**State Settlement Shines Light on Civil Rights Protections for Black Students**

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A state civil rights investigation into Yuba City Unified School District (YCUSD) has resulted in a settlement requiring districtwide corrective actions after allegations that a Black elementary school student was subjected to repeated racial harassment over multiple school years.

[**The settlement**](https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2026/01/Yuba-Settlement2_Redacted.pdf)**,** announced by the California Civil Rights Department (CRD), stems from a 2024 complaint filed by the Black student’s family under the [**Ralph Civil Rights Act**](https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2017/12/Ralph-Fact-Sheet_ENG.pdf)**.**

According to CRD, the alleged misconduct included incidents over multiple school years in which students used racial slurs while repeatedly kicking, slapping, or taunting the student. The complaint also alleged that a teacher pulled the student’s hair and used disparaging comments. CRD said the family raised concerns with school administrators multiple times, but the conduct allegedly continued.

The Yuba City Unified settlement highlights how existing civil rights laws can be used to protect Black students from racial harassment in all California schools -- particularly in districts where they represent a very small share of the overall student population. In Yuba City Unified, Black students account for 183 of the district’s 12,176 students, or roughly 1.5 percent of enrollment.

According to [**statewide survey data**](https://calschls.org/reports-data/query-calschls/?ind=2) from the California Healthy Kids Survey, which is administered by the California Department of Education to assess school climate and safety, a substantial share of students report being bullied or harassed at school, with measurable differences by race and ethnicity available through the survey data system.

State officials said the settlement is intended to address both the harm alleged by the family and concerns about school culture, staff response, and accountability. The agreement was reached through mediation and does not include an admission of wrongdoing by the district. The settlement was secured by Senior Staff Counsel Shilpa Ram and mediated by Senior Attorney Mediator Yu-Yee Wu, according to CRD.

“Every single student has the right to feel safe at school,” said CRD Director Kevin Kish. “Teachers, administrators, and other school staff are responsible for helping make that happen. There is no place in our schools for anti-Black harassment or discrimination. I applaud our team at the Civil Rights Department for ensuring the Yuba City Unified School District takes action to protect the civil rights of its students.”

The YCUSD settlement is notable because it involves the Ralph Civil Rights Act; a law CRD more commonly applies to cases involving hate violence in public spaces and only rarely in K–12 schools. By contrast, other school districts in California -- including Los Angeles Unified, Antelope Valley Union High School District, Elk Grove Unified, and Santa Monica–Malibu Unified -- have faced state or federal intervention over racial harassment affecting Black students under different legal authorities, such as [Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964](https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/civil-rights-laws/race-color-and-national-origin-discrimination/education-and-title-vi#:~:text=Title%20VI%20of%20the%20Civil%20Rights%20Act%20of%201964%20prohibits,that%20receive%20federal%20financial%20assistance.) or state education oversight provisions. The Ralph Act applies fully in schools when allegations involve race-based threats or violence.

Advocates for Black children say the Yuba City case reflects deeper, long-standing failures in how school systems respond when Black students report harm.

Jerry L. Green, from the Student Advocacy Network Institute (SANI) who works with families nationwide, said such cases often reveal institutional instincts to protect systems rather than students. “This is a failure in the whole system,” Green said. “When a student is assaulted on a school site and no one calls police or child protective services, that tells you the system is protecting itself instead of the child.”

Under the settlement, YCUSD is required to implement a series of actions aimed at preventing future incidents and improving how concerns are handled. These measures include mandatory training for teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals on harassment and discrimination policies; written guidance clarifying reporting procedures; climate and culture surveys at the affected schools; family education meetings; and age-appropriate counseling and small-group discussions focused on safety and inclusion.

The settlement also includes $30,000 in compensation to the family who filed the complaint.

The agreement does not appoint an independent monitor to oversee compliance, leaving implementation to the district, with CRD retaining authority to step in if the agreement’s terms are not met.

In a response to California Black Media, Superintendent Doreen Osumi said the settlement allows the district to move forward while continuing efforts to strengthen school systems.

“While the settlement does not include findings of wrongdoing by the district, we are steadfast in our responsibility to continue strengthening our systems, so every student feels safe, supported, and respected at school,” Osumi said. She added that the district has taken steps to reinforce expectations for student behavior, improve staff training at identified school sites, and monitor progress through school climate indicators, staff training participation, and feedback from administrators and families.

The YCUSD settlement follows a widely reported racial 2022 incident in the district in which a video circulated showing high school football players participating in [a mock slave auction](https://sacobserver.com/2022/10/naacp-call-for-more-data-collection-high-school-students-taught-a-lesson-for-holding-mock-slave-auction/) involving Black classmates -- an episode that drew statewide and national attention and led to disciplinary action and public apologies by the students involved.

Lorreen Pryor, CEO and president of the Black Youth Leadership Project, said cases like these underscore what is at stake for Black children and their families when schools fail to act decisively. “For so long, our children have been left unprotected in educational settings,” Pryor said. “When complaints are raised and nothing changes, families become frustrated and exhausted, and children are left to just tough it out. Kids should not have to survive their childhood.”