



Education and Employment of High School Males of Color

January 2012

Summary of Roundtable Discussion

High school males of color face a number of barriers to high school graduation attainment and transition into post-secondary and the workforce. Males of color are less likely to graduate from high school. Nationwide, only about half of black and Hispanic males who begin high school will graduate four years later.

Teen males of color are far less likely to have access to jobs, work experience and training opportunities that lead to pathways to good jobs. For example, at any given time in 2011, less than 20 percent of African American and Latino teens were employed. Early work experience is especially important for low-income youth, as research shows employment is linked to increased attachment to school and teens who work in high school have a smoother transition into the workforce.¹

To discuss the policy barriers and solutions to meeting the education and employment needs of these young men, a group of local and national policy leaders, practitioners, advocates, and researchers was assembled. The roundtable discussion began with an overview of some of these issues and then challenged the experts to delve deeper into the specifics regarding education policy, existence of public will and data, and opportunities for action. This paper is a summary of the notes and key themes that emerged during the roundtable discussion. While employment is especially significant to ensuring positive outcomes for this population, the participant dialogue focused mainly on education barriers, challenges, and solutions. Other pressing policy issues significant to this population, including workforce development, juvenile/criminal justice and higher education policy will be identified in subsequent work by CLASP staff. The roundtable participants and the notes provide additional content knowledge in framing the education and employment policies and practices for high school males of color.

Policies and Practices Impacting this Population

The roundtable participants identified a number of policies and practices and the federal and local levels that impact positive educational outcomes for high school males of color, including (a) federal policies of accountability and funding and (b) local issues related to discipline policies and the quality of the teachers and resources.

¹ Andrew Sum, Joseph McLaughlin, Ishwar Khatiwada, et al., *Still Young, Idle, and Jobless: The Continued Failure of the Nation's Teens to Benefit From Renewed Job Growth*, Center for Labor Market Studies Northeastern University, 2006

Federal Policies

The following articulates growing policy concerns at the federal level. As Congress continues to work on efforts to reauthorize and make improvements to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), it is essential that the inequities in funding and impact of the movement toward common core standards are addressed.

- The long-term impact of the policy shift towards high academic standards/common core standards is yet unknown for this population. There is a need for analysis of the practices, supports, innovation and accountability systems needed to assure success of high school males of color given these realities.
- Inequities in the allocation of public education dollars have long played a role in the disparities seen in education for young men of color. Overall, high-poverty and high-minority schools are known to have greater needs, yet they often operate with fewer resources. In addition, high schools receive far fewer federal Title I resources to impact the education of low-income students than at the elementary school level. With the funds that schools do have, there is often a lack of flexibility that is needed to address local needs.

School and District Level Policies

Roundtable experts identified six primary barriers at the school and district level, including availability of effective teachers, archaic zero tolerance and truancy policies, disproportionality in special education and access to gifted and talented instruction.

- There is a dearth of effective teachers in high-minority schools. In particular, there are insufficient teachers certified to teach in particular subject areas. Schools also lack male teachers of color in the classroom. School districts have not been effective in the recruitment and placement of effective, experienced teachers in schools where the need is greatest. These schools often have high concentrations of students of color.
- Zero tolerance and harsh disciplinary policies have disproportionate impact on male students of color, particularly African American males. These policies push young men out of high school, and function as a structural pipeline to prison.
- Truancy policies also affect males of color to a greater degree than their white counterparts. In many school districts, the sanctions for truancy are quite punitive and lead to the further disconnection of students from school. In the harshest cases, truancy has criminal consequences, which also is a gateway into justice system.
- Males of color are disproportionately tracked into special education at early ages. Oftentimes, males of color remain in special education for the duration of their schooling because there are no policies in place to assure that they are removed as they progress academically. This lifelong tracking into special education has long-term effects, leading to dropout, low achievement in high school, lack of participation in postsecondary education, and even lower earning potential in adulthood.

- Males of color are under-represented in the gifted and talented student population. The selection of students to participate in advanced coursework for gifted students is very subjective, and often happens in the early grades. Male students are often denied access to advanced courses at the discretion of teachers. There needs to be a focus on both high-achieving males and low-achieving males who are not supported to thrive academically.
- Lack of access to high quality career and technical education, work experiences, and internships that expose young men of color to and prepare them for career opportunities in high skilled and high-wage areas of the labor market limits their chances for long-term economic success.

Cross-System Collaboration Issues and Building Work History

The roundtable participants also identified challenges associated with establishing a comprehensive continuum of care for a high school aged population that is often in need of blended services through multiple systems including, secondary and higher education, workforce, child welfare, justice, and social service.

