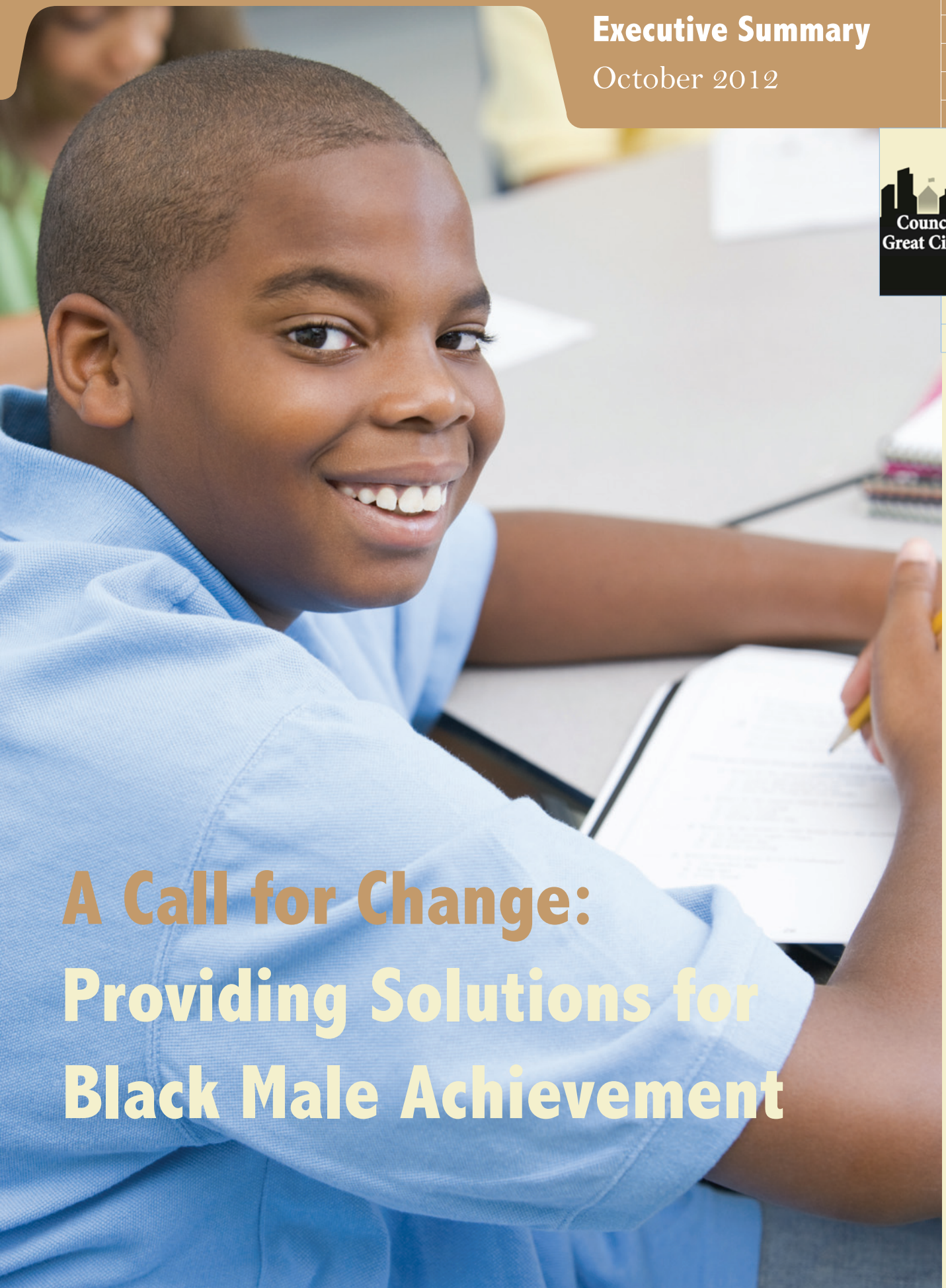

Executive Summary

October 2012

Council of the Great City Schools™

A Call for Change: Providing Solutions for Black Male Achievement

ABSTRACT

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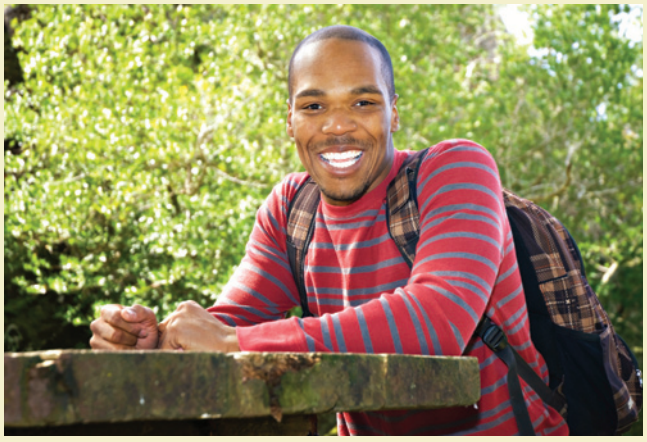
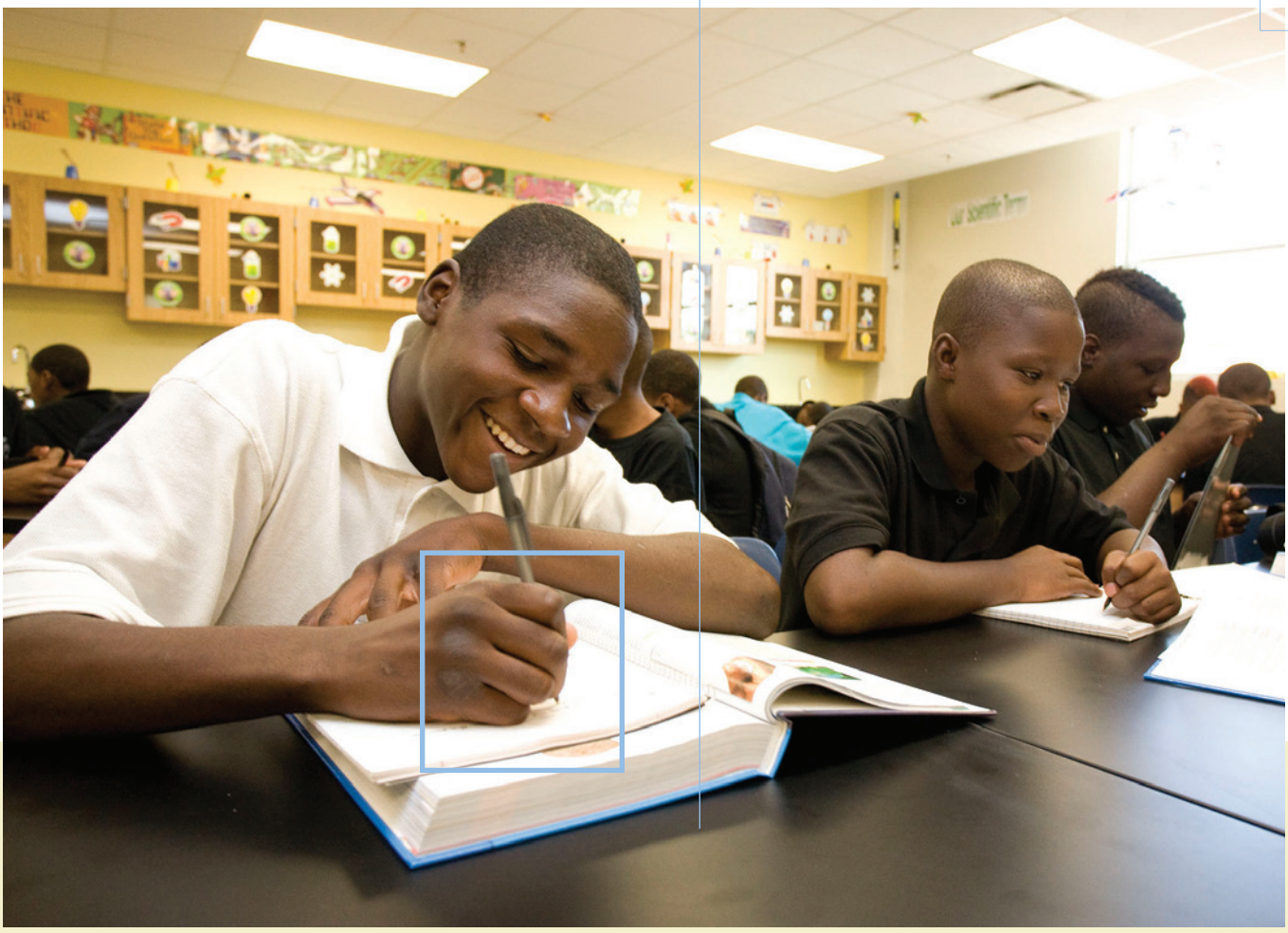


