Education, Employment, and Health Outcomes for Black Boys and Young Men:
Opportunities for Research and Advocacy Collaboration

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SCHOLARS NETWORK
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CLASP created the Partnership Circle for Boys and Young Men of Color to establish a venue for national policy organizations, advocacy groups, and researchers to discuss policy opportunities that may improve education, employment, and health outcomes for boys and young men (ages 12-24) of color. One of the salient findings of the group's initial meeting in September 2012 was that research on black males should be used more effectively to influence policy change. To address this finding, CLASP and the Scholars Network on Black Masculinity (an assembly of scholars committed to reshaping scholarly and public understandings of the lives of African American men and exposing the cultural dimensions of the Black male experience) collaborated to host a joint working session on May 2-3, 2013. This meeting with members of both the Partnership Circle and the Scholar's Network attracted 32 nationally recognized researchers and policy advocates, representing 25 institutions of higher education, research organizations, national membership organizations, national policy organizations, civil rights groups, and foundations interested in this issue. The convening had three objectives:

1. To develop formal and meaningful relationships between researchers and national policy advocates
2. To connect research findings to national, state, and local policy discussions that support solutions to the dropout and employment crisis for middle school, high school, and out-of-school black males
3. To reach consensus and focus efforts on activities over the next two years that advance policy solutions for employment and dropout prevention and recovery for middle school, high school, and out-of-school black males

Participants heard presentations and engaged in discussions with representatives from the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, Open Society Foundations, Trust for America's Health, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, and ColorOfChange. Participants also engaged in dialogue about strengthening the education pipeline at both the middle school and high school levels, and for those students who need to be reconnected and reengaged with education after dropping out. The discussion raised key issues such as cultural competence, teacher expectations, fair school discipline, 9th grade transition, over-age and under-credit youth, multiple pathways, barriers to college and career readiness, and disconnected youth re-engagement as part of the high school responsibility. Participants also discussed the non-school factors impacting student achievement, such as poverty, unemployment, violence, fatherhood. In addition, the group addressed opportunities for a coordinated role of school and community in supporting students and families and serving as advocates for sustainable change.

As the participants deliberated, a few important issues arose in the discussion that will shape how the group thinks about future tasks related to black males and achievement in school, work, and beyond. The first is **geography**. Education, employment, and health issues differ within the urban context versus rural and suburban settings. Thus, they require a differentiated response. Second, any advocacy approach that is taken on these issues should utilize **multiple strategies for engaging communities**, such as emerging technologies (e.g., social media) to creatively engage millennial and younger audiences. Third, we need to be sensitive, yet unapologetic, in answering the question regarding the need for **particular emphasis on boys** for this work. Finally, there needs to be purposeful, **meaningful engagement of black male youth** at the local, state, and national level to identify solutions that address the issues they face.

Eight Areas of Opportunity

Through this joint working session, the participants identified eight areas where they could be influential in crafting policy solutions for black male adolescents and opportunities to act individually and collectively to advance work in these areas.

1. Develop a framework and consistent message to elevate particular education, employment and health issues in national policy conversations.

Opportunities for Action:

Participants expressed consensus about a perceived lack of willingness by policymakers to state the needs of black males directly and consistently. Historic shifts show the possibility of national policy being reframed to a color-blind narrative. National policy advocates and researchers have to shine light on conditions that impact black males to demonstrate that a color-conscious approach in policymaking is appropriate and necessary.

All members of the Partnership Circle have expertise in specific issues and carry their own messages. The development of a unified message solidifies the Partnership Circle as an entity and enables partners to actively elevate each other's work.

- Identify major issues raised in this convening and what partners are already doing to elevate them.
- Develop a document and web-based portal to frame issues, present current work, and identify potential solutions.
- Identify opportunities to consistently present messages in the work of individual organizations and collectively.

2. Increase the number of voices on issues of education, employment pathways, and health of black boys and young men.

Opportunities for Action:

As policymakers, advocates, opinion leaders and others engage in conversations regarding national policy, too many of those discussions are devoid of a perspective on black males, or are being led by only one organization that serves as a lone voice. Each of the partners occupy a unique space in advocacy and research. Members of the Partnership Circle should maximize the opportunity to utilize expertise from different arenas to frame and influence current and future public policy on black males. Where knowledge development is needed on issues, our partners who can provide critical analysis that includes the particular nuances of the black male experience should be tapped to offer guidance.

- Create a web-based portal detailing all partners, their areas of expertise, and relevant publications. Later, expand the online system to include other individuals and organizations working on education, employment and health issues that focus on our frame of black boys and young men.
- Identify current opportunities to bring additional scholars, researchers, and advocates into important conversations, such as common core discussions and the expansion of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights data set.

