

Racial Disparities in High-Stakes Assessments in California Teacher Education: Analysis of 2018-2023 Data on edTPA, CalTPA, and RICA

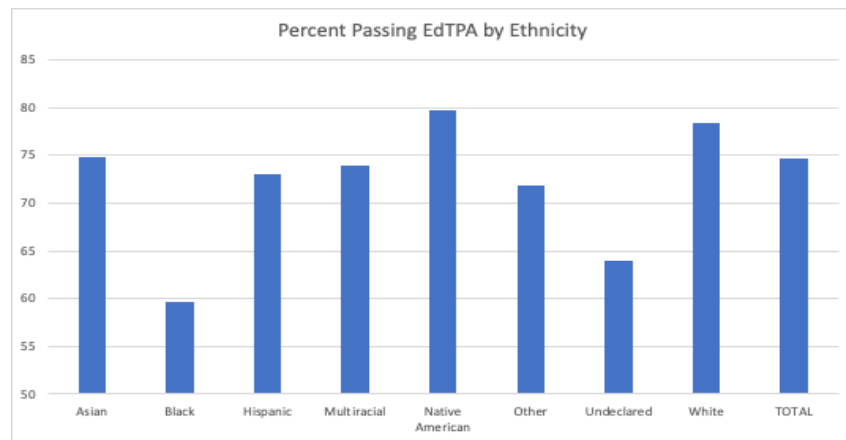
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In 2019, the California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education (CARE-ED) examined barriers to diversity in the California teacher pipeline in its Research Brief #3 (<https://www.care-ed.org>), of which one of the most significant of barriers noted was high-stakes assessments in teacher preparation. Our study examines the most recent data (from 2018-2023) from across the state of California on three such high-stakes assessments: two teacher performance assessments, or TPAs (the edTPA and the CalTPA), and the Reading Instruction Competency Assessment (RICA). As we describe below, the racial disparities are significant and undeniable. *Barriers like these that disproportionately block otherwise qualified candidates of color from becoming certified teachers must be eliminated if we are to diversify the California teacher pipeline.*

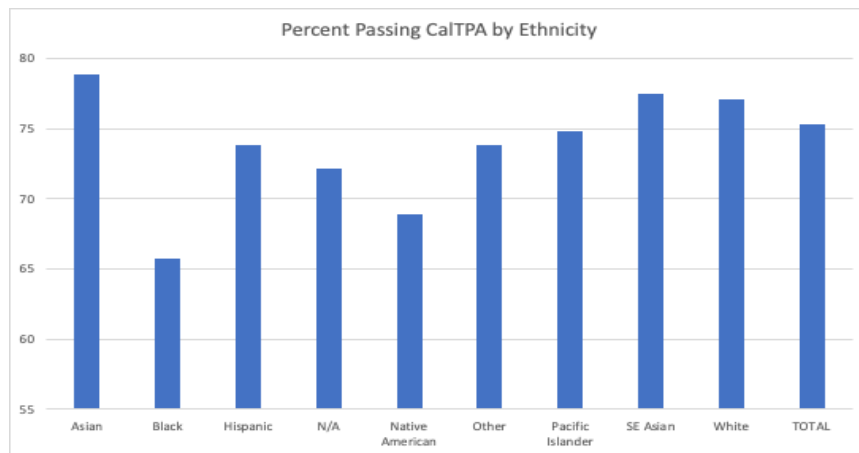
What is the history of the CalTPA, edTPA, and RICA? The mandated use of Teacher Performance Assessments has been part of California’s teacher-education landscape since the 1998 passage of Senate Bill 2042, which argued for a “professionalized” teacher force through the use of a standardized performance assessment for beginning teachers. Currently, California has approved CalTPA and edTPA (among others) as culminating assessments of prospective teachers. This emphasis on high-stakes testing reflected the trends of the time. Professionalization as an educator-led reform strategy coincided with the most dominant of reform strategies that has characterized K-12 and higher education policy nationwide for the past forty years, namely, standards-based reform and its prioritizing of high-stakes assessment. Students pursuing multiple-subject credentials must also take a literacy assessment called RICA, which was approved by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing on October 1, 1998. Our data analysis shows that these mandatory exams are hindering California from diversifying the teaching profession.

What did we find? We analyzed data provided by Pearson, the global educational publishing and services corporation that administers these assessments. The data included, for each test taker, self-reported demographic information (including Ethnicity), details about the teaching credential being sought, the candidate’s licensure program, and whether or not each candidate passed the performance assessments. We analyzed the passing rates of teacher candidates who took the edTPA (n = 24,253) and CalTPA (n = 74,999) between August 2018 and December 2023, as well as the RICA passing rates for the same years as provided in three data sets: for academic years 2018-2020 (n = 361,710), 2020-2022 (n = 499,432), and 2022-2023 (n = 732,298). For each group, we divided the number of passing attempts by the total number of attempts in order to calculate the overall pass rate as a percentage. Our analysis included individuals who took the test multiple times (i.e., we did not limit our analysis to first-time test takers only). For each assessment, we identified racial disparities when we disaggregated pass rates by Ethnicity.

A) For the edTPA, *the average pass rate of all candidates is 74.72%, while the average pass rate of Black candidates is 59.63%*. The highest pass rate was for Native Americans, but it should be noted that the number of Native Americans test-takers was so low as to make difficult any generalization of findings.