ABSTRACT



Introduction

America's Great City Schools educate approximately one-third of the nation's African American male students. Many of these students do well in school 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 must vastly improve the quality of education they offer in order for these students to succeed in college and careers. Others—institutions at the local, state, and national levels—must also do a better job, but the Great City Schools are stepping up to the plate, taking responsibility and working to reverse negative trends in order to improve the quality of life of, and future opportunities for, our African American youth.

In this document, members of the nation's leading urban school districts, academics and scholars and community activists, outline the steps that schools must take to increase African American male access to rigorous core instruction, elevate the quality of education, strengthen personal and social supports needed to bolster young black males' achievement, and overturn the low expectations that were born of one group's misbegotten sense of superiority over another.

The text addresses the following areas of school-based policies and programs: early-childhood education; reading, writing, and intellectual development; mathematics; gifted and talented programs; college and career readiness; equity and access; effective teaching and learning environments; mental health and safety; out-of-school time learning; and partnerships and mentoring.

Although their recommendations are presented as discrete actions in designated categories, the authors acknowledge, in keeping with the research on urban school improvement, that effective change can occur only in the context of a holistic approach that takes into account the role of the larger community. What is needed is a coherent strategy for improvement.

Each action step or initiative presented in this document—and others aimed at raising achievement for our students—is critical, 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 work together that is likely to make the biggest difference for our students. Consequently, we are urging a strategic and systemic approach that incorporates the broadest possible array of recommendations presented in this paper.

Still, familiar as we are with the broad policy strategies and programmatic tactics that have been implemented with an aim toward improving urban schools, it is clear that a more dedicated and focused series of steps need to be taken to support the attainment of African American males, who historically have not been well served in our urban schools.

Such specific measures are articulated herein, by authors whose proposals are undergirded by concepts of academic rigor and the need for full and equitable access; respect and support for all students and the talents, assets, and perspectives they bring to our classrooms; full inclusion and participation in the academic, cultural, and socioemotional life of the school; community and parent engagement and buy-in; and adult accountability from children's earliest years through graduation and the transition into careers. This document thus offers a fundamental shift in the traditional approach of schools, which has been to sort children for the benefit of some and to the detriment of others.

Finally, this paper does not seek to lecture anyone on what needs to be done to improve conditions for African American males, although there is much work to do. Instead, it is meant to be a broad road map for urban schools to follow as they strive to improve the academic attainment of their African American male students. It is both a forum for soliciting input and help from others, and a public commitment to improvement.

We hope that this endeavor and what flows from it will benefit and inform the work of President Obama's Commission on African American Education, and help galvanize the urban public schools that serve so many African American male students to move urgently on behalf of these valuable young people.

The document is divided into two parts. The first is a summary of the twelve solution papers commissioned by the Council of the Great City Schools to address the educational challenges facing African American males, and of a concluding paper by Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, which synthesizes the recommendations in discussing the path forward. The summary contains information about the authors as well as an abstract of each paper. The second part is a Blueprint for Action—a summary of the recommendations drawn from the papers. This summary provides a general overview; we encourage you to read the complete papers, which include a full discussion of the research, the authors' experiences, and their in-depth analyses as well as detailed recommendations. The full document, *Providing Solutions for Black Male Achievement*, can be accessed on the Council's website, www.cgcs.org. The ebook version will also be available on Amazon.com, iTunes, and for the NOOK at barnesnoble.com.

Summary

Reading, Writing, and Intellectual Development of African American Male Children and Youth

Alfred W. Tatum
University of Illinois at Chicago

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses issues related to the literacy development of Black males throughout all grade levels. The author illustrates how literacy development rests at the intersection of many factors, race and gender among them, but differs across various profiles of African American male students and their specific academic needs. To address the issue, the author presents a framework of literacy instruction to guide teachers and school administrators in their efforts to raise the reading and writing achievement of Black males.

The framework the author proposes addresses key aspects of literacy development in three general categories:

+

Conceptualizing literacy instruction and setting success metrics

+

Improving literacy instruction to raise student achievement in reading and writing

+

Improving teacher quality and effectiveness through professional development

These guiding principles give educators the tools to assess their efforts to raise the reading and writing achievement of all students, particularly African American males, in light of the recent adoption by many states of the Common Core State Standards. In order to engage Black males in reading and writing instruction, the author encourages educators to move away from a test-driven curriculum to one focused on the intersection of reading, writing, and intellectual development.

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* The Reading Teacher, Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Illinois Reading Council Journal, 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 at Chicago.*

Accelerating the Learning of Underperforming Students in High School Mathematics

Robert P. Moses
The Algebra Project
Omowale J. Moses
The Algebra Project

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the need to improve achievement in high school mathematics for African American males and increase their representation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses. Drawing on almost thirty years of experience working with low-performing students in predominately African American and Hispanic schools as part of the Algebra Project, the authors advance solutions and program elements that have been successful in raising student mathematics achievement and increasing participation in college-level STEM courses. The Algebra Project is designed to address four areas that support student success in mathematics:

+

Developing strong connections with communities and families through outreach

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Building content knowledge and pedagogy through learning communities and teacher professional development

+

Developing instructional materials for teachers and students

+

Creating a space for peer learning and mentoring using game-like mathematics activities out of school

In order to meet the needs of an evolving skill-based workforce, and to enable full economic and civic participation among African American males, improving mathematics achievement and participation in STEM courses is essential. This paper provides educators with recommendations relating to successful program elements, instructional practices, community outreach, professional development, and success metrics to achieve this goal.

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.*

Omowale J. Moses *is the Founder and Co-Director of the Young People's Project, a key partner to the Algebra Project that recruits and trains math literacy workers to work with K-12 students. Along with his father, Robert 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.*

Increasing the Representation of African American Males in Gifted and Talented Programs

James L. Moore III
The Ohio State University
Lamont A. Flowers
Clemson University

ABSTRACT

This solution brief highlights the disproportionate underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs and offers recommendations to improve their recruitment into and retention in these programs. The authors illustrate that the exclusion of African American males in gifted and talented programs is just as consequential to their education as their disproportionate inclusion in special education. In order to underscore the need to improve the recruitment and retention of African American males in gifted and talented programs, the authors conduct an analysis of data from twenty school districts. The recommendations that follow from this analysis address four key levers of change:

+

Policies for identification and recruitment of students into gifted and talented programs

+

Organizational and financial support for gifted and talented programs

+

Professional development for staff in the areas of identifying and nurturing gifted students

+

Data collection and research on equal access to gifted and talented programs

The aim of this solution brief is to raise the awareness of educators about the importance of increasing the representation of African American males in gifted and talented programs. The authors propose a set of actionable steps school districts can take to nurture the talents of all promising and gifted students, including African American males.

