

# CITY LEADERSHIP TO PROMOTE BLACK MALE ACHIEVEMENT



Municipal Action Guide





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## About the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families

The National League of Cities (NLC) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. Working in partnership with the 49 state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource to and an advocate for the more than 19,000 cities, villages and towns it represents.

The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute), a special entity within NLC, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers, and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

Through the YEF Institute, municipal officials and other community leaders have direct access to a broad array of strategies and tools, including:

- Action kits and other publications that offer a menu of practical steps that officials can take to address key problems or challenges.
- Technical assistance projects in selected communities.
- Peer networks and learning communities focused on specific program areas.
- The National Summit on Your City's Families and other workshops, leadership academies, training sessions, and cross-site meetings.
- Targeted research and periodic surveys of local officials.
- The YEF Institute's monthly webinar series.

To learn more about these tools and other aspects of the YEF Institute's work, go to [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef).

## Acknowledgements

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## The Challenge

Commitment to equal opportunity – a society in which every child has the same chance for success regardless of his or her background – is among the most deeply-held convictions shared by Americans of all political persuasions. Yet nowhere is there a wider and more apparent gap between our ideals and our experience than in the immense and persistent disparities in outcomes between black male children and their peers.

As reflected in an extensive range of indicators that are strongly correlated with children's future success in school and the workforce, black children – and in particular black males – grow up facing some of the largest disadvantages of any demographic group:

- In 2010, black children were more than twice as likely to live in households with no parent in the labor force as white children,<sup>1</sup> nearly three times as likely to live in single-parent households,<sup>2</sup> and nearly 60 percent more likely to lack health insurance.<sup>3</sup>
- The poverty rate for black children in 2010 was 39.1 percent compared with 12.4 percent of white children,<sup>4</sup> and black children are nine times as likely to live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.<sup>5</sup>
- In 2009, only 11 percent of black male fourth grade students in cities with populations above 250,000 were proficient in reading compared with 38 percent of white male public school students in cities of all sizes across the nation.<sup>6</sup>
- Fewer than half of black male students graduated from high school on time in 2008, compared with 78 percent of white male students.<sup>7</sup>
- In 2008, black males ages 18 and over were underrepresented in colleges and universities, accounting for five percent of the nation's college students, and overrepresented in prison, accounting for 36 percent of the nation's prison population.<sup>8</sup>
- Homicide is the leading cause of death for black males between the ages of 15 and 24, and is responsible for more deaths of black males in this age group than the nine other leading causes combined.<sup>9</sup>

Other data show that black children and youth are disproportionately more likely to be abused and neglected, be placed into foster care, report a gang presence at their school, be suspended from school, be disconnected from both school and the workforce, and fail to complete their postsecondary educations after enrollment.<sup>10</sup>

The existence of these disparities has been well known for a long time. Only recently has the national dialogue on these issues reflected a heightened sense of urgency. The Campaign for Black Male Achievement – led by Open Society Foundations, which supported the production of this municipal action guide – was created in 2008 to address the intensification of negative outcomes for black males and their continued educational, economic, social, and political exclusion. Some of the most vocal and active policymakers in this burgeoning, nationwide movement are mayors and other municipal leaders from cities across the country.

Every day, city officials are reminded of the impact of these corrosive disparities in education, work, and family outcomes on their communities, and many have been sounding the alarm for decades about the high rates of dropout, poverty, youth violence, mass incarceration and homicide among black males. Some municipal leaders express their concerns in terms of equity and core values while others emphasize public safety or the link between a skilled workforce and local economic vitality. Local responses to the crisis facing young black males have been muted by the devastating economic recession and shrinking federal and state assistance to families and cities, which have exacerbated pressures on households and forced deep cuts in municipal budgets. Nonetheless, cities continue to develop innovative, cross-sector strategies to strengthen families, promote early literacy, raise high school graduation and college completion rates, reengage disconnected youth, and enhance family economic success.

The development of effective citywide approaches that “move the needle” in eliminating disparities between black males and their peers remains an elusive goal for several reasons. One is the sheer complexity of the changes needed to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Long-term solutions will require collaboration across a broad range of public, private and nonprofit sector organizations that reach children and families at various stages of their lives.