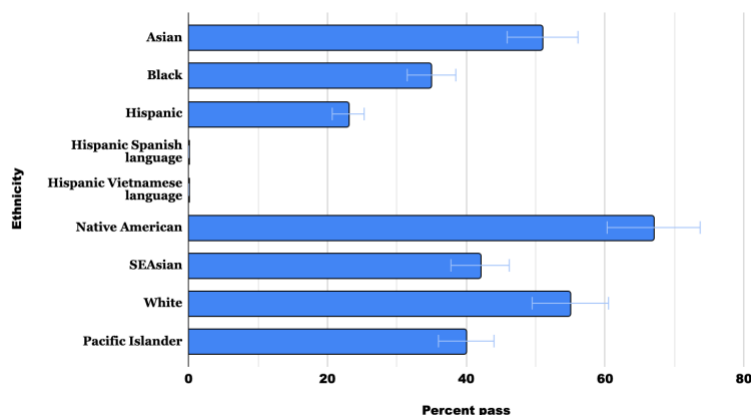


B) For the CalTPA, the average pass rate of Black test-takers was 66%, compared 77% for White test-takers. *Black pre-service teachers had the lowest pass rates in both edTPA and CalTPA.*

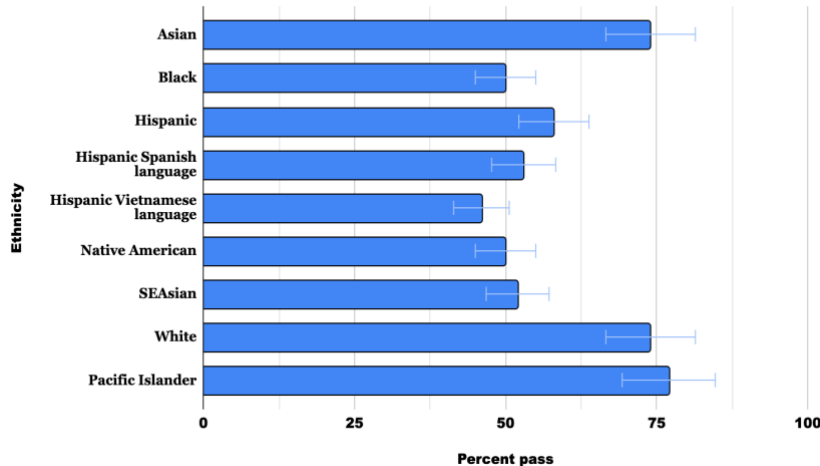


C) For the RICA, the data was provided in three time periods. As with the TPAs, some charts show unusual divergence for one or more groups (such in 2018-2020 when Hispanic-Spanish and Hispanic-Vietnamese recorded 0% and Native American had the highest rate; or 2020-2022 when Pacific Islanders had the highest) that are difficult to generalize due to the low number of test-takers. Overall, however, the trend is clear: *White and Asian (excepting Southeast Asian) test-takers tended to pass at statistically significantly higher rates than all other groups.*

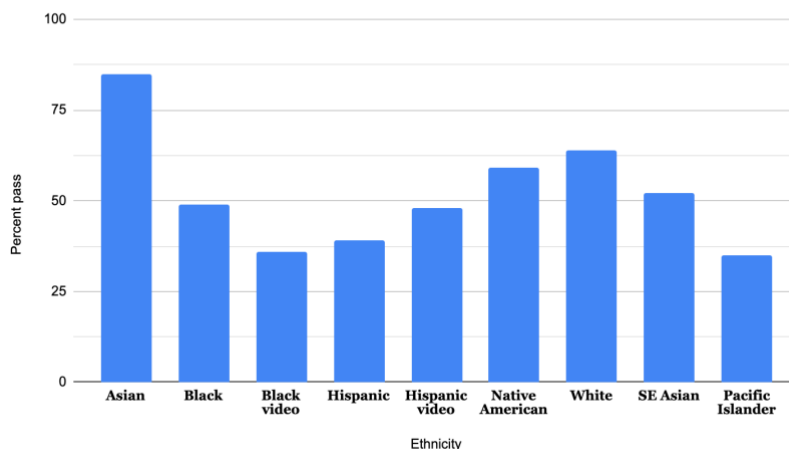
RICA pass rates by Ethnicity 2018-2020 (361,710 attempts)



RICA pass rates by Ethnicity 2020-22 (499,432 attempts)



RICA pass rates by Ethnicity 2022-23 (732,298 attempts)



All three high-stakes assessments are functioning as racialized gatekeepers that systematically and disproportionately block candidates of color—particularly Black, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian candidates—from certification.

What are more effective assessments? We already have them! California already has rigorous standards, called the Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs), and an accreditation process that evaluates whether candidates are meeting those standards. Teacher preparation programs infuse both the content and pedagogical practices contained in the TPEs into every course including an assessment or signature assignment aligned to the TPEs. Every five years, teacher education programs are subjected to an intense and thorough accreditation process. Therefore, there is no need for California to de-professionalize and de-legitimate educators by dictating how programs are to assess their candidates. California requires extensive assessments of candidates, which means that ending the TPA mandate does not mean that “anybody can become a teacher.” Candidates must complete a post-baccalaureate program of study, typically 2 years, including 600 hours of student teaching with observations by mentor teachers and university supervisors. Courses must document how they are covering the TPEs, and during student teaching candidates are evaluated at least 6 times regarding the TPEs. Once they get their preliminary credential and are working at a school, they need to demonstrate and document mastery of the TPEs. Professors, supervisors, mentor teachers, and mentors during induction are all involved in evaluating candidates regarding the TPEs.

Conclusion: High-stakes assessments in teacher education have clear racial disparity in outcomes. Eliminating such assessments is essential to increasing teacher diversity in California.