About the Council

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 67 of the nation's largest urban school systems. Its Board of Directors is composed of the Superintendent of Schools and one School Board member from each member city. An Executive Committee of 24 individuals, equally divided in number between Superintendents and School Board members, provides oversight of the 501 (c)(3) organization in between Board meetings. The mission of the Council is to advocate for and to assist in the improvement of public education in the nation's major cities. To meet that mission, the Council provides services to its members in the areas of legislation, research, communications, curriculum and instruction, and management. The group convenes two major conferences each year on promising practices in urban education; conducts studies on urban school conditions and trends; and operates ongoing networks of senior communications, curriculum, research, technology, and other staff groups. The Council was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, and has its headquarters in Washington, DC.

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A Call for Change: Providing Solutions for Black Male Achievement

December 2012

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Introduction

In October 2010, the Council of the Great City Schools released a major report on the academic status of African American males, *A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*. The report was the first phase of the Council's efforts to recommit the energies of the nation's urban public school systems to improving the quality of education for African American males nationwide. The report, along with efforts by other groups and individuals, was instrumental in calling attention to this issue.

In the second phase of the Council's work, we commissioned a series of solution briefs from some of the nation's leading scholars and experts to help us think through an effective set of strategies to address the academic needs of African American males. This e-book is a compilation of those papers. The solutions outlined in each paper focus on both educational and noneducational strategies, such as expectations and self-esteem, early-childhood programs, college and career readiness, gifted and talented education, mathematics instruction, English language arts instruction, partnerships and mentoring, successful learning communities, out-of-school-time learning, health and safety, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

We do not claim that these solutions are exhaustive or that there are no other issues to be identified and addressed. Still, this compilation is a good beginning, and if taken seriously could move urban public education a long way toward improving the quality of life for these young men. We believe that the papers are thought provoking and constructive, and will guide the initiatives of urban schools going forward.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to each of the authors for their expertise, time, and commitment. And we thank Houghton Mifflin Harcourt for its support and generosity in publishing this work. We hope you find this volume helpful.

Thank you.

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

Responding to the Challenges Confronting Black and Latino Males: The Role of Public Policy in Countering the "Crisis" and Promoting Success

Pedro A. Noguera

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The Vulnerability of Black and Latino Males

The killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager who was shot by a neighborhood-watch coordinator in a gated community in Florida in February 2012, may have accomplished something that numerous policy reports and research studies have failed to achieve: drawing the public's attention in a sustained manner to the precarious plight of African American males. There is of course tremendous irony here. Although Martin's admitted killer was eventually arrested and charged, in the summer of 2012 it remained to be seen what would happen when the case is fully investigated and brought to trial. Like Emmett Till, the Black teenager murdered by a mob in Mississippi in 1955 for the crime of looking at a White woman, Trayvon Martin has become a symbol, not because of the hoodie he was wearing the night he died, but because he is representative of a class of people whose status in American society is noteworthy for its vulnerability.

The vulnerability of Black males is particularly evident in education. On all of the indicators of academic achievement, educational attainment, and school success, African American males are distinguished from other segments of the American population by their consistent clustering in categories associated with failure (Schott Foundation 2010). In most schools and districts throughout the United States, African American and, in many cases, Latino males are overrepresented in educational categories typically associated with failure and subpar academic performance. Similarly, on those indicators that are associated with success—enrollment in honors or gifted classes, Advanced Placement courses, matriculation to college, and degree attainment—African American and Latino males are vastly underrepresented. With few exceptions, these dismal patterns are evident in urban, suburban, and rural school districts throughout the United States, even in communities with relatively small minority populations (Majors and Billson 1992). Nationally, African American and Latino males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school. (It is worth noting that Trayvon Martin was suspended at the time of his shooting. See Fergus and Noguera 2010, and Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera 2010 for a discussion of racial disparities and school suspensions.) They are also more likely to rank at the bottom on most indicators of academic performance in most subjects.
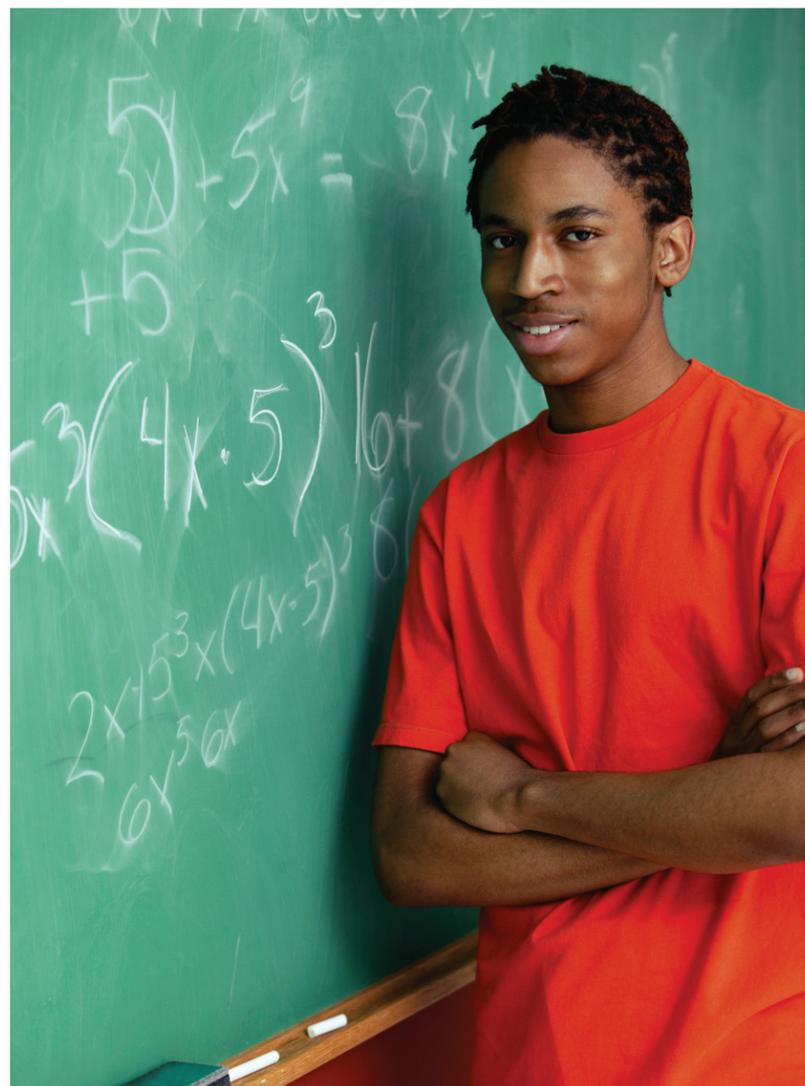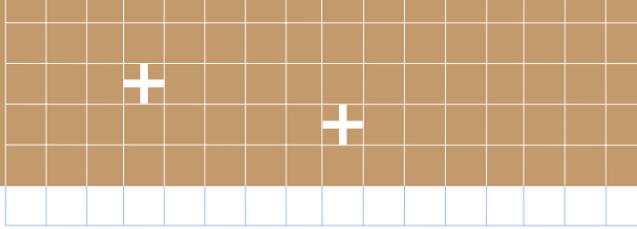
A decade after the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002, dropout rates for African American and Latino males remained well above 50 percent in most American cities. Sadly, this included cities such as New York, Austin, and Miami, where overall graduation rates were rising (Schott Foundation 2010; Fergus and Noguera 2010). In urban, suburban, and rural school districts throughout the country, African American males are more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or to be identified as suffering from a learning disability and placed in special education than any other student group. They are also more likely than other students to be placed in highly restrictive learning environments (Losen and Orfield 2002). Even class and gender privileges, which clearly seem to benefit their White counterparts, do not buffer Black middle-class males from educational hardships. Middle-class Black males consistently lag behind their peers on standardized tests (Jencks and Phillips 1998). Moreover, unlike their White male peers, African American males lag behind Black females in science and math, both with respect to grade point average and on standardized tests (Noguera 2008; Pollard 1993).

Results from a 2009–10 survey by the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights show that one in five Black boys and more than one in ten Black girls received an out-of-school suspension, compared with 9 percent of Hispanic boys and 4 percent of Hispanic girls, and 7 percent of White boys and 3 percent of White girls. Additionally, Black and Hispanic students represented more than 70 percent of those involved in school-related arrests or referrals to law enforcement (US Department of Education 2012). Similarly, a 2011 study on suspension patterns among ninth graders in the state of Texas revealed that 83 percent of African American males and 74 percent of Latino males were suspended at least once, and one in seven students was suspended at least *eleven times* (Council of State Governments 2011).

Although education is the primary focus of this policy series by the Council of the Great City Schools, it is important to recognize that the problems confronting Black males in the United States are not limited to education. As the Trayvon Martin case reminds us, Black males face a wide array of hardships in American society that add to their vulnerability. For many years, Black males have led the nation in homicides and violent assaults, both as victims and perpetrators (Skolnick and Currie 1994; Earls 1991). In what many observers regard as an alarming trend, they are now experiencing the fastest decline in life expectancy (Walsh 2012) and the highest growth rate for suicides (Poussaint and Alexander 2000, p. 22). For the last several years, Black males have been contracting HIV and AIDS at a faster rate than any other segment of the population (Centers for Disease Control 1988, p. 17), and their incarceration, conviction, and arrest rates have been at the top of the charts in most states for some time (Skolnick and Currie 1994, p. 416). They are vulnerable even as babies: Black males have the highest probability of dying in the first year of life (Auerbach, Krimgold, and Lefkowitz 2000). In the labor market, Black males generally have the highest unemployment rates. This is true during periods of prosperity and recession (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012). Typically, they are the least likely to be hired, and the most likely to experience longterm unemployment (Feagin and Sikes 1994, pp. 33–42).

The situation confronting Black males is particularly critical in the criminal justice system. As legal scholar Michelle Alexander has noted, since the 1970s the United States has pursued a policy of "mass incarceration." Imprisonment is occurring on a scale that is almost unparalleled in human history (Alexander 2010). As prison populations throughout the United States have increased dramatically over the last thirty years, overwhelmingly, Black men have borne the brunt of the drive to incarcerate. There are now more Black men ensnared by the criminal justice system—in prison, on probation, in county jails, or on parole—than any other racial or ethnic group, and more than all others combined. Of the more than six million persons across the United States held in prison, more than 50 percent are Black men, and in several states, the Black male incarceration rate is substantially higher (Alexander 2010).

Equally troubling is that prisons have literally become a growth industry, and with many prisons now managed by private firms, there are clear financial incentives to sustain mass incarceration. In 1980 there were approximately 220 people incarcerated for every 100,000 Americans. By 2010 the incarceration rate had more than tripled (Gopnik 2012). Today there are more than 700 prisoners for every 100,000 Americans. In almost all states, public funding for prisons has come at the expense of funding for health, transportation, and, most significantly, education. On average, state governments now spend six times as much on prisons as they do on higher education. In New York City, the hub of the prison system is on Rikers Island, located adjacent to LaGuardia Airport. With ten separate jails, a budget of $860 million a year, an inmate population of 14,000, and a staff of 8,500, Rikers Island is one of the largest penal institutions in the world. The overwhelming majority of those held on Rikers Island are Black and Latino males, and of that population, most are between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. An estimated 90 percent of the youth held at Rikers Island today will be rearrested by the time they are twenty-eight years old.

Given the dire situation confronting African American (and in many cases Latino) males in health, the criminal justice system, and the labor market, it would be a mistake to focus intervention efforts on education alone. Education is clearly an important arena for interventions because there is ample evidence that individuals with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to be employed, to earn higher salaries, to live longer, healthier lives, and to stay out of prison (Carnoy 1997). However, even as we focus on addressing the educational needs of African American males, we must recognize that factors that are external to schools, namely parental support, peer influences, housing, crime, and public health, also have an impact on the development and academic success of African American males. Hence, what is needed is an integrated and holistic policy approach that aims at erecting a safety net through a system of buffers and supports, a system that would make success for Black males more likely.

Elsewhere, I have written that although the problems confronting Black and Latino males are stunning in their magnitude and in their dire consequences, it would be a mistake to characterize them as a
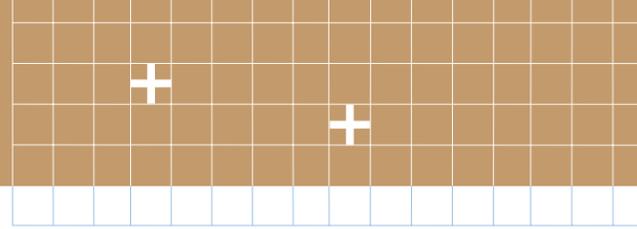
"crisis" (Noguera 2008). Indeed, if in fact these problems were recognized as a crisis, we would by now have witnessed an urgent and concerted response. After all, a crisis is by definition a temporary condition. The array of problems confronting Black and Latino males in American society is by no means temporary, and despite several policy reports issued by private foundations, governmental agencies, and community groups, there has in fact been no urgent response to these problems. Rather, throughout American society these patterns have become so common, widespread, and entrenched that a recitation of the dismal statistics no longer generates surprise or even alarm. The Black and Latino male problem has been normalized, and like other unpleasant social conditions—drug trafficking and addiction, homelessness, child abuse—there is a widespread sense that it will always be with us.

However, the killing of Trayvon Martin and the massive amount of media attention it generated may have created an opportunity and an opening for a more constructive approach to addressing the larger set of social and economic problems facing Black males. Perhaps Martin's death will compel us to realize that new policies must be formulated to respond to the challenges confronting vulnerable populations. The present approach, which could be characterized as reactive, narrow in scope, and too focused on symptoms rather than on the underlying systemic causes, is far too costly and ineffective to be sustained. It is with this hope that I offer the following recommendations.

Addressing the Needs of Black and Latino Males: Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations for restructuring social institutions and redesigning public policy are necessarily framed in general terms—in order to be effective, they would have to be modified to meet the needs of particular communities and regions. Despite their obvious limitations, these recommendations are offered in recognition that actions can be taken now to address the needs of Black and Latino men.

### Implement Educational Interventions Early, When Warning Signs Are Present

The longer the educational hardships experienced by Black and Latino boys are ignored, the more difficult it is to address them. In several states and school districts, policymakers have adopted measures to end "social promotion"; however, in most cases this amounts to little more than a requirement that students who do not meet grade-level expectations be required to repeat the grade. Rarely do such policies include a plan to diagnose the learning needs of students who have fallen behind or to provide access to high-quality interventions, such as Reading Recovery and other response to intervention (RTI) programs that have been shown to be effective (Slavin, Karweit, and Madden 1989). A substantial body of research has shown that over-age students are at substantial risk of dropping out of school (Gates Foundation 2006). Moreover, in states and school districts where grade-retention policies have been implemented, there are still large numbers of students enrolling in high school who lack basic literacy (Mimms, Stock, and Phinizy 2001).

Instead of merely requiring students to repeat a grade in school, school districts would be better off increasing access to quality early-childhood programs, providing expanded access to extended learning opportunities after school and during the summer, and utilizing targeted interventions to cultivate literacy and bilingualism during the elementary years to ensure that students have the literacy skills required to succeed in secondary school (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). A vast body of research has shown that these types of initiatives and interventions can be effective in improving academic outcomes for students (Fashola and Slavin 1997; Rothstein 2004; Kirp 2011). There is no reason that such interventions would not also work for Black and Latino boys.

Design Interventions to Be Holistic and Integrated

Policy interventions must be designed in a comprehensive manner in order to respond to the broad range of individual needs—economic, social, psychological, emotional—that impact child development and social welfare. For example, research has shown that efforts to reduce recidivism among recently incarcerated youth must include a focus on their educational and employment needs, so that as young men make the transition to life outside they have access to genuine opportunities that can set them on a new trajectory (Earls 1991). Likewise, discipline policies in school should not only focus on applying appropriate consequences for inappropriate behavior, they must also address the underlying factors that cause this behavior (Noguera 1995). Students who are behind academically, who are experiencing abuse or neglect at home, or who have unmet mental health needs are unlikely to improve their behavior through discipline alone. A study conducted by the Applied Research Center in Oakland, California (2000), shows that a comprehensive approach to school discipline must include strategies to address the causes of behavior problems and a plan to reconnect offending students to the goals and purpose of school.

Additionally, interventions aimed at changing individual behavior should involve efforts to transform the institutions that serve young men so that they become more responsive to their needs. For example, research has shown that serious efforts to increase college enrollment must focus both on the changes that individual students need to make (improved study habits, more proactive help-seeking, etc.), and on the changes that are needed in the structure and climate of educational institutions (greater access to counselors and mentors, access to campus jobs, etc.). Several studies have shown that schools and community-based programs that are successful in positively influencing academic and social outcomes for young men of color employ adults who are well trained and highly skilled, culturally competent, in that they have the ability to build strong relationships with the young men they serve and if necessary transcend differences in race and class differences, and have a high degree of moral authority (McLaughlin 2000). Recruiting adults (particularly men) from diverse backgrounds as teachers, social workers, and directors of afterschool programs, and providing them with training, is essential to the success of schools and programs that serve young men of color (Girabaldi 1992).
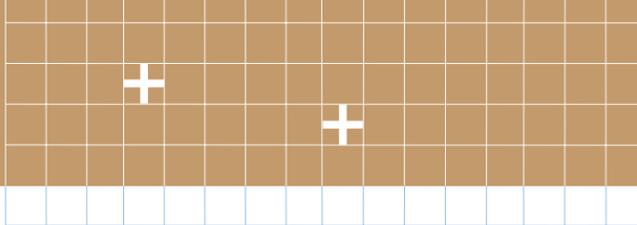
Evaluate Interventions Regularly and Modify Them as Necessary

Too often, local communities and school districts adopt programs aimed at addressing a social issue or problem (gang involvement, dropout prevention, youth unemployment) but fail to carry out effective evaluations of these efforts. Similarly, foundations frequently launch funding initiatives in response to a pressing problem and then shift to focus on a different set of issues and problems long before prior initiatives showed even a measure of success. Public and private initiatives are frequently launched without adequate consideration of how the initiatives they support can be sustained. In recent years, several major foundations and local governments have announced initiatives to address the "crisis" confronting young men of color; however, with few exceptions, these efforts have ceased or simply dissipated. Sporadic efforts that are not evaluated or assessed for their effectiveness and that are not accompanied by a plan to sustain programs that prove to be successful will have little impact upon the complex challenges confronting Black and Latino males. Good intentions are not good enough, and without a commitment to sustain and adjust intervention efforts as necessary, there is no reason to expect that they will have a lasting impact.

Be Sensitive to Ethnic, Racial, and Socioeconomic Differences

The challenges confronting Black and Latino men must be differentiated by national origin, class, geographical location, educational level, and age. The most effective interventions will be based upon an intersectional approach that acknowledges the complex interaction between ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexuality. Rather than a "one size fits all" approach, special attention needs to be paid to social context and the ways in which social identities are shaped by the distinctive conditions in a particular milieu. The needs of the most at-risk youth (homeless youth, young people in foster care, and those who have already been incarcerated) are very different from those of the college-bound. Yet both groups require attention and support. Similarly, while many of the hardships African American and Latino youth face are the same, support programs must be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences. Especially in communities where there are tensions between Blacks and Latinos, it is important not to assume that a single initiative focused on the needs of young men will work for all in need.

Avoid Stigmatizing Those in Need

Rather than designing interventions that are exclusively targeted at Black and Latino males, in many cases it will be beneficial to focus policies based on need rather than race or gender identity. In addition to making reverse-discrimination lawsuits less likely, such an approach will make it less likely that policy interventions will inadvertently contribute to the stigmatization and marginalization of those they were designed to help. For example, if a diverse high school is concerned about the academic performance of its African American males, it would be wise to develop support programs for all students who need help rather than exclusively for Black males. Schools in particular have a long history of devising programs (such as remedial and special-education programs) to help students that, in their implementation, have the opposite effect. In addition to avoiding labels that may create stigma, it is important to ensure that support programs are staffed by highly competent, caring adults.

Consider Both Individual and Institutional/Systemic Levels of Change

A growing body of research has shown that the most successful interventions for supporting students focus both on school-change strategies and providing additional support for individual students (Steinberg 1996). Similarly, interventions that are designed to address social problems like unemployment and underemployment, domestic violence, gang violence, and HIV must focus on both individual behaviors and the need for systemic change. For example, programs aimed at reducing the number of students who drop out of school are unlikely to succeed if they only target at-risk students while ignoring the conditions in school (such as shortage of counselors and lack of academic support) that contribute to high dropout rates.

Create a Context for Supportive Interpersonal Interactions

Several studies of successful intervention programs have shown that changes in the attitudes and behavior of Black and Latino men and boys are most likely to occur if they are carried out within a collective, community-based approach rather than one that focuses exclusively on the individual (Jesús Acosta 2007). Developing communities of support (Smithers and Robinson 2006), peer study groups and community-based "safe havens" (James, Jurich, and Estes 2011), and afterschool programs (Steinberg 1996) have all shown to be effective in reinforcing pro-social behavior and deterring delinquency and other social problems. Research has also shown that a collaborative approach that occurs within a supportive community is more likely to result in the internalization of a new set of attitudes and behaviors (Boykin and Noguera 2011). This is true for health and education-based interventions, and it may also be true for other social issues.

Conclusion

This is only a partial compilation of the types of initiatives and principles that should be used in the development of policy interventions. It is important for others to expand upon these recommendations, to critique them, and to offer new ones based upon further experience and ongoing research. While it is important to recognize that more fundamental changes in law, policy, and the structure of economic opportunities are needed to make lasting, far-reaching changes, it is also necessary to advocate for more limited changes so that we can alleviate some of the hardships facing Black and Latino men and boys.
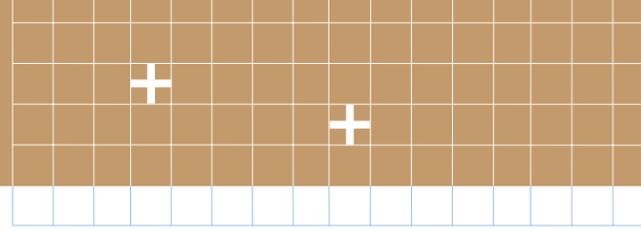
For those reading these reports, it would be wise to maintain a healthy degree of skepticism toward any policy or program that is held up as a panacea. While action is essential, we must guard against reacting to alarmist announcements, such as those identifying Black males as an "endangered species" (Taylor-Gibbs 1988), which offer little guidance for policy, or to make major investments into programs that have not been carefully studied and assessed. We don't have the resources to waste on half-baked ideas or untested gimmicks.

For example, in response to the educational challenges confronting Black and Latino males, many communities have created single-sex schools in the hope that these will "save" boys of color (Watson and Smitherman 1996). However, a four-year study conducted by the Metropolitan Center of Urban Education at New York University found that while some of the single-sex schools that have been created over the last few years are quite successful, others are not. Many of these schools have been created without a clear sense of the kinds of instructional supports needed by the male students they serve. They also have not created a learning climate that is conducive to academic success and positive youth development. Not surprisingly, some of these schools are foundering, and the students they serve are not thriving. Clearly, separating boys of color into schools that serve them exclusively is no panacea.

However, there are several schools across the country that are succeeding at educating African American and Latino males. Schools like Urban Prep in Chicago, Imhotep Institute Charter High School in Philadelphia, Eagle Academy for Young Men and the Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice in New York, and Excellence Boys Charter School in Brooklyn, show us that *the problem is not who is served within a school but how they are served*. Policymakers and educators who have lapsed into blaming the Black male students or, by extension, their parents must learn from the examples of success.

At the same time, we should not be so naive as to lose sight of the fact that children living in communities with high concentrations of poverty are more likely to be affected by asthma and an assortment of other health challenges, and by drugs, gangs, and other social problems, and that these hardships pose formidable challenges to learning and development that schools cannot solve by themselves. The pull of the street and all of its associated dangers is drawing too many young males of color onto the path of delinquency at an early age (Anderson 1990; Majors and Billson 1992). The schools that have demonstrated success in educating Black and Hispanic males show us that these obstacles can be countered. However, consider how much more might be accomplished if educators working closely with parents and community agents were to be supported by policymakers. Together, they could design support systems that work in alignment with schools to meet the needs of disadvantaged children.

Of course, creating support systems for males of color and schools that are successful at addressing their academic and social needs is not easy. If it were, the problems facing Black and Latino males would not be as severe as they are now. We need to address the issues confronting Black and Latino males with a sense of urgency and treat it as an American problem, rather than as a problem that only those who directly experience it should be concerned about. This means drawing on the resources of our entire society in the public and private sectors to respond in a concerted and coordinated manner.

The continued failure of so many young men is costly to the entire society. Every dollar spent to incarcerate a Black or Latino man or boy, to support them during periods of unemployment, to house them when they are homeless and destitute, to police them when there is a lack of safety in the neighborhoods where they reside, to pay for the cost of medical care when they show up with chronic health conditions at hospital emergency rooms, or to support their children because they are unable to provide as fathers, could easily be redirected to address other needs. We need a proactive, preventative strategy, and education must be at the center of it.

Of course, given the current state of American politics, it will be difficult to generate the will to embark upon a new direction. Racial bias, xenophobia, and plain old indifference toward the plight of the poor are not insignificant constraints. Still, those who seek to bring about changes in policy that would benefit Black Latino men and boys must find ways to implement policy interventions across a broad spectrum—school, community, state, and nation.

We can't afford to wait. To the extent that we allow boys and men of color to remain vulnerable, all of us are endangered. When armed with a different vision of how to address the challenges they face, we can and must begin to construct a new reality now

Summary of Solutions

1. Implement educational interventions early, based on data showing when warning signs are present. The longer the educational hardships experienced by Black and Latino boys are ignored, the more difficult it is to address them.

2. Couple policies to end "social promotion," or address students at risk of dropping out of school, with a plan to diagnose the learning needs of these students.

3. Increase access to quality early-childhood programs by providing expanded access to extended learning opportunities after school and during the summer, and utilizing targeted interventions to cultivate literacy and bilingualism during the elementary years, to ensure that students have the literacy skills required to succeed in secondary school.
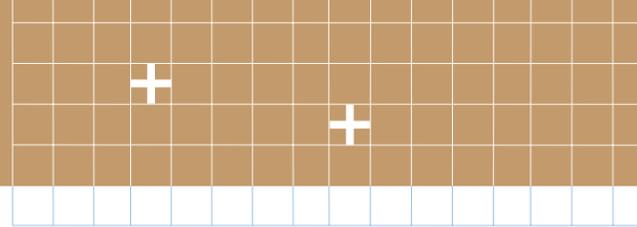
4. Create policy interventions that are holistic and integrated. Policy interventions must be designed in a comprehensive manner in order to respond to the broad range of individual needs—economic, social, psychological, emotional—that impact child development and social welfare.

5. Create a comprehensive school-discipline policy by including strategies to address the causes of behavior problems and a plan to reconnect offending students to the goals and purpose of school.

6. Ensure that interventions aimed at changing individual student behavior also involve efforts to transform the institutions that serve young men so that they become more responsive to their needs. Changes need to be made by individual students (improved study habits, more proactive help-seeking) as well as with respect to the structure and climate of educational institutions (greater access to counselors and mentors, access to campus jobs).

7. Evaluate policy interventions regularly and make modifications based on new evidence to ensure effectiveness. Include a plan to sustain programs that prove successful.

8. Create policy interventions that are sensitive to ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic differences among different groups of Black and Latino boys. The challenges confronting Black and Latino students must be differentiated by national origin, class, geographical location, educational level, and age. While many of the hardships African American and Latino youth face are the same, programs to support these youth must be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences. Especially in communities where there are tensions between Blacks and Latinos, it is important not to assume that a single initiative focused on the needs of young men will work for all in need.

9. Design policy interventions to avoid stigmatizing while providing youth with the needed support. Rather than designing interventions that are exclusively targeted at Black and Latino males, in many cases it will be beneficial to focus policies based on need rather than race or gender identity.

10. Include both individual and institutional/systemic levels of change in policy interventions. For example, programs aimed at reducing the number of students who drop out of school are unlikely to succeed if they only target at-risk students while ignoring the conditions in school (shortage of counselors, lack of academic support, etc.) that contribute to high dropout rates.

11. Design policy interventions that identify systems of social support in order to create a context for supportive interpersonal interactions. Successful intervention programs are most likely to occur if they are carried out within a collective, community-based approach rather than one that focuses exclusively on the individual.

12. Advocate for limited changes with an aim toward alleviating some of the hardships facing Black and Latino boys while recognizing that more fundamental changes in law, policy, and the structure of economic opportunities are needed to make lasting, far-reaching changes.

13. Remember that a policy or program that works in one setting may not be easily replicated in another. Review and understand the research associated with programs prior to implementation.

14. Form collaborations with educators, parents, community agents, and policymakers to design support systems that work in alignment with schools to reinforce and meet the needs of disadvantaged children.

15. Address the issues confronting Black and Latino males with a sense of urgency and treat it as an American problem, rather than as a problem that only those who directly experience it should be concerned about. This means drawing on the resources of our entire society in the public and private sectors to respond in a concerted and coordinated manner.

16. Create a national proactive, preventative strategy with education at the center to address the needs of Black and Latino boys.

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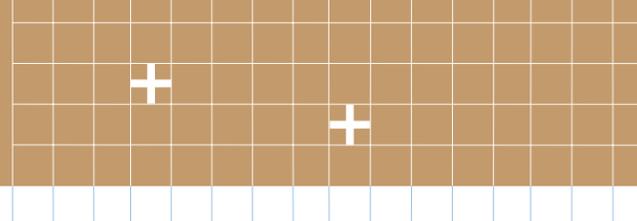
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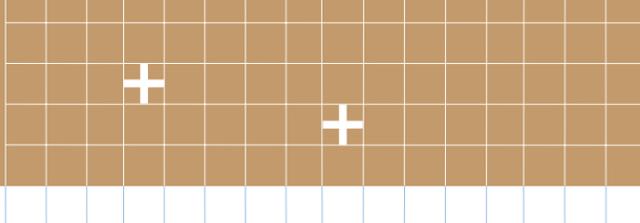
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Robert L. Green, PhD, Dean and Professor Emeritus and Distinguished Alumnus, Michigan State University, is a scholar and activist on issues related to urban schools and educational equity. Dr. Green is the author of many books and reports on urban education issues, among them *Expectations: How Teacher Expectations Can Increase Student Achievement and Assist in Closing the Achievement Gap* (2009) and *The American Dilemma and Challenge: The African American Male Dropout Rate* (2010). Over the past forty years, he has provided consulting services to more than twenty-five school districts. In this report, he has applied knowledge from work on behalf of Michigan State University and school districts in Las Vegas, Dallas, Portland, Detroit, Memphis, and San Francisco. During his career, he has created staff-development strategies for teachers and administrators and produced research and initiatives to reform schools, close the achievement gap, and improve graduation rates.

George White, MA, is a communications consultant and policy analyst with expertise on issues related to education, health, and economic development. He has helped Dr. Green develop education research and training initiatives and has served foundations, universities, and NGOs on communications and development issues. Mr. White has helped manage communications institutes at UCLA and the University of Southern California, produced reports on community economic development for the Ford Foundation, and developed strategies to promote initiatives related to health and education on behalf of The California Wellness Foundation and The Annie. E. Casey Foundation. In addition, he edited research that explored ways to improve the education, health, and life prospects of young men of color and wrote *A Way Out: Creating Partners for Our Nation's Prosperity by Expanding Life Paths of Young Men of Color* (2010), a public policy solutions report published by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies. More recently, Mr. White has helped create knowledge-sharing projects for initiatives related to educational equity and economic development.

Kevin K. Green, PhD, is an electrical engineer, computer vision scientist, and education technology entrepreneur with high school math teaching experience. He has conducted workshops for math instructors in Las Vegas schools and has a distinguished record as a math teacher. In 2006 he received a Faculty Achievement Award honoring excellence in teaching from the University of Phoenix, Northern Virginia Campus. He has also served as a math teacher at high schools in Fairfax County, Virginia, and Montgomery County, Maryland. Among his publications is "Best Practices on How Teachers Can Instill Confidence and Competence in Math Students," a chapter in *Expectations in Education: Readings on High Expectations, Effective Teaching, and Student Achievement*, edited by Robert L. Green (2009).

Background

I learned the value of expectations from my father, Thomas J. Green, who communicated the importance of academic achievement to his nine children. When I was a middle school student, it was clear to me that my older siblings had embraced his expectations. At that time, I had a brother in medical school, a brother pursuing a master's degree, another pursuing a BA while serving as a US Army
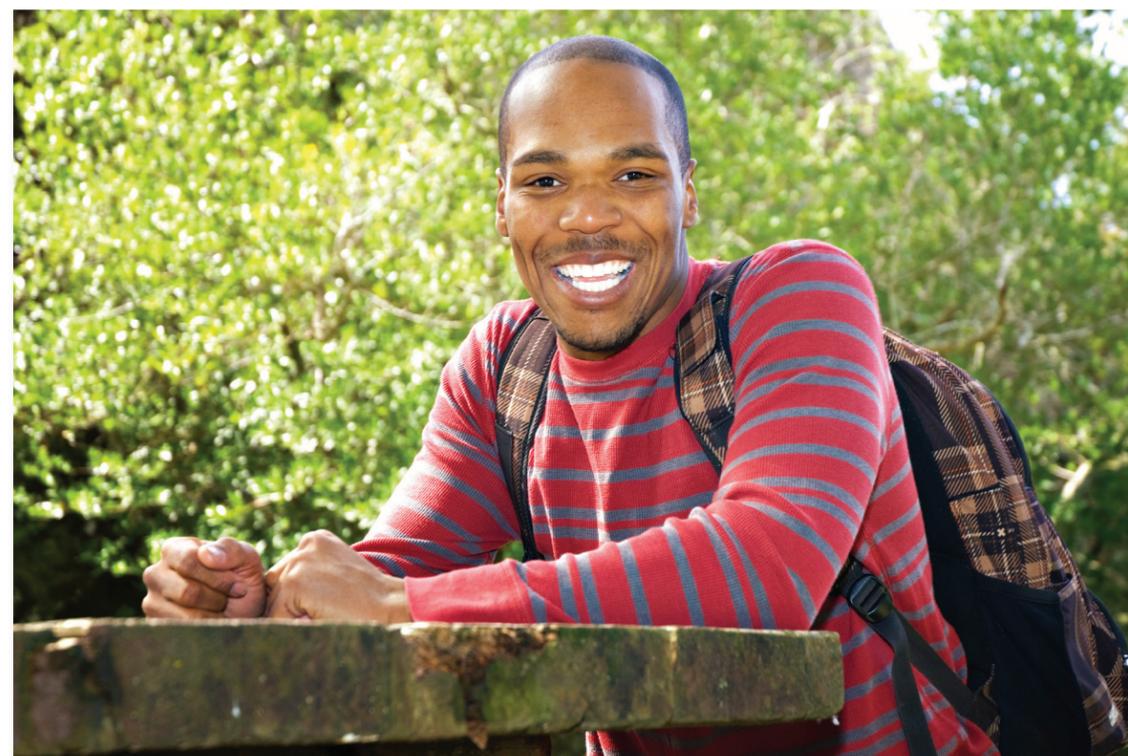
officer, and two sisters in nursing school. In addition to instilling high expectations, my father also provided the resources for success—clothing, books, financial and emotional support, and praise.

Later, as a professor and dean at Michigan State University from 1964 to 1982, I sought to instill in my students high expectations. I had recruited and helped enroll many young African Americans at MSU. I was aware that some faculty members believed these students would not excel. They were wrong.

I took a leave from MSU in 1965–66 to serve as education director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference under the direction of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Again, I had a mentor who reinforced high expectations. Dr. King expected me to excel as an activist-educator, to engage the public toward promoting educational equity and social justice.

I have tried to meet the expectations of Dr. King, my father, and my family as I have fought for educational equity as a consultant for the NAACP and in more than twenty-five public school districts. In my consulting work and my scholarship, I have devoted much effort to addressing the challenges facing African Americans, particularly Black males.

For example, I recently directed a project that helped teachers in the Dallas Independent School District raise their expectations of students of color. Subsequently, on behalf of the Clark County School District in Nevada, I developed a knowledge-sharing initiative that is enabling elementary school principals to address factors that may later prompt Las Vegas students—most of them children of color—to drop out of school.

Regarding this report, I want to acknowledge George White, who provided research, writing, and editing assistance. I also want to thank Dr. Kevin Green for his research and review assistance— particularly for his expertise on expectations and Black male achievement in math and science. In addition, I want to congratulate the Council of the Great City Schools for organizing a knowledge-sharing forum on solutions to the challenges facing Black male students—the most critical issue in public education.

—Robert L. Green, PhD

Introduction

This paper reviews the crisis in public education—the persistent inadequate academic achievement levels of Black males, and the socioeconomic and political ramifications thereof. It also references the value of high expectations as a first step toward educational equity, and documents how innovators in many parts of the country have boosted the self-esteem and achievement levels of Black male students. In addition, it argues that advocates of educational equity must engage the public to generate the support for solutions in all schools at all levels regarding improving the educational status of Black males.

## The Academic Achievement Gap

A variety of studies over the decades have indicated that Black children from poor households are more engaged, have higher expectations, and perform better in elementary school if they attend pre-kindergarten programs such as Head Start. A recent study published by the Center for Public Education (2011) showed that pre-K experiences increased the chances that Black students would achieve higher elementary-school reading levels.

Responding to *A Call for Change*, a 2010 study on racial and ethnic disparities published by the Council of the Great City Schools (Lewis et al. 2010), Professor Ronald Ferguson, director of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, told the *New York Times:* "There's accumulating evidence that there are racial differences in what kids experience before the first day of kindergarten…They [those differences] have to do with a lot of sociological and historical forces. In order to address those [differences], we have to be able to have conversations that people are unwilling to have" (Gabriel 2010).

According to the Council's study, only 12 percent of Black fourth-grade boys in large cities are proficient in reading, compared with 38 percent of White boys in the nation, and only 12 percent of Black eighth-grade boys in large cities are proficient in math, compared with 44 percent of White boys in the nation (Lewis et al. 2010). The data was distilled from the 2009 reading tests from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), given to students in fourth and eighth grades. The Council's report shows that Black boys on average fall behind during their earliest years. Based on my research and observations in education, struggles during the elementary school years often put students on a path to becoming high school dropouts.

Data from the NAEP over the past decade show that despite gains in both math and reading, the academic performance of Black males remains comparatively low. In grade-four math, for example, the average scale score among national public school students for Black males increased nearly twenty points between 2000 and 2011, but the Black-White gap closed only slightly, as White male students' gains were nearly as large. The Black-White gap results are similar for grade-eight math as well as for grades four and eight reading (National Center for Education Statistics 2010–11).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the high school graduation rate of African Americans is the lowest among four major demographic groups. The graduation rates in 2008–9 was 91.8 percent for Asian/Pacific Islanders, 82 percent for Whites, 65.9 percent for Hispanics, 64.8 percent for American Indians, and 63.5 percent for Blacks. NCES dropout-rate data, available through 2009 and based on the percentage of those ages sixteen to twenty-four who are not enrolled in school and have not completed a high school degree, show that dropout rates of Hispanic males, Hispanic females, and Black females have declined since 2006. The data show that the dropout rate of White males has stayed about the same since 2006. On the other hand, after declining between 2000 and 2006, the
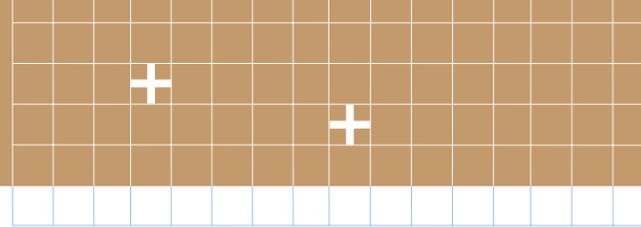
Black male dropout rate rose between 2007 and 2009. To be sure, the best extrapolation of the latest NAEP data on Black male achievement has come from the Council of the Great City Schools. *In A Call for Change*, the Council reports that only 12 percent of Black fourth-grade boys in large city schools are proficient in reading, compared with 38 percent of White boys in the nation, and only 12 percent of Black eighth-grade boys in large city schools are proficient in math, compared with 44 percent of White boys in the nation (Lewis et al. 2010).

The Income Gap

There are clear and consistent relationships between the level of education and earnings. US Census Data shows that the average earnings of full-time workers with a bachelor's degree in 1999 was $52,200—far higher than the $30,400 earned by a high school graduate and more than twice the $23,400 earned by a person without a high school degree.

Extrapolated over a forty-year career, individual differences in earning capacity become even more dramatic. High school graduates earn nearly $1 million less than those with bachelor degrees. Underscoring the value of education even further is that the earning power of those with no high school degree has actually diminished over the past three decades as high-paying, low-skilled manufacturing jobs have declined. In 1971, for example, twenty-four- to thirty-four-year-old male workers with less than a high school education earned a median of $31,039. In contrast, that same worker earned only $19,255 in 2000 (Green 2009a).

Incarceration Disparities

According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, African Americans accounted for 39.4 percent of the total prison and jail population, but based on the 2010 US Census Bureau statistics, Blacks comprised only 13.6 percent of the US population.

In 2010, Black non-Hispanic males were incarcerated at the rate of 4,347 inmates per 100,000 US residents of the same race and gender. White males were incarcerated at the rate of 678 inmates per 100,000 US residents. Hispanic males were incarcerated at the rate of 1,755 inmates per 100,000 US residents (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2010).

The Impact of Expectations on Academic Performance

Scholars have been documenting the relationship between expectations and academic achievement for decades (Green 1987; Berndt and Miller 1990). Much of the research on expectations has focused on African American students—males in particular (Wood, Kaplan, and McLoyd 2007). Achievement Gap

Initiative director Ronald Ferguson notably concluded that teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors help sustain, and perhaps expand, the test score gap between White and Black students (Ferguson 2003).

In the context of education, expectations—simply put—are the standards or the bar we set for others. Expectations are a factor in effort and outcomes. If a teacher holds high expectations, that teacher will seek to have students achieve those standards. If students have high expectations, they will make an effort to meet those standards. Conversely, low expectations discourage effort and achievement.

The impact of standards is explored in the anthology *Expectations in Education: Readings on High Expectations, Effective Teaching, and Student Achievement* (Green 2009b). It includes a contribution from UCLA sociologist Professor Gary Orfield. Orfield's chapter explores the factor of race-based attitudes in the low expectations of some teachers: "In a nation where 85 percent of teachers are White and mostly suburban and where there are serious problems of racial segregation . . . and stereotyping, it is easy for teachers to misunderstand students and misinterpret behavior and attitudes in ways that lead them to expect too little of some groups of students and tend to interpret their actions and work in ways that reinforce those stereotypes. In the worst cases, the teachers project an attitude of hostility and disparagement toward their students that is all too easy for students to understand and return in kind" (Orfield 2009).

Based on my research and classroom observations, the signs that a teacher has low expectations include the following:

+ Lesson plans are poorly prepared or lack rigor.

+ Teachers rarely ask specific students questions.

+ Teachers don't insist that homework be turned in on time.

+ Teachers don't correct homework and return it to students in a timely manner.

+ Teachers permit students to sleep or demonstrate inattentive behavior in class.

+ Teachers accept poor or incorrect answers from students.

+ Teachers display angry attitudes toward Black boys.

+ There are few students of color in advanced or STEM courses (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and an overidentification of students of color in special education classes.
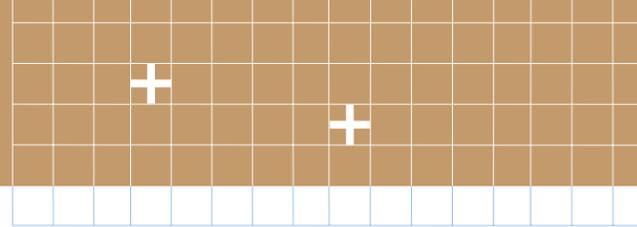
+ A disproportionate number of students from one racial or ethnic group is suspended or expelled.

However, Orfield and other scholars have noted that it is not just suburban teachers or White teachers who bring these low standards and practices into a classroom. For example, Jean Anyon, in a book titled *Ghetto Schooling* (1997), commented that teachers in urban environments, from marginalized communities themselves, often reinforce deficit thinking in their students and have low expectations, give low-level assignments, and speak in ways that are demeaning and demoralizing.

Orfield expanded on the factors involved in expectations by noting that low standards are often the result of teacher inexperience, which is more pervasive in schools in poorer communities: "Teachers get weaker support and more rapidly leave high poverty schools (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin, 2004). This is a problem since there is a systematic tendency for the weakest schools to receive many brand new teachers, while teachers with experience and seniority move to schools that have more middle class students…The expectations conveyed to students by an experienced teacher are likely to be based on a more realistic understanding of the capacity of students to grow in achievement and a repertoire of techniques to make it happen. These are expectations rooted in experience and linked to probable outcomes" (Orfield 2009).

Experienced teachers are often more qualified to deal with discipline issues in the classroom. Many studies have documented the alarming disparities in suspensions, expulsions, and placement in special-education classes or schools as they relate to Black students—particularly Black males. Citing the following statistics, the Children's Defense Fund in 2011 concluded that minority students are often inappropriately labeled as mentally disabled or emotionally disturbed and placed in "special education" classes or schools:

+ A Black child is only half as likely as a White child to be placed in a gifted and talented class.

+ A Black child is more *than* one and a half times as likely as a White child to be place in a class for students with emotional disturbances.

+ A Black child is twice as likely as a White child to be placed in a class for students with mental retardation.

In the words of the report: "Many schools contribute to the devastating Cradle to Prison Pipeline. The overrepresentation of poor and minority children in grade retention, out-of-school suspensions and special education coupled with low teacher expectations has contributed to these children's discouragement, low self-esteem and disengagement from school" (Children's Defense Fund 2011).

To be sure, in my experience I have observed that expectations in behavioral programs and special-education classrooms are very low. In those classrooms teachers are more concerned with discipline than learning. The federal government has recognized that equitably enforcing school discipline policies is a major issue in education, particularly for Black males. A report (Losen 2011) posted by the Civil Rights Project on its website states the following:

> In March of 2010, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan delivered a speech that highlighted racial disparities in school suspension and expulsion and that called for more rigorous civil rights enforcement in education. He suggested that students with disabilities and Black students, especially males, were suspended far more often than their White counterparts. These students, he also noted, were often punished more severely for similar misdeeds. Just months later, in September of 2010, a report analyzing 2006 data collected by the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights found that more than 28 percent of Black male middle school students had been suspended at least once. This is nearly three times the 10 percent for White males.

The Department of Education weighed in on this issue again at a Howard University symposium in March 2012—this time making a connection between teacher experiences, discipline, and curriculum standards in this press-release statement:

> Minority students across America face harsher discipline, have less access to rigorous high school curricula, and are more often taught by lower-paid and less experienced teachers, according to the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR)…African American students, particularly males, are far more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their peers. Black students compose 18 percent of the students in the…sample, but were 35 percent of the students suspended once, and 39 percent of the students expelled were African Americans (US Department of Education 2012).

The issue of low expectations is often a subject of discussion in the national news media. A recent *Education Week* article (Sparrow and Sparrow 2012) interviewed Black male students from Washington, DC, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, about what they thought was standing in the way of their academic success. The students summarized the obstacles in their own words. They placed no blame on the school system or their teachers. Rather, they attributed the problem to society, culture, and themselves, a sign of negative internalization.

Prince, a DC eighth grader, said that "the rap culture" teaches young Black males to live a life on the street and not worry about education. Rasean, another eighth grader in DC, said that Black male students drop out of school because "they think they can't make it. They think they won't amount to

anything because they think Whites are going to be higher than Blacks…We think because we are from the 'hood' we don't have a chance to do something with ourselves."

In my professional research experience, these comments are not representative of all Black youth. For example, in my focus groups with eighth-grade Black males in the Dallas Independent School District and the Hamilton County School District in Tennessee, the students were critical of the role the school plays in creating both low and high grades and high and low self-esteem. To be sure, many scholars have concluded that expectations for student performance and student culture are set, in large part, by the adults in the school (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2003).

As this report reveals, there are solutions to the low self-esteem, low expectations, and low academic achievement of Black male students. From a private school in Piney Woods, Mississippi, to charter schools in Chicago and Boston, to public school academies in New York, to traditional public schools in Las Vegas, Madison, Wisconsin, Prince George's County, Maryland, and Houston, educators are raising the expectations of teachers and Black male students and providing resources to help these students achieve higher academic standards. However, this report notes that raising expectations in schools is not a panacea. It is only a first step.

Another step is to engage public schools and communities nationwide to generate support for the resources that will provide the conditions and environment conducive to higher achievement and retention. For example, considering poverty and the educational levels of their parents, it is clear that most Black students enter the public school system vastly behind middle-class White and Asian children in terms of knowledge and skills. Thus it is important that we address expectations within the context of preschool disparities.

Addressing the Needs of Black Male Youth

The CGCS report *A Call for Change* (Lewis et al. 2010) prompted new discussions on how to address the problem related to the outcomes of Black males. One of the recommendations in the report is to "marshal the energies and commitment of national and local organizations with an interest and stake in seeing improvement to coordinate their efforts on behalf of Black male youth." A number of organizations have taken on this challenge and are working tirelessly to provide solutions.

For example, Communities In Schools, the nation's largest dropout-prevention organization, posted a number of responses on its website. Communities In Schools is a nationwide network of professionals working in public schools to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. It operates in twenty-five states and the District of Columbia, serving the most vulnerable students in the most dropout-prone school districts, nearly 1.35 million young people in more than three thousand schools.

The organization is actively engaged with policymakers, school staff, parents, and business partners to ensure that Communities In Schools' services are extended to as many K–12 students as possible and that those students have access to college. The organization noted in a 2012 posting that the early warning signs of high school failure can be identified. "When we think about the barriers that prevent a student from achieving academic success, we can point to easily apparent signs of trouble…a child… wearing the same clothes every day or falling asleep in class…External cues like these tip people off to students in distress" (Communities in Schools 2012).

If we expect principals and teachers to identify these cues and do something about them, they must be provided with training and/or knowledge-pool resources. In the wake of my knowledge-sharing partnership with the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, we determined that educators can be empowered with knowledge that will enable them to raise their expectations about their ability to address factors that later prompt students to drop out of school.

Early Warning Signs of Potential Dropouts

In my decades of research and classroom observations in Las Vegas and more than twenty-five other school districts, I have identified important early warning signs that indicate if an elementary school student will likely become a high school dropout. I listed those indicators on a survey form and, with the support of the Clark County School District, surveyed nine Las Vegas elementary school principals on how they addressed early-age determinants of potential dropouts. With the support of my research team, I identified the best responses and produced a best-practices report that the school leaders distributed to educators in Clark County as a guide, which is part of the district's efforts to improve graduation rates (Green, White, and Ransaw 2012).

These best-practices responses were provided by elementary school principals at selected West Las Vegas schools, administrators who are on the front lines of the battle for academic achievement in Clark County. Many of these schools have some of the poorest and most segregated student populations and have been the most academically challenged in the district.

By supporting this study, the Clark County School District has created a new approach to engendering academic achievement in its most challenged region. It acknowledges that collectively, nine school principals know more than any individual principal. This report advances the notion that knowledge sharing is an effective way to address urban education issues. It is an approach supported by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The early warning signs and the nine principals' responses to those indicators can be grouped into the following categories: academic performance, student and parent participation and involvement, home

and neighborhood environment, difficult behavior and discipline, dangerous and negative motivators, poverty, grade failure, and expectations. The principals created initiatives and practices, based on these data, that have engaged parents, addressed high-impact factors such as poverty and hunger, created school-wide standards of behavior, helped students become knowledge-sharing leaders for their younger peers, and raised academic expectations.

Identifying Expectations in Curriculum and Academic Achievement

In addition to dropout prevention, Communities In Schools focuses on expectations: "The first step in breaking down the barrier of low expectations is helping students discover and believe in their own potential. If we can help convince young Black men—and all students at risk of academic failure—that they can succeed and have choices, it won't be long before their resignation turns to anticipation of a brighter future, and the cycle of low expectations is broken" (Communities In Schools 2012).

The organization, which has operated for more than three decades, understands the connection between a sense of history and expectations. Consider its perspective on Black History Month: "The truest way to honor the famous figures in Black history is to close the achievement gap and help today's students succeed. If we take what we learned this month and apply it to every day of the year, we can change expectations. We can help more students earn post-secondary degrees, achieve bright futures and make history" (Communities in Schools 2012).

As an activist-scholar who worked with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the historic civil rights movement, I can attest to the inspirational value of having an awareness of Black history and culture. Many studies have documented the relationship between culturally relevant curriculum and expectations. In a case study by Landsman and Lewis (2006), students expressed how they enjoyed learning about different cultures, including their own. "They appreciated when their teachers taught their history lessons about notable African Americans and when they read books written by Black authors."

Numerous publications (Kochman 1981; Murrell 2002; Jones and Bush 2005; King 2008; Kunjufu 1988; Ogbu 2004) detail the value of culturally relevant content in education. My *Expectations in Education* anthology also included research reports that cited the value of cultural relevance as it relates to Black students and subjects such as math and science. Consider the findings of Dr. Kevin K. Green (2007):

> We need to promote achievement and honor minority students who achieve, especially among males if we want them to succeed. The students who typically fall at the bottom in math are Black males. So when we find Black males who do well in math, we should honor them and allow them to understand that there is a payoff to being a good math student and those payoffs can be tremendous. In the curriculum we need to highlight Black scientists and mathematicians who teach math in high schools, colleges, and universities throughout

the nation. It is not enough to focus on them during Black History Month; the curriculum should be infused with Black and Hispanic role models who are achievers.…The faces of Black scientists and Black faculty who teach math at colleges and universities throughout the country should be visible throughout the curriculum.

Indeed, Black models of success can and should be noted from time to time in classes with a large percentage of Black males. There can and should be references to nationally recognized leaders of African descent—from President Barack Obama to Black achievers in business, science, and academics.

It's clear that Black male youth idolize and, in many cases, seek to emulate successful Black athletes. Can that interest in championships and trophies be transferred to high expectations at the academic level? Yes, says Henry Johnson Pruitt, an educator who has served as a middle school science teacher, principal of both public and charter schools, university professor, and former president of the Teaneck (NJ) Board of Education. As a member of the board of directors of the Educational Testing Service (ETS), Pruitt participated in the "Positioning Young Black Boys for Educational Success" forum, a partnership with the Children's Defense Fund, in June 2011. Teachers, he suggests, need to engage Black students on their high expectations in the sports arena and transfer it to academics "in more clever and engaging" ways. "Can't we improve on a piece of paper for the valedictorian?" he said at the forum. Invoking the athletic work ethic, he suggested the following: "Smart is not something that you are, smart is something you can get" (Educational Testing Service 2011).

Raising Teacher Expectations of Students

The campaign to raise expectations must begin on the front lines—with teachers. The Dallas Independent School District created a model for measuring and improving teacher expectations by commissioning surveys and workshops in October 2010. I led the research team that developed and managed the project. We began by having teachers complete a survey that measured their feelings and attitudes on a range of variables related to successful student achievement: curriculum, principal leadership, impact of student background, and expectations, to name a few. The following were among the questions on the form.

+ What percent of the pupils in your class do you expect to be reading at grade level at the end of the school year?

+ What percent of the pupils in your class do you expect to be at grade level in mathematics at the end of the school year?

+ What proportion of the pupils in your class do you expect to graduate from high school?
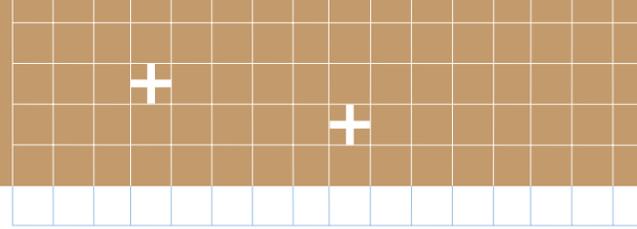
My team subsequently conducted six workshops over a three-day period. During the workshops, I defined expectations, emphasizing that expectations are a belief system. I also provided instruction on how to create circumstances and conditions that enable students to meet those higher expectations. For example, I encouraged teachers to (1) give underachieving students more opportunities to respond to questions and (2) provide verbal praise when they responded correctly. In addition, we stressed the importance of excellent teaching. When we completed the workshop, the teachers were asked to complete a survey on attitudes. An outside consultant—Dr. John H. Schweitzer, professor at the Center for Community and Economic Development at Michigan State University—evaluated the responses and produced a February 2011 report with the following conclusion: "The workshops conducted by Dr. Green and his associates were highly effective. Changes were measured for nine variables that the literature indicates are related to student achievement. Movement in the positive direction was found for eight of these variables, and all but one of the positive changes [was] strongly statistically significant." Teacher expectations were among the variables that improved.

Some of the most important expectations-raising exercises in schools are actually the give-and-take between teachers and the class—specifically, question-and-answer exchanges. Before we turn to best practices, however, it's important to understand the principles that guide expectations (Green 2009a).

Guiding Principles on Expectations

Effective teachers not only have high expectations, but also set clear standards of attainable academic and behavioral performance and hold students to them. Students must know precisely what is expected of them and why it is expected and believe that they can meet those expectations. As much as possible, they should be empowered and have played a part in setting those standards. Students should see standards upheld and know specific consequences relate to each standard. Standards should be consistent and equally applied to all students, but teachers must be reasonable with respect to enforcement when conditions warrant. Good behavior should receive positive reinforcement.

Effective teachers call on all students to participate in classroom discussions with challenging questions, in multiple forms, related to the cognitive information being covered. Effective teachers appreciate the importance of every student. All students can and should participate in class activities. Frequently, certain students tend to monopolize class discussions. All students should be supported in developing the confidence to fully participate. Care must be given to structure activities so that all students succeed and, over time, develop skills in class discussion and other activities.

Effective teachers react to student responses with praise at the appropriate time and in the appropriate amount. Praise is directed and specific, not general, stereotyped, and/or single-worded. All teachers give pupils reinforcement and praise, but research indicates that there are sharp differences in the type of praise given. "Low expectations" teachers praise less for correct answers and criticize more for incorrect answers. "High expectations" teachers praise correct answers more often and more appropriately and shape incorrect answers into ones that can be praised.

Effective teachers appreciate and celebrate diversity in the classroom. Students should be introduced to concepts of diversity so that they will be more open-minded in their attitudes about other races and cultures.

In *Expectations in Education* (Green 2009b), I cite the work of Julie Landsman and Chance Lewis (2011), who identified five major guidelines that promote the success of Black students. They are as follows:

1. Show students respect and it will be reciprocated.

2. Consider your first impression of a student. Avoid judging the student based on stereotypes.

3. Take the time to learn about the students' backgrounds and interests. This will help in developing a connection with them that will foster an environment conducive to learning.

4. Recognize cultural differences and develop a multicultural curriculum.

5. Establish high expectations and standards for all students and they will meet the challenge.

We can most efficiently raise expectations by adopting the best from public and private schools. In my experience, the most exemplary example in private schooling is the Piney Woods School in Mississippi, a beacon of Black achievement in high school education for more than one hundred years. It's a long tradition kept alive by Dr. Reginald Nichols, the former Piney Woods president. Using my instructional monographs on expectations, he presides over workshops that train teachers in August and January each year. During a recent chat, he explained the value of such training in this statement: "I think it's important to reinforce the understanding that teachers are investing in the lives of students. Expectations are investments of hope." Those investments are paying off at Piney Woods. In 2011, 95 percent of its Black male graduates moved on to college.

Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, founder of Chicago's Urban Prep charter school, made national news in 2010 when he announced that 100 percent of his Black male seniors had enrolled in college (Dwyer 2010). Dr. Kunjufu, too, emphasizes the importance of teacher expectations. In an interview in the *Journal of African American Males in Education* (Johnson 2011), he explained his approach, which includes "raising teacher expectations, increasing time on task, understanding that children have different learning styles, [and] making curriculum more culturally relevant."

Case Studies of Schools Raising Expectations

At Kermit R. Booker Sr. Elementary School in Las Vegas, former principal Beverly Mathis believed that when the expectations of teachers were raised, teachers could tend to the major task of raising the standards of students. In 2000, Dr. Mathis won a Milken Educator Award, a leadership citation bestowed by The Milken Family Foundation, which reviews candidates submitted by independent blue-ribbon commissions established by state education departments nationwide. In recognizing Dr. Mathis, the foundation said: "Following the motto 'It takes a village to raise a child,' principal Dr. Beverly Mathis has transformed Kermit R. Booker Sr. Elementary School in Las Vegas into a place of strong community, high expectations, and improved student achievement. Dr. Mathis implemented the Gents and Lads Program, which calls upon community members to provide strong male role models to Booker's young African American male students. She has boosted student test scores in part by ensuring that the curriculum is aligned with district frameworks" (Milken Family Foundation 2000).

Dr. Mathis retired as principal of Booker in 2011 after sixteen years, and now serves as a consultant to the Clark County School District in Las Vegas. Situated in one of the city's poorer committees and with a student body that is about 82 percent Black, Booker received passing grades in English, math, and other ranking areas from the US Department of Education's No Child Left Behind rating system for the 2010–11 school year, Dr. Mathis's final year as principal.

Booker is only one of a number of schools that are experiencing success by stressing high expectations. Excellence Boys Charter School, located in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant community, is another success story. At Excellence, which currently serves 395 boys in grades K–8, teachers refer to students as "scholars," homerooms bear university names, and the name of the school itself—"Excellence"—instills high expectations. Jabali Sawicki, principal of the Excellence school, explains the school's approach: "Excellence Boys has unapologetically high expectations for each of our scholars for both academics and behavior. We cultivate in our young men the knowledge, skills, and character necessary to succeed academically, embrace responsibility, and become honorable citizens and courageous leaders. In 2009, grade four, 90 percent of students passed reading exams at Advanced or Proficient levels; in grade five, 100 percent of students passed math exams at Advanced and Proficient levels—placing Excellence among the top schools in New York City" (Educational Testing Service 2011).

The staff at Sherman Middle School in Wisconsin is dedicated to developing curriculum that actively involves the young adolescent learner and engages every student in applying their knowledge and skills toward topics and issues that are based on curriculum standards (expectations) and take into consideration the cultures of students. Sherman Middle School is a comprehensive school reform (CSR) site that is influenced by Turning Points, a national design model for middle school change coordinated by the Boston-based Center for Collaborative Education. The Turning Points approach includes an emphasis on instructional methods designed to prepare all students to achieve high standards and become lifelong learners. Sherman operates on principles and practices requiring commitments from staff and parents as well as students. Teachers are expected to "organize relationships for learning" and use "instructional methods designed to prepare all students." The staff is also expected to "involve parents and the community in supporting learning and teach a curriculum grounded in [high] standards" (Madison Metropolitan School District). Based on a couple of years of promising data, sixth graders who enter Sherman can anticipate significant improvements in their reading ability. For example, between fall 2009 and fall 2010, nearly half of the sixth-grade class gained more than two years in reading ability, and about a dozen had recorded some eyepopping gains, moving from first- or second-grade levels to sixth- or seventh-grade levels and beyond. For Black students, the gains were particularly impressive, with some formerly struggling readers gaining three, four, or five grade levels in a year. There have also been improvements in state testing scores, with Sherman's Black seventh graders posting an average improvement of thirty points on the standardized reading test after their first year at Sherman.

