

# “*Through My Eyes*” Research Project

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### What

This project challenges the way schools talk about progress. Policies like [No Child Left Behind](#) sound like support, but in practice, they often just move students along, whether they’re learning or not. A student might graduate without being able to read critically, express their thoughts clearly, or see themselves in the stories they’re given. Still, the system calls it a success.

**Through My Eyes** explores **Black literacy** as more than a score or reading level—it’s the ability to engage with language, identity, and culture in ways that reflect and affirm Black students’ lived experiences. In this context, Black literacy includes **oral tradition, dialect, music, spirituality, and community storytelling**—forms of communication and knowledge that schools often overlook, but that hold power and truth.

This research examines the gap between what schools measure and what truly matters. It’s about how reading is taught, who gets labeled, and how education either builds a student’s voice or tries to silence it. If schools want to support fundamental literacy, they have to recognize the culture, creativity, and confidence that make it whole.

### Problem

The issue isn’t just whether a child can read—it’s how they’re being taught or overlooked. It’s less about individual struggle and more about gaps in support, tech overuse, and emotional strain. Research from [Brookings \(2021\)](#) and the [UCLA Civil Rights Project \(2020\)](#) shows that pandemic-era digital learning hit low-income and Black students hardest—reducing them to data points instead of treating them as whole learners.

This research looks at how schools misread Black literacy, especially in the post-COVID era—where screens replaced teachers, books became optional, and focus became something to punish. Instead of just asking *what went wrong*, we ask: **what needs to be built in its place?**

We aim to expose:

- How schools punish instead of support
- How bias, funding gaps, and testing criminalize difference
- And what real healing could look like—in practice, in policy, and in people

# Refined & Purpose-Driven Key Research Questions

## **EARLY LITERACY AND LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (QUESTIONARE):**

What do you do when you don't understand something you're reading in class? Who do you go to? Who helps, and who doesn't?

Outside of school, where do you *actually* read or learn? What's something you've read, heard, or seen that really taught you something—whether school counts it or not?

Have you ever seen someone treated like they weren't smart because of how they read or spoke? What happened—and how did it make you feel about yourself?

## **EARLY LITERACY AND LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (OBERVATION):**

How are reading difficulties in Black students misunderstood or punished, instead of being supported?

What happens to Black students' confidence and engagement in school when they're told they "can't read" early on?

How do different Black communities (urban vs. suburban, coastal vs. inland) experience reading support and challenges differently?

How often do students receive one-on-one help during reading blocks, and who provides that support—peer, teacher, or tech?

What role do families, schools, and community groups play in helping—or failing to help—Black students learn to read?

# Afrofuturism and Community Grounding

This project grows from the belief that the future of Black education must be imagined by us, for us. Afrofuturism is how I see what's possible—it's the lens through which I question what's broken and envision what should exist instead. In this work, Afrofuturism means valuing the culture, creativity, and spirit Black students already bring with them.

Community dialogue and firsthand perspectives have played a key role in shaping this research:

- Mothers in the Pomona Unified School District
- Fathers in the Fontana Unified School District
- (Soon Scheduled Meetings) Leaders from a grassroots education program in Downtown Pomona

**\*\*Community dialogue revealed gaps in how the work was being measured, prompting a shift in the research framework to reflect lived experiences better. \*\***

General Resources I found:

[Black Girls Smile](#)

Research Resources:

[Ruha Benjamin on AI and the Freedom Struggle](#)

[The Black Curriculum](#)

THROUGH MY EYES: WHAT WE MEASURE VS.  
WHAT MATTERS

INSPIRING WORDS TO LIVE BY

THE MORE  
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JUSTICE SPEAKS

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# Through My Eyes: *Reading vs. Literacy*



THIS PROJECT EXAMINES HOW SCHOOLS MEASURE READING BUT FAIL TO GROW LITERACY—THE ABILITY TO THINK, EXPRESS, AND SEE YOURSELF IN WHAT YOU LEARN.