3. Develop a strategy to address the issue of cultural competence in schools.

Opportunities for Action:

A key first step is to develop a common understanding of "cultural competence" and how it should be applied in the context of education. It is critical to identify methods for teaching cultural competence to school staff in preservice and inservice training, and then to hold school staff accountable for the creation of culturally safe places in schools. Partnership Circle members should seek out legislative opportunities to include language about cultural competency in schools, using these as leverage points for black boys and young men. The Partnership Circle should reach out to existing leaders in this arena to generate a discussion and develop a course of action.

- Identify how partners have individually advanced issues of cultural competence.
- Create a national working group on the issue of cultural competence to develop a common understanding, identify the policy opportunities, and craft an agenda to move this work forward.
- Work with schools of education with expertise on black students to develop and test cultural competence coursework for educators.
- Engage other policy and civil rights organizations and members of the Tri-Caucus (Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and Congressional Black Caucus) to work collaboratively on policy goals.

4. Identify and elevate model approaches, policies and programmatic interventions that strengthen academic and employment outcomes for black boys and young men.

Opportunities for Action:

Highlight successful approaches and programmatic interventions on a local level that work to effectively educate black boys and young men and prepare them for careers. In addition, identify successful policies that make it easier to implement the types of programmatic changes needed. This information about effective policies and practices is not widely known or shared. A role for partners and researchers should be to increase the documentation and dissemination of this information with the aim of generating the will to have them replicated.

- Utilize research centers to provide expertise in various areas of policy and practice and to identify approaches, policies, and interventions that should be uplifted.
- Identify a mechanism for sharing information with the broader field.
- Determine those robust programmatic interventions with black boys that would benefit from data analysis support to prove their effectiveness, and use the Partnership Circle to potentially partner evaluators and researchers with these programs.

5. Empower communities to take leadership roles to demand policy change locally.

Opportunities for Action:

While policy changes at the federal level are a part of the solution, much of the change that must happen to impact education, employment, and health outcomes for black boys and young men should happen at the local level. Leaders need to begin to think about community empowerment in new ways. It is clear that authentic and sustainable change will not happen without community advocates as the leaders and accountability partners in the work.

Several members of the Partnership Circle have a presence and/or relationships in many communities. We should become more intentional about leveraging the individual work by forging new linkages in communities, supporting each other's work, sharing resource materials, or creating joint materials with common messages.

- Identify communities where partners have a presence and where there is overlap. Determine what policy or practice issue each partner is seeking to address.
- Identify sources of research and data that should be shared with communities to increase their capacity to engage in advocacy.
- Create a working group to identify mechanisms for engaging communities around advocacy for specific policy issues.

6. Increase access to data to inform policy decisions.

Opportunities for Action:

Policy work needs to be more science-driven. Researchers interested in black male achievement can provide stronger analysis to bring issues to light, engage thought leaders, and determine the policies that need to be advanced. There is, however, limited access to data that will yield this type of progress. State-collected data are insufficient. Researchers can be a strong voice for how data are collected, give examples of more ways that good data would be useful to the field, and show how arming folks with key data will drive the work.

- Collaborate with the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans to engage the U.S. Department of Education in discussions about greater access to data for the purposes of analysis and research-driven policy solutions for black boys.
- Hold a joint discussion with researchers and program advocates on how to create and measure interim outcomes for high-needs populations to make the case for progress toward educational end goals.
- Identify data/research projects needs from Partnership Circle and initiate conversations with potential research partners in Scholars Network to meet those research needs.

7. Reframe the image of black male adolescents to increase public will for reforms to education, employment, and health policy and practice.

Opportunities for Action:

The shift in people's perception of black boys from "little boy" to "potentially threatening adolescent" is harmful to teacher-student interactions in school, damaging to employment prospects for youth, emotionally hurtful for youth, and detrimental to public policy reform. Decisions made about public policies are affected by unconscious biases and stereotypes that are exacerbated by the media and popular culture. Perceptions of black male adolescents need to be addressed to garner increased public will for reform.

- Consult with experts to develop a consistent message about who black male adolescents are and what youth development says about the adolescent stage. This messaging tool can be used by partners in documents, talking points, events, etc.
- Partner with experts to organize training sessions with leading media venues to help them better understand the issues related to black males. Encourage these media outlets to reframe the way they report on black males.

8. Strengthen the social-emotional wellness of black male adolescents to improve their outcomes in school, work, and health.

Opportunities for Action:

Black boys and young men often find themselves fulfilling negative stereotypes because they lack other examples of positive behavior or manhood. An effective way to undo these stereotypical images in the minds of black boys and young men is to offer them a counter-narrative. Moreover, black boys and young men who live in concentrated poverty have life experiences that are emotionally traumatic and can have lifelong consequences. If society hopes to improve long-term outcomes for black boys and young men, issues of social and emotional wellness must be addressed.