The Eagle Academy Foundation in New York City, launched in the Bronx in 2004 to address the failure and dropout rates of Black boys, now has middle and high schools in Brooklyn and Queens. A fourth school was scheduled to open in Newark, New Jersey, in the fall of 2012. The Eagle Academy schools are often cited as model venues of Black male academic achievement. The academy states that "academic rigor and high expectations flow beyond the traditional school hours to the mandatory extended-day and Saturday Institute programs, which include workshops for parents, life-skills training and remedial services for our students. Rituals establish expectations shared by students, teachers, parents, and school administrators and include school uniforms, daily town hall meetings, and athletics" (Eagle Academy Foundation).

At Eagle Academy's Ocean Hill/Brownsville, Brooklyn, middle school, 84 percent of eighth graders are reading at or above grade level—up from 17 percent when they first entered the Academy as sixth graders. Twenty-five percent of all eighth graders have passed all three New York State Regents Exams, and 70 percent have passed at least one Regents Exam. New York State requires high school graduates to pass five exams in order to graduate from high school with the prestigious Regents Diploma. At the high school level, 85 percent of seniors at the Eagle Academy for Young Men in the Bronx graduated in 2010, more than twice the citywide graduation rate for African American males that year. Ninety percent of Eagle Academy graduates go on to attend four-year colleges and universities.

Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Prince George's County has a stated commitment to having all of its nearly twenty-eight hundred students ready for college by the time they graduate. About 67 percent of students are African American. The high school divides students into smaller learning communities, such as academies for science and technology, health and human services, and business and law. The
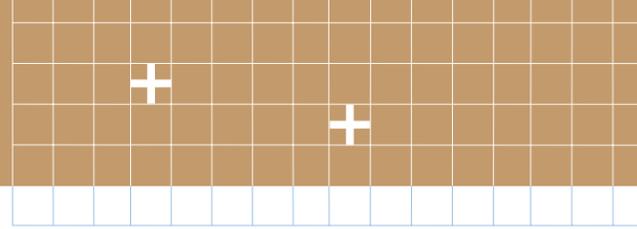
College Board last year recognized Roosevelt as one of the nation's best high schools at producing successful Black AP test-takers, citing 2010 high test-scores in biology, chemistry, English language and composition, and English literature and composition. The College Board honored Roosevelt High in 2009 for having more Black students earn a "3" or higher on AP English, biology, and chemistry exams than any school in the nation. A report posted on the website of the College Board, the company that administers the AP and SAT tests, says students entering the school "know what they're getting into …High expectations are described to students and families, and big dreams are encouraged" (College Board 2012). Roosevelt has received numerous awards throughout its thirty-four year history, including being twice awarded the US Department of Education's National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. The award honors schools that have achieved high levels of performance or significant improvements, with emphasis on schools serving disadvantaged students.

The MATCH Charter Public High School in Boston has been a national leader as a creator of academic achievement solutions since its founding in 2000. More than 90 percent of its students are Black and Hispanic, and they live in some of the city's poorest communities. The school demands excellence by requiring students to take part in an extended school day and year in a program that includes working with tutors at Boston University and MIT. In 2010–11, MATCH tenth graders ranked first in the state in student growth percentile based on their gains on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System since the eighth grade.

In the Houston Independent School District (HISD), which has a student population that is 88 percent Black and Latino, school leaders are also generating academic excellence by adopting higher standards and some of the same practices employed at MATCH. Apollo 20 is a groundbreaking program designed to improve the academic achievement of students in twenty HISD "priority" schools, and to create models for excellent teaching and learning for replication throughout the district. With help from Harvard Professor Roland Fryer, a champion of high expectations in his work to reduce the racial academic-achievement gap, the program was launched in four high schools and five middle schools at the start of the 2010–11 school year.

Apollo is guided by five broad strategies: (1) effective teachers and principals at every school; (2) more instructional time; (3) data-driven instruction; (4) high-dosage tutoring; and (5) a culture of high expectations. The district set the bar high by informing students in Apollo schools of the following expectations:

+ 100% of students performing on or above grade level

+ 100% of students taking at least one college-level course

+ 100% graduation rate

+ 95% attendance rate for students and staff

+ 100% of students accepted to a four-year college or university

On a more practical level, "to instill a culture of high expectations and college access for all students, we started by setting clear expectations for school leadership," Fryer explained in a recent report. "Schools were provided with a rubric for the school and classroom environment and were expected to implement school-parent-student contracts. Specific student performance goals were set for each school and the principal was held accountable for these goals" (Fryer 2011).

Eleven Houston elementary schools were included in the Apollo program during the 2011–12 academic year. Results from the original nine—middle schools and high schools—have been tabulated, and they are dramatic. The Apollo schools saw major improvements in school culture, with higher attendance rates and a safer learning environment. In addition, every sixth- and ninth-grade student received sixty to eighty minutes of intensive math tutoring. The program's annual review by Harvard researchers determined that Apollo 20 schools improved their achievement in math by 0.276 standard deviations. In 2011, 82 percent of students at Lee High School passed the state standardized test in mathematics, up from 67 percent just one year earlier. "These results provide the first proof point that charter school practices can be used systematically in previously unsuccessful traditional public schools to significantly increase student achievement in ways similar to the many successful 'No Excuses' charter schools" (Fryer 2011).

HISD School Superintendent Terry B. Grier cited the academic improvements at the Apollo 20 schools during his March 1, 2012, State of the Schools address (Houston Independent School District 2012). He noted, however, that while the HISD has tried to leverage resources to raise standards and results at the Apollo 20 schools, the Texas legislature has cut funding to Houston Schools by about $120 million in a two-year period. Those cuts have left HISD with 835 fewer teachers this school year and forced students to go without field trips, school nurses, librarians, art teachers, and PE coaches.

Raising Public Expectations and Support

Expectations are important, but schools must also have the resources to create the conditions to enable students to reach high standards. Public funding is important. The Education Trust, which promotes academic achievement, frames the challenge in this recent post on its website.

> Research and common sense tell us that schools need more resources to help the low-income students and students of color who have less outside of school achieve at the same high levels as their more affluent peers. But at the federal, state, and local levels, we actually spend less on the schools serving the highest concentrations of these students…
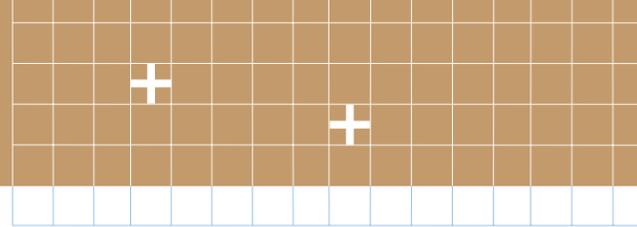
In many states, school districts that serve the highest concentrations of low-income and minority students receive less in state and local funding per pupil than districts serving affluent and white students. Nationally, the districts that serve the largest concentrations of students of color receive an average of $1,100 less per student in state and local funds… What's more, even in some states that drive money to high-poverty districts, those dollars may not actually get to the highest poverty schools within the district because of differences in how teachers are paid. Simply put, the highest paid teachers generally are not teaching in the schools where they're most needed.

Closing these funding gaps is critical if we are to live up to our national ideal of providing all children with equal opportunities to become educated citizens (Education Trust 2009).

To be sure, if we are to generate the resources necessary to increase Black male academic achievement, we must convince the public to increase its expectations of schools and motivate citizens to demand change. This can only be done by engaging the public via local and national media.

The Council of the Great City Schools has also recognized the importance of generating public support through the media. For example, in a 2011 press release the council announced that it had received a grant of $4.6 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The three-year grant is aimed at promoting and coordinating successful implementation of the new kindergarten-to-twelfth-grade common core standards in English language arts and mathematics in big-city public school systems nationwide. "We're about to undergo a sea change in instituting new academic standards," Council Executive Director Michael Casserly said in the release. "Common core standards are necessary to make real the promise of American public education to expect the best of all our schoolchildren" (Council of the Great City Schools, 2011).

The grant will contribute to strategic communications, capacity building, curriculum and assessment alignments, professional development, pilot testing, and a host of other measures needed to provide strategies, tools, advice, and counsel to the nation's urban school districts as they prepare to implement the state-led common core standards. Externally, the Council will also develop materials that will build public awareness to engage communities. This will include development of public service announcements for broadcast, cable, and social media outlets to educate the public and communities to the need and importance of common core standards.

Media initiatives by national organizations such as the Council and campaigns by media advocates are very important. However, most of us are fighting educational equity for Black males on a local level. The Civic Index for Quality Public Education understands the need to inform the public on local levels. It provides resources to help community-based organizations support local public education. The Civic Index makes the case for engaging local media on education issues, to raise the expectations and the understanding of journalists. This is an excerpt from its *Guide to the Media:* "As you explore the ideas presented in this material, you will find new ways to improve and encourage [media coverage] of education issues. Though media coverage of educational issues can be positive or negative, in either form it is a powerful way inform and educate the public about issues that affect the public's view of schools" (Civic Index for Quality Public Education 2008).

Raising the expectations of students and teachers is a first step toward promoting Black male academic achievement. As noted in this report, my experience and research indicates that parents, too, must be engaged and that school administrators must be champions of equity and achievement. Other contributors will offer additional solutions. However, in the end we must take the additional step of raising the consciousness of the public so that local resources are brought to bear on reforming our schools to create the high expectations that will raise achievement at all levels of public education.

Summary of Solutions

I. **Teachers should…**

1. Create lesson plans that focus on academic rigor and raise expectations for Black male students.

2. Ensure that all Black male students participate in class. If necessary, ask specific students questions.

3. Insist that homework be turned in on time and correct and return it to students in a timely manner.

4. Refuse to accept poor or incorrect answers from students.

5. Reinforce positive behavior and provide verbal praise when students respond correctly.

6. Be respectful of all students and avoid speaking to students in ways that are demeaning and demoralizing.

7. Create multiple opportunities for Black males to be successful.

8. Do not allow students to sleep or demonstrate inattentive behavior in class.

9. Fairly enforce the district's discipline policy equally across all student groups.

10. Monitor the treatment of Black male students to ensure that a disproportionate number are not suspended or expelled from class or unfairly singled out for other disciplinary infractions.
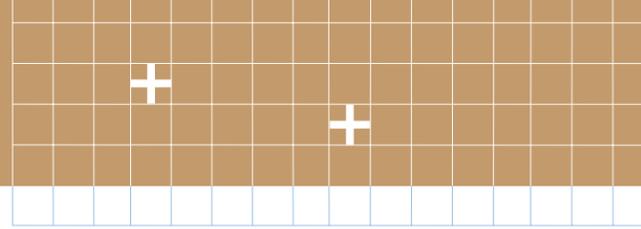
11. Apply standards consistently and equally across all student groups, recognizing that, at times, modifications may be necessary.

    a. All students can and should participate in class activities.

    b. Students should be empowered and play a part in setting standards.

    c. Students should see standards upheld and know specific consequences related to each standard.

    d. Students must know precisely what is expected of them, why it is expected and believe they can meet those expectations.

12. Encourage Black students to channel their high expectations in the sports arena into academic areas in clever and engaging ways by invoking the athletic work ethic, "Smart is not something that you are, smart is something you can get."

II. **District leaders (Superintendents/Principals/Curriculum Leaders) should…**

13. Create programs/activities that help Black males develop strong self-esteem.

14. Create programs to help teachers better understand Black male students in order to avoid misinterpreting their actions and to reduce stereotyping.

15. Ensure that experienced teachers are placed equally in all schools.

16. Monitor the number and percentage of Black male students that are enrolled in specific courses/activities to ensure that they are proportionately and fairly represented. Examples include enrollment in:

    a. Advanced courses (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate (IB), honors, etc.) as well as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses

    b. Extracurricular activities focused on academic engagement

    c. Special education classes

    d. Gifted and talented classes

17. Monitor the number and percentage of Black male students that are suspended/expelled from school.

18. Ensure that district policies regarding discipline are fairly enforced and create professional development opportunities for staff when it appears that disparities exist.

19. Create opportunities for Black males to see others like them in successful roles.

20. Provide professional development for teachers so that they recognize the signs of Black male students in trouble and help them to identify the appropriate support.

21. Create opportunities for teachers and other staff to address their feelings and perceptions about Black males. Examples of probing questions:

    a. What percent of the pupils in your class do you expect to be reading at grade level at the end of the school year?

    b. What percent of the pupils in your class do you expect to be at grade level in mathematics at the end of the school year?

    c. What proportion of the pupils in your class do you expect to graduate from high school?

22. Create opportunities for community members to become strong role models to Black male students.

23. Require performance commitments from students, staff, and parents.

24. Provide multiple opportunities for Black male students to participate in positive support programs—extended school day, tutoring, mentoring, college tours, etc.

25. Help Black male students develop post-high school plans and help them understand what is necessary for them to meet those goals.

26. Set high standards and inform students and their parents of those standards. Examples include the following expectations:

    a. 100% of students performing on or above grade level

    b. 100% of students taking at least one college-level course

    c. 100% graduation rate

    d. 95% attendance rate for students and staff

    e. 100% of students accepted to a four-year college or university
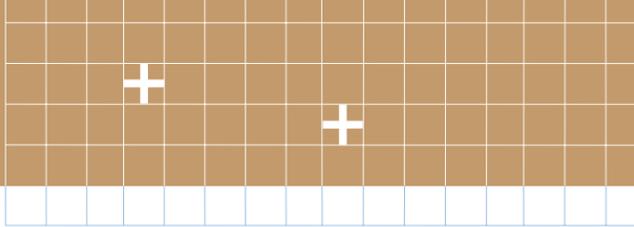
27. Develop materials that will build public awareness to engage communities. This will include development of public service announcements for broadcast, cable, and social media outlets to educate the public and communities about the need and importance of common core standards.

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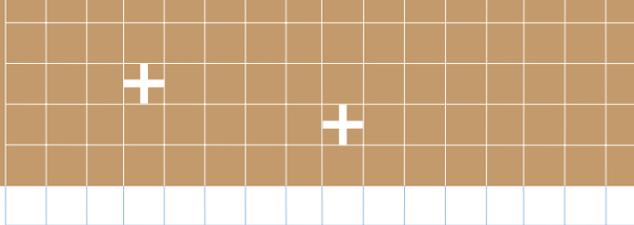
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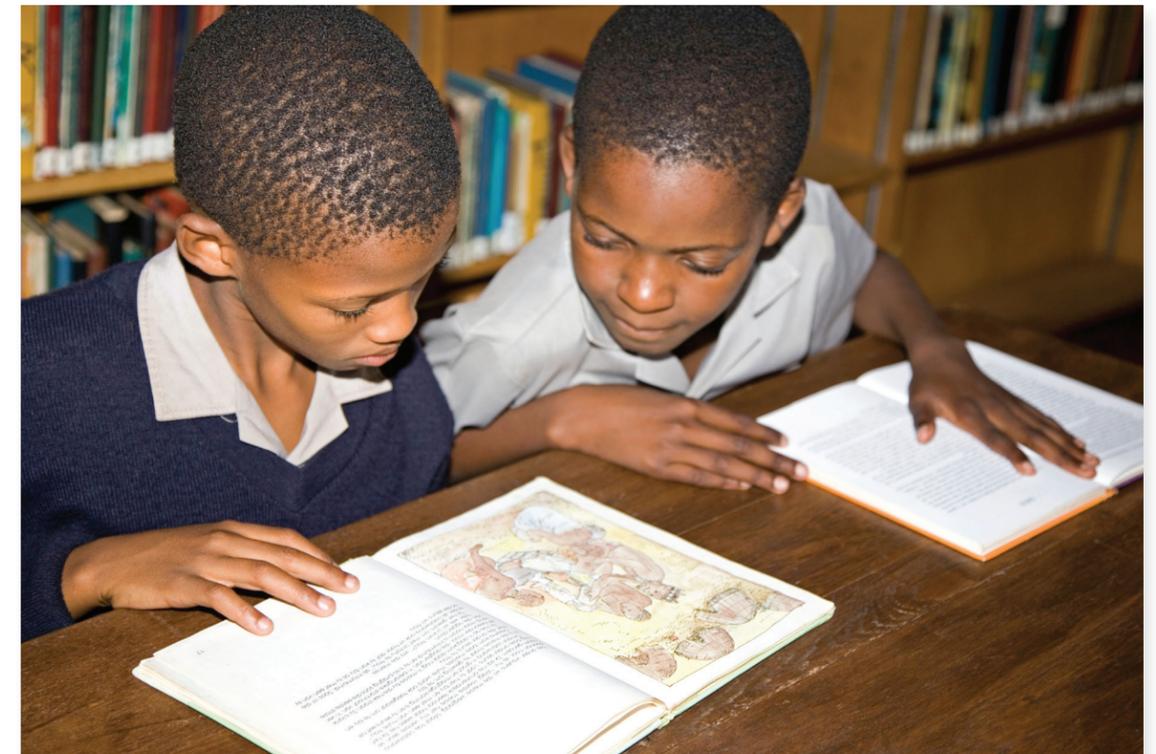
Aisha Ray

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Problem Statement: The Achievement Gap and Black Boys

American education promises fairness and equity for children regardless of characteristics or circumstances. An "even playing field" is supposed to provide the context in which every child has a chance to achieve through effort, study, and perseverance. The cultural currency of American education has been individual effort, hard work, and equal opportunity. Despite these powerful cultural messages, American schools have failed to deliver on this promise, especially in educating Black boys, other children of color, and children from economically disadvantaged families. While in general Black boys are intellectually capable learners able to achieve at the highest academic level, in too many US public schools their intellectual potential may be untapped, undervalued, and derailed.

Educational research on instructional practices, urban education, educational policy, and school reform often cast Black educational achievement in terms of deficits, such as insufficient vocabulary, parents who do not value education, and behavioral problems. This perspective situates the problem of Black boys' educational success in children and their families, rather than in structural disparities and inequality that significantly threaten their development.

On average, Black children, compared to their White peers, are not achieving in almost every major urban school system (Murrell 2002), and achievement differences emerge prior to kindergarten (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Poverty is a significant factor in the educational achievement gap experienced by Black children. In the United States, one-fifth of all young children and two-fifths of young Black children live in poverty. At nine months, Black children in poverty are behind their economically advantaged peers in cognitive development, and the gap widens by twenty-four months. By age four, low-income children are eighteen months behind their affluent peers, and this gap continues into high school (Klein and Knitzer 2007). Economically impoverished Black boys who enter school behind their more affluent peers may never catch up and may never achieve the skills necessary for successful employment that will help them escape poverty. Research (Wirt et al. 2004) has indicated that lower mean reading and math achievement-score gaps in kindergarten may widen by the end of third grade. In addition, Black boys in comparison to White boys are more likely to be suspended and expelled from school (including preschool), to be placed in special-education classrooms, to miss more days of school, and are less likely to be invited into gifted classes. Smith (2004) found that while Black boys were 8.6 percent of all students enrolled in public schools in 2000 to 2001, they were 21 percent and 20 percent of those
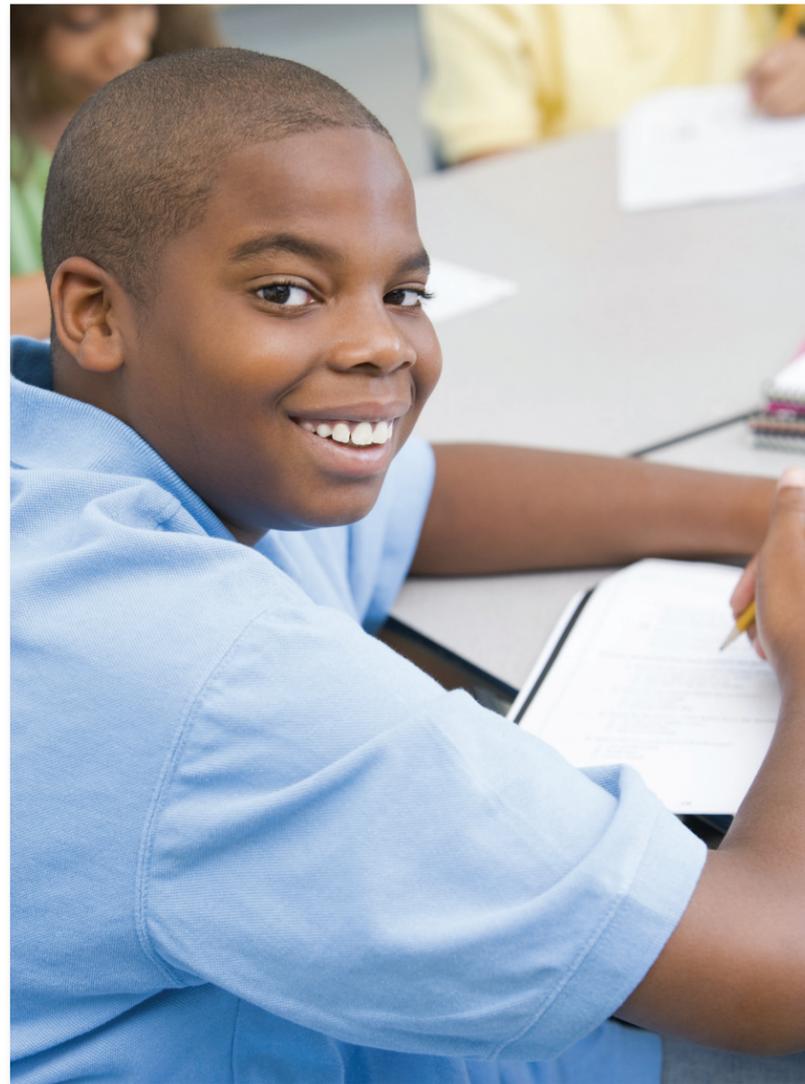
classified as emotionally disturbed and mentally retarded, respectively, 15 percent of those placed in special education classes, and 12 percent of those identified with a specific learning disability. Further, Smith states, "Twice as many black boys are in special education than black girls, a fact that rules out heredity and home environment as primary causes and highlights school factors."

Many factors have been used to explain the relative poorer educational outcomes of Black children and the poor—teacher education (Sleeter 2001); low teacher expectations (Gay 2004); limited exposure to "school" language and discourse patterns (Heath 1983; Delpit 1995); negative stereotypes internalized by children (Steele 1999); parent/guardian/family involvement (Comer 1986; Epstein 1992; US Department of Education 2001); need for multicultural education (Banks 1996; Gay 2004); and school curriculum (Apple 1990). In addition, the education of boys in general may be compromised by the failure of schools and educators to understand male development, male educational needs (Sprung, Froschl, and Gropper 2010), and especially the development of Black males (Ferguson 2001). But despite these explanations, the achievement gap between economically privileged and low-income children persists and is pervasive.

Science of Early-Childhood Development: Stress and Neurological Development

The foundation for addressing the educational crisis of Black boys must be constructed during early childhood, when the antecedents of this crisis emerge. It is during early childhood that society has the opportunity to lay the groundwork for optimal development for every child, yet we fail to do so despite robust evidence that critical neurological, cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and physical development occurs between birth and age eight. Too many American children, including Black boys, are reared in conditions that threaten their development and put their educational achievement at risk. On numerous major developmental and educational indicators of child well-being, Black boys are threatened: for example, infant mortality, low birth weight, foster-care placement, chronic poverty, "apartheid" schools, poor nutrition, grade retention, school suspensions, single parenting, incarcerated parents, school achievement, and exposure to violence (Children's Defense Fund 2011). In addition, young Black children are more likely than their White peers to be affected by four factors significantly associated with profound developmental risk, especially neurological development, namely: (1) growing up in long-term poverty (five years or more); (2) growing up in deep poverty (150 percent of the poverty level); (3) exposure to potential trauma and multiple stressors (e.g., violence, abuse); and (4) growing up in dangerous, impoverished, and racially isolated communities that are underserved by social support programs and other resources that might help to ameliorate the effects of extreme poverty, social isolation, and trauma. These ecological factors can affect the quality of care young children receive, including maternal stress, responsiveness, and depression (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000).

Neurological development is a lifelong process, but from the neonatal period through age eight the brain is especially plastic and responsive to environmental factors. In early childhood, neural circuitry evolves from the simple to the complex, and ultimately supports cognitive and emotional functions throughout childhood and adulthood. The quality of Black boys' early caregiving environment plays a significant role in neural development through providing adequate nutrition, cognitive stimulation, and emotional attachment, warmth, and responsiveness. Human infants are totally dependent on caregivers and can only develop successfully if an adult is devoted to their well-being. Caregivers' capacities to engage consistently and predictably in ways that support loving attachments in a mutually rewarding relationship are significant factors in optimal child outcomes. Research (Blair et al. 2011; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000) has shown that attachment and responsive maternal caregiving, even for children in highly stressful environments, can act as a critical protective factor.

Regrettably, too many Black children grow up in settings where they and their caregivers experience significant environmental stress (e.g., community violence); and caregivers may struggle to be responsive and appropriately engaged with their young children. Maternal depression, a significant risk factor for young children, can be exacerbated by environmental stressors including poverty and a lack of parenting and mental health services (McLoyd 1998). One out of eleven infants in the United States is reared by a mother with major depression (Center on the Developing Child 2009). Maternal depression interferes with a mother's capacity to respond to the child's needs consistently and appropriately, and can influence children's neurological development over the life course (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Men in poverty, especially Black men, can also experience depression, which is likely to go undiagnosed and untreated (Black Mental Health Alliance for Education and Consultation 2003) and which may make them less able to emotionally support mothers and children.

Neuroscience research reports that unrelenting stress in early childhood caused by factors such as extreme poverty, maternal depression, and repeated abuse can alter brain structure and lead to long-term problems in mental health, learning, and self-regulatory behavior in relation to educational and life success (Evans and Schamberg 2009; Center on the Developing Child 2012). Especially important is the effect of poverty, trauma, and stress on the development of children's prefrontal cortex, the neurological site of executive functioning, associated with the ability to deal with ambiguity, contradictions, and confusing cognitive and social-emotional information; and working memory, the capacity to retain and recall numerous facts in a given situation. Both executive functioning and working memory help children understand the contradictions they encounter in school and in life, e.g., the difference between *week* and *weak*, which are pronounced the same way but mean different things, or the difference between the letter *O* and the number *0*, or comprehending adult behavior and motivation. Learning requires the ability to manage numerous ambiguities, to understand the rules that apply to exceptions, and to retain this knowledge and draw on it when appropriate. These abilities are associated with both school success and success in adult work.
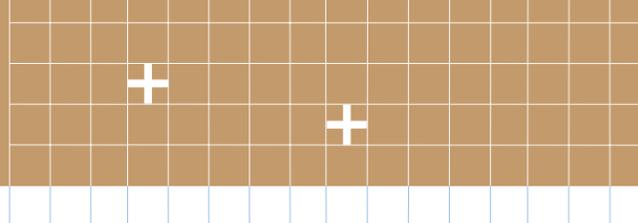
In addition to cognitive skills, young children must develop social learning and emotional regulation, which also relies on executive functioning, to be successful students. They must learn to be self-motivated, persist when frustrated, regulate their emotions and behavior, get along well with others, and master a range of other social behaviors. Because of the pernicious effects of poverty, trauma, and stress on the neurological development of young children, their capacity to regulate emotions, manage impulses, and draw correct inferences from affectively laden situations may be compromised. Hence, dealing with the everyday interactions in classrooms—waiting one's turn, expressing one's feelings appropriately, understanding the emotions of others, accepting redirection from a teacher or peer, managing anger and suppressing aggression—may be difficult. Executive functioning is highly related to children's school success and more likely to be jeopardized by the environmental conditions in which too many Black boys are reared.

The developmentally toxic environment experienced by some Black boys also may contribute to long-term problems with peers, aggression, and school adjustment. Some estimates report serious conduct disorders in 5 to 10 percent of all school-age children (Kaiser and Hester 1997), and teachers are more likely to identify boys as behavioral problems than girls. In our nation's schools, Black students, especially boys, from kindergarten through high school receive harsher discipline and are more likely to be suspended from school in comparison to White students (Lewin 2012). Persistent patterns of aggression and rejection of peers present in early and middle school is observable as early as three years of age (Rutter, Giller, and Hagel 1998). Children with conduct problems are more likely to do poorly in school and in turn to have more conduct problems (Arnold 1997). Disruptive preschoolers are less likely than nondisruptive children to pay attention to instruction and to teachers. Conduct problems that emerge when boys are young are moderately associated with depression, drug use, and other antisocial behavior in adolescence (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000, p. 176). The preschooler's social reasoning may be a factor in the child's adjustment to peers and to early schooling. Children who are aggressive and rejected by peers in the preschool years may lack the skills to socially interact effectively with adults and peers and to control their behaviors, including emotional outbursts (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000, p. 170).

In summary: The early experiences of Black boys, both positive and negative, become written into their brains and bodies, and this interaction of biology and environment can result in physiological and psychological adaptations that have lasting effects on their behavior, learning, social relationships, and mental well-being (Center on the Developing Child 2012). Especially pernicious is toxic stress, because, if chronic, it can contribute to Black boys' inability to manage and respond to stress, can alter brain architecture, and can detrimentally affect other complex physiological systems that help children learn and maintain health and mental health. For Black boys the ecology of early childhood in the United States must lay a foundation that supports optimal developmental outcomes and educational achievement.

Ecology of Young Black Boys' Development: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class

The complexity of young Black male development cannot be denied—race, racism, poverty, and gender are critical factors. But being Black, low-income, and male does not automatically place a child at risk of school failure or developmental problems. Similarly, many Black families living in poverty successfully rear their young children. Individuals and families respond to the difficulties of poverty, racism, gender bias, and other forms of discrimination and prejudice in varying ways. Some Black boys who experience these forms of disadvantage excel educationally and go on to lead productive lives, while others do not. Understanding the interplay of structural, cultural, and individual factors that contribute to the academic success of Black boys is critical to addressing the difficulties encountered by Black boys who are not succeeding academically.

Whether they grow up in challenging urban neighborhoods or privileged suburbs, Black boys from infancy through adulthood are burdened with negative stereotypes that depict them as deficient, threatening, disengaged, angry—even criminal. Black boys, including young boys, are more likely than their White peers to be disciplined more severely in school for minor infractions, suspended from school (including preschool), and stopped by police. In addition, Black adult males and youth are frequently portrayed in the media as problems for their families, their communities, and the larger society. This treatment by key social institutions, the media, schools, and law enforcement is such a common part of the experience of Black boys that Black parents engage in childrearing practices to help their children cope with and respond appropriately to this type of biased scrutiny (Stevenson, Davis, and Abdul-Kabir 2001).

Social psychologists have identified these negative experiences of Black boys as *microaggressions*, a term originally used by psychiatrist Chester Pierce in the 1970s to refer to common everyday encounters in which through verbal (e.g., racist speech) or behavioral interactions (e.g., crossing the street to avoid Black boys, following young Black boys in stores) Black boys experience hostile and degrading racial insults and slights (Feagin and Sikes 1995). In addition, Black families and communities may also be subject to stereotypes that cast them as incapable of providing rich experiences that develop sufficient academic skills necessary for school success in their children. These factors are a part of the unique ecology of young Black boys, and may contribute to a sense of alienation, distrust, and reluctance to fully engage in school—all behavioral and emotional responses that have implications for early schooling and learning. Early schooling should provide Black boys with the knowledge, capacities, confidence, and abilities to succeed educationally and in life. Regrettably, the experiences many Black boys have in school, regardless of social class, may contribute to their alienation from school, school failure, and social adjustment problems.
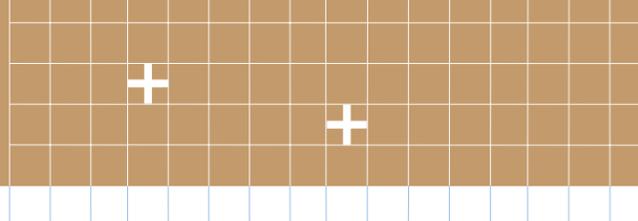
Further, education pedagogies, instructional practices, and administrative policies may implicitly or explicitly attempt to marginalize knowledge, language, and experiences Black boys bring to school (Baugh 1999; Moll 2001). European American *cultural knowledge* is institutionalized through language ("standard" English, norms of speech and grammar, tone and volume of voice); what is taught (literature, social studies); social norms (notions of politeness, physical distance, eye contact); expression of emotion (anger, aggression); policies (expectation of parent involvement); and curriculum choices (Sheets 2005). When entering school, young Black boys may experience greater cognitive dissonance in teaching and learning than do their White peers, whose cultural knowledge is privileged and reflected in school settings (Irvine 2003).

Cultures shape who children are and how they experience the world (Rogoff 2003). Through participation in everyday cultural practices (e.g., feeding, bedtime, religious worship, going to preschool), Black boys of all classes learn meaning systems, identity, language, values, beliefs, behavioral norms, and roles intended to develop the competencies appropriate to their culture (Rogoff 2003; Whiting and Edwards 1988). Cultural patterns of thinking and behaving are internalized, becoming part of individual and group identity. The cultural repertoires Black boys bring to classrooms may be misunderstood, even punished by teachers and administrators. For example, research (Baugh 1999; Boykin and Toms 1985; Delpit 1995) suggests that African American expressive styles, behavior, and language may be stigmatized because they do not conform to the cultural model of behaving, learning, and language that schools demand.

While Black boys have the same genetic capacities for language, social relationships, and cognition that all children have, they may be more likely to be judged as inferior learners and socially disruptive (Boykin and Toms 1985; Ferguson 2001). The problem may not be Black children's culture per se but rather that schools require children to comply with different cultural expectations and repertoires (Irvine 2003; Nieto 1999). The knowledge, beliefs, and expectations that educators and school administrators have for Black boys may reflect unexamined racial bias, cultural misunderstanding, and/or cultural ignorance. In addition, to successfully address the achievement gap, both the unique developmental ecology of Black boys and the potential for there to be a misfit between school and the cultures of young Black children need to be considered.

In summary: At the heart of the developmental and educational difficulties that young Black boys face is a national failure to confront, address, and eradicate structural inequalities, disparities, and discrimination that constitute the childhood ecology of Black boys and significantly contribute to negative outcomes. The complexity of factors (health, mental health, poverty, etc.) that shape the development of young Black boys necessitates *proven strategies employed consistently over time* to ameliorate the challenges they encounter. The sheer scope of the problems Black boys face, the persistence and intractability of

this crisis, may lead some to conclude that nothing can be done; or that the problems of Black boys represent the historic difficulties of the Black community and must be addressed by that community first. But both arguments ignore an important reality, namely that the crisis of Black boys represents a larger American failure that involves too many of its children, including Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, Asian American, and White children and boys generally. Black boys' problems are serious, but they are part of a larger problem affecting a wide range of American students. For example, 42 percent of White fourth graders in public schools cannot read at grade level, and roughly 50 percent cannot do math at grade level; in comparison to 80 percent (not reading at grade level) and 78 percent (not able to do math at grade level) of Black and Latino children (Children's Defense Fund 2008). Black children are not doing well educationally, but White children are not faring well either. These data underscore a national problem with profound implications for our nation's future. Addressing the crisis of Black males will advance our nation's capacity to solve the problems of all of its youngest citizens. Changing demographics led by children of color, the persistence of the educational disparities, increased global competition, and our democratic ideals require that we address the issue of Black male development, education, and citizenship as central challenges of our democracy.

High-Quality Early Education: Programs for Black Boys and Low-Income Children, Birth to Age Eight

While many schools and school districts struggle to address young Black male educational achievement, there is evidence that schools and education policy can make an enormous difference in the outcomes of Black boys and poor children. One successful strategy for addressing low-income Black boys' educational and developmental challenges is high-quality early-childhood education and services for children ages birth to eight. While not a silver bullet for everything that ails Black boys, research has shown that high-quality early-childhood education improves children's educational outcomes and reduces educational achievement disparities, especially for culturally and racially diverse children and low-income children (Heckman 2007; Reynolds, Magnuson, and Ou 2006).

Since the inception of Head Start in 1965, high-quality early-childhood intervention programs have addressed a variety of needs of low-income children and families (e.g., nutrition, child education, parent education) and have employed various strategies including home visitation, center-based programs, and early-childhood classrooms in public schools. High-quality early-childhood programs for low-income children have common characteristics that include:

+ Small class size and teacher-child ratios (2:17 for example)

+ Carefully developed and age-appropriate curriculum

- Well-trained teachers with child-development knowledge

- Parent involvement and/or education component

- A combination of services intended to meet multiple needs of young children and families in poverty including education, health, and nutrition

Programs with these characteristics have been shown to significantly support the long-term developmental and educational achievement of children in poverty, including Black boys at risk for school failure. Specifically, the federal Head Start program, Perry Preschool Program, and Abecedarian Project have demonstrated both short- and long-term positive cognitive and social gains (e.g., high school graduation, low rates of delinquency) for Black adults who participated when they were young children (Campbell et al. 2001). In contrast, low-quality early-childhood programs can detrimentally affect low-income children, who are more likely to be enrolled in inadequate early-education programs (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2006). Unfortunately, in comparison to White children, Black children and children in poverty are more likely to attend programs with teachers who lack subject content knowledge, have lower academic achievement, and are inexperienced (Peske and Haycock 2006). In addition, inadequate early-childhood programs and schools are part of a larger ecology that includes poverty, racism, low-wage jobs, unsafe housing—all factors that jeopardize children's development and family functioning (Garcia Coll et al. 1990; McLoyd 1998).

Four examples of high-quality effective early education programs will be described. They are the Abecedarian Project, the Perry Preschool Project, the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, and the Montgomery County Public Schools.

The Abecedarian Project

Between 1972 and 1977, the Abecedarian Project (Ramey and Campbell 1984) enrolled 111 individuals in four cohorts beginning in infancy and provided high-quality early education through age five. All children were from low-income families, 98 percent were Black, all lived in North Carolina. Children were randomly assigned to either the control or the intervention group. The intervention group received full-time activities that targeted social, emotional, language, and physical development. Participants were followed for many years, and in comparison to the control group, they had achieved more years of schooling and were four times more likely to have earned a college degree (Campbell et al. 2012). These benefits apply to both male and female participants.

Participants were also more likely to be consistently employed, more likely to delay parenthood, less likely to have been on welfare, and more likely to have earned more income.

The Perry Preschool Project

Economist James Heckman has examined the social and economic benefits of public investment in high-quality early-childhood programs for low-income children. Heckman has argued that experimental preschool programs like the Perry Preschool Project demonstrate that children who participate in early enrichment programs fared better over their lives than their peers who did not, and hence the public investment in the early years saves society from the increased cost of remediation (e.g., prisons, early pregnancy, delinquency programs) in later life. Specifically, the Perry Preschool Project initiated in the 1960s involved low-income Black families in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Children were taught by experienced early-childhood educators and were given opportunities to problem solve, make decisions, and learn through a play-based curriculum. Twenty years of follow-up research on participants concluded that they had higher overall earnings, had fewer arrests for violent crimes, spent less time in prison, and completed more years of schooling than their peers who did not attend preschool. Also, Heckman asserts that the success of high-quality early-childhood programs is not simply that they increase academic skills but that they have lasting effects on noncognitive skills, which if acquired early in life form a foundation for lifelong achievement. Specifically, these programs affect children's motivation, help to develop socialization skills, support emotional development and self-regulation that aid in learning, and support school adjustment and employment in adulthood.

Chicago Child-Parent Centers: Pre-K–3rd Early-Childhood Programs

Increasingly, early-childhood educators, advocates, and researchers have expanded the traditional definition of early childhood education—birth to age five—to birth to age eight. This effort, commonly referred to as pre-K–3rd, can include preschool, full-day kindergarten, and first- through third-grade classrooms within public schools. The pre-K–3rd effort seeks to significantly change how and what children three to eight years of age learn in school, and to coordinate instruction across grades within schools, districts, and states. The effort focuses on improving instructional practices; reducing class size; providing a broad, integrated curriculum that includes strong literacy, art, numeracy, science, and social and emotional learning; aligning of educational standards from preschool through third grade; incorporating developmentally appropriate assessment processes; providing strong professional development for teachers; providing leadership development for principals; and supporting a dual-generation strategy to ensure parent and family engagement.

Pre-K–3rd programs have included Follow Through (begun in 1968), Chicago Child-Parent Centers (begun in 1967), Project Developmental Continuity (begun in 1974), and the National Head Start–Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (begun in 1999). The Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) model is an influential example of the pre-K–3rd approach and one of the most
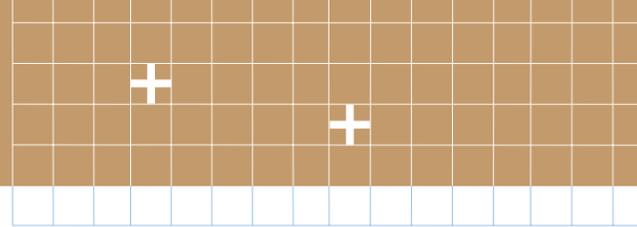
extensively researched. The CPC is the second largest federally supported early-childhood program designed to address educational disparities. Head Start, the largest federal early-childhood-education effort, focuses primarily on the preschool years (ages three to five), while Early Head Start serves children under age three. Child-Parent Centers were created in 1967 by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to educate children not being served by other antipoverty programs such as Head Start. Since 1967 the CPC program has served over 100,000 primarily Black American low-income children and their families. At its height, CPS funded twenty-five CPC programs and currently runs eleven. The CPC program is funded through Title 1 of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act and state dollars. Chicago was the first public school district to use Title 1 dollars for preschool education (Reynolds 1997).

Chicago Child-Parent Centers consist of two well-integrated sections—preschool/kindergarten and first grade through third grade. Both sections are administered by a single school principal and staffed by a head teacher, parent resource teacher, school-community representative, teachers and aides, and a school nurse, psychologist, and social worker. In addition, the elementary-school-age program has a co-ordinator called a curriculum-parent resource teacher. Class size in preschool is seventeen children and two teachers; and in kindergarten through third-grade classrooms it is twenty-five children and two teachers. The preschool-kindergarten portion of the CPC has four key components: (1) outreach services including home visitation, resource mobilization, school-community representatives, and parent conferences; (2) a parent component including a parent resource teacher, a dedicated room for parent activities within the school, and classroom volunteering; (3) a curriculum component including a focus on language and early literacy, small class sizes, and in-service training of teachers; and (4) a health component including health screening, nursing services, and free and reduced-price lunch. The elementary school portion of the CPC program includes three components: (1) parent room activities including home support and classroom volunteering; (2) a curriculum component including reduced class size, teacher aides, age-appropriate instructional materials, individualized instruction, and in-service teacher training; and (3) school-wide services including health services, school-community representatives, free and reduced-price meals, and resource mobilization.

Ideally, children enter the CPC program at three years of age and receive two years of preschool. Teachers are highly qualified (e.g., have advanced degrees, training in child development, and are certified by the state) and compensated in line with all CPS teachers. Family involvement is an important element of CPC programs and space is dedicated in each school to parent education activities intended to support parents' role in their children's education. The goal of the family-school partnership is to reduce social isolation of parents and families, increase school and residential stability, strengthen parent engagement in their children's schooling, and support parent's economic and educational attainment.

CPC is widely recognized as one of the nation's most successful early-childhood program initiatives

(Guernsey 2009). Longitudinal research (Reynolds 1997; Reynolds et al. 2011) based on following a 1979–80 cohort of 1,400 individuals who participated from age three in the CPC programs indicate that, in comparison with the control group, participants had higher levels of school attainment, job skills, and socioeconomic status, and lower rates of felony arrest, incarceration, and substance abuse. The preschool and extended-day components were especially beneficial for Black boys in comparison to girls. For example, social and public benefits of preschool attendance for boys ($60,635 annual income for treatment group and $34,835 control group) exceeded those of girls' ($31,238 and $16,402) annual incomes for treatment and control groups, respectively. Reynolds suggests that these social and public benefits are due to boys' greater high school completion and, to a lesser extent, special-education placement (Reynolds, 1997, p. 34).

Child-Parent Centers represent the earliest successful effort of a major American school system to provide comprehensive high-quality early education to significant numbers of low-income children; to use Title 1 money to support this effort; to align the preschool and early elementary curriculum; and to provide significant parent education and support tied to educational goals. Currently, early-childhood advocates, school districts, major foundations, and others have initiated a national effort to create seamless, rigorous, and developmentally appropriate early-education systems from preschool through third grade, and many of these initiatives incorporate CPC components (see, for example, Nyhan 2011). Washington State, Illinois, North Carolina, and New Jersey, among other local school districts and state efforts, have developed new programs or are continuing pre-K–3rd initiatives to address educational disparities.

Montgomery County Public Schools

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) chose to address district-wide educational disparities through boldly changing their educational system including adopting a pre-K–2rd early-learning initiative (Marietta 2010). In 1998 the MCPS had an increase of 103 percent in its population of English-language learners and a 44 percent increase of children in poverty as evidenced by children receiving free or reduced-price lunch. During this same period, MCPS improved the proportion of third-grade reading proficiency to 88.9 percent and shrank the achievement gap by 29 percentage points (Marietta 2010, p. 1). MCPS' efforts were led by Superintendent Jerry Weast and a leadership team committed to intentionally linking early childhood to K–12 education and to reducing educational disparities. Their effort focused on five critical system-level changes: (1) establish a clear, compelling, meaningful district-wide goal (e.g., 80 percent of graduates are college-ready) that can be embraced by all (administrators, parents, teachers) and is mapped from early childhood through high school learning; (2) create integrated district-wide early-learning strategies (e.g., achieve advanced reading competency in grades K–2; achieve advanced math in grade five) to assure that the clear and compelling goal is met; (3) align
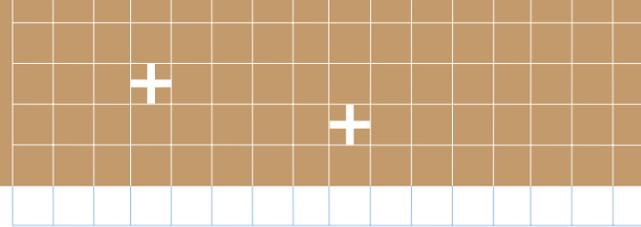
early-learning programs and services (e.g., afterschool programs; focused instruction across all grades in reading, writing, math, and language) with K–12 programs to support the achievement of the compelling goal; (4) balance accountability and improve teacher support and performance to ensure effective and consistent implementation; and (5) ensure continuous improvement and innovation (e.g., online integrated curricula platform, professional development), and monitor and analyze progress.

In 1999, when Weast became superintendent of MCPS, there were essentially two districts—one serving predominately high-poverty Black and Latino children who were, on average, not succeeding in school, and another serving predominately affluent White students who were, on average, doing well academically. The achievement differences between affluent and economically disadvantage young children at age four were apparent in MCPS children. In order to begin to address these educational disparities, MCPS developed the Early Success Performance Plan that provided, in the beginning, full-day kindergarten to the most educationally vulnerable children (eventually full-day kindergarten was available in all MCPS elementary schools); student teacher ratio in the highest-need schools was 15 to 1; and the most educationally at-risk children had afterschool and summertime extended-learning opportunities from kindergarten through fifth grade (Marietta 2010).

The system change adopted by MCPS sought excellent highly trained teachers for all grade levels and incorporated a standards-based curriculum with appropriate assessments that were used to inform classroom teaching and learning. For the early learning (preschool, Head Start, and kindergarten) component, MCPS developed its own diagnostic assessment. During the first few years, all early-learning teachers received more than one hundred hours of training in assessment and curriculum. In addition, MCPS adopted a Teacher Professional Growth System that provided mentoring, professional development, and peer support for all new and struggling teachers. To reduce school transitions for young children, MCPS worked to create early-learning classrooms in its highest-need schools; this effort significantly reduced the movement of children from one school to another during the first five years of schooling. Further, parents were involved in creating the Early Success Performance Plan, helped revise the kindergarten program, and redesigned the kindergarten report card. Parents sat on advisory boards, attended parent academies, and in numerous other ways were involved in MCPS systems change.

The complexity of the systems change created in Montgomery County, Maryland, has been described in detail (see, for example, Marietta 2010). But in relation to Black children's educational achievement, MCPS reforms significantly decreased the gap in reading and math between Black and White children. For example, in 2003 the percentage of MCPS third graders proficient at or above grade level in reading was 83 percent of White students but only 48 percent of Black students; but in 2009 the gap had decreased—the percentage of MCPS third graders proficient at or above grade level in reading was 95 percent of White students and 80 percent of Black students.

In summary: The four programs described above are excellent examples of high quality effective early-education programs. They represent both relatively small demonstration projects (Abecedarian and Perry Preschool) and efforts by large urban public school districts (Chicago, Montgomery County, Maryland) to address poverty and the achievement gap through the creation of high-quality early-childhood programs. Each is acknowledged to be successful in addressing the educational achievement of Black boys and children in poverty in the short-term; each is supported by research that demonstrates its effectiveness in long-term educational and developmental outcomes; and each can be replicated by schools districts staffed by committed educators and administrators.

Our National Challenge

Our challenge as a nation is to ensure that every young Black boy achieves to his fullest potential, that we bring every resource to bear to optimize young Black male development, and that we minimize or ameliorate risks. In achieving these goals we can tolerate no excuses and no failures. As this brief discussion suggests, we do not need to reinvent the wheel—effective, evidence-based models of early-childhood education programs within public schools serving Black children exist, and they have been successful in reducing the achievement gap. Do we have the will as a nation to create high-quality, developmentally appropriate early-education programs for optimal Black male development and educational achievement? As a democratic nation, we can't afford not to commit ourselves to that goal.

Summary of Solutions

At the heart of the developmental and educational difficulties young Black boys face is a national failure to confront, address, and eradicate structural inequalities, disparities, and discrimination that constitute the childhood ecology of Black boys and significantly contribute to negative outcomes. The complexity of factors (health, mental health, poverty) that shape the development of young Black boys necessitates *proven strategies employed consistently over time* to ameliorate the challenges they encounter. They include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Ensure that all early childhood staff participates in professional development designed to:

    a. Reduce the influence of negative stereotyping of Black boys that depict them as deficient, threatening, disengaged, angry—even criminal.

    b. Bring awareness to the fact that Black boys are disciplined more severely in school for minor infractions, suspended from school including preschool, or stopped by police.

    c. Understand the potential misfit between school and the cultures of young Black males.

    d. Understand child development and specifically the development of Black males.
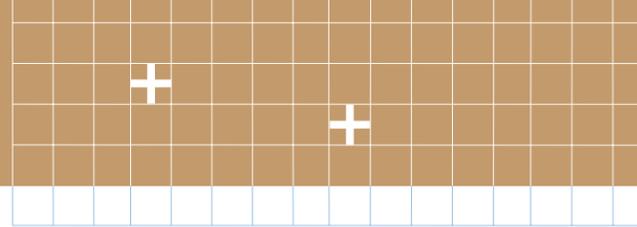
2. Address low-income Black boys' educational and developmental challenges by creating high-quality early-childhood education and services for children ages birth to eight. These programs should have the following characteristics:

    a. Small class size and teacher-child ratios—for preschool, seventeen children and two teachers; for kindergarten through third-grade classrooms, twenty-five children and two teachers

    b. Carefully developed and age-appropriate curriculum

    c. Well-trained teachers with child development knowledge

    d. Parent involvement and/or education component

    e. A combination of services intended to meet multiple needs of young children and families in poverty, including targeted social, emotional, language, physical development, health, and nutrition supports

    f. Coordinate instruction across grades within schools, districts, and states

    g. Improve instructional practices; reduce class size; provide a broad integrated curriculum that includes strong literacy, art, numeracy, science, and social and emotional learning; and align educational standards from preschool through third grade

    h. Incorporate developmentally appropriate assessment processes, providing strong professional development for teachers; providing leadership development for principals; and supporting a dual-generation strategy to ensure parent and family engagement

3. Consider home visitation, center-based programs, and preschool classrooms in public schools to address the variety of needs (e.g., nutrition, child education, parent education).

4. Guarantee that children are taught by experienced early-childhood educators and given opportunities to problem solve, make decisions, and learn through a play-based curriculum.

5. Sufficiently staff the early-childhood program (pre-K through third grade): e.g., a single school principal and staffed by a head teacher, parent resource teacher, school-community representative, teachers and aides, and a school nurse, psychologist, and social worker.

6. Include six key components in preschool programs: (1) student enrollment at age three, receiving two years of preschool; (2) outreach services including home visitation, resource mobilization, school-community representatives, and parent conferences; (3) parent component including

a parent resource teacher, a dedicated room for parent activities within the school, and classroom volunteering; (4) curriculum component including a focus on language and early literacy, small class sizes, and in-service training of teachers; (5) health component including health screening, nursing services, and free and reduced lunch; (6) highly qualified teachers (e.g., have advanced degrees, training in child development, and are certified by the state) and compensated in line with all other teachers.

7. Include three key components in the elementary school program: (1) parent room activities including home support and classroom volunteering; (2) curriculum component including reduced class size, teacher aides, age-appropriate instructional materials, individualized instruction, and in-service teacher training; and (3) schoolwide services including health services, school-community representatives, free and reduced-price meals, and resource mobilization.

8. Establish clear, compelling, meaningful district-wide goals (e.g., 80 percent of grade-three students will read at grade level) that can be embraced by all (e.g., administrators, parents, teachers) and is mapped from early childhood through high school learning.

9. Create integrated district-wide early-learning strategies (e.g., achieve advanced reading competency in grades K–2; achieve advanced math in grade five) to assure that the clear and compelling goal is met.

    a. Align early-learning programs and services (e.g., afterschool programs; focused instruction across all grades in reading, writing, math, and language) with K–12 programs to support the achievement of the compelling goal.

    b. Balance accountability and improve teacher support and performance to ensure effective and consistent implementation.

    c. Ensure continuous improvement and innovation (e.g., online integrated curricula platform, professional development), and monitor and analyze progress.

10. Ensure that all early-learning teachers receive extensive professional development in assessment and curriculum.

11. Provide mentoring, professional development, and peer support for all new and struggling teachers.

12. Include parents in all activities (e.g., revising the kindergarten program, redesigning the kindergarten report card, serving on advisory boards, and attending parent academies).

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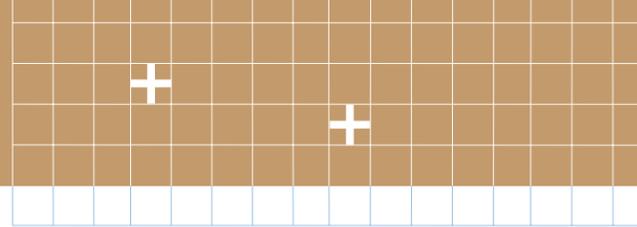
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The Underrepresentation of African American Males in Gifted and Talented Programs

The educational and social status of African American males is well chronicled. As a result, compelling analyses of dropout statistics and academic achievement issues pertaining to African American males can be found throughout the scholarly literature (Farmer et al. 2004; Jackson and Moore 2006, 2008; Lee and Ransom 2011; Moore 2006; Noguera, 2003). With respect to other racial groups, significant comparative research has focused on the overrepresentation of African American males in special education as well as excessive disciplinary practices (Butler et al. 2012; Cartledge, Gibson, and Keyes 2012; Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake 2010; Geisler et al. 2009; Lewis et al. 2010; Moore, Henfield, and Owens 2008; Whiting 2009). For example, a recent report from the US Department of Education showed that African American male public school students had been suspended at a higher rate than males from other racial groups in 1999, 2003, and 2007 (Aud, KewalRamani, and Frohlich 2011). While many issues affecting the educational plight of African American males have been highlighted, the gifted education crisis affecting African American males is not as apparent in the media or in scholarly settings. As a result, it appears that lesser attention has concentrated on the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs (Donovan and Cross 2002; Ford 1998, 2011; Whiting 2009).

National education data illustrate the low percentage of African Americans in gifted and talented programs (Hargrove and Seay 2011). For example, in 2002, 3.1 percent of African Americans participated in gifted and talented programs in public elementary and secondary schools (US Department of Education 2006). Moreover, according to national data, 3.5 percent and 3.6 percent of African American students participated in gifted and talented programs in 2004 and 2006, respectively (US Department
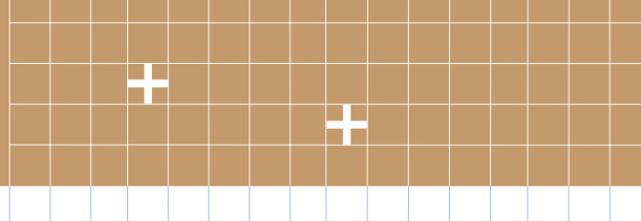
of Education 2008). The statistical data also illustrate that African American females are more likely to be represented in gifted education programs (Ford, Grantham, and Bailey 1999; Jackson and Moore 2006; Lewis and Moore 2008b) and less likely to comprise special education classrooms when compared to their African American male peers (Cartledge, Gibson, and Keyes 2012; Lo and Cartledge 2007). Additionally, data from the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2008, 2010) suggest that African American males are more likely to be underrepresented in gifted and talented programs and less likely to be selected (or identified) for these types of accelerated learning opportunities.

Education trends associated with African American males tend to portray a bleak academic and occupational future for this population (Darensbourg, Perez, and Blake 2010; Lewis et al. 2010). Also, on many school indicators, African American males are less likely to perform as well as African American females and their White peers (Ford and Whiting 2010; Irving and Hudley 2005, 2008; Jackson and Moore 2006, 2008; Lewis, Chambers, and Butler 2012; Moore and Owens 2009). As a result, White male students tend to be represented in gifted education programs (Ford, Grantham, and Whiting 2008), while African American male students tend to be underrepresented (Ford 2003, 2011; Henfield, Owens, and Moore 2008). Given the compounded effects of educational issues, these disturbing trends in gifted education are likely to intensify rather than improve.

Across the United States, the underrepresentation problem for African American males is more visible in suburban school districts (Lacy 2007; Ogbu 2003). However, it appears, to some extent, that the gifted education underrepresentation crisis goes unnoticed in urban school districts, where African Americans commonly represent a considerable percentage of the student enrollment and where consistent examples of academic challenges are evident for African American males (Noguera 2008). It has been argued that the challenges facing urban school districts are widespread, to the point that negative educational outcomes for African American males are viewed with a degree of normalcy (Noguera 2008; Lewis and Moore 2008a, 2008b). This idea may explain why the low number of African American males in gifted education is seldom perceived as a topic of concern. Pedro Noguera (2008) suggests that too many public school personnel "have grown accustomed to the idea that a large percentage of the Black male students they serve will fail, get into trouble, and drop out of school" (p. xix).

Adhering to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation has increasingly become the primary focus of urban school districts (Gallant and Moore 2008; Michael-Chadwell 2011; Moore and Owens 2009). However, a common criticism of the legislation is that school districts have little, if any, incentive to improve students' test scores beyond the minimum scores set by the state. Another critique of NCLB, according to researchers such as Sharon Michael-Chadwell (2011), is that it neglects to include educational programming and special funding specifically for gifted and talented students. As Michael-Chadwell states, "With the focus of US public education systems on improving the academic competency of their low-performing students, questions regarding the feasibility of maintaining enrichment programs

for gifted students persist" (p. 101). By focusing intently on students who are apt to underperform on standardized tests, urban school districts may be likely to underidentify African American males who possess the ability for gifted education. Furthermore, because substantial resources are utilized to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students, it is also possible that the concerns of gifted and talented African American male students may be overlooked.

It has also been noted in the scholarly literature, but not proven conclusively, that some urban school districts are considered ineffective in educating African American males (Lewis and Moore 2008a, 2008b; Moore and Lewis 2012; Noguera 2008). Research regarding this issue suggests that, despite the fact that thousands of African American males attend urban school districts, only a small and disproportionate number of them are enrolled in gifted and talented programs (Ford 2003, 2011; Whiting 2009). Thus, many African American males may never have the opportunity to be in gifted and talented classrooms. Stated differently, many African American males may never experience intellectually-stimulating gifted and talented programs that can help them realize their full academic potential (Bonner and Murry 2012; Ford 2011).

Identification and Assessment Issues

Because of the negative categorizations commonly assigned to African American males, their schooling experiences are often compromised (Jackson and Moore 2006). Regrettably, many urban school districts concentrate on the academic shortcomings as opposed to the strengths of African American males. These tendencies are quite prevalent in school settings and tend to negatively impact African American males (Bonner and Murry 2012; Whiting, 2009). Accordingly, in numerous urban school districts, the academic needs of gifted students of color are not being met (Ford 2011).

Because some school districts rely heavily on standardized assessments to identify gifted students, gifted education scholars (e.g., Ford 2003, 2011; Ford et al. 2002) assert that these practices may contribute to the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted and talented programs. For example, test scores are usually the main variables used to identify gifted students (Briggs, Reis, and Sullivan 2008). Moreover, it is widely believed that, due to the conceptions of giftedness (Sternberg and Davidson 2005) in public schools, which are usually restricted and limited to cognitive measures, many African American male students may not be selected to participate in gifted and talented programs (Ford 2003, 2011; Ford et al. 1999). Regrettably, test scores do not always support the identification of the unique academic abilities of African American males (Ford 2003; Ford et al. 1999). Also, in some urban school settings, there is a tendency to assess the academic aptitude of these students in relation to White students. In such cases, the academic potential of African American males may go unrecognized (Bonner and Jennings 2007; Ford 1995).
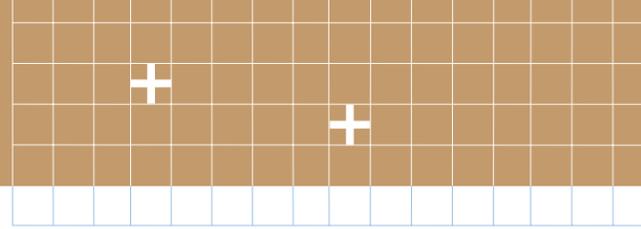
In the research literature, numerous education scholars (e.g., Bonner and Murry 2012; Ford et al. 1999; Michael-Chadwell 2011; Moore, Ford, and Milner 2005) have indicated that structural factors, which are embedded in the philosophies and practices of school districts, contribute to the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs. Aligned with these perspectives, Mara Sapon-Shevin (2003) asserted, "Gifted programs are implemented for students for whom educational failure will not be tolerated (generally the children of White, privileged parents) and are enacted in ways that leave the general educational system untouched and immune to analysis and critique" (p. 129).

One strategy for expanding the educational opportunities of African American males in urban school districts is to focus the attention of educators and school leaders on selecting African American males to participate in gifted and talented programs. Consistent with this idea, Alexinia Baldwin (2011) wrote, "Variables such as socioeconomic deprivation, cultural diversity, social and geographic isolation, and a relative perception of powerlessness, require assessment or identification techniques which cut across these variables to locate the hidden talents of the black child" (p. 14). Therefore, urban school leaders need to understand how these variables may affect test scores in order to effectively translate the test results (Ford et al. 2002). It is also important that urban educators (e.g., teachers, school counselors, and school psychologists) are adequately trained to assess African American male students' academic potential for gifted education. However, Ford (2003) suggests that educators sometimes develop extensive processes that decrease minority students' chances of being admitted to gifted education programs. For example, in one urban school system, students had to meet the following eight requirements, before being admitted to gifted education (Ford 2003, pp. 147–148):

1. an admission fee ranging from $160 to $600, depending on the school building (no financial support given to families unable to pay the fee);

2. a history of perfect attendance or only excused medical absences;

3. no negative behavioral marks on report cards;

4. no grade below a C in any previous course;

5. official transcripts submitted by parents with an application (even if the student was already enrolled within the district);

6. application to be submitted to the school only on two specified dates and only during certain hours;

7. a contract signed by parent or guardian agreeing to participate in certain activities on predetermined dates and at predetermined times; and

8. all applications delivered in person.

