

Education Policy Brief

Any child can learn. Our state's future prosperity and health depends on all Californians having a fair chance to thrive and succeed. Education is an important piece of this puzzle. Studies show that higher educational outcomes have a lasting impact on a young person's ability to obtain meaningful employment and be set on a path for health and success. As California becomes increasingly diverse, it will be especially critical to nurture and harness the talent, skills, and hope of young people of color—and boys and young men of color in particular.

To be successful, all children need strong and effective schools that are designed to build the skills and capacity needed for healthy social, academic, and career development. This is no different for boys and men of color. This is especially important for those who live in neighborhoods and communities, where a daunting set of challenges and obstacles stand in the way of their success. **A consensus has now developed among child development experts and public health researchers: environments of concentrated disadvantage tend to engender behaviors and stresses that are not conducive to learning and that often trigger hostile attitudes toward institutions. African American and Latino children have far less access to schools that display high levels of academic achievement, and less access to after-school programs and safe recreational spaces. To further complicate matters, boys and young men of color are over-represented in the juvenile justice system, which is wholly unequipped to take an approach that recognizes the trauma and chronic adversity experienced by these boys and young men.**

Neighborhoods can expand or limit the opportunities of boys and young men of color, and this extends to schools. Attendance at most public elementary schools in the United States is neighborhood-based, and the level of neighborhood segregation is high.³¹ As a consequence, vast racial and ethnic gaps in neighborhood poverty match vast racial and ethnic gaps in school poverty, underscoring a strong structural link between neighborhood and school context.³² This means that African American and Latino children are more likely to experience "triple jeopardy": to face challenging issues in their families, their neighborhoods, and their schools, all at the same time. These challenges at multiple levels may compromise the resilience of African American and Latino children.³³

Young men of color are also more likely to go to schools where they don't have the tools and help they need to learn, including experienced and qualified teachers. For instance, during the 2008-2009 school-year, the California middle schools that served more than 90 percent Latino, African American and American Indian students were almost 10 times more likely than majority white and Asian schools to experience severe shortages of qualified teachers.

Harsh discipline policies and practices compound the problem of attending low-performing schools. Some advocates use the term "zero tolerance" which is shorthand for mandatory, uniform punishments and practices that suspend, expel, or push out students of all races at now record rates and students of

³¹ Iceland, John, Daniel H. Weinberg, and Erica Steinmetz. *Racial and Ethnic Residential Segregation in the United States: 1980–2000*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002.

³² Logan, John R. *Separate and Unequal: The Neighborhood Gap for Blacks and Hispanics in Metropolitan America*. Albany, N.Y.: Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research, 2002.

³³ Acevedo-Garcia, Dolores, et al., "The Geography of Opportunity: A Framework of Child Development" In *Changing Places: How Communities Will Improve the Health of Boys of Color*, edited by Christopher Edley and Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, 358-406. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

color at highly disproportionate rates. California schools suspend and expel students at an annual rate of 12.75 percent, resulting in nearly 800,000 suspensions and expulsions. And more than half of suspensions and expulsions don't stem from more serious offenses like violence or bringing a gun to school, but from misbehavior like shoving in the hallway, talking back to teachers, or missing school. National studies have called the effectiveness of harsh discipline policies into question, demonstrating the loss of instruction time faced by young people who are subject to these practices. School districts from Georgia to Maryland that have reoriented school discipline policies away from harsh disciplinary policies are beginning to see results including increased graduation rates.

Health and Education Go Hand-in-Hand

Bridging the divide between health and education will be an important step in addressing the issues laid out above, particularly given the clear connection between health and learning. A large body of evidence strongly and consistently links education—the number of years spent getting a primary, secondary, and tertiary education—with health, even when taking factors like income into account. People with more education are likely to live longer, to be healthier, to exercise regularly, refrain from smoking, and go to the doctor for timely health-care check-ups and screenings. A recent analysis makes explicit the connection between young people's education and health issues such as vision, asthma, teenage pregnancy, aggression and violence, physical inactivity, lack of breakfast and inattention and hyperactivity.³⁴

Frameworks such as the Coordinated School Health Program offer an important conceptual approach. School-based health clinics operated in partnership with health agencies are growing. Mental health agencies offer some services on-site at schools. Youth development organizations often operating in schools are concerned about health competencies but do not have true partnerships. The Healthy Start program in California has stayed alive at low levels of activity; and the California Department of Education is supporting exploration of the community schools approach across the state. The past 15 years have seen progress in bridging these institutions, yet the system of narrow categorical funding and self-interest of individual agencies remains dominant.