“There is no easy, quick fix to addressing the barriers and inequities facing black men and boys in America. Educating and engaging municipal leaders and elected officials to promote responsive policies and programs that advance black male achievement is essential to sowing the seeds of sustainability for tackling this entrenched problem.”

**- Shawn Dove, Campaign Manager, Campaign for Black Male Achievement, Open Society Foundations**

For instance, closing the academic achievement gap cannot be the sole responsibility of school districts. City leaders have the unique ability – and challenge – of working with school district officials to bring together and coordinate the efforts of numerous external partners who can increase parent support and engagement, promote early learning, enhance school and neighborhood safety, expand access to high-quality af-

terschool programs, offer health and social services, or recruit tutors and mentors. Building on the work of the Campaign for Black Male Achievement and its philanthropic partners, this guide highlights opportunities for municipal leadership to improve education, work and family outcomes for black males through thoughtful, cross-system collaboration.

A second obstacle that city officials face in promoting black male achievement is the challenge of developing strategies that are fairly and appropriately targeted toward this population. Legal and political constraints typically prevent local officials from granting eligibility or preference in publicly funded programs based solely on race and gender. Even place-based approaches that depend on concentrated investment within a disadvantaged neighborhood may struggle to maximize their effectiveness if limited resources are spread more thinly across all city council districts or neighborhoods.

Many public officials instead opt for more universal approaches under the assumption that their efforts will benefit all groups equally. However, according to John A. Powell, former executive director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University and now director of

the Haas Diversity Research Center at the University of California-Berkeley, this “false universalism” overlooks the uneven or limited impact that universal approaches may have on disadvantaged groups who face different circumstances from the majority, even if they are disproportionately affected by a problem or threat.<sup>11</sup> He cites as an example the allocation of federal stimulus dollars to construction projects that increased employment in an industry overrepresented by white and Latino workers but produced relatively fewer jobs for blacks.<sup>12</sup> Powell suggests that cities need to be universal in their goals – e.g., equitable access to high-quality education and family-supporting employment – but targeted in their processes and strategies for achieving them.

One way in which cities are being more strategic in targeting their efforts is in reviewing the impact of local policies on different groups. For instance, as part of New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg’s Young Men’s Initiative, which is grounded in the “collective impact” framework that has captured many local officials’ attention, city department heads are examining their agencies’ practices to identify where their interactions with young men of color may increase disparities and are using data to reform agency operations and policies. Similarly, in Philadelphia, Pa., an annual report by the Mayor’s Commission on African-American Males (re-established by Mayor Michael Nutter in 2011) will track progress in reducing disparities, issue recommendations for action, and hold local leaders accountable.



“This is the first time New York – or any major city in America – has engaged every relevant local agency and analyzed all available data in a collective effort to improve outcomes for black and Latino young men. Together, these reforms will equal more than the sum of their parts, and create positive and lasting changes that, we hope, will affect young men of this generation and many generations to come.”

**- Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, New York City**

Finally, cities must avoid the temptation to take a narrow programmatic focus that is detached from a larger strategic vision for reducing racial and gender inequalities. The establishment of new programs to improve black male achievement will be most effective if they are embedded within a larger strategy that contains clear goals, a defined target population, effective use of data, and shared accountability among multiple community stakeholders. The next section outlines strategies for taking a citywide approach to help more black males succeed.



## Strategies

In their roles as policymakers, chief executives, and prominent community leaders, mayors and other municipal leaders are uniquely positioned to convene a broad range of local partners behind a shared vision and set of measurable objectives for helping black males succeed. Because of the complexity inherent in addressing the overlapping barriers to black male achievement, no single program will be sufficient. A citywide strategy driven by data is necessary to make a significant and lasting impact on outcomes for black male residents in the areas of education, work and family. The following steps offer guidance to cities as they seek to develop a strategic approach to this issue.