Because teacher recommendations frequently comprise a major part of the identification process for gifted education (Baldwin 2011; Ford 2011), some researchers have argued that negative or vague teacher recommendations prevent African American males from being selected for gifted and talented programs (Bonner and Jennings 2007; Ford 2011; Ford et al. 2002; Ford and Whiting 2010; Whiting 2009). In support of this assertion, in the mid-1930s, M. D. Jenkins (1936) conducted a landmark study on African American students and gifted education. Although Jenkins found no differences between the test scores of African American males and females, the females were twice as likely to be referred for gifted education. As a possible explanation for this finding, "one can attribute part of this imbalance to teacher perceptions; namely, teachers may be more willing to accept Black females as gifted" (Ford et al. 1999, p. 52). In this regard, research suggests that teachers may hold negative biases about African American males, and some teachers may not possess the needed training in multicultural education (Flowers, Milner, and Moore 2003; Ford et al. 2002) or understand the importance of culture and its effects on African American male students (Ford 2011). Thus, teachers who are unwilling to learn and utilize multicultural knowledge in their classrooms may be less likely to positively interact with African American male students and assess their academic potential (Ford 2011).

When African American students perceive that teachers do not believe in their academic ability, their educational aspirations are often negatively affected (Flowers, Milner, and Moore 2003). Deborah Harmon (2002), utilizing a qualitative research design, found that urban African American students believed that some of their teachers lacked understanding and appreciation of African American culture and that their teachers behaved in manners that communicated low expectations of them. In 2008, Moon and Brighton discovered that only 65 percent of the teachers in their study agreed with the assertion that "the potential for academic giftedness is present in all socioeconomic groups in our society" (pp. 460–461). Having these perspectives is often referred to as deficit thinking (Ford et al. 2002; Ford and Whiting 2010). Given that urban school districts are usually situated in dense communities of poverty (Lewis and Moore 2008a, 2008b), the aforementioned research findings have major implications pertaining to the identification of African American males for gifted and talented programs.

In light of the structural dysfunction associated with many school environments, sometimes, even when identified and placed in gifted education, urban school systems may still struggle to retain African American males in these programs. Additionally, because gifted programs tend to mostly consist of
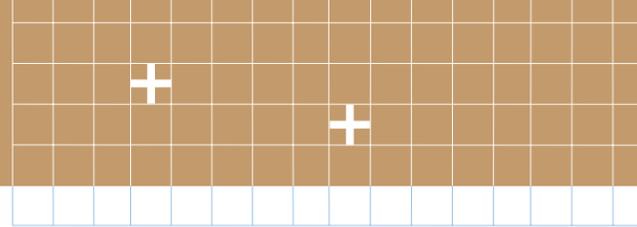
students who are White, female, and middle-class, African American males in gifted and talented programs may experience some degree of discomfort because they are not well-represented as a group (Ford et al. 1999). Also, some African American males may not fare well in certain gifted and talented programs because they may feel or believe that they need to make substantial academic, personal, and social adjustments that are not required of them in non-gifted classroom settings—where they tend to be more populated (Ford 2011). Regardless of a particular school's approach to gifted and talented education (e.g., enrichment, pullout, compacting, cluster grouping, self-pacing, and acceleration), several education researchers (Baldwin 2011; Bonnor and Murry 2012; Ford 2003, 2011) have highlighted the importance of diversifying gifted education. One study (Ford, Grantham, and Bailey 1999) asserted that having a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse gifted student population increases the likelihood that African American males are motivated and interested in participating in a gifted and talented program.

According to the existing research on this topic, the negative feelings that African American males may experience in gifted programs requires that educators closely monitor students' progress, academically and socially, as well as the pedagogical approaches used in classroom settings (Ford 2003, 2011). In light of the research describing the experiences of African American males in gifted programs, it is well established that the pursuit of excellence for those students, who attend urban schools, is often challenged (Lacy 2007; Ogbu 2003). However, there is little data, if any, that closely examines the extent to which African American males are represented in gifted education programs among the nation's largest school districts. To provide initial data, the next section of this article summarizes the research design of a descriptive study that attempted to explore an aspect of the gifted education problem facing African American males.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis of African American Male Enrollment in Gifted and Talented Programs

Data Source

Data from the US Department of Education's Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) were accessed for this study. The CRDC, a federally mandated reporting system, was designed to obtain school-level data highlighting specific dimensions of school and student characteristics (US Department of Education 2010, 2012). The CRDC information was deemed useful for the present study because it contained student enrollment data partitioned by race and included data highlighting student participation in school-based activities (e.g., gifted and talented programs). Regarding the primary variable of interest for this study, schools were asked to report if they had "students enrolled in gifted/talented programs" (US Department of Education 2010, p. 4). Then, schools were asked to report their student enrollment

in gifted and talented programs "on a single day between September 27 and December 31" by race, gender, disability status, and English proficiency status (US Department of Education 2010, p. 4).

Variables

For this study, we reviewed gifted and talented program student enrollment data from the twenty largest school districts that were also examined in a recent report, utilizing CRDC data, produced by the US Department of Education (2012). According to the CRDC variable definitions (US Department of Education 2010), gifted and talented programs are defined as "Programs during regular school hours offered to students because of unusually high academic ability or aptitude or a specialized talent or aptitude" (p. 34). Descriptive statistical data of the racial composition of each school district's student enrollment and their gifted and talented program enrollment were obtained to examine the representation of African American males in gifted education. As shown in Table 1, for the twenty largest school districts, we examined the African American male enrollment in the school district, the percentage of African American males enrolled in the school district, the number of African American males enrolled in gifted and talented programs, the percentage of African American males in gifted and talented programs among the total population of African American males in the school district, and the percentage of African American males enrolled in gifted and talented programs (which shows the percentage of African American males in gifted and talented programs compared to the total number of students in gifted and talented programs).

Results

Among the twenty school districts analyzed for this study, the average total enrollment in each school district was 257,065 students. The average enrollment in gifted and talented programs in each school district was 21,682 students. Comparatively, the average enrollment of African American males in each school district was 37,342 students. The average enrollment of African American males in gifted and talented programs was 1,622 students. To explore the extent to which African American males were represented in gifted and talented programs, the number of African American males enrolled in gifted and talented programs was compared to the number of African American males enrolled in the school district. As shown in Table 1, of the twenty school districts, only two of the school districts had percentages higher than 10 percent, indicating that, among many of the school districts, a small percentage of the African American males participated in gifted and talented programs. Based on these data, as well as additional data shown in Table 1, African American males are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs among these school districts. Additionally, we reported the percentage of African American males in gifted and talented programs among the number of students enrolled in gifted and talented programs. Of the twenty school districts, African American males comprised 10 percent or more of the
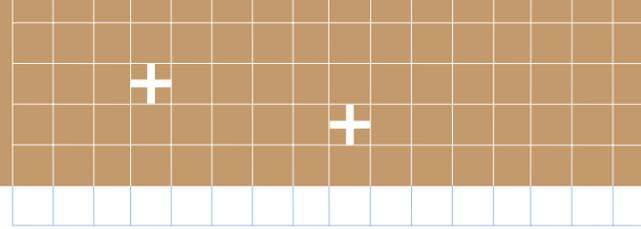
gifted and talented program enrollment in only four school districts. In contrast, in sixteen of the twenty school districts, African American males comprised less than 10 percent of the gifted and talented enrollment. In these twenty school districts, there is ample evidence suggesting that African American males are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. However, the level of underrepresentation is more extreme in some school districts than others.

Conclusion

The study presented above can be used to initiate important conversations, within and among urban school districts, pertaining to the problem of underrepresentation among African American males as well as signal the need for more research on this topic (Ford et al. 2008; Ford and Whiting 2010; Hargrove and Seay 2011; Whiting 2009). In light of the study's findings, research and policy questions remain as to the reasons why the gifted education underrepresentation crisis is more pronounced in some school districts than in others. Moreover, future research should investigate why some school districts are more successful than others in identifying and retaining African American males in gifted education programs. This type of research and scholarly analysis will, it is hoped, encourage education practitioners and policymakers to examine issues associated with the recruitment and retention of African American males in gifted and talented programs in a way that enables more African American males to explore the opportunity to achieve their highest potential.

Summary of Solutions

African American males represent a considerable percentage of the student enrollment in urban school districts; however, they reflect a small percentage of the enrollment in gifted and talented programs. To address and rectify this issue, below are recommendations that urban school districts may consider to increase the representation of African American males in gifted and talented programs.

1. Collect and disaggregate gifted and talented program participation data by race, gender, socioeconomic status, grade level, and description of the gifted and talented program.

2. Ensure that selection committees for gifted and talented programs are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.

3. Develop and utilize a variety of strategies (e.g., portfolio assessments, student transcripts, observational and performance-based assessments, nominations by parents, teachers, and peers) to identify and select African American males for gifted and talented programs.

4. Eliminate any policies and practices that might prevent African American males from participating in gifted and talented programs (e.g., admissions fees, attendance requirements, and parent contracts/agreements).

5. Provide multicultural training to all urban school teachers to ensure that they possess the appropriate multicultural awareness, skills, and knowledge to work with gifted African American males.

6. Ensure that African American males have the opportunity to participate in gifted education by providing financial resources to support gifted and talented programs.

7. Provide multicultural professional development for school counselors so that they are able to positively support and interact with gifted African American male students and their parents.

8. Ensure that gifted and talented programs are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.

9. Provide professional development opportunities for principals to ensure that they are aware of the issues associated with the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted programs.

10. Encourage university-level collaborative partnerships with faculty and students in principal preparation programs to ensure that future principals are able to support the recruitment and retention of African American males in gifted and talented programs.

11. Encourage university-level collaborative partnerships with faculty and students in teacher preparation programs to ensure that future teachers are being prepared to identify, teach, and nurture gifted and talented characteristics in African American males.

12. Implement parent-training programs in urban schools to help families or legal guardians better understand the benefits of gifted and talented programs.

13. Pursue funding opportunities from the US Department of Education and National Science Foundation to examine issues impacting the recruitment, retention, and educational excellence of African American males in gifted education.

14. Conduct research studies to answer important questions, such as:

   a. How do urban school districts define gifted education?
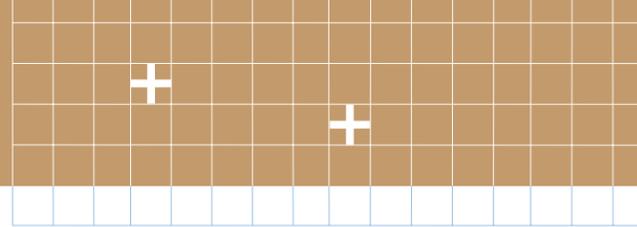
b. What identification and selection processes do urban school districts utilize with regard to gifted education?

c. What gifted education policies and practices are implemented in urban school districts?

d. What types of resources are allocated to gifted education in urban school districts?

e. What type of gifted education training is provided to teachers, school counselors, principals, and other school personnel?

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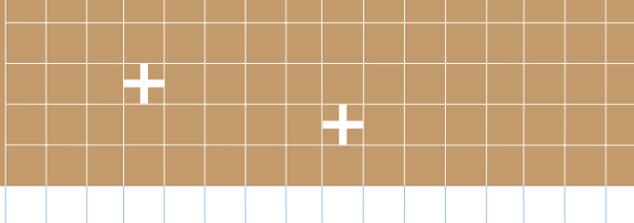
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Table 1. Representation of African American Males in Gifted and Talented Programs in the Twenty Largest School Districts

School District	State	African American Male Enrollment in the School District	Percentage of African American Male Enrollment in the School District	African American Male Enrollment in Gifted and Talented Programs	Percentage of African American Gifted and Talented Students (as a percentage of the total enrollment of African American male students in the school district)	Percentage of African American Gifted and Talented Students (as a percentage of the total enrollment of gifted and talented students in the school district)
New York City Public Schools	NY	150,150	15%	5,490	4%	12%
Los Angeles Unified School District	CA	30,395	5%	1,730	6%	3%
Chicago Public Schools	IL	92,210	22%	1,010	1%	16%
Dade County Public Schools	FL	44,380	13%	2,385	5%	7%
Clark County School District	NV	23,080	7%	160	1%	3%
Broward County Public Schools	FL	51,115	20%	785	2%	7%
Houston Independent School District	TX	27,220	13%	1,540	6%	6%
Hillsborough County Public Schools	FL	22,710	12%	275	1%	4%
Fairfax County Public Schools	VA	9,855	6%	1,265	13%	4%
Philadelphia City School District	PA	53,380	32%	1,250	2%	20%
Palm Beach County Public Schools	FL	25,605	15%	285	1%	4%
Orange County Public Schools	FL	24,705	14%	360	1%	4%
Gwinnett County Public Schools	GA	22,375	14%	1,325	6%	6%
Dallas Independent School District	TX	20,500	13%	1,450	7%	8%
Montgomery County Public Schools	MD	16,860	12%	7,110	42%	9%
Wake County Public Schools	NC	18,650	13%	1,025	5%	4%
San Diego Unified School District	CA	8,170	6%	85	1%	2%
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools	NC	30,665	23%	1,165	4%	8%
Prince George's County Public Schools	MD	46,550	37%	3,535	8%	30%
Duval County Public Schools	FL	28,265	23%	210	1%	6%

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Alfred W. Tatum

Alfred W. Tatum, PhD, began his career as an eighth-grade teacher, later becoming a reading specialist and discovering the power of texts to reshape the life outcomes of struggling readers. His current research focuses on the literacy development of African American adolescent males. He is the author of *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap* (2005), and *Reading for Their Life: (Re)Building the Textual Lineages of African American Male Adolescents* (2007). He is published in several journals, including *Harvard Educational Review*, *Urban Education*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, and *Principal Leadership*, and he provides teacher professional development to urban middle and high schools. He is currently a professor at the University of Illinois–Chicago.

Four Literacy Profiles of African American Male Youth

For this paper, I was charged with providing solutions for increasing the reading and writing achievement of African American males across grades K–12, a charge I find both daunting and complex, because reading and writing achievement sits at several different intersections, race and gender among them, although race and gender are not root causes of reading and writing difficulties. Additionally, the profiles of struggling and nonstruggling African American male readers and writers are varied. Generally, struggling readers and writers are categorized based on assessment scores that offer little information about their specific needs.

I offer four literacy profiles of young African American males to illustrate this point.

Literacy Profile 1

The first profile emerges from a reading screening I conducted with an African American male adolescent at the University of Illinois at Chicago's Reading Clinic. I dictated the following sentence as part of the screening to gauge the student's ability to spell: "When writing a book on peer pressure, I'm clearly aware that life as a teen hasn't gotten easier."

The male adolescent wrote the following:

> Wod skt
> book
> P

His writing and subsequent reading, in which he identified a few high-frequency words such as *the*, *a*, and *you*, but struggled with other words such as *sure* and *want*, presents at minimum three literacy-related challenges: (1) making instructional decisions to help him become a better reader and writer; (2) identifying texts that engage him and that he finds meaningful, and; (3) nurturing his intellectual development. Too often, efforts focus on making instructional decisions while ignoring other aims that can serve as conduits to reading and writing development. I constructed the following map of this reader to emphasize why the other aims are equally important.

Writer's Map
African American Male Adolescent

WRITING | WRITER

Spelling
NO

Decode
NO

Talk/Speech
YES

Motivation
YES

Goals
YES

School-related
NO
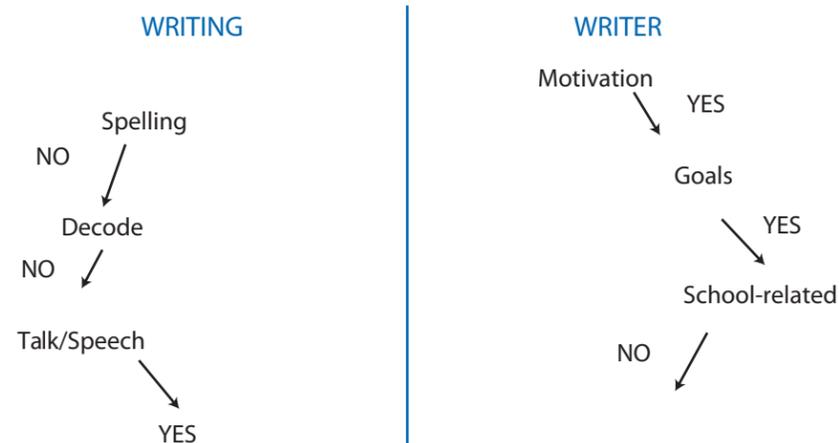
**Literacy Profile
Map 1**

To construct this map using the assessment data available to me, I asked the following questions—1 through 3 in relation to his writing and reading skills, and 4 through 6 in relation to his person:

1. Can he spell? — *No*

2. Can he decode? — *No*

3. Can he talk and is his speech fully formed? — *Yes*

4. Is he motivated? — *Yes*

5. Does he have clearly defined goals? — *Yes*

6. Are his goals school-related? — *No*

A summary profile would yield that this young male is a highly motivated high school student who struggles with both reading and writing. He is driven by several non-school-related goals and wants to experience reading and writing in ways that have utility in helping him realize those goals. Also, his window of resilience may be closing, because he is an over-age student at his assigned grade level who may determine that he has been defaulted by a school system or other adults in his life who allowed both his reading and writing to remain grossly underdeveloped. Dropping out of high school can become a real option unless he believes he is receiving sufficient reading and writing supports.

Three additional literacy profiles serve as points of comparison for this student.

Literacy Profile 2

The second profile is based on a writing sample I received from an African American male adolescent who participated in a literacy institute I hosted during the summer of 2009. The young male wrote:

> "All my life I have never been anything more but a trouble making black boy. I was always the one that got in the most trouble throughout my family. In my entire life I never had my time to shine. Everyone around me was happy and joyful but not me. I was by myself in a cold world. I always tried my best at everything but my best wasn't good enough.
>
> I know no one in the world liked me because every time I walked in a room people looked at me like I was wanted for murder. Most people tell me that I will be locked up with the real bad boys but truly I would love that because most of the bad boys I talked to know how much it hurts to be left out or forgotten. They know it hurts to look in the eyes of their family and friends and teacher and they see fire and disappointment. For me, I never could look in someone's eyes and see happiness when they look at me. All I would see is my reflection fading away."

I constructed the following map of the young male based on his writing sample.

Writer's Map
African American Male Adolescent

WRITING | WRITER

Spelling
YES

Writing
Conventions
YES

Organization
YES

Complex
Sentences
NO

Identity
YES

Positive
School
Experience
NO

Positive out-of-
school experience
NO

Resilient
YES

Vulnerable
YES
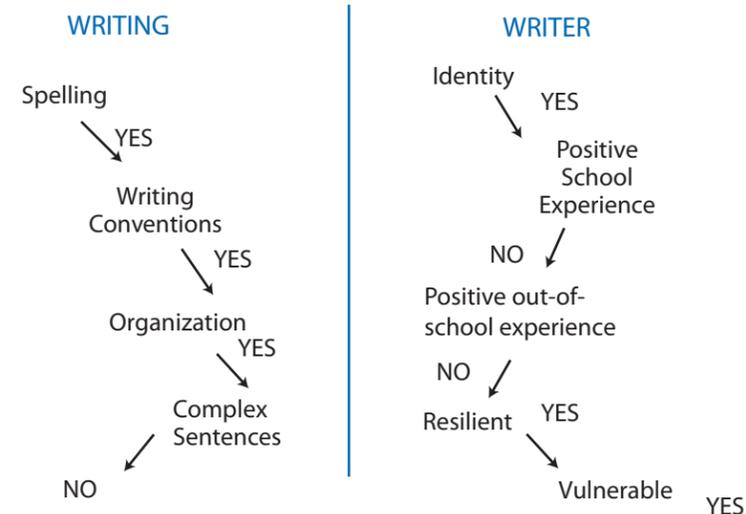
**Literacy Profile
Map 2**

Although this student's writing is qualitatively better and more advanced than that of the writer in Profile 1, instructional decisions still have to be made to improve his writing. His personal profile is also qualitatively different from that of the previous student. The summary of this profile yields a young male who embraces his ethnic and gender identity and who also exhibits evidence of spelling, writing conventions, and organization as reflected in simple sentences. He has had negative in-school and out-of-school experiences that are causing him to feel vulnerable, as reflected in his words: "Most people tell me that I will be locked up with the real bad boys but truly I would love that because most of the bad boys I talked to know how much it hurts to be left out or forgotten." Like the student in Profile 1, this young man feels vulnerable; he admits to his willingness to surrender his life's chances at such a young age because all he sees is "[his] reflection fading away." His narrative would lead some to focus on his vulnerabilities by attempting to find culturally relevant materials to the exclusion and detriment of his writing development. These are the "either-or" decisions that are made by well-intentioned educators. However, it is more appropriate to plan instruction at the intersections.

Literacy Profile 3

The third profile is based on a conversation I had with the aunt of a four-year-old African American male who provided a description of her nephew based on an observation and conversations with one of the boy's parents.

A summary profile would indicate that this young male is an emerging reader and writer who has limited alphabetic knowledge and is unable to write his full name. He is a child who attempts to write using the letter knowledge he has, along with drawing images to construct stories. He enjoys writing and listening to stories. He can discuss his writings, but has difficulty retelling stories that are read aloud to him. Although the young male has clear strengths, he would be viewed as an at-risk youth because he does not have alphabetic knowledge. This could lead to instructional decisions that suppress his opportunities to write and retell stories until he develops alphabetic knowledge.

Literacy Profile 4

The final profile is based on my son's reading and writing behaviors in grades four through nine. His reading performance on the state standardized assessment ranged from the ninety-fifth to the ninety-ninth percentiles throughout grades four through eight.

Writer's Map
African American Male Pre-K

Alphabetical knowledge → NO → Developing letter knowledge → YES → Writes his full name → NO → Uses images when he writes → YES → Discusses his writings → YES

Attempts to write → YES → Enjoys writing → YES → Enjoys listening to stories → YES → Retells a story → NO

Literacy Profile Map 3

Reader's Map
African American Male Grades 4–9

Reading

Read → YES → Strong Vocabulary → YES → Disciplinary Schema → YES

Reader

Enjoys school → YES → Avid Reader → YES → Finds assigned texts meaningful → NO → High GPA → NO

Literacy Profile Map 4

A summary profile would indicate that he is an avid reader who enjoys school and comprehends texts at a high level, as indicated by his performance on the state's standardized assessments. He has a strong receptive and expressive vocabulary and has a strong schema for many school-based subjects. However, he does not find assigned readings meaningful and does not have a high grade point average. Again, decisions have to be made to ensure that he is not being underserved in school. So much attention is often directed toward students who struggle with reading that the needs of high-performing readers and writers are ignored.

Analyzing Proposed Solutions

The varying literacy profiles presented here illustrate the complexity and challenge of offering solutions for African American male readers across pre-K–12. Currently, literacy development for many African American male youth is conceptualized as an in-school phenomenon related to standardized scores. This focus is influenced by public policy at the national, state, and local levels. As a result, there is an overreliance on generic profiles in making instructional decisions to improve the reading achievement of African American males. Students are often grouped based on these narrow profiles. A narrowly focused skill-and-strategy approach that leads to small upticks in reading achievement is often adopted to put reading difficulties into remission from testing cycle to testing cycle. Instructional decision-making is handicapped by using three of the four school-aged profiles aligned with the categories from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (see Table 1). The four NAEP categories (Below, Basic, Proficient, Advanced) provide an indicator of the students' performance on the assessment, but do not offer the more nuanced profiles that are necessary to improve students' reading and writing achievement. (Below ≠ Below; Basic ≠ Basic; Proficient ≠ Proficient; Advanced ≠ Advanced.) For example, one student can be categorized as "Basic" because of difficulties with decoding, while another can be categorized as "Basic" because of the failure to monitor reading comprehension.

Improving reading scores are inconsequential for three of the four readers represented in the literacy profiles. The goals of the first student are not school-based. The four-year-old is not focused on scores. The advanced reader has already attained high reading scores, but does not find in-school readings meaningful. Profiles 1 and 2 emerged from boys who attend highly segregated schools in one of the member districts of the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS), whereas profiles 3 and 4 emerged from boys who attend more ethnically diverse schools with a wider income distribution among the parents.

The literacy profiles also debunk the notion that "best practices" or "research-based practices" have been settled, and that educators know "what to do" and simply need to build teachers' capacities to "just do it." This is the "skill versus will" argument. But it is important to understand that "best practices" are not static. As the goals and aims of education change, new implications arise for literacy instruction for students in the CGCS member school districts. The questions begin to change. For example, we do not have answers for the following questions:

1. What literacy approach will contribute to African American fourth-grade boys reading several years above grade level instead of several years below grade level in a nation focused on the "fourth-grade slump" that occurs in many of the member school districts, and how can this achievement occur to support simultaneous growth in reading, writing, and disciplinary knowledge (e.g., science, history, and mathematics)?

2. How do we teach reading, build knowledge of science, and nurture the writing of African American male sixth-grade students in a special-education classroom?

3. How do we teach reading, build knowledge of science, and nurture the writing of high-performing African American second-grade males who are motivated to write and love science?

4. How do we structure classroom environments to improve the reading and writing for both profiles mentioned in questions 2 and 3 above, as these students sit among other students with different reading and writing profiles?

While it may be true that we have a better idea of what to do to prevent reading and writing difficulties for children and youth and have identified effective approaches for teaching adolescents who do not have learning or language disabilities (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998), the pathways for addressing and reversing reading and writing problems once they exist remain less clear. Current proposed solutions are outlined in Table 2.

The research is clear that the volume of experiences students have interacting with texts significantly correlates with their overall reading success. It is also clear that reading comprehension is correlated with high student engagement with texts. Reading comprehension is also heightened by discipline and world knowledge, and through the efforts of effective teachers who employ classroom discussions to make meaning of the texts they encounter (see Duke et al., 2011). Still, as I have written elsewhere: "There is virtually no empirical evidence of proven practices and programs that significantly improve the reading achievement of a high percentage of African American male adolescents who enter [middle and] urban high schools as struggling readers. Guidance for advancing their literacy development has been extrapolated from reading research on elementary-aged children where the research literature is more robust" (Tatum 2012, p. 5).

Closing the Reading and Writing Achievement Gap for Young African American Males

The Slow-Growth Model

The effort to close the reading and writing achievement gap has been based on a slow-growth model that stems from the idea that three to five years of professional development is needed to turn around underperforming schools. Schools are generally not turned around using a slow-growth model anchored by skill and strategy development alone (Tatum 2003). However, a slow-growth model is typically adopted because there is very little literacy research involving African American males that has yielded exponential growth in literacy achievement.

Closing the Gap Between Low-Performing and High-Performing Readers and Writers
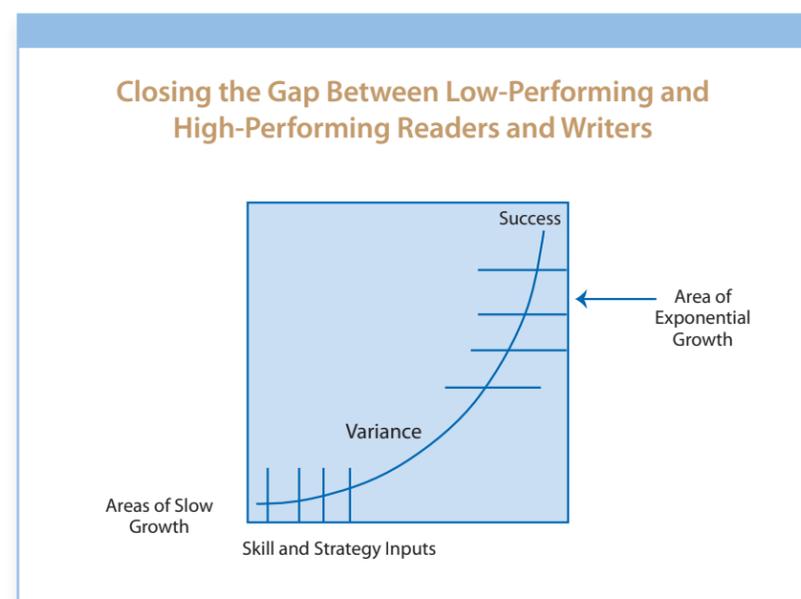
Some might argue that slow growth is better than no growth. There are three counterarguments to be considered: (1) Slow growth may not be fast enough to stem the tide of African American males dropping out of high school at disproportionate rates, particularly for the ones who have experienced years of academic failure related to the inability to handle text independently. (2) A slow-growth model grounded in skill and strategy instruction alone may fail to address other contributing factors to students' reading- and writing-related profiles, as illustrated in the literacy profiles offered earlier in this paper. (3) There is too much variance with respect to readers and writers to ground efforts in a skill-

and-strategy-based slow-growth model. This is why researchers have examined the impact of home literacy environments, community patterns, and cultural practices, poverty, motivation, language and vocabulary differentials, and teacher quality, among other variables, on students' reading and writing achievement.

The absence of empirical evidence has led to the adoption of oversimplified solutions and the four core educational reforms listed in Table 3. "While these priorities are promising, they are too generic for advancing the literacy development of African American male adolescents. More specific guidance is needed. Most school literacy practices continue to miss the mark and suffer from an underestimation of the range and depths of student needs" (Tatum 2012, p. 3).

A New Model: Literacy Vital Signs

The proposed solutions offered in this section are based on (1) my critical analysis of currently proposed solutions, and (2) my reflections on more than two decades of practice and research focused on the literacy development of African American males in highly segregated and diverse school settings. For fourteen years, I have grounded my research in the following seven questions:

1. What are the barriers that disenfranchise African American boys from reading and how do you break down those barriers?

2. How do you engage African American boys with texts and why do they find texts meaningful?

3. What factors contribute to African American males' writing?

4. How do you increase the reading achievement of African American male fourth-grade students?

5. What does the research suggest about providing effective reading instruction in schools that are characteristically urban?

6. Why are we continuing to miss the mark with literacy instruction for African American male children and youth in urban and suburban school districts?

7. What aspects of teacher professional development do teachers find useful for advancing the literacy development of African American adolescents who struggle with reading?

Investigating these questions has led me to a model of literacy instruction based on multiple variables categorized as "vital signs" in four areas (Tatum 2005, 2008, 2012), as shown in Table 4.

I have found an additive impact working at the intersections of the multiple vital signs, because each has the potential to accelerate or slow students' reading, writing, and intellectual growth (Tatum 2000, 2003). A numerical weight cannot easily be assigned to the variables that would allow one set of vital signs (e.g., reading) to be rank-ordered over another set (e.g., reading instruction). The connection across the vital signs has to be strengthened to develop an exponential growth model focused on reading, writing, and disciplinary knowledge. Competencies across the vital signs are needed to address several common refrains I hear:

+ I can teach reading (i.e., vital signs of reading), but I cannot teach African American boys (i.e., vital signs of readers).

+ I can teach the skills and strategies (i.e., vital signs of reading), but I have difficulty getting African American boys to read the text (i.e., vital signs of reading instruction).

+ I can select text to engage my students in rich discussions (i.e, vital signs of instruction), but I still have challenges improving their reading and writing as indicated by standardized assessments (i.e., vital signs of reading).

+ This is why I have called for a more complete framework of literacy instruction to address the literacy needs of African American males (Tatum 2008) as described below.
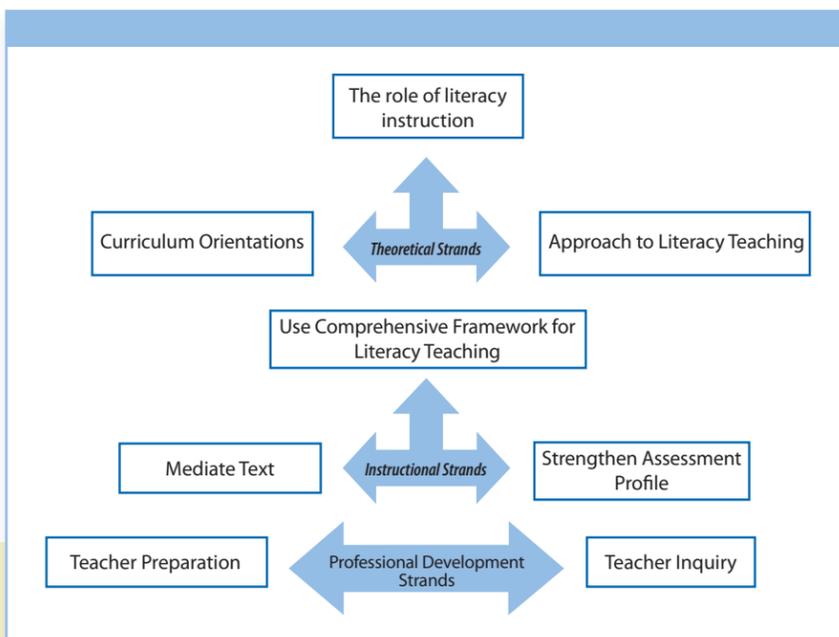
Conceptualizing literacy instruction and its roles and associated success metrics is associated with theoretical strands. The instructional strands are necessary for improving reading and writing achievement and strengthening students' relationships with texts. The professional-development strands are essential for improving teacher quality focused on the theoretical and instructional strands. The scope of this paper does not afford a lengthier discussion of each of the strands. A more concentrated treatment, along with practical examples of each, can be found in *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males* (Tatum 2005).

The Model in Practice

I conducted a ten-week pilot study during the spring of 2011 with twenty African American male fourth-grade students aimed at having them read three years above grade level. A multidimensional reading model based on effective research practices and the other variables found in the vital signs chart (see Table 4) were used. The model will be used for a lengthier study during the summer of 2012.

The role of literacy instruction — Curriculum Orientations — Approach to Literacy Teaching — *Theoretical Strands* — Use Comprehensive Framework for Literacy Teaching — Mediate Text — *Instructional Strands* — Strengthen Assessment Profile — Teacher Preparation — *Professional Development Strands* — Teacher Inquiry

Multi-Dimensional Reading Model

Personal Growth ← Extension → Academic Growth

← Comprehension →

Application ← Vocabulary

ZOOM — Decoding Fluency — ZONE

Concept

Developed by Alfred Tatum

The model was structured to have the young males do the following during each lesson:

+ Strengthen their concept of reading

+ Read a fluency-practice piece with 100 percent accuracy (during a cooperative repeated reading with a partner) and respond to two comprehension questions

+ Practice decoding multisyllabic words

+ Demonstrate that they could read across and understand a work of fiction

+ Demonstrate that they could read across and understand a work of nonfiction

+ Write to demonstrate that they understood the connection between the works of fiction and nonfiction

In sum, the young males were asked to read and write across two texts during each one-hour lesson that also involved them in decoding, fluency, and vocabulary experiences. The demands of this approach occur in very few fourth-grade classrooms, with or without African American males. I assessed whether there was evidence they became better readers and learned new information during each lesson. (I have included a sample of a fluency practice piece and decoding list used with the fourth-grade boys, as well as a sample of companion texts, one fiction and one nonfiction.)

The students were asked to think and write about how both texts were connected. The companion texts were connected to the concept of self-reliance, which was one of the studied vocabulary concepts for the lesson. Writing across texts was modeled for the students prior to their having to write across texts. All lessons focused on the intersections of reading, writing, and intellectual development.

The model used with these fourth-grade males aligns with the emerging Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (National Governors Association 2010) that call for: (1) including texts that are appropriately complex at each grade level to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge for students to succeed in school and life; (2) engaging students in close and careful reading by requiring them to focus on the specifics of the text, drawing evidence from the text, and gleaning meaning from it; and (3) ensuring that 50 percent of reading material is focused on informational reading in grades three to five or literary nonfiction in grades six to twelve. Additionally, there is a fundamental shift away from using "leveled texts" based on Lexile levels and assigning students to tiers influenced by response to intervention (RTI), a widely adopted instructional intervention to support struggling readers—both, in my estimation, based on a slow-growth model. Efforts must be strengthened to make sense of these changes. The existing research, the vital signs, and a more complete instructional framework provides a productive starting point.

Conclusion

The causes of reading and writing difficulties are varied. It would be virtually impossible, and quite frankly unnecessary, to construct individualized literacy profiles of all African American male children and youth to address their literacy needs. It would also be an overwhelming task to group students based on such profiles. The profiles, however, illustrate the need to pay attention to the multiple vital signs of literacy instruction and to utilize teacher professional-development supports that align with a more comprehensive model of literacy instruction. Educators must avoid narrowly focused approaches that have been shown to have little impact on improving reading and writing achievement and nurturing the intellectual development of African American males. If I were a teacher, principal, or superintendent in one of the member school districts, I would want to know: (1) if I am making sound instructional, assessment, curricular, and leadership decisions that increase the likelihood of an exponential growth model for all children, including African American males who struggle with reading and for those who do not struggle with reading; and (2) if my efforts are too narrow to achieve sustainable literacy-related goals focused on students' reading and writing skill development and students' multiple identities (e.g., academic, developmental, personal).

Again, it is not just a matter of implementing "the" solutions; there is a need to continue to expand on and modify the solutions. The debate about what works for struggling readers and writers has not been settled. However, it is safe to recommend the following:

+ Prioritize language development in the primary grades. African American males must be immersed in rich language experiences and have many experiences with rare words.

+ Avoid narrow approaches to literacy development. Instead, focus on the intersections of reading, writing, and intellectual development.

+ Improve teacher and principal quality by focusing on the multiple vital signs of literacy development. Efforts should be made to audit reading programs and practices using the vital signs as a starting point.

+ Use the collective power of organizations such as CGCS to force curriculum developers and publishers to address these intersections.

+ Examine curriculum orientations and clearly define the purposes of literacy instruction with the recognition that a focus on test scores alone can become problematic as African American males move beyond the primary grades.
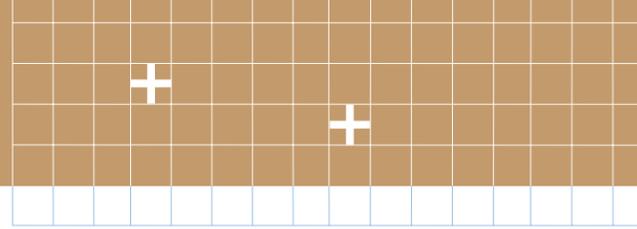
+ Support and encourage ethically responsible reading research agendas so that African American males benefit as they become part of research studies.

+ Force changes in teacher-preparation programs by refusing to accept student teachers or interns from university and other programs that do not address these intersections.

Proposing solutions for reading and writing achievement has become troubling within the existing educational backdrop. Confidence in public education is eroding: principals and teachers are facing increasing pressures to raise reading scores, which in many cases leads to a neglect of writing; many school leaders are becoming distrustful of literacy-based solutions, opting instead for policy-based solutions. At the same time, I am convinced that struggling readers and writers do not care about any of the adult conversations taking place. Never once have I been asked by a student, "Did they get the policy right this time?" They simply gauge the legitimacy of the instruction, texts, and contexts in which their education takes places. It is up to the leadership and the teachers at the classroom level to ensure students' reading and writing pathways are being protected. This can be difficult in the face of stifling, misguided policies and mandates.

We can afford policy to fail, but we can't afford literacy instruction to fail. Our current efforts to improve reading and writing achievement and nurture intellectual development may boil up to policy, but it boils down to teaching reading and writing. We are not just missing the mark with respect to African American boys, we are missing the mark with many of the nation's children. Ultimately, members of CGCS must work to ensure that literacy-based solutions are not static, and that policy-based solutions are not erratic—both yielding small upticks in reading and writing achievement until the next policy solutions are introduced. Some of our African American male students may not be around that long. Data suggest this last point is irrefutable.

Summary of Solutions

1. Become knowledgeable about current practice and research on reading and writing achievement for African American males.

   a. Reading and writing achievement sits at several different intersections, race and gender among them, although race and gender are not root causes of reading and writing difficulties.

   b. The profiles of struggling and nonstruggling African American male readers and writers are varied.

   c. Struggling readers and writers are often categorized based on assessment scores that offer little information in addressing their needs.

   d. Closing the reading and writing achievement gaps has traditionally been based on a slow-growth model entrenched in the idea that three to five years of professional development is needed to turn around schools. Schools are generally not turned around using a slow-growth model anchored by skill and strategy development alone. However, a slow-growth model is adopted because there is very little literacy research involving African American males that has yielded exponential growth in literacy achievement.

   e. The absence of empirical evidence has led to the adoption of oversimplified solutions. While these priorities are promising, they are too generic for advancing the literacy development of African American male adolescents. More specific guidance is needed. Most school literacy practices continue to miss the mark and suffer from an underestimation of the range and depths of student needs.

2. Incorporate the findings from the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2000) in professional development for teachers, curriculum development, and classroom instruction.

   a. Teaching phonemic awareness (PA) to children significantly improves their reading more than instruction that lacks any attention to PA.

   b. Teaching systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through sixth grade and for children having difficulty learning to read.

   c. Providing fluency instruction has a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels.

   d. Providing vocabulary instruction leads to gains in comprehension, but methods must be appropriate to the age and ability of the reader.

   e. Providing explicit or formal instruction in the application of comprehension strategies has been shown to be highly effective in enhancing understanding.

3. Build instructional programs around the essential elements of fostering reading comprehension (Samuels and Farstrup 2011):

   a. Building disciplinary knowledge
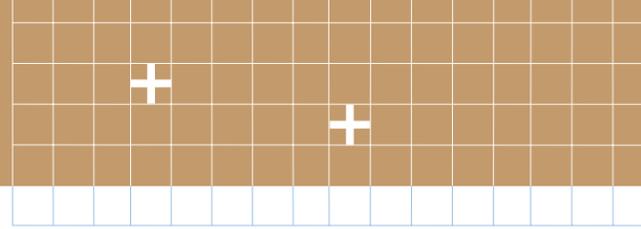
b. Providing exposure to a volume and range of texts

c. Providing motivating texts and contexts for reading

d. Teaching strategies for comprehending

e. Teaching text structures

f. Engaging students in discussion

g. Building vocabulary and language knowledge

h. Integrating reading and writing, observing

i. Assessing students

j. Differentiating instruction

4. Recognize that increasing the volume of experiences students have interacting with texts significantly correlates with their overall reading success.

a. Reading comprehension is correlated with high student engagement with texts.

b. Reading comprehension is heightened by discipline and world knowledge, and effective teachers of reading comprehension who employ classroom discussions to make meaning of the texts they encounter.

5. Create lessons that focus on the intersections of reading, writing, and intellectual development.

6. Know the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (National Governors Association 2010), which call for:

a. Including texts that are appropriately complex at each grade level to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge for students to succeed in school and life.

b. Engaging students in close and careful reading by requiring them to focus on the specifics of the text, drawing evidence from the text, and gleaning meaning from it.

c. Ensuring that 50 percent of reading material is focused on informational reading in grades three through five or literary nonfiction in grades six through twelve. Additionally, there is a fundamental shift away from using "leveled texts" based on Lexile levels and assigning students to tiers influenced by response to intervention (RTI).

7. Avoid narrowly focused approaches that have a history of little impact on improving the reading and writing achievement and nurturing the intellectual development of African American males.

8. Ask the following questions:

a. Am I making sound instructional, assessment, curricular, and leadership decisions that increase the likelihood of an exponential growth model for all children, including African American males who struggle with reading and for those who do not struggle with reading?

b. Are my efforts too narrow to achieve sustainable literacy-related goals focused on students' reading and writing skill development and students' multiple identities (e.g., academic, developmental, personal)?

9. Prioritize language development in the primary grades. African American males must be immersed in rich language experiences and have many experiences with rare words.

10. Avoid narrow approaches to literacy development. Instead, focus on the intersection of reading, writing, and intellectual development.

11. Efforts must be made to improve teacher and principal quality focused on the multiple vital signs of literacy development. Efforts should be made to audit reading programs and practices using the vital signs as a starting point.

12. Use the collective power of organizations like the Council of the Great City Schools to force curriculum developers and publishers to address these intersections.

13. Examine curriculum orientations and clearly define the purposes of literacy instruction with the recognition that a focus on test scores alone can become problematic as African American males move beyond the primary grades.

14. Support and encourage ethically responsible reading research agendas so that African American males benefit as they become part of research studies.

15. Force changes in teacher-preparation programs and refuse to accept student teachers from university programs or other programs that do not address these intersections.

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Table 1.

Over-reliance on "existing" reading profiles to make instructional decisions

"Three Profiled Readers"

| BELOW	BASIC	PROFICIENT	ADVANCED
Profile 1	Profile 2		Profile 4
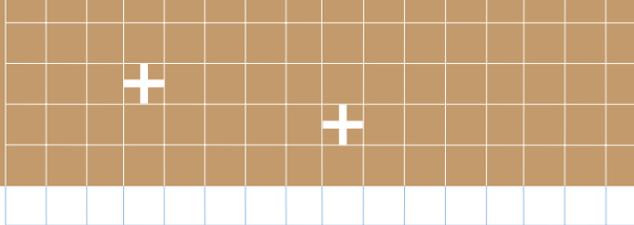
Table 2. Proposed Solutions: Reading and Writing Instructional Practices

Findings from the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development 2000)	Essential Elements of Fostering Reading Comprehension (Samuels and Farstrup 2011)
Teaching phonemic awareness (PA) to children significantly improves their reading more than instruction that lacks any attention to PA.	Building disciplinary knowledge
Teaching systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through sixth grade and for children having difficulty learning to read.	Providing exposure to a volume and range of texts
Providing fluency instruction has a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels.	Providing motivating texts and contexts for reading
Providing vocabulary instruction leads to gains in comprehension, but methods must be appropriate to the age and ability of the reader.	Teaching strategies for comprehending
Providing explicit or formal instruction in the application of comprehension strategies has been shown to be highly effective in enhancing understanding.	Teaching text structures
	Engaging students in discussion
	Building vocabulary and language knowledge
	Integrating reading and writing, observing
	Assessing students
	Differentiating instruction

Table 3. Addressing the Achievement Gap: General Reforms

Four areas stressed in *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,* released by the U.S. Department of Education (2010)	Four core educational reform areas offered in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009
Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader	Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students for college and to compete in the global economy
Providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's school, and to help educators improve their students' learning	Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction
Implementing college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards	Recruiting, rewarding, and training effective teachers and principals
Improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions	Turning around the nation's lowest-achieving schools

Table 4. Vital Signs of Literacy Instruction across Pre-K–12

Vital Signs	Reading	Readers	Reading Instruction	Educators
Rationale	Supporting Skill and Strategy Development	Honoring Multiple Identities	Nurturing Engagement	Improving Teacher Quality
Variables	Word Knowledge Fluency Strategy Knowledge Writing Language Proficiency	Personal Home Life Culture Environment Language Economics	Quality Instructional Support Text Context Assessment Technology	Competence Caring Commitment Culpability Courage
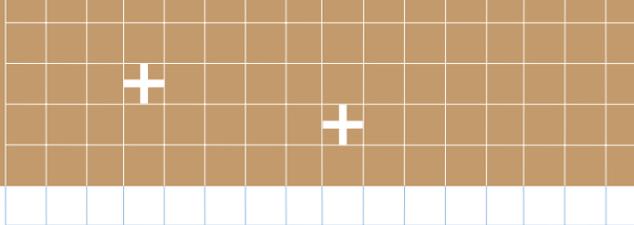
Fluency Practice Piece

Perhaps the greatest dilemma in the attempts to raise ethnic minority income is that those methods which have historically proved successful – self-reliance, work, skills, education, business experience – are all slow developing, while those methods which are more direct and immediate – job quotas, charity, subsidies, preferential treatment – tend to undermine self-reliance and pride in achievement in the long run. If the history of American ethnic groups shows anything, it is how large a role has been played by attitudes – and particularly attitudes of self-reliance.

Thomas Sowell

Developed by Alfred Tatum

WORD PRACTICE

1. dilemma
2. minority
3. historically
4. experience
5. immediate

6. quotas
7. subsidies
8. preferential
9. particularly

Developed by Alfred Tatum

Black Toilet Paper
by Alfred W. Tatum
January 30, 2011, 4:28 pm

"Black toilet paper, please?"
The store clerk gave me a strange look.
"Are you mistaken," he asked?
He pointed to aisle number 3
Expecting me to follow the same path
I had already scanned the shelves
I knew what I wanted
He tried to convince me otherwise
I wasn't mistaken
I was just in the wrong place
My failed request became a personal request
I am determined to get some black toilet paper.

Fluency Practice Piece

There are the voices which we hear in solitude but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist. Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Developed by Alfred Tatum

Robert P. Moses
Omowale J. Moses
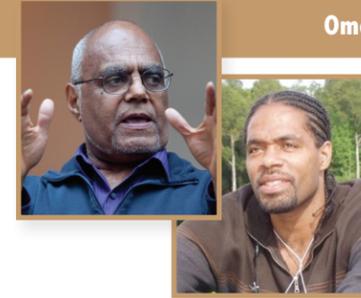
Robert P. Moses, PhD, is the President and Founder of The Algebra Project, a national organization committed to developing mathematics literacy as a tool for civic and economic inclusion for inner-city and rural low-income students. Dr. Moses has a history of civil rights leadership and advocacy on behalf of disenfranchised peoples, beginning with his student and political activism in 1960–64 as the director of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's Mississippi Voter Registration Program, which led to the organization of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and extending to his work in Tanzania as the chairperson of the math department at the Samé school. His work has since focused on math literacy as a means of inclusion in the information and technology age, particularly for previously low-performing students, including tangible solutions to ensure that African American boys excel in mathematics from K–12.

Omowale J. Moses is the founder and Co-Director of the Young People's Project, which, as a key partner of The Algebra Project, recruits and trains K–12 math literacy workers. Along with his father, Robert P. Moses, Omowale has played a vital role in organizing and delivering mathematics literacy instruction to students and putting The Algebra Project's theory into action.

The Algebra Project: Challenges and Opportunities

As our nation and world confront severe economic and environmental challenges, our public education system must raise the level of mathematics knowledge, producing highly skilled, creative individuals who can take the lead in technical innovation and find solutions to a variety of problems.

Not only is the overall number of college STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) majors too low to meet societal challenges, but the participation of African American and Hispanic male and female students—a vast pool of talent—in STEM studies and careers is disproportionately low in comparison with other population groups (BEST 2004). Increasing and diversifying representation in STEM courses not only addresses workforce shortfalls but strengthens science knowledge, because different backgrounds and experiences give rise to different questions from new perspectives, which in turn serves the creative enterprise of science (Selby 2006; Malcom, Chubin, and Jesse 2004).

Our projects—the Algebra Project and the Young People's Project—target those underserved students who are now performing in the bottom quartile on commonly used state and national achievement tests. Boys of African American and Latino descent score disproportionately low on these tests in comparison with the general population.

The in-school learning activities of the Algebra Project and out-of-school activities of the Young People's Project are all designed to develop students' competence in mathematics as well as their sense of self-efficacy. A review of self-efficacy research (McClure and Rodriguez 2007) indicates that students' belief in their ability to succeed in science tasks, courses, or activities, or their science self-efficacy, influences their choices of science-related activities, the effort they expend on those activities, the perseverance they show when encountering difficulties, and the ultimate success they experience in science (p. 486).

Project Description

History and Current Goals

The Algebra Project's current work addresses the mathematics education of students who enter high school performing in the lowest quartile on state or national achievement tests. The project enables them to "catch up," graduate in four years, and qualify to take college math courses for college credit. It was built on some sixteen years of experience in middle schools (1983–2000), followed by developing and piloting a new program with instructional materials at the high school level, with support from the National Science Foundation (NSF) (see Moses and Cobb 2001). The Project now has evidence of successful teacher engagement, long-term student outcomes in middle schools, and promising results in high schools.

In middle schools where more than half of the students participated in the Algebra Project in school or out of school (in YPP), graduates enrolled in college-prep math courses in high school at about twice the rate of graduates of similar schools not participating in the Algebra Project (West, Davis, Lynch and Atlas 1998; West, Davis, and Currell 2006).

Of about seven hundred teachers who took part in an NSF-funded professional development program from 1997 to 2001, 31 percent participated in more than the minimum 100 hours expected, and 17 percent participated in from 150 to 400 hours. These teachers volunteered to attend additional workshops, facilitate workshops for their peers, or organize and lead sessions for students. Teacher participation compared favorably with a similar NSF mathematics professional-development program for grades three through eight in the greater Boston area (West and Davis 2007).

At the first implementation of a four-year high school cohort program with daily math instruction in sixty- to ninety-minute periods, Algebra Project students outperformed non–Algebra Project students at the same high school on many indicators. For example, 69 percent of Algebra Project students who remained in the project for two years graduated high school in four years, compared with 27 percent of students who were in the project for one year or not at all. This high school was historically the lowest performing of eight high schools in Jackson, Mississippi. And in two low-performing high schools piloting the new grades nine–ten instructional modules (Petersburg, Virginia; San Francisco), Algebra Project students outperformed their nonparticipating peers on their districts' end-of-course test and student scores were especially high on the functions strand (West 2010).

In a study assessing students' thinking abilities conducted in three high schools, Algebra Project students demonstrated an understanding of and problem-solving abilities for basic-function concepts on a level that compared favorably with incoming college students, and even pre-service teachers (Dubinsky, Leon, and Wilson 2010).

School records have been used to assess long-term student-achievement outcomes, and we have extensive video archives and in-school and out-of-school anecdotal evidence suggesting positive project impact. These include written and/or oral testimonies by students, teachers, and parents, and students' descriptions of their own development from year to year. However, at this time, it is essential for us to learn how to monitor successful implementations in order to scale up effectively. Therefore we seek to identify:

+ Features and metrics for successful ongoing implementation of all project components

+ Interim measures for levels of development in students' attitudes

+ Facilitators of and obstacles to scaling up

The Algebra Project is currently transitioning from working with individual classrooms within schools to working with whole schools. Our long-term goal is to enable a majority of previously low-performing students to:

+ Pass state-mandated high school graduation tests and mathematics subject-matter tests

+ Graduate high school on time (in four years)

+ Qualify for admission to a college that offers courses meeting STEM career interests

+ Once in college, qualify to take college mathematics courses for credit (rather than remedial courses)

We also aim for specific student outcomes that are known from research to be critical to mathematics participation, persistence, and preparation. They include:

+ Increased interest in mathematics

+ Interest in pursuing a career that requires mathematical knowledge

+ Knowledge of mathematics content and skills

+ Advanced mathematics course-taking

+ Participation in other STEM activities
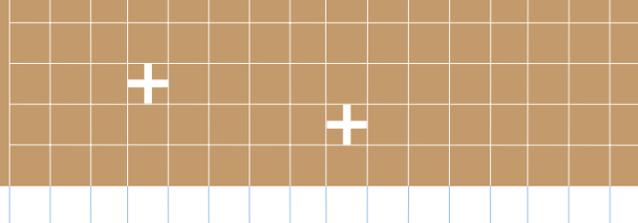
Founded in 1996, the Young People's Project (YPP) is a national organization with sites and programs in Chicago, Illinois; Miami, Florida; Mansfield, Ohio; Boston, Massachusetts; Ann Arbor, Michigan; Jackson, Mississippi; Los Angeles, California; and satellite programs in colleges and high schools. The YPP has adapted pedagogy and curriculum from the Algebra Project to create a Training of Trainers (TOT) program offered to high school and college students who serve as math literacy workers (MLWs). YPP locates its sites in neighborhood schools and afterschool youth programs with high concentrations of low-income, minority students. Within this pool of students, YPP seeks to recruit a diverse group of academic performers to become MLWs. Through its programming and training opportunities, the YPP provides youth with educational support and social skills that increase their chances of graduating from high school and college, thus empowering them to become agents of change, and maximizing their chances of becoming productive, responsible adults.

The YPP Math Literacy Work program is delivered to elementary students by teams of four high school student MLWs who receive stipends and are supervised by a college math literacy worker (CMLW). A four-person team of MLWs can serve up to sixteen students (i.e., a 4:1 student/MLW ratio). The basic elements of programming include:

✚ MLW Training: training of high school students to teach math to elementary students, which includes a framework to support young people in understanding their own history and experiences and to build a commitment to contributing toward improving their communities and society

✚ Math Labs: math-related games and activities for third through sixth graders

✚ Algebra Labs: math related activities for seventh to eighth graders

✚ Community Events: events that promote learning and math literacy across the full community in which children live and learn

✚ Coalition Work: participation in broader coalitions working on issues of educational justice and youth development and leadership

Theory of Change

Based on its twenty-nine years of experience working in low-performing schools, the Algebra Project has a four-pronged strategy targeting families/communities; teacher development; instructional materials for students and teachers; and near-peer learning and mentoring using game-like mathematics activities out of school.

The project believes that it is necessary to "harness the peer culture" in order to "turn around" schools and build the needed motivation for academic success among students, teachers, and in schools. The project's Cohort Model has both in-school and out-of-school components. Site activities ideally begin with pre-grade-nine activities for students and families, as well as multiple discussions with the school and community members (informal needs assessment). Cohorts of students are kept together in math class for all four years of high school, instructed by project-trained teachers who teach math daily in long periods using project-designed materials. Afterschool programs and summer programs are in place for students, with ongoing professional-development support for teachers and outreach to families. Note that the project's long-held strategy of parent involvement is now a research-based practice (e.g., Rene and McAlister 2011). Students can join the Young People's Project (YPP) to participate in near-peer teaching and learning, and also be mentored by college-age YPP-trained math literacy workers (MLWs). The YPP has long practiced extensive mentoring and coaching of high school students, and is currently developing metrics to gauge student development.

Specially designed instructional materials have been created to engage students who may have "given up" on math, or find it uninteresting. Classroom materials lead students through a "five-step curricular process," beginning with group experiences involving physical motion and observations. Students are guided to break down their experiences into components that they discuss in their own language, and represent in their own pictures and invented icons. Lessons then lead students to "regiment" their language and icons step by step, moving toward the conventional mathematics concepts and procedures. Students practice these transformations until they internalize new mental structures (schema), which can be operated on as mathematical objects using mathematical procedures.

Since 2001, the project has convened a dedicated team of university mathematicians and math educators who have designed and piloted student and teacher materials for grades nine through ten. We are currently developing materials for grades eleven and twelve, with college and career readiness in mind. The materials are very well aligned with the new Common Core State Standards. Out-of-school activities will include math games that follow the same learning principles.

Teachers are introduced to the materials and pedagogy in two-to six-week summer institutes, and are supported with site visits and/or additional institutes during the school year. Teachers and university personnel who show interest, knowledge, and leadership ability may attend the project's training for trainers: Professional Development for Professional Developers (PDPD). Ideally there are several teachers in a site, who are able to continue supporting each other, developing a professional learning community (PLC).

Table 1 illustrates the project's model of inputs and outputs, shown in approximately chronological implementation "steps" that build on each other and are modified/adapted as students move from grade
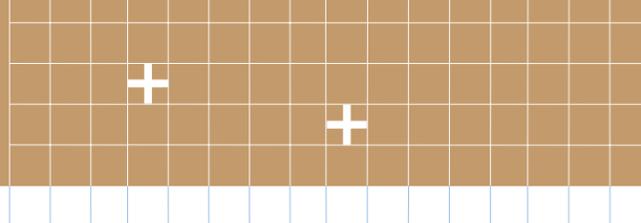
nine to twelve. Note the high level of community involvement evidenced in these steps. The project believes that, in communities where families and students do not have a high expectation of educational success, family and community engagement are essential to effective implementation and positive outcomes.

Current Work

The National Science Foundation's Discovery Research K–12 program has funded the Algebra Project to test the Cohort Model implemented in four sites that were not previously affiliated with the project (NSF award #DRL-0822175). Evidence from this research will build on the promising evidence collected at the development site, Lanier High School, Jackson, Mississippi, where project staff were extensively involved in implementation (West & Davis 2004).

Algebra Project Cohort Model and Expectations

The Algebra Project Cohort Model is a program created to accelerate the mathematical learning of students previously underperforming in mathematics. It is based on research and development experiences at Lanier High School in Jackson, Mississippi, and at Edison High School in Miami, Florida, and a current five-year, NSF-supported research study of cohort classes in Los Angeles, California; Eldorado, Illinois; Mansfield, Ohio; and Ypsilanti, Michigan. The Cohort model involves keeping a group of students together for math instruction from grades nine through grade twelve. Based on past experience, the Algebra Project proposes five "required" features and several "recommended" features. These features will enable students who enter high school performing in the bottom quartile on national or state tests to become prepared for college study.

Cohort Implementation

1. Cohort schools commit to reducing class size to twenty students and providing a daily math class for sixty to ninety minutes for all four years, and providing a common planning period if there is more than one Algebra Project teacher.

2. Cohort students commit to taking math classes daily for sixty to ninety minutes with Algebra Project teachers for all four years and participating in summer institutes as well as other aspects of the program, listed below.

3. Students use the Algebra Project's experientially based classroom materials for all four years.

4. Teachers are prepared and supported in the use of the Algebra Project's materials by participating in two to six weeks of summer and winter professional development (PD) institutes annually, as well as at least two classroom visits by experienced Algebra Project professional developers during the school year.

5. Cohort students attend summer institutes (that are locally developed and designed) to enhance their learning.

Expected Outcomes for Students

If the five Cohort Characteristics are implemented, we predict the following outcomes for cohort students, which is the focus of research being conducted at four sites participating in the five-year NSF initiative:

1. More than 90 percent of the cohort students will chose to remain in the program for all four years.

2. All cohort students who remain in the program will pass state mathematics tests and mathematics sections of graduation exams.

3. All cohort students who remain in the program will perform sufficiently well on college entrance exams (SAT® or ACT®) to gain admission into college.

4. A large majority of cohort students who remain in the program will place out of remedial math in college and will be qualified to enroll in mathematics courses for college credit.

5. Cohort students will exhibit:

    a. a positive attitude toward mathematics and confidence in their own mathematical thinking

    b. a desire and capacity to engage in deep mathematical thinking about various concepts

    c. a willingness to demand engagement from their peers, and to take responsibility for the classroom environment

    d. an insistence on support from adults, including teachers, parents, administrators, and government officials
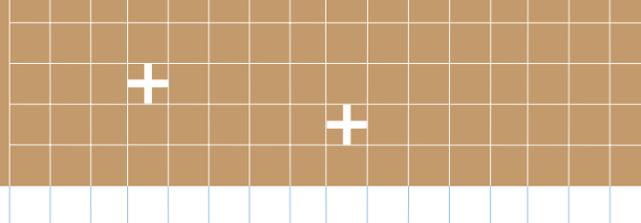
Our model is designed to accelerate, rather than remediate, student performance. Young people are asked to work on their motivation and commitment and help develop the family and community involvement needed for such acceleration—to pass state- and district-mandated tests in mathematics, to pass the mathematics portions of any graduation test, to score well enough on the SAT or ACT to enter college, and to place into mathematics courses for college credit (not remedial courses). The combination of innovative classroom materials and professional-development work, together with community involvement, provides an intervention that can significantly transform the peer culture, even in the face of negative forces.

Classroom Practice and Student Proficiency in Mathematics

Teachers and students need support in the reorganization of their classrooms around discussion and conjecture rather than procedures and skills. But students still need to develop procedural proficiency based upon a foundation of conceptual understanding. We are instituting three practices to support these needs.

1. **Accountable Talk.** Accountable Talk is a protocol enabling teachers to structure classroom discourse to strategically support learning. One of the founders of Accountable Talk, M. Catherine O'Connor, and the first Algebra Project teacher, Lynne M. Godfrey, train teachers in the protocol to ensure that it is institutionalized at all grade levels involved in the project (see Michaels, et al. 2003 and 2008).

2. **Review for tests.** A central part of giving low-performing students opportunities to internalize an "I can do the math" disposition is providing a platform where those students can demonstrate their own efficacy in mathematics to themselves.