Absent are coherent policy frameworks and essential partnership vehicles to drive these and other systems to work together toward the kind of results that boys and young men of color need: a healthy home for every child and family; increased opportunity for employment; decreased youth violence and increased attendance. Schools are places where eligibility for health benefits can be determined, and school health clinics should be linked to other medical facilities. Health is among the factors that affect attendance; childhood asthma and parental depression are also among the health-related indicators affecting attendance and youth violence is clearly a public health problem and affects the climate at and around school.

The strategies proposed in this paper focus on developing the people, partnerships, and policies that will bring health and education institutions together with neighborhood and community leadership to achieve the results that are necessary over the long haul. Specific evidence-based programs are indeed important; however, implementing and sustaining such programs requires a new set of institutional arrangements. These arrangements should be built on the principle that partnership is the key to better

³⁴ Basch, Charles. *Healthier Students are Better Learners: A Missing Link in School Reforms to Close the Achievement Gap*. Campaign for Education Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University, March 2010.

Claiming the Promise of Health & Success for Boys and Men of Color

results and thus public policy must provide “incentives for sustainable results-driven partnerships” — partnerships that mobilize and organize the financial resources of public and private agencies and the human capital of neighborhoods and communities toward a set of common goals.

That the educational success of boys and young men of color lags far behind that of any of their peers is well known. However, the systemic challenges outlined above that underpin this reality are less known. This issue brief provides some of the more important facts relevant to education policy reform efforts in California, identifies strategic intervention points, and shares examples of policy and systemic reforms that are essential to improving educational outcomes for BMoC. For the purposes of this issue brief, education encompasses early childhood programs, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities, and workforce training programs.

Fast Facts

The numbers below tell a grim story. Yet there is hope and promise because we do know what works and there are successful programs emerging across the state and country that can be built on, as detailed in the Strategic Intervention Points and Policy and Systems Reform sections.

- **Health Issues Widen Serious Achievement Gaps.** The achievement gap is evident by third grade in California as shown by STAR English Language Arts scores where 30 percent of Latino students, 32 percent of African American students, 61 percent of white students and 67 percent of Asian students score proficient or advanced.³⁵ This achievement gap is paralleled by noteworthy gaps students of color experience in school safety, connection to and engagement in school, and basic supports for health and wellness.
- **Lower Levels of Reading and Math Proficiency.** According to a study by the Rand Corporation, African American and Latino fourth graders are 2.2 times and 2.3 times, respectively, more likely to score below proficient on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading test than their white classmates. They are 3.5 and 3.6 times more likely to score below proficient in the NAEP math test than their white classmates.³⁶ Research has demonstrated the importance of these early indicators for predicting which children will have trouble progressing successfully through elementary, middle, and high schools.
- **Disproportionate Use of Disciplinary Measures.** The proliferation of harsh and extreme disciplinary measures is disproportionately pushing students of color out of our public education system. The Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (IDEA) based at UCLA found that African American students represented 8 percent of the state's public school enrollment, but 19 percent of out-of-school suspensions in the 2002-2003 school term.³⁷
- **Shortage of Qualified Teachers.** The class of 2009 entered ninth grade at a time of expanding economic opportunities, but graduated in a period of economic decline. During the 2009 class enrollment, California's per-pupil expenditures were lower than almost any other state, with the near worst ratios of teachers and counselors to students. In 2008-09, the many California middle schools that served more than 90 percent Latino, African American, and American Indian students were almost 10 times more likely than majority white and Asian schools to experience severe shortages of qualified teachers.³⁸
- **Lower Rates of High School Completion.** African American Californians over age 25 are nearly twice as likely to be without a high school diploma as whites, while Latinos in California are almost seven times as likely to be without a high school degree. This extremely large gap for Latinos is explained in part by the differences in educational attainment between native-born and other citizens. In

³⁵ Children Now analysis of data from the California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, "California Standards Test Score," for 2010 STAR Test Results, <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

³⁶ RAND Corporation, *Reparable Harm: Assessing and Addressing Disparities Faced by Boys and Men of Color in California*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009.