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### *Ensure a Strong Focus on the Target Population*

While defining the target population for a black male achievement agenda may seem straightforward, only a handful of local governments have launched initiatives that clearly focus on this subgroup of city residents. Cities such as Philadelphia, Pa., and Savannah, Ga., as well as the Oakland Unified School District in Oakland, Calif., have established task forces or commissions or have partnered with other community leaders to identify specific policy changes that could improve outcomes for young black males. In New York City, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg's Young Men's Initiative has a somewhat more expansive focus on young black and Latino males. In California, the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, led by The California Endowment, PolicyLink, and other foundations and advocates, is working with a growing number of cities to enact policy and system changes on a comprehensive set of issues, with a particular focus on Fresno, Los Angeles and Oakland. All of these initiatives seek to ensure that the needs of young men and boys of color remain at the center of communities' and city agencies' efforts.

More prevalent, but less specifically targeted toward young black males, are place-based efforts that seek to improve outcomes in disadvantaged neighborhoods with a large share of poor and minority residents. The Parramore Kidz Zone in Orlando, Fla., and other initiatives that have adapted the Harlem Children's Zone model are prominent examples of this rapidly spreading approach. Under the leadership of Mayor Buddy Dyer, the City of Orlando has invested significant resources in the Parramore neighborhood, where more than 95 percent of children are black and 98 percent qualify for the free and reduced-price school lunch program, and has launched citywide and neighborhood-based strategies targeted toward black men and boys. The trend toward city strategies that concentrate investments and energies in high-need geographic areas has been accelerated during the past several



"The thinking was that if we could 'move the needle' on juvenile crime and school failure in Parramore, we could ultimately do it in other Orlando neighborhoods where youth face similar challenges.

It's working. Since 2006, we have reduced juvenile arrests in Parramore by 82 percent and made great strides in closing the achievement gap between Parramore students and their peers city-wide. How? By investing in the things

that research says is good for kids. Mentors and adult role models. Tutoring. Pre-K education. Afterschool programs. Sports. Youth jobs. College assistance...Like all children, black boys and young men need the support of their community if they are to grow up socially, academically and economically successful."

**- Mayor Buddy Dyer, City of Orlando, Fla.**

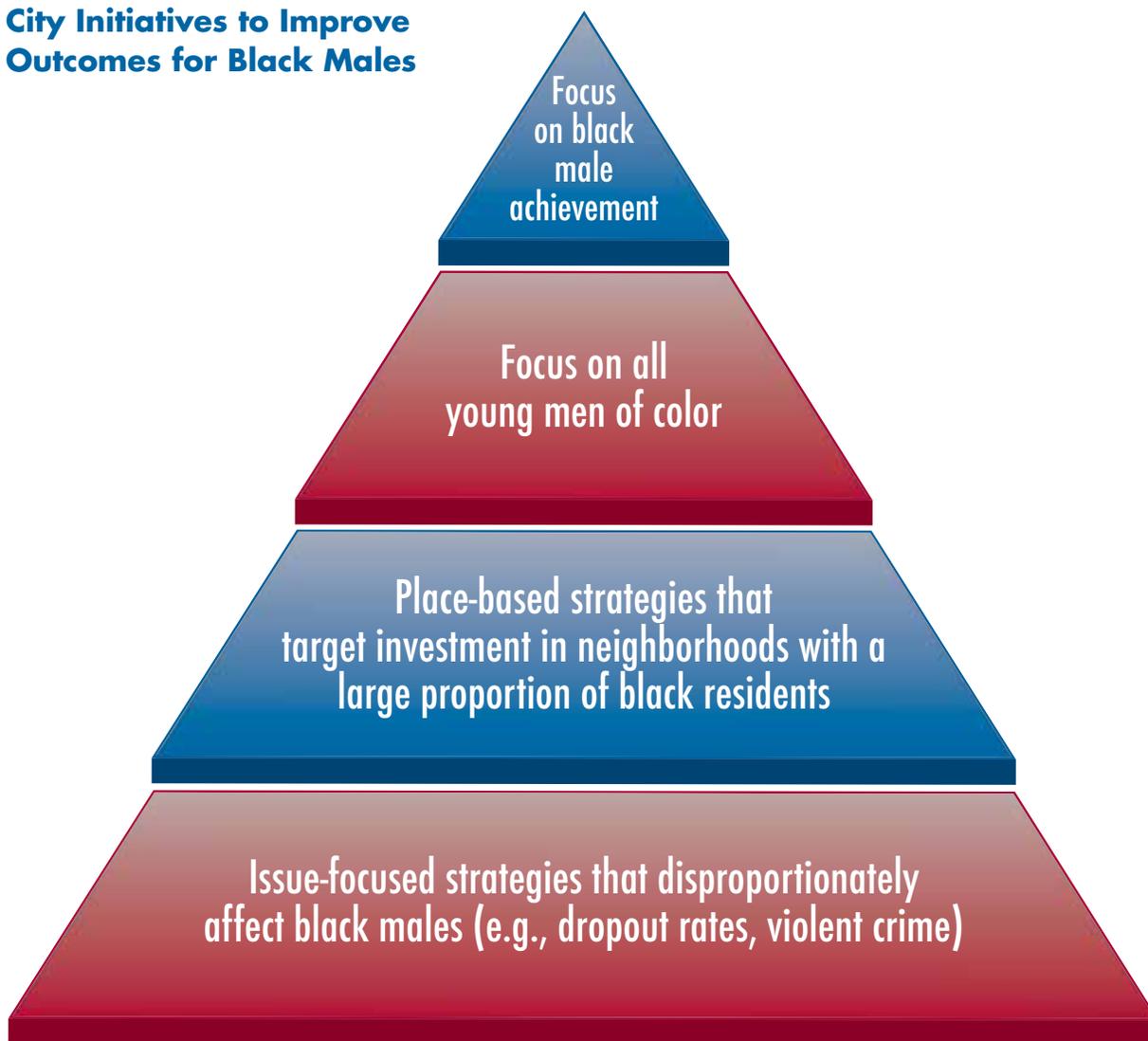
years by the availability of federal funding for such efforts through the federal Promise Neighborhoods initiative. PolicyLink, through the work of its Promise Neighborhoods Institute, facilitates a community of practice for Promise Neighborhood coalitions to incorporate a focus on black male achievement into their planning and implementation strategies.