3. **Embedded classroom support.** The head of the Algebra Project's Professional Development Program works with teachers in their classrooms, with school- and district-based mathematics coaches, and with mathematicians and mathematics educators to design and ensure ongoing professional development support to teachers implementing the Algebra Project.

Fundamental Strategies

Research shows that preparing students for careers that have a foundation in mathematics literacy requires (1) specific knowledge and skills that are concretely connected to real-world problems, applications, and careers; (2) career exploration that attends to human development as well as future directions of science and technology; and (3) a robust system of informed participation and support from parents/

guardians, teachers, and counselors that is designed to promote decisions and positive actions critical to building young people's self-efficacy and to reduce negative behaviors and messages.

Our program is grounded in several fundamentals based on research in mathematics learning, and on work with students in low-performing schools:

+ *A shared, experiential pedagogy:* Students and teachers must be given opportunities to participate in real experiences and investigations, make observations, discuss them, experiment, and observe again.

+ *Exploring a more limited number of topics in depth, to prepare for college-level work:* For students to grasp the most important mathematics concepts at the depth of knowledge needed for college-level and advanced studies, the number of topics in the curriculum should be reduced to a few key topics.

+ *Starting where learners are now:* Our experts' approach to math and science instruction, as well as to reading and writing, addresses learners' individual starting points.

+ *Developing students' learning identities:* Mathematics programs have long focused on building career awareness through field visits, mentors, and role models. This project will enhance those activities with attention to self-efficacy.

+ *Professional development (PD) for teachers:* PD activities should engage teachers in learning of the subject matter, enriching and deepening their knowledge, while at the same time modeling for them how to teach. Teachers should have opportunities to observe demonstration lessons, participate in debriefings, co-teach, and design and adapt lessons. They should receive feedback from peers and experts, and be able to set goals for themselves and monitor their progress.

+ *Group discussion and classroom discourse:* Learning is known to be most robust when learners become actively engaged in reasoning about the knowledge they are acquiring.

+ *Extended learning time for students with low student/teacher ratio:* Since many of our students enter high school performing below grade level, they must be enabled to "catch up" through extended learning time and more attention from teachers and their assistants, ideally in a ratio of about twelve students to every teacher/teaching assistant, and no more than twenty-five students per class.
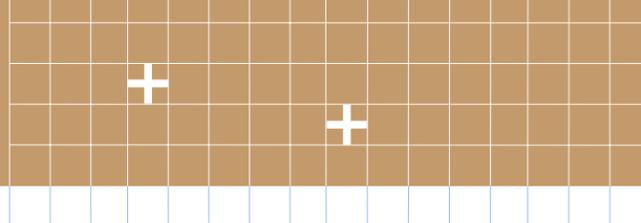
+ *Peer teaching and learning*: Working in low-performing schools where many students do not expect to attend college, the Algebra Project has found that the combination of innovative teaching/learning activities used in school and out of school, together with opportunities to teach and mentor younger students, can change the peer culture, even in the face of negative forces. The Young People's Project (YPP), an off-shoot of the Algebra Project developed by young people in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Jackson, Mississippi; and Chicago, Illinois; has identified more than two thousand college and high school mathematics literacy workers, who have provided learning activities and mentoring for about seven thousand younger students in community-based settings, or assisted in classrooms, in nine sites including Jackson, Chicago, Greater Boston, and Los Angeles. Their "near-peer" model is aligned with twenty-five of Search Institute's forty "developmental assets for youth" (Search Institute 2012; Tirthapura 2008).

+ *Parent and community support:* Research shows that parents do not need to be knowledgeable in science or mathematics, but rather, they need to be supportive by communicating and enforcing high expectations for achievement. Our outreach activities are designed for this kind of parental support and community recognition.

+ *Support of school and district leaders:* From twenty years of experience in more than one hundred schools in urban and rural districts, the Algebra Project has learned that support of school and district leaders is essential to successful implementation and positive student outcomes.

Target Population

For its first ten to fifteen years, the Algebra Project was the only mathematics-education project designed for and by African American students and families in low-income urban and rural communities. Recently, the project has expanded its target population to include all low-performing students. The NSF-funded test sites for the Cohort Model include two schools with predominantly African American students, one with African American and white students, one with a majority of Hispanic students, and one with Appalachian rural and white students.

The project's curricular materials were developed in classrooms of the target populations first at middle school (as a pre-algebra "transition curriculum") and then in high schools with two awards from NSF, and the participation of university-based mathematicians/math educators. Teacher institutes are co-led by university-based specialists and the project's experienced PD personnel, and an institute to develop teacher support specialists includes both kinds of participants. The NSF granted supplementary funds in 2008 to study effective collaboration between university discipline specialists and school-based educators/PD specialists.

The activities of the AP curriculum are nationally recognized for being "culturally responsive." The project was invited to present at the NSF's conference on Culturally Responsive Mathematics Education held in 2004, which resulted in a 2009 volume edited by Brian Greer, Swapna Mukhopadhyay, Arthur B. Powell, and Sharon Nelson-Barber. As described in that volume (Moses, West, and Davis 2009), the project's pedagogy is "culturally responsive" but not culturally exclusive. Project materials "start where students are," which is consistent with best practice in science teaching and learning. Where students are may include past experiences that are cultural in nature, but classroom work includes group experiences, such as field trips, that build a common classroom culture and a foundation on which to scaffold mathematics learning.

Performance Measures

The project's goals for the Cohort Model are: passing scores or persistence in taking state-mandated tests; progress through the college-prep curriculum resulting in on-time (four years) high school graduation; qualifying to enter a college that will prepare the student for a career of their choosing; and placing out of remedial mathematics courses in college.

These performance indicators are well established, are readily available in schools, and are excellent monitoring tools. However, we find that the successful attainment of these outcomes depends on assistance from teachers and school leaders to raise students' expectations and confidence.

We are currently developing interim measures to assess quality of implementation as well as quantitative measures to assess growth in student attitudes as well as student socioemotional development. These tools would provide the project with reliable, quantitative, and formative data needed for expansion.

Public System Involvement and Sustainability

Our work in high school pilot and current test sites shows that it is essential to have good buy-in and cooperation from the school system and school. The project's curriculum is designed so that students will "catch up" academically, and requires doubling math instructional time, class sizes of twenty or fewer, and keeping students together as a cohort for four years. It requires a two-week introduction for teachers, and ongoing professional-development time. In order to schedule this project, some schools have to hire another teacher. We also find that schools have to be assisted to ensure that cohort students are kept together from year to year. This was established easily in several sites (Mansfield, Ohio; Eldorado, Illinois; Petersburg, Virginia; Proviso, Illinois), but is much more difficult in large schools and complex school systems.
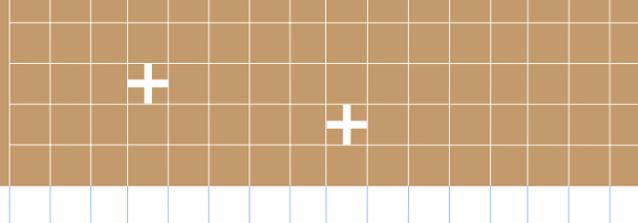
In a large system, the project may develop buy-in of a particular community but get bogged down later, or fail to expand. In fact, the project's demands on public bureaucracies are radical and must be carefully tended. With this in mind, in the case of Los Angeles, the Algebra Project retained OneLA-IAF to ensure that the project was established in the neighborhoods, schools, and school system. OneLA-IAF is part of the national Industrial Areas Foundation, which was founded by Saul Alinsky in 1940. OneLA-IAF is an experienced community development organization that works on issues of education, housing and banking, training and development, and healthcare in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. (For more information, visit the organization's website at http://onela-iaf.org/.) The large high schools in the Los Angeles area have been successful largely because of sustained support at both the local school site and district levels, as facilitated by OneLA-IAF.

Public System Dissemination

The project already has in place professional-development materials and train-the-trainer workshops (now termed "professional development for professional developers (PDPD)"; reports of past evaluations; newsletters; and technical assistance from evaluators. In the past, needs assessments have been conducted through in-depth discussions with parents, business leaders, school leaders, teachers, and students. The Algebra Project has extensive experience with this process and is able to get a good understanding of the community and school needs, and then tailors the cohort implementation to those needs. However, the project lacks tools to measure fidelity. In this case, "fidelity" includes tailoring to local needs and objectives. The quality and fidelity of the implementation must be defined to allow local adaptations, but to also ensure that teachers are following the program's pedagogy and not reverting to old practices. These new tools must include an assessment of community, superintendents, central office staffs, principals, and teacher buy-in.

Summary of Solutions

1. Implement a program that:

a. Is grounded in research-based practices, including a shared, experiential pedagogy. Students and teachers are given opportunities to participate in real experiences and investigations, make observations, discuss them, experiment, and observe again.

b. Explores a limited number of topics in depth, to prepare for college-level work. For students to grasp the most important mathematics concepts at the depth of knowledge needed for college-level and advanced studies, the number of topics in the curriculum should be cut back to a few key topics.

c. Starts where learners are now. Math and science instruction, as well as reading and writing, should address learners' individual starting points.

d. Develops students' learning identities. Mathematics programs have long focused on building career awareness through field visits, mentors, and role models.

e. Supports professional development (PD) for teachers. PD activities should engage teachers in learning the subject matter and enriching and deepening their knowledge, while at the same time modeling for them how to teach. Teachers should have opportunities to observe demonstration lessons, participate in debriefings, co-teach, and design and adapt lessons. They should receive feedback from peers and experts, and be able to set goals for themselves and monitor their progress.

f. Encourages group discussion and classroom discourse. Learning is known to be most robust when learners become actively engaged in reasoning about the knowledge they are acquiring.

g. Extends learning time for students in classrooms with low student/teacher ratios. Since many of our students enter high school performing below grade level, they must be enabled to "catch up" through extended learning time and more attention from teachers and their assistants, ideally in a ratio of about twelve students to every teacher/teaching assistant, and no more than twenty-five students per class.

h. Provides peer teaching and learning. Working in low-performing schools where many students may not expect to attend college, the combination of innovative teaching/learning activities used in school and out of school, together with opportunities to teach and mentor younger students, can change the peer culture, even in the face of negative forces.

i. Engages parents and community. Research shows that parents do not need to be knowledgeable in science or mathematics, but rather, they need to be supportive by communicating and enforcing high expectations for achievement.

j. Has the support of school and district leaders. Support of school and district leaders is essential to successful implementation and positive student outcomes.
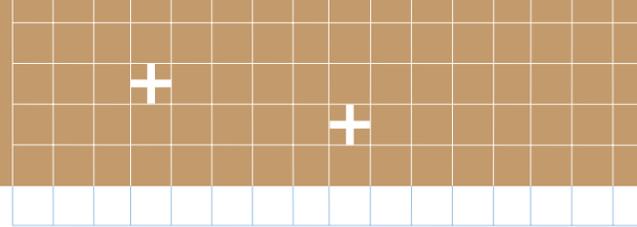
2. Create programs that are designed to increase students'

    a. Interest in mathematics

    b. Interest in pursuing a career that requires mathematical knowledge

    c. Knowledge of mathematics content and skills

    d. Advanced mathematics course-taking

    e. Participation in other STEM activities

3. Devise and implement a program that has both in-school and out-of-school components.

4. Conduct a formal or informal needs assessment with school and community members in order to obtain an understanding of the students' strengths, weaknesses, and challenges.

5. Create pre-grade-nine mathematics activities for students and their families.

6. Create cohorts of no more than twenty students, and have those cohorts undergo mathematics instruction together for all four years of high school. Incorporate the following practices in mathematics instruction:

    a. Provide students with a ninety-minute math class daily.

    b. Develop summer institutes for students to enhance their learning and reduce their "summer learning loss."

    c. Ensure that students have access to and use high-quality materials for all four years.

    d. Provide a common planning period if there is more than one teacher teaching mathematics.

    e. Conduct summer and winter professional-development institutes for teachers annually.

    f. Conduct at least two classroom visits by experienced curriculum leaders during the school year.

7. Provide afterschool programs for outreach to students' families.

8. Provide near-peer mentoring by college and high school students for elementary and middle school students with teaching and learning activities out-of-school.

9. Provide teachers with a well-designed summer institute, minimum two weeks, where they are introduced to materials and pedagogy including:

    a. **Accountable Talk.** Enables teachers to structure classroom discourse to strategically support learning, and organize classrooms around discussion and conjecture rather than procedures and skills.

    b. **Review for tests.** Give all students, especially low-performing students, opportunities to demonstrate their own efficacy in mathematics, and to pace their own practice toward procedural proficiency in mathematics.

    c. **Embedded Classroom Support.** Support teachers in their classrooms and ensure ongoing professional development.

10. Recognize the importance of and put in place processes to enable buy-in from community, superintendents, central office staffs, principals, and teachers.

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Table 1. Project Algebra Input–Output Model

INPUTS	OUTPUTS
AP school and community needs assessment, design, and program buy-in	Community holds school accountable
YPP establishes youth program and community outreach	Youth and families learn about the project
AP family engagement/student recruitment	Families buy in to program
AP teacher institute and ongoing teacher support	Teachers gain content knowledge Teachers gain pedagogy Teachers establish professional learning community Teachers choose to continue implementation
AP trainer of trainers program	Teachers assist other teachers, potential to support additional schools
School provides ongoing support	a. School provides needed schedule modifications, administration support, opportunities for teachers to interact b. Program interfaces with district practices c. School supports college admissions process
AP ongoing formative evaluation	Feedback to program staff who adjust program as needed
YPP ongoing formative evaluation	Feedback to program staff who adjust program as needed
Implementation continuing grades 9–12	a. Students pass or persist on mandated tests b. Students display attitudes for educational achievement c. Students score adequately on college admissions tests d. Students graduate from HS in 4 years e. Students pass college placement exams (do not require remediation in mathematics)

Appendix

It's Time to Include the Children: A Statement from Omowale J. Moses, National Co-Director of the Young People's Project (YPP)

When I volunteered to go to Mississippi, I was signing up to get myself together. I followed my younger brother and father to the Sam M. Brinkley Middle School in May 1995, after my basketball career grounded to a halt when the George Washington Colonials lost to the Ohio University Bobcats in the NIT Tournament. I had spent the last decade pursuing the NBA and the accumulation of material things that are important to most twenty-year-olds. With no sense of purpose and clear direction, I asked my dad if I could spend the next year working with him in his classroom. He was surprised. He had spent the better part of the last ten years recruiting his children to work with the Algebra Project, which he characterized as the family business. I was the last one he expected to sign up voluntarily. The truth is, I hadn't thought about doing much else with my life other than playing basketball and was fortunate to have a place to go to and the tools to reimagine myself.

While growing up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, my dad moved us from the campus of Harvard University, where he was finishing a PhD, to the street across from the Newtowne Court housing projects; conscientiously placing my brother and I, then eight and ten, among the children whose failures are predictable and profitable for American business. The children of the Algebra Project and the children of the Young People's Project (YPP) are these children—the children from my neighborhood who grew up on streets occupied by a war on drugs, the children of Mississippi who embraced my brother and then me when we arrived, the six sets of brothers that became and remain my friends to this day. It wasn't clear then where the choices our ten-, eleven-, and twelve-year-old selves were making would lead. Now, at the median of our lives, the various outcomes include: dead; fifteen years in jail for murder; school committee member; in jail for assault and battery; general contractor; in jail for selling drugs; in jail for drug use; meter maid; homeless; IT technician; nonprofit executive director; and financial manager. In the shadows of institutions like Harvard and MIT, most of us couldn't see beyond what was in front of us, couldn't imagine making other choices, and had no clue as to how those choices became available.

Within a week of my arrival in Mississippi, my dad began declaring that the young people need to get their act together. There was a sense of urgency in his voice that my brother and I didn't share. He talked about jail, saying that if young people didn't do well in math they were going to end up in jail. The cover of the February 21, 1993, edition of the *New York Times Magazine* had a picture of him with children from the Mississippi Delta beneath the title *We Shall Overcome, This Time with Algebra: Bob Moses and Mississippi Children Focus on a Plastic Learning Screen—A Path Out of Modern Bondage.* It's difficult to make the connection between success in algebra and serfdom. When I was playing at George Washington my dad came to town to give a speech to a bunch of mathematicians. A decade before Google

and Facebook, he told them that whether they liked it or not they were the leaders of the planet. It was difficult for them to imagine the role history and the evolution of technology had conceived for them, harder still to enlist them in a struggle for freedom and democracy.

As we worked to create a Math Lab out of an unused classroom, clearing the walls of chipped paint before covering them with affirming words and images, my dad's unspoken hope was that we would join the struggle he and students our age participated in during the civil rights movement in the 1960s: confronting America on paper and in practice, as they removed Jim Crow from public accommodations and the democratic political apparatus. Getting our act together in 1995 meant organizing ourselves, without the explicit threat to our lives that sharecroppers faced as they stepped off plantations to demand the right to vote, to remove what has amounted to Jim Crow in the educational system, and to erase the narrative that Black boys in particular are complicit in their own failure. We began innocently, doing graphing calculator workshops for teachers and then students in Jackson and the Mississippi Delta to prepare them for the statewide Algebra 1 exam.

The Young People's Project was founded in 1996 with my brother, a cousin, and eight eighth-grade Algebra Project students from Brinkley. Over the last sixteen years we have successfully tapped the energy of thousands of high school students in urban and rural communities across America to work to ensure that mathematics isn't a barrier to high school graduation, college entry or career choice. YPP trains and employs teams of high school students, coached and mentored by college students, to conduct math labs for third through sixth graders and algebra labs for sixth through eighth graders in community and school-based afterschool programs. We call this Math Literacy Work. Through this work we enlist students who have historically been set up to fail to work to address the mathematics needs of their communities. The competencies these experiences seek to develop are teamwork and cooperation, self-confidence, achievement, relationship building, and conceptual and analytical thinking. Through these efforts we have come to believe, and have demonstrated, that young people, particularly black and brown boys, need to be part of designing and implementing proposed solutions to transforming their academic and life outcomes.

Our mission is to use Math Literacy Work to develop the abilities of elementary through high school students to succeed in school and in life and, in doing so, involve them in efforts to eliminate institutional obstacles to their success. Our vision includes all young people having access to high quality education and the skills, attributes, and community support needed to successfully meet the challenges of their generation. The outcomes that we strive to produce begin in third grade and continue into college: success in grade-six math, passing Algebra 1/Algebra Exam, completing grade nine on time, staying on track for college math, acquiring Math Literacy Worker Competencies, successfully completing a minimum of two years of college, developing leadership skills, demonstrating leadership action, registering to vote if eligible, and contributing to the elimination of institutional obstacles to student success.
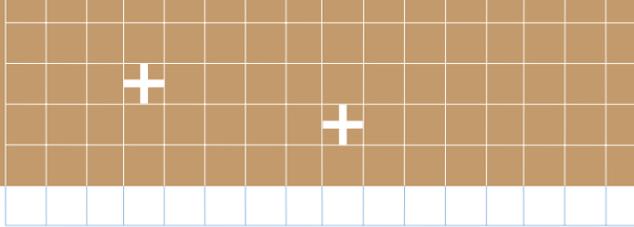
In discussions with students from Cambridge and Boston, Jackson, Mississippi, and Brooklyn, New York, we spent a lot of time talking about success and what gets in the way of it. The students described success as: happiness, always growing, having a vision and working hard to get there, overcoming obstacles, helping others on the way to success, and the ability to rise after failure. Through YPP, doing math literacy work has been an entry point for students to experience and think about success as individuals and, more broadly, as members of a group and a community. Math Literacy Work also challenges high school students to think about the conditions that drive their learning experiences and the subsequent choices they see available and make.

I brought a childhood friend to our discussion about institutional obstacles a few weeks ago in Cambridge. He hasn't had a job his entire life and is a year out of a fifteen-year prison sentence. As we began talking about barriers to success, the students struggled to define "institution." Some of the ideas they came up with were *institutions have rules and expectations, they are bigger than you and impact how your life plays out whether negative or positive, sometimes they can be controlled and sometimes not.* My friend wanted to know why I invited him to join our conversation. In his mind these students weren't the young people faced with the choices he had been faced with growing up. But they are. They are all navigating a similar terrain in which there is little or no safety net for the decisions they make as adolescents. The experience of doing Math Literacy Work allowed them to see beyond what's in front of them and allowed them to understand, imagine, and create new possibilities.

> *I am better at math and leadership and expressing my opinions because of YPP, because, when you're in school, or out in the world what you think usually doesn't matter because you're just a kid. YPP listened to our opinions, and cared. I was terrible at math, and kind of still am, but I'm much better at it. I can do multiplication and factors now and Venn diagrams better too. In YPP I learned leadership better because I used to not lead anything, or you know, run anything, I let others do it. In YPP you are responsible for a workshop and you have to run what you plan. I expected to learn how to teach math and how to have fun with it. I did but it's a lot more complicated than I thought it would be. I expected to learn ways to play with math, but I didn't expect it to be so hard! I expected to learn how to control an environment with younger kids. I guess I also expected to learn how to lead little kids and I did. A lot of what I expected to learn, I did, but it's a lot harder than I thought it would be.*

> Tasha, Grade 10 (2010)

People often ask, "Why math?" Math is powerful. In the context of YPP, math is the avenue through which young people can reimagine and make a way for themselves as they begin to understand the choices they have and how they become available. For black and brown boys in particular, there is a need for such spaces and experiences that build their power to define, choose, and achieve success.

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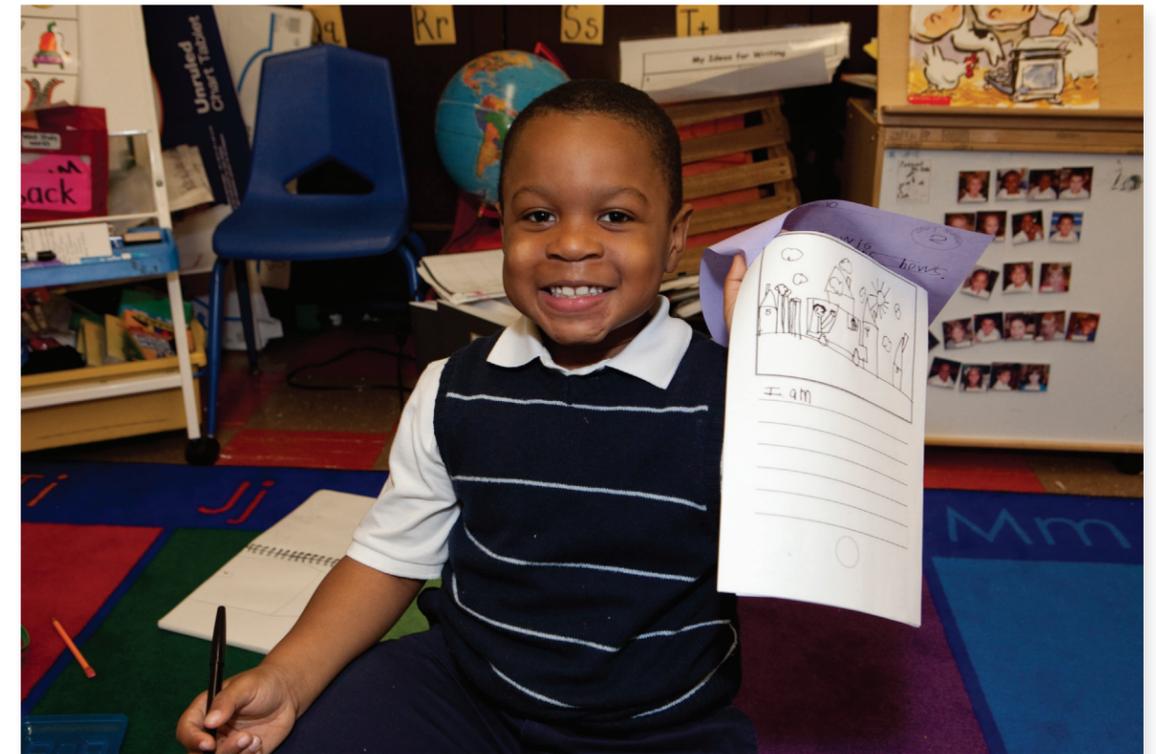
College and Career Readiness: Closing Gaps in Educational and Occupational Achievement for African American Males

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Introduction

President Barack Obama set ambitious educational attainment and achievement targets for the nation and has sought innovative ideas and policies to meet them. One ambitious target is for 60 percent of the American adult population to earn a college or university degree by the year 2020 (US Department of Education 2012). The Obama administration has also promoted the development of new Common Core State Standards and is sponsoring the development of corresponding new assessments to measure student achievement. The president's objective is for the United States to regain its preeminence in the world by (a) once again becoming the nation with the largest share of its population earning college degrees, and (b) ensuring that the US population is prepared for a contemporary labor market requiring more highly educated and skilled workers than in the past (Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl 2010).

Even though these policies are intended for the entire US population, the president's overall objective could be achieved by raising the rate of achievement, college degree attainment, and employment of
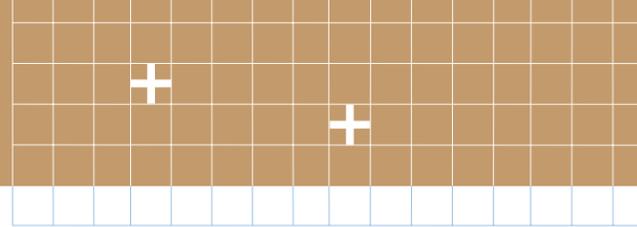
the majority population, even if the minority and relatively low-achieving segments of the population make no progress. The effect would be a widening of existing race and social class gaps and continued suffering of underrepresented minorities in school, college, and the workforce. To prevent these gaps in achievement and attainment from widening, disadvantaged populations that are lagging behind in education and the workforce need to be at the heart of the nation's efforts to increase college and workforce readiness.

African American males are the most disadvantaged among major population groups in the United States, and have the farthest to travel in order to meet national education achievement and attainment goals. This paper examines the relative condition of achievement and attainment of African American males, the increased productivity required of them to reach the nation's education and workforce achievement and attainment goals, the obstacles that they must overcome in order to close gaps with other major population groups, and the actions that need to be taken to ensure their college and career readiness.

This paper focuses on the precollegiate academic, financial, and social indicators of college and career readiness, and the actions that need to be taken toward ensuring that African American males are prepared for higher education and the workforce upon becoming adults. We begin by presenting the current status and condition of African American males' college degree attainment, enrollment, rate of degree completion, and representation among degree holders, and then examine the relative rate of increased effort and production required of African American males to reach national achievement and attainment goals. Next we discuss the three key aspects of preparation and readiness for college and careers—academic, financial, and social—and the ground that African American males need to cover in order to achieve equality. We then present the results of regression analyses showing the relative importance of students' backgrounds and behaviors in determining their college and career readiness. We close with a discussion of the actions that need to be taken in order for African American males to make progress and avoid being left behind while the rest of the nation soars toward achieving greater preparation, access, and success in college and careers.

Status of Enrollment, Degree Completion, Timeliness of Completion, and Degree Attainment

Compared with other racial and ethnic groups, African American men and women are severely underrepresented on multiple indicators of higher-education participation, including enrollment, degree completion, time to degree completion, and attainment. While not quite equal to African American women on degree attainment—i.e., the proportion of individuals holding degrees within a given population—African American men are close. They lag far behind African American women, however, in entering college immediately after high school, overall enrollment in college, degrees earned per year,

and completing degrees on time or nearly on time. Among major population groups in the United States, African American men are the least represented among (a) the adult population with college degrees, (b) students enrolled in colleges and universities, and (c) recent college degree recipients. They also have the highest rates of unemployment and the lowest rates of high-status careers (Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl 2010). Here we present data characterizing the relatively low degree attainment of African American males in the US adult population and their underrepresentation among enrolled college students and degree recipients.

Attainment

Figure 1 presents the proportion of the nation's Black and White men and women in 2011 who were twenty-five to thirty-four years of age and had achieved one of the following levels of education: (a) some college without receiving a degree, (b) an associate's degree, or (c) a bachelor's degree or higher. The data in Figure 1 reveal a large difference between the nation's Black and White adult populations in the proportions attaining bachelor's degrees, and the difference between the two racial groups is larger than the sex differences within each race. In 2011 adult Black women had a slight edge over Black men in each of the three categories of degree attainment, ranging from about 2.5 to 5.5 percent.

The difference between Blacks and Whites in bachelor's degree attainment is substantial. In 2011, approximately 36 percent of the White males and 44 percent of White females between twenty-five and thirty-four years of age had attained at least a bachelor's degree. These rates of attainment are about double those of Blacks. The gap in associate's degrees is much narrower. Between 8.5 and 12.5 percent of both races and sexes had attained associate's degrees.

Undergraduate Enrollment

The substantially smaller proportion of bachelor's degrees among the adult African American male population is made more problematic by their underrepresentation in the pipeline of undergraduate students. Unlike degrees attained, where men and women were not much different from one another, in recent years women have made up a larger proportion of college students than men overall and within each racial/ethnic subgroup. But the sex gap is more pronounced within the African American population than in other groups. African American males comprise a lower proportion of African Americans enrolled in college than males represented in each of the other major racial/ethnic groups (Aud et al. 2011b, Table A-8-3). Of the nation's 17.6 million undergraduate students in 2009, 57 percent were women and 43 percent were men (Aud et al. 2011a, Table A-8-1). Roughly 15 percent of undergraduates in 2009 were African Americans, of which 64 percent were women and 36 percent were men (Aud et al. 2011b). The hopeful news about African American males is that despite continuing to be underrepresented among college and university students in the United States, their undergraduate enrollment increased by percent from 2000 to 2009, from 577,000 to 938,000. Over the same time,
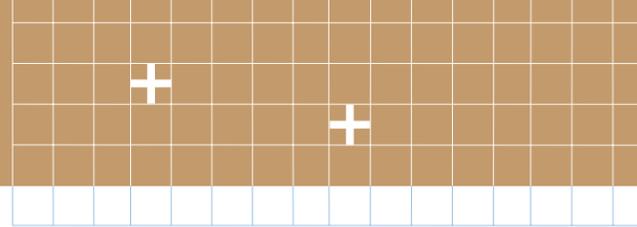
White male undergraduate enrollment increased by 21 percent (from 4,010,000 to 4,860,000) (Aud et al. 2011b, Table A-8-3).

Degree Representation and Completion

As with degree attainment and student enrollments, African American males are underrepresented among recent degree recipients. While making up about 6 percent of the US population, they made up 4 percent of associate's and 3 percent of bachelor's degree recipients in 2009. Even though they, too, are underrepresented overall, African American women are better represented than men, comprising slightly more than two-thirds of both the associate's and bachelor's degrees awarded to African Americans (Aud et al. 2011e, Table A-26-2).

Despite their continuing underrepresentation among degree recipients, the trend in African Americans earning degrees during the first decade of the twenty-first century was very positive. They received 77 percent more associate's degrees and 53 percent more bachelor's degrees in 2009 than in 1999 (Aud et al. 2011e, Table A-26-2). That compares favorably to the nation's overall increases in associate's and bachelor's degree completion of 41 and 33 percents, respectively. The number of associate's degrees awarded to African American women grew more than that of African American men (83 percent compared to 65 percent), and for both, the increase in the rate of bachelor's degrees was the same (53 percent) (Aud et al. 2011e, Table A- 26-2).

Degree Completion Rates

The increase in representation of African American males among associate's and bachelor's degree recipients could have been even greater if their timeliness of completion had been higher. Degree completion rates are presented as the proportion of enrolled college students who graduate within 150 percent of the expected time needed to attain the degree. Of the cohort of students entering public community colleges in 2005, about 12 percent of African American men and women, compared to 23 percent of White men and women, completed associate's degrees within three years of initially enrolling (Aud et al. 2011d, Table A-23-3). At the bachelor's degree level, 33 percent of African American men and 44 percent of African American women who entered public colleges and universities in 2002, and 39 percent of men and 49 percent of women who entered private, not-for-profit colleges and universities, graduated within six years. These completion rates compare with 54 percent and 60 percent for White men and women, respectively, in public colleges and universities, and 65 percent and 69 percent, respectively, in private, not-for-profit colleges and universities (Aud et al. 2011c, Table A-23-2). The gaps in timely college completion are much wider between Blacks and Whites than between males and females.

The data presented in this section reveal how African American men, as a group, are the farthest away from achieving the nation's college access and attainment goals. Among major population groups, they are the least represented among (a) earned degree holders in the adult population of the United States, (b) enrolled undergraduate students, and (c) recent college graduates. The large overall increase of African Americans in college enrollments and earned associate's and bachelor's degrees during the past decade offers a glimmer of hope that they are at least beginning the very long road to closing degree-attainment gaps.

Increased Degree of Production Required to Meet the Challenge

Rate of Increase Required

In this section we attempt to put into perspective the ground that needs to be covered in degree attainment based on projections of future attainment, calculated by the authors using a variety of data sources. Achieving the goal of 60 percent among adult twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-olds by 2020 will require a roughly 30 percent increase in the total number of the nation's growing and diverse population holding college degrees. Taking into account increasing rates of degree attainment over the last decade, the nation will only reach 77 percent of the goal by 2020 unless actions are taken to increase participation (see Appendix A, Table A1). At the present rate of growth, the African American population is projected to reach only 58 percent of the national goal by 2020—African American women will reach 68 percent of the goal, while African American men will be at 46 percent. If growth in degree attainment continues at about the same rate as the last decade, Black males between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four will increase from 26 percent having at least an associate's degree to 28 percent by 2020. In order to achieve the 60 percent attainment goal as a group, Black males will need to produce an average of 140,000 additional degrees each year from 2012 to 2020 (see Appendix A, Table A2).

Pool of Prospects to Cultivate

Data from the High School Longitudinal Study showed that around 59 percent of the estimated 248,516 African American male high school ninth-graders in 2009 indicated that they expected to earn a bachelor's degree, and another 6 percent expected to earn an associate's degree. Nineteen percent expected to earn less than an associate's degree and 15 percent indicated that they did not know (National Center for Education Statistics 2009b). Assuming that the number of Black male ninth-graders is the number of students in each grade, if each year the nation succeeded in converting 65 percent (162,368) of Black male twenty-five-year-olds into the degree holders they expect to become, this would constitute 85 percent of the average annual number needed to meet the 60 percent attainment goal in 2020 (192,000) (see Appendix A, Table A2). However, 65 percent attainment among twenty-five-year-olds may be unrealistic, since neither White males nor females are projected to reach this level of attainment even by 2020. A more reasonable target for the rate of attainment among twenty-five-year-old Black males is
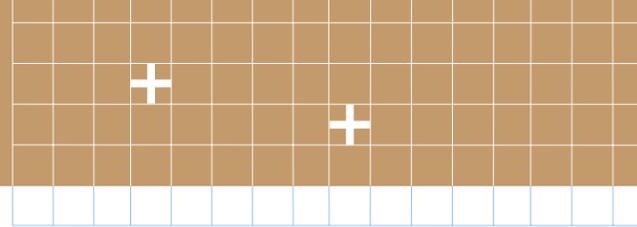
35 percent. This would be equivalent to 87,000 degrees, leaving 104,000 of the 192,000 unaccounted for. So in addition to graduating and preparing more African American male high school students for college and the workforce, by recruiting to college each year just over 5 percent annually of the approximately 600,000 African American adult males in the population of twenty-five- to thirty-four-year-olds who have completed some college but have attained no degree, and 5 percent of the additional 1.4 million with no college experience, the goal can be achieved (US Census Bureau 2011, Table 1).

In considering these difficult goals, it is important to note that the number, types, and modes of delivery of post-secondary education and student financial aid are sufficiently available that access and opportunity are abundant for anyone who wishes to attend, as long as they are able to afford it, and are not overly burdened with extraordinary personal and social impediments (Shannon and Smith 2006). But while academic preparation does not operate as an obstacle for the vast majority of people entering some type of post-secondary institution, it has substantial influence on the range of available options concerning where they might attend and the degree of success they experience in performing and completing the curriculum after matriculating (Noeth 2008). Therefore, one of the keys to improving African American male representation and completion of college is improving their precollegiate academic, financial, and social preparation and their educational test scores.

Preparation: The Key to College and Career Readiness

Student success in college and careers is enhanced by years of adequate preparation. Here we discuss the challenges that African American males confront as they prepare academically, financially, and socially for college and careers.

Academic Preparation

The college and workforce application processes focus on students' academic records, namely high school transcripts reflecting courses taken and grades earned and admissions test scores. College admissions officers and employers use curricula transcripts and test scores as proxies for knowledge, skills, and the ability to achieve. These representations of student achievement weigh heavily in decisions by selective colleges and universities to admit and by employers to hire, and consequently make academic preparation the most prominent component of college and career readiness.

Although not an assessment used for college admissions, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is one indicator of academic preparation for college and careers. Presently, African American students generally, and African American males in particular, are among the lowest performers on NAEP, and their performance has not improved relative to other population groups in recent years. Figure 2 shows that in mathematics, only 6 percent of both African American men and women achieved at or above proficient compared to 35 percent of White men and 30 percent of White women,

respectively. Figure 3 reveals that in reading, only 12 percent of African American twelfth-grade men compared to 22 percent of African American women were at or above proficient compared to 40 percent of White men and 53 percent of White women in 2009.

While scores on NAEP change somewhat from year to year, they have not improved enough for African Americans to close the vast gaps with other population groups. The situation is unlikely to change unless dramatic improvements are made to education offerings and other living conditions inside and outside of school, and in the testing performance of the vast majority of African Americans. While NAEP does not gather data on school quality or students' prior attendance in early-childhood education, research has shown that on average low-income and minority groups receive a poorer-quality education. Often schools serving these students are not adequately funded and have lower-quality teachers (Baker, Sciarra, and Farrie 2012; Peske and Haycock 2006). Similarly, low-income and minority children often do not have access to quality early-childhood education services, which have been shown to produce long-lasting effects such as decreased rates of retention, placement in special education, and delinquency and crime; increased rates of high school graduation and college attendance; and higher lifetime earnings (Barnett and Frede 2010; Heckman and Masterov 2007).

Unlike NAEP, college admissions tests are not generalizable to the whole population of students of various age and grade levels. At the same time, however, they are a useful indicator of the readiness of the subpopulation of high school students who self-select to pursue college admissions. The SAT is one of two major college admissions tests. The nearly 96,000 Black men and 120,000 Black women who took the SAT in 2011 represented 6 percent and 7 percent, respectively, of total test-takers. The promising news is that in 2011 there were nearly twice the number of African American males taking the SAT than in 2001, and the number of African American women was 70 percent larger in 2011 than in 2001. These increases in African American test-takers occurred at a time when the overall SAT test-taking population increased by 53 percent. The troubling news is that in terms of scores, African American men continue to trail White men by more than one hundred points, and African American women trail White women by nearly one hundred points on each of the three parts of the test: Critical Reading, Mathematics, and Writing (College Board 2001, 2011). These wide gaps in college admissions tests have persisted historically without substantial narrowing. Beyond revealing substantial differences in achievement, these gaps result in lower representation in the nation's selective colleges and universities and ultimately lower-status professional networks and occupations for African Americans (Bowen and Bok 1998).

High school curricula and grades are two additional indicators of college and career readiness. Thirty percent of African American men and 34 percent of African American women completed the minimum curriculum considered necessary in order for students to be ready to perform academically in colleges and universities, compared to 38 and 46 percent, respectively, of their White male and female counterparts
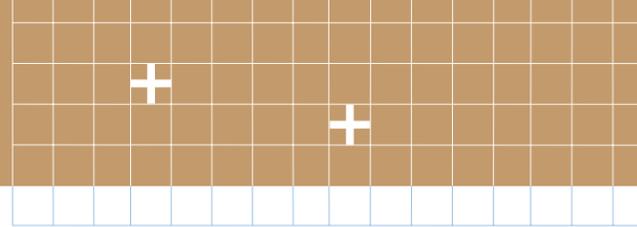
(National Center for Education Statistics 2006). The minimum curriculum consists of four years of English, three years of mathematics, science, and social studies, and two years of foreign language. The difference between the minimum and advanced curricula is that the latter includes an additional year of mathematics, science, social studies, and foreign language plus at least one Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) course. Roughly 1 percent of African American men and 2 percent of African American women compared to 5 percent of both White men and women achieved advanced high school curricula (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). Black Americans represent over 15 percent of the US student population but only 9 percent of AP examinees (College Board 2012).

Underachieving students entering college are often required to take remedial courses. Around 50 percent of male and 52 percent of female Black students attending two-year colleges and 40 percent of Black male and female students attending four-year colleges and universities took either remedial mathematics, writing, or reading upon entering college. These rates compare to 44 percent and 31 percent, respectively, of White males and 47 percent and 32 percent of White females, respectively. So while remediation is required of beginning students of each race and sex, rates are especially high among both Black males and females (National Center for Education Statistics 2006).

By any of the measures for which data are here presented (NAEP, college admissions tests, curriculum-taking and remedial education) more than half of African American men and women leave high school academically unready for college and careers. According to NAEP scores, which are the best representation of the population, 6 percent of African American high school men and women are college and career ready in mathematics, and just over 10 and 20 percent of African American males and females, respectively, have college-level reading skills.

Financial Preparation

Financial readiness for college means having the capacity to pay the price of tuition, fees, books and subsistence at the point of entering and being able to sustain that capacity through degree completion. For careers, financial preparation means increasingly being able to afford the training and assessments that are required to prepare and gain certification for participating in the workforce. The extent of readiness is typically determined by combinations of people's personal savings and income. The average price of tuition, fees, and expenses required to attend the nation's public two-year and four-year colleges and universities in 2010 was $12,000 and $19,000, respectively (Aud et al. 2011f, Table A-47-1). For most potential college-goers, while attending and completing college may be among the very best investments, it is also a non-trivial expense, and the price is growing annually (Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah 2011).

African American men and women college students are at a severe financial disadvantage relative to their White counterparts. Figure 4 shows that 70 percent of African American male beginning college students were from households whose income was below $60,000. Just over one-third were from

households where the family income was under $30,000, and 36 percent between $30,000 and $60,000. These compare to 10 percent of White male students whose family incomes were below $30,000 and 30 percent between $30,000 and $60,000. Only 13 percent of Black college students were from households where the annual incomes exceeded $90,000 compared to 33 percent of their White male peers.

For the 2003 cohort of entering students, over 70 percent of African American males relied upon financial aid to meet their college expenses compared to 60 percent of their White male counterparts. Around 56 percent of African American males relied upon grants and 44 percent upon loans compared to 44 percent and 35 percent, respectively, of White males (National Center for Education Statistics 2008). Compared with White Americans, African Americans generally face greater financial obstacles to college attendance and positions in the workforce that require the skills gained from a college education. One encouraging recent development in financial assistance for college access has been the rise of "promise" initiatives. These programs pool local resources and create endowments that fund local children's college educations. Various criteria to receive tuition support may apply, such as having a history of residency in the locality, meeting a minimum GPA, having a high school diploma, and having low-income status. Depending on the criteria, students are eligible to have a large portion, if not the entirety, of their tuition covered by the program. The programs both increase college enrollment and invigorate local economies (Miller-Adams 2009).

Social Preparation

A variety of social factors influence the likelihood that individuals will attend college and be successful after enrolling. Included among the available indicators of precollegiate socialization for college are the college-going rates of high schools attended, teacher and parental expectations, teacher quality, and family history of college attendance and completion. These are indicators of students' exposure to a culture and environment emphasizing higher education.

+ *Parents' education.* For the majority of African American high school students, if they continue on to college and complete their college curriculum, they will be the first generation in their family to attain a degree. In 2009, the highest level of education of the parents of 57 percent of African American male high school students was a high school diploma or a GED, compared with 38 percent of their White male peers (National Center for Education Statistics 2009b).

+ *Student expectations.* A student's expectation of going to college is a prerequisite to actually applying and enrolling. In 2009, 65 percent of ninth-grade African American males indicated that they expected to attain at least a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics 2009b). This was the same level of expectation
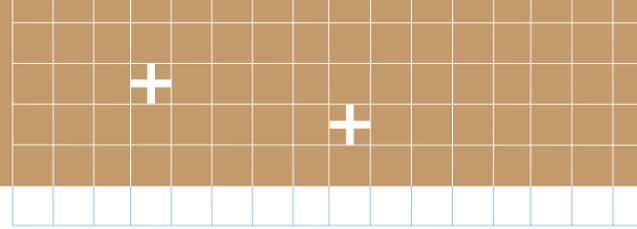
expressed by Hispanic females and 8 percent higher than Hispanic males. This was a somewhat lower percent than White males (71 percent), African American females (74 percent), Asian males (79 percent), White females (81 percent), and Asian females (89 percent).

+ *School quality.* There are many attributes of schools such as their physical structure and resources, community involvement, prizes won in competitions, and so on that combine to reflect their quality. One indicator of school quality is the rate at which graduating students enter college. Students who are enrolled in schools with higher college-going rates are in places where they are more likely to have a college-going culture and environment. As with other forms of socialization, African American males are lagging. Fifty-five percent of White male high school sophomores studied in schools with more than 50 percent of their graduates who went to four-year colleges in previous years compared to 39 percent of Black male high school sophomores (National Center for Education Statistics 2006).

+ *Teacher expectations.* Teacher expectations may be related to academic success and in turn the pursuit of higher education. In 2002 math teachers expected 80 percent of White male sophomores to attain some college or above but had the same expectations for only 59 percent of Black male sophomores. English teachers expected 80 percent of White male students but only 63 percent of Black male sophomores to attain some college or above (National Center for Education Statistics 2006).

+ *Teacher quality.* Lower-quality teachers could also be an impediment to Black males' achievement in high school and beyond. Teacher quality consists of several attributes of teachers, such as their education and training, their experience in the field and subject matter they are teaching, their experiences as teachers, their ability to connect with students, and more. One readily available and accessible indicator is whether they have earned a certificate to teach the subject matter that they are teaching In 2009, 77 percent of Black male students were taught by math teachers with a regular certificate compared with 83 percent of White male students. Coincidentally,the disparity was identical for Black and White males taught by credentialed science teachers. And 42 percent of Black male students and 52 percent of White male students were taught by science teachers with a bachelor's in science (National Center for Education Statistics 2009b).

+ *Parent expectations.* Another indicator of social preparedness is represented by parents' expectations of their children. To the extent that these expectations are reflected in parents' attitudes, encouragement, and guidance, they may be an influence upon student behaviors. On the one hand, in contrast to the parents of Black males, a larger share of the parents of White male students expect their sons to achieve associate's degrees (14 percent compared to 7 percent), bachelor's (47 percent compared to 41 percent), and master's degrees (21 percent compared to 18 percent). On the other hand, a larger share of parents of Black males expected their sons to earn doctoral degrees than the parents of their White counterparts (29 percent compared to 15 percent) (National Center for Education Statistics 2009b). These data suggest that parents' expectations of their African American sons are relatively high.

While African American males are at a disadvantage relative to their White male counterparts on such measures as school and teacher quality, teacher expectations, and parent education, they show similarities with their White male counterparts on other indicators such as parent expectations and their own expectations. School quality, teacher quality, and teacher expectations, however, are the more important elements of socialization for college and career readiness, and like academic preparation and financial preparation, the social preparation of African American males will be important to address in order to mobilize them toward higher educational achievement and career success.

Correlates of Readiness

In the previous sections we identified key indicators of student readiness for college and indicated a number of background and school factors that are related to college readiness. On many of these measures, there are substantial gaps between Black males and White males, and even between Black males and females. In order to identify and prioritize actions that need to be taken to improve the condition of Black males, the relative importance of these background, behavioral, and school factors toward each of the indicators of college and career readiness needs to be examined.

A regression analyses was conducted to ascertain how particular student, family, and school characteristics contributed to students' academic, social, and financial preparation. We used GPA, college admission test score, student education expectation, and parents' saving effort as the indicators of these three dimensions and criterion variables representing college preparation. Independent variables included at the student level were sex, race, and hours per week spent on homework. At the family level, variables were socioeconomic status (SES) and whether English was the native language. And at the school level the independent variables were the percentage of students who were eligible for free lunch and the percentage of graduates who went to four-year college. We used logistic regression models to estimate
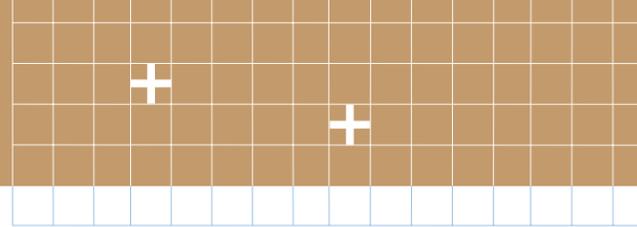
the association of independent variables with GPA (if GPA was equal or above 3.0), student education expectation (if students expected to attain a bachelor's degree or higher) and parents' financial saving for college (if parents made saving efforts for their tenth grader's education after high school). We used regression to estimate the association of independent variables with admission test scores, i.e., SAT composite scores. Data were from the Education Longitudinal Study (National Center for Education Statistics 2006). The full model results are displayed in Appendix B, Table B1.

Gender differentials were found in students' college readiness. Compared to male students, female students were 1.2 times more likely to get a 3.0 GPA or above, 75 percent more likely to expect to have a bachelor degree or higher, but averaged eighteen points less on their composite SAT scores.

Regarding race, the analyses indicated that an African American student, compared to a White student, is 74 percent less likely to get a GPA equal to or above 3.0, and 24 percent more likely to expect to have a bachelor's degree or higher. On average, African American students received 136 points less than White students on their composite SAT scores. Regression models revealed that a student who spends one more hour per week on homework out of school is 7 percent more likely to get a GPA of 3.0 or above and gain five more points on the SAT.

The results of the regression models confirmed that students' family SES is significantly associated with students' college readiness. Students from families at the highest SES quartile are 2.4 times more likely to get a GPA of 3.0 or above and 2.7 times more likely to expect to earn a bachelor's degree or above than students from families in the lowest SES quartile. Students from the highest quartile gain 146 more points on composite SAT scores and their parents are 4.1 times more likely to make financial savings efforts for their college education, compared to students from the lowest SES quartile families. Meanwhile, English being a student's native language is positively associated with composite SAT scores and financial savings efforts for education after high school.

At the school level, high school quality and the poverty level of the student body are significantly associated with composite SAT scores. Students from high schools with 75 percent or more of graduates who went to four-year colleges gained 64 points on the SAT, compared to those from high schools with only 0–24 percent of graduates who went to four-year colleges. Being from high schools with 51–100 percent of their student body eligible for free lunch gives students 50 points less on the SAT, compared to those from high schools with only 0–5 percent of their student body eligible for free lunch.

These results show significant differences between the sexes and between race/ethnic groups; however, no policy implications emerge from these findings without knowing what is behind race or sex that leads to these differences. Cultural and institutional factors that we did not measure may contribute to the significant effect of race and could be targeted by policy if more were known about these factors. The findings, however, do seem to point to two different practical responses: financial assistance to low-income students, and increased time spent on homework. The results show that students with more financial resources have higher GPAs, higher SAT scores, and more savings for college. These students also have higher educational expectations to go along with their favorable circumstances. It is also true that school environments with less poverty in the student body are associated with higher SAT scores. Substantial financial support to low-income students would likely be an effective means of improving their college readiness. Apart from finances, the results also show that each additional hour spent on homework is associated with higher GPAs and SAT scores. Promoting additional study time out of school may be another important way to improve college readiness for disadvantaged students.

Conclusion

Compared to other population groups, African Americans, males in particular, have the steepest climb up through the most rugged terrain in order to achieve the nation's educational-achievement and degree-attainment goals. New national goals and policies pertaining to achievement and degree attainment give African Americans an ambitious timeline by which to close the gaps between themselves and other population groups. The foregoing analyses suggests that in order for African Americans to meet with success in achieving the goals and closing the gaps with other population groups, the policies need to be tailored and directed to address African Americans' specific challenges of economic disadvantage; low-quality commerce, services, and community organizations; lack of academic opportunity; low level of academic effort; and low academic performance and test scores. We conclude this paper by offering recommendations for how African American males can make progress and close gaps based upon the evidence presented.

The data and analyses presented in this paper reveal how African Americans generally, and African American males in particular, trail other major population groups on every meaningful aspect of college and career readiness. None of the data suggest that the lagging is a consequence of a lack of talent among African Americans. Rather, their poor conditions and circumstances inside and outside of school cry out for extraordinary attention and represent the initial steps required to make progress toward becoming college and career ready in far greater numbers than they are today.

The recommendations for improving the college and career readiness of Black males fall into four categories: (a) starting education early in life and sustaining academic, social, and financial support efforts throughout; (b) improving academic achievement and standardized-testing performance; (c) improving college admissions, persistence, and completion, and upward education and career mobility; and (d) improving the research necessary to identify factors that lead to solutions and monitor progress. The recommendations are presented with the recognition that while African Americans reside in all fifty states and therefore require attention in every place, they are highly concentrated in a few states where the effort may need to be more intense and focused.
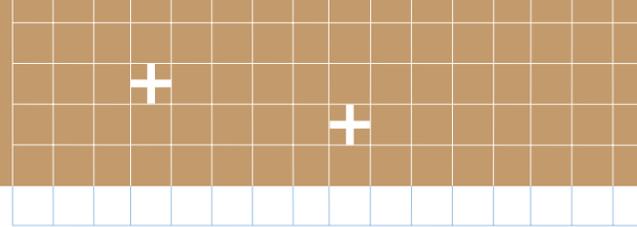
Meeting President Obama's 60 percent attainment goal for college degrees is a daunting prospect for the population as a whole, but for African American males, the segment of the population that is farthest behind, achieving such a goal may be unprecedented and the prospect seems especially challenging. Achieving the goal for the overall population would not be unprecedented. In 1947 President Harry Truman announced his national goal of doubling higher education enrollment by 1960. At the time, there were 2.3 million students enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities, and by 1963, enrollments had indeed doubled to 4.7 million (Snyder et al. 1991). But the goals were not accomplished without extraordinary innovations and policies. Establishing community colleges and federal student financial aid were among the most extraordinary innovations, expanding adult education, and ending racial and religious discrimination in higher education were among the progressive policies (President's Commission on Higher Education 1947).

Achieving such a lofty goal for the nation's African American male population may be unprecedented. President Obama's education policies could be a similar catalyst to achieving educational equity and provide the stimulus for African Americans to achieve national goals and close gaps, but they may need to be more tailored and targeted. For example, for progress in academic achievement, the new Common Core State Standards and the K–12 assessments that the US Department of Education is supporting to measure student achievement represent innovations that have the potential to contribute to closing gaps. While the development of standards and assessments are not innovative concepts, what is innovative in this instance is that for the first time, children everywhere in the nation will be expected to pursue the same standards and be measured by the same instruments. Specifying what children should know and be able to do from kindergarten through grade twelve presents an extraordinary first step, offering opportunity for people to set goals and develop strategies for achieving the standards. Further policies will be needed, however, to support communities in developing and implementing curricula and other strategies to achieve the standards. Evolving state policies aimed toward improving school curricula and standards, teacher quality, and student performance appear on the surface to be potential solutions. Schools and school districts with large populations of African American students, however, are among the places in the nation today that are least equipped financially to support high quality teaching and learning (Baker, Sciarra, and Farrie 2012). Making meaningful progress will require more targeted and tailored efforts that include significant investments into schools and school districts where African American children comprise a large share of the population. In our opinion, this seems unlikely to occur through ordinary actions of state governments, and therefore will possibly require incentives and inducements by the federal government in order to initiate action at the state and local levels.

The large annual increase in the number of degree recipients required to reach President Obama's goal, combined with the accelerating costs and tuition increases of post-secondary education, demands the consideration of innovations that provide help to students in paying the cost of attending, innovations in delivering higher education instruction, and the use of assessment as an alternative approach that recognizes that people possess knowledge, skills, and other attributes deserving of credentials.

Lessons learned from implementing President Truman's education goal can be instructive in the pursuit of President Obama's ambitious education goal. On the way to achieving Truman's goal in 1963, one innovation in the delivery system changed the landscape of American higher education: the development and spread of community colleges throughout the United States (Boggs 2010; President's Commission on Higher Education 1947; Snyder and Dillow 1991). Many innovations may emerge as the nation progresses toward President Obama's goal of regaining preeminence in education, and efforts must be made to ensure that African American males make progress in closing gaps with other population groups on the way to higher levels of educational and occupational attainment.

Summary of Solutions

The following are recommended actions that should be taken to address both the short-term and long-term underachievement and low-college-degree attainment of African American males and ensure their readiness for college and careers:

1. For African Americans to make education their top priority, starting with early ages of life and sustaining the focus on developing human capital through college completion. Actions should include the following:

   a. The development of high-quality K–12 schools that are on par with the best schools in the nation, where teaching, learning, and socialization are the prime indicators of quality

   b. The development and delivery of high-quality curricula for the early years (ages birth to eight) of life that emphasize literacy, numeracy/mathematics, social and emotional development, and executive functioning

   c. The initiative taken by local communities to launch campaigns designed to raise the expectations of students and teachers that African American males will (a) prepare academically, financially, and socially for college, and (b) attend and graduate from college with at least an associate's or baccalaureate degree

   d. The establishment of "promise" community initiatives in cities throughout the United States that resemble initiatives in El Dorado, Arkansas, Kalamazoo, Michigan, New Haven, Connecticut, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Syracuse, New York, where local communities promise children in the public schools that their college education will be paid for if they graduate from high school and are admitted to college, and the community generates substantial financial resources to fulfill the promise
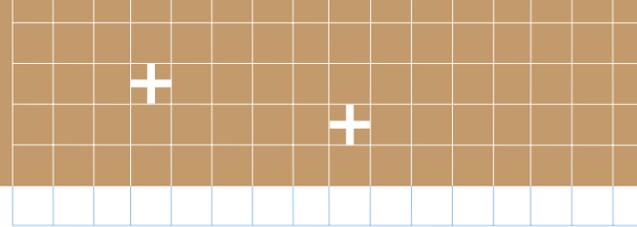
e. The offering to local communities of incentives by the federal government to establish permanent endowments to fund "promise" initiatives that would make up the difference in price between national and state grants and the price of college tuition, thereby reducing students' reliance upon loans to cover the cost of college

2. Assist African Americans to prepare for taking standardized tests in elementary, middle, and high school by introducing the following actions in schools:

a. Identify the best available standardized tests and assessments and deliver education programs to African American communities about the tests, their structures, contents, and uses.

b. Expose students to high-quality formative assessments and standardized tests regularly, as part of their school curriculum.

3. Recognize that African American males are the least represented group among new entering college cohorts, enrollments, and completers. College admissions, persistence, and completion can be substantially improved through the following actions:

a. Local communities should encourage African American students to aim to attend the nation's selective colleges and universities and also vigorously pursue alternative routes to earning higher education credentials.

b. Cities should follow the model established by Louisville, Kentucky's 55,000 Degrees initiative, where the local community set five-year and ten-year goals for making progress toward college-degree-attainment targets and developed a plan involving the business and civic communities for pursuing the goals.

c. Colleges and universities and their feeder school systems and schools should design and implement education strategies that prepare students better academically, reducing the reliance of African American students on collegiate-level remediation programs.

d. Public colleges and universities in states with high concentrations of African American people should be offered incentives for successfully recruiting, enrolling, and succeeding in graduating adult African American students.

e. Public colleges and universities located in states with a high concentration of African American students should be rewarded financially by the state for improving their retention and graduation rates of African American students.

f. Records should be kept on the status of college enrollment, degree completion, timeliness of completion, and degree attainment of all students. And the number of students required to take remedial courses should be monitored. All data should be disaggregated by race within gender.

4. Conduct new high-quality research for improving the quality and effectiveness of educating African American males. Included among the important issues that require the attention of researchers, but for which data and evidence are lacking, are the following:

a. The knowledge and substantive awareness by the public about the problems of achievement, attainment, and the challenges that must be overcome in order for African American males to make progress

b. How to remove or compensate for the impediments to educational attainment and achievement that result from the poverty and low socioeconomic conditions of African Americans

c. The resources required in and outside of schools to meet the challenges of achievement and attainment

d. Innovative ideas that would address the particular achievement and attainment challenges of school-age African American males

e. The incentives and resources required to attract adult African American males back into schools, colleges, and universities to put them on track toward earning degrees

f. Replicating and adapting programs and initiatives that are found to be successful with other populations in the US and abroad

g. The quality of the home and family lives of African American boys, their communities' encouragement of and support for their education and careers, the quality of the education they experience prior to entering school, and the quality of teaching and encouragement they receive throughout their school-age years
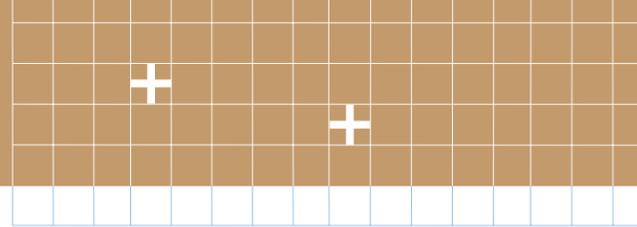
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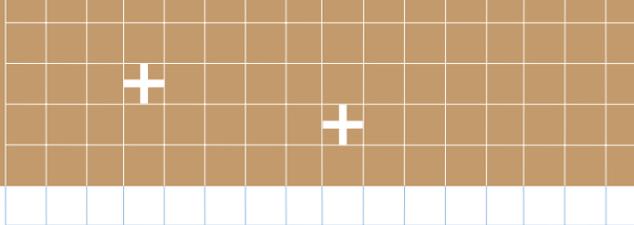
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Figure 1: Proportion of Blacks and Whites, Males and Females Ages 25–34 Attaining Higher Education, 2011
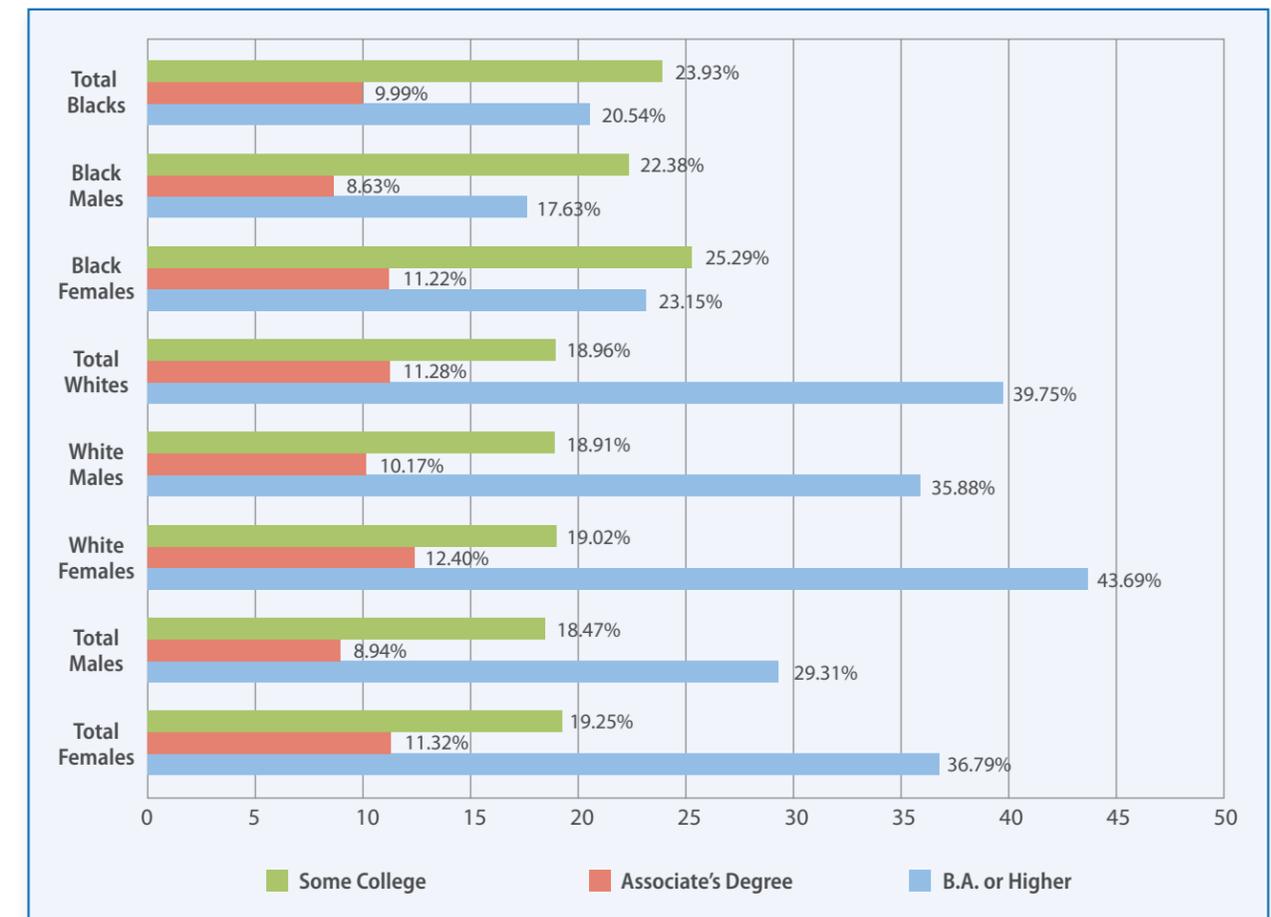
Note: The categories Black and White exclude individuals who indicated they were from two or more racial backgrounds. Figures for total males and total females are based on the whole US population, i.e., these data include all racial/ethnic groups.
Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Educational Attainment in the United States: 2011—Detailed Tables, Table 1. Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2011.
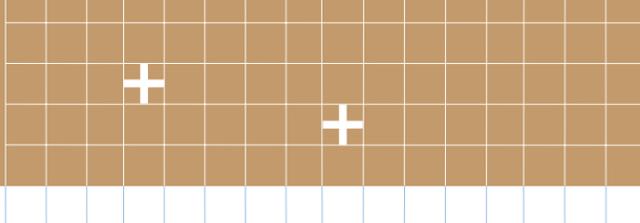
**Figure 2: NAEP 2009 Mathematics High School Transcript Study: Percents of Achievement
Level for Grade 12 by Gender and Race/Ethnicity**

	Below Basic	At or Above Basic	At or Above Proficient	At Advanced
Black Males	64.0%	29.6%	6.2%	0.2%
Black Females	62.9%	31.1%	5.8%	0.2%
White Males	25.3%	39.7%	30.9%	4.1%
White Females	25.6%	44.1%	28.1%	2.2%

Note: Black includes African American. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin. Students in the "two or more races" category were categorized as "unclassified." Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Some apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant.
Source: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Mathematics High School Transcript Study.