James L. Moore III, PhD, *is an Associate Provost in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at The Ohio State University, where he also serves as the Director of the Todd Anthony Bell National Resource Center on the African American Male. Additionally, he is a professor in the College of Education and Human Ecology. Dr. Moore examines issues impacting urban education, and African American males and their inclusion in gifted and talented education. He is the co-editor of* African American Students in Urban Schools: Critical Issues and Solutions for Achievement *(2012). He also has published extensively in a number of peer-reviewed journals and has worked as an education consultant for various school districts, universities, and agencies around the country.*

Lamont A. Flowers, PhD, *is the Distinguished Professor of Educational Leadership, and the Executive Director of the Charles H. Houston Center for the Study of the Black Experience in Education, in the Eugene T. Moore School of Education at Clemson University. Dr. Flowers has authored several scholarly publications pertaining to the factors impacting the pathways to a college degree and occupational attainment for African Americans, including empirical studies regarding academic achievement, access and equity, educational attainment, educational policy, labor market outcomes, and student development.*

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

Michael Nettles
Educational Testing Service (ETS)
Robert C. Schwartz
Educational Testing Service (ETS)
Haijiang Wang
Educational Testing Service (ETS)

ABSTRACT

This paper explores African American males' pursuit of educational attainment and college and career readiness. In light of the federal government's goal to have 60 percent of the adult US population earn a post-secondary degree by the year 2020, the authors examine key indicators of educational success to illustrate how much African American males have improved over the past decade in terms of post-secondary participation and how much progress still has to be made. The paper draws conclusions from an analysis of community, school, financial, and academic-preparation factors influencing student achievement. Its proposals to increase the college and career readiness of African American males fall into four categories:

+

Promote early-childhood education to nurture and sustain academic, social, and financial supports for students

+

Provide continued academic support to improve performance on standardized tests

+

Improve avenues for upward education and career mobility to encourage college persistence and completion among African American male students

+

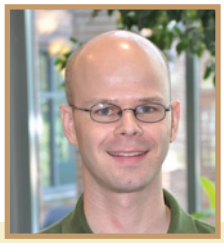
Support further research on monitoring student progress and providing meaningful interventions

The authors note that as states and the federal government introduce incentives and education reforms to meet the goal of 60 percent postsecondary attainment, there is a danger that African American males will be left behind, therefore widening already existing educational and opportunity gaps. However, positive trends in the post-secondary participation of African American males over the past decade lend a sense of optimism. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to provide educators with a set of short- and long-term solutions to ensure the college and career readiness of African American males.

Michael Nettles, PhD, *is the Senior Vice President of ETS's Policy Evaluation & Research Center, where he serves as the Edmund W. Gordon Chair for Policy Evaluation and Research and leads the Early Childhood Research Center. He has also served as the Executive Director of the Fredrick D. Patterson Research Institute at the United Negro College Fund and Vice President of Assessment for the University of Tennessee system. Dr. Nettles has focused his research on issues of equity, access, and diversity in K-12 schooling and higher education for students, faculty, and staff. As a professor, academic, and leader of national research institutes, Dr. Nettles has advanced the study of the education of African Americans, including a range of education policy challenges, throughout his distinguished career. His publications include* The African American Education Data Book *series;* Two Decades of Progress *(1999), a detailed chronicle of the educational status of African Americans;* The Challenge and Opportunity of African American Educational Achievement in the United States *(2006); and* Developing High-Potential Youth Programs: A Return on Investment Study for US Programs *(2009).*

Rob Schwartz, MS, *is a Research Associate in the Policy Evaluation and Research Center at ETS. He received an MA in Political Science from San Francisco State University and an MS in Education Policy from the University of Pennsylvania. At the University of Pennsylvania he worked as a Research Assistant with Professor Laura Desimone and Dean Andy Porter, studying the effects of mentoring on new teachers. Some of Rob's current projects include organizing and implementing a new-teacher induction program and writing a paper on the development of teacher evaluation policies.*

Haijiang Wang, PhD, *is a Senior Research Data Analyst in the Policy Evaluation and Research Center (PERC) at ETS. He received a PhD from Johns Hopkins University. At the PERC, he is a resident statistical and quantitative expert and is involved in multiple research projects such as Equity and Excellence, New Career in Nursing Program, Go College, College Readiness, Teacher Evaluation, and other PERC Research Initiatives.*



Early-Childhood Education and Young Black Boys: A National Crisis and Proven Strategies to Address It

Aisha Ray
Erikson Institute

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the role early-childhood education programs play in mitigating the effects of poverty, racism, and gender stigmatization on the cognitive development and educational achievement of African American boys. The author draws research-based recommendations from a series of case studies that illustrate how participation in early-childhood programs can profoundly alter students' trajectories throughout the course of their education and the rest of their lives. The recommendations offered throughout the paper represent a collection of proven, research-based components of effective early-childhood programs that facilitates the development of African American boys in order to:

+

Provide African American boys with the knowledge, capacities, confidence, and abilities to succeed educationally and in life

+

Lay the groundwork for the healthy neurological, cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and physical development of African American boys early on in their lives

+

Create an understanding of the interplay between structural, cultural, and individual factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys

The aim of the paper is to provide educators with a framework for understanding how participation in early-childhood programs can impact short-term educational goals and long-term life outcomes. Such programs and initiatives have been replicated and proven successful in closing the achievement gap. While this issue has an immediate relevance for African American males, the author emphasizes that the educational crisis in the United States does not belong to a single demographic group and requires the collective will of the entire nation in order to bring about positive change.

Aisha Ray, PhD, *is the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Dean of Faculty at the Erikson Institute, where she currently holds the Rochelle Zell Dean's Chair. Throughout her career, Dr. Ray has played an instrumental role in promoting the study of early-childhood development for students from diverse cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds. Dr. Ray has also worked closely with Chicago Public Schools, as an advocate for professional-development policies that prepare teachers to work with diverse student populations, including young immigrant children.*

The Expectations Factor in Black Male Achievement: Creating a Foundation for Educational Equity

Robert L. Green
Michigan State University
George White
Policy Research Consultant
Kevin K. Green
Education Technology Entrepreneur

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of expectations in closing the achievement gap and ensuring educational equity and civic participation among African American males. While high expectations are important with respect to the academic achievement of African American males, the authors propose that they are not sufficient to improve these students' educational opportunities or outcomes. Drawing from decades of research and field experience, the authors recommend a comprehensive school- and district-wide approach to raising expectations for all students, particularly African American males, and reinforcing those expectations with a system of academic and social supports.

These recommendations have implications for education stakeholders at all levels including:

+ Teachers

+ School principals and district leaders

+ Community activists and policymakers

The aim of the paper is to convey the importance of academic expectations and outline actionable solutions to improving the academic achievement and self-esteem of African American male students. The author believes that teachers, school leaders, and the larger public each have a responsibility to elevate academic and societal expectations of African American males. Fulfilling this responsibility will require a comprehensive approach on behalf of the wider school community guided by culturally sensitive pedagogical approaches, fair application of school disciplinary policies, and rigorous academic expectations.

