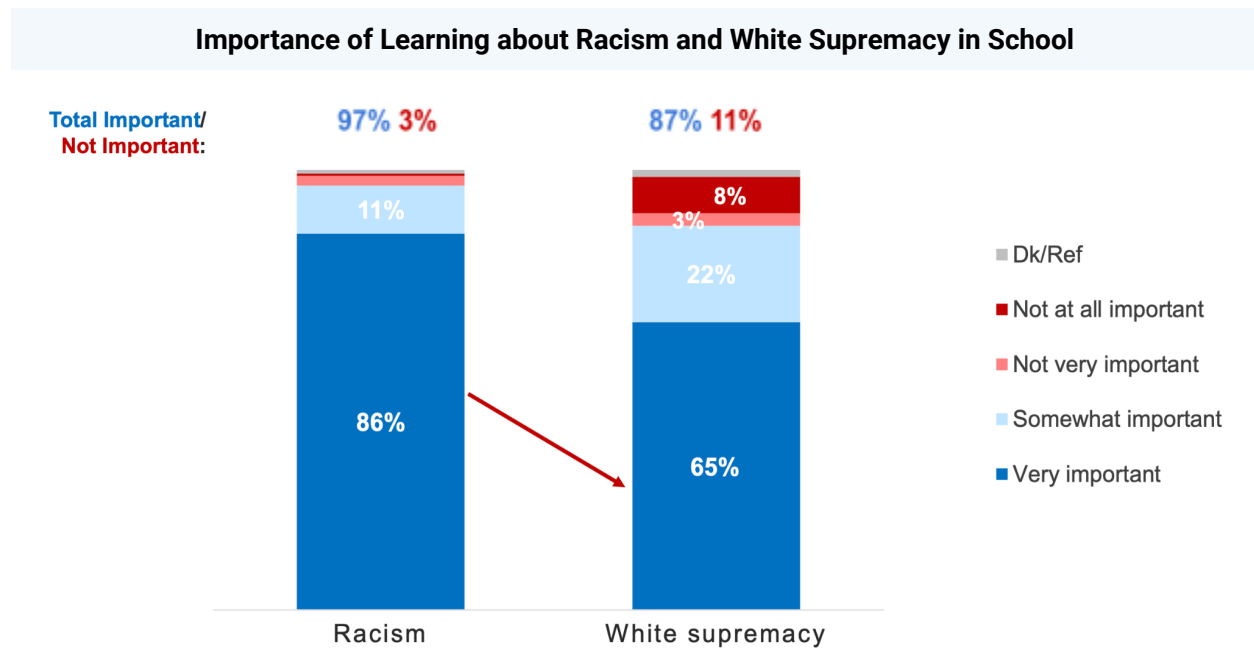


Figure 10 shows that both racism and white supremacy were seen as important subjects for public school students to learn. Interestingly, survey data shows that, at 97%, more respondents felt stronger about racism being taught in schools than those who felt it was important for students to learn about white supremacy (87%). The difference, while not overwhelming, does cause one to question what exactly accounts for the difference. Interestingly, teaching about white supremacy was found to be more controversial among younger women, non-college voters, and those who said that the role of history is to celebrate the past.

The next set of figures look at the opinions of respondents with regard to including a Black Studies Curriculum (BSC) in New York City public schools.

**97%**

of survey respondents felt it was important to teach about racism.

**87%**

of survey respondents felt it was important to teach about White Supremacy.



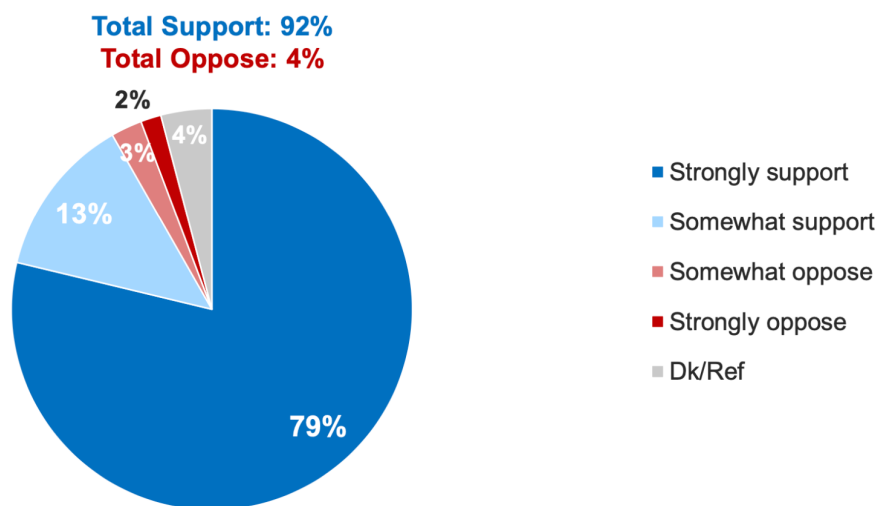
Curriculum writers at Teachers College, Columbia University on May 7, 2022

## The Black Studies Curriculum: An Educational Necessity

Survey respondents provided insights about a landmark new initiative to develop an interdisciplinary PK-12 Black Studies Curriculum for New York City public schools. Figure 11 shows that at 92%, there is enthusiastic and overwhelming support for adding a Black Studies Curriculum in schools.