**Figure 3: NAEP 2009 Reading High School Transcript Study: Percents of Achievement
Level for Grade 12 by Gender and Race/Ethnicity**

	Below Basic	At or Above Basic	At or Above Proficient	At Advanced
Black Males	51.3%	36.8%	11.2%	0.6%
Black Females	36.1%	42.4%	20.2%	1.4%
White Males	24.3%	36.2%	34.7%	4.8%
White Females	13.1%	33.6%	44.2%	9%

Note: Black includes African American. Race categories exclude Hispanic origin. Students in the "two or more races" category were categorized as "unclassified." Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Some apparent differences between estimates may not be statistically significant.
Source: US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading High School Transcript Study.
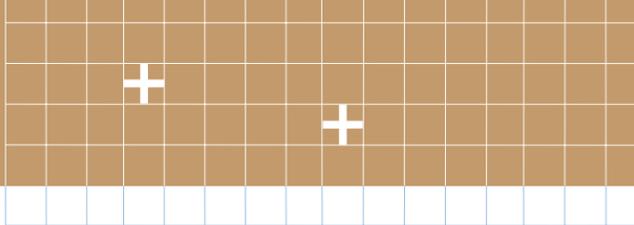
Figure 4: Parents' Income in 2006 for 2003/04 Beginning College Students by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

	Under $30,000	$30,000 to $59,999	$60,000 to $89,999	$90,000 and above
Black Males	34.2%	36.2%	16.9%	12.7%
Black Females	37.9%	37.2%	12.5%	12.5%
White Males	10.2%	29.5%	26.9%	33.4%
White Females	15.8%	33.3%	26.7%	24.2%
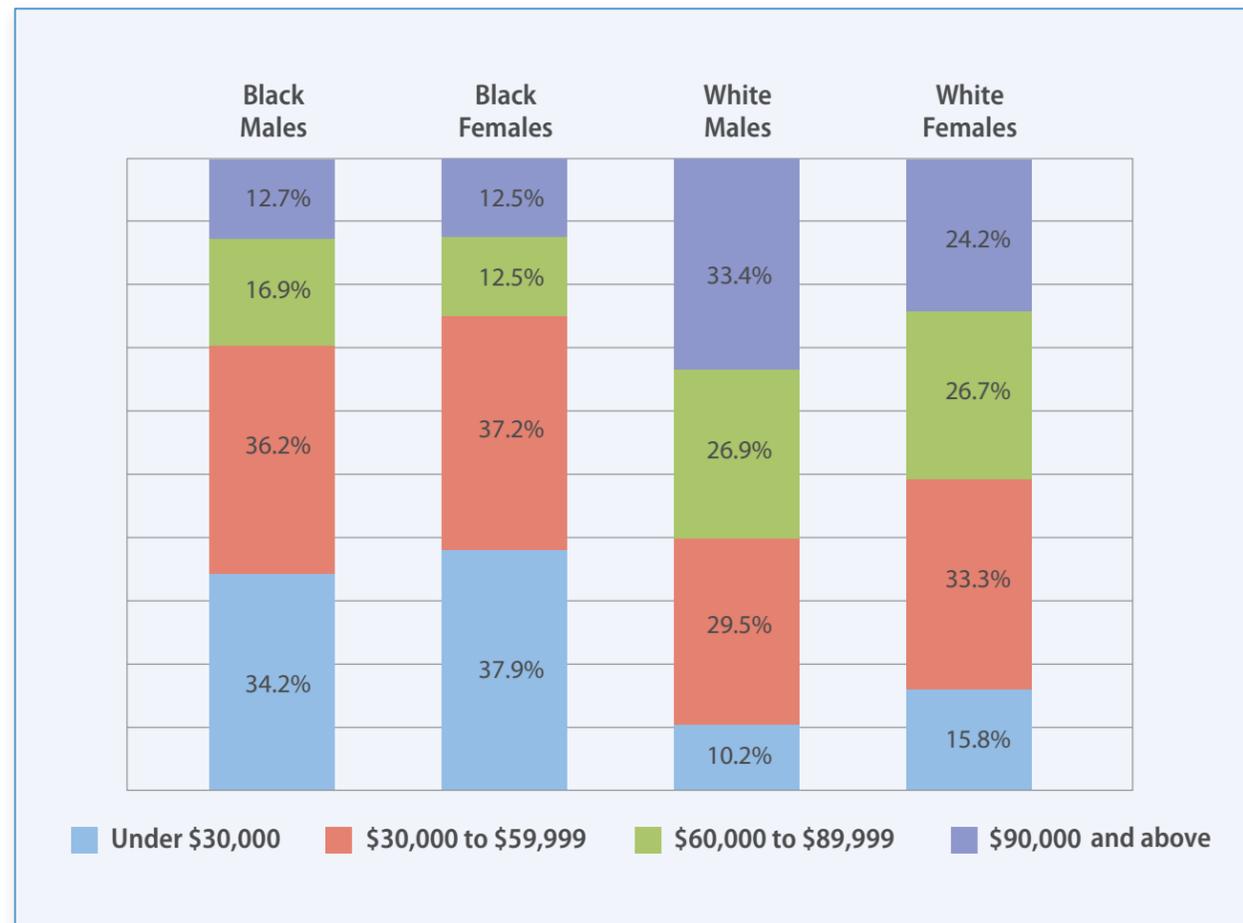
Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09). Computation by NCES PowerStats Version 1.0.

Appendix A

Table A1. 2020 Bachelor's and Associate's Degree Attainment Projections for Ages 25–34 Compared to the Number of Degrees Needed to Reach the 60 Percent Attainment Goal (Numbers reported in thousands)

Population	Total Number of Adults in US Population, 2010	Number of Adults Who Have Associate's or Bachelor's Degree, 2011	Current Percent with Associate's or Bachelor's Degree	Projected Total Adult Population in 2020	Projected Percent with Degrees in 2020 (Based on Current Growth in Attainment)	Projected Number of Degrees in Population in 2020	Number of Degrees Needed to Reach 60% Attainment in 2020	Projected Number of Degrees Attained Represented as a Proportion of 60% Attainment in 2020
US Population	41,584	17,936	43.13%	46,061	46.28%	21,317	27,637	77.13%
Whites	24,860	12,686	51.03%	25,896	55.08%	14,264	15,538	91.80%
Males	12,524	5,768	46.06%	13,193	47.52%	6,269	7,916	79.20%
Females	12,336	6,920	56.10%	12,703	62.80%	7,977	7,622	104.67%
Blacks	5,638	1,721	30.53%	6,923	34.64%	2,398	4,154	57.73%
Males	2,654	697	26.26%	3,472	27.69%	961	2,083	46.15%
Females	2,985	1,026	34.37%	3,452	41.00%	1,415	2,071	68.33%

Note: The categories Black and White exclude individuals who indicated they were from two or more racial backgrounds. Figures showing males and females alone are based on the whole US population, i.e., these data include all racial/ethnic groups. The projected percentage of degrees held within each population group in 2020 was calculated using linear estimates based on annual attainment proportions for each population group from 2001 to 2011. All other numbers in the table are taken directly from the US Census Bureau or can be easily calculated from the Census data and our 2020 attainment projections.
Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Educational Attainment in the United States: 2011—Detailed Tables, Table 1. Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2011.
Source: US Census Bureau, National Population Projections Released 2008 (Based on Census 2000): Summary Tables.

Table A2. Projected Yearly Attainment Growth and Yearly Attainment Growth Needed to Reach the 60 Percent Goal in 2020, Ages 25–34 (Numbers reported in thousands)

Population	Number of Adults Who Have Associate's or Bachelor's Degree, 2011	Projected Number of Degrees in Population in 2020	Number of Additional Degrees Earned Per Year if Attainment Continues to Grow at Current Rates	Number of Degrees Needed to Reach 60% Attainment in 2020	Number of Additional Degrees Needed Per Year to Reach 60% Attainment in 2020 (Not Accounting for Continuing Growth)	Number of Additional Degrees Needed Per Year to Reach 60% Attainment in 2020 (Accounting for Continuing Growth)	Number of Associate's or Bachelor's Degrees Held By 25-Year-Olds in 2009	Number of Degrees Needed in Each Cohort of Incoming 25-Year-Olds to Reach Goal in 2020, if Only They Increase Attainment
US Population	17,936	21,317	376	27,637	1,166	790	1,863	2,653
Whites	12,686	14,264	175	15,538	335	159	1,334	1,493
Males	5,768	6,269	56	7,916	262	206	565	771
Females	6,920	7,977	117	7,622	73	-44	779	734
Blacks	1,721	2,398	75	4,154	295	219	150	369
Males	697	961	29	2,083	170	140	51	192
Females	1,026	1,415	43	2,071	125	82	98	180

Note: The categories Black and White exclude individuals who indicated they were from two or more racial backgrounds. Figures showing males and females alone are based on the whole US population, i.e., these data include all racial/ethnic groups. The projected number of degrees held within each population group in 2020 was calculated using linear estimates based on annual attainment for each population group from 2001 to 2011. The number of additional degrees earned per year, if growth continues at the same rate, was calculated by taking the difference between the projected attainment in 2020 and attainment in 2011, then dividing by 9 years. The number of additional degrees needed per year to reach the 60 percent goal was calculated by subtracting attainment in 2012 (attainment in 2011 plus one year at the current growth rate) from the number of degrees needed in 2020, then dividing by eight years. To take into account continuing attainment growth—i.e., without policy changes—the number of additional degrees needed per year were calculated by taking the difference of the number needed to achieve the goal in 2020 and the projected level of attainment in 2020, then dividing by 8 years. The number of associate's and bachelor's degrees held by 25-year-olds was calculated by taking the total number of degrees conferred from the Digest of Education Statistics 2010 and using B&B data from 2007-08 to estimate the distribution of degrees conferred across age groups. Degrees conferred to 18- to 25-year-olds were added to get the number of degrees held by 25-year-olds. B&B:09 only had data on bachelor's degrees. So the proportion of bachelor's degrees held by 25-year-olds across age groups was assumed to be the same for associate's degrees. The number of degrees needed in each incoming cohort of 25-year-olds, if this were the only source of increases in attainment, was calculated by adding the number of degrees held by 25-year-olds to the number of degrees needed each year in addition to projected attainment growth.

Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Educational Attainment in the United States: 2011—Detailed Tables, Table 1. Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Over, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2011.

Source: US Census Bureau, National Population Projections Released 2008 (Based on Census 2000): Summary Tables.

Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, B&B: 09 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study. Computation by NCES PowerStats Version 1.0.

Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2010, Table 293, Table 296.

Appendix B

Table B1: Summary of (Logistic) Regression Results for GPA, Admission Score, Education Expectation and Saving Efforts

		GPA		Admission Score		Expectation		Saving Efforts	
		Exp (_)	P-Value	_	P-Value	Exp (_)	P-Value	Exp (_)	P-Value
Gender	Male (Ref.)								
	Female	2.19	0.00	-1.80	0.00	1.75	0.00	0.98	0.67
Race	White (Ref.)								
	Asian	1.41	0.00	5.12	0.00	1.23	0.08	1.68	0.00
	Black	0.26	0.00	-13.64	0.00	1.24	0.01	1.09	0.30
	Hispanic	0.53	0.00	-6.97	0.00	0.94	0.47	0.94	0.49
	Others	0.63	0.00	-2.97	0.00	1.14	0.27	1.06	0.62
Hour/week on home-work out of school		1.07	0.00	0.49	0.00	1.05	0.00	1.01	0.19
SES Quartile	Lowest quartile (Ref.)								
	Second quartile	1.42	0.00	3.61	0.00	1.35	0.00	1.58	0.00
	Third quartile	2.05	0.00	8.02	0.00	2.14	0.00	2.32	0.00
	Highest quartile	3.37	0.00	14.64	0.00	3.74	0.00	5.12	0.00
If English is student's native language	No (Ref.)								
	Yes	1.15	0.12	2.76	0.00	0.95	0.58	1.55	0.00
School control	Public (Ref.)								
	Private	1.09	0.24	-1.75	0.01	1.19	0.08	1.07	0.39
Percent of school's 2003 graduates who went to 4-year colleges	0-24% (Ref.)								
	25-49%	0.85	0.03	1.49	0.05	1.20	0.01	1.05	0.56
	50-74%	0.91	0.20	2.95	0.00	1.42	0.00	1.15	0.09
	75-100%	0.99	0.93	6.44	0.00	1.82	0.00	1.13	0.23
10th graders' schools' percent of students eligible for free lunch	0-5% (Ref.)								
	6-20%	0.97	0.69	-1.95	0.00	0.96	0.65	0.92	0.28
	21-50%	0.95	0.54	-3.78	0.00	0.84	0.05	0.79	0.00
	51-100%	1.24	0.03	-4.98	0.00	0.90	0.31	0.76	0.01
	Constant	0.18	0.00	92.33	0.00	0.95	0.73	0.36	0.00
	R^2	0.22		0.27		0.15		0.15	

Note: R2 is the coefficient of determinant. It measures the proportion of variability in the dependent variable that is accounted for by the model.
Source: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Education Longitudinal Study of 2002,* Base Year Survey, 2004 First Follow-up Survey, and 2006 Second Follow-up Survey (ELS: 2002). Computation by authors.

Oscar Barbarin

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Introduction

This paper outlines the challenges attendant on meeting the educational and socioemotional needs of African American boys and young men. It describes the qualities that make for an auspicious environment that will nurture their skills, address their mental health issues and place them on the road to academic success. We call this auspicious environment a mentally healthy and safe school. The paper enumerates the current challenges faced by schools serving substantial numbers of African American males and outlines strategies that might be used to address them.

Mentally Healthy Schools

A mentally healthy school does the following:

+ Supports the well-being of students and staff through the maintenance of a safe social and emotional working and learning environment

+ Communicates respectfully, as reflected in the kinds of words used in exchanges among students, staff, and school leaders

+ Provides safe opportunities for staff and students to express themselves, and to develop effective communication skills such as active listening

+ "Sounds" happy and positive: sometimes noisy and playful; sometimes placid and serious

+ Honors and celebrates positive efforts and achievement; e.g., via "Wonder Wall" displays and "Random Acts of Kindness" boards

+ Values students and staff through policies that foster a sense of connection and security; e.g., taking steps to minimize stress and maximize a supportive school environment
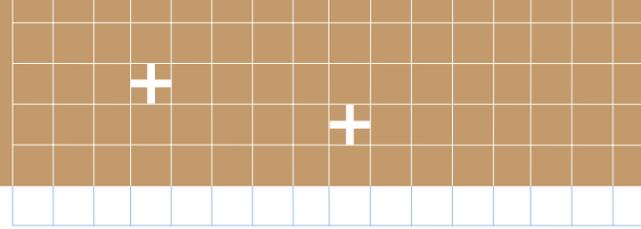
+ Respects diversity regarding culture, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, gender, and disability

+ Encourages emotional literacy and help-seeking behaviors by providing accessible and culturally supportive systems and services

+ Places mental-health-promotion activities prominently in the school calendar

+ Addresses issues of change, loss, and grief—a whole-school approach to coping with the range of situations that affect individuals and school communities; e.g., death of a family member, separation, or some large-scale incident (Adapted from Dickinson 2001)

These qualities reflect an environment that most of us would like to create in our own homes and communities because they support healthy development. One study (Shochet et al 2006) found that a lack of school connectedness was associated with depressive symptoms that persisted over the course of a year for boys and girls, future anxiety for girls, and future general functioning for boys (hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, conduct problems, and peer problems). Others have found an association between a low sense of school community and worry, loneliness, self-esteem, emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, and eating disorders. In the High School Survey of Student Engagement (Center for Evaluation & Education Policy 2009), as many as 43 percent of respondents did not feel that they were an important part of their high school community. Data suggest that healthy school environments are not uncommon but perhaps not as common as they should be.

Schools face a number of challenges that make creating and sustaining a healthy environment difficult, but not impossible. It is important to note that most of the schools our children attend are safe. Although there is much variation in the extent to which schools can be described as health promoting, most offer reasonable and secure environments. However, we don't have to go beyond the 1999 mass shooting at Columbine High School to understand that violence afflicts even schools serving affluent suburban communities. And some districts, especially larger districts with schools serving poorer communities, face special challenges with respect to developing and maintaining healthy learning environments. Neighborhood rivalries and peer conflicts, and even guns and other weapons, often find their way into schools. Similarly, many African American males are subject to a variety of strains that negatively impact their adjustment to school. Again it is important to note that not all students are affected; it is a troubled/distressed minority of students that create most of the chaos in schools and receive most of the attention. Moreover, most children, including a majority of African American males, are functioning well and developing the competencies they need to be successful in life. Nevertheless, there are challenges that must be addressed if we are to serve those African American males who are not doing well.

Social Competence and Complex Trauma in African American Males

Development of socioemotional skills is critical to successful adaptation in school. These skills are outlined in Table 1. A recent study (Barbarin 2012) examined the level of social competence in a large sample of African American male kindergartners drawn from four school districts. The results showed that a substantial percentage of African American males were judged by teachers at a level of competence that augured well for their school adjustment. Over 85 percent were judged to have positive relations with teachers, and 66 percent had developed positive relations with peers. A majority (59 percent) had developed the capacity to self-regulate their behavior. Slightly less than half (47 percent) had developed sufficient social communication skills to be judged competent in that domain. However, the weak link in their development was the self-regulation of emotions, on which only a third were judged by teachers to be competent. This means that they were not able to control anger, frustration, disappointment, sadness, and anxiety in response to situations they encountered in the classroom. They were judged to be emotionally labile and overresponsive to trying social situations.

The delays in the development of emotional self-regulation experienced by African American males are sometimes explained in terms of trauma they experience at home and in the community. Many African American males who enter school with the most serious challenges often come from a home and community environment where they have experienced complex trauma: multiple traumatic events that impair the development of coping skills and competencies that would help them adjust to the demands of school life. These multiple traumatic events include poverty, abuse or neglect, family and community violence, substance abuse, and physical deprivation. As young children, they are exposed to a variety of fear-arousing and overwhelming experiences that impair their emotional development, leading to feelings of grief, anger, and depression, and causing hypersensitivity to insults and irritability in social situations. These students might also engage in high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse and risky sexual behavior. Also common is an inability to deal with emotionally charged situations and conflicts without resorting to violence.

For example, a mental health professional reported that when three seven-year-old boys were asked about possible ways of expressing anger, they stated, in unison, that you could kill somebody, and they went on to elaborate in detail the various means of doing just that (Barbarin 2011). Following are two other examples of how some students are coping with the stress of their environments.

+ Jamal, a teenage student distraught over the suicide of his sister and anxious about the violence in his neighborhood, stays awake all night playing video games as a way of coping with stress. By morning, he is too tired to go to school. Lacking direction and guidance, he plans, with the help of a friend who has dropped out of school, to rob an armed bank truck.
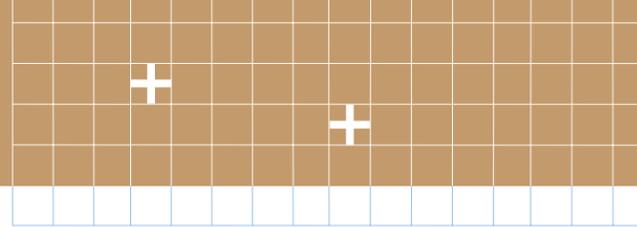
+ Antonio is suicidal after an incident in which his guardian put a gun to his head. He wants to live with his mother, but cannot because she abuses drugs. Child Protective Services will not help him, believing the report about his guardian to be false.

The experience of complex trauma results in impulsivity, easy arousal, hypervigilance, overreaction to perceived threats, and fear, irritability, and hostility. That said, it is important that African American boys as a group not be looked at as damaged and in need of repair. Again, many are doing well and are resilient in the face of hardship. Instead, it is more helpful to understand these boys as struggling to define what they are to become and to find their place in the world. This understanding should guide our attempts to address their needs, involving the boys as partners, agents in their own development. This means including them in the conversation and working with them to define themselves as competent people in the world.

In adolescence, the effects of complex trauma on Black males may take the form of feigned nonchalance and hypermasculinity. They develop confusion about what it means to be a male, and thus assume roles, trying to be the alpha male, for example, where physical toughness and stoicism are valued. Boys aspire to become men but almost never achieve the ideals of masculinity; this failure can lead to frustration. Consequently, they have difficulty expressing their feelings, although talking about their feelings could help to reduce their cognitive stress.

The transition from elementary to middle school may be an especially vulnerable time for African American males, a time in which they disconnect from school, give up on academic aspirations, and pursue interests that have to do more with peer acceptance. Although school leaders and staff want to focus boys' attention on academics, heroic efforts may be needed because African American males may come to view schooling as of lower value in their hierarchy of needs. Devotion to academic achievement may be in question for many African American males in middle school. Instead, popularity with peers may be a more highly valued outcome. As a consequence, academic achievement and behavioral compliance tends to deteriorate more for African American males than for most other groups during the transition to middle school.

National estimates of the prevalence of mental disorders among children range from 11 percent to 25 percent. Conservative estimates set the average rate of disorders among preschoolers at 10.2 percent; 13.2 percent among pre-adolescents; and 16.5 percent among adolescents (Roberts, Attkisson, and Rosenblatt 1998). Given the multiple strains experienced by poor children, the prevalence rates for children in school districts serving poor students fall arguably toward the higher end of the estimated ranges. Although the results from teacher-reported concerns estimated emotional problems at 6 percent, national studies show that depression rates are higher, and reach 10 percent among African American children (Costello et al. 1996). Emotional problems are less likely to be reported than conduct problems, because teachers and parents generally do not recognize the early signs of emotional problems in children and adolescents.

The mental health challenges facing the public schools are clearly evident in the human dramas that unfold in the hallways, classrooms, and playgrounds of some schools, where it is possible to witness students being pushed to the edge of despair and staff that are taxed to their limits. The strain on students and staff can be palpable. Expertise in mental health diagnosis is not required to conclude that serious emotional and behavioral problems are evident in incidents at school such as:

+ Anger-driven cursing and striking out at adults

+ Tantrums ending in hurling chairs and desks across the room

+ Setting fires in school

+ Threatening physical harm to self or others

+ Selling and using drugs at school

+ Smearing feces on bathroom walls

+ Sexually assaulting peers

When asked for an expert opinion about the problems that represented the most serious mental health challenges in the schools, a panel of mental health professionals reached consensus on five issues (Barbarin 2011). Their rankings of the most serious child mental health problems are as follows:

+ Co-occurring academic and emotional symptoms such as anxiety, agitation, difficulty concentrating resulting from trauma, abuse, and bullying

+ Extremely disruptive behavior problems: opposition and aggression

+ Problems of inattention and hyperactivity

+ Emotional difficulty especially resulting in depressed mood and irritability

+ Childhood psychoses and serious emotional problems

Problems such as these are more common than many people expect. Based on even the most conservative estimates, primary-grade teachers are likely to have at least two children in their classrooms that
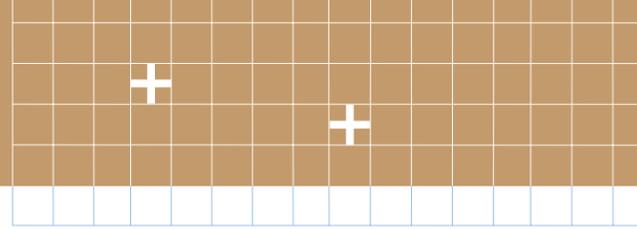
have serious mental health difficulties. That number increases in middle and high school. It doesn't take too many episodes of acting out or extreme emotional expression to disturb the learning environment and disrupt the academic development of an entire class. Incidents such as these are disturbing and difficult to forget and directly impact individual students. It is clear that mental health directly affects learning and development as well as the climate of the classroom and the school. When incidents of emotional outbursts and their behavioral sequelae become commonplace, subpar academic performance is guaranteed. These incidents decrease time for instruction in the classroom and increase fear and disrespect. As indicated by legislation recently introduced to the House and the Senate,[1] positive school climates and the socio-emotional health of students are deemed critical factors for academic success. From the vantage point of many schools, mental health problems are a subset of special-education-mandated services.

Emotional disturbances that impact learning can be easily missed, along with the opportunity to get to the root cause of children's difficulties with emotion-focused interventions that work. However, the nature of these problems makes it clear that they are ignored only at the peril of schools and their students. The costs are also evident in the achievement ceilings many schools hit as they try to improve the academic performance of their students. These costs are apparent in the experiences of youth whose personal difficulties and lack of support lead to despair. Consider the following examples:

+ Jamil, sixteen years old, sees no purpose in living and certainly no point in studying. He is a bright student capable of good grades, and one who could do well in college if he applied himself. He thinks about killing himself. He has received medication in the past but says that he cannot "keep up with it" so he manages his mood by smoking marijuana instead.

+ Phillip is so anxious and unsettled by the arguing and violence occurring at home that he finds it difficult to focus in school. When he attends, he bounces aimlessly from room to room. He is missing so much instructional time that his grades have suffered.

The pain of children with serious emotional problems is often overlooked as attention is drawn to children who are disruptive. Depression can take the subtle form of a child sitting quietly but zoned out, staring into space. It can also take a more obvious form of a sobbing child who does not know why he is crying and why he cannot stop. These children epitomize the silent crisis of school mental health

1. Reducing Barriers to Learning Act of 2011 (HR 1995); Mental Health in Schools Act of 2011 (HR 751); Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students Act of 2011 (S 919).

that undercuts the extraordinary efforts of schools to raise achievement levels. Until such issues are addressed vigorously and creatively, progress in improving these students' academic performance will stall out at a level that is unsatisfactory.

## Threats to Emotional and Physical Health in Schools

Bullying

Bullying is one of the most serious threats to psychological health and safety in schools. In 2009–10, 74 percent of public schools recorded one or more violent incidents of crime (National Center for Education Statistics 2012). In a 2009 Gallup poll of ten- to eighteen-year- olds, 37 percent reported that they did not feel safe at school. Almost half of girls in elementary school reported being afraid of being bullied (Olweus and Limber 2010). Bullying is a major threat to health and well-being in schools, and it is widespread. Moreover, contrary to common perceptions, bullying is not restricted to adolescence but can be observed as early as kindergarten (Perren and Alsaker 2006).

Bullying can be thought of as the use of verbal threats, physical aggression, or psychological coercion to exercise power over, to subjugate, intimidate, harm, or shame a target child or victim, sometimes with the goal of making them do things against their will. More than half of the sixth graders in a nationally representative study reported at least one form of victimization through bullying (Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel 2009). Bullying usually involves a complex social situation consisting of the bully, the victim, and corroborating bystanders. The effects of bullying for all participants are far from trivial. Victimization through bullying has significant long-term psychological consequences for the victim (Hodges and Perry 1999; Hawker and Boulton 2000). Adverse psychological effects of bullying in childhood are evident even into adulthood (Isaacs, Hodges, and Salmivalli 2008). What has not been appreciated until recently is that bullying is associated with adverse psychological outcomes for the bully. This is true because the roles of bully and victim are not fixed but changeable, and victims of bullies can on other occasions become bullies themselves (Conners-Burrow et al. 2009). Children who are bullied, physically restrained, isolated, or discriminated against may exhibit emotional withdrawal and have trouble forming new attachments with others.

Punitive Behavior Management

Some of the approaches schools take to address behavior problems, bullying, and student disengagement from academic pursuits may actually make things worse. These include poor classroom management; teacher overreaction and use of coercive discipline; excessive reliance on punishment; ethnic disparities in suspensions; infrequent, insufficient use of positive reinforcement of desired behavior; and poor teacher-child relations.
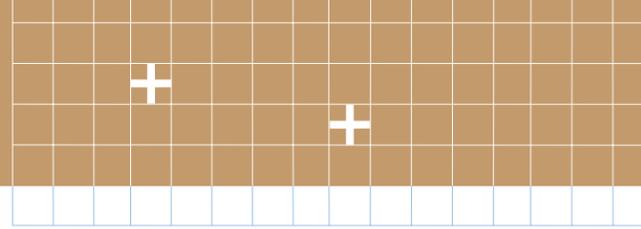
In some schools, a punitive approach to behavior management, including inappropriate use of restraint and seclusion as intervention techniques, has become more common with increased training in these types of interventions (TASH 2011). The result is a coercive and violent environment that threatens trusting relationships and undermines learning (National Disability Rights Network 2009).

Student suspension is among the approaches most commonly used by schools to address behavior problems and violations of school rules (Boccanfuso and Kuhfeld 2011). It is so greatly overused that it has resulted in a backlash on the part of students, families, and communities (Karp 2011). Such exclusionary forms of discipline are counterproductive and often make behavior and academic problems worse (Algozzine, Wang, and Violette 2011). School suspension is ineffective because it does not reduce the undesirable behavior, it limits opportunities for learning, and it reduces the child's sense of connection to the school (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force 2008; Skiba and Rausch 2006). It is also associated with school dropout and entry into the criminal justice system (Wald and Losen 2003).

National suspension rates have increased for all children in K–12 education since the 1970s. However, they have increased dramatically for African American males. For example, in 1973 Black students were suspended at about twice the rate of White students; 6 percent compared to 3 percent. By 2006, the rate of suspensions for African American students had climbed to 15 percent, compared with 5 percent for Whites. Much of this increase has been attributed to zero-tolerance policies put in place by school districts (Losen and Skiba 2006). In exploring a possible explanation for the overrepresentation of certain groups being disciplined, one study (Skiba et al. 2011) ruled out low socioeconomic status and severity of the offense. By inference, race remained as a possible explanatory factor. Specifically, the authors concluded that race and factors associated with it contributed to the differential use of harsh discipline in the case of African American males (Losen and Skiba 2006).

There is compelling evidence that teachers tend to judge African American males more harshly and punish them for minor offenses that would be overlooked for other groups of children. Research indicates that a complex interaction between school systems, educators, and students results in discriminatory practices (Losen and Skiba 2006). The situation is not hopeless. There is much that can be done to turn it around and create a more favorable school climate for African American males and all students.

Emerging from the Shadows: Making a Place, Finding a Voice

African American boys are often lost in the crowd at school; they can feel anonymous, as though they have no stake in and little to gain from doing well in school. Sometimes they emerge from the shadows as a result of remarkable athleticism, or when they are perceived as a challenge to adult authority or a physical threat to others. The vast majority are faceless, voiceless, and most often part of the invisible underground in school. The successful education of boys requires engaging them, connecting to them socially, knowing them individually ("giving them face"), and listening to their voices. This requires that steps be taken to promote their social competence and nurture their mental health. The importance of mental health and social competence to academic achievement is often lost on educators until they are confronted with their failure to reach their students and make a difference in their educational outcomes. Before taking up this issue seriously on the front end, many school administrators exhaust all other options. Instead of directly addressing the mental health concerns of their students, they pin all their hopes on educational interventions: whole-school reforms, demanding standards, teacher accountability, differentiated instruction, intensive literacy programs, and an array of other initiatives.

Even with the best teachers, the most demanding curriculum, and excellent pedagogy, schools will fail to reach many boys, because teachers and administrators have not made sufficient efforts to connect with them on an emotional and social level. They often neglect the importance of emotions and emotional functioning in academic achievement. Too often the emotional difficulties of boys are misread as behavioral problems and addressed as problems of discipline and control. Educators underestimate the truth of the principle that learning involves a combination of thinking and feeling, of reflection and emotion. Eliciting positive emotions and connecting to students on a social level are underutilized tools educators might use to tap boys' curiosity and channel their enthusiasm. Many boys growing up in urban areas experience complex trauma from troubles they face at home and in their neighborhoods. Boys who arrive at school anxious, depressed, and bored may find it difficult to enlist their psychic energies for learning. Educators often overlook the powerfully suppressive effect of negative emotions on boys' ability to learn.

How do we ignite the fire of enthusiasm and open them to learning? Through supportive relations, providing opportunities to understand and give expression to their emotions, schools can help boys deal with the mental health sequelae of stressful lives. An important goal of education must be to help students reflect on and understand their emotional lives. This means providing them with a safe space in which to acknowledge feelings, label them accurately, and learn ways to channel emotions productively. Schools thus need to focus on the development of the inner lives of students. They need to accept the legitimate role of emotions in learning. Students learn more deeply and consolidate learning more fully when content is linked to emotions, when the learner makes a personal connection to that which is taught.

This does not happen when boys feel faceless and voiceless in schools, when they are barely known to their teachers and other adults in the school environment, when their opinions and views are not solicited and valued.

As educators we must utilize tools to get to know our students, offer them opportunities to weigh in on their experiences and a chance to reflect on shared information about how they are doing emotionally
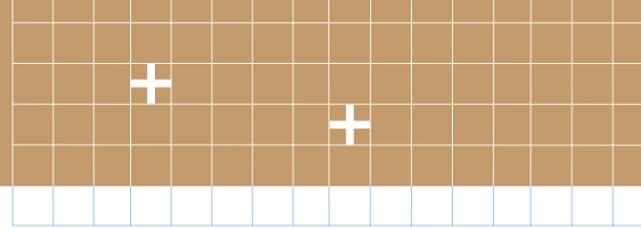
and socially at school. Teachers are not always cognizant of their students' emotional states and of how these states impact learning. Universal mental health screening that also covers dimensions of social competence is a valuable tool. ABLE (Barbarin 2012) is just one of many tools that can be used to help schools benchmark the social functioning and emotional well-being of their students. Schools can use information from mental health screenings to detect, through student voices, if students feel safe, if they trust the adults in their lives to take care of them, if they feel valued, and if they can afford to take risks, and possibly fail, without losing face.

Recommendations Supporting Mentally Healthy and Safe Schools

As we have seen, schools face a range of challenges in promoting the healthy development of African American males. The problems identified here include:

+ Lack of connectedness to schools

+ Lack of engagement and relationships within schools

+ Punitive discipline that disproportionately impacts African American males

+ Unmet mental health needs of African American males

The recommendations that follow focus on the central issues of relationships and connectedness, discipline, and mental health.

Promote a Sense of School Community and Connection

All students benefit from a positive, welcoming, supportive environment that goes beyond the prevention of harm and imparts a sense of community, a sense of belonging. Students' experiences of school as a community is positively related to their self-efficacy, concern for others, acceptance of members of other ethnic groups, positive coping skills, social skills, and sense of autonomy. Creating a welcoming environment lessens the likelihood of substance abuse, delinquency, and violent behavior within schools.

To this end, school staff should strive to make individual connections with all children in the school, and particularly with those young people who are isolated and troubled. Every child in the school should be known by name and family by at least one staff person at school other than the classroom teacher.

Interpersonal connections are optimized when schools are organized into smaller units of responsibility, wherein staff get to know and work closely with specific children. School leaders should embrace the kinds of structural changes, such as smaller schools, block scheduling, departmental teaming, houses, and looping, that help support a climate of connectedness, as evidenced by:

+ Warmth and responsiveness on the part of teachers and administrators

+ Promotion of mutual respect and connectedness among administrators, teachers, and students

+ Competent classroom management

+ Regularly scheduled class meetings with active participation by students

+ School work that encourages cooperative learning and dialogue

+ Student engagement in class-level decisions (intrinsic motivation)

+ Engaging class material

+ Positive parental engagement

A sense of community also issues from effective and respectful communication within schools. Schools should create forums for school leaders to take the pulse of and obtain feedback from students. Creation of a principal's advisory council that includes substantial representation of troubled and troubling children is also advised. This council would meet twice a month with principals and assistant principals to give input and provide student perspectives on what is happening within the school and what students would like to see changed and opportunities they would like the school to include.

Another important way to encourage students' sense of connection with school is to support their sense of agency, personal efficacy, responsibility for, and ownership of the school environment. One of the reasons boys fail to engage in school and improve over time is that they lack an opportunity to connect the knowledge they have acquired outside of school with their school environment. What is taught in school does not touch their lives in any meaningful way. Consequently, there is little opportunity to apply what they know and what they are learning in school to their own lives. School leaders should offer opportunities for students to be included in the decision-making process of the school. In addition, schools should provide programs that directly impact Black males.

Embrace Alternative Models of School Discipline

District and school disciplinary policy should be revised to eliminate zero tolerance. Zero-tolerance policies are inflexible and, in practice, ensnare a disproportionate number of African American males. Schools should make the use of suspensions exceptional and rare. This is especially true for problems such as truancy or violations of a school's dress code.
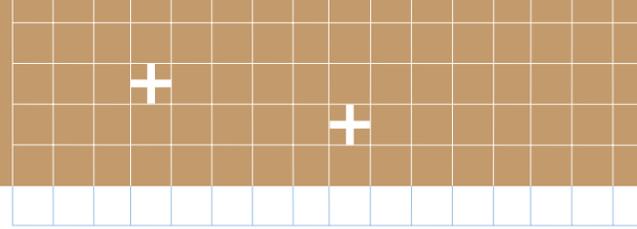
Decrease reliance on punishment as a means of social control. This would involve a shift in school discipline from punitive methods based on adult control to peer-focused practices such as conflict resolution, victim/offender mediation, and reconciliation, community conferencing, and peacemaking (Morrison and Vaandering 2012). Discipline should be viewed as an extension of the teaching function. Steps in this direction begin with a focus on the positive—what students and staff are doing right. The result should be that students feel like they are known both for what they do well and for areas in which they need improvement.

When possible, invoke principles of restorative justice for conduct problems. Restorative justice emphasizes the natural and relational consequences of misbehavior, thus it provides a comprehensive framework for reconceptualizing behavior management in school and offers a useful alternative to suspension and other punitive measures. School leaders and staff should master principles of restorative justice and implement its related practices in the school by:

+ Implementing strategies that investigate the offense

+ Requiring the student to reflect on the incident

+ Involving educators in determining the impact of the behavior and fellow students in assigning consequences

+ Designing individualized interventions for each student based on whether the behavior is the result of making bad choices, a skill or ability deficit, or stemming from a social/emotional need

Administrators, teachers, and other school staff must be trained to employ the new strategies being implemented. Teachers should be provided with professional development to address issues that many boys of color may have with regard to authority. In addition to training, staff needs resources for assessment as well as support in carrying out response to intervention (RTI) systems.

Develop a Coordinated System to Address Mental Health Care Needs

Schools should adopt a mental-health screening process that is implemented as consistently as efforts to screen for learning difficulties in reading and mathematics. Each district should adopt a standardized tool designed for mental health screening to be completed by teachers and or educational specialists for each student in their classes. Where feasible, parents could be invited to provide input and complete the screening tool.

Each school needs to develop a process for reviewing results and developing plans to address the concerns identified by the screening. A system of care should include the following elements:

+ A universal mental health screen implemented twice a year in every school

+ Socioemotional curricula implemented in each classroom

+ In-class consultation to help teachers with student mental health issues

+ An emergency response Crisis Intervention Team to provide immediate on-the-spot assistance to teachers and administrators when a serious problem erupts, especially as an alternative to calling the police

+ Outpatient services that include Tier 3 intensive intervention and a medication-evaluation clinic for school mental health

+ A therapeutic/school program for children with serious emotional/behavioral disorders run collaboratively by the schools and the Health Department

+ Short-term inpatient services for children who are in crisis

Sustained teacher training enabling teachers to implement a socioemotional curriculum in the classroom is key to this effort. Schools should dedicate a minimum of one day a year each year to professional development that helps teachers understand what mental health is, what to look for in child behavior in the classroom, and what sets off out-of-control behavior.

Teachers must be provided with mental health resources they can call on to address students' needs. Standardized socioemotional curriculum (e.g., Second Step, Paths, or Coping Power) can increase children's understanding of their own emotional functioning and provide them with a vocabulary to express what they are feeling, effective strategies for coping with stress, and skills to resolve conflict without violence.[2]

It goes without saying that dedicated psychology and social work services should be provided to schools. If not as a full-time member of the school staff, psychologists and social workers should be employed part-time to address the mental health and behavioral needs of students.

Finally, school districts need to partner and coordinate with community health and human service agencies. The city or county government needs to be involved in a way that supplements what the

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2. For a recent review and evaluation of these programs see Joseph A. Durlak et al., "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions," *Child Development* 82 (2011): 405–32.
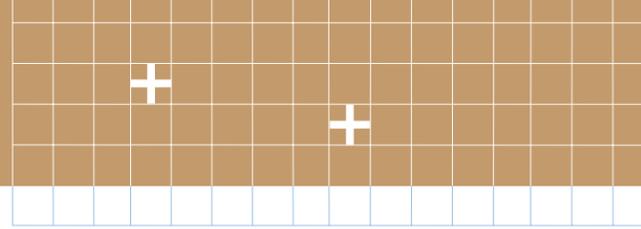
schools can provide. Students in need should be referred to child mental health services provided by community health clinics and day hospital programs. The schools should work with community health clinics to tap the variety of state and federal funding streams in Medicaid, Title I, and special education that might support these services.

Increase Accountability Through the Collection and Use of Mental Health Data

Schools must be more accountable internally and to the public with respect to their handling of school mental health issues. School leaders should answer the following questions when assessing how they are servicing the mental health needs of students:

+ To what extent are the mental health needs of students specifically addressed in annual reports to the school board?

+ How is mental-health-service delivery described in the operating procedures of the school?

+ To what extent is the school complying with state and federal law in their written policies?

+ How much of the school's resources (staff and financial) is devoted to mental-health-service delivery?

+ To what extent is the school aware of, taking advantage of, and partnering with the network of mental-health-services agencies to assist in addressing the mental health needs of children?

Conclusion

A mentally healthy and safe school is a prerequisite to successful learning and advancement, and key to addressing the achievement gap affecting African American boys and young men. In failing to provide such an environment, we risk failing our youth.

In the final analysis, addressing the issues of school connectedness, discipline, and mental health will require extraordinary creativity and patience. Moreover, to be successful it will require a whole-school approach, involving school leaders, teachers, students, families, support staff, and the larger community.

Summary of Solutions

Relationships and Connectedness to School

1. Teachers should make individualized connections with all children in their classrooms and particularly with those young people who are isolated and troubled. Every child in the school should be known by name and family by at least one staff member other than the classroom teacher.

2. Organize the school into smaller units of responsibility wherein staff gets to know and work closely with specific children.

3. Support structural changes, such as smaller schools, block scheduling, departmental teaming, houses, and looping that encourage changes in the interactions between students and staff.

4. Create a school climate of warmth, support, and responsiveness on the part of teachers by promoting mutual respect and connectedness among administrators, teachers, and students; competent classroom management; regularly scheduled class meetings with active participation by all students; schoolwork that encourages cooperative learning and dialogue; and student engagement in class-level decisions, intrinsic motivation, and engaging class material.

5. Create a principal's advisory council that includes substantial representation of troubled and troubling children as well as other students, that meets twice a month with principal and assistant principals to get input on school activities; and provides feedback on student perspectives, likes, dislikes, what is going well and what students would like to see changed, events they would like to see happen, and opportunities they would like to have in the school.

6. Support development of a sense of agency, personal efficacy, responsibility, and ownership of the school environment.

7. Create an opportunity for students to apply knowledge they have from outside of school to school-related activities so that there is a stronger connection between in-school and out-of-school learning.

8. Focus on the positive—what students and staff are doing right—so that all feel that they are valued.
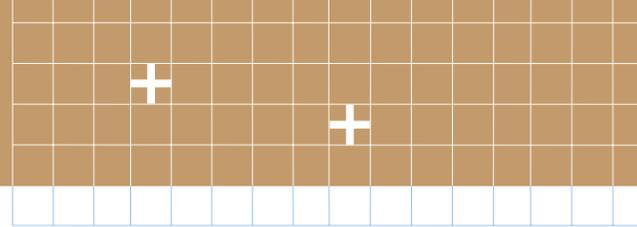
Student Safety and School Discipline

9. Help school staffs understand that race and factors associated with it have contributed to the differential use of harsh discipline in the case of African American males.

10. Ensure that teachers do not judge African American males more harshly and punish them for minor offenses that would be overlooked for other groups of children.

11. Revise district and school disciplinary programs to eliminate zero-tolerance policies, which are inflexible and in practice ensnare a disproportionate number of African American males.

12. Decrease the reliance on punishment as a means of social control by shifting school discipline practices from punitive methods based on adult control to peer-focused, positive behavior interventions such as conflict resolution, victim/offender mediation and reconciliation, community restorative conferencing, and peacemaking.

13. Invoke principles of restorative justice for conduct problems, with an emphasis on the natural and relational consequences of misbehavior, providing a comprehensive framework for conceptualizing behavior management in school that offers a useful alternative to suspension and punishment.

14. Train school leaders and staff in alternative disciplinary procedures and provide resources for assessment, reinforcements, socioemotional training materials, and support to carry out procedures such as Functional Behavioral Analyses (FBAs) associated with Tier I and II interventions of the response to intervention (RTI) system. Use expert consultants to provide assistance, when necessary.

Mentally Healthy Students, Staff, and Schools

15. Galvanize a concerted effort to get out in front of and address a school's mental health by creating schools that:

 a. Support student and staff well-being through the maintenance of a safe social and emotional working and learning environment

 b. Communicate respectfully, as reflected in the kinds of words used in exchanges among students, staff, and school leaders

 c. Provide safe opportunities for staff and students to express themselves, and to develop communication skills such as active listening

 d. "Sound" happy and positive, sometimes noisy and playful, sometimes placid and serious

 e. Honor and celebrate positive efforts and achievement e.g., with a "Wonder Wall" display at the school entrance, or a "Random Acts of Kindness" board

 f. Value students and staff through policies that foster a sense of connection and security; e.g., taking steps to minimize stress and maximize a supportive school environment

 g. Respect diversity regarding culture, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, gender, and disability

 h. Encourage emotional literacy and help-seeking behavior by providing accessible and culturally supportive systems and services

 i. Place mental-health-promotion activities prominently in the school calendar

 j. Address issues of change, loss, and grief—a whole-school approach to coping with the range of situations that affect individuals or entire school communities; e.g., death of a family member, separation, or some large-scale incident

16. Include students in the conversation and work with them to define themselves as competent people in the world.

17. Recognize that the challenges that children with emotional and behavioral problems bring into the school are often made worse by the lack of appropriate supports in the school environment.

18. Create programs that smooth the transition from elementary to middle school for African American males in order to minimize their disconnecting from school, giving up on academic aspirations and pursuing interests that have more to do with peer acceptance.

19. Provide multiple opportunities for Black males to talk about feelings to help reduce the strain and cognitive load of stress.

20. Help school staff understand that serious emotional and behavioral problems are evident in incidents at school such as:

 a. Anger-driven cursing and striking out at adults

 b. Tantrums ending in hurling chairs and desks across the room

 c. Setting fires in school
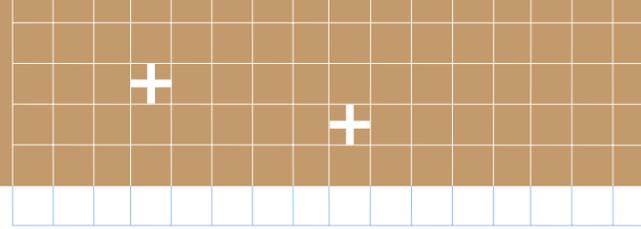
d. Threatening physical harm to self or others

e. Selling and using drugs at school

f. Smearing feces on the bathroom walls

g. Sexually assaulting peers

21. Recognize that emotional problems can be subtle and may not be easily detected without training in psychological assessment.

22. Vigorously and creatively address problems of children with serious emotional problems. These students may or may not be the same as those who routinely act out.

23. Identify and eliminate the obstacles that must be overcome when promoting mentally healthy schools:

a. Schools are typically in a reactive rather than proactive, preventative mode. This often results in an overreliance on the use of punitive strategies that deprive children of instructional time.

b. Mental health services are typically seen as a luxury, or as being outside the domain of the academic environment, and thus a low priority within often constrained school budgets.

c. Schools have difficulty embracing a multitiered approach to social and emotional health that parallels the multitiered response to intervention (RTI) approach commonly implemented for development of academic skills.

d. More time and attention are devoted to assuring compliance with process than to assuring the quality of services. Staff resources are often devoted to making sure the i's are dotted, the t's are crossed, and the paperwork is completed, but little effort is made to evaluate whether services provided are effective and efficient.

24. Adopt a universal mental-health-screening process that is as consistently implemented as efforts to screen for learning difficulties in reading and mathematics. Where feasible, parents could be invited to provide input and complete the screening tool. The process should include, but is not limited to:

a. A universal mental health screening implemented twice a year in every school

b. Socioemotional curricula implemented in each classroom

c. In-class consultation to help teachers with student mental health issues

d. An emergency-response crisis-intervention team to provide immediate on-the-spot assistance to teachers and administrators when a serious problem erupts, especially as an alternative to calling the police

e. Outpatient services that include Tier 3 intensive intervention and a medication-evaluation clinic for school mental health

f. A therapeutic/school program for children with very serious emotional/behavioral disorders run collaboratively by the schools and the Health Department

g. Short-term inpatient services for students who are in crisis

25. Develop programs that help teachers understand what mental health is, what to look for in child behavior in the classroom, and what sets off out-of-control behavior.

26. Provide each school with dedicated psychology and social work services, and partner with community agencies.

27. Increase accountability through the collection and use of data. The following questions might be asked:

a. To what extent are the mental-health needs of students specifically addressed in annual reports to the school board?

b. How is mental health service delivery described in the operating procedures of the schools?

c. To what extent are schools complying with state and federal law in their own written policies?

d. How much of the school's resources (staff and financial) are devoted to mental-health-service delivery?

e. To what extent are schools aware of, taking advantage of, and partnering with the network of mental-health-service agencies to assist in addressing the mental health needs of children?

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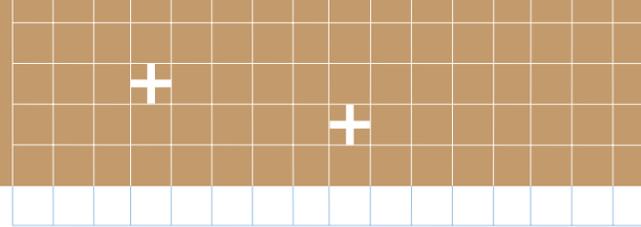
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Table 1. Social Competencies Needed for Success in School

|	
Emotion Self-Regulation	Ability to moderate emotional reactions to frustrations, limits, disappointments, failure, and teasing
Behavior Self-Regulation	Ability to moderate impulses, follow rules, delay gratification, sustain effort, and use nonaggressive tactics to resolve conflicts
Social Communication Skills	Ability to express self, discuss thoughts, defend own ideas, question unfairness, and lead others
Peer Relations (Positive)	Ability to behave in an affable and friendly way that results in being popular and well-liked by peers
Relation with Teacher	Capacity to form cooperative and emotionally close relations with teachers and other nonfamily adults

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Introduction

The history of legalized segregation in the United States has had a tremendous and detrimental impact that continues to extend into the nation's education system. It has been noted that the enslavement of Blacks[1] was permitted in the United States for 245 years, and then, after slavery ended, legalized segregation persisted in the United States for another 100 years.[2] Public schools were not exempt: the system of de jure segregation existed throughout the country until the United States Supreme Court handed down its landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.[3] In *Brown*, the Court held that a system of separate but equal education was inherently unequal and a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution, ending de jure segregation in schools. Approximately one year after the 1954 decision, the Supreme Court handed down another decision that ordered school districts to desegregate with all deliberate speed.[4] A little over ten years later, in *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*,[5] the Supreme Court issued another decision that made clear that school systems had to eliminate the vestiges of de jure segregation in all facets of school operations.[6] In many instances those operations have included student discipline. Although the decision in *Brown* was handed down nearly sixty years ago, today hundreds of school districts remain under Court order or agreement to desegregate—meaning they have not been found to have eliminated the vestiges of prior de jure segregation.

Even after the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown*, school systems' operations often resulted in students being segregated by race. Black students were often segregated as a result of tracking into certain classes and being overidentified as having special needs.[7] Although the placement of Blacks and other minorities in special education may have been intentional on the part of school districts during desegregation, it is evident that discriminatory practices have remained as a reality throughout the United States.[8] In many instances, Black students are identified as being emotionally and behaviorally disturbed, expelled or removed from the classroom, and arrested and adjudicated into the juvenile justice system at rates far greater than their White peers.[9] Today, excessive and overly punitive discipline of

young Black males is prevalent as a primary force in pushing Black males out of classrooms and schools and funneling them into the prison system.

Although segregation in schools on the basis of race is not legal today, the impact of disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of African American males in particular is having a segregating effect in classrooms and schools. Young Black males continue to be pushed out of schools and disciplined at alarmingly disproportionate rates, and it is clear that we should operate with all deliberate speed in eliminating racial disparities in school discipline. Fortunately, advocates, educators, parents, and policymakers are looking for solutions to address discipline disparities based on race.

Concern over the school-to-prison pipeline or "schoolhouse to jailhouse track"[10] and ideas as to how it might be eliminated have generated a great deal of academic research in recent years.[11] The school-to-prison pipeline is a set of policies and practices that isolate and remove students from schools and funnel them into environments outside of classrooms—including alternative schools and programs and the juvenile and criminal justice systems.[12] Courageously confronting the issue of school discipline and race will help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, which has a devastating impact on students, families, and communities, and also results in education systems being financially burdened.[13] African American students are overrepresented in the pipeline, accounting for 34 percent of all school suspensions in the year 2000, even though they made up only 17 percent of the total school population in the United States.[14] Children who find themselves pushed out of classrooms are statistically much more likely to use drugs, drop out of school, and/or become involved with the criminal justice system.[15] This reality exacerbates the skewed racial makeup of American prisons—one in every nine African American males between the ages of twenty and thirty-four is incarcerated.[16] The results of this disparity have been devastating, for both the children who are caught up in the school-to-prison pipeline and for the communities they call home, damaging social networks, jeopardizing community safety, and limiting community political power.[17]

There is no question that issues of race in schools remain prevalent today. A search of federal and state court decisions referencing the discipline of Black males reveals the following: (1) more than 400 opinions discuss or mention Black males being suspended or expelled,[18] and approximately 150 of those decisions are from the past ten years;[19] and (2) at least 60 case decisions mention the terms *Black* or *African American*; *school discipline*, *suspension*, or *expulsion*; *males* or *men*; and *disproportionate* and *disparate*.[20] Although it is evident that issues surrounding disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of Black males from schools have been raised in courts nationwide, the gravity of the problem appears more severe when we consider the administrative complaints filed by advocates and the investigations and compliance reviews initiated by government agencies surrounding school discipline.

Our history of education demonstrates that race can affect an individual's opportunities to learn; however, it is imperative and obviously possible to prevent young Black males from meeting the intersection of the education and juvenile and criminal justice systems. We know that in our schools young Black males continue to be denied equal educational opportunities on account of their race, because they are being pushed out of schools as a result of overly punitive disciplinary policies such as suspension and expulsion.[21] We also know that once pushed out of school, young Black males have difficulty obtaining the education that will ensure their ability to thrive in their communities and our society. We must, as educators and stakeholders, send the message to all students that they are welcome and wanted in schools, not in prison.

This paper provides a current overview of the problem of the school-to-prison pipeline and disparities in discipline faced by young Black males in schools and districts throughout the United States, highlights the actions of federal agencies and advocacy groups to address the issue, discusses the funding of related research and initiatives, and provides recommendations for education leaders and advocates as they move forward.

Schools Today: Discipline and Disproportionality

For more than twenty-five years, national, state, and district-level data confirm that students of color have been suspended at rates two to three times higher than their White peers, and have received higher numbers of office discipline referrals, harsher punishment for behavioral issues, and more expulsions.[22] National suspension rates beginning in the early 1970s also reveal a significant increase in the use of suspension, as well as an increase in the racial discipline gap.[23] Nearly four decades later, race continues to play a significant role in disproportionate disciplinary outcomes, even when controlling for socioeconomic status.[24]

Despite nearly two decades of school districts implementing zero-tolerance disciplinary policies, which remove students from school for a violations ranging from minor infractions to serious offenses, there is no evidence that frequent reliance on the removal of misbehaving students improves school safety or student behavior. Suspensions and removals do, however, result in a loss of instructional time and other possible harmful effects. Concerns about the effects of these policies become amplified by the consistent findings that African American and Hispanic students are overrepresented in school suspension data, and that the increased use of suspension has been largest for African American and Hispanic students.[25]

Students of color, and young Black males in particular, have suffered the greatest impact as schools have embraced more punitive disciplinary measures that effectively push the most vulnerable students into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. National data demonstrate that in the 2009–10 school
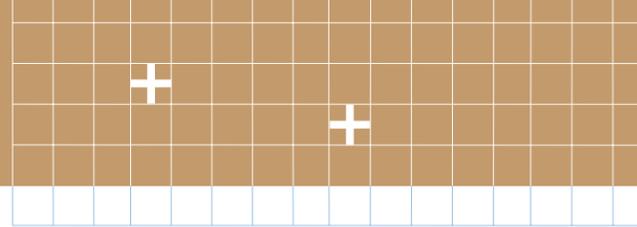
year, nearly one out of every six African American students (17 percent) was suspended at least once, as compared to one out of every twenty White students, and research shows that school suspension is a predictor of student incarceration.[26] Although African American youth and youth of color make up a small percentage of the nation's juvenile population, they account for a large percentage of juvenile arrests throughout the country. The school-to-prison pipeline isolates and criminalizes African American students and students of color, depriving them of opportunities for education, future employment, and active participation in our democracy.[27]

Today, diverse sets of stakeholders are actively trying to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. Researchers have documented the problem of Black males being disciplined at disproportionate rates, and other stakeholders have sought to address the problem. For example, overly punitive disciplinary measures have been identified and discredited by civil rights advocates and organizations nationwide. Specifically, education and civil rights advocates have held briefings and conferences, published reports, and filed complaints; and many advocates recognize that collaborative initiatives may be necessary to curb the problem.[28] The issue has also received national attention, and the media continues to cover school discipline practices that push students of color out of schools.[29] In addition, reports issued in 2010 and 2011 by the United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) for three states—Kentucky, Tennessee, and Florida—identify problems with school discipline, highlight disproportionate discipline rates for African American students, and also propose remedies to addressing problematic school disciplinary policies.[30] Although the USCCR reports only focus on three school districts, two of the reports note that the disparities in disciplinary practices identified in their respective districts are not unique to the school districts identified, but instead are similar to those seen in other urban school districts in the South. Fortunately, a number of school systems throughout the country have recognized the need to be proactive about curbing the issue of school pushout and revise their own school discipline policies so that students may stay in school.[31] All of these efforts by stakeholders help further our understanding of one barrier Black males face in attaining a high-quality education—namely, overly punitive disciplinary measures that disproportionately affect them as compared with their White peers—and present some solutions that may help eliminate the problem.

Federal Action and Initiatives

The United States Departments of Education and Justice have embarked on a number of efforts in recent years that address school discipline and demonstrate the importance of curbing school pushout for all students. Their efforts have included expanding the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), launching the Supportive School Discipline Initiative (SSDI), requiring the consideration of student discipline in the competitive grant process, initiating compliance reviews and conducting investigations to assess

whether there may be violations of civil rights laws, and reaching resolutions addressing concerns related to student discipline. In addition, the United States Commission on Civil Rights held a briefing and issued reports on school discipline.

Civil Rights Data Collection

For more than four decades, the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has requested that local education agencies (LEAs) participate in the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC). In 2009, the Department of Education made significant changes to the 2009–10 CRDC, including collecting data on various disciplinary actions.[32] Data in 2009–10 was collected from a representative sample—7,000 school districts and more than 72,000 schools—including all districts with at least 3,000 enrolled students, state-operated facilities for deaf and blind students, and state-operated juvenile justice facilities. In addition, the 2009–10 collection included some new data fields that sought to capture racial and disciplinary data. For example, the previous CRDC only recorded data on instances of out-of-school suspension (OSS), expulsion, and corporal punishment. Although the 2009–10 CRDC collected that same data, it also expanded to include in-school suspension (ISS), separate categories for single instances of OSS and multiple instances of OSS, zero-tolerance expulsion policies, referral to law enforcement, school-related arrests, and disaggregation of the data pertaining to students with disabilities, by race/ethnicity, sex, and limited English proficiency (LEP) status.[33]

The collection for disciplinary data was expanded again for the 2011–12 CRDC. The data collection will include numbers for preschool suspensions and expulsions. In addition, the 2011–12 CRDC will be universal (the last universal collection occurred in 2000), and collect from all public schools and school districts, including juvenile justice facilities, charter schools, alternative schools, and schools serving children with disabilities.[34] The expanded data collection will provide educators, researchers, advocates, and other stakeholders with critical information necessary to understanding the impact of overly punitive disciplinary practices on Black and other students, identifying areas of concern in school disciplinary practices, and informing best practices moving forward.