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 research expert on issues related to education, health, and economic development. He has provided assistance to Dr. Green on public school research and training initiatives and served foundations, universities, and non-governmental organizations on communications and development issues. Mr. White has helped manage communications institutes at UCLA and the University of Southern California, directed a media-community engagement program funded by the Ford Foundation, and developed strategies to promote initiatives related to health and youth development 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.*

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 Confidences 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).*

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

Pedro A. Noguera
New York University

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of public policy in shaping the educational and life outcomes of African American males on a systemic and institutional scale. It proposes a range of short-term modifications to public policy and general policy principles in order to better respond to the needs of Black and Latino males. While the author builds the case for holistic and integrated policy solutions, he also advocates for policy approaches that are racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically appropriate to meet the diverse needs of Black and Latino males. He acknowledges, however, that policymakers and educators must be careful to avoid stigmatizing students in need of academic and social support. The policy recommendations proposed by the author address levers of change at a variety of levels including:

+ Local, state, and national institutions
+ Schools and classrooms
+ Communities
+ Individual students and their families

The aim of this paper is to build an understanding among policymakers and educators of the systemic educational, health, disciplinary, and policy issues affecting the academic achievement of Black and Latino males. Although the factors limiting Black and Latino male achievement are varied, the author stresses that education must be at the center of efforts to align policy solutions and community efforts to raise the outcomes for disadvantaged children. After all, as the author points out, the challenges facing Black and Latino men are an American problem and it will require the collective efforts and resources of our entire society to address it effectively.

Pedro A. Noguera, PhD, *is the Peter L. Agnew Professor of Education at New York University. He holds tenured faculty appointments in the Departments of Teaching and Learning and Humanities and Social Sciences at NYU's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, where he is also the Executive Director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education and the Co-Director of the Institute for the Study of Globalization and Education in Metropolitan Settings (IGEMS). Noguera's most recent books are* Creating the Opportunity to Learn: Moving from Research to Practice to Close the Achievement Gap, *with A. Wade Boykin (2011),* *and* Invisible No More: Understanding and Responding to the Disenfranchisement of Latino Males, *with Aída Hurtado and Edward Fergus (2011). Noguera appears as a regular commentator on educational issues on CNN, National Public Radio, and other national news outlets.*

Providing Solutions for Black Male Achievement: Partnerships and Mentoring

George L. Garrow Jr.
Concerned Black Men
Esther B. Kaggwa
Bloomberg School of Public Health

ABSTRACT

This paper explores best practices and lessons learned for building collaborative partnerships between school districts and community-based organizations and mentoring programs for young Black males. The authors propose recommendations for schools and school districts learned from years of experience of developing school-based partnerships as part of Concerned Black Men–National Organization. These recommendations address:

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Implementing school-based partnerships

+

Setting expectations and goals of school partnerships

+

The principles and elements of effective mentoring programs

The recommendations are intended to provide a comprehensive roadmap for getting the most out of school-based partnerships and creating learning and engagement opportunities for young African American males. The authors feel that strong partnerships, particularly within the context of addressing low Black male achievement, can lead to innovative solutions not previously recognized. Such collaborations can also provide a greater focus on the issue of low achievement among Black boys, help garner resources in a resource-limited environment, and be a bridge for parental involvement.

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 initiatives 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 child 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 AB 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.*

Great Schools Are Not an Accident: Standards and Promising Practices for Educating Boys of Colors

Ronald Walker
Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color
Edward Fergus
New York University
Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt Bryant
Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color

ABSTRACT

This solution brief is intended to provide a set of guidelines to create meaningful learning opportunities within the school system for boys of color. Rather than emphasizing students' deficiencies, the authors propose that school systems look inward at school policies and practices to meet the educational and social needs of boys of color. The paper encourages educators and policymakers to take manageable steps to examine school practices and plan the implementation and evaluation of new policies. The authors note that while this process takes time, it has the potential to lift the achievement of all students, and particularly boys of color. The recommendations provide school leaders with a set of strategies to develop and sustain a school environment that is conducive to the academic success of boys of color, focusing on four broad areas of school organization:

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School leadership: creating a school culture that supports and reinforces high expectations for all students, and particularly boys of color

+

Staff development: ensuring that school staff are appropriately trained and held to the highest professional standards for educating boys of color

+

Curriculum and assessments: focusing on the developmental, academic, and cultural relevance for all students, and particularly boys of color

+

Community engagement: creating an inclusive school environment that embraces student, family, and community involvement to support student achievement

Ronald Walker, MEd, *is currently Executive Director of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC), a network of schools ranging from single sex, coed public, charter, and independent, with an agenda that places critical attention on the quality education of boys and young men of color. Mr. Walker is the former Associate Director of ATLAS Communities, a comprehensive school-reform organization with more than one hundred schools across the country in urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Mr. Walker is the recipient of the Black Educators Award for Professional Service in Education (1995) and the Liberating Vision Award presented by the National Council of Negro Women (1997). He was the recipient of a $60,000 grant from the Mott Foundation to reconnect African American communities and their schools in Boston, Philadelphia, Oakland, and Baltimore. Mr. Walker was recently the recipient of a Harvard University Gates Fellowship for senior-level education-change coaches.*

Edward Fergus, PhD, *is Deputy Director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at New York University. A former high school teacher, his expertise is in the theory and practice of youth development programming, out-of-school time opportunities, program evaluation and needs assessment, community and school partnerships, academic resilience, adaptation processes of immigrant youth, race/ethnic identity formation, and qualitative research methods. Dr. Fergus has published various articles on disproportionality in special education, race/ethnicity in schools, and he is the author of* Skin Color and Identity Formation: Perceptions of Opportunity and Academic Orientation among Mexican and Puerto Rican Youth *(2004). He is currently the Co-Principal Investigator of a study of single-sex schools for boys of color, the New York State Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality, and various other research and programmatic endeavors focused on disproportionality and educational opportunity. Dr. Fergus received his doctorate and masters in social foundations and educational policy from the University of Michigan.*

Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt Bryant, MA, *is currently a consultant to the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC). She has more than sixteen years of experience in the field of education and youth development. Most recently, Ms. Bryant has worked at the national policy level advocating for education reforms to meet the needs of struggling students in distressed communities, with particular emphasis on youth of color. Ms. Bryant has also worked for the Delaware Department of Education, where she coordinated the state's strategic agenda for quality improvements in early-childhood education. She has been distinguished as a Head Start Fellow, wherein she served the Bush Administration in making improvements to Early Head Start and Migrant Head Start services. Ms. Bryant was named a Children's Defense Fund Emerging Leader in 2006. She has written many reports and articles on issues affecting the academic achievement of boys and young men of color. Ms. Bryant is an alumna of the University of Delaware, where she received a Master of Arts in Urban Affairs & Public Policy and a Bachelor of Science in Human Resources.*

Community-Based and Equity-Centered Approaches to African American Male Development

Hal Smith
National Urban League

ABSTRACT

The effective use of out-of-school time learning for urban youth, particularly African American males, fosters the academic, social, and life skills necessary for individuals to prosper in the twenty-first century and close opportunity gaps between affluent and disadvantaged students. This paper highlights the benefits of positive developmental and learning opportunities for students using a community-based and equity-centered approach to out-of-school time. The author provides recommendations on creating effective out-of-school learning opportunities that engage urban youth, families, and key stakeholders using approaches that are:

+

Holistic: encompass the intellectual, socioemotional, and physical development of youth

+

Asset-based: focus on building capacities in young people rather than emphasizing their deficiencies

+

Ecological: strengthen the interaction between a student's development and their immediate environments and influences, which may include family, school peers, and neighborhood

Through local partnerships between schools and community-based organizations, students can gain access to a stimulating learning environment that enhances their academic skills and their personal development. The aim of this paper is to provide educators with a framework for developing meaningful out-of-school opportunities for positive adult and peer interactions, so that African American males can develop the skills and abilities that will enable them to become active civic participants in their adult lives.