Figure 11

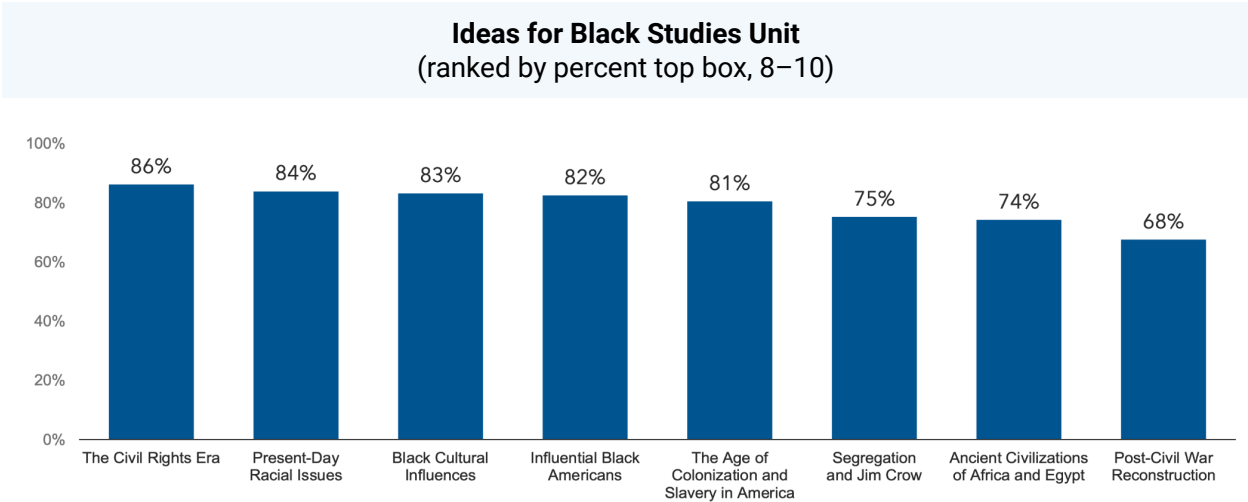
### Support or Oppose Adding the Black Studies Unit



It is important to note that the 92% of respondents who expressed support for a Black Studies Curriculum includes the opinions of those who initially stated that they were unaware of NYC’s newly approved Black Studies Curriculum. This suggests a sense of excitement among respondents about the possibilities of what a Black Studies Curriculum might mean to NYC public schools in terms of new course content and methods of instruction.

Figure 12 illustrates the topics that should be covered in a Black Studies Curriculum, ranked in order of importance among respondents. Notably, the Civil Rights Era was seen as more important to teach than any other historical period. Among college educated respondents and those who expressed that the role of history is to question the past rather than to celebrate it, they were more likely to rate the period of Reconstruction as an important topic to teach in a Black Studies Curriculum.

**Figure 12**



While Figure 12 shows that the Civil Rights Era was seen as more important to teach than any other historical period, among college educated respondents and those who expressed that the role of history is to question the past rather than to celebrate it, they were more likely to rate the period of Reconstruction as an important topic to teach in a Black Studies Curriculum.

# Chancellor's Day Freedom Dreams: Juneteenth-Inspired Professional Learning for NYC Educators



BERC team members at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture for Chancellor's Day on June 9, 2022.

## Key Takeaways & Conclusion

Overall, feedback from the survey was positive. There was little resistance to the Black Studies Curriculum and it was seen as imperative to meeting Black students' needs in schools. Respondents who had positive experiences with schools thought public school teachers were doing a good job. However, many respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of public schools overall and indicated that there has been minimal progress over the years. Generally speaking, respondents were not against Critical Race Theory (CRT). Those who were uninformed (25%) or knew little (38%) about CRT did not completely oppose it. The survey also disproves a common misconception that Black voters are a monolith.

Future research should include asking Black community members, parents and educators about factors they believe contributed to a negative virtual learning experience for students. Testing, assessment, equity and integration were not indicated as top priorities, even though historically, these have been considered measures of school quality. School quality also needs to be defined with and by the Black community and grounded in African-centered ways of knowing.

This survey underscores what participants from the report, *Black Education in the Wake of COVID-19 & Systemic Racism*<sup>3</sup> shared about schools being equipped to meet the physical, mental, and social needs of Black students, families, and communities. It is now time for policymakers to listen and take action.

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<sup>3</sup> Horsford, S. D., Cabral, L., Touloukian, C., Parks, S., Smith, P. A., McGhee, C., Qadir, F., Lester, D., & Jacobs, J. (2021). *Black education in the wake of COVID-19 and systemic racism: Toward a theory of change and action*. Black Education Research Collective. Teachers College, Columbia University. <https://bit.ly/3LAqg6c>

# Methodology

A survey of 705 Black (African-American) registered voters in New York City was conducted by phone, using professional interviewers starting on January 23rd and ending on January 26th, 2022 during the transition time prior to the beginning of the new chancellor of New York City public schools administration. The survey's sample was drawn randomly from the voter file and geographically stratified for proportional representation. Survey respondents are represented in the table below.

**Table 3**  
Key Groups Represented as Survey Respondents

Breakout	% of Total	Definition
Parents	35%	Black NYC voters with children 18 or younger
<50 women	28%	Black NYC women voters under the age of 50
Non-coll	63%	Black NYC voters with less than a 4-year college degree
College	35%	Black NYC voters with a 4-year college degree
Celebrate	30%	Black NYC voters who say history should celebrate our nation's past
Question	47%	Black NYC voters who say history should question our nation's past
Schools pos	36%	Black NYC voters who say public schools in their neighborhood are good or excellent
Schools neg	52%	Black NYC voters who say public schools in their neighborhood are just fair or poor



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