³⁷ UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access. *Suspension and Expulsion At-A-Glance*. Accessed August 1, 2011 <http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/files/suspension.pdf>.

³⁸ Rogers, J., Bertrand, M., Freelon, R., and S. Fanelli. *Free Fall: Educational Opportunities in 2011*. Los Angeles: UCLA IDEA, UC/ACCORD, 2011.

Claiming the Promise of Health & Success for Boys and Men of Color

California, about nine out of ten native-born U.S. citizens have a high school degree, compared with only half of noncitizens and three-quarters of naturalized citizens.³⁹

- **Lower Rates of Post-Secondary Completion.** As of 2008, only 41.6 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds in the United States had attained an associate degree or higher. However, only 30.3 percent of African Americans and 19.8 percent of Latinos 25 to 34 years old attained an associate degree or higher in the United States compared to 49.0 percent for white Americans and 70.7 percent for Asian Americans.⁴⁰
- **Limited Qualifications for Colleges and Universities.** Furthermore, a study by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard Law School shows of those that do graduate from high school, only 14 percent of Latino high school graduates and 15 percent of African American high school graduates have successfully completed the courses that are required to seek admission to California's four-year colleges and universities.⁴¹
- **High Rates of Contact with Criminal Justice System.** Nationally, African American children are almost seven and a half times more likely, and Latino children are more than two and a half times more likely than white children to have a parent in prison.⁴² According to a study by the California Research Bureau in 2000, an estimated 856,000 California children—approximately one in nine—have a parent involved in the adult criminal justice system. Research has shown that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to exhibit low self-esteem, depression, emotional withdrawal from friends and family, inappropriate or disruptive behavior at home and in school, and increased risk of future delinquency and criminal behavior.⁴³

³⁹ RAND Corporation, *Reparable Harm: Assessing and Addressing Disparities Faced by Boys and Men of Color in California*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009.

⁴⁰ Lee, J. M., and A. Rawls. *The College Completion Agenda: 2010 Progress Report*. New York: The College Board, 2010.

⁴¹ Ali, Russlynn. "A-G for All... Bringing the LA Movement to your Backyard: A Snapshot of High Schools in Oakland and San Francisco," presentation by The Education Trust-West, July 2008.

⁴² Glaze, Lauren and L. Maruschak. *Parents in Prison and Their Minor Children*. U.S. Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics. 2008.

⁴³ RAND Corporation, *Reparable Harm: Assessing and Addressing Disparities Faced by Boys and Men of Color in California*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009.

Strategic Intervention Points

We have identified a number of important efforts to improve educational outcomes for boys and men of color through partnership, systems change, and policy reform. These interventions focus on strategic points along the state's (P-16) public education and workforce training systems. Though there are many variations of the following cross-cutting efforts, the work can be organized to focus resources and leadership toward the following broad streams.

Better Health through Academics

Young boys and men of color need strong and effective schools that are designed to build the skills and capacity needed for healthy academic development.

- **Improving the performance of Early Childhood Programs and Elementary Schools** to ensure boys of color are reading, writing, and doing math at or above grade level by third grade. These efforts have focused on: improving attendance in school, building the capacity of parents to take leadership and serve as their child's first teacher, reforming curriculum and instruction to improve program, school and teacher performance, and supporting strategies to strengthen community-school partnerships.
- **Improving the performance of Middle and High Schools** to ensure greater numbers of youth of color make a successful transition from middle to high school, graduate in greater numbers, and are better prepared for success in colleges, universities, and their careers.
- **Improving retention and performance in College and University Systems** to ensure that the young men of color that do complete the A-G coursework, gain GEDs or diplomas, and are able to enter into colleges and universities are given the resources and support to continue their academic excellence and development and successfully complete higher education programs.