Hal Smith, EdD, *is the Vice President for Education and Youth Development, Health, and Quality of Life for the National Urban League, where he is also a Senior Research Fellow. He has worked in youth development and education advocacy for most of the last twenty years. Prior to joining the National Urban League in 2008, Dr. Smith held teaching, administrative, policy, and advocacy positions with the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, the City College of New York, the College of the Holy Cross, Northern Illinois University, Lesley University, and Harvard University.*

Mentally Healthy and Safe Schools

Oscar Barbarin
Tulane University

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses issues surrounding the development of mentally healthy and safe school environments to meet the educational and socioemotional needs of African American males. The author proposes solutions that address the development of key socioemotional skills among African American males to create supportive school environments that help students cope with complex trauma and nurture academic success.

The recommendations proposed by the author are framed around three fundamental principles that promote safe and healthy learning environments for African American males:

+

Encouraging a strong sense of connection and engagement between African American males and their school environments, and fostering strong interpersonal relationships

+

Promoting equity-centered school discipline policies focused on the development of students' socioemotional skills

+

Ensuring that appropriate mental health services are made available to all students who need them, including African American males

Although the majority of African American males are in fact developing the socioemotional and resilience skills necessary to succeed in academics and in life, these issues must be addressed to help the students who are often overlooked and disproportionately mislabeled with mental and emotional disorders. This paper is intended to build an understanding of the support systems and services needed to create a safe and caring environment that supports student and staff well-being.

Oscar A. Barbarin, PhD, *is the Lila L. and Douglas J. Hertz Endowed Chair in the Department of Psychology at Tulane University. He earned a doctorate in clinical psychology at Rutgers University in 1975 and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in social psychology at Stanford University in 1983. He is past president of the American Orthopsychiatric Association and a Fellow in the American Psychological Association's Division 27 Society for Community Research and Action. Dr. Barbarin is the co-editor of the* American Journal of Orthopsychiatry *and the Chair of the National Committee for Psychology of the National Academies of Science. He has been involved in longitudinal studies of the socioemotional and academic development of boys of color. His current work focuses on universal mental health screening in schools, alternative models of school discipline, and the use of group interventions to promote social competence in adolescents.*

Ensuring Equality in School Discipline Practices and Policies and Dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Leticia Smith-Evans
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund

ABSTRACT

This solution brief addresses the racial disparities in school discipline policies that disproportionately affect Black males and perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline, eroding families and entire communities from within. The author makes the case that the overrepresentation of Black males being disciplined in schools (which includes suspension and expulsion from school) is the current manifestation of racial school segregation and therefore a modern civil rights issue. As Black males are pushed out of schools and classrooms, their opportunities for academic and social growth are diminished while their exposure to high-risk behaviors such as drug use, criminal activity, and dropping out of school is increased. The author devises solutions to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline by exploring various areas and levers of change in order to:

+ Provide the historical context of the school-to-prison pipeline and reveal disparities in discipline faced by Black males

+ Highlight actions and initiatives of federal agencies and community activists to address the issue

+ Discuss research initiatives funded by various governmental agencies, foundations, and philanthropic organizations

The aim of this solution brief is to raise awareness of the various avenues for action to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, to approach school discipline in ways that create equitable educational and developmental opportunities for Black males. This involves a multifaceted response focused on developing opportunities for Black males both inside and outside the school system. The author posits that educators, policymakers, families, researchers, and legal advocates must all work together to contribute positively to the solution, and not the problem.

Leticia Smith-Evans, JD, PhD, *is a civil rights attorney at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), where she advocates for equal access to educational opportunities via impact litigation, policy advocacy, and technical assistance. Her work currently centers around school desegregation, voluntary integration, discipline reform, and access to higher education; her research interests include education law and policy, equity and diversity, and cultural competence. Prior to joining LDF, she was an associate at a large international law firm, served as a judicial law clerk for the Honorable Dickinson R. Debevoise of the United States District Court for the District of New Jersey, and as a policy advisor and agency liaison for Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle. She is also a former New York City public school teacher, and often serves as an adjunct professor of education law and policy. Dr. Smith-Evans received a BA from Williams College, and a JD, MS, and PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She is a member of the University of Wisconsin Law School's Board of Visitors and serves on a number of other nonprofit boards and committees.*

Improving the Academic Achievement of African American Males: A Path Forward for America's Great City Schools

Michael Casserly
Council of the Great City Schools

ABSTRACT

The concluding chapter of the text outlines strategies for improving the quality of education for African American males, pulling together the broad themes described in the solution briefs. This chapter is intended not only to provide an overview of the lessons learned but to emphasize how interconnected the various areas of reform are to improving the quality of education for African American males. Taken together, the findings and recommendations in this document argue for a fundamental shift in the traditional approach of schools, which have tended to sift and sort children for the benefit of some and to the detriment of others. The chapter discusses four broad thematic areas:

+ The importance of strong leadership and a unifying vision for reform

+ The role of instructional rigor and high expectations for all students

+ The pursuit of a multilayered approach to reforms at the district, school, and individual levels

+ Family and community involvement

The author argues that these reforms, taken together as a whole, have the potential to make the biggest difference for students and give school districts a road map to improving the academic attainment of African American males. In summary, these ideas and lessons advocate for shifts in the approaches of educators, families, community organizations, and other stakeholders, to build a culture of collaboration on behalf of African American males.

Michael Casserl, PhD, *has served as Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools since January 1992. Before assuming his current position, he was the organization's Director of Legislation and Research for fifteen years. As head of the urban-school group, Casserly has unified big-city schools nationwide around a vision of reform and improvement; led the nation's largest urban school districts in volunteering for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); guided the organization to be the first national education-membership group to call for the Common Core State Standards; initiated an aggressive technical-assistance program to improve urban education; directed the development of public education's first performance-management system; and led the first national study of common practices among the nation's fastest-improving urban school districts. He is currently spearheading efforts to boost academic performance in the nation's big-city schools; strengthen management and operations; and improve the 'image of urban education.* USA Today *has referred to him as a crusader for urban schools. He is an US Army veteran and holds a PhD from the University of Maryland and a BA from Villanova University.*

Blueprint FOR Change

Education and Schooling

A
School-Based Policies and Programs for Equity and Access

In many cases, schooling in America has not been set up to meet the academic needs of African American males and other historically underserved students. In fact, the institution was organized and operated to sort children in ways that matched society's perceptions of students. If we are to begin addressing the needs of all students, urban schools could start by pursuing the following steps:

1
Articulate in the school district's mission statement a clear belief that all students, including African American males, are valued and can achieve at the highest levels.

2
Ensure that African American males have comprehensive access to a core curriculum in their schools, and ensure that curriculum is grounded in rigorous college and career-ready standards for all.

3
Closely monitor instruction for African American males to ensure that the content or rigor of their courses is not being diluted or watered down.

4
Implement early intervention strategies for African American males if data on early-warning indicators suggest that they are falling behind.

5
Review the school district's instructional policies and programs to ensure that they are comprehensive, systemic, and integrated enough to address the economic, social, emotional, and psychological needs of African American males at both individual and institutional levels. Develop a plan for the evaluation of these policies and practices for their effectiveness with respect to African American males.