Supportive School Discipline Initiative

In July 2011, the US attorney general and the secretary of education announced the Supportive School Discipline Initiative (SSDI) as "a collaborative project" between the Departments of Justice and Education that will address the "'school-to-prison pipeline' and the disciplinary policies and practices that can push students out of school and into the justice system. The initiative aims to support good discipline practices to foster safe and productive learning environments in every classroom."[35] The year-old initiative will work in conjunction with other stakeholder groups, including the Council of State Governments and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, to address discipline issues in
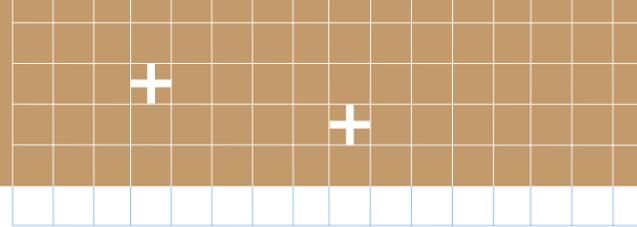
schools, thereby utilizing the experience and knowledge of critical stakeholders to help curb school pushout and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

Competitive Grant: Race to the Top District Competition

Another recent effort of the US Department of Education demonstrates consideration of discipline among different student groups. The Department of Education's May 21, 2012, Executive Summary Draft for Race to the Top District Competition (RTT-D) includes in its Program Requirements section that "[d]istricts where minority students or students with disabilities are overly-represented in discipline and expulsion rates (according to data submitted through the Civil Rights Data Collection) must undergo a district assessment of the root cause and develop a plan over the grant period to address root causes."[36] Although the announcement is in draft form, the inclusion of the language in the nineteen-page document and among the eight program requirements is significant because it demonstrates the fact that addressing racial disparities in school discipline is a priority for the federal government. What remains to be seen is whether the language will be amended or deleted, to reflect comments solicited by the department through an open comment period that ended on June 8, 2012.[37] The language requires that where there is overrepresentation of students of color being disciplined, the district specifically determine the root causes and then develop a plan to address the root causes. Importantly, this proposed requirement does not penalize districts that have been identified as having disproportionate discipline rates for Black males or other students of color, or prohibit them from engaging in the competitive-grant process or disadvantage them in the grant process; rather, it encourages the district to proactively address the discipline issues and problems that its school community faces. School districts should appreciate and take advantage of this opportunity to create a viable and effective plan of action to address racial disparities in school discipline, which may be incorporated into their application for a national competition.

United States Commission on Civil Rights

On February 11, 2011, the United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) held a briefing entitled "School Discipline and Disparate Impact." The commission inquired, in part, whether schools have changed their disciplinary policies as well as how schools implement and track the effectiveness of their discipline policies. Participants included teachers and administrators from a variety of states, as well as a representative of the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Most teachers who presented at the briefing contended that disciplinary problems were greatly reduced by attention to levels of difficulty of academic material, sensitivity to students and their backgrounds, parental involvement and support, and school principals that effectively assumed leadership roles within their schools. Administrators who appeared at the briefing found it useful to exercise flexibility in meeting the needs of students rather than imposing zero tolerance rules that could produce unfair results, train teachers to be culturally competent, establish programs for behaviorally high-risk students, implement parent-engagement and education programs, and/or adopt one of the nationally tested behavior-management programs known to have reduced disparities and expulsions.[38]

As noted above, the USSCR also recently issued reports on school discipline that looked at specific school districts in Florida, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and each report discusses disciplinary policies that increase obstacles to African American students' success in schools. Each school district identified by the reports is highly segregated by race and has a high level of poverty, and markedly low levels of educational success among African American students; and the reports note that each of the districts is facing challenges surrounding school discipline. However, the reports also identify areas for improvement in school disciplinary policies and alternative practices that may reduce racial disparities. Specifically, the Tennessee and Kentucky reports suggest that some disciplinary policies are clearly superior in assuring that a greater number of students succeed in and stay in schools. Both reports also promote alternatives to punitive disciplinary practices, which involves early identification of at-risk students and special programs catering to their needs, and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) as better alternatives to the current disciplinary policies in place at problem schools.

Findings from the reports also demonstrate the effects of overly punitive disciplinary measures on African American students. The Florida report found that students benefit from school/community/home partnerships. It also found that out-of-school suspension, alternative school placement, and expulsion contribute to a higher risk of school dropout and that dropping out of school increases the risk of incarceration. Moreover, the report found that African American students in District C schools receive a disproportionate amount of discipline at harsher levels meaning that its discipline policies continue to have a disparate impact. Both the Kentucky and Tennessee reports highlight the public schools' responsibility to educate all students who walk through their doors. And both assert that African American students in their respective school districts receive disproportionate discipline. Both assert that exclusionary punishments lead to a higher risk of incarceration for students who receive them. The Tennessee report suggests that the district needs to be vigilant in monitoring its disciplinary practices.

Compliance Reviews, Investigations, and Resolutions

While there is no question that schools are subject to the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, both of which prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin, allegations of violations of these key civil rights laws exist today.[39]
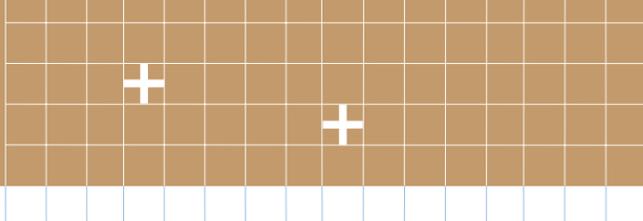
As a result of the allegations, over the past four years there have been a number of complaints filed with the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. Similarly, there have been compliance reviews initiated by the Office for Civil Rights, and both the Departments of Justice and Education have reached agreements and resolutions that address Title VI violations and discrimination on the basis of race. This section will provide a sample of the compliance reviews, resolutions, settlement agreements, and complaints that the US Departments of Education and Justice have been involved in. Complaints have been brought alleging both the disparate treatment of students and also under a disparate impact theory.

Discipline-Related Reviews and Investigations

Over the last few years, the United States Department of Education has initiated nearly a dozen discipline-related compliance reviews in school districts across the country.

OCR began an investigation into District D in Delaware to determine whether African American students, and in particular African American male students, were being punished disproportionately. Recent data from the Civil Rights Data Collection (2009 Survey year) demonstrates the following district disciplinary data:

	Student Population	Out-of-School Suspensions	Expulsions
Black	42.9%	68.2%	50%
White	36.6%	19.3%	37.5%

Media reports indicate that the school district has come under scrutiny for its strict zero-tolerance policies.[40] Since the investigation began, district discipline rates have decreased slightly.[41]

The media also reports that OCR is looking into disproportionate rates of discipline for Black students (particularly Black males) in District E in North Carolina. Reports indicate that based on 2009–10 data, although Black males make up about 13 percent of all students in the district, they account for approximately 63.8 percent of all suspensions.[42]

Some of these investigations may lead to curbing school pushout and help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

Resolution Agreements

A series of resolution agreements between school districts and the United States Department of Justice and/or the United States Department of Education demonstrate that agreements include similar requirements and recommendations for addressing Title VI violations. Although the agreements do not always focus entirely on discipline matters, the recommendations and requirements require training, data collection, implementation of best practices, systems for monitoring programs designed to curb school pushout, assignment of designated personnel, and revising policies. The resolution agreements for three school districts are outlined below.

District F

District F's resolution agreement came about as a result of an alleged Title VI violation in which a student wrongly received an in-school suspension (ISS).[43] The resolution agreement required that District F:

+ Evaluate and revise discipline policies to ensure that they are not discriminatory on their face and limit subjectivity of infractions

+ Implement data collection and analysis for the use of ISS and out-of-school suspension (OSS) as punishments

+ Review whether prior ISS and OSS referrals were used in a discriminatory fashion, comparing rates of referrals of African American, Hispanic, and White students and assessing whether specific teachers or administrators referred disproportionately high numbers of specific groups to ISS or OSS

+ Provide trainings for faculty, staff, and administrators on revised procedures and data tracking and also to demonstrate best practices in avoiding discrimination in disciplining African American and Hispanic students

District G

In District G an investigation was initiated to evaluate whether the district was denying equal educational opportunities to national origin language-minority students.[44] The investigation was expanded to focus on the allocation of resources to five predominantly African American schools as compared to five predominantly White elementary schools, and also addressed disciplinary practices. A section of the resolution mandates that District G:

+ Evaluate disciplinary policies at district and school levels and develop a comprehensive plan to eliminate the disproportionality in discipline imposed on African American students
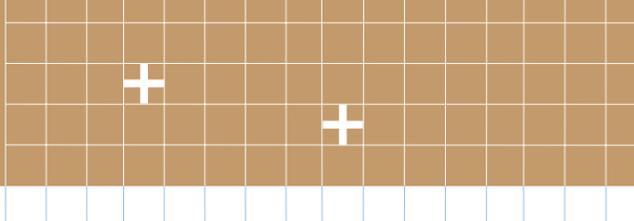
- Determine programmatic elements that minimize subjectivity in imposing disciplinary sanctions

- Develop a system for monitoring the success of the disciplinary plan in reducing disproportionality in punishments

District H

District H's resolution agreement addressed a pending Title VI investigation.[45] The resolution was designed to prevent hostile environments and to address allegations of harassment based on race and national origin. The resolution agreement required that District H:

- Publish and disseminate an anti-harassment statement to students, parents, and staff

- Hire a third-party consultant to study and determine whether additional antiharassment measures were necessary and to provide the consultant's report to the federal government

- Revise its existing anti-harassment policy with specified language; revise its disciplinary policies with regard to student harassment; and submit all revisions to the United States for approval

- Provide annual training to staff regarding harassment and how to recognize and prevent unwanted behaviors

- Create a student committee to discuss discrimination and harassment for students

- Create a monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of anti-harassment efforts

- Develop a report demonstrating the implementation of anti-harassment programs and policies required by the agreement and annual submission of documentation of steps taken to address race-based harassments

Advocacy Complaints

A number of complaints have recently been filed with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) regarding disparate disciplinary practices for African American students. This section highlights the claims and remedies sought in some recent complaints filed with OCR.

District I

In June 2012, a complaint was filed with OCR against District I, located in Massachusetts.[46] The complaint, filed by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies at the Civil Rights Project of UCLA and the ACLU of Massachusetts, alleges that the frequent use of out-of-school suspension in public schools in District I violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibiting discrimination based on race, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, prohibiting discrimination based on disability. The complaint alleges that the district's suspension policy amounting to the frequent use of out-of-school suspensions violates Title VI and has a disparate impact on Black and Latino students and students with disabilities. The complaint also alleges that the district's suspension policies are unnecessarily harsh, resulting in frequent out-of-school suspension for all students, and unsupported by research on best educational practices. Data from the 2009–10 school year demonstrates the following:

	Student Population	Percent of Suspensions
Black	9.6%	25.9%
White	68.4%	13.4%

More recent data indicates that the district's suspension rate is rising, and that the district authorizes out-of-school suspension for noncriminal, nonviolent, and minor, public-order–related infractions.

District J

In May 2011, a complaint was filed with OCR citing excessive use of harsh disciplinary practices against African American students and students with disabilities by District J, located in Kentucky.[47] The complaint raises violations of Title VI, under disparate-treatment and disparate-impact theories. Specifically, the complaint alleges that the district's implementation of zero-tolerance policies and vague and ambiguous discipline procedures results in African American students being disciplined more harshly and more often than their White peers, and that the policies are having a disparate impact on both African American students and students with disabilities. Further, the complaint alleges that African American students are disproportionately placed in the district's alternative education programs. The complaint provides data from the 2008–09 school year that demonstrates the following:
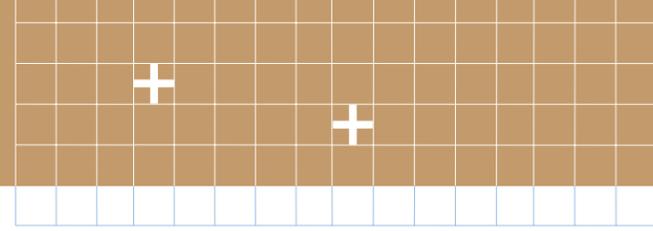
	High School Student Population	Percent of Suspensions
African American Students	35%	63%

	Middle School Student Population	Percent of Suspensions
African American Students	36%	60%
White Students	54%	33%

District K

In September 2010, a complaint was filed with OCR citing the disproportionate suspension of Black students in District K, located in North Carolina.[48] Complainants contend that for the 2008–9 school year the district had the highest number of long-term suspensions and the second-highest number of short-term suspensions in the state. The complaint raises violations of Title VI, under disparate-treatment and disparate-impact theories. Specifically, the complaint alleges that the district's policies and procedures surrounding student discipline disproportionately exclude African American students from schools. The complaint provides data from the 2008–9 school year that demonstrates the following:

	Student Population	Short-term Suspensions	Long-term Suspensions	Expulsions
African American Students	26.1%	62.3%	67.5%	100%

The complaint also notes that during the 2005–6 school year, each of the seventeen students expelled from the school system was a Black male. In addition, the complaint includes examples of disparate treatment of students of different races receiving different punishments for the same offense. In all instances, the percentage of African American students receiving short- or long-term suspensions was higher than the percentage of White students receiving them for the same offense.

OCR has not yet issued findings, but advocates have noted the following data for the 2010–11 school year:[49]

|	Student Population	Percent of Suspensions
African American Students	25%	59.1%

Emerging Research and Initiatives

Education officials and advocates have access to resources that serve to help curb punitive disciplinary practices, curb racial disparities in school discipline, and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. The availability of these resources demonstrates the commitment of additional stakeholders in addressing the critical problem faced by Black males in schools. School districts should be proactive in seeking sources of funding for research and implementation of systems that help and inform and present alternatives to punitive disciplinary measures and policies that disproportionately impact African American students.

Government Funding

In the past decade, the federal government has awarded grants totaling over $35 million dedicated to initiatives aimed at addressing school discipline issues—by implementing preventative measures and programs, training, engaging multiple stakeholders, and enhancing conflict-resolution skills.

One grant was awarded to support the design of an intervention aimed at reducing the overrepresentation of minority students in special-education and disciplinary actions by promoting cultural proficiency and student engagement. The focus of the intervention is culturally responsive teaching and classroom-management and student-engagement strategies, and participants include parents, youth,
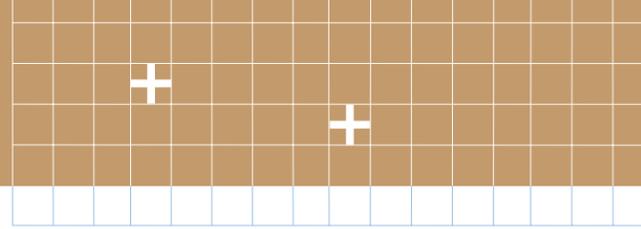
teachers, and administrators. Similarly, other grants focus on training for teachers, implementation of effective classroom management strategies, culturally responsive pedagogy, and improving student-teacher interactions. Many include components related to eliminating conflict between students—such as teacher-led instruction aimed at facilitating conflict-resolution skills, peer mediation, and developing problem-solving skills. In addition, numerous grant awards include examination of school-wide discipline rules, and others focus on examining and building positive behavior support systems. Some awards include multiple stakeholders in the process—parents, teachers, administrators, and youth.[50] These awards are critical because they recognize the need for continued creation of positive strategies and effective interventions and also the need for collaborative solutions to eliminating school discipline as a barrier to educating Black males and other students.

Other Funding Opportunities

Similarly, a number of foundations and endowments have supported research and initiatives tied to curbing punitive disciplinary practices that push students out of schools and have a chilling effect on African American students and other students of color. The effects are educational, social, and economical—just to name a few—and it is clear that some are committed to school discipline reform, as they acknowledge through their grant awards the detrimental impact of zero-tolerance and other disciplinary measures that remove students from the educational environment. Five foundations and endowments are highlighted below.

+ **Open Society Foundations:** The mission of Open Society Foundations (OSF) includes strengthening respect for human rights. OSF's Strategic Opportunities Fund is currently seeking proposals for programs that support the implementation and evaluation of alternative school-climate and discipline models.[51] In 2012, the fund is undertaking an initiative that seeks to reduce the inappropriate and harmful use of suspensions, expulsions, and arrests in public schools in an effort to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. To achieve its objectives, the fund seeks to support organizations that work at multiple policy levels to address policies and practices that reinforce, often unintentionally, the school-to-prison pipeline, including zero-tolerance school discipline codes, use of the juvenile justice system by schools to address minor youth misbehavior, and certain provisions of federal policy.

+ **Atlantic Philanthropies:** Atlantic Philanthropies aims to bring about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people.[52] The organization provides grants through several programs, including the Children and Youth program, which has focused on reforming school discipline policies in its grant-making process. Over the past two years, Atlantic Philanthropies has provided more than a half-dozen grantees more than $7 million to pursue initiatives to help reform current school discipline policies. These grantees include: NAACP LDF, the Children's Defense Fund, ACLU, NYCLU, Council of State Governments Justice Center, The Schott Foundation for Public Education, New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, and Rethinking Schools.

+ **William T. Grant Foundation:** The William T. Grant Foundation seeks to understand human behavior through research, with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of children and young people.[53] The foundation has an interest in research that is focused on understanding and improving social settings such as families, schools, peer groups, and organizations, and studying how these social settings affect youth. The foundation recently provided a grant to a pair of researchers at Indiana University and Indiana-Purdue University who seek to better understand the effect of school discipline measures on African American students and proposed to do so by conducting observations and interviews on a bimonthly basis in four middle schools in Indiana.

+ **California Endowment:** The California Endowment promotes fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians, with the belief that "health happens where we live, learn, work and play—in neighborhoods, schools, and with prevention." In April 2012, the endowment announced the creation of a $1 million fund to support positive school discipline. The fund has targeted school districts, which can apply for training, grants, and other support in the fall of 2012. In support of the new fund, the president and CEO of the California Endowment noted, "An increasing number of school leaders now understand that harsh, unforgiving approaches are not helping students succeed…These school leaders are committed to changing their approaches, and in these difficult fiscal times, additional resources can help to speed adoption of new strategies and make Health Happen in Schools."[54]

+ **Just and Fair Schools Fund:** The Just and Fair Schools Fund (JFSF) supports grassroots organizing initiatives that work to eliminate harsh school discipline policies and practices—and that uphold the right to education for all youth. The JFSF is awarding twenty-one grassroots organizations a total of $2,375,000 in two-year grants/subgrants during 2011–12.[55] The fund articulates four goals for its grantees:

(1) with targeted support and broader collaboration, organized communities shift the national discourse from zero tolerance to keeping all children learning in school; (2) youth and parents convince schools, school districts, and states to adopt prevention-oriented and evidence-based school discipline that respects students' right to education and fosters engaging learning climates; (3) organizing victories to reduce suspensions, expulsions, school-based arrests, pushouts, and dropouts; and (4) create interest in and support for community-organizing efforts on school discipline reform.

The School-Justice Partnership

In addition to the funding provided for research and strategies to curb school pushout, one initiative aims to bring together multiple stakeholders to address school discipline and pushout. The School-Justice Partnership, an initiative of the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, seeks to reduce the number of children entering the justice system by improving educational engagement and outcomes through innovative practices.[56] Multiple stakeholders are part of the partnership, including government officials, experts, advocates, community organizers, and other key stakeholders, and they will study the issue and make recommendations for systemic change and attainable reform based on national strategies that are effective alternative approaches to keep students engaged and in school but also hold students accountable for their behavior. The final product will be a report of the Task Force's recommendations that will be released publicly in 2013 and distributed nationwide. The report will aim to include recommendations that will consider policies and practices that promote safe, respectful, and supportive learning environments; reserve the use of punitive measures—including school suspension and mandatory arrest—for the most egregious cases; and address the overrepresentation of students receiving special-education services and children of color who are exposed to exclusionary school discipline practices that can lead to court involvement.

Conclusion

The school-to-prison pipeline is a civil rights issue, and it has a significant negative impact on many student groups including African American males. African American youth are being pushed out of schools at alarming rates—thereby diminishing their opportunities for academic and social growth and development both in and outside of the classroom. It is imperative that solutions to eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline and racial disparities in school discipline focus on increasing student achievement and opportunities while keeping students in schools. Therefore, it is recommended that school systems consider and appreciate the power of multi-stakeholder approaches to address these issues. Ideally, community advocates, law- and policymakers, students, judicial officers, parents, teachers, social scientists and researchers, legal advocates, and school and district leaders should take part in critical conversations regarding appropriate actions that may help address the problem. Such a multi-stakeholder approach may potentially permit and promote rich discussion and diversity of ideas to help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, that continues to devour Black youth and youth of all races. The multi-stakeholder approach also permits those involved to provide input and gain an understanding of the challenges each stakeholder group faces in the effort to educate *all* students. Stakeholders who work together may also hold each other accountable—thereby ensuring collaborative work and solutions. As school systems consider their approach to address the school-to-prison pipeline and school discipline, they must remember—it is critical that a school system contribute significantly and positively to the solution, not the problem.

Summary of Solutions

Based on the actions of advocates and government agencies, research by social scientists, the experiences of educators, and grant making by foundations, it is clear that multiple stakeholders aim to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and curb the pushout of Black males and other children from schools due to overly punitive disciplinary practices. Resolution agreements between federal agencies and school systems, complaints filed by advocates, and research and briefings on school discipline all highlight key methods that may be employed to keep African American and other students in schools. The following is a list of recommendations for school systems that will help dismantle the costly school-to-prison pipeline and keep all students in schools.

1. Incorporate recommendations such as those provided by individuals and organizations that have filed complaints against school districts with the US Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights:

   a. Hire a consultant to meet with the stakeholders involved in the complaint and resolution process

   b. Implement evidence-based practices to reduce disparities in suspensions and expulsions and referrals to alternative schools

   c. Increase the access of alternative-school students to regular education classes and extracurricular activities

   d. Provide intensive educational instruction (remediation) for those students who are suspended for more than ten days and are behind according to educational assessment

   e. Use alternatives that will address the needs of all students
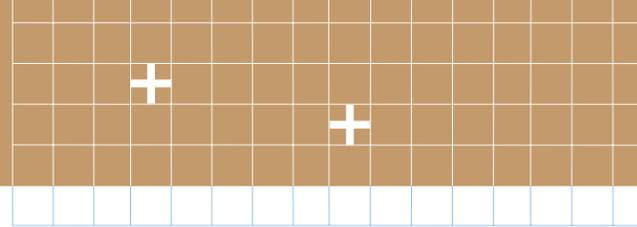
f. Adopt and implement district-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), school-wide positive behavioral interventions (SWPBIS), and other alternatives to zero-tolerance policies and suspension

g. Create training and support for teachers in classroom and behavior management as a systematic means of improving school discipline

h. Develop training for implementing viable alternative-disciplinary practices that don't disproportionately impact students of color and that don't serve as zero-tolerance policies or policies that push students out of schools

i. Change underlying attitudes and policies regarding how behavior is addressed by focusing on school-wide goals and collective behaviors and structures rather than individual students

j. Use out-of-school suspensions as a measure of last resort, and require inschool suspension and other less severe sanctions for less serious offenses

k. Produce alternative disciplinary policies that are less severe and discriminatory, and more effective in improving educational outcomes and school discipline. Some viable alternatives include mediation, counseling, and parent conferences, which provide more constructive interventions and a better opportunity to understand and address the cause of the misbehavior.

l. Determine social and emotional strategies aiming to develop student characteristics that foster self-discipline

m. Consider restorative justice as an alternative, as it emphasizes a collaborative response to misbehavior that encourages support and taking responsibility for one's own actions

2. Keep sight of the goal—keeping all students in the classroom. Schools cannot exist without students; therefore officials should focus on ensuring school and classroom climates support effective student learning. Educators may conduct climate surveys to help assess how members of the school community feel about their schools.

3. Nurture student leaders. Schools should focus on nurturing potential student leaders from all student groups. For example, students from different racial backgrounds and students with different levels of academic achievement should be considered and included. Nurturing a diverse group of student leaders would provide the opportunity for all student voices to be heard and demonstrate that all students are valued. Students should have a voice in how their school is governed—including in the creation and revision of discipline policies and practices.

4. Be transparent. School systems should aim to collect and share student discipline data with all school community stakeholders. Data must be available to inform stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, advocates, and parents, about what is going on in schools.

5. Be proactive. School systems should aggressively identify problems in their schools and aim to eliminate them. Where there are a disproportionate number of Black males or other subgroup(s) of students subjected to punitive disciplinary practices, systems must not ignore the trend, but acknowledge that there may be a problem that should be addressed. A system should not wait until a complaint has been filed or a compliance review has been initiated to assess what improvements can be made and should be made in order to eradicate systemic race and discipline problems in the district. In addition to understanding what is going on in one's own school system, efforts should be made to consider the struggles and accomplishments of other school systems that have dealt with or are tackling school discipline issues.

6. Utilize a multi-stakeholder approach. School systems should consider utilizing a multi-stakeholder approach to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and eliminating racial disparities in school discipline. Such approach should include community-based and grassroots advocates, parents, educators, students, policy and law makers, researchers, and public officials.

7. Provide staff development. School systems should embrace development for all staff in schools on a consistent basis. Development opportunities should include cultural competence training for educators and other training and development related to implementing new policies and systems for tracking and evaluating school discipline.

8. Implement effective data and other systems. It is imperative for school systems to collect accurate data regarding school discipline at the classroom, school and district levels. Data should be disaggregated by race and gender and other subgroups so that opportunities for growth and professional development, areas of success, and areas in need of improvement may be identified.

9. Monitor systems and progress. School systems should appoint dedicated staff to implement discipline systems and monitor progress. The monitoring should occur on a regular basis.
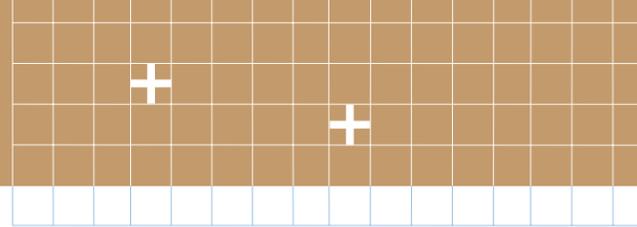
10. Set goals. School systems should set benchmarks and goals to reduce their suspension and expulsion rates. They must also aim to eliminate racial disparities in disciplinary practices. If a system has set goals, it should be in a position to respond immediately if or when the system comes dangerously close to failing to progress or meet the set goals.

11. Seek technical assistance and funding. School systems should not be afraid to ask for help. There are often opportunities to request technical assistance offered by the government, academic institutions, or other organizations. Similarly, there are funds available for assisting with initiatives to eliminate disparities in school discipline and reduce numbers of school suspensions and expulsions.

12. Be accountable. School systems must remain accountable to the students they are meant to serve and the entire school community. Therefore, they should set up an internal system of accountability that all are aware of and understand.

Notes

1. Throughout this paper, the terms *Black* and *African American* are used interchangeably.

2. Roger Wilkins, "Racism Has Its Privileges," *Poverty & Race* 4, no. 3 (1995).

3. 347 US 483 (1954).

4. 349 US 294 (1955).

5. 391 US 430 (1968).

6. The school-district operations that courts consider when making a determination about whether a school district has eliminated the vestiges of prior de jure segregation include student assignment, faculty assignment, staff assignment, extracurricular activities, transportation, and facilities. Courts also consider ancillary factors such as student discipline, placement in gifted and talented programs, curriculum, and other school operations.

7. People Who Care v. Rockford Board of Education, School District No. 205, 851 F.Supp. 905 (N.D. Ill. 1994); People Who Care v. Rockford Board of Education, School District No. 205, 111 F.3d 528 (7th Cir. 1997). See also Kevin G. Welner, *Legal Rights, Local Wrongs: When Community Control Collides with Educational Equity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), and Rosemary Henze et al., *Leading for Diversity: How School Leaders Promote Positive Interethnic Relations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2002).

8. Patrick F. Linehan, *Guarding the Dumping Ground: Equal Protection, Title VII and Justifying the Use of Race in the Hiring of Special Educators*, 2001 BYU Educ. & L.J. 179 (2001).

9. Daniel J. Losen and Kevin G. Welner, *Disabling Discrimination in Our Public Schools: Comprehensive Legal Challenges to Inappropriate and Inadequate Special Education Services for Minority Children*, 36 Harv. C.R.-C.L. L. Rev. 419 (2001).

10. Zachary W. Best, *Derailing the Schoolhouse-to-Jailhouse Track: Title VI and a New Approach to Disparate Impact Analysis in Public Education*, 99 Geo. L.J. 1671, 1673 (2011).

11. Catherine Y. Kim, Daniel J. Losen, and Damon T. Hewitt, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Structuring Legal Reform* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Thalia González, *Keeping Kids in School: Restorative Justice, Punitive Discipline, and the School to Prison Pipeline*, 41 J.L. & Educ. 281 (2012); Mary K. Sullivan, *Long-Term Suspensions and the Right to an Education: An Alternative Approach*, 90 N.C.L Rev. 293 (2011).

12. Augustina Reyes, *The Criminalization of Student Discipline Programs and Adolescent Behavior*, 21 St. John's J. Legal Comment 73, 95 (2006).

13. Louis Freedberg and Lisa Chavez, *Understanding School Discipline in California: Perceptions and Practice* (Oakland, CA: EdSource, 2012); Disability Rights Texas, "30 Texas School Districts Disproportionately Rely on Out of School Suspension: Leaving Money Behind and Pushing Students Out of School," http://www.disabilityrightstx.org/files/JointOSSReportAug7-2012.pdf.

14. Deborah N. Archer, *Introduction: Challenging the School-to-Prison Pipeline*. 54 N.Y.L. Sch. L. Rev. 867, 869 (2010).

15. NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. *Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline*, (2006), http://www.naacpldf.org/files/publications/Dismantling_the_School_to_Prison_Pipeline.pdf; Johanna Wald and Daniel J. Losen, "Defining and Redirecting a School-to-Prison Pipeline," *New Directions for Youth Development* 99 (Fall 2003): 10.

16. Katayoon Majd, *Students of the Mass Incarceration Nation*, 54 How. L.J. 343, 353 (2011).

17. Dorothy E. Roberts, *The Social and Moral Cost of Mass Incarceration in African American Communities*, 56 Stan. L. Rev. 1271 (2004).

18. This is evident based on a July 30, 2012, search of the Westlaw Database using the following terms and connectors: Black African American /5 boy student /s suspen! expel! expul! disciplin! punish!
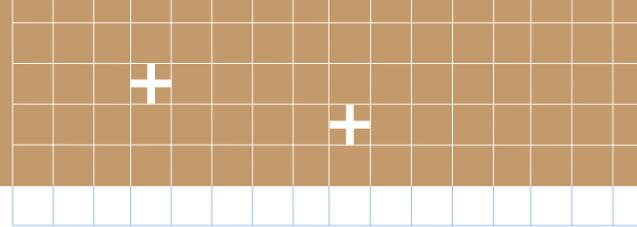
19. This is evident based on a July 30, 2012, search of the following in the Westlaw Database using the following terms and connectors: Black African American /5 boy student /s suspen! expel! expul! disciplin! punish! & da(last 10 years).

20. This is evident based on a July 30, 2012, search of the following in the Westlaw Database using the following terms and connectors: Black African American /5 boy student /s suspen! expel! expul! disciplin! punish! /p disparat!disproportionat!.

21. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).

22. Claudia G. Vincent et al., "Discipline Referrals and Access to Secondary Level Support in Elementary and Middle Schools: Patterns Across African-American, Hispanic-American, and White Students," *Education and Treatment of Children* 35, no. 3 (2012): 431–58; Russell J. Skiba, et al., "Race Is Not Neutral: A National Investigation of African American and Latino Disproportionality in School Discipline." *School Psychology Review* 40, no. 1 (2011): 85–107.

23. Daniel J. Losen and Russell J. Skiba. *Suspended Education: Urban Middle Schools in Crisis.* Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center, 2010.

24. Skiba et al., "Race Is Not Neutral," 86.

25. Losen and Skiba, *Suspended Education.*

26. Daniel J. Losen and Jonathan Gillespie, *Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School* (Los Angeles: Center for Civil Rights Remedies, Civil Rights Project: 2012).

27. Losen and Gillespie, *Opportunities Suspended*; NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, *Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline.*

28. In September 2011, the NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund and the African American Male Achievement Group cohosted a multi-stakeholder national convening of hundreds of stakeholders titled, "Race, Gender, Discipline and Justice: Students Locked Out of a Quality Education."

29. Chandra Thomas Whitfield, "School Scam: How Children of Color Get Stuck in Low-Performing Public Alternative Schools," Crisis 119, no. 2 (2012), http://www.gaappleseed.org/news/crisis_spring12.pdf.

30. The Kentucky report cites the "zero tolerance" standard in District A, whereby certain offenses like possession of tobacco or drugs or acts of violence result in an immediate removal from school as a major factor in disproportionate disciplinary practices. Additionally, Kentucky uses "alternative school settings" where a student may be placed in a "highly structured environment" outside of his/her regular school for disciplinary reasons. In addition, the report notes the disproportionate placement of African American students in alternative programs and also discusses the disproportionate number of disciplinary referrals and suspensions issued to African American students resulting in their rate of suspension being 50 percent higher than that of White students in District A.

The assessment of Tennessee's discriminatory disciplinary policies begins with citing the high level of discretion afforded to principals in those administering discipline in District B. The discretion, the report says, is due to unclear labels for qualifying offenses under District B's "zero-tolerance" policy. The report also cites several troubling statistics indicating the extent to which discipline is meted out unevenly along racial lines. For example, although African American students make up one-third of the student body in District B, they receive 60 percent of disciplinary referrals, two-thirds of out-of-school suspensions, and 83 percent of referrals to alternative education tracks.

The Florida report begins by noting that the student code of conduct intended to guide student behaviors at District C schools is written at a college graduate reading level, making it inaccessible to students and occasionally their parents or guardians. The report also discusses disparities in disciplinary consequences and notes that the level of segregation in alternative education programs in District C is problematic. Finally, the Florida report notes that efforts by District C to reduce suspensions and referrals to alternative programs have been successful in five sites where an "Alternative to Out-of-School Suspension Program" (ATOSS) was implemented.

31. The New York City Public Schools and Maryland State Department of Education recently proposed revisions to their discipline codes: "Notice of Public Hearing" (June 2012), http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/DisciplineCode/DisciplineCodeDevelopment; *A Safe School, Successful Students, and a Fair and Equitable Disciplinary Process Go Hand in Hand: A Study of School Discipline Practices and Proposed Regulatory Changes* (February 2012), http://msde.state.md.us/School_Discipline_Report02272012.pdf.

32. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, http://ocrdata.ed.gov; Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2009–10 Civil Rights Data Collection Questions and Answers, http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-2009-10-factsheet.html.

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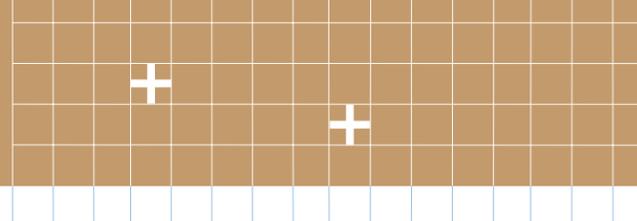
35. Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs, "Attorney General Holder, Secretary Duncan Announce Effort to Respond to School-to-Prison Pipeline by Supporting Good Discipline Practices," Press release, http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2011/July/11-ag-951.html.

36. Race to the Top District Competition Draft Executive Summary, p. 13. http://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/rttd-executive-summary.pdf.

37. Race to the Top District Competition Draft http://www.ed.gov/race-top/districtcompetition.

38. US Commission on Civil Rights, School Discipline and Disparate Impact Briefing Report (March 2012), p.1. http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/School_Disciplineand_Disparate_Impact.pdf.

39. 42 USC. 2000d et seq.; US Const. amend. XIV.

40. Christine Armario, Associated Press, "Civil Rights Complaints in Schools on the Rise," *Columbia Missourian*, October 12, 2010, http://www.columbiamissourian.com/stories/2010/10/12/number-ed-civil-rightscomplaint-rise/.

41. Nicole Dobo, "Discipline Rate of Black Students in Del., Elsewhere Is Probed" *Wilmington (DE) News Journal*, (October 17, 2010), http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2010-10-16-school-discipline_N.htm.

42. Mary Giunca, "Office of Civil Rights to Examine Discipline of Black Students," *Winston-Salem (NC) Journa*l March 24, 2011, http://www2.journalnow.com/news/2011/mar/24/wsmain01-office-of-civil-rightsto- examine-discipl-ar-886967/.

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44. Office for Civil Rights Case #09105001, resolution dated October 11, 2011.

45. Office for Civil Rights Agreement #05-10-1148, resolution dated April 11, 2011.

46. Complaint against District I under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, June 2012, http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rightsremedies/racial-inequity-in-special-education/administrative-advocacy/complaint339against-the-fall-river-public-schools-by-aclum-and-ccrr/2012-aclum-ccrr-fallriver-complaint.pdf.

47. Complaint against District J under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, May 20, 2011, http://clcky.squarespace.com/storage/documents/2011-5-20%20JCPS%20Complaint.pdf.

48. Complaint against District K under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, September 2010, http://www.educationrightscenter.org/uploads/TitleVIComplaintWCSB9242010FINAL.pdf.

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50. Detailed information on these grants can be found at the website of the US Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (http://ies.ed.gov/funding/grantsearch/index.asp); see, in particular, "Double Check: A Cultural Proficiency and Student Engagement Model" (Award No. R324A110107); "Academic and Behavioral Competencies Model" (Award No. R305L030065); "Evaluation of a Video-Based Modeling Program to Promote Effective Teacher Classroom Management Practices" (Award No. R305A100342); "The Chicago Social and Character Development Trial: Extension to Grade 8" (Award No. R305A080253); "Increasing Adolescent Engagement, Motivation, and Achievement: Efficacy of a Web-Based, Teacher Professional Development Model" (Award No. R305A100367); "A Randomized Controlled Trial of the Combination of Two Preventive Interventions" (Award No. R305A080326); "Early, Evidence-Based Intervention for Externalizing Behavior Problems in School: From Efficacy to Effectiveness of the First Step to Success Program" (Award No. R324B060003); "Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies" (Award No. R305L030165); "Enhancing Data-Based Decision-Making in Schools" (Award No. R324A070226); "Identifying Factors Predicting Implementation and Sustainability of School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports" (Award No. R324A120278); "Systems-Level Analysis of Evidence-Based Intervention Implementation by Problem-Solving Teams" (Award No. R324A120212); "Testing the Impact of PBIS Plus" (Award No. R324A070118).

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George L. Garrow Jr.
Esther B. Kaggwa

George L. Garrow Jr., Esq., is the Executive Director of Concerned Black Men–National. Mr. Garrow has helped African American men and others of good will in cities across the United States provide mentoring, tutoring, and various enrichment programs to thousands of children of all ages. Under his leadership, CBM has developed best-practice programs—sustainable, high-quality school-based youth initiative such as mentoring, tutoring, and teen-pregnancy and other prevention programs. He is leading CBM in its effort to replicate quality interventions for youth, and in particular Black males, such as the CBM CARES® National Mentoring Initiative, the organization's mentoring program for middle school boys. He is a member of the Coordinating and Steering Committees for the 2025 Network for Black Men and Boys, a national movement-building strategy focused on developing positive life outcomes for Black males. He is also a member of the Black Male Achievement Advisory Board for the Council of the Great City Schools. In his efforts to support all children in the District of Columbia, Mr. Garrow serves as Vice Chair of the DC Children's Trust Fund, an advocacy and education group working to defeat child abuse and neglect in the nation's capital. A native of Hampton, Virginia, he received his law degree from the University of Virginia School of Law, and an A.B. degree from Dartmouth College.

Esther Kaggwa, PhD, has more than fifteen years of experience in research, program evaluation, and development. She possesses a doctorate in public health from the Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, and a master's in social work from the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. In addition to her current role as an advising consultant to CBM, she serves as a monitoring and evaluation adviser for the Center for Communication Programs at the Bloomberg School of Public Health. Dr. Kaggwa served for many years as the Director of Programs for Concerned Black Men. In this capacity, she participated in the development and implementation of several organizational projects including those focusing on education and academic enhancement. Dr. Kaggwa has conducted research and published on a variety of youth development issues.

The Problem: Lagging Black Male Achievement

Recent history offers troubling educational statistics for African American boys. It is no longer newsworthy to state that young African American males are not doing well in school compared to their white counterparts. From truancy to suspensions to low high school graduation rates, in many schools across America, Black males generally are not achieving at grade level and progressing at rates consistent with similarly situated students. Numerous reports, articles, papers, and journals have lamented these academic struggles across the educational spectrum. No additional negative data need be given here. But how do we create an educational environment in which young Black boys achieve and thrive? How must the educational experience be transformed to accommodate our young boys? And what supports are needed to make this change a reality?

The Promise: Raising Black Male Achievement through School-Based Partnerships

Concerned Black Men–National Organization (CBM) has significant experience working with schools
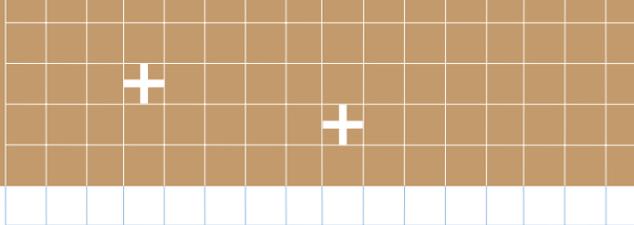
and school districts, developing collaborations to achieve positive outcomes for African American youth. Creating school-based programs and initiatives specifically targeting young Black males has been an organizational priority of CBM for many years. Reducing truancy, increasing students' school attachment, and raising grade levels for Black youths are achievable results if partnerships between schools and community and faith-based groups are nurtured and supported. Many of the strategies and ideas discussed below come from the lessons that CBM has learned during its thirty-six-year history of helping children and youths in school-based partnerships.

Benefits of School/Community Partnerships

A school partnership with a community-based organization (CBO) can be a most compelling collaboration, particularly within the context of addressing low Black male achievement. First, partnerships can provide a greater focus on issues. Most schools and school districts acknowledge the seriousness of depressed grades and test scores for their Black male students, but don't have an intentional strategy to address and turn around the problem. Most problems in schools (as in life) don't get solved without the proper focus, yet scores of schools believe that the problem of, for example, Black male truancy and low achievement will miraculously solve itself if the institution just gets better at educating its youths. That generally does not happen. A collaboration, at minimum, offers school leadership a foundational tool to develop strategy and focus on pernicious problems. Even with no additional help from the city, county, state, or federal governments, a CBO/school partnership can help a school or school district provide more attention to such problems.

Such partnerships also serve to garner resources in a resource-limited environment, bringing volunteers and solution-based expertise to schools and school districts, in an effort to address the Black male achievement problem. As part of a well-designed initiative, for example, mentors and tutors can help young Black boys develop school attachment and an increase in math and reading scores. Sometimes, the only cost might be with respect to time and meeting space within the school.

School-community partnerships have also been noted for their potential for innovation (Van Acker et al. 2001). "Fresh eyes" have a greater likelihood of seeing solutions and possibilities not previously recognized. When schools and districts partner with community-based organizations, ideas that would otherwise not have been conceived and implemented are introduced and developed. Obviously, when tackling the pernicious problem of low Black male achievement, new and innovative strategies must be welcomed.

Another benefit of CBO/school partnerships is that they create opportunities for parents to become engaged in the lives of their children while at school. Research shows parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes across racial lines (Jeynes 2005). Whether we examine grades, standardized test scores, or a variety of other measures, including teacher ratings, the strong correlation between parental involvement and achievement suggests that schools must find ways to engage parents. Yet schools sometimes unwittingly become places that intimidate parents and thus prevent their consistent involvement. Many CBO/school partnerships support parents in their efforts to engage school officials and teachers—communication that most likely would not occur without the relationship, program, or initiative between the school or district and CBO.

Finally, these partnerships support needed public policy changes. Community-based partners sometimes become the best school advocates to move legislators to make important changes in educational policy. While such a strategy can be fraught with challenges, community members who have a stake in the manner in which our children are educated often are CBO leaders who take action on their own accord to influence policy. Whether intentional or not, the partnership can lead to beneficial changes in the education of our children, and in the case of the subject at hand, our Black male children.

Implementing a School-Based Partnership

Developing a strong CBO/school partnership requires the consideration of several key steps. At the outset, research tells us that successful partnerships effectively use collaboration processes that facilitate coalition building, such as shared decision making, effective communication, and developing a clearly defined structure (Merrill et al. 2012). Below, we examine some of the strategies that are helpful in forging strong and lasting school/community partnerships.

Developing and Maintaining a Realistic Policy and Procedural Framework

Every school or school district contemplating a CBO/school partnership needs to ensure that it has the necessary policies in place to develop the partnership and maintain a positive collaboration with the community based organization. Policies related to the use of volunteers, selecting partner organizations, aligning expectations, dealing with grievances, and evaluating and concluding partnerships generally are helpful. These policies must be known to the potential partners and all school and school-district decision makers. A careful balance between comprehensive policies that frame the nature of the relationship and what is expected of the potential partner is needed. Remember that a potential partner generally offers resources, skills, and talents at a discounted or nominal cost. The school or district therefore wants to encourage the relationship and make it easy, enjoyable, and productive. Yet an important goal is to select and maintain the right partners and prevent or dissuade the wrong ones. Clear policies set within the context of the mutual needs of the parties generally are the best starting point.
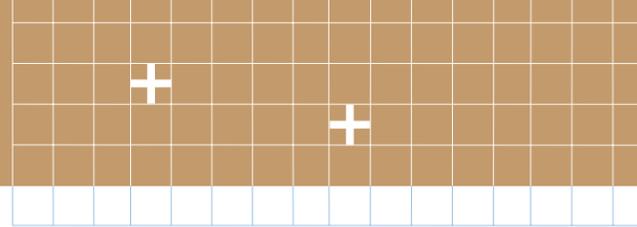
Assessing Needs and Gaps

From the perspective of the school or school district, the primary motivation for developing a CBO/school partnership generally is solving a problem, filling a pressing need, or seeking crucial help in a particular area or field. Every school and school district needs to assess its needs and gaps to determine the type of partnerships needed. Performing a basic needs assessment prior to developing any partnership is essential in most cases. After determining needs and gaps, deciding upon the focus of the future partnership is advised. A school or school district, therefore, should seek to play an active role in the creation of the partnership.

Educating School Management and Teachers on Partnership Development

Teachers and school officials must be educated on the need for CBO/school partnerships. Insisting that management and teachers recognize partners as critical players in educating children is vital. The partnership cannot be viewed as an "added bonus" or a pet project for which optional participation is countenanced. Rather, the partnership must be valued and viewed as a critical component in meeting school targets and goals. Visionary school leadership making it clear that the partnership must be given priority status is vital if it is going to be an effective tool in creating positive outcomes for Black male achievement

Identifying the Right Partners

After considering policies, assessing needs, and changing hearts and minds, the most important step is partner identification. A school or school district might be approached by many organizations with good intentions. As Joellen Killion (2011) notes:

> "Reciprocally beneficial partnerships expand opportunities and extend the capacity of schools and districts. Schools and districts have much to offer as partners because they are so visible in their communities and because they touch so many members of a community. They have much to gain and potentially much to lose from partnerships. The sure way to find and enter partnerships that add value to each partner is to take adequate time to build relationships with potential partners, assess potential partnerships, evaluate partnerships they enter, and avoid partnerships that might detract from their priorities and immediate needs."

A school/district must ask the following questions:

+ *How long has the community-based organization/potential partner been operating in the community?* Picking a partner that has roots in the community is extremely important. A school/district needs a partner that will be respected by parents. It is difficult to establish a successful partnership without parental cooperation. Many parents

will not agree to enroll their students in the partnership's program or initiative if the CBO does not have a good reputation in the community.

+ *What experience does the organization have in the proposed scope of work?* Obviously, experience in the proposed scope of work of the partnership is necessary for any organization to succeed.

+ *Has the organization implemented the project in other schools/districts?* School officials will want to call colleagues in other schools and districts who have experience with this community partner.

+ *What challenges has the organization faced in implementing programs and how have they been overcome?* Every CBO/school partnership will face challenges in implementing its programs. A successful and competent CBO must learn how to overcome challenges and persevere.

+ *What results did the organization achieve and over what period of time?* Developing positive outcomes for young people is the goal of any youth-focused CBO. A successful CBO should have a record of accomplishments to share.

+ *Does the organization have policies on child abuse and other crimes against children as well as procedures governing the use of volunteers? Has it or its volunteers had complaints brought against them related to sexual abuse or other violent crimes against children?* School officials must understand the origins of any complaints brought against the CBO and how they were resolved. Having many complaints against an organization may be indicative of poor volunteer-recruitment procedures.

+ *How long does the organization plan to stay in the school/district and does it have the funding to continue program implementation over this period?* Program and partnership sustainability is important—particularly with respect to multi-year partnerships.

Setting Expectations and Goals, and Clarifying Scope and Roles

Any successful endeavor requires all parties to share mutual goals. The CBO/school partnership is more likely to succeed if the school or district is convinced that it will meet specific goals. Community partners must appreciate that schools primarily are interested in improving grades and academic performance. Therefore, it is important for the CBO partner to articulate how the partnership will contribute. In setting goals and clarifying roles, the following questions are relevant for school officials:
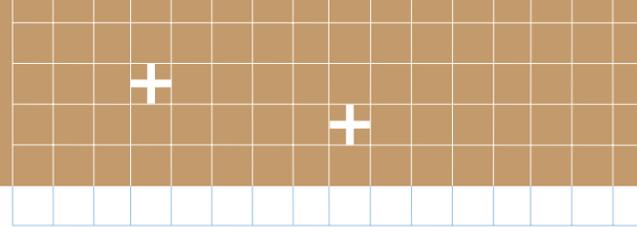
+ What are the primary goals for the program?

+ Which type of student will be recruited in the proposed program or initiative?

+ How will students be recruited?

+ How do program goals contribute to or impact learning?

+ How long does the partner have to implement the project before results are realized?

+ How will achievement be assessed?

+ Will the program coordinate with teachers to address student weaknesses/strengths, and if so, when and how often will this coordination take place?

Partnership Coordination

Partners to such collaboration must ensure that there is coordination of effort. A community-based partner, for example, should be assigned a school liaison as the daily point of contact. The liaison should communicate any changes at the school or in the school district that could affect the partnership programs. A CBO, on the other hand, must keep the school or district informed as to all program activities, schedules, and events. Further, coordination in a school district also includes CBO placement in schools. Certain schools or principals, for example, are more popular than others, and these schools sometimes get a disproportionate share of offers to form partnerships with CBOs. School officials must caution against such a partnership imbalance. Some school districts have initiated a vetting process that includes district-wide placement of partners. Partners apply for particular schools and are selected to conduct programs in specific schools based on need. They also provide information on the organization and its experience.

Mutual Accountability

The success of the CBO/school partnership in large part will depend on the extent to which both parties hold each other accountable. In most cases, the school or school district is accountable for providing continuous and timely access to youths, space in the school building to conduct the program, and other supports needed to implement successfully the program, such as a school liaison. The CBO generally is accountable for proposed program activities, and specifically, conducting those activities in a manner consistent with the mutual understanding agreed upon by the parties. It is important for schools to understand that in order for a program to succeed, support should be vertical throughout the school

and executive ranks. As noted earlier, support by school officials is vital to the success of the partnership and its programs. Unfortunately, many school officials do not ensure this vertical support. Rather, CBO programs sometimes are viewed as the "the principal's pet project" instead of an integral part of a coordinated strategy to develop positive outcomes for young people. The following steps are suggested to ensure effective accountability:

1. A memorandum of understanding that outlines the school/school district and CBO's roles and responsibilities

2. Education sessions (prior to the commencement of the partnership) for all school staff about the partnership, its purpose, policies, and procedures, and the staff's role in ensuring its success

3. Assigning a school liaison officer who is responsible for coordination and communication with the CBO

4. Periodic meetings (for example, on a quarterly basis) with key school staff to discuss project activities, successes, and challenges

5. Beginning-of-the-year and year-end planning meetings between key partner officials to discuss changes needed to make the project more effective in the following school year

6. Schoolwide dissemination of program results and evaluation

Cost-Sharing and Funding Options

Unfortunately, the costs of excellent school-based programs often exceed the budgets of many CBOs. Current governmental reductions in program-related dollars have made funding the best partnership efforts even more difficult. Cost-sharing and funding options, however, can be considered a way for schools to help finance partnerships that address important school needs. Schools can consider providing space to conduct the program and pay for certain items such as snacks, offer human resources by volunteering teachers and other staff, and direct financial support.

Policies and Procedures Regarding the Use of Volunteers

School and school districts often have diverse policies regarding the use of volunteers who have significant contact with youths while in school. Having intelligent and standardized policies helps the CBO understand how to recruit volunteers and others to participate in partnership activities.
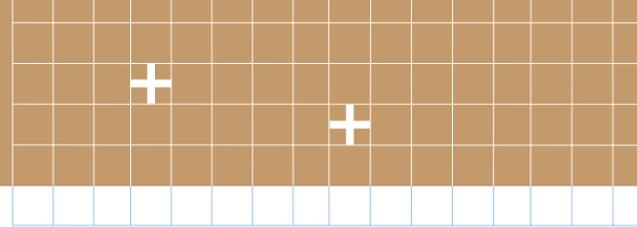
Evaluating CBO/School Partnerships

Evaluating the success of the partnership and its programs is critical. Evaluation not only assesses whether the goals and objectives were achieved but also provides information on the more challenging aspects of the collaboration. Evaluating the partnership could be done in several ways: (1) using an external evaluator (an outside or independent evaluator offers funding agencies the assurance that your outcomes are not biased); or (2) internal evaluations by members of the partnership.

The actual evaluation can take two forms: (1) *process evaluation*, which asks if the inputs and processes that were anticipated were carried out (for example, the CBO stated that it would enroll fifteen Black male youths in its program, and it accomplished this objective); and (2) *outcome evaluation*, which determines if the partnership achieved it goals and objectives (consistent with the above example, the CBO commits to raising the reading grades by one grade letter or more of at least 50 percent of those youths enrolled during the year, and it accomplishes this objective by raising the grades of eight of the fifteen enrolled youths). Note that these two basic evaluation processes are not mutually exclusive; in fact, both are often included in an evaluation plan.

Mentoring As a Viable Program in a CBO/School Partnership

Mentoring is a key strategy that can be used, in the context of young Black males, to create school attachment, target truancy, and help with negative behavior. While schools sometimes conduct their own mentoring programs, most involve partnerships with community-based organizations. Improvements as a result of mentoring have been noted where there has been evidence of drug abuse (Tierney and Grossman 1995; LoSciuto et al. 1996), and violence (Tierney and Grossman 1995). The impact of mentoring on academic performance also has been documented in the literature. In evaluating the Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI) mentoring program, one study (Gordon et al. 2009) found that sixth-grade students in the BEMI group had a statistically higher GPA compared to a comparison group of similar students (2.8 versus 1.06). The BEMI group also identified more with academics than the comparison group. The program was conducted among urban middle-schoolers in Hartford, Connecticut. It included one-on-one mentoring; interaction with professionals in the neighboring community; structured events for all participants that allowed for interaction, sharing and developing common goals around the mentoring experience; and instruction by male instructors in major subject areas.

Another support program that included high school students also demonstrated academic success among its students using a mentoring strategy. An evaluation of the long-term impact of Sponsor-a-Scholar program found that those with better relationships with their mentors were more likely to achieve higher GPAs, and get into and stay in college. Effects also have been witnessed as a result of "natural mentoring." In a study among 3,320 high school students from fourteen school districts in eight states (California, Arizona, Kansas, Louisiana, South Carolina, Washington, Maryland, and Massachusetts), it was found that students with naturally occurring mentoring relationships had a higher level of school attachment, which in turn led to lower rates of substance abuse and other risky behaviors (Black et al. 2010). A number of pathways have been suggested to explain the influence of mentoring on youth behavior and outcomes. Cohen and Galbraith (1995) indicate that mentoring could be used to counter the attitude that "no one cares" experienced by students. Introducing mentors in a school system also could create resilience in settings that are unresponsive to student needs (Gordon et al. 2009). Research suggests that mentoring provides social learning and opportunities for attachment to conventional organizations and institutions, leading to a reduction in risk behaviors (Black et al. 2010). Further, the trusting relationship developed between the mentor and mentee encourages the young person to model the pro-social behavior performed by the mentor. When mentors model high regard for education, abstinence from substance abuse, violence, and sexual activity, this begins a cycle of self-examination and adaptation that eventually leads to the mentee's change in behavior. Finally, the instruction, encouragement, and support the mentor provides goes a long way in helping the young person navigate tough circumstances that otherwise would prove difficult to handle.

Types of Mentoring

Mentoring is typically done one-on-one or in the context of a small group. One-on-one mentoring involves matching a student with an adult with whom he will have frequent contact. Group mentoring pairs a small group of students with one mentor. The mentor may meet with students individually above and beyond the required group interactions, but the main interaction occurs within the group. To allow effective relationship building between the mentor and mentees, in areas where group mentoring is implemented, a mentoring ratio of one adult to four young people is suggested.

School-based mentoring programs are housed at the school site, with adults and youth meeting in various campus locations and the program making use of school facilities and administrative space. Community mentoring, on the other hand, takes place at locations within the community.

Principles of an Effective Mentoring Program

Although mentoring has been consistently found to make a difference in youth outcomes (Tierney and Grossman 1995; O'Connor 1995), scholars have consistently agreed that not all mentoring programs are equally effective (Sipe 2002; Grossman and Rhodes 2002; Herrera et al. 2000). A meta-analysis of mentoring programs (DuBois et al. 2002) found that program outcomes are enhanced significantly when greater numbers of both theory and empirically based "best practices" are relied upon. These best practices include monitoring of program implementation, screening of prospective mentors, matching
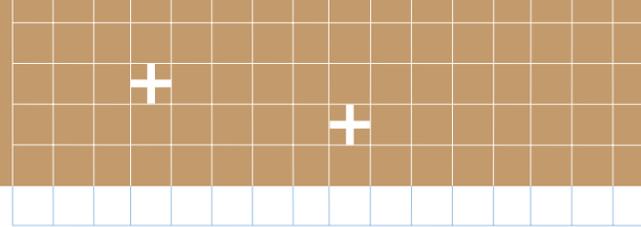
of mentors and youth on the basis of one or more relevant criteria, and other best-practice procedures (Freedman 1992). Additionally, an assessment of the effectiveness of fifty mentor/mentee relationships among youth participating in a Big Brothers Big Sister's program in the Midwest found that best practices in mentor training were positive predictors of mentor efficacy (Parra et al. 2002). The same study showed that mentors who were confident and knowledgeable (both included as functions of mentor efficacy) were more likely to have substantial positive associations with youth, meet with their mentees more regularly, and overcome program difficulties more easily.

Other studies have underscored the importance of the length of the mentoring relationship. As noted earlier, Grossman and Rhodes (2002) found that youths who were in mentoring relationships lasting a year or longer reported more improvements in academic, psychosocial, and behavioral outcomes. The study found that youth in relationships that terminated within three months reported drops in self-worth and perceived scholastic competence. However, length alone does not tell the whole story. A number of other factors, including the mentor's interpersonal style, the mentor's approach during the first few meetings, the closeness of the mentor/mentee relationship, as well as the number of hours of each meeting have been found to have a bigger influence on outcomes (Grossman and Johnson 1999). Interviews conducted with mentors indicate that the number of hours per month that mentors and youths spent together was associated consistently with reports of more positive relationship experiences (Herrera et al. 2000). In analyzing the impact of the quality of mentor/mentee relationships, scholars suggest that closer relationships are more likely to last longer and provide more emotional and practical assistance (Rhodes et al. 2002; Herrera et al. 2000).

Elements of a Successful CBO/School Partnership Mentoring Program: CBM CARES® National Mentoring Initiative

Since 1975, Concerned Black Men has implemented successful children and youth programs. In 2007 CBM National established a local mentoring program in Washington, DC, for mostly African American middle school boys. A little over a year ago, relying upon the lessons learned in the local project, Concerned Black Men created the CBM CARES® National Mentoring Initiative. CBM CARES® is a national effort that works with schools and school districts across America to implement school-based mentoring programs for Black male youths in grades five through eight. The mentors are primarily African American men and come from all walks of life. The program's goal is to keep boys in school and not truant, safe from violence and negative consequences, and help them achieve. While it is challenging indeed to raise grades and test scores for any group of youths solely through mentoring, such a program can enhance the environment for academic achievement by reducing problem and high-risk behavior exhibited by boys who lack responsible male adults in their lives. The specific problem behaviors

targeted include those most likely to change dramatically and negatively the life of a young boy: juvenile delinquency and general violence; drug use and abuse; and poor school attachment (high truancy and suspension rates, and low attendance and graduation rates). CBM thanks the program's principal funding agency, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, Department of Justice, for the opportunity to help our boys succeed and achieve.

What are the essential components of a school-based mentoring program seeking to support Black male youths? Here, we use CBM CARES® as an example of such an initiative conducted by a CBO in partnership with a school or school district. With nominal modifications tailored to locality, CBM believes that such a program can be conducted in any school or across any school district in the nation.

Target Population

CBM CARES® currently includes young males in grades five through eight. African American boys are the principal recruitment targets. Given the large number of Black boys not achieving in school, truant or suspended and exhibiting negative behavior, CBM believes it is imperative that programs focusing primarily on Black males be developed. Because such youths face similar problems across the country, CBM created a program with the potential to touch many children in schools and districts nationwide. Engaging boys prior to entering high school also is important. Studies (Jimerson et al. 2000, and many others) have found that school dropout has its genesis early in a child's school career. Therefore, CBM includes young males in the mentoring program beginning in late elementary through middle schools.

In adopting such a program, a school or school district might be asked "Why a focus on boys? And why African American boys in late elementary and middle school?" Studies show that students with poor academic achievement and inconsistent attendance in middle school are likely candidates for dropping out prior to completing high school (Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver 2007). The normal transition from middle to high school significantly increases at-risk behaviors such as drug use, school misbehavior, and delinquency. Boys are more likely to initiate marijuana use at an earlier age (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2010), more likely to be involved in the juvenile justice system, more likely to engage in violent crime (Snyder and Sickmund 2006), and more likely to drop out of school (Child Trends Data Bank 2007). Research suggests that African American boys are subject to the greatest risk for the above-targeted behaviors. For example, with respect to school completion, African American boys generally have the worst high school graduation rate of any school-aged group. While there is no nationally accepted standard to measure graduation, various methodologies show only 49 percent and 48 percent of African American and Hispanic males graduating from high school within four years, respectively, compared to 74 percent of white males and 59 percent of black females.
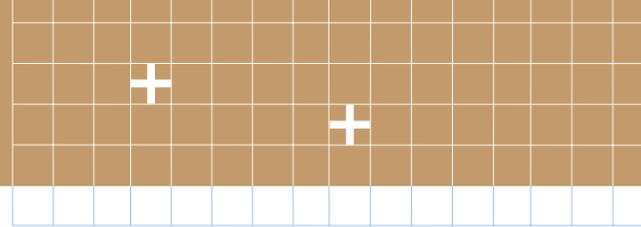
Project Location

CBM took the lessons learned from its early DC-area local mentoring project and geared up quickly to create a multisite national mentoring program. The importance of incorporating lessons learned from other partnership-based efforts, particularly mentoring programs, cannot be overemphasized. From operational delays to mentor-recruitment problems, such partnership programs operating across many schools or school districts are fraught with challenges that can derail good intentions. By relying upon lessons learned, a CBO anticipates challenges and stays in front of them, thereby minimizing their impact upon the partnership program. CBM CARES® is conducted in five locations nationally, in approximately four schools per district, for a total of twenty schools. Columbia, South Carolina; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Richmond, Virginia; and Washington, DC, initially were included. Recently, Prince George's County, Maryland, was added.