Better Health through Work

Policy changes are required to enable increased access to economic opportunities for boys and young men of color. Employment is a key focus of such policy concerns. Beyond working to develop new opportunities, it is also important to ensure increased access to existing public resources and benefits.

- **Improving and expanding Workforce Training Programs** to ensure a greater number of young men of color that leave high school without a diploma and men who are re-entering communities from jails and prison are offered *Second Chance* educational pathways to good-paying career ladder-oriented jobs in high-growth sectors.

Ensuring Access to School Health

The health status of California's boys and young men of color is directly impacted by school dropout rates, attendance, academic performance, and school district revenues. By carefully considering where and how to provide services, schools and policymakers can take immediate and low cost steps to improve the health of boys and young men of color and increase student academic achievement and graduation rates. Student health must be a key component in the ongoing discussion about school reform. In addition, to address the realities of trauma experienced by boys and young men of color, educational institutions need to incorporate this experience into their approach to these boys and young men.

Claiming the Promise of Health & Success for Boys and Men of Color

- **Improve the ability of schools to identify and respond effectively to chronic trauma in young males of color.** Support school staff and school systems in expanding opportunities for services such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, counseling, support groups, mentoring, conflict and anger management training, gender-specific health services and other interventions that mitigate the impact of stress and trauma and help youth of color break the cycle of violence.

Creating a Healthy Neighborhood

Neighborhoods should have the following intended outcomes: residents live in communities with health-promoting land use, transportation, and community development; children and their families are safe from violence in their homes and neighborhoods; and neighborhood and school environments support improved health and healthy behaviors.

- **Expand and support community-school-police solutions to make schools and neighborhoods safer and shelter kids from violence and trauma.** Provide enriching after-school programs in safe haven environments for at-risk kids. Curb violent crime and firearm usage and access through legislative, administrative, and community interventions.
- **Work on long-term solutions for desegregating neighborhoods and schools, de-concentrating poverty, and helping people move to opportunity.**⁴⁴ Concentrated poverty, disadvantage, and unhealthy environments are profoundly impacting boys and men of color physically, mentally, and emotionally. Some school- and housing-based policy solutions do exist but better, higher-impact policy and system reforms are needed to properly address this disparity.
- **Improving outcomes through use of community programming and resources.** A number of policy advocates and community builders are engaged in important strategies that focus on different stages of male development and different parts of the state's education and workforce training system.

Policy and System Reforms that Can Make a Difference

Beyond strategic intervention points, there are broader policy and system reforms that can make a difference. These reform recommendations take into account the multiple touch points that a boy or young man of color may experience when accessing educational institutions throughout his life.

Key legislative and administrative actions are those that will:

- Reduce the use of harsh and extreme school policies and practices that disproportionately “push out” boys and young men of color and expand the use of common sense school discipline models that increase the participation and efficacy of boys and young men of color in California’s public schools.
- Expand the number of California public schools that adopt “full service” school models that engage community and other important partners in providing children and youth with the supports needed for healthy and social development in high-need neighborhoods.
- Increase the number and rates of highly qualified teachers in the California public schools that serve the greatest number of boys and young men of color. Similar steps could be taken to expand technical assistance and competitive grants to public schools and communities for professional development and training that increases the capacity of teachers, counselors, other school personnel, and community partners to effectively engage, serve, and educate boys and young men of color.
- Accelerate the adoption of school reforms, curriculum, and collaboration/partnerships that have demonstrated success improving academic achievement, graduation, college attendance, and workforce training among boys and young men of color. Such reforms should account for the urgent need to ensure the social science curriculum from Pre School to University includes the content, pedagogy, and leadership/service experience that are required to ensure the healthy development of young men of color into responsible and contributing members of their families, communities, and the greater society.
- Strengthen and expand community-school prevention efforts and ensure schools and neighborhoods are safe and free from violence.
- Lead to the adoption of an equity-based school finance approach in which allocation of state and federal funds accounts for the scale and diversity of needs boys and young men of color encounter as they move through our public school system. This restructuring of school finance policies would need to account for the actual cost of preparing students for college and careers in high-need neighborhoods and would be reflected in basic state reimbursement rates and in allocation of competitive grant programs.