6
Pursue aggressive and research-based school-turnaround initiatives in schools with large numbers of African American males that have chronically failed their students, and transform them into centers of excellence. Explore special academies for African American males.

7
Encourage and guide African American male students to participate in extended-time academic programs—in school and out of school—to strengthen literacy, math, and science skills. Involve families in this effort and encourage their active involvement.

8
Ensure that African American males have full access to positive behavioral supports and interventions, and access to mental health and diagnostic services.

9
Clearly differentiate instructional and behavioral interventions to ensure that they are sensitive to the ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic differences among African American and Latino males.

10
Review policies and practices to ensure that they are not stigmatizing students while attempting to provide supports for them. Consider policies and practices at both the individual and institutional levels, and at the school and district levels.

11
Develop a strong system of social supports, mentors, and interventions to create an environment for positive interpersonal interactions for African American males.

12
Ensure that parents and guardians of African American male students are actively encouraged and welcome to attend and participate in school and Parent Teacher Organization or Parent Teacher Association (PTO/PTA) activities. Students are less likely to be ignored or mistreated if their parents or guardians are visible regularly in the schools. In addition, parents should have ample choices of excellent educational opportunities for their children.

B
Early Childhood

The need for early-childhood programming for African American males is profound, and in too many cases, unmet. Yet the nation has not seriously confronted or addressed the inequalities and disparities facing some children from their earliest years—inequities that contribute to negative outcomes over a lifetime. The research indicates that early-childhood programs can produce substantial benefits for students; thus urban schools should:

1

Establish high-quality educational and developmentally appropriate preschool and early-childhood programs and supports to which African American males have full access. These programs should have small teacher-to-child ratios, an age-appropriate curriculum that is integrated across subjects, well-trained teachers in child development, and mechanisms for engaging parents or guardians.

2

Set clear goals for the developmental progress of African American children participating in early-childhood programs. Monitor student progress, regularly evaluate results, and follow students as they move up the grades.

3

Ensure that early-childhood programs connect developmentally to kindergarten and first- through third-grade curriculum, address social, emotional, health, nutritional, and physical development needs of children, and use developmentally appropriate assessments.

4

Consider implementation of home-visitation efforts, preschool centers, and preschool classes in the schools to address the multiple needs of some African American males.

5

Ensure that teachers and aides in early-childhood programs serving African American males are early-childhood certified; have adequate training in child development (particularly as it applies to African American males); understand the effects of negative stereotyping and the appropriate use of assessments, and are compensated commensurate with other teachers. Provide mentors in cases where teachers struggle.

6

Make sure that early-childhood programming that serves African American males is staffed with appropriately trained teachers, aides, parent-resource personnel, community liaisons, nurses, psychologists, and social workers. (Early grades could use these supports as well.) Staff compensation should be in line with others in the district.

7

Make certain that preschool programming includes services starting at age two and spanning two years; that parents or guardians have the opportunity to volunteer and participate in program decisions; that there is a curriculum in place that focuses on language and early literacy and is aligned with the curriculum of later grades, and that these programs offer health screenings, nursing services, and free or reduced-price meals.

8

Eliminate the use of out-of-school suspensions to discipline students participating in early childhood programming.

C
Reading, Writing, and Intellectual Development

Critical to the academic success of students, particularly African American males, is the instruction they receive in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. New standards being pursued by many states and local school districts have the potential to improve academic achievement, but urban schools will need to ensure that all students have the academic literacy skills necessary to access rigorous course content. To address the literacy needs of African American male students, the best evidence suggests that we should:

1

Define the content of classroom instruction for African American males (and others) around college- and career-ready English-language arts (ELA) standards at every grade level. Multidisciplinary texts at every grade level should be appropriately rich and complex, with instruction that engages students in close and careful reading to draw evidence and meaning from the material.

2

Make sure that the school and district instructional programs used with African American male students are integrated across subjects; teach sentence and text structure and vocabulary; blend reading and writing; provide differentiation according to student needs, and use appropriate assessments to inform progress.

3

Review the instructional materials used in classes with large numbers of African American males to ensure that those materials prioritize language development from the earliest grades; include content and reading lists that will engage students and motivate them to read more; encourage discussion, and build comprehension across subjects. Supplement basal texts if necessary. Do not buy or use materials that do not nurture strong language development among African American male students.

4

Incorporate the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) in curriculum development, professional development, and classroom instruction, including the importance of providing explicit instruction to build phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension strategies, particularly for African American male students who may be at risk for reading problems. However, avoid overly narrow approaches to literacy development that rely exclusively on phonics and/or "leveled texts," and programs that have shown little impact, and that do not emphasize comprehension, understanding, and broad intellectual development.

5

Use various supports and data to determine if, when, and how to implement ELA interventions with African American male students. Avoid placing African American male students in interventions or remedial classes based solely on test scores or any single criterion.

6

Provide principals and teachers who are working with large numbers of African American males with comprehensive professional development on the multiple vital signs of strong literacy development.

7

Ensure that assessment results on reading and writing are used by teachers and other academic staff to inform instructional strategies for African American males, but do not reduce their achievement to the sole measure of test scores.

8

Decline to hire new teachers in urban schools who lack adequate training in reading, writing, and intellectual development to work with African American male students.

9

Develop a defined and ethical research agenda around effective literacy strategies with African American males to better determine what works and doesn't.

D
Mathematics Achievement

African American males are significantly underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, and few urban school systems graduate large numbers of students with the skills necessary to pursue post-secondary education and careers in this field. The best evidence on this issue suggests that urban schools should:

1

Define the content of classroom instruction for African American males (and all others) around college- and career-ready standards in mathematics at every grade level. Curriculum and texts at every grade level should include strong examples of the most important math concepts and applications to be studied in depth.

2

Make sure that math programs and materials serving African American male students include experiential projects, observations, investigations, applications of interest to students, and group discussions. Math programs should also include connections to STEM careers, offer tutoring, provide field trips, and offer mentors with strong math backgrounds.

3

Consider using the same high-quality math teacher (i.e., looping) with small groups of African American male students who stay together in 90-minute math classes for four years of high school, and extended-learning opportunities like summer math programs to prevent summer learning loss. Also consider the use of teachers who are dedicated solely to math instruction (i.e., differential staffing) with African American males in upper elementary grades.

4

Use multitiered systems of support or response-to-invention approaches to determine if, when, and how instructional interventions in math are needed with African American male students. Avoid placing African American male students in interventions or remedial classes based solely on test scores or any single criterion.

5

Monitor the course-taking progress in math of every African American male student to ensure that he is successfully taking a core sequence of math courses throughout the secondary grades, including Advanced Placement math and science courses.

6

Make extensive use of peer tutoring among African American males to support their mathematics learning and confidence. Also enlist area African American college students with strong math skills to serve as tutors and mentors.

7

Provide district leaders, principals, and teachers who are working with large numbers of African American males with comprehensive and regular professional development, common planning time, professional learning communities, and extensive summer math academies to strengthen math-content knowledge, pedagogical techniques, and math applications that will engage African American male students (e.g., use of technology, demonstration lessons, co-teaching, and differentiation).

8

Encourage parents and guardians to support their African American sons in their study of mathematics and science. Create math activities for students and their families to help with the transition into high school.

9

Ensure that assessment results in mathematics are used by teachers and other academic staff to inform instructional strategies for African American males, but do not reduce their achievement to the sole measure of test scores.