Goals and Objectives

Program goals and objectives have to be both realistic and challenging. In creating a school-based mentoring program for African American male students, goals and objectives must embody the problem behavior the CBO and school or school district wants to change. Typically, the CBO's goals would include some or all of the following language:

+ **Goal 1:** To reduce the proportion of students who engage in violence-related problem behavior

+ **Goal 2:** To reduce drug abuse among participating youth

+ **Goal 3:** To increase school attachment among participating youth

+ **Goal 4:** To increase overall academic performance

The actual goal language would be more specific—tailored to the particular situation—including the desired percentage reduction (or increase) of the specific behavior, the time period in which the CBO wants to achieve the reduction or increase, and the evaluative tool used to measure the change. For example: Goal 3, as given above, might be narrowed as follows:

+ **Objective 3.1:** To reduce by 50 percent the number of unexcused school absences among youths who have been matched with mentors for one year as measured by the student's attendance records before and after the one-year match

Again, depending on the strategy employed by the CBO in your partnership, additional objectives associated with this overall goal might also be included.

Project Activities

The "intervention" includes activities that make up the core of the program: mentoring, parent and youth workshops, and structured enrichment activities.

As noted, with CBM CARES®, the interventional activities revolve around one-on-one and group mentoring. CBM CARES® includes approximately eight contact hours between mentor and mentee per month. Most but not all of the mentoring time involves personal contact. A minimum of two in-person meetings per month is required. Generally, the group mentoring sessions are conducted on the school grounds. Mentors, with the assistance of CBM staff, select a venue for the one-on-one mentoring sessions.

A very important point regarding mentoring and achievement: Mentors can encourage school attachment by getting students to commit to attending school more regularly, promote positive social behavior such as respect for self and others, and help youths develop and explore college, vocational, and career pursuits. Mentors also can help mentees improve academically in reading and language arts, but note that a mentor is not a tutor or a teacher. A principal objective of mentoring is the establishment of a trusting relationship—one in which the youth feels comfortable sharing feelings and personal thoughts with his mentor. If the potential mentor views his role as that of instructor or disciplinarian, it is less likely that the mentee will view the relationship as special and less likely that a true mentor-mentee relationship will develop and last.

One study of mentoring in the learning environment (Karcher et al. 2006) distinguished between "developmental" and "instrumental" mentoring activities. The former focus on the mentee's social and emotional development, with activities such as play and recreation, casual conversations, and the discussion of close relationships. The latter, in contrast, primarily involve learning skills (e.g., vocational), achieving specific goals, or thinking critically about issues that may be important to the youth's future. In this and other recent studies, mentors in matches that engaged in more developmental activities reported the highest levels of positive outcomes, while mentors in matches enlisting more instrumental activities reported the lowest level of beneficial outcomes.

Essentially, mentoring will have the greatest impact upon achievement if homework and schooling are *not* the key interventional activities of the mentoring relationship.

Parent and youth workshops are another important element of the CBM CARES® intervention. Many parents, especially single mothers, face significant challenges raising sons. CBM's interaction with families in the target group also has shown that many parents, especially single mothers, lack sufficient knowledge to develop supportive relationships with their sons. Lack of understanding of the issues and pressures faced by male children, lack of confidence in their ability to relate to their sons, poor disciplining methods, and the inability to identify and address "red flags" involving the drug culture, school, and
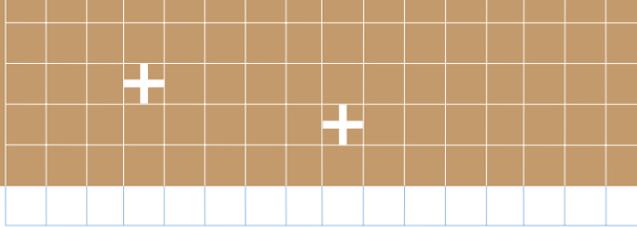
associations all hinder many of our parents from being active catalysts for change in their sons' lives. CBM CARES® therefore organizes a number of parent workshops a year to help improve parenting skills. These workshops discuss a variety of issues including relationship building, monitoring children, establishing a stable home environment, effective parent-child communication, drug prevention, avoiding violence, gang involvement, and school dropout, and a number of other topics.

Finally, CBM CARES® offers structured enrichment activities intended to: (1) expose youth to higher career and educational goals; (2) provide opportunities for bonding with parents and guardians; (3) instill a love for reading and educational pursuits; and (4) provide additional opportunities for mentors and mentees to interact.

The Mentor-Mentee Relationship

As noted above, CBM CARES® mentoring activities require mentors to meet with the mentees for at least eight hours a month in not fewer than two meetings. Mentors who can attend the group mentoring sessions are permitted to count this hour toward the required time commitment. One-on-one meetings take place primarily out of school at a place agreed upon by the mentor and mentee (with advisement of the staff). Examples of meeting places include public parks, restaurants, public libraries, movie theaters, and sports arenas. To protect students, staff ensures that one-on-one meetings are conducted in public settings. To help the mentor, the majority of the meeting hours can take place during structured enrichment activities, as described earlier.

CBM emphasizes that at minimum a twelve-month relationship with a mentee is required and three years desired. Why a minimum of twelve months? Studies show that youths who were in matches that lasted more than twelve months reported significantly higher levels of self-worth, social acceptance, and scholastic competence. Mentees also report that their relationship with parents had improved, school had become more rewarding, and both their drug and alcohol use had declined (Grossman et al. 2012; Slicker and Palmer 1993). Mentors are therefore asked to make a one-year commitment.

Recruitment and Screening of Mentors

While CBM relies upon volunteers of all races and both genders in most of its projects, CBM CARES® endeavors to match young Black males with caring, responsible African American men. Based on years of experience, and the declining number of Black men consistently involved in the lives of African American boys, CBM strongly believes it must make an attempt to connect these young males to responsible adult Black men.

Increasing fatherlessness and gang and crew membership make it more likely that the typical Black male role models available to these youths might be "nurturing" but not positive or particularly responsible. The few mentoring programs offered by great groups such as Big Brothers Big Sisters have an extremely difficult time recruiting Black men. CBM, in many communities, is the only option for a mother desperate for her son to bond with responsible Black men. In any event, while CBM and other CBOs applaud and encourage diversity among mentors (particularly because it can make mentor-mentee matching much easier), every effort should be made to recruit African American men to join the pool of potential mentors.

Screening procedures are designed to retain volunteers who have the sensitivity, commitment, and sense of responsibility to be good mentors while eliminating individuals who might harm youths. CBM CARES® has four levels of reference checks: (1) completion of a detailed application process; (2) a thorough personal interview to solicit information on interests, motivations for mentoring, and personality assessment, and probe for criminal activity or undesirable behaviors; (3) review of personal references; (4) FBI records check for criminal activity and child or domestic abuse. All information collected in the above procedures is kept confidential.

Recruitment and Retention of Youths

As noted earlier, CBM CARES® includes Black boys from grades five through eight. School officials, including school social workers and counselors, should help steer young people meeting the requirement to the program. In addition, counselors are asked to make referrals for youths who may have been in trouble with drug use and violence or are at high risk for school dropout. To recruit students, CBO staff addresses parents during PTA and other parent meetings at the beginning of each year. Staff also promotes the project to students during assemblies and other school-arranged meetings. Parents interested in enrolling their children return a signed consent form, and student and parent profile forms.

Matching of Mentor and Mentee

CBM CARES® uses both the MENTOR PRO program, a database that assists in program management, and subjective staff assessment to match mentors with mentees. In order to match a mentor with a mentee, Mentor Pro requires data on mentor/mentee interests, goals, mentor demographic characteristics, and other factors. CBM CARES® collects this information on the potential mentor's application and profile forms as well as during personal interviews. An initial match is made using this database. Staff then reviews these preliminary matches and makes a final match based on information collected from both the mentor and mentee. Also considered are observations and recommendations made by the parents and their children resulting from an informal "meet and greet" between mentor and mentee scheduled early in the school year.
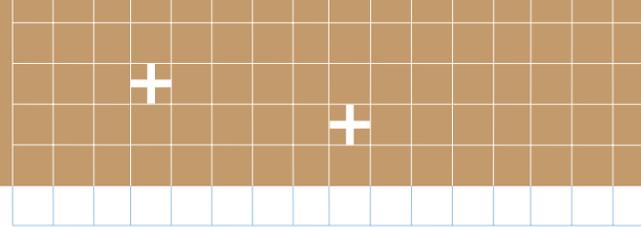
Training of Mentors

Mentors who are poorly trained are more likely to drop out of mentoring programs and less likely to develop quality and lasting relationships with their mentees. CBM CARES® provides mentor training prior to being matched with mentees, and in-service training, which is conducted throughout the mentor/mentee relationship.

+ **Pre-match training:** During this training, program policies and procedures as well as expectations and roles of the mentor, mentee, parent, and CBO are discussed. Each mentor also receives a mentor's manual, which includes the CBO's policies on volunteering as well as detailed information on mentoring and volunteering for a CBO, how to develop and sustain a relationship with the mentee, and similar information.

+ **In-service training:** CBM CARES® also conducts in-service training throughout the program year. The required workshops focus on: urban culture and the hip-hop generation; working with youth from low-income families; youth-development principles; and dealing with "family" in the mentor-mentee relationship. CBM CARES® seeks to provide at least twenty hours per year of mentoring training.

Supervision and Support of the Mentor/Mentee Match

Studies have shown that mentors who are supported in their efforts tend to have a greater impact on their mentees (Abell Foundation 1990; Tierney et al. 2001). The CBO's match-supervision and support mechanism: (1) ensures that the mentor and mentees are meeting regularly; (2) monitors the quality of the mentor/mentee relationship and assesses whether the relationship is progressing; and (3) addresses potential and actual problems between the mentor and mentee. The first step in supporting mentors consists of providing comprehensive training that adequately prepares them for this important responsibility. Once a month, a CBO staff person should call the mentor and mentee to ask about their meetings during that month. During these calls, any potential problems are explored. When necessary, match support also involves preparing the mentor and mentee to end the match. While the project works diligently to beat the odds, research shows only approximately half of the mentoring relationships established through such programs last beyond a few months (Rhodes 2002). Among at-risk youths, as those included in CBM CARES®, an even higher percentage should be expected to end prematurely (Grossman and Rhodes 2002). Care must be taken to ensure the ending of the match occurs without the young male thinking that he (again) has been abandoned or that the relationship is ending because of something he has (or has not) done.

Summary of Solutions

Partnerships

When creating partnerships, schools and districts should…

1. Create the necessary policies to facilitate collaboration: for example, procedures that define how to use volunteers, select partner organizations, deal with grievances, evaluate and conclude partnerships, and other important considerations. In following this process, schools and school districts ensure that these policies are known to the potential partners and all decision-makers.

2. Cultivate partnership relationships that are easy, enjoyable, and productive. Remember that the potential partner generally is providing resources, skills, and talents at a discounted or nominal cost. Use collaboration processes that facilitate coalition building, such as shared decision making, effective communication, and developing a clearly defined structure.

3. Perform a basic needs assessment prior to developing any partnership. After determining need and gaps, deciding upon the focus of the future partnership is critical.

4. Educate teachers and school officials on the need for the partnership. Management and teachers should recognize partners as critical players in educating children. The partnership cannot be viewed as an "added bonus" or a pet project for which optional participation is countenanced. Rather, the partnership must be valued and viewed as a critical component in meeting school targets and goals.

5. Evaluate potential partners to determine their efficacy, and avoid partnerships that might detract from their priorities and immediate needs by asking the following questions:

   a. How long has the potential partner been operating in the community?

   b. What experience does the organization have in the proposed scope of work?

   c. Has the organization implemented the project in other schools/districts?

   d. What challenges has the organization faced in implementing programs and how have they been overcome?

   e. What results did the organization achieve and over what period of time?
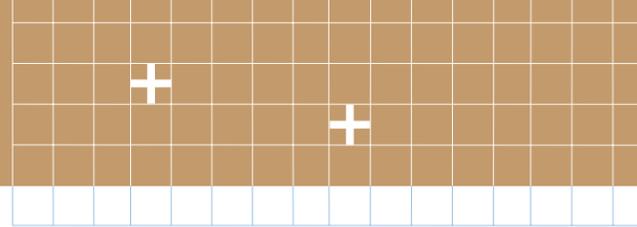
f. Does the organization have policies on child abuse and other crimes against children as well as procedures governing the use of volunteers? Does it or its volunteers have complaints related to sexual abuse or other violent crimes against children?

g. How long does the organization plan to stay in the school/district and does it have the funding to continue program implementation over this period?

6. Ensure that the partner understands that schools/districts are primarily interested in improving grades and academic performance. Therefore, it is important for the partner to articulate how they will contribute. In setting goals and clarifying roles, the following questions are relevant for school officials:

a. What are the principal goals for the program?

b. Which type of student will be recruited in the proposed program or initiative?

c. How will students be recruited?

d. How do program goals contribute to or impact learning?

e. How long does the partner have to implement the project before results are realized?

f. How will achievement be assessed?

g. Will the program coordinate with teachers to address student weaknesses/strengths and if so when and how often will this coordination take place?

7. Ensure that there is coordination of effort. A school liaison should be assigned as the daily point of contact. The liaison should communicate changes at the school or in the school district that could affect the partnership programs. A partner, on the other hand, must keep the school or district informed as to all program activities, schedules and events.

8. Be mindful of how partners are placed in schools. Certain schools or principals, for example, are more popular than others, and these schools sometimes get a disproportionate share of offers to form partnerships. School officials must caution against such a partnership imbalance.

9. Establish an atmosphere of mutual accountability. In most cases, the school or school district is accountable for providing continuous and timely access to youths, space in the school building to conduct the program, and other supports needed to successfully implement the program, such as a school liaison. The CBO generally is accountable for proposed program activities, and

specifically, conducting those activities in a manner consistent with the mutual understanding agreed upon by the parties.

10. Support for the partnership's initiative should be vertical throughout the school/district and executive ranks. Support may be evidenced by the following:

a. A memorandum of understanding that outlines the school/school district and partner's roles and responsibilities

b. Education sessions (prior to the commencement of the partnership) for all school staff about the partnership, its purpose, policies, and procedures and the staff's role in ensuring its success

c. Assigning a school liaison officer who is responsible for coordination and communication with the partner

d. Periodic meetings (e.g., on a quarterly basis) with key school staff to discuss project activities, successes and challenges

e. Beginning-of-the-year and year-end planning meetings between key partner officials to discuss changes needed to make the project more effective in the following school year

f. School-wide dissemination of program results and evaluation

11. Share the financial costs of the partnership. Schools can provide space to conduct the program and pay for certain items such as snacks, offer human resources by volunteering teachers and other staff, and direct financial support. The partner may pay for costs directly related to their program activities.

12. Evaluate the success of the partnership and its programs. Evaluating the partnership could occur by using an external or internal evaluator. The evaluation should include both formative and summative components and both the school/school district and the partner should determine how the project will be evaluated.

Mentoring
When creating mentoring programs, schools and districts should…

13. Review and become knowledgeable about the different types of mentoring programs: one-on-one and group mentoring, and school-based versus community mentoring.
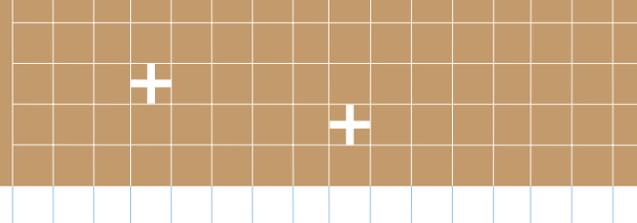
14. Become knowledgeable about and implement the best practices for screening of prospective mentors, and matching of mentors and youth, on the basis of one or more relevant criteria. Target problem and high-risk behaviors exhibited by young males who lack responsible male adults in their lives, such as: juvenile delinquency and general violence; drug use and abuse; poor school attachment (high truancy and suspension rates, and low attendance and graduation rates).

15. Understand that the role of the mentor is not that of instructor, tutor, or disciplinarian. Mentors must develop trusting relationships with mentees, such that mentees will feel comfortable confiding in their mentors about challenges in school and at home. Collaborate with mentors in conducting parent and youth workshops to address a variety of issues, including relationship building; monitoring children; establishing a stable home environment; building effective parent-child communication; avoiding violence, drugs, gang involvement, and decreasing school dropout; and other topics as necessary. These workshops are especially helpful for single mothers who face significant challenges raising sons alone.

16. Ensure that the mentor provides enrichment activities to expose youths to higher career and educational goals and encourage bonding with responsible male figures in their lives. Such activities can: (1) expose youth to career and educational goals; (2) provide opportunities for bonding with parents and guardians; (3) instill a love for reading and educational pursuits included as a part of "fun" events; and (4) provide additional opportunities for the mentor and mentee to interact.

17. Require a mentoring relationship of at least twelve months. The best programs seek to establish mentoring relationships that last as long as three years or more.

18. Make an attempt to connect young Black males to responsible adult Black men.

19. Establish clear screening procedures to eliminate individuals who might harm youths and identify those who are best suited to serve as mentors. Four levels of reference checks might include: (1) completion of a detailed application process; (2) a thorough personal interview to solicit information on interests, motivations for mentoring, and personality assessment, and probe for criminal activity and undesirable behavior; (3) review of personal references; (4) an FBI records check for criminal activity and child or domestic abuse. All information collected in the above procedures is kept confidential.

20. Enlist the support of school officials, including school social workers and counselors, to help identify young males for the program. An overview of the program may be shared with parents during PTA and other parent meetings at the beginning of each year. Staff may also talk with students during assemblies and other school-arranged meetings. Parents interested in enrolling their children return a signed consent form, and student and parent profile forms.

21. Carefully match the mentor with a mentee by examining mentor/mentee interests, goals, mentor demographic characteristics, and other factors. Also consider observations and recommendations made by the parents and their children resulting from an informal "meet and greet" between mentor and mentee scheduled early in the school year.

22. Ensure that mentors receive professional development throughout the mentor/mentee relationship. Activities should include a review of program policies and procedures as well as expectations and roles of the mentor, mentee, and parent. Each mentor should receive a mentor's manual, which includes policies on volunteering as well as detailed information on mentoring and volunteering, and how to develop and sustain a relationship with the mentee, and other important issues. At least twenty hours per year of mentoring training is recommended.

23. Ensure that the mentor, if appropriate, keeps in touch with his organization, at a minimum once a month. The mentor reports progress and any potential problems are explored.

24. Ensure that there is a procedure for ending the mentor/mentee relationship that does not cause the young male to believe that he (again) has been abandoned or that the relationship is ending because of something he has done.

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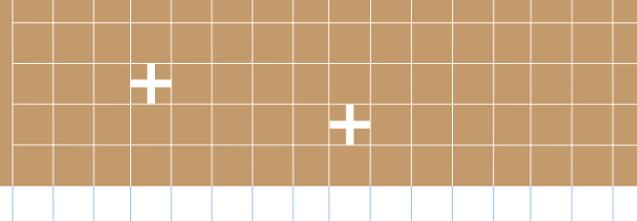
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**Great Schools Are Not an Accident:
Standards and Promising Practices
for Educating Boys of Color**

11

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Introduction

The current educational dilemma of boys of color has significant implications for our nation and the world. The strength of our nation is dependent on our ability to educate all students. Failure to successfully
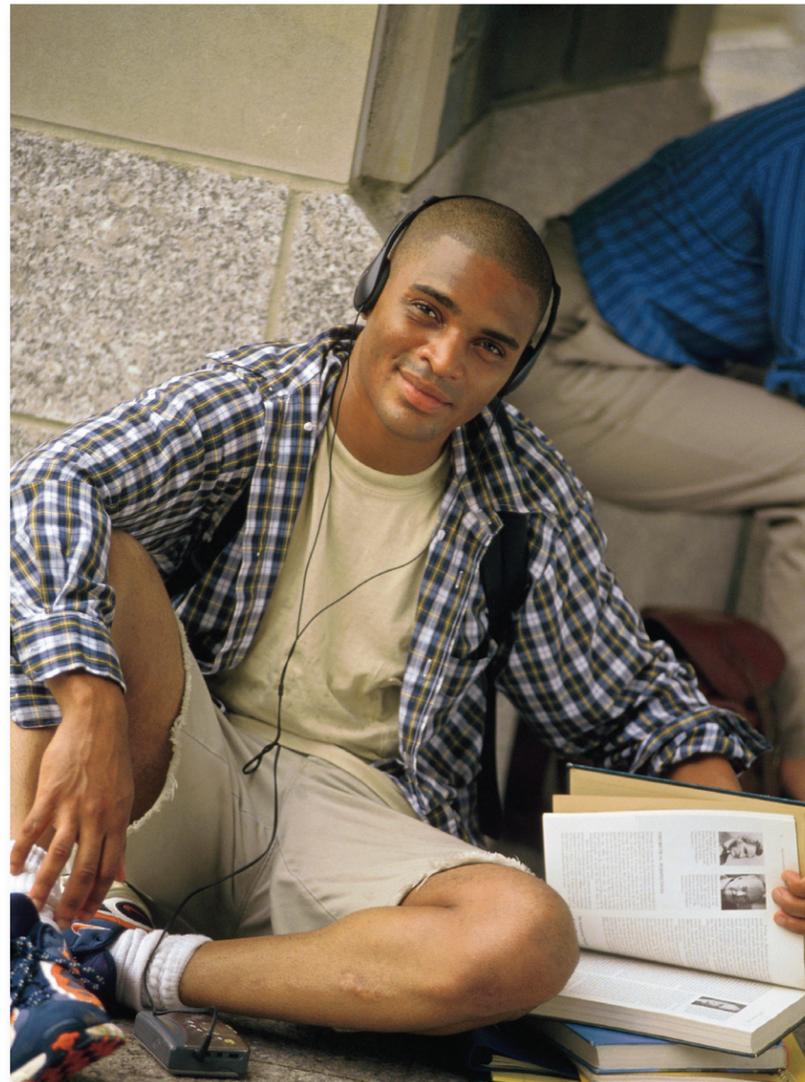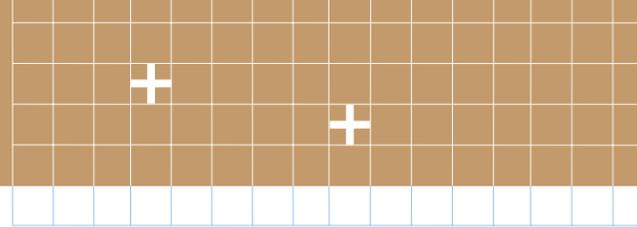
educate boys of color, who represent one-fifth of school-age enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics 2010) impacts the future workforce, the economic stability of whole communities, and the viability of families of color. Despite compelling research on many areas of this problem—standardized test results, school discipline, the dropout rate, the achievement gap, etc.—there fails to be a strategic national response to the issues facing boys of color in educational settings. Policymakers and education reformers cannot continue to ignore the persistent problem of academic failure among boys of color. To do so is to put the nation in jeopardy.

Boys of color across all socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate gaps in learning as compared to white male children. Often, socioeconomic factors are raised as significant barriers to education for boys of color. Students whose families live in poverty or reside in low-income communities do face additional barriers and pressing needs that impact their ability to focus on education. Many students go hungry, have unattended medical issues, have unstable housing, or face trauma in their homes or the communities in which they live. In addition, schools operating in low-income communities lack sufficient resources to provide educational environments that are not only comparable to schools in more affluent neighborhoods, but that can address and mitigate the barriers to education their students face. These barriers, however, must not provide an excuse for giving up on boys of color. We cannot simply throw our hands in the air and declare the task of educating these boys as too daunting.

It is imperative that America recognize that the problem is not the students themselves. There are countless stories of boys of color who were failing miserably in one teaching environment, only to thrive after being placed in another. Those students didn't suddenly change—rather, the new educational setting was able to provide a more developmentally responsive learning environment. The solution to the sweeping problem of academic struggle for boys of color does not rest with the students themselves, it rests with policymakers and schools. Rather than looking at the students for the solution, we must begin to look critically at our federal, state, and local education policies, as well as the way in which educational institutions and school leadership function. Our nation's schools, particularly those serving students from low-income communities, are simply not equipped with the tools or resources that are needed to successfully educate boys of color. To change the outcomes of boys of color, policymakers and school leaders must begin to evaluate their policies, practices, and beliefs, then make changes that will increase the ability to effectively educate boys of color.

Promising Practices for Schools Educating Boys of Color

The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) was created to support school leaders in successfully educating boys of color. COSEBOC is committed to high standards, exemplary instruction, and the building of coalitions within and outside the community. As such, we work with schools to improve their performance in these critical areas so that they are able to teach boys of color more effectively. In partnership with the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University, COSEBOC has developed the Standards and Promising Practices for Schools Educating Boys of Color Self-Assessment Tool as a mechanism and set of guidelines to assist school districts and educational leaders that seek to develop and enhance schools and programs serving boys of color. The document is based on the assumption that under the right learning conditions, all students can be successful. While the measures and indicators in the COSEBOC Standards can lift the achievement of all students, they were designed specifically to address the needs of boys of color and to bring a level of intentionality to the work of improving outcomes for these students.

The goal of this self-assessment tool is to assist schools in their pursuit of ongoing school improvement. The tool merges the research on effective schools with promising practices for working with boys of color. The instrument is organized into seven core areas; each contains a list of quality indicators and promising practices for ensuring improved outcomes for boys of color

Seven Core Areas for Improving Education for Boys of Color

Core Area 1: Assessment
Determine the rate by which or amount of what a student has learned, what his/her needs may be, and how to best meet those needs.

Consistently, research on the opportunity gap identifies behavioral and cognitive assessments and their implementation as minimizing educational access for boys of color (Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 1997). More specifically, the research on disproportionality in special education and suspension (Ahram, Ferbus, and Noguera 2010; Ahram and Fergus 2011; Artiles, Klingner, and Tate 2006) highlights how assessments are used as criteria for entry into special education, talented and gifted, Advanced Placement, and honors programs. Based on this understanding, the COSEBOC tool's focus is on mitigating the negative effects of assessment upon the educational trajectories of boys of color.

In the COSEBOC tool, "assessment" refers to a process of determining the rate by which or amount of what a student has learned, what his needs may be, and how to best meet his needs. Similarly, "evaluation" refers to the process of determining a condition, significance, or worth of an element of the teaching/learning process (i.e., how a student has learned something, how a teacher may improve his/her lesson plan, etc.). Assessment, in other words, is something that can be calculated or measured through a system, often consisting of numbered scores, whereas evaluation is based on study or observation, typically conducted over a period of time. Research highlights five core categories of assessment as impacting learning opportunities for boys of color. In addressing these categories, the COSEBOC Standards seek to improve access for boys of color, as presented below.
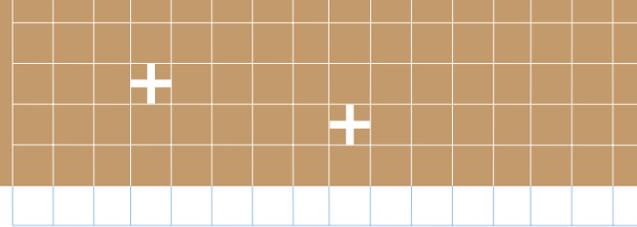
+ **Standardized assessment preparation.** State assessments operate as critical accountability levers for schools and, as a result, urban school districts and low-performing schools spend a large portion of the school year preparing students for them. Based on this knowledge and research, the COSEBOC Standards contain indicators on alignment of existing standards to available instructional strategies, continuous data examination of universal and diagnostic assessments, and core instructional strategies centered on skill development and acceleration rather than simply remediation.

+ **"Alternate" or "authentic" assessment.** The COSEBOC Standards tool indicators involve students creating a response to a question or task, rather than choosing a response from a set of possible answers. Alternative assessments can include short answer questions, essays, performances, oral presentations, demonstrations, exhibitions, and portfolios.

+ **Special education assessment.** The process of special education assessment is outlined by IDEA (reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). Given the history of disproportionate representation of boys of color in special education despite IDEA provisions, the COSEBOC indicators focus on improving the assessment process in order to minimize bias. The indicators include examination of collaboration with instructional support and problem-solving teams, the types of evaluation tools used, engagement with parents, and adherence to the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

+ **Talented/gifted and honors/Advanced Placement program assessment.** The process of selecting students for rigorous academic preparation must involve criteria that consider multiple facets of the abilities of boys of color. The indicators include identifying criteria such as sample work, prior course grades, teacher and parent recommendations, standardized test scores and diagnostic assessment data, and examination of disproportionate representation by race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status.

+ **Self-assessment.** Students, teachers, and administrators each need opportunities for reflection and self-assessment of their abilities. The COSEBOC Standards tool offers indicators to assess students' own academic and social progress. For teachers, it calls for opportunities to assess students' own pedagogical practices. In like manner, administrators should take opportunities to assess their own leadership practices.

Core Area 2: Parent/Family/Community Partnerships
Create a safety net for students through substantive engagement of parents and family in the educational process, and cultivation of formal partnerships with organizations in the larger community to effectively address student needs.

Implementing and sustaining systemic educational change is a slow and challenging process, and engaging in that process in conjunction with community partners, parents, and community members represents a fundamental shift in the way school districts and schools have traditionally done business. This kind of change requires profound shifts in both community expectations and participation as well as school and district operations. It challenges district, school board, and teacher leadership to overcome resistance and systemic barriers and create alternatives to current administrative and institutional arrangements. In January 2002, Congress expanded parental involvement statutory provisions in Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act. The provisions provided the tools by which student achievement can be enhanced through parental involvement in schools. The use of learning compacts or pledges is required in all public schools receiving Title I funds, affecting over half the nation's public school children.

In the COSEBOC Standards tool, the Parent/Family/Community Partnership section is organized based on the premise that the development of a close social safety net surrounding boys of color is vitally important. Research demonstrates that students do better in school when their families get involved, but unless schools send clear messages of respect and inclusion, families who do not fit the mold may never trust educators enough to speak up or show up (Catsambis 1998; Epstein 1995; Henderson and Mapp 2002; Simon 2000). To engage these key stakeholders, districts need to establish mechanisms for informing and engaging the parents or caregivers of boys of color in assessment, planning, decision making, and implementation processes. For schools, which have seen far too many reform efforts come and go, having external partners who can support them in the process is one way to ensure both sustainability and accountability. Indicators included in the tool borrow from the substantive research of educator Joyce L. Epstein and others.

+ **Teacher-family or school-family communication.** Making information available to parents and caregivers is essential to creating connections between home, community, and school. Sample indicators of communication strategies involve providing consistent and accessible information, opportunities to communicate with parents and caregivers of boys of color that focus on the academic and behavioral progress of the child, information about school processes, and ensuring that all communication is provided in the primary languages of the community.

+ **Community involvement.** Collaboration with community organizations is vital for school districts serving vulnerable populations, because the needs demonstrated
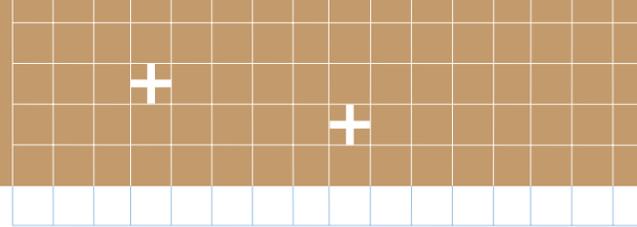
by population go beyond the capacity of the school district. A number of organizations are engaged in collaborative community planning to support needs; examples include Beacon Program schools, Children's Aid Society Community Schools, and Communities In Schools.

+ **Parent involvement.** Parents have a high sense of efficacy when they believe that they can: (1) help their children do well in school, and be happy and safe; (2) overcome negative influences and keep their children away from illegal drugs or alcohol; and (3) have a positive impact such as improving quality of the school and making the neighborhood a better place. The COSEBOC Standards indicators focus on building parents' sense of efficacy through targeted workshops that meet their needs as individuals and parents, as well as opportunities for parents to see their boys of color excel in an academic, athletic, and/or performance experience.

Core Area 3: Curriculum and Instruction
Ensure that curricula and expectations in schools educating boys of color are aligned to requirements, and sufficiently rigorous to assure preparation for post-secondary opportunities; ensure that instruction demonstrates both cultural and gender sensitivity and relevance.

Aligning curricula and expectations from grade to grade, as well as aligning pre-K–12 requirements with those for college entrance, ensures that students are (1) well prepared each successive year of school; (2) aware of the expectations at each successive year of school; and (3) prepared for full participation in post-secondary education. COSEBOC recognizes that the purpose of pre-K–12 is to prepare boys of color for some type of postsecondary education, to assist in reducing their risk and to mitigate the effect of structural bias. Thus, the curriculum and instruction core area looks at the central elements involved in the delivery of curriculum and the quality indicators of "good" instruction to prepare boys of color for post-secondary education. Borrowing from decades of research, the following are sample indicators in the COSEBOC Standards tool.

+ **Culturally relevant instruction.** This component considers the facets of culture represented in curriculum and instruction in ways that absorb the lived experiences of boys of color as central to the active knowledge in the classroom. The indicators include activities such as examining curricula and interactions that do not make assumptions about students because of their races or ethnicities, accounting for multiple perspectives on what is or is not "relevant" to boys of color.

+ **Gender-relevant instruction.** This component considers the social, emotional, and physical development of boys. The indicators address issues of child and male development

(social, emotional, and physical) at various life stages, including "coming of age" during adolescence, school environmental cues that promote various types of masculinity representations, and instruction that incorporates discussions of sexuality and critiques of gender roles.

Core Area 4: School Environment and Climate
Create a social atmosphere or learning environment in which students have positive and developmentally protective school interactions and experiences with both staff and peers, based upon protocols set up by teachers and administrators.

The importance of climate as it relates to the academic success of vulnerable populations is documented in various bodies of research. Key among these school climate factors are relationships with adults and peers in which students feel they are part of the school and have a strong sense of belonging (Gottredson et al. 2005; Gregory and Schoeny 2007; Way and Rhodes 2007), where they are treated fairly and respectfully by staff and administration (Bryk and Thum 1989; Gottfredson et al. 2005), and where there is a strong sense of cohesion and camaraderie among peers. The physical, cognitive, social, and emotional environment of the school binds vulnerable populations to the school in the belief that they can achieve success. In the COSEBOC Standards tool we approach school climate as the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical atmosphere of a setting or learning environment in which the protocols established by the teachers and administrators enable boys of color to have a better school experience. The following provide sample indicators of school climate:

+ **Physical environment.** This involves considering the environmental or physical cues that can demystify for boys of color ways in which to be successful. The indicators include classroom displays of cultural diversity of populations present around the world, consistent displays of student work including rubrics on how to achieve success with each assignment, and inclusive policies and practices that consider emotional/cultural factors and the physical safety of students.

+ **Student leadership and voice.** This involves considering the extent to which boys of color feel they are provided opportunities to be heard and voice concerns and feedback to adults. While teachers and administrators may feel they offer ample opportunities to everyone, the school environment can provide unspoken social cues to boys of color that cause them to feel limited. The indicators include development of student-led groups that provide feedback to the school, providing opportunities for positive child development (e.g., field trips), and antidiscrimination policies and practices that promote student self- monitoring and support for diversity.
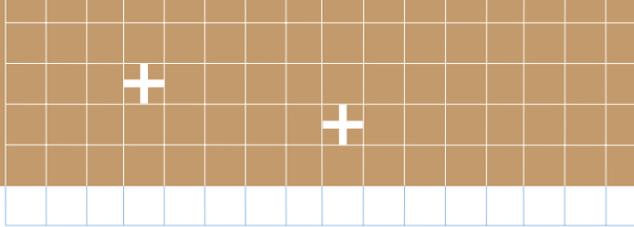
Inclusive policies and practices. This involves considering the degree to which the policies and practices governing the social, emotional, and physical environment encourage reflection/self-assessment as to whether there is sufficient inclusivity. The indicators of inclusive policies and practices include evaluation of teachers and administrators by various constituency groups (other teachers, students, colleagues, self, supervisor, etc.) with respect to inclusive practices that promote achievement and prohibit retention of lower-achieving groups without having first provided academic supports, prohibit harassment and discriminatory behaviors of any kind, address the needs and safety of adults as well as students, and promote practices and curricula that build a sense of community, a greater understanding of individual student needs and goals, and respect for and among all students.

Core Area 5: School Leadership

Enlist and guide the talents and energies of teachers, pupils, and parents toward achieving common educational aims.

Both district and school leadership provide critical bridges between most educational reform initiatives, and those reforms make a genuine difference for all students. A number of strategies have been identified to develop teachers' and administrators' leadership and professional abilities. Efforts to improve the recruitment, training, evaluation, and ongoing development of high school teachers and leaders are considered highly cost-effective approaches to successful school improvement (Leithwood et al. 2004).

In order to prepare teachers and school leaders to teach and lead to academic excellence and to build accountability into that equation, schools must offer continuous opportunities for leadership and professional development at all levels.

Principals remain key individuals as instructional leaders, initiators of change, school managers, personnel administrators, problem solvers, and boundary spanners. Effective leaders engage in ongoing opportunities for continuous growth by participating in inquiry and study groups as well as formal opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge, and create many opportunities for educators at all levels to engage in dialogue, planning, action, and reflection as a cycle of learning to improve student achievement (Shen 2001). School leaders also provide opportunities for, and participate in, groups where the challenges of instructional leadership can be solved (Fullan 2001); gain greater understanding of why, when, and how to create learning environments that support people, connect them with one another, and provide the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to succeed; and provide support for aspiring and first-year administrators to increase the probability of their success on the job (Lambert 2003). The COSEBOC Standards focus on outlining the landscape of key leadership areas that matter in creating supportive environments for boys of color.

Instructional leadership. The emphasis in this area is on strengthening the instructional and classroom management capacity of teachers to increase achievement of boys of color. Indicators include placing educational concerns of students over the management concerns of the school, strengthening teaching practices through professional development that impacts directly on classroom practice, and integrating more progressive approaches to classroom management and discipline.

Community leadership. Strengthening the school community as a whole is an important task for school leadership. It is important that each partner is confident in their role and their importance in achieving the school vision. Indicators include school leaders building the capabilities and confidence of those they lead, establishing coherent communities within schools and a sense of a responsible community beyond the school, and having the confidence to deal effectively with conflict.

Visionary leadership. This involves more long-range thinking about the goals of educating boys of color, and the strategies needed to make sustainable changes to benefit them. Indicators include taking a broad view of change that is focused on the larger picture beyond day-to-day operations, taking advantage of external opportunities to generate change and to encourage staff to innovate, and placing emphasis upon forms of leadership that are people-oriented, transformational, and empowering.

School leaders' self-awareness. School leaders ought to be intentional about exploring and affirming their knowledge and awareness about culture and race, and the vital role it plays in both educating and advocating for boys of color. Indicators include being conscious of their own cultural heritages and the values associated with those heritages, accepting and respecting cultural difference, possessing specific knowledge about the racial/ethnic groups that are represented in the school community, and being aware of the institutional barriers that hinder the educational mobility of students of color.

Core Area 6: School Counseling and Guidance

Engage school counselors at the elementary, middle, and high school levels to provide academic, career, college readiness, and personal/social competency support to all students through advocacy, leadership, systemic change, and teaming and collaborating with other stakeholders as part of a comprehensive developmental school counseling program.

As stated earlier, the school environment must take into account the social and emotional factors affecting male racial/ethnic minorities. Counselors, both guidance and social workers, can play a key role
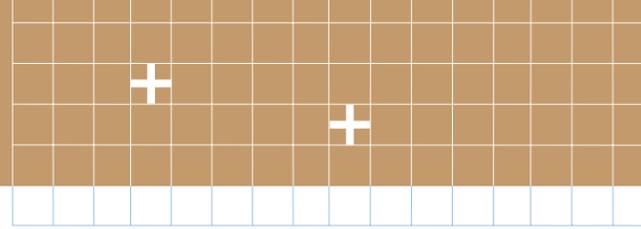
in the context of school. The range of issues that surround boys of color span the social and emotional terrain, and counselors can play a critical role in helping youth gain coping strategies. The COSEBOC Standards outline some of the key strategies of supporting the emotional development of boys of color.

+ **Academic counseling.** This involves rethinking the way in which school counseling services are typically administered, and empowering other staff in the building to see themselves as participants in the counseling process for boys of color. Some of the indicators in this area include utilizing counselor-teacher-parent-administrator teams to strategically plan challenging cases, fostering an awareness of the effect of ecological conditions surrounding boys of color, and provide the support and resources necessary to help all students meet challenging standards. Of great importance also is maintaining a student-counselor ratio that allows for students to meet with their school counselors one or more times per term.

+ **Social and health services coordinated with larger community.** Partnerships to provide greater access to needed services for boys of color and their families support learning and development, and ease the stress of families. Indicators in this area include greater coordination between schools and service agencies, revision of policies to facilitate students' access to the services they need, and regular communication about available services to the school community through presentations and one-on-one meetings.

+ **School counselors' self-awareness.** Like school leaders, school counselors must bring to their roles cultural and racial awareness, acknowledging the role such an awareness plays in meeting the needs of and advocating for boys of color. The indicators here include counselors being conscious of their own cultural heritages and values, and accepting and respecting the range of ways that students display social and cultural identities; demonstrating a willingness and ability to collaborate with other counseling personnel employed by schools and community organizations; being able to send and receive culturally sensitive verbal and nonverbal messages accurately and appropriately; and serving as interpersonal and systemic (school system) advocates, depending on the situation.

Core Area 7: School Organization

Develop a strong structural arrangement for the educational institution that includes (but is not limited to) course schedule, leadership structure, staffing arrangements, etc., to ensure a better educational experience.

Improving and reforming schools to meet the needs of boys of color requires profound changes at the community, school, and district levels, changes that can be facilitated or complicated by state and federal policies and structures. These types of improvements cannot happen without support and understanding at the state and federal level, particularly given the nature of many of the issues that schools need to address. School reform issues such as accountability systems and waivers, alignment of state standards with assessment programs, and the articulation of common-core standards-based instruction place pressures on schools that must be considered. Thus, school organization becomes a paramount focus of examination, because having accountability systems and standards does not automatically create a highly effective school. Clear visions for organization, leadership, and development are binding tools for making such educational elements operate effectively and take hold. The COSEBOC Standards take into account the following with respect to school organization:

+ **Core mission statement.** The creation and implementation of a core mission statement for schools that conveys a belief that all students, including boys of color, are valuable and can soar to their highest potential is of tremendous value. Key indicators include setting high academic and social/emotional expectations and developmental goals for every student, providing educational experiences that prepare students to be lifelong learners and participants in a global society, and providing all students with opportunities to demonstrate participatory citizenship and leadership.

+ **Alignment between high school and college preparedness.** Schools should be intentional about coursework offerings to ensure that boys of color graduate from high school prepared for collegiate courses. Some of the indicators in this area include increasing the availability of honors and Advanced Placement classes, providing options for dual (high school and college) enrollment, and enabling transition from high school to career/technology programs through joint articulation agreements.

+ **Small learning communities.** This involves rethinking the middle and high school experience, incorporating a small learning community paradigm that has been shown to provide greater educational support for boys of color. Indicators in this area include fostering high academic achievement through a variety of interventions such as academic teaming, counseling, tutoring, and extended day and week learning opportunities. In addition, there is an emphasis on increasing efforts to improve communication, coordination, and trust among the adults in the various settings where boys of color spend their time.

Engaging in the Self-Assessment Process

The self-assessment tool is designed to assist school leaders in taking manageable steps toward determining their current ability to educate boys of color effectively, and to set tangible goals for the future. The process of examining school practices is time consuming and complicated. The tool is not to be used simply as a checklist to highlight school strengths and deficiencies; nor is its use meant to burden school leaders such that their daily school responsibilities are shortchanged. To assist in this process, COSEBOC outlines the following steps:

1. Decide which core areas to examine for a given school year. Think about which areas necessitate close attention and improvement. Remember that the process of examining a core area also entails the planning, implementation, and evaluation of new practices.

2. Define the process of examination. The tool can be used by a school team made up of administrators, teachers, students, parents, and support staff, or it could involve an outside evaluator. Using a school team or an outside evaluator will still involve defining what period of time will be spent on examining the practices, planning for improvements, implementing improvements, and evaluating improvements. If a team approach is used, multiple formats for self-assessment would work, including professional-development days, committee meetings, grade- or content-level meetings, and parent meetings.

3. Identify a good facilitator for the examination process. The facilitator must be able to engage all participants, actively listen and connect ideas from multiple constituents, avoid personalizing feedback, remain nonjudgmental, and work toward achieving consensus. This process will result in a ranking of 1–4 for each quality indicator in each of the core areas being examined. To be effective, schools need to work towards achieving, at minimum, a "satisfactory" level in all of the quality indicators within each of the seven areas.

4. Develop a timeline for school improvement, prioritizing the quality indicators that the tool deems most critical to schools working with boys of color. In devising an improvement plan, begin to establish benchmarks and develop an action plan to reach those benchmarks.

5. Assess the action plan periodically during the school year to ensure that you remain on course, and make any adjustments necessary during the implementation process.

Summary of Solutions

The issue of academic achievement for boys of color, though laden with challenges, is not without solutions. By placing emphasis on the educational systems and policies, not on the boys themselves, we shift the conversation from deficiencies in the students to opportunities within the system. Both education policymakers and school leaders must play a role in reframing how boys of color are perceived and served in the education system. Even in the face of significant external barriers, school leaders have the opportunity to shape educational opportunities in a manner that overcomes barriers and meets the educational and social needs of the boys of color in their care. These changes will not come without effort and planning on the part of school leaders. But by engaging in an intentional process to identify and understand issues, with the aim of strategically implementing changes and monitoring progress, schools can provide a higher quality education to boys of color and improve academic outcomes.

To be successful in this work, COSEBOC has learned through research and its development of the Standards and Promising Practices Self-Assessment Tool that there are several key solutions that are important for school leaders:

1. Create and implement a core mission statement that expresses a belief that all students, including boys of color, are valuable and can soar to their highest potential. Ensure that this mission statement is reinforced daily in your leadership approach, and that both staff and students embrace and affirm it. This mission statement becomes the driving force for all other areas of improvement that will come.

2. Cultivate strong school staff who work together toward the common vision of achievement for boys of color. Develop and articulate a goal of high achievement for boys of color, and express to all school leaders the specific role they play in meeting that goal. Invest in professional development opportunities that will directly benefit boys of color. For example, strengthen the ability of teachers to manage their classrooms effectively, as this has a positive impact on school discipline. In addition, guide all school personnel through a process where they become more self-aware and knowledgeable about issues of race, gender, and unconscious bias, and can use that knowledge to strengthen their role as educators and advocate for boys of color.

3. Create a school environment that is safe and supportive for boys of color. The social atmosphere and learning environment should be one where boys of color have positive school interactions and experiences with both staff and peers. The physical environment should be in good condition, and the décor should reflect cultural diversity. Boys of color should have opportunities to participate in school leadership activities. School discipline should also be handled in a manner that is consistent with sound youth-development theory.
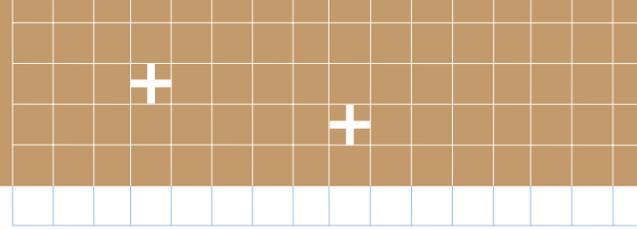
4. Be certain that the curriculum and instruction provided is sufficiently rigorous, and has both cultural and gender relevance for boys of color. Ensure that boys of color have access to course work and curriculum that assures they are prepared for post-secondary opportunities. Ensure that instruction demonstrates both cultural and gender sensitivity and relevance, such that boys of color can see themselves represented well in the material taught.

5. Organize the school in the manner that is most conducive to academic success, considering the needs of all students including boys of color. Develop a structural arrangement for the school that ensures an optimal educational experience. This may require evaluating areas such as the physical layout and location of classrooms, course schedules and offerings, the leadership structure, staffing arrangements, and class configurations.

6. Ensure appropriate and culturally sensitive academic assessment of boys of color. Identify what a student has learned, and what his academic needs may be, by observing the quality of classroom experiences, observing levels of participation in academic clubs or school activities, and analyzing data on participation of boys of color in special education, low-level courses, gifted education, and honors or higher-level courses. Develop methods to meet the academic needs of boys of color and ensure their participation in higher-level coursework.

7. Strengthen school counseling and guidance services provided to boys of color. Ensure that school counselors provide a comprehensive set of services to boys of color, including academic, career/college readiness, and personal/social competency support. Engage teachers, parents, and the students themselves in the academic goal-setting process. Partner with other organizations to provide access to supportive services for students and their families in a respectful and confidential manner.

8. Engage in meaningful partnerships with parents and caregivers to increase their participation in the educational process. Establish methods of communicating with parents that work well for them, rather than at the school's convenience. For example, consider whether parents and caregivers have reliable access to the Internet before determining that communication via computer is the best method. Initiate communication with parents before problems arise, and encourage them to raise any questions or concerns. Help parents feel like valued participants in their children's education. In addition, have parents participate in decision-making for the school and implementation of new ideas.

9. Develop partnerships with trusted community organizations to work in collaboration with the school to effectively address the needs of boys of color. Increase the school's capacity to meet the academic and social needs of students by working with community organizations that provide youth development services. Work together to build cohesion, structure supportive activities, and identify sources of funding.

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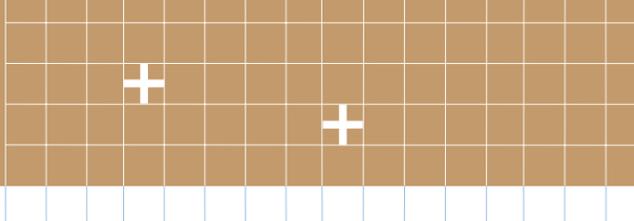
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### A Way Forward: Ready for College, Work, and Life

America's youth often experience pressures to succeed and perform, without the recognition and nurturing of the strengths and capacities they possess. For many African American male students, in particular, absent this kind of investment, adolescence is a turbulent time that can easily overwhelm them as they navigate the passage to adulthood. Predictably, youth can feel unsupported and disconnected from both adults and peers as they disengage from and disinvest in their learning and success.

For more than half a century, the National Urban League's (NUL) Education & Youth Development Division has worked to improve educational opportunities for African American students by developing innovative programs to support their academic achievement, encourage their civic involvement, and contribute to their intellectual, physical, and emotional development.

Our signature national education program, Project Ready, is designed to help the nation reach our Education Empowerment Goal: that every American child is ready for college, work, and life by 2025. Project Ready develops an individual student's knowledge and attitude toward, and capacity for, post-secondary success via strong local partnerships and an emphasis on positive youth development and out-of-school time (OST). Our model brings together research and promising practices in youth development, adolescent literacy, OST learning, and readiness, within the tradition and legacy of the Urban League Movement.

The NUL has more than one hundred years of experience providing education and workforce-development services through our network of ninety-eight affiliates in thirty-six states and the District of Columbia. Throughout its history the NUL has been committed to the belief that educational opportunity is the most significant means and lever for communities of color and underserved communities to empower themselves and their families. Most critically, we believe that the focus should remain squarely on the readiness of youth and young adults to succeed after high school. For the NUL, readiness is best defined as the ability to enter the first year of higher education or a career without the need for remediation. Delivering outcomes such as these for African American males and other vulnerable students will require additional investments in human, fiscal, capital, and content resources, as well as a commitment to provide each student with the opportunity and access necessary to achieve at the highest levels.

The Opportunity Before Us

Current research suggests that expanded-opportunity programs and supports can have positive impacts on achievement in both reading and math for participants, even absent a sole focus on academic achievement to attain those results (see, e.g., Durlak and Weissberg 2007). Furthermore, it is possibly the breadth of opportunity and supports that provides maximum benefits for young people in raising achievement levels, rather than a singular approach focused on one aspect of development (academics) to the detriment of others. As experts such as Karen Pittman of the Forum for Youth Investment rightly suggest, "problem-free" does not mean "fully prepared" or "fully engaged" youth (Pittman 1992). In order to grow into healthy, responsible adults, youth require a range of developmentally appropriate supports, services, and opportunities, only some of which are provided in schools.

In different ways and to varying degrees, progress has been made in diminishing the educational and opportunity gaps our students face. Educators have been engaged in multiple activities that have been shown to work, and in some cases work well. However incomplete our understanding and perspective about these approaches, it is becoming increasingly clear that given the right interventions and investments, there are things we can do, there are questions we can answer, and there are young people who can benefit.

However, more than fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, nearly half of our nation's African American students, and nearly 40 percent of Latino students, attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm. More than one million youth annually leave the school system prior to—or during—high school; every nine seconds, a child drops out of school (American Youth Policy Forum 2006). The failure to graduate has long-lasting individual, community, and national consequences. Dropouts from the class of 2008 alone will cost the United States almost $319 billion in lost wages over the students' lifetimes.

By almost any measure, including high school graduation, employment, and involvement in the juvenile justice system, African American and Latino youth are failing to thrive and are at substantially elevated risk for social and economic failure compared to their white counterparts. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 73 percent of all American high school students graduated on time, while only 55 percent of African Americans and 53 percent of Hispanics did the same (Stillwell and Hoffman 2009). Not surprisingly, low levels of educational attainment are also reflected in unemployment. Currently, the national unemployment rate is 8.3 percent, but for African Americans ages sixteen to nineteen, the unemployment rate is 39 percent, not including "discouraged workers" who have abandoned looking for work. The long-term impact on work and earnings due to dropping out is also grim.

Before the current economic turmoil began, the unemployment rate for high school dropouts was 26.9 percent versus just 9.8 percent among those who graduated from high school and were enrolled in college. High school dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to be in poor health, live in poverty, be on public assistance, and be single parents. High school dropouts earn $9,200 per year less than high school graduates, and more than $1 million less over a lifetime than college graduates. Dropping out is strongly correlated to involvement in the criminal justice system, with dropouts incarcerated at more than eight times the rate of high school graduates. A recent College Board literature review finds that generally men of color outpace their female counterparts in a number of negative post-secondary outcomes including unemployment, incarceration, and death (Lee and Ransom 2011). Research shows that 10 percent of African American males, 3 percent of Asian American males, 5 percent of Hispanic males, and 3 percent of Native American males are currently incarcerated.

Most distressingly, unemployment is the most likely destination for those African American and Hispanic males who do not end up either dead or incarcerated. Data shows that more than 51 percent of Hispanic males, 45 percent of African American males, 42 percent of Native American males, and 33 percent of Asian American males ages fifteen to twenty-four will end up unemployed, incarcerated, or dead. It has become an epidemic, and one that we must solve by resolving the educational crisis facing young men of color (Lee and Ransom 2011).

According to a September 2009 report from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the US Department of Education, more than one out of four public high school students in the class of 2005–6 did not graduate "on time" (in four years). Another IES report, released in June 2010, similarly sets the figure for students who did not graduate on time at 25 percent for the class of 2008 (Stillwell 2010). Unless this pattern is altered, one million students that entered the ninth grade in the fall of 2010 in public high schools in the United States will fail to graduate high school in the spring of 2014.

Even for those who persist to high school graduation and go on to college, there are distressing signs that approaches that worked for them may not be available at sufficient scale or distributed equitably. Participants in the National Black Male Achievement study (Harper 2012), specifically designed to track early schooling experiences, cited at least one influential teacher who helped solidify their interest in going to college. Several participants shared that in their cases a few educators went beyond typical teaching duties to ensure these young men had the information, resources, and support necessary to succeed in school. Noteworthy, however, is that some Black male students felt that these same teachers failed to support other African American male students in comparable ways. Many participants perceived teachers (especially White women) as incapable of engaging meaningfully with more than one or a few Black male students at a time—only these teachers' favorites received such attention. Most considered themselves among the lucky few to have had teachers who, for some reason, thought they were worth the investment (Lee and Ransom 2011, p. 60).
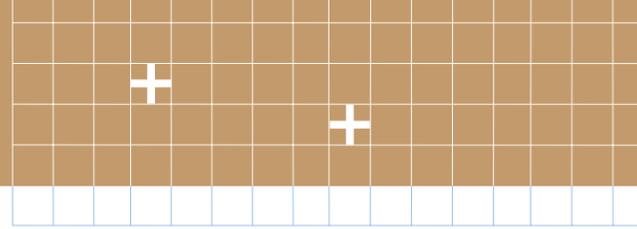
Over the past thirty-plus years, African American men have steadily represented only 5 percent of all undergraduates in the United States, with little positive change in trajectory or progress. Similarly, African American males represent 3 percent of all graduate students in higher education today; this is also unchanged from 1976. All progress made in the number and percentage of African Americans attending college has been made by African American women. In addition to a skills gap among urban young people, "Black women are still enrolling and graduating from college at nearly double the rate of Black men; a disparity that does not exist among any other minority group" (US Department of Education 2002). This gender gap in college enrollment and completion will greatly impact our communities in the decades to come.

Put simply, African American male student success—the success of any student—should not be a matter of chance and the extraordinary efforts of solitary teachers, no matter how well intentioned. What is required are systemic approaches and investments that have demonstrable benefits for all African American male students. Fortunately, a growing body of evidence and emerging set of promising practices suggest that it is possible for youth, even those from historically underresourced and underserved schools, to find the path toward education and socioeconomic development and success via just such equitable, systemic approaches.

An Alternative Narrative of Opportunity, Possibility, and Success

Fundamentally, the Urban League Movement believes in the importance of education as an empowering force in the lives of individuals and communities. However, we believe that too many people confuse what an education (teaching and learning wherever it takes place) can do with what schools (teaching and learning in a school building during school hours) can do. Schools in and of themselves were not designed to, are not adequately funded to, and cannot accomplish all of the educational outcomes necessary for student success.

In the Urban League's framing, an education system implies connections not just between the larger community and schools, but between the various members of the community (including schools) and other members. Rather than a wheel, with schools as the hub, it is best described as a web, with connections and relationships that relate to the center without all contacts running directly through the center. More than a semantic shift, the creation of a system that is inclusive of schools but moves beyond in-school learning ultimately means forging new relationships, building a multiplicity of connections, and developing new capacities to collaborate, in order to expand educational and developmental opportunities for all students.

One component of such an education system has been identified as high-quality out-of-school time (OST) programming, provided by a professional team of OST educators. Providing youth with additional productive exposure to an array of learning and developmental opportunities, knowledgeable adults outside their families, and motivated peers can result in very different levels of student development and achievement (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2001). In fact, research demonstrates that a substantial percentage of achievement and academic success for high-income students can be explained by their increased access to educational opportunities in non-school settings.

Youth-development and OST research convincingly demonstrates that the activities young people engage in outside regular school hours (after school, summer learning opportunities, Saturday academies, etc.) have important developmental consequences. Unsupervised time puts youth at risk for academic and behavior problems, drug use, dropping out of school, and many other detrimental activities and behaviors; most importantly, unsupervised time deprives them of critical learning and developmental opportunities (Gordon, Bridglall, and Meroe 2004).

Conversely, young people benefit when they spend time engaged in structured activities that offer opportunities for positive interactions with adults and peers, encourage them to contribute and take initiative, build fresh capacities, and participate in challenging and engaging tasks that allow them to develop and apply new skills and competencies.

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that it is possible for youth, even highly vulnerable youth like African American male students, to find the path toward educational growth and success. Recent research and practice strongly suggest that in order to significantly address the findings described above, multidimensional, asset-building approaches are required.

Many of these resources are available to those who know about them, can access them, and can advocate for additional resources. However, this knowledge and opportunity is unevenly distributed across families and communities, resulting in an opportunity gap that accelerates achievement gaps. Furthermore, an ill-conceived or low quality OST system could reinforce and amplify inequity, rather than expanding the prospects of historically underserved and underperforming students such as African American males. On the other hand, high-quality learning and developmental systems of opportunities create additional learning and developmental spaces where young people can experience success and opportunity.

A careful examination of OST programs and supports nationally could help clarify the association between opportunity, supports, and achievement for African American males. While there has been a great deal of focus over the past two decades on addressing the achievement gap, with limited impact and success (DeShano da Silva et al. 2007), it is increasingly important to frame and understand how critical these out-of-school and expanded-learning opportunities are to student success.

Providing youth with productive exposure to an array of learning and developmental opportunities,
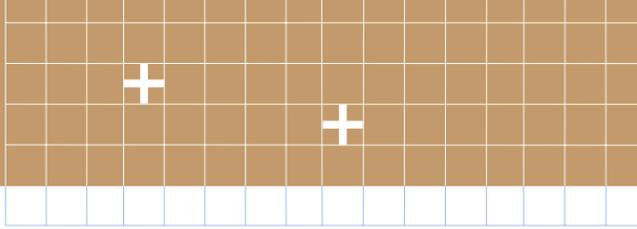
knowledgeable adults outside their families, and motivated peers can result in very different levels of student development and achievement. Youth success is often wrongly attributed chiefly to school-based factors, when in fact it is their exposure to an array of education and developmental opportunities that causes differentiated achievement. In order to grow into responsible adults, youth require a range of appropriate supports, services, and opportunities, only some of which exist in their communities and home lives. These opportunities and supports can exist in a mentor relationship, in a community-based program, or in an internship. For the majority of African American males and other vulnerable populations, the location of meaningful relationships and opportunities matters far less than their sustained presence and their quality. The hallmark of prevention and youth-development strategies is a focus on nurturing strengths, capacities, and assets, and on programming that helps young people acquire skills that promote a sense of accomplishment and self-worth and allow them to excel and contribute to their communities in substantive ways.

Out-of-school-time providers and experts are increasingly relying on a set of practices collectively known as positive youth development (PYD), which seek to build on the existing assets of youth and supplement those assets with relationships and programs that support healthy development. A report by the Pew Charitable Trusts (Fry 2003) found that effective PYD programs share a number of common characteristics, including: physical and psychological structure and safety, opportunities to belong, skillbuilding opportunities, and connections to out-of-school-time programs and supportive relationships, particularly with responsible adults.

Despite the dismal school-completion statistics, data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (Yazzie-Mintz 2010) tell a compelling story about student aspirations. From 2006 to 2010, more than 350,000 students from high schools in forty-two states completed the survey. Of these students (n=352,140), only 3 percent expected that they would not finish high school. While 8 percent did not know how far they wanted to go in their schooling, 89 percent expected to leave high school with a diploma and 80 percent expected to attain some form of post-secondary degree. Though the dropout problem dominates policy discussions, students' aspirations and expectations for their own schooling and attainment are often overlooked. Assisting students in making the leap from aspirations to actuality is a challenge of policy and programming.

Positive developmental and learning opportunities are best developed where the youth/adult relationships are based on the youth's assets and interests rather than focusing on existing or perceived deficiencies. Similarly, young people benefit when they spend time engaged in structured activities that offer opportunities for positive interactions with adults and peers, encourage them to contribute and take initiative, and contain challenging and engaging tasks that allow them to develop and apply new skills and personal talents.