- The multiple systems that are designed to serve the varying needs of high school aged youth are not connected or jointly held accountable for outcomes. This has significant impact on males of color, as they are often participants in many systems that have similar goals or intended outcomes. Most communities lack a mechanism that supports a continuum of care for youth, one that is able to leverage investments of multiple systems to assure seamless services and greater outcomes. For example, it is sometimes difficult to blend work and high school education services, despite the known need to prepare students for the labor market and postsecondary education and training. Students who are a part of the justice system, disproportionately males of color, face challenges with education and employment training due to lack of cross-system collaboration.
- Beyond barriers to blending education and workforce services, there is a lack of access to post-secondary opportunities and pathways to careers for many low-income males of color. Even those that do graduate from high school face challenges to being prepared for work and higher education.
- Solving interconnected issues requires integrative rather than siloed policy responses, especially in the arena of justice issues, which males of color are disproportionately represented. Justice reinvestment towards education and prevention services is one emerging approach in this area.

Quantifying the Issues of High School Males of Color

From this portion of the discussion emerged three primary points, there is some data available to articulate the needs, but that data is not often used to change the perceptions of males of color. It must be used to place emphasis on what is needed to make systems-levels reforms.

- Extensive data exists that documents the academic failure of males of color at the high school level and the schools and districts where the situation is most challenging. There is also significant data that reveals the impact of high school dropout on future earnings and quality of life. Some advocates have also, at both the federal and local level, begun to emphasize the connection to economic impacts and the economic costs of doing nothing
- For males of color, the focus should not be on highlighting their deficits. Rather, emphasis must be placed data to support the need for systemic reforms to address high quality education and training. Data describing the problem must be linked to outcomes data, which in turn must connect to changing community level outcomes.
- Bringing strategies that work to scale is a challenge. A strong emphasis is needed on data to show the success of some existing solutions. It may be beneficial to also look at international outcomes and efforts to inform this process.
- Data exists or could be accessed at the district level and the school level to identify those who enter high school with risk factors that can predict their likelihood of failure. This includes data related to emotional and mental health, family stability, previous failure, transience, etc. Yet, this data is not effectively used to put in place school and community based supports that assure that these students thrive in the educational environment.

Creating Political Will to Make Change

The discussion centered around what the potential “movement” needs from the local community stakeholders, as well as what local stakeholders need to impact federal policy decision-making.

- There seems to be a lack of political leadership and voice in communities to address the needs of boys and young men of color, particularly as these youth get older. Leaders are unwilling to force the issue of race and build public will. Efforts ought to center around getting the community and public to understand and own the data, and be vocal about young men of color.
- Community stakeholders will need to establish a collective vision and outcomes for boys and young men of color. The faith-based community is a critical ally in this process.
- At the federal level, it is important to ensure that communities have a voice in decision-making. Federal policy can insist on community engagement with legislative reform, regulatory reform, and grant making processes.

What Are the Most Immediate Opportunities?

There are several immediate opportunities to improve education and employment outcomes for this population, including investments in community-based interventions and research. The group participants noted that any foundation investment should build on the existing momentum around high school policy reform and practice and preparing a future workforce. Experts predicted that within the next three years a great possibility to see movement in reforms at the federal and state levels; this area would be ripe intervention.

- Invest in research to demonstrate solutions that work at the local level for high school males of color.
- Assemble the stakeholders and resources to create broader community engagement and buy-in to understand and invest in elements that work well for high school males of color.
- Provide substantive input on education and workforce reform regarding federal to local policy to serve needs of high school males of color.
- Assist communities to elevate their voice to change local systems and have an impact at the federal level.
- Given that many young men of color elect to become a part of the armed forces, consider and investigate the development of a role for the military to create meaningful career pipelines for this population.

Additional Thoughts for Consideration

- Suggestion to RWJF to lead a funding collaborative that should invest in implementation effort through a long-term period (10 year) implementation.
- The perspectives of young men of color need to be included in the overall framing of the foundation's Forward Promise work.
- The socialization of young males of color must be a focus. Structural and cultural relevant approaches to working with males are needed.
- The negative perception of the caliber of students coming out of urban schools creates a barrier to employment, as well as increases criminalization or contact with law enforcement.
- There is recognition of the tension between the middle class and poverty agenda, which impacts communities of color. In addition, the changing housing patterns in the United States means there is a growing need to focus on the needs of suburbia, as well as rural and urban. Sustained "buy-in" for efforts around boys and young men of color is critical. Therefore, expanding the base of supporters beyond urban advocates may require capitalizing on demographic shifts to the suburbs.

Participants

NAME	POSITION	ORGANIZATION
Michael Wotorson (facilitator)	Executive Director	Campaign for High School Equity
Rhonda Bryant (facilitator)	Senior Policy Analyst	CLASP
Kisha Bird	Senior Policy Analyst	CLASP
Ryan Davis	Relationship Manager for Outreach	Gates Millennium Scholars Program
Linda Harris	Director, Youth Policy	CLASP
David Johns	Senior Education Advisor	Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee
Cassius Johnson	Associate Vice President, National Education Policy	Jobs for the Future
Fred Jones	Legislative Associate	Alliance for Excellent Education
Helly Lee	Director of Policy	Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
John Michael Lee, Jr.	Policy Director, Advocacy & Policy Center	The College Board
Judith Richardson	Director of Diversity, Equity, and Urban Initiatives	National Association of Secondary School Principals
George Walters Sleyon	Executive Director	The Center For Church and Prison