E
Gifted and Talented Programs

Low participation rates in gifted and talented programs among African American males suggest that school districts need to do a better job of identifying and recruiting exceptional students, ensuring that advanced coursework is broadly available to all students, and supporting the skills necessary for students to be successful in these courses. The research in this area indicates that urban schools should:

1

Routinely collect and analyze disaggregated data on the numbers of African American male students who are enrolled in or placed into gifted, Advanced Placement, and honors classes by type of class and school, compared with the total numbers of African American males districtwide, to ensure that that these students are not underrepresented. Develop a comprehensive plan for building a pipeline for these students to high-level courses.

2

Remove or modify artificial restrictions to identifying students as eligible for gifted and talented programs. These restrictions may include the use of standardized achievement tests as a sole or major criterion, admission fees, perfect attendance, no behavioral infractions, official transcripts with applications, no grade below C in any course, restricted hours and locations for applying, parent contracts, and applications having to be delivered in person.

3

Provide professional development for staff and teachers on how to recognize African American males who could benefit from gifted programs.

4

Establish aggressive efforts to recruit those African American male students who could benefit from them into advanced and gifted programs.

5

Evaluate the results of participation by African American males in gifted programs to ensure barriers do not inhibit success.

F
Special Education

Urban public schools often have some of the best special-education programs available, but too many African American male students get routed to special education when they have not been adequately taught basic reading and math skills or when there is a behavioral issue that has been mistaken, wittingly or unwittingly, as a disability. The research in this area indicates that urban schools should:

1

Establish explicit and measurable goals for decreasing placement and participation rates of African American males in alternative or special-education programs that too often restrict access to high-quality core instruction. Be transparent about data that are collected and monitor progress toward goal attainment.

2

Review special-education identification rates in your district to determine whether African American males are being overidentified as disabled, particularly in the areas of emotional disturbance and intellectual disability, and if the data shows overidentification, develop a districtwide plan for addressing the issues.

3

Ensure that district accountability procedures address disproportionate placement of African American males in special education or watered-down courses. Provide professional development on goals, procedures, and programs.

G
College and Career Readiness

Dropout rates among African American males in too many urban school districts are excessively high. In addition, many students emerge from our schools without the preparation they need to be ready for college or careers. To reverse these trends, urban schools should:

1

Establish priorities and initiatives in the African American community or launch local campaigns to underscore the centrality of education from the earliest years, the importance of staying in school, and the need to prepare financially for college. Establish "promise" type programs like the "Pittsburgh Promise," where college will be paid for by the local community if a student stays in school, graduates, and is accepted into college. Encourage and monitor participation by African American males. Advocate federal support and incentives for such endowments.

2

Have local communities establish specific, measurable goals over five and ten years to raise college admission and graduation rates among students in the community, particularly African American male students. Develop community-wide plans for meeting goals.

3

Encourage African American male participation in various test-prep and test-familiarity efforts in schools so students are ready for and savvy about college-entrance examinations. Do not, however, interpret the results as the sum total of any student's knowledge or potential.

4

Encourage local colleges and universities in communities with large numbers of African American students to create and promote incentives to recruit, enroll, support, and graduate large numbers of African American male students. States should reward universities that improve retention and graduation rates for African American students.

5

Require colleges and universities to track college enrollment, degree completion, and degree attainment of African American male students, if they don't do so already.

6

Have local school systems and urban school systems clarify the skills students will need to be successful in college without remedial work. Provide opportunities for students to earn college credit through university/community college partnerships.

7

Encourage colleges, universities, and others to establish more comprehensive research programs to explore gaps in our knowledge about African American male achievement. Programs studied would include those on promising and effective practices; necessary resources and strategies to overcome barriers; innovative ideas and approaches; ways of overcoming the impediments of weak academic attainment; strategies to attract African American male students back into school or preventing them from dropping out, successful programs with other populations and in other countries, and needed family and community supports.

H
Teaching and Effective Learning Communities

Too many African American males are denied full access to high-quality instruction due to the inequitable distribution of teachers in major city and other school systems. The result is that, although some students are taught by the best teachers, many students with the greatest needs are taught by the weakest. The research indicates that urban school districts should:

1

Provide financial, course-load, and other incentives for the district's most effective teachers to teach in schools with the highest percentages of struggling students, particularly struggling African American males.

2

Charge professional-learning communities (PLC) in schools with large numbers of African American males with including these students in teachers' deliberations and planning.

3

Modify the district's teacher-recruitment strategy to aggressively seek out and recruit African American male teachers who are at the top of their classes academically.

4

Ensure that each school in the district has a parent/family/community partnership in place that involves the African American community in decision making, and builds outreach, communications, and parent involvement.

5

Ensure that schools in the district have a supportive learning environment that enhances African American students' sense of success, safety, and value in society.

6

Develop and implement aggressive school attendance efforts targeted at those African American males who don't attend school regularly each day.

7

Develop self-assessment tools to assist schools/districts in their pursuit of ongoing school improvement. The tools should merge research on effective schools with promising practices for working with boys of color and measure progress in seven core areas: assessment, parent/family/community partnership, curriculum and instruction, school environment and climate, school leadership, school counseling and guidance, and school organization.

Mental Health, Discipline, and Safety

Schools often do not do an adequate job of supporting the socioemotional health of students and providing needed personal supports to students, particularly African American males. Moreover, too many African American males are pushed out of classes because of suspension and disciplinary policies that some have characterized as leading inextricably to the criminal justice system. An emphasis should be placed on creating leaders, not potential prisoners. To address these challenges and barriers, research and best practices indicates that urban schools should:

1

Set up a local task force with multiple stakeholders to review suspension and expulsion data on African American males to see if they are differentially punished for the same offenses. Develop short-term steps to ensure that students being suspended are provided the instructional supports they need, so that they do not fall behind. In the longer term, hold principals and others accountable for disproportionate suspension rates in their schools.

2

Encourage teachers and other staff members to make personal and individual connections with each child in their classes, particularly African American males who appear isolated or troubled. Also ensure that teachers have the training they need to provide competent classroom management, use cooperative learning strategies, encourage class discussion and student engagement, and build a sense of personal efficacy and responsibility among students.

3

Organize schools with large numbers of African American males into smaller units, if possible, to encourage more personalized attention. Other strategies like departmental teaming, house-schools, and looping (i.e., the use of the same teachers with a group of students over multiple years) can also be effective in creating more personal attention for students.

4

Monitor school climates to ensure that they are positive, supportive, and responsive to students, and that they foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and connectedness. Schools should promote student well-being, respectful communications, social/emotional learning, safe opportunities for students to express themselves constructively, and ways to honor and celebrate student achievement and diversity (i.e., racial, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity and age, language and culture).

5

Help school staff understand the connections between race and discipline patterns in the case of African American males.

6

Revamp school-district disciplinary policies to restrict harsh punishments for minor offenses, eliminate zero-tolerance policies that ensnare disproportionate numbers of African American males, and reduce the numbers of out-of-school suspensions. Create alternative disciplinary procedures and response-to-intervention strategies to address behavioral issues.

7

Be proactive in identifying and addressing issues of equity, and don't be afraid to seek technical assistance or funding from others to support initiatives. Don't wait until a civil rights complaint has been filed against the school district before admitting there is a problem or doing anything about it.

8

Develop or adopt and implement positive behavior programs and strategies beginning in the early grades for all students. Strategies could include positive behavior interventions, personal responsibility, victim/offender mediation and reconciliation, anti-bullying, socioemotional learning, and peacemaking.

9

Create programs that help smooth the transition from elementary school to middle grades and from eighth grade to high school (i.e., bridging programs) for African American males to minimize a sense of disconnectedness at a time when so many students begin to think about dropping out.