In addition to exposure to high-quality school-based and OST learning opportunities during the academic year, families and communities must make specific and significant additional investments in learning environments and opportunities during the summer in order to drive success for African American males. Differences in summer learning opportunities and supports during the foundational pre-K to sixth grade school years help explain aspects of the achievement gap in the middle grades and high school. Young people from low-income backgrounds specifically lag behind their more affluent peers, perpetuating family advantage and disadvantage across generations through differential access to summer learning and developmental opportunities (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2007).

Again, in order to produce the desired impacts (improved outcomes, engagement in learning, post-secondary success, etc.), summer learning need not equate with "summer school." Significant and durable academic and intellectual gains are probable even when those gains are not the primary focus of a high-quality learning and developmental opportunity.

In an effort to develop a comprehensive set of supports, the National Urban League designed our signature education program, Project Ready, in order to expose urban youth to diverse, asset-based educational, developmental, and career opportunities with increasing degrees of complexity, responsibility, and skill acquisition.

Project Ready: An Overview

Project Ready is a signature program of the National Urban League, meaning that it is innovative, scalable, evidence-based, demonstrably enhances a participant's economic or educational status, and can be easily replicated and expanded. The goal of all Urban League signature programs, beyond better outcomes for individuals and families as well as the larger urban communities in which they live, is to replicate innovation, improved standards, and additional accountability throughout the affiliate movement. The Project Ready theory of change illustrates how the various program elements fit together to accomplish the goal of building a "ready for success" identity in youth to enable them to thrive and prosper in the twenty-first century—in college, work, and life. Project Ready is specifically designed to provide high-quality experiences that encourage children and youth to aim for success.

Our theory of change is based on assumptions that are holistic, asset-based, and ecological. By *holistic*, we mean that the theory specifically includes the intellectual, social/emotional, and physical development of children and youth. An *asset-based* (or developmental) approach focuses on building competencies in young people so that they will be prepared for the challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities of adulthood; this approach differs from one that too often emphasizes youth deficits and casts African American male students as fundamentally broken. An *ecological* view acknowledges that an individual
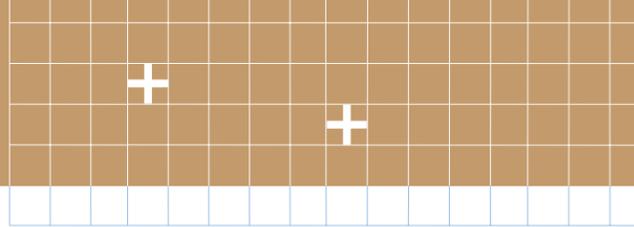
develops within a context of interacting environmental systems.[1] Simply put, an individual's development is influenced by his or her immediate environment (such as family, school, peers, and neighborhood), which is embedded within larger social, cultural, economic, and political systems. These systems interact with each other and are influenced by changes over time—from individual growth to changes in life circumstances, such as changes in a family's income or housing situation or citizenship status.

While we recognize that participation in a program cannot, by itself, override the many direct and indirect influences on a child living in disadvantaged circumstances, the Urban League Movement strives to tilt the trajectory toward success, through high-quality programmatic approaches steeped in positive youth-development principles, research-based curricula, asset-focused pedagogy, high expectations, deep engagement, intentional planning, competent staff, timely evaluation of impacts and outcomes, and robust community partnerships.

Launched in the fall of 2006, the National Urban League's original Project Ready College Access Curriculum provided a comprehensive approach to addressing the academic and personal needs of young people as they prepared themselves for a variety of higher education settings (four-year college, community college, technical and professional schools that provide market-ready credentials, etc.). Traditional college-access programs tend to place greater emphasis on academic skill-building, often at the expense of other equally important concerns such as students' personal and social maturity and readiness for college (Anderson 2006 and 2011). Since creating the original Project Ready model, the NUL has learned that a key strength of the approach is its focus on building the diverse academic and social assets of urban youth, its inherent flexibility, which encourages local innovation and customization, and its ability to serve an affiliate's larger goals of positive impacts on family and community. Affiliates that have successfully adopted Project Ready implement one of the following models:

+ **Magnet Model:** an organizational model supporting students during out-of-school time at a site other than a school (affiliate offices, college/university, etc.) typically serving the target population drawn from multiple schools or school districts.

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1. Introduced by psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979, these interacting "nested structures" include a microsystem directly interacting with the child (such as family, peers, school, childcare workers, etc.), a mesosystem (linkages between two or more settings that directly affect the individual, for example, parents and teachers, school and peers), the exosystem (linkages between two or more settings that indirectly affect the individual, such as extended family networks, parental work situations, social welfare agencies, or neighborhoods), macrosystems (overarching influences of the previous systems, such as cultural practices and values, economics, opportunity structures, hazards, etc. that are embedded in the broader systems), and chronosystems (the changes that occur within individuals and the larger systems over time).

+ **School-Based Model:** an organizational model supporting students during out-of-school time at a single school or school campus.

+ **Expanded Day or Year Model:** an organizational model featuring additional learning and developmental time added to a school day. The additional educational time is provided by the local Urban League affiliate during the school day and during out-of-school time via an explicit partnership with school administration and faculty.

While many college-preparation programs place great emphasis on academic skill building for college, often at the expense of other equally important concerns such as students' personal and social maturity for college, as a post-secondary success program Project Ready specifically integrates academic preparation with life-skills development and personal, global, and cultural awareness.

In 2011 the National Urban League expanded the Project Ready curriculum into a "2.0 version" in order to support middle and high school students and refocus our aim on post-secondary success and readiness. The updated program model creates additional supports in order to maximize the impact of the intervention through a clear focus on youth readiness for college, work, and life after high school. Students are expected to make measurable academic progress, benefit from cultural-enrichment opportunities, and develop important skills, attitudes, and aptitudes.

Project Ready's three targeted groups align with the Urban League's historical focus. The *primary group* is African American and other children and youth in urban communities. Urban youth in historically underserved and underresourced communities can be particularly vulnerable to an educational system that does not adequately prepare them for academic success. The Project Ready curriculum, sustained literacy resources, and a comprehensive approach focused on summer learning opportunities and local approaches and program designs support youth as they persist to graduation and begin their careers.

The *secondary group* is parents and families of urban children and youth. The National Urban League is very clear that parents can be effective "first teachers" of their children and can be similarly effective in maintaining educational growth with the proper resources and engagement. Engaging parents in a meaningful and systemic manner allows for them to support and even accelerate children's learning both before children enter formal settings and throughout the pre-K through college school years. This is especially true in the middle and high school years when many parents reduce their interaction with schools and are not as actively engaged in their child's development as they were in the early and elementary school years.

The *tertiary group* consists of community leaders, elementary school teachers, youth-serving organizations, childcare providers, policymakers, advocates, corporations, and foundations that support African
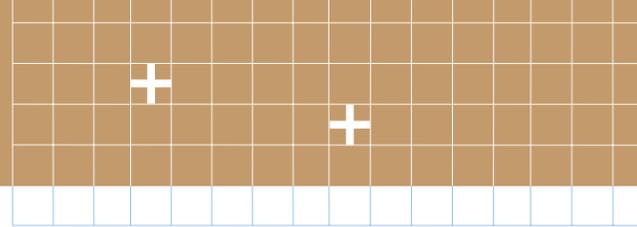
American and urban student success. These entities are most fully invested in, and informed about, the issue, and will incorporate information and perspective into their practice, policy, advocacy, and community-building work. Improved student literacy skills, capacities, aptitudes, and competencies will hopefully result in additional investments in children and the institutions that serve them, both locally and nationally.

Project Ready posits a number of inputs as critical to meaningful out-of-school-time learning and developmental time, including hiring and supporting a professional staff of OST educators, providing high-quality content, ongoing capacity building, clear accountability, and established program standards, but four additional elements stand out when the programs specifically support African American males: effective partnerships, successful transitions, individualized support, and sustained engagement.

Effective Partnerships

As we implement and continue to develop Project Ready, the National Urban League seeks to provide a set of resources and content that allows affiliates to partner more effectively with schools and families to improve educational outcomes for urban youth. The larger concept of partnering in OST to deliver improved outcomes for African American males holds great and specific potential because it focuses on achievement and readiness issues holistically, rather than in a piecemeal fashion. Furthermore, rather than explicit alignment with the school day, Project Ready instead seeks coherence with the school day so that the approaches are reinforcing, not repetitive.

Valuable education partnerships are constructed through, and maintained by, high-functioning collaborative relationships and structures that build the capacity to engage, partner, and innovate. Developing effective education partnerships requires creating a new covenant between communities and their schools, which is explicitly tied to the creation of an education system that includes, but extends beyond, schools. Meaningful partnerships ultimately require forging new relationships, building a multiplicity of connections, and developing new capacities to collaborate, all tied to a vision of successful outcomes for children and youth (Smith 2009).

Reform and innovation efforts in education or youth development too often consist of little more than loose civic associations with competing ideologies and cross purposes that quickly deteriorate into dysfunctional programs and policies. Such efforts fail to recognize the interrelatedness of the issues they attempt to address, and can provide an incomplete and constrained understanding of the problems they are designed to remedy. Isolated approaches severely limit what can be understood and thereby what can be accomplished. Meaningful and substantive partnerships encourage constituencies to engage in cooperative planning, implementation, and support of African American children and youth as both an institutionalized practice and a shared responsibility.

Despite the potential for partnerships to better provide young people with opportunity and support, with increasing intensity and frequency, blame—directed primarily at teachers, schools, and parents—has replaced a sense of collective responsibility at the heart of community/school relationships. Accountability has largely been reduced to test scores rather than the larger sense that somehow everyone has a stake in the success of children and youth. Complicating relationships and the development of a shared vision for better serving and supporting African American males are legacies of race, income, and gender-based inequities that inhibit opportunity and power differentials (individual and institutional) and preconceptions around capacity, skills, and appropriate roles.

Theoretically, widespread school-reform efforts and investments in urban areas over the past decade have cultivated a fertile landscape for active community participation at various levels of the school system. In response, many school systems have begun to turn away from the traditional paradigm of soliciting community stakeholder feedback on decisions that have already been made, and instead ask community members for input and perspective on emergent decisions. Implicit in the idea of education partnerships is the idea that they should be as impossible to imagine without the full participation of community partners in their shaping and implementation, as it would be to imagine an education reform absent the full participation of principals and teachers.

Effective education partnerships such as those at the heart of local high-quality implementations of Project Ready demonstrate that community-based organizations such as Urban League affiliates can be leaders as well as great partners in educational content development, service delivery, innovation, and reform. As a required part of each local program, Urban League affiliates engage a number of partners including schools, museums, private industry, volunteer organizations, and institutions of higher education. While each partnership is unique in multiple ways, they provide an important blueprint upon which other partnerships can develop. Education relationships are not simple to build or maintain, but they clearly represent a means to deliver opportunity and improved outcomes in ways not possible for a single institution, such as an individual school or school system, to accomplish.

Additionally, the perspectives of and data from other child- and youth-serving sectors holds great potential for education partnerships in bringing helpful resources, tools, and practices to bear. Increasing the graduation rate should not only be measurable in school achievement data but seen as correlating with such factors as a decrease in risky behaviors among teens, improved feelings of youth connectedness and engagement, the rise in the teen employment rate in the city, and the ability to retain and attract businesses and industry. Successful partnerships perhaps translate best as increases in issue ownership, additional traction for reform, and the development of collective efficacy, or the belief in the ability that outcomes for African American students and other vulnerable students can improve through better relationships, shared visions of success, and, most importantly, shared work (Smith 2005).
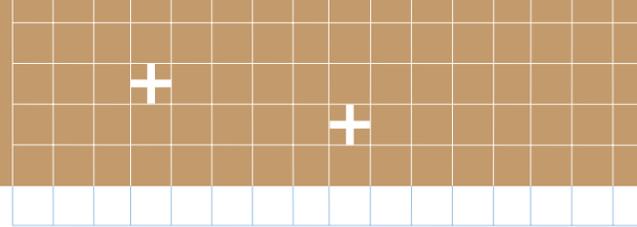
Successful Transitions

Ideally, community-based opportunities and other OST programs should prepare youth with an explicit focus on readiness, persistence, and success beyond high school. In Project Ready, the National Urban League argues that academic success in high school and beyond requires the creation of robust supports and opportunities at the pre-K, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to postsecondary transition points in order to positively impact the dropout and achievement gaps. Rather than focusing on the achievement, opportunity, and graduation gaps as an African American male phenomenon that emerges primarily in high school, research suggests it is much more productive to concentrate investments at a much earlier time in students' development, in order to prevent or at least slow the gap nearer to its inception point.

At each transition point along the pre-K through college pathway, children and youth can fall behind and become disconnected from schools as they struggle to adapt to changed expectations, supports, and learning environments. Most high school dropouts do not simply fall behind in the ninth grade; rather, they enter high school not fully prepared to thrive and graduate. What do we know about the kinds of experiences and measures that are predictive of dropouts prior to high school, when the learning gaps are far smaller and far more manageable?

A 2006 Philadelphia study found that there are four powerful factors (both individually and in combination) that can predict which sixth graders will ultimately fall behind and off-track: attending school 80 percent or less of the time; receiving a poor final behavior mark; failing math; and failing English. A sixth grader with any of the four indicators has only a 10 to 20 percent chance of graduating with his/her peers. Researchers have begun to label these students "early dropouts" (Balfanz and Herzog 2006). Current research also shows that achievement levels attained by eighth grade are more determinative of readiness for post-secondary success than anything that happens academically in high school (ACT 2008).

In response, the National Urban League has developed a comprehensive, research-driven education and youth development approach focused on supporting successful transitions for urban youth. The Project Ready approach focuses on smoothing transitions from one developmental state to another and as such is critically important at the middle and high school ages. Adolescence is a time when African American males struggle with developmental changes on several fronts. At this stage of life, youth have a special need for challenging activities and supportive programs to promote their positive development and foster the problem-solving and critical thinking skills that help them stay on track and excel (Balfanz and Herzog 2006; NYC Coalition for Educational Justice 2007).

While retention in any earlier grade decreases a student's odds of making it through the ninth grade, retention in the middle grades is particularly problematic and has been shown to be a contributing factor in a student's dropping out later in their academic career (Balfanz, Herzog, and Iver 2007). Students must successfully navigate a myriad of physical, emotional, and intellectual changes as they enter adolescence. In order to be successful, they require intentionally structured opportunities designed to improve educational outcomes, and developing such interventions is the central focus of the Project Ready approach.

Many of the positive effects of youth-development programs are well-documented statistically, yet youth in grades seven to twelve are less likely to participate in any type of afterschool program compared to younger children. For many middle- and high-school students, low participation in out-of-school programs is the norm (Lauver, Little, Weiss 2004; Little and Lauver 2005), and providers often struggle to engage older youth in their programs (Hall, Israel, and Shortt 2004). Yet it appears that high-quality programs such as Project Ready that allow youth to build real-life skills may have greater appeal for teenagers and the potential to draw in youth who would not otherwise participate in any college-readiness program.

Individualized Support

Project Ready students engage in activities that require them to take a look at themselves and "take stock" of their skills and abilities. These exercises are used to build a foundation to help students identify their aspirations and set specific goals. More specifically, student progress and success are guided by an Individual College/Career Development Plan (ICDP), a set of explicit, personalized student outcomes for achievement and success. While the ICDP is initially administered at intake, a student's progress through Project Ready is closely monitored by affiliate staff during the program year via the ICDP.

In that way, the ICDP remains a critical component of our approach, and provides each student with a clear, incremental, and understandable plan of action and mentoring to help ensure they succeed. The components of Project Ready are grouped into benchmarks that are similar to "units" in other types of in-school curricula. Benchmarks represent "stages" or "milestones" individual students should reach in the program and those which are necessary to facilitate their success after high school. In the enhanced Project Ready 2.0, each component is broken into approximately twenty benchmarks (except the Academic Achievement component, which has only one benchmark each for reading/vocabulary, math, and writing).

As a matter of course, Project Ready participants are introduced to an array of content, tools, approaches, and resources necessary to achieve their goals and the goals of the program. Students are led through the process of discovering their "success tools," which include workshops and programs that focus on (1) strong decision-making skills; (2) positive work and study habits; and (3) understanding time management. Each benchmark includes a series of lessons, activities, and assessments that are
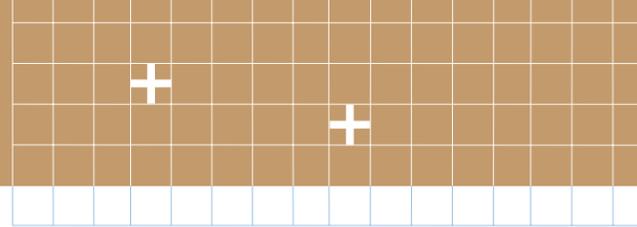
aligned with the Project Ready curriculum outcomes, detailed steps for a teacher/facilitator, and can be modified or rearranged to be completed in one session or over several sessions depending on student interest and progress. Further, given the developmentally appropriate activities, the benchmark system can be spread over four academic years, if benchmarks are done concurrently.

Sustained Engagement

Studies of out-of-school-time programs have consistently shown that participation for at least two years is positively correlated with positive outcomes, and that the longer participants remain in the program, the greater the impact (Chaput, Little, and Weiss 2004). As a result, Project Ready has been designed to serve students for multiple years via the inclusion of a number of local customizations and via nationally designed enhancements. To date, the National Urban League enhancements have included a STEM-focused curriculum (emphasizing science, technology, engineering, and math), a service-learning curriculum, a middle-school demonstration project, the development of content and supports specifically designed to combat summer learning loss, a multistate mentoring enhancement funded by the Department of Justice, a digital literacy program funded by the Department of Commerce, and piloting the use of literacy coaches to drive improved academic outcomes.

As a result of their participation in our programs, the Urban League expects that the more than seventeen hundred students currently enrolled in Project Ready, nationally, will achieve academic progress, benefit from cultural-enrichment opportunities, and develop the critical skills, attitudes, and aptitudes necessary for post-secondary success.

Our framework intentionally links research and "leading edge" practices on youth development, adolescent literacy, out-of-school-time learning, and student success and readiness with the tradition and legacy of the Urban League in the delivery of better outcomes for African American males across the nation.

Communities in Action

Provided here are overviews of local approaches to serving African American males in three Urban League communities: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Rochester, New York; and Chicago, Illinois.

Pittsburgh

According to data compiled by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, fourteen thousand African Americans between the ages of fourteen and eighteen live in Allegheny County, the service area of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh (ULGP). Only 22 percent are believed to reside in two-parent households, while 75 percent are estimated to live in a female-headed household, many of which are also low-income.

As a result, many African American males in Pittsburgh are raised in impoverished families without a male presence.

Statistics also show that more than 80 percent of African American tenth graders score in the bottom half of statewide Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) reading and math tests, with African American males performing worse than their female counterparts. Even among students attending college, African American males have the lowest graduation rate of any racial/gender group (Education Trust 2007).

In greater Pittsburgh, the employment rate of sixteen- to twenty-four-year-old African American males is 30 percent below that of comparable rates for Whites and Latinos. African American males are nearly seven times more likely to be incarcerated, nine times more likely to die from homicide, and nearly seven times more likely to suffer from AIDS than their white counterparts (National Urban League 2007). In light of these statistics and as a part of its historic mission, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh created a leadership program devoted to helping young African American males take advantage of educational opportunities, become productive citizens, and achieve their full potential.

Each year, the Black Male Leadership Development Institute (BMLDI) enrolls seventy-five African American male students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds entering ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grades from Allegheny County. Since it was launched in 2006, the program has served more than four hundred students. The BMLDI, cosponsored by the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and Robert Morris University (RMU), consists of a week-long summer residential program on the RMU campus, and a year-long series of Saturday Institutes and Saturday luncheons. In addition, administrators from area partner schools provide access to their school facilities, teachers and counselors, as well as students as a part of program recruitment and engagement. The program is viewed as a success by partners and, in the words of Dr. Rex Crawley, Associate Dean of Communications at the university, "provides Robert Morris University the opportunity to sow into the lives of African American high school students essential skills to help them develop not just into manhood but into productive members of society."

School partners provide sustained access to youth during the school day in order to provide additional support to the students in their educational pursuits, collaborate in order to create additional high-quality expanded-learning opportunities, and participate in larger collaborative groups intentionally focused on building the educational and developmental assets of African American males.

Other partners include notable African American male leaders in the Pittsburgh community, fraternities, and African American educators who serve as speakers, sponsors, hosts, and mentors. Esther Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, believes that effective partnerships are
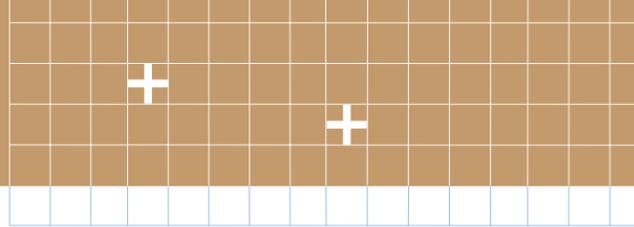
critical to their approach and more importantly to addressing the issue across Pittsburgh. "'It takes a village to raise a child' is an ancient West African proverb. The Black Male Leadership Development Institute is an outgrowth of this community-centered tradition, which the Urban League seeks to reinvigorate."

Developmental outcomes include enabling participants to internalize and demonstrate the desired behavioral changes that the BMLDI program seeks. Evidence of this type of change is shown in their ability to go beyond the simple recitation and itemization of leadership skills that they have learned, and instead define themselves as leaders via their service to the community and their ability to prepare themselves for the challenges of high school, college, and the world of work.

While it may be a bit early to say that all of the changes evidenced thus far have been completely internalized by participants, the program has produced evidence that positive changes in the participants' behaviors, aptitudes, attitudes, and performance are sustained over the time period that they are actively involved in the program. Participants have cited how the program has helped them to "stay on the straight path, and not focus on anything but what I should be focused on." In general, the young men report that the program has improved their readiness, expanded their thinking about their future and the options available to them, and meaningfully provided a set of pathways for attaining success during and after high school.

The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh is eager to expand its program and develop a similar approach for African American females, similarly based on building their educational and developmental assets. In furtherance of their work in the community, the ULGP is a leader in the African American Achievement Trust and has also launched the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh Charter School, serving 230 K–fifth-grade students from across the city. The ULGP is motivated to continue to innovate and improve through a commitment to serving African American males and all of their students by way of seeking out the best possible content, learning and developmental opportunities, partnerships, and enhanced options as a part of their guiding philosophy and ongoing practice.

Rochester

The Urban League of Rochester's long-standing high-school-to-college transition program is the Salute to Black Scholars program. The program was founded in 1980 to identify and encourage academic achievement among African American high school students in the Rochester area. It provides recognition, assistance, and incentives to high school students who, by their senior year, have achieved a B or better average for seven consecutive semesters.

In 1980, when the first group of Black Scholars graduated, 56 African American students were eligible for recognition. Since that time, more than 7,700 students have been designated as Black Scholars, and the number increases with every graduating class. In 2011, there were 323 Black Scholars from forty-six high schools in the greater Rochester area.

The Early Recognition component of the program was founded in 1985, and works with youth in grades nine to eleven to encourage them to aspire to become Black Scholars by their senior year. The Early Recognition component has recruited over 28,000 students to date. In November 2011, ULR recognized 1,065 students from fifty-nine schools as Early Recognition schools.

In June of each year, the program organizes and sponsors a Recognition Banquet at the local convention center, where scholars are presented with personalized plaques commemorating their academic achievement. In addition, organizations, businesses, corporations, churches, sororities, fraternities, and others announce their scholarship winners. In 2005, approximately $4.2 million in scholarships were awarded to the Black Scholars by forty-four organizations, a high point for the program. The annual culminating event is attended by well over five hundred students, parents, and other family members, teachers, and individuals instrumental to the success of the participants. In the week before the banquet, the local newspaper features all students who have earned designation as Black Scholars.

The most successful area of accomplishment in the implementation of the ULR Black Scholars program is in assisting students as they prepare for college. Over 80 percent of Black Scholars enroll in college in the fall following their high school graduation. The Black Scholars program provides students and their families with opportunities to learn about preparing for college through workshops such as The Real Deal About Going to College, which covers all of the steps involved in applying for college. The Black Scholars college fair, financial aid workshops, and information on scholarships also help prepare college-bound students and their families.

The Black Scholars program also helps low-income students stay in college through the Black Scholars Endowment Fund. In the late 1980s a group of local Black business owners, along with leaders from other business and social organizations, established this fund specifically to enable Black college students from the Rochester area to remain in college when all other sources of financial assistance have been exhausted. The fund is administered in conjunction with the program and complements existing established scholarships that are awarded annually to students. The endowment fund currently stands at over $1.4 million.

Building on the success of the Black Scholars program, in 2006 ULR launched a Project Ready program for African American male high school students in grades eight to twelve. The students participating in ULR's program show potential to successfully complete high school and enroll in college but also demonstrate the need for a range of supports in order to ensure that they stay on track academically and take the appropriate steps necessary to gain admittance to college. The program operates according to
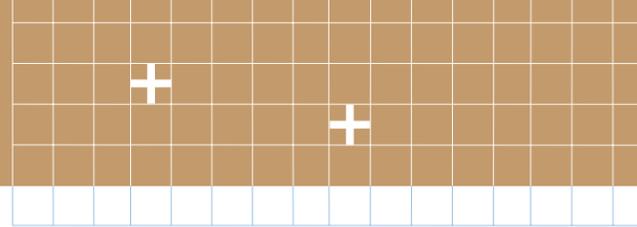
the Project Ready magnet model, providing program activities after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer.

The need for a Project Ready program was evidenced by the fact that the Rochester City Schools struggle with high dropout rates, low rates of student achievement, and low graduation rates. The substantial dropout rate in the Rochester schools meant that a significant number of youth were unprepared for college, work, and life. According to Rochester City School District records, 1,122 students left high school in the 2009–10 school year. The majority of these students (1,097, or 98 percent) dropped out of school, while only 25 (2 percent) left school to enter an approved high-school equivalency preparation program. Only 51 percent of Rochester students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 2006 graduated four years later in August 2010 (New York State Department of Education 2011). Alarmingly low rates of achievement in Rochester City School District (RCSD) schools mean that even students who graduate are not likely to be prepared for work or college. In the 2010–11 school year, only 20 percent of eight graders met state standards for achievement in math, and only 17 percent met state standards for English Language Arts (New York State Department of Education 2011). The lack of achievement experienced by RCSD students is even greater for African American males. Just one-third of black male students in the Rochester School District finished high school during the 2007–8 school year (the most recent year this data was available), the seventeenth-lowest rate of the nation's fifty-nine largest school systems. About 44 percent of their white male classmates finished. (*Democrat and Chronicle* 2011).

Since its launch in Rochester, Project Ready has worked with approximately thirty young men annually, helping them excel in their academic work and focus on their goal of going to college. Overall, the youth served by the program have improved their academic skills and experienced success in high school, and those who have graduated have enrolled in college. Through participation in the program these young men realize the importance of good attendance at school and devotion to improving their academic grade point average while taking rigorous classes that prepare them for college.

ULR's extensive community linkages make it possible to draw upon the expertise of a wide range of individuals, organizations, and businesses to provide workshops, field trips, and other learning opportunities for Project Ready participants. Currently ULR works with local colleges including the University of Rochester, Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), Nazareth College, St. John Fisher College, and Monroe Community College to conduct workshops on college access and financial aid; scholarships; and access to learning opportunities for high school students. ULR partners with RIT's Office of K–12 Programs to provide workshops for Project Ready STEM participants. ULR works closely with the Rochester City School District (RCSD) as well as other local school districts to provide coordination of information and referrals to the program. Foodlink provides nutritious snacks and meals for all of ULR's afterschool programs including Project Ready. Affiliate staff serve on the Monroe County Youth

Services Quality Council and the United Way of Greater Rochester's Learning Circle for afterschool programs. Both groups bring representatives from organizations serving youth together to share information and best practices.

Project Ready also collaborates with other ULR programs to share resources in order to provide services to participants in an efficient manner. Project Ready students and their families attend the college fair and workshops on college applications, financial aid, the college experience, and preparing for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing Program (ACT), presented by the Black Scholars Early Recognition program. ULR's Afterschool Academy programs (Project Achieve, Project Excel, Project Ready, Project Ready STEM, Digital Connectors) share curriculum resources and program materials; jointly plan field trips and college visits; and coordinate staff development opportunities.

Program staff draw upon the expertise of staff in other ULR programs when students and their families demonstrate needs that are beyond the scope of the services provide by Project Ready. Other ULR program staff also provide referrals to the program and serve as guest speakers on topics such as career exploration, job searches, and financial literacy.

The majority of Project Ready students have improved their GPAs and their math and reading skills, in preparation for high school graduation, applying to college, and ultimately persisting to college graduation. All of the students have stayed in school throughout their participation in the program and all have maintained a school attendance rate of 93 percent or better. All of the students enrolled over the last three years have been promoted to the next grade level or have graduated from high school. Furthermore, 72 percent of those for whom we have data improved their math scores, and 68 percent improved their reading scores. Over the last three years the program has enrolled fifty youth ranging from freshmen to seniors. Eighteen students have graduated from high school and are enrolled in college.

Chicago

For almost a decade the Chicago Urban League, through its African American Male Adolescent Initiative (AAMAI), has operated programs specifically targeting African American males, with a focus on education, inspiration, and empowerment The initiative provides intensive case management and mentoring services to low-income youth ages thirteen to eighteen from female-headed households. The program helps young men transition to manhood through the exploration of healthy lifestyles, personal development, career choices, and self-empowerment.

According to the Chicago Public School data, 58 percent of African American males drop out of high school. For every one hundred African American males who graduate from high school, only two will successfully graduate from college. PR Newswire (2009) states that on any given day, 23 percent of
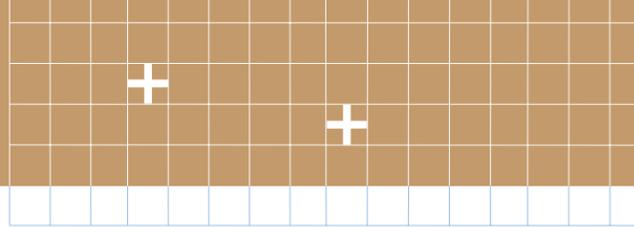
African American men ages sixteen to twenty-four who dropped out of high school are in jail, prison, or a juvenile institution in America—compared to only 6–7 percent of Asian, Hispanic, or White dropouts. The 2005 Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission Annual Report similarly finds that "African American youth comprised approximately 18% of Illinois' youth (ages 10–16), yet make up 57% of youth arrests and 41% of youth held in detention. In Illinois' juvenile correctional facilities, African American youth are 52% of the population although detention can cost as much as 15 times more than alternative programs" (Sum, Khatiwada, and McLaughlin 2009).

With statistics showing a very grim set of outcomes for African American youth, it is no wonder that there are few programs that actually attempt to specifically address African American male adolescents. The social service community in Chicago has traditionally placed most of its service dollars into programs addressing women and young children, with the primary initiatives for African American males closely and overly related to the juvenile justice system in their approach and orientation.

While the Chicago Urban League feels there is a strong need for programs that prevent this population from entering the juvenile justice system, they also felt that there was a need for programs that expand the educational outlook and prospects for African American males beyond keeping them out of the courts and prisons. As a result, the CUL has created a program approach and set of partnerships specifically intended to instill a sense of self-worth and agency and that builds skills that can ultimately help African American males achieve academic and career success.

In 2010, the Chicago Urban League expanded its approach by developing the Urban Youth Connection Mentoring Program (UYC) in conjunction with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to serve 175 adolescent males through the AAMAI program and also through the CPS Mentoring and Advocacy Program (MAP). MAP is a pilot program managed by CPS, and offered to nineteen Chicago agencies for one year. The new program component required ten to twelve mentors (per agency) to provide intensive mentoring services for each participant fifteen to twenty hours per week. This program was designed to foster leadership, increase school attendance, and provide youth with the resources to achieve academic success. In 2012, the Urban Youth Connection Mentoring Program was also included in the National Urban League's Project Ready Mentor portfolio, allowing the program to serve additional youth beyond those served in the initial pilot.

The Chicago Urban League Violence Prevention Initiative was developed by CPS after a comprehensive assessment was conducted of the violence-related risks posed to CPS high school students inside and outside of school. In response to extensive databased research and community discussion, the CPS Board created a strategy to advance the protection, safety, and security of high school students. The Chicago Urban League was selected as a vendor because of the African American Male Adolescent Initiative program's pre-existence in a number of target neighborhoods.

Over the life of the program the Urban League has served 3,636 African American males, targeting fathers between the ages of eighteen and forty (Male Involvement Program), ex-offenders, returning veterans, and others. African American youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, mostly from single-female heads of households and/or who have been pre-identified from community partners such as schools, and other CBO's are the target population for the UYC. Currently the CUL programs have 250 adult males and 70 youth enrolled. All are African American, and 90 percent are low- to moderate-income Chicago residents.

Partners include local schools and the staff, parents, drug and alcohol abuse counselors, other local CBOs with specific capabilities (early-release centers, AIDS counselors, etc.), hospitals and health centers. Because their partners are specialists in their fields, each brings additional resources to the table that support participants across the specific circumstances in which they find themselves. Partners also provide critical additional mental health resources for both mentors and constituents that are based on an understanding of, and sensitivity to, the personal history of African American males and the many challenges that impact their development, readiness, and success.

Of particular importance to the success of the program are the strong relationships with the Chicago Public Schools. Partner schools provide a critical link to information on grades and behavior and are central to the readiness and post-secondary success of the program participants, and maintaining a good relationship with the schools is vital to the program's aims and implementation. The better the program staff's relationship is with the schools that participants attend, the better the parent can engage with the school when problems arise or when there are opportunities to further and deepen success, and the better advocate the CUL can be on behalf of the families. The CUL approach helps parents develop a more comfortable relationship with schools where they may not feel accepted or see the importance and relevance of school because of their personal histories with the school system.

Essential to the success of the UYC is the relationship built with both the youth and his or her family. Time is spent to develop a trusting relationship in order to empower youth and their families to make better and healthier choices. The Urban Youth Connection Mentoring Program staff and partners consistently look to enhance current approaches to better reach and serve program participants. Specifically, they seek to fill in the gaps that exist in services and supports for vulnerable students; for example, ensuring that students who are suspended from school attend workshops instead of staying at home doing nothing. This encourages parental and familial engagement, as it provides a meaningful opportunity for students and parents to dialogue and problem-solve about issues that often go unnoticed under other approaches.

The UYC tracks a number of student/participant outcomes, but mainly focus on a student's BAG (behavior, attendance, grades). When each student becomes a part of the program, he goes through a DAP
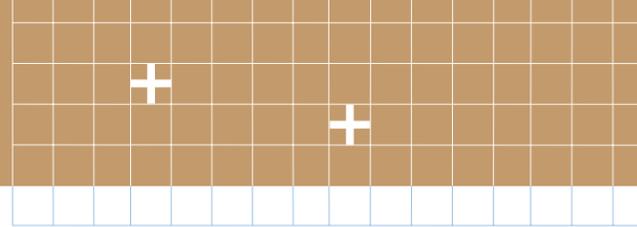
(data, assessment, plan), analogous to the Project Ready ICDP. This process consists of the mentor and program staff collecting all of the data pertinent to the student's readiness and preparation for success. This data usually consists of the student's current and past grades, number of credits, behavior infraction, home life, street gang affiliation, and extracurricular activities. After the mentor has collected all the data, he or she assesses the data to come up with a plan on how to engage the student in a way that will be most effective and impactful. Utilizing this process, the CUL has been very successful in helping students to graduate from high school and go on to college. Working with local colleges and universities, the CUL is developing additional outcome and tracking measures such as gang affiliations, enhancing program offerings through the use of additional data points and research, and calculating the return on investment for participants who avoid incarceration and instead positively contribute to the local economy and community.

Conclusion

The mission of the Urban League Movement is to enable African Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity and power, and civil rights. Preparing young people for success is critical to achieving this mission. For more than fifty years, the National Urban League's Education & Youth Development Division has worked to improve educational opportunities for African American students by developing innovative programs to support their academic achievement, encourage their civic involvement, and contribute to their healthy physical and emotional development. The Urban League's Project Ready approach combines the NUL's history of service and programmatic opportunities with a deep reservoir of community trust and decades of experience in developing and implementing technical assistance for national social and human services programs.

Community-based and equity-centered approaches to out-of-school-time learning and the kinds of partnering embodied in the Project Ready design are instrumental in closing and eliminating opportunity gaps between African American males and their peers. Our approach centers primarily on how local partnerships can build the capacity of youth, families, and community through the creation of a diverse array of developmental spaces and processes that are explicitly asset-based. This approach may well involve local partnerships in offering very different opportunities, structured in quite different ways, but always reflective on the experiences and support necessary to best support students.

A structuring of out-of-school time as merely an explicit reinforcement of, or supplement to, academic work done in school is insufficient for ensuring learning and development. Opportunities configured solely in this way can function as something done to young people and communities, or in their name, rather than with them, for their ultimate benefit. Critical innovations on learning time and out-of-school-time learning opportunities should substantively reframe teaching and learning to include better

content, more hands-on learning, project-centered content, additional supports, and expansive opportunities for students. More of the same practices stretched out over longer periods of time are clearly insufficient to produce the educational results we seek.

What may be most beneficial to African American males in particular, and to vulnerable students more generally, is offering alternative pathways to those who struggle in traditional school-based approaches and with classical approaches to pedagogies and curricula. Providing multiple opportunities for learning, success, and achievement in sufficient breadth, depth, and variety allows for alternate definitions of, and pathways to, excellence and equity. Increased post-secondary readiness and success for larger numbers of urban children must be built on a complex interplay of structures, supports, and opportunities that create better results and outcomes for young people.

The likely outcome of failing to improve the educational and developmental opportunities for underrepresented populations such as African American males is that the average education level of the American workforce in 2020 will actually be lower than it is today. The technologies and economies of the twenty-first century will continue to demand a greater number of educated and highly prepared workers than has ever been produced in prior generations. Clearly, additional strategies and investments will be necessary to help ensure that young people acquire the knowledge, skills, habits, and opportunities that will lead to academic, civic, and economic success.

Educational investments of this type and magnitude are representative of the Urban League Movement's historic and ongoing dedication to advancing the quality, scope, and scale of opportunity for urban youth. We believe it is worthwhile to investigate innovations such as positive youth development and out-of-school time in both the singular and the collective, for it is only through a range of efforts that we will make accelerated progress for African American males.

Summary of Solutions

1. Create a support system that is inclusive of schools but moves beyond in-school learning, by forging new relationships, building a multiplicity of connections, and developing new capacities to collaborate, in order to expand educational and developmental opportunities for Black male students.

2. Provide Black males with productive exposure to an array of learning and developmental opportunities, knowledgeable adults outside their families, and motivated peers to enhance student development and improve student achievement.
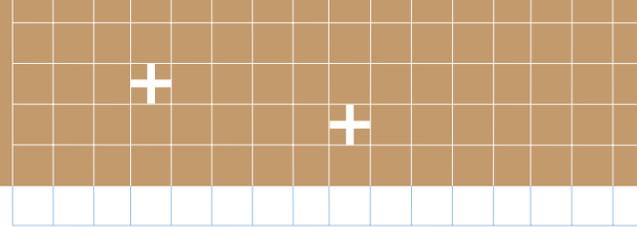
3. Create opportunities that focus on nurturing strengths, capacities, and assets, and on programming that helps Black males acquire skills and capacities that promote a sense of accomplishment and self-worth and allow them to excel and contribute to their communities in substantive ways.

4. Enroll Black males in effective Positive Youth Development (PYD) programs that include: physical and psychological structure and safety, opportunities to belong and connect, skill-building opportunities, connections to out-of-school-time programs, and supportive relationships, particularly with responsible and knowledgeable adults.

5. Assist Black males in making the leap from their aspirations to actuality by creating opportunities where the youth/adult relationships are based on the youth's assets and interests rather than focusing on existing or perceived deficiencies, engage in structured activities that offer opportunities for positive interactions with adults and peers, encourage them to contribute and take initiative, and contain challenging and engaging tasks that allow them to develop and apply new skills and personal talents.

6. Encourage families and communities to make specific and significant additional investments in learning environments and opportunities during the summer in order to drive success for African American males.

7. Ensure that all out-of-school opportunities for Black males are **holistic,** and that they address their intellectual, social/emotional, and physical development needs; are **asset-based** (or developmental), that they are focused on building competencies in young people so that they will be prepared for the challenges, opportunities, and responsibilities of adulthood; and that they incorporate an **ecological** view in their approach, acknowledging that youth develop in a context of interacting environmental systems.

8. Create effective education collaborations by recognizing that meaningful and substantive partnerships encourage constituencies to engage in cooperative planning, implementation, and support of Black males as both an institutionalized practice and a shared responsibility.

   a. Partners can be leaders in educational content development, service delivery, advocacy, innovation, and reform; they clearly represent a means to deliver opportunity and improved outcomes in ways not possible for a single institution, such as an individual school or school system to accomplish.

   b. Successful partnerships perhaps translate best as increases in issue ownership, additional traction for reform, and the development of collective efficacy, or the belief in the ability that outcomes for African American students and other vulnerable students can improve through better relationships, shared visions of success, and, most importantly, shared work.

9. Create a system of robust supports and opportunities at the pre-K, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to post-secondary transition points, in order to positively impact the dropout and achievement gaps of Black males. Smoothing transitions from one developmental state to another is critically important at the middle and high school ages.

10. Work with Black male students and their families in order to identify clear benchmarks or milestones necessary to facilitate their success after high school. Benchmarks should be both academic and nonacademic in nature.

11. Ensure that Black male students participate in workshops and programs that focus on (1) strong decision-making and leadership skills; (2) positive service, work, and study habits; and (3) effective time management.

12. Customize out-of-school experiences for Black males that are long term, minimally two years, and are customized to the local environment and include nationally recognized enhancements such as service learning, rites of passage, etc.

13. Create leadership programs devoted to helping young Black males take advantage of educational opportunities, become productive citizens, and achieve their full potential.

14. Recognize and provide assistance, incentives (such as internships or summer work opportunities), and financial rewards to Black male high school students who, by their senior year, have achieved significant post-secondary milestones.

15. Collaborate with local higher education partners to conduct workshops on college access, college completion, financial aid and scholarships, and to provide equitable access to a range of high-quality learning and developmental opportunities for Black male high school students.

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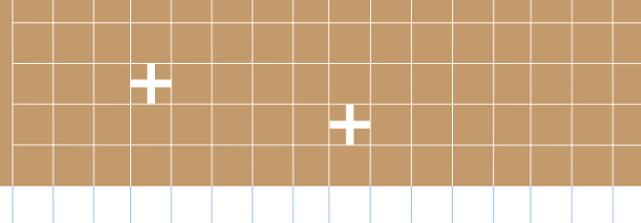
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Introduction

America's Great City Schools educate approximately one-third of the nation's African American male students. Many of these students do well and go on to take important leadership positions in their chosen fields. They make substantial contributions to the nation, raise and support loving families, and serve as role models for others.

Still, too many African American males do not realize their full potential in our schools. A number of reports and studies, including the Council of the Great City Schools' 2010 report—*A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*—indicate that too often our schools have not served these students well. In many cases, in fact, we have simply failed them.

To be sure, there is now broad consensus that the nation's urban public schools need to vastly improve the quality of education these students receive in order for them to succeed in college and careers. Other institutions at the local, state, and national levels also need to do a better job, but for our part, the Great City Schools are stepping up to the plate, taking responsibility, and working to reverse negative trends and improve the quality of life of, and future opportunities for, our African American youth.

This chapter pulls together some of the broad lessons articulated by the authors of the previous chapters and outlines steps urban school leaders should take to increase African American male achievement. The lessons learned are organized around broad themes: (1) the importance of strong leadership and a unifying vision for reform; (2) the role of instructional rigor and high expectations for all students; (3) the pursuit of multilayered reforms at the district, school, and individual levels; and (4) family and community involvement.

The recommendations and proposals in the chapter are gleaned from the suggestions of the other authors in this series and are infused into the chapter's various sections. Together, this collection of
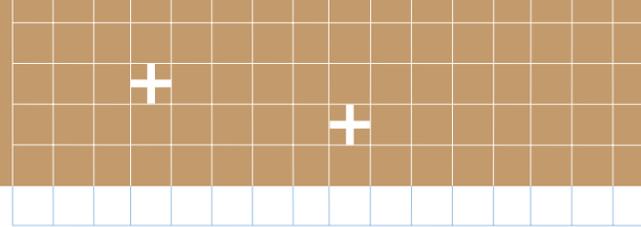
articles argues for a fundamental shift in the traditional approach of schools, which has been to sift and sort children for the benefit of some and to the detriment of others.

Each theme and action step presented in this chapter is crucial, but it is unlikely that, taken in isolation, any of them could result in better outcomes for the African American males in our urban schools. Instead, it is the combined force of these reforms and how they lock together that is likely to make the biggest difference for our students. Consequently, we are urging a strategic and systemic approach that uses the broadest possible array of action steps.

Finally, this chapter does not seek to lecture anyone on what needs to be done to improve conditions for African American males, although there is more than enough work to do. Instead, the chapter is meant to be a broad and thematic road map for urban schools to follow as they strive to improve the academic attainment of their African American male students.

Themes and Strategies for Action

In discussing the strategies likely to improve the academic progress of African American males, it is worth stepping back to consider what strategies are employed to improve urban student achievement as a whole, and applying those lessons. What follows is a description of the major themes that should define our work on behalf of African American males in the nation's urban public schools, as well as the ways that schools and communities throughout the country have begun to approach this work. It seeks to synthesize the lessons learned from the previous chapters, and to prompt urban public schools to move urgently on behalf of these valuable young people.

1. Strong Leadership and a Unifying Vision for Reform

In general, efforts to improve urban public education are galvanized when there is clear political consensus around the need for change, and a unifying vision for what shape this change should take. The demonstration of a compelling community interest in school reform—as well as the dedication and talent of strong leaders willing to work toward this shared goal— opens the door to constructive dialogue about which reforms a school district should pursue, setting measurable goals and translating these goals into attainable objectives, sustaining support for reforms, and establishing mechanisms for holding people accountable for results (Snipes, Doolittle, and Herlihy 2002; Casserly et al. 2011). For instance, the specific programs and instructional approaches may vary, but the broad success of reforms in urban school districts such as Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte, Long Beach, Richmond, and other cities that have shown substantial improvements over the years is typically driven by stable, energetic leadership teams and their vision for improvement, their skill in working collaboratively toward realizing that vision, their facility at using political opportunities to further reforms, and their ability to manage change and sustain the implementation of reforms over an extended number of years.

It is not a coincidence that these significantly improving urban school systems—Atlanta, Boston, Charlotte, Long Beach, Richmond, and others—have had leaders with long tenures relative to other big-city school systems, have enlisted the expertise of skilled instructional and programmatic staff, and have seen important gains in student achievement across their school systems.

Yet despite the demonstrated necessity of defining a unifying vision for reform, most urban school districts lack such consensus around the need to improve the academic attainment of African American males. In fact, the topic is largely avoided in many places for fear of generating blowback among individuals and groups that are opposed to doing anything explicitly in this area on the grounds that it would sow seeds of division or trigger class or racial resentments. The result is haphazard, sporadic efforts, and uncertain direction about the reforms a district should pursue on behalf of these students.

Potentially, one of the most important things urban school districts could do on this front involves explicit goal setting for the academic growth and educational outcomes of African American males. The simple and powerful step of articulating in the school district's mission statement a clear belief that all students are capable of achieving at the highest levels can help unite a district around the steps that need to be taken to realize this goal. This shared vision of broad-based student success should also trigger a review of district policies and practices to ensure that they are comprehensive, systematic, and integrated enough to address the economic, social, emotional, and psychological needs of African American males. Finally, urban school systems need to develop clear mechanisms by which staff members are held accountable for the academic progress of these—and all—students.

2. Instructional Rigor and High Expectations for All Students

Another important strategic element shared by urban school districts that have shown overall academic progress is the pursuit of reform at scale. In other words, to attain district-wide results, districts need to pursue district-wide reform strategies, not just school-by-school improvements. Moreover, these district-wide reforms were focused primarily on improving curriculum and instruction. While high-achieving or fast improving districts do not necessarily employ uniform academic programs or materials in every school, they do develop a clear, system-wide approach to instruction, with clear, grade-specific learning objectives for all students.

Not surprisingly, most districts that have seen substantial overall gains in student achievement because of the instructional reforms they pursue also see significant improvements in the academic attainment of African American male students. For example, two districts that have seen some of the most substantial gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the history of the assessment—Atlanta in reading and Boston in math—also produced large gains among African American males attending their schools. The reading scores of Atlanta's fourth-grade African American males went up
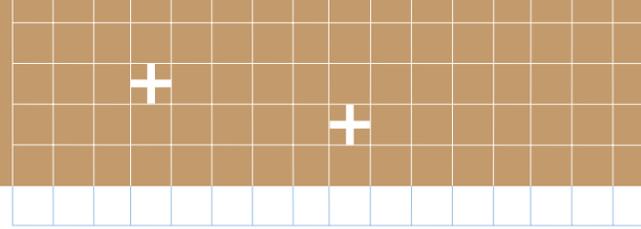
eleven scale-score points between 2003 and 2011 and eighth-grade males jumped fourteen points over the same period, while nationally NAEP reading scores increased by only four points and two points, respectively. Math scores in Boston among African American fourth-grade males increased by fourteen scale-score points, and eighth-grade males jumped twenty-three points between 2003 and 2011, while nationally math scores went up only six points and seven points, respectively, over the same period.[1] The gains in both cities were achieved by improving the overall instructional program in districts with large numbers of African American students, but the reforms themselves were not specifically defined around them (Casserly et al. 2011).

Without being an "African American male" initiative per se, these instructional reforms improve the academic achievement of these students because they address the fundamental educational obstacles African American male students face: failing schools, low-quality instruction, ineffective teachers, and inadequate educational resources.

In too many schools, African American male students and others are denied access to a rigorous core curriculum on many other fronts as well, contributing to the inequities in public education and exacerbating achievement gaps. In many cases, the practices that cut off students from high-quality instruction have little to do with either spending levels or the availability and distribution of high-quality teachers. Instead, they are driven by low expectations for student performance that were born of one group's misbegotten sense of superiority over another and result in the perpetuation of gaps in achievement and opportunity.

Generally, there are three main ways in which African American male students are steered away from instructional content that would prepare them for college or careers. The first involves the inequitable placement of students into instructional "tracks" that deny them full access to high-level instruction. Examples of this are found in the overidentification of students in special-education classes not held in a "least restrictive environment," who are separated from their nondisabled peers and receive limited access to the general curriculum; or remedial classes or intervention programs that do not include critical features of the core curriculum.

The converse of this practice involves restricted access to gifted and talented programs, where entry is often determined based on personal references or scores on standardized tests that are not necessarily designed to identify special talents or potential. In other cases, students are placed in gifted programs that would constitute a standard program in any other school or find that they are enrolled in a school with no higher-level math courses, like calculus, and few Advanced Placement classes. Finally, schools sometimes deny students the benefits of the curriculum by not ensuring their course-taking sequences

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1. The achievement gap between Black and White students within each city did not necessarily narrow, however.

are aligned with college and career-ready graduation requirements or that students are staying on track to high school graduation.

A second way in which high-quality instruction can be denied to students is by excluding them from the school setting. This is sometimes done through suspensions, expulsions, or placements in alternative settings. And the research is clear that these exclusionary tactics are applied disproportionately to African American male students and are more often applied to African American males for behavior that others would not be sanctioned for. The problem is both the excess use of suspensions on the one hand and, on the other, the failure of schools to provide ongoing instructional support, homework assignments, or catch-up work for students while they are out or when they come back. In either case, the result is often an extraordinary number of lost instructional days for students, lower achievement, and wider gaps.

Unfortunately, these instructional practices—and others—go hand in hand with inequities in state and local funding and high-quality teacher distribution that stack the deck against African American male students and others in ways that aggravate our achievement gaps and impair our ability to raise student achievement.

A third way in which inequities in education are sometimes perpetuated to the detriment of African American males is through coursework that is low in academic rigor. In an effort to make the material more "accessible" to students, districts and schools sometimes devise courses, particularly in math and science, which fail to develop an understanding of complex ideas or concepts or that rely inordinately on worksheet drills on basic skills.

This use of watered-down instructional materials and strategies fails to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in subsequent grades where the content becomes increasingly complex. In addition, the misuse of "leveled" texts can sometimes keep students from accessing more advanced material even if they are ready for it. A variation on this dynamic is sometimes seen with African American students who are also English-language learners. In these cases, students are sometimes placed in remedial reading or special-education programs because they are not equipped with the academic vocabulary or language-development skills that would grant them full access to the content being taught.

In each of these circumstances, African American males and others are denied quality instruction because some educators have low expectations for their performance. There are numerous ways in which these low expectations can be exhibited in addition to those cited above. When teachers, administrators, or parents fail to hold African American males responsible for not finishing assignments or completing homework, they are signaling that they do not expect high academic attainment. When schools use
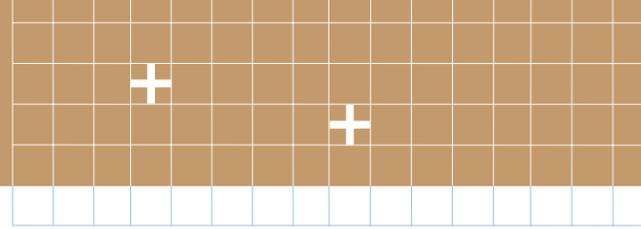
"safe harbor" accountability provisions under No Child Left Behind to avoid sanctions, they are lowering expectations for student performance. When district curriculum writers delete requirements from national or state standards for students to solve word problems or for teachers to teach comprehension skills, they are indicating low expectations for student achievement.

Many of these practices, of course, are driven by ideas about who is valuable in this society and who is not. Who we have high hopes for and for whom we have no hopes at all. Who we have high standards for and for whom we hold no great expectations. However, our job in urban education is not to reflect, affirm, and perpetuate the nation's inequities or to let them define us or hold our kids back. Instead, our job is to overcome these barriers and teach all our children to the highest standards.

A more productive path forward for our African American male students would be for school districts to raise the standards of teaching and learning, while ensuring full access for all students to this rigorous instruction. Our urban schools should be routinely collecting and analyzing disaggregated data on the numbers of African American males enrolled in or placed in gifted and talented programs, Advanced Placement classes, special-education programs, remedial classes, and the like before the Office of Civil Rights does so, and devising comprehensive plans for ensuring more balanced results and the mechanisms by which staff are held responsible for ensuring those results. Moreover, districts should devise aggressive programs that build stronger system-wide pipelines of African American males enrolled in advanced coursework and minimize placements in remedial or special-education programming.

Urban school districts—and others—also need to be far more proactive about the degree to which they suspend or expel students, particularly African American male students, from classes or place them into alternative schools or programs with watered-down coursework and little chance of returning to regular core classes. Part of this effort ought to include the restricted use of harsh penalties for minor offenses, the elimination of zero-tolerance policies that ensnare disproportionate numbers of African American males, the pursuit of effective school-attendance policies and programs, and the development and universal implementation of positive behavioral strategies for students.

Finally, every urban school system ought to be devoting time and energy to ensuring that disproportionate numbers of African American males are not being placed in undemanding or low-level courses that deprive them of engaging academic content, as well as the skills they will need to succeed in college or careers.

3. Pursuit of Multilayered Reforms

In addressing the needs of African American males, acting at scale on behalf of these students also means acting on multiple fronts—at the school level, with turnaround strategies for improving failing schools that African American males are more likely to attend; at the individual level, with intervention strategies designed to identify and support at-risk students; and at the family and community levels, with social outreach strategies and out-of- school programming aimed at addressing the full range of academic, financial, and social challenges these students face.

Broad, system-wide reforms can accrue to the benefit of African American male and other students, but substantial numbers of schools and students may be left behind with such generalized strategies. In response to this need for additional layers of support, urban school systems are beginning to supplement their broad district-wide improvement strategies with more targeted school-by-school reforms. Examples of these school specific turnaround strategies include Atlanta's Carver High School, Philadelphia's Clemente Roberto Middle School, Cincinnati's Taft High School, Denver's Bruce Randolph School, Boston's Orchard Gardens K–8, and Miami's Edison and Central High Schools. The importance of these and other school turnaround strategies supplementing district-wide efforts is that these chronically low-performing schools often enroll large numbers of African American students.

For instance, the racial composition of Great City Schools receiving federal Tier I or Tier II School Improvement Grants (SIG)[2] is 55 percent African American, according to a study published last year by the Council of the Great City Schools (Lachlan-Haché, Naik, and Casserly 2012). In fact, some 7.4 percent of the nation's African American students are enrolled in a Tier I or Tier II school, compared with only 1 percent of the nation's White students. In all, approximately 2.9 percent of all students nationwide are enrolled in a Tier I or Tier II school.

These school-by-school turnaround efforts are often dramatic and comprehensive, involving the substantial replacement of staff and the overhaul of curriculum and instructional approaches. It is still too soon to tell whether these efforts are likely to result in overall academic gains among African American males in urban schools, but preliminary evidence indicates that these reforms are on the right track. Like the district-wide reforms, these school-by-school reforms are not necessarily focused specifically on African American students, but on the schools that these students are most likely to attend. In that

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2. Under the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, a Tier I school is either a Title I participating school that is identified for school improvement, corrective action, or restructuring under No Child Left Behind or has a graduation rate lower than 60 percent; or is a school that is at least as low achieving as the highest achieving of the previously described schools and has either not made adequate yearly progress for at least two consecutive years or has a reading and math proficiency rate in the lowest quintile of its state. A Tier II school can be any secondary school that is among the lowest five secondary schools that are Title I eligible or the lowest 5 percent of schools, whichever is greater; or is a Title I-eligible (but not participating) school that has a graduation rate lower than 60 percent over a number of years.
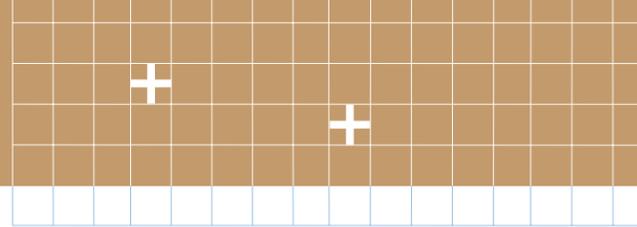
way, these school turnarounds have the potential—if done well—of boosting the academic attainment of African American male students in urban settings.

In addition to school-level supports, districts face the need to provide individualized support to struggling students—particularly those at risk of dropping out of school. For instance, dropout-prevention strategies—particularly those that are targeted at African American males specifically—have the potential to improve educational outcomes for these students given the large numbers that drop out of urban high schools every year. To an even greater extent, districts should meet the dropout crisis among African American males head-on by developing and instituting early warning systems based on the proven signs of academic failure. These systems can help identify students for support and intervention when they are starting to slip behind academically or behaviorally.

Finally, in addition to providing support to African American males via school turnaround efforts or individualized dropout-prevention strategies, there are a small number of urban school districts that are implementing targeted efforts that are specifically focused on the academic attainment of African American males. Examples include TechBoston Academy in Boston, B.E.S.T Academy High School in Atlanta, the 10 Boys Initiative in Boston, the MORE (Men Organized, Respectful & Educated) Initiative in Cincinnati, the Columbus City Preparatory School for Boys, the Male Academy Program in Long Beach, the Empowering Boys Initiative in New York City, the African American Male Achievement Program in Oakland, the Men's Leadership Academy in Sacramento, and other efforts.

In addition, a number of charter schools, like the Urban Prep Academies that are chartered by the Chicago Public Schools, specialize in educating African American males in urban settings with relatively positive results. In general, there is some evidence from NAEP that district-authorized charter schools overall are making somewhat more progress with African American students generally than regular public schools are, but not necessarily with African American males specifically. Still, the strategy of dedicating specific schools or programs to the academic attainment of African American males— whether in regular or charter schools—may hold promise when they involve enhanced curriculum, strong interventions, and extended hours and instructional days.

All in all, these strategies dedicated specifically to the improvement of the academic attainment of African American students, particularly males, are relatively new, and it is unclear how these efforts will do over time. What is even less clear is the promise behind the possible layering of all three types of strategies—district reform, school-turnaround efforts, and dedicated tactics devoted specifically to African American male students. There is reasonable evidence to suggest that the three approaches could add substantial value one to another in improving the academic attainment of African American males in urban school districts. In combination with the other strategies discussed in this chapter and elsewhere

in this volume, it is worth major city school systems attempting this kind of strategic layering of efforts more so than they currently do.

4. Family and Community Involvement

In addition to these multitiered academic-reform strategies, acting at scale to improve African American male achievement requires schools and communities alike to address the social, mental health, economic, family, nutritional, and health dimensions of the challenges African American males face. Many African American male students served in urban public schools are hampered by poverty and lack the family supports that other students rely on. These conditions are exacerbated by parents or guardians who often lack post-secondary education and who themselves have had bad experiences with schools. Moreover, weak coordination between schools and various social service agencies often denies these children of critical social supports and resources.

The need to address this array of challenges begins at birth, with early-childhood programming. Addressing achievement gaps that appear as early as pre-kindergarten means ensuring that African American children have access to high-quality preschool and early- childhood programs. These programs should set clear goals for the developmental progress of children, and provide a seamless transition to kindergarten and elementary school curricula.

Comprehensive district strategies also need to address out-of-school-time learning, promoting the participation of African American males in extracurricular programs that include physical development, academic enrichment, social and emotional support, positive relationships with adults and peers, and skills and leadership development. These opportunities should build on and enhance what students are learning during the school day, and further engage students in their own academic and social development.

Finally, recognizing the important—but partial—role schools play in shaping African American male development, districts need to establish and nurture constructive partnerships with families and communities based on shared goals and priorities for student enrichment. Parent outreach initiatives should seek to inform and engage parents in the work of supporting their children's academic and social development. Districts should ensure that the parents and guardians are actively encouraged to participate in school and parent/teacher activities, as well as out-of-school learning programs.

Schools should also work with community organizations to create an even wider support network of mentors, role models, and opportunities for social engagement that reinforce joint school and community priorities such as high school graduation and college enrollment. Education may be the key to social and economic opportunity for these students, but schools alone cannot level the playing field.

Conclusion

Efforts to improve African American male outcomes work best when they are implemented in tandem to produce an overall culture of support and reform. Each element of reform is critical, but it is unlikely that, taken in isolation, any one of them can result in higher student achievement.

To move forward, urban school districts need to develop a strong, unifying vision for the improvement of African American male achievement, as well as multilayered strategies for translating this vision into practice. They need to ensure that African American males have full access to high-quality instruction during the school day, as well as ample opportunities for out-of-school enrichment. And they need to engage not only schools and teachers, but parents, social service agencies, and communities in order to create a wide network of people and institutions ready to intervene and support African American young men.

In sum, these strategies need to be as comprehensive as the challenges these students face, for it is typically the joint force of multiple reforms and how they are locked together and integrated that appears to make all the difference in improving student achievement. It will not be enough to purchase a program stamped "Black Male" and think the issue has been solved, when the remaining levers of the school system are stacked against these students.

As the preceding chapters of this volume discuss at considerable length, supporting African American male students will require a shift in the approach of educators and communities alike, as well as greater collaboration between schools, families, and community-based organizations on behalf of African American males.

Moreover, these efforts need to be rooted in a belief in the potential of our African American students, and a commitment to not only holding students to these high standards, but holding teachers, schools, leaders, and communities accountable for the academic attainment of all of our students.

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