- Identify successful school- and/or community-based examples of masculinity development programs to pinpoint elements of effective practice and make recommendations to school systems.
- Identify successful school and/or community-based examples of addressing trauma for black boys living in communities of concentrated poverty.
- Create a policy case for why these types of programs are important and what public resources can be used to support them.

Collective Next Steps

The working session with the Partnership Circle and the Scholars Network on Black Masculinity yielded many strong ideas for collaboration to influence outcomes for black boys and young men. We expect that individual organizations will follow up on new alliances created as a result of the working session and collaborate to advance their work on specific policy issues. Excellent ideas were generated in this meeting for work that should be done jointly to improve outcomes for black boys and young men in education, pathways to employment, and health. Over the next few months, CLASP will work with the Partnership Circle to further the work by: using technology to foster ongoing communication with members of the Scholars Network on Black Masculinity; developing a work plan based on the identified opportunities for action; and identifying partners to take the lead on specific actionable items based on their areas of expertise. CLASP also plans to develop an event series in collaboration with partners to have education, employment, and health issues of black male adolescents as an ever-present part of national policy discussion. Future meetings of the Partnership Circle will also focus on moving the strategies outlined in this document and identifying policy leverage points for advancing critical solutions.

Appendix A

Summary of Raw Notes, By Topic

1. **Develop a framework and consistent message to elevate particular education, employment and health issues in national policy conversations.**

    a. Seize every opportunity to speak out. Use examples such as the Central Park 5 and create messages about the color issues that black boys and young men face.

    b. Big investments have been made in things that will impact black boys – ACA, HeadStart, early childhood, etc. But experts and advocates for black boys do not do enough to talk about these victories in the context of the benefit for black boys. What would a steady and consistent drumbeat on this issue look like? We need to find ways to continue to push the conversation, and celebrate the victories. Use social media, for example. Work to envision additional BMB work that can happen over the next few years. The President's budget request shows attention to the issue of poverty. How do we capitalize on that for black males and their families?

    c. The message that earliest years are the most important creates a barrier for those individuals who wish to impact on education in later years. We need a strategy for making later years equally important, while not undercutting the value of early childhood work. As people are rethinking the preK-20 model, need to weave our narrative into the conversation. But what is our narrative? A collective narrative should be developed.

    d. Embed intentional workforce development strategies in education discussions around college and career readiness, such as career exposure, internships, and other models.

    e. Capitalize on policy openings to create the political, social, and economic will for addressing disparities in federal policy and applications. For example, the U.S. Department of Education has stated a priority for investing in high need schools. Use this as an opportunity to push the issue of equity. The definition of "high needs" is broad; therefore, push to narrow the definition to get intentional focus on vulnerable black males. Make the case, use the numbers that are in our favor, and push for targeted investment.

    f. Black boys and young men with high needs are served by many governmental agencies. The work of interagency workgroups should be to identify ways that they can jointly address issues of disparity and low outcomes for black boys and young men.

2. **Increase the number of voices on issues of education, employment pathways, and health of black boys and young men.**

    a. Identify and bring more voices to the table that focus on the common core discussion.

    b. Push for further expansion of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights data set under the current Administration.

    c. Build more relationships and be more intentional about outreach to partners.

    d. Create web-base portal of partners, their areas of expertise, and publications.

    e. There are researchers who have conducted studies in areas that are relevant to the national policy conversations and can shed light on the discourse. There are also other policy organizations that can provide support and aid in disseminating important messages.

    f. Where limited research exists on an issue, create opportunities and funding sources to engage a research partner in doing analysis to help make a case.

3. **Develop a strategy to address the issue of cultural competence in schools.**

    a. Define what it means for teachers, school counselors, and school leaders to be culturally competent – what does it look like, what does it sound like, what does it feel like?

    b. Create more robust accountability measures that address cultural competence of teaching, counseling, and leading staff.

    c. Much of the cultural competency discussion is abstract; therefore, advance this work to craft a concrete policy ask and generate advocacy around it.

    d. Connect with thought leaders on this topic like Carol Lee, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Franklin and Brenda Campbell-Jones, Donna Y. Ford, Carl Grant, and others who get this issue to have a discussion.

    e. Engage members of the Tri-Caucus (Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and Congressional Black Caucus) to work collaboratively on this issue.

    f. Take advantage of existing federal legislation that could be used as examples to advance this work (e.g., language in ESEA for indigenous populations)

    g. Be aware of language that invites consideration versus language that creates fear due to unconscious bias, and message this work in ways that can elicit a positive response.

