

# RESEARCH FINDINGS SUMMARY

Health outcomes for  
students of color in  
schools that  
emphasize diversity



## QUICK SUMMARY

This study focuses on how school environments, in terms of how much they value diversity, are related to students' health. We looked at school environments that emphasized diversity, based on what they expressed in their mission statements, versus those that did not and assessed the health of students attending these schools. We found that when schools emphasized values of diversity, students of color had better cardiovascular health.

## WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

The United States is becoming more and more diverse. At the same time, health disparities persist in many domains for people of color. Health disparities are the “preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations,”<sup>2</sup>

This research looks at the relationship between school environments and the cardiovascular health of underrepresented students of color, with a focus on diversity values.

## WHAT DID WE DO?

Data was analyzed from eighth grade students of various ethnicities (3.33% Asian, 24.07% Hispanic, 29.63% African American, 27.41% white, and 15.56% more than one race/ethnicity) attending 120 different schools in the greater Chicagoland area. Blood samples were collected from students, which were used to assess inflammation and cardiovascular health. We examined each school's mission statement as a reflection of their policies, attitudes, and values. These mission statements were coded by researchers as either emphasizing or not emphasizing diversity.

## WHAT DID WE FIND?

When schools emphasize the value of diversity, students of color have better cardiovascular health compared to students of color who attend schools that do not emphasize diversity. This includes having lower levels of inflammation, less insulin resistance, and fewer metabolic syndrome signs.

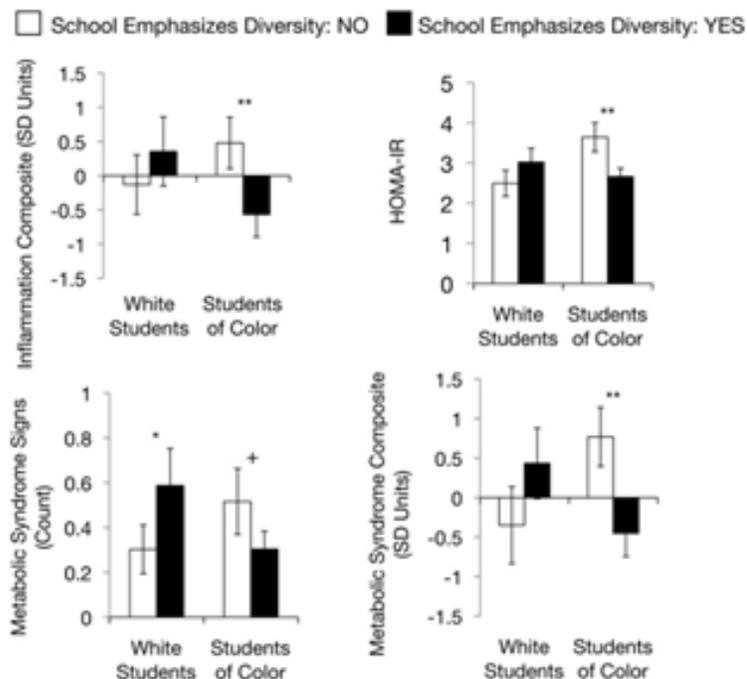


Fig. 1. Estimated marginal means of inflammation composite, insulin resistance, and metabolic syndrome outcomes among white students and students of color as a function of whether the school emphasizes diversity. Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  SE. \*\* $P \leq 0.01$ ; \* $P \leq 0.05$ ; + $P \leq 0.10$ .

## WHAT SHOULD YOU REMEMBER?

School environments may play a role in shaping the health of students. When schools emphasize diversity, students of color may feel more connected, welcomed, and valued, which in turn may have implications for their cardiovascular health

## **PUBLICATIONS**

1. Levine, C. S., Markus, H. R., Austin, M. K., Chen, E., & Miller, G. E. (2019). Students of color show health advantages when they attend schools that emphasize the value of diversity. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(13), 6013-6018. doi:10.1073/pnas.1812068116.  
<https://foundationsofhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/19-PNAS-diversity-mission-statements-student-health.pdf>.

## **ADDITIONAL SOURCES**

2. Disparities. (2020, September 14). Retrieved October 05, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/index.htm>

## **ABOUT THIS SUMMARY**

This summary was prepared by Sarah Davis on behalf of the Foundations of Health Research Center at Northwestern University. You can access all of our research for free at our website, [www.foundationsofhealth.org/publications](http://www.foundationsofhealth.org/publications).