## What this project examines

- **Culture as literacy:** oral storytelling, dialect, music, and community language practices.
- **Post-COVID** habits: device-read text, fewer books, shorter stamina.
- **Support vs. sanction:** how misunderstanding reading difficulty reduces confidence and participation.

## Guiding Questions

### 1. Students — in-class, personal



- When someone/ a video reads aloud for you, does it make next-day paper reading easier or harder?
- Which type of content do you remember most: short facts/how-to, stories, or something else?

### 2. Parents/Caregivers — observational



- When your child reads at home, what do you notice first (settled / fidgety / asks to be read to)?
- Since COVID, how have reading logs or habits changed at home?

Teachers — system improvement



## Methods & Sample

- Instruments: Student questionnaire (10 items + 3 open), class observation log, family dialogue prompts.
- Where: 4 Pomona schools (2 under-resourced, 2 higher-resourced).
- Who: ~32 students, 6–8 teachers, ~20 parents/caregivers.
- When: 2–3 weeks; aggregate notes only.

## Combined Findings — Classroom, Conditions, What Helped

- Wide gaps. Some upper-grade students read at early-grade levels, most common in under-resourced schools with more pull-outs interrupting reading time.
- Different patterns in better-resourced schools. Fewer below-grade readers overall; when present, common threads were low interest and limited at-home time (parents working long hours). Some students still saw school as an outlet.
- What sticks. Students most often remembered short factual/how-to items, especially social-media facts and quick demonstrations.
- Parents' view. Many described “pass-through” teaching (materials handed off), more reliance on screens reading for students, and weaker reading-log habits since COVID.

- When readers are below grade, which support is available in the room (model sentence, partner explain, sentence starters)?
- What do students remember most from your class: short factual/how-to items, demos, or longer readings?

## Claim for expansion

*In under-resourced schools, the lack of a steady daily reading block means loss of focus is handled by removal—most often to the dean's office or a special education room; some students instead zone out and find another room to stay in. When assigned texts don't match student interest, the response leans toward control (pull-outs, strict pacing) instead of relevance, which cuts time on paper reading and lowers engagement.*

Which can lead to, outside of school:

- Weaker independent reading habit and missed credits
- More reliance on short-form/social-media info instead of deep reading
- Schedule drift (late/absent) and more time in unsupervised spaces
- Avoidable security/police contact in the community



# The Power to Understand, *The Skill to Respond*

Reading lets us hear the world’s many voices; literacy is how we respond with understanding and purpose.

When schools reduce literacy to test scores, they leave people unprepared for real-life challenges. Without the ability to read critically, navigate documents, or understand legal language, individuals are vulnerable to unfair policing and predatory legal practices.

## Tool-Kit

### Applied Literacy Protects People



Based on conversations with Puente organizers, this panel reflects issues they’re seeing now—language access gaps, confusing notices, family separation, and predatory fees.

#### How we know:

Method: short field conversations + document review; Scope: AZ community issues; Limit: not exhaustive; Last updated: Aug 2025.

Hands-on practice > abstract lessons. This is why the panel uses scripts, checklists, and scenarios instead of paragraphs

### Common Situations



#### At the door (ICE/Police)

- Don’t open; request judge-signed warrant through door/window.
- You can remain silent; ask for a lawyer.

#### Police stop

- Ask if you’re free to leave; if not, stay silent; don’t consent to searches.
- Note officer names/badge #.

#### Detained family member

- Gather full legal name, A#/booking #, last location; call clinic/legal aid.
- Share childcare plan; keep a communication log.



#### Lawyer & fees

- Check Bar #; written retainer required; keep receipts.
- Get a second opinion if pressured.

#### Resource pouch

- ID • case # • notices • receipts • contacts • meds list

(General information, not legal advice.)

No personal case details are collected or displayed.

Why it matters: fewer traps, stronger cases, safer families.