    h. Explore the peculiar institution of black maleness outside the context of white supremacy.

i.   Link this issue to discussions on economic opportunity for black males.

j.   Pre-service training programs in colleges of education need to have coursework designed to give a deeper understanding of culture and its effects on the learning process. To date, teacher education has not done much beyond awareness. Need to move beyond abstractions to building knowledge, skills, and abilities. Explore the development of college coursework for schools of education that can be implemented, packaged, and replicated. Partner with Clemson University's Charles Hamilton Houston Center for the Study of the Black Experience in Education.

k.   Both middle school and high school are generally far more punitive environments for black male students than elementary school, and some of that punitive environment is due to educators' unconscious bias, expectations, and tendencies in relation to black males.

4. **Identify and elevate model approaches, policies and programmatic interventions that strengthen academic and employment outcomes for black boys and young men.**

Examples of models that should be investigated and elevated:

a.   Full-service community schools

b.   PBIS and restorative justice models

c.   Mandatory wellness plans for students similar to Individual Education Plan (IEP) plans for students with disabilities.

d.   Use of technology to support both remedial and advanced learning. For example, dropout recovery programs can use technology to create flexibility for older students, and districts can use technology to offer higher level courses when the student demand is insufficient to hire a full-time teacher.

e.   Models that work well to diffuse black boys fighting in school. School data reveal that many black boys are suspended for fighting. More information on why it happens and targeted approaches to curb the fighting would be of significant benefit to organizations working to reduce suspension and expulsion.

f.   Better school finance models

g.   Models that have demonstrated success with black males who are overage and under-credited, or youth who were socially promoted and get to high school and realize they are unprepared

h.   Multiple pathways to high school credential

i.   Programs that address chronic absence from school as a dropout prevention strategy

j.   Models that address the role of fathers/fictive kin in educational pursuits.

k. Models that promote the strengthening of study skills and soft skills.

l. Approaches that link career readiness to higher education

m. Strategies and pipelines that feature continuous work experience and exposure to careers while also providing education.

n. Models that take a trauma-informed approach to working with black boys and young men

o. This group needs to consistently share stories and disseminate practical solutions.

5. **Empower communities to take leadership roles to demand policy change locally.**

a. Share research and data with communities in a way that gives them the tools they need to engage in their own advocacy. This requires more than just e-mailing a report to grassroots organizers. It requires writing documents with an advocacy audience in mind, making the document usable, making it relevant to that particular community.

b. Use community partners in gathering local data. These local partners provide context and tell the "why" behind the numbers. Make the community partners the primary presenters of this data, but give them the training and tools to be successful.

c. Help communities to mobilize and create the collective human capacity to make a demand.

d. Many communities are resource-depleted. Poverty and joblessness in communities clearly impacts school systems and students' education outcomes. How do we connect these ideas in our messaging?

e. How do we promote new economies?

f. Learn more about the Search Institute's 40 developmental assets for adolescents that developmental communities support; this research has great potential to help provide insight on what supports should be in place for students and communities at-large.

6. **Increase access to data to inform policy decisions.**

a. Build access to data to 1) increase community capacity to advocate and 2) increase our capacity to move a national message.

b. Explore partnership with the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans as a vehicle for elevating this data access issue.

c. One example of a data project discussed: collect data on extended/flexible graduation rates after the Department of Education graduation rate regulations took effect. How many more

black males graduate when this is taken into account? Are dropout re-engagement efforts in districts effectively reaching black male students?

    d. Emphasize the importance of data collaborations between educational systems and research universities. Such partnerships could provide actionable research to school systems and data of better suited to scientific research. The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago is an example of this kind of data collaboration.

7. Reframe the image of black male adolescents to increase public will for reforms to education, employment, and health policy and practice.

    a. The public narrative of black male identity differs starkly from the truth. Advocates, researchers, and leaders need to rescue the image of young black males as a critical component of advancing policy changes for their benefit. Consult with The Opportunity Agenda around creating a messaging document.

    b. Disseminate messages about the need for positive youth development practices in school for all students.

    c. Organize training sessions with leading media venues to educate them about the issues in relation to black males. Consult with experts in this area, such as Columbia University's Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media.

8. Strengthen the social-emotional wellness of black male adolescents to improve their outcomes in school, work, and health.

    a. Reframe identity for black male youth, and instill self-love and ingrain a new identity that is uplifting.

    b. These programs (e.g., COSEBOC Sankofa Passages Program was described in the session) have implications for other areas as well, such as decreased school suspensions due to fighting, decreased dropout rates/increased high school completion rates.

    c. If strong data support the utility and effectiveness of programs, leaders can make the policy case for using public resources to fund them.

Appendix B

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