10

Provide avenues and opportunities for African American males to talk about their emotions and feelings to help reduce stress and the need to act out. Ensure that counseling and psychological staff are trained on signs of serious emotional and behavior problems, and are able to provide assistance or referrals. Establish mental health screening processes if necessary. Protect counseling staff and other support staff as much as possible during budget cuts.

11

Conduct regular evaluations of school mental health and safety programs, expenditures, and staffing to ensure their effectiveness. Evaluation results should be presented to the school board on a routine basis and accountability mechanisms should be established.

12

Create safe passageways between home and school for African American males living in neighborhoods marked by violence. Work with law enforcement to coordinate efforts.

Out-of-School Time Learning

Research is quickly demonstrating that programs that extend the school day, school week, and school year are producing significantly better student achievement when these opportunities are structured to build on and enhance what students are learning during the school day. Some of these programs are provided through the schools, but many are offered through community-based organizations with strong links in the African American community. Best practices and experience in these areas indicate that urban schools should:

1

Encourage enrollment of African American males in community-based youth-development programs that include physical development, skill building, social and emotional support, positive relations with adults and peers, and study time. Out-of-school learning should also include decision-making skills, work habits and expectations, leadership development, and time management.

2

Actively enlist the participation of families, parents, and guardians in these out-of-school learning programs with their children and youth, particularly during the summer.

3

Enlist schools and community-based organizations in programs or projects that enable African American males to link their aspirations to actual opportunities, and that emphasize students' assets, capacities, self-worth, and talents rather than deficits. Collaboration with schools should help create a more seamless network of support for youth.

4

Coordinate the academic activities of community groups and schools so that they reinforce each other.

5

Work with African American male youth to create clear personal goals for their academic, financial, and career aspirations.

6

Work to retain African American male youth in mentoring and community-based programs for at least two years, so that they develop connections with adults, peers, and programs.

7

Set up awards programs for African American males who have accomplished goals and attained significant milestones.

8

Create opportunities for African American male students to apply their knowledge outside of school to school-related activities in order to build greater connections to school.

9

Coordinate programs not only with local schools and school districts but with local colleges and training programs so that African American males have a number of ways to access post-secondary opportunities.

Partnerships and Mentoring

Urban school leaders and others have assembled this paper to lay out a game plan for improving opportunities for African American males, but schools will not be able to address all the challenges successfully on their own. Experience and research indicate that community partnerships and adult mentoring can be critical in the lives of many African American males.

A
Establishing Partnerships

Urban schools should:

1

Perform a basic needs assessment prior to developing any partnership between schools and community organizations to determine what African American male students need, both in school and out of school, that community-based organizations can help fill. This process should define the focus of the partnerships.

2

Review school district policies to ensure that they define the goals, purposes, and priorities of partnerships to work with African American male students; how partners will be selected; what expectations will exist for partnerships; how long the partnerships will last; how conflicts will be resolved; how frequently the parties will meet for planning and coordination purposes; how the partnerships will be evaluated, and how these expectations will be communicated to interested groups.

3

Educate school staff and teachers on the integral need for and benefits of partnerships that work with African American male students, so school personnel don't view the collaboration as a supplemental "add-on" where participation is optional.

4

Evaluate potential partnerships with community organizations based on their experience in the African American community, their track record with similar school partnerships, their history in implementing programs, their past results over an extended period, their policies and practices related to the vetting of staff and possible abuse of children, and the plans and sources of funding they have to maintain a presence in the schools.

5

Establish a clear set of procedures (either through a Memorandum of Understanding or other means) for how volunteers are placed in or assigned to schools or students to ensure that African American males have equitable access to organizational resources and assistance. Procedures should be clear about the goals of the program; which types of students will be recruited for and served by the program; how recruitment will be executed; when results are expected; how progress will be determined; how the partnership will interact with staff and teachers; and how the program will help meet student needs.

6

Determine who is responsible and accountable for what in the partnership arrangement and what the roles of the partnering organizations are. (Typically, schools would be responsible for access to African American male students, space in the buildings to conduct a program, and other supports, while the community-based organizations would be responsible for program activities that are consistent with their agreement with the schools). Work out who pays for what in the partnership, whether monetary or in-kind payments.

7

Design and provide to school and/or community-based staff the professional development and volunteers necessary for the partnership program to reach its full potential on behalf of African American male students.

8

Assign a staff member from the central office to serve as liaison to community organizations that have a strong presence in the African American community, and can help coordinate and communicate their work on behalf of the district's students.

9

Cultivate partnership relationships that are productive and enjoyable; that utilize shared decision making, effective communications, and a defined structure, and that actually foster rather than hinder collaboration with community-based organizations serving the African American community.

Partnerships and Mentoring

10
Ensure that partnerships include connections with mental health agencies, nutrition groups, family-services organizations, recreation outlets, and the like.

11
Evaluate the partnerships based on the goals set jointly by the school district and community groups for the improvement of the academic performance and social well-being of African American male students. Evaluate intermediate goals as well, and disseminate the results for others to see.

B
Developing and Overseeing Mentoring Programs

Urban schools should:

12
. Determine goals for a mentoring program meant to assist African American males either academically or otherwise, and decide whether the mentoring will be one-on-one, group, community or school-based, or some combination of these approaches. Ensure that the design of a mentoring program reflects best practices in matching mentors and students based on relevant criteria.

13
Clarify that mentors do not have the roles of tutors or disciplinarians. Mentors need to have a trusting relationship with young African American males. School staff should be informed of what this role is and what it is not.

14
Have the mentorship program target problem and high-risk behaviors (e.g., delinquency or violence, drug use, absenteeism, or high suspension rates) exhibited by African American males who may lack responsible male adults in their lives.

15
Recruit responsible African American adult mentors from the community to pair with district students before and after school and on weekends. Set up clear screening procedures and background checks for mentors and professional development to support their relationships with African American male students.

16
Carefully match mentors with young African American mentees based on interests, goals, demographic similarities, interview results, and other factors. Enlist the support and assistance of school administrators, counselors, and social workers in identifying students for mentoring and to coordinate efforts.

17
Mentoring activities with young African American males should include such key activities as exposing them to higher education and career paths, personal relationship building, joint reading and discussion sessions, and sports and recreation.

18
Provide professional development for mentors throughout their relationship with their young African American male charges, and ensure that mentors are in touch with their organizations at least monthly to discuss progress and challenges.

19
Require a mentoring relationship with young African American males of at least twelve months and ideally of three years. Care must be taken to ensure that the relationship does not end with the student thinking that he has been abandoned (again) or that it has ended because of something he did or did not do.

20
Set up special parent-training workshops, particularly for single mothers who may be having difficulty with their African American sons, on how to be a positive role model to and catalyst in the lives of their male children. Other workshops might include relationship building, monitoring, stable home environments, drug prevention, avoiding violence, effective parent-child communications, gang involvement, and the value of staying in school.

Final Note

This blueprint was developed to encourage a national discussion on the steps that urban schools and others could take to improve their performance with the many African American students that have not been served well in our settings. Other constructive ideas are welcome.

The focus of the paper has been on schools, where young people spend so much of their time, but it does not mean to exclude a broader audience of actors who have a major role to play. They include the justice system, the world of entertainment and sports, higher education, housing and the healthcare sector, local, state, and federal governments, the private sector and the business community, the philanthropic community, the faith-based community, the news media, and many others.

All will need to be enlisted to ensure that all children nationwide inherit the excellence and opportunity that America promises.

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