Finally, municipal leaders in nearly all major cities are addressing issues that disproportionately affect young black males, such as low high school completion rates, high rates of incarceration, devastating levels of violent crime, an epidemic of childhood obesity, and pervasive poverty. While this guide highlights actions that are relevant to all of the approaches described above, its recommendations may be particularly useful in the context of a more targeted agenda to bolster black male achievement.

## *Use Evidence of Unequal Outcomes to Define the Challenge*

Conversations about reducing disparities between black males and other residents often begin with a brief, high-level summary of the facts on the ground. City leaders can use widely available public data sets to compare the educational achievement, employment, and family environment of black males to other demographic groups, quickly frame the problem, sharpen their call to action, and identify key stakeholders that should be engaged (see page 8 for examples).

## City Initiatives to Improve Outcomes for Black Males



*A small number of cities have launched targeted initiatives focused specifically on black males or young men of color, while a larger number of cities have launched place-based or issue-focused strategies that disproportionately affect black males.*

Other tools are available to help city officials better understand educational indicators for K-12 schools in their local school districts, as opposed to indicators for all adults throughout the community. School districts are now required to calculate cohort graduation rates disaggregated by race and make that data available to the public, but it is not always easy to organize this information by race and gender.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT Data Center (<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>) provides a wealth of information on child well-being and is a great starting point to identify other key state and local data. Every state has a KIDS COUNT grantee that compiles these statistics and serves as a local data expert. The data center lists K-12 outcome information for many states and which state office provided the grantee with this information. That state office may provide its own web interface for downloading more specific educational outcome data disaggregated by race and gender.

## Tools for Building a Basic “Scorecard” for Black Male Achievement

Outcome	Indicator	Source and Method
Family Well-Being	Child Poverty	<p>The U.S. Census American Community Survey, through its “FactFinder” application, provides <i>Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age</i> for all demographic groups. Estimates are available for the most recent year, though cities may choose to use 3- and 5-year rolling averages to look at smaller geographic areas with a smaller margin of survey error.  <a href="http://factfinder2.census.gov">http://factfinder2.census.gov</a></p>
Employment	Unemployment	<p>For larger cities, recent annual data are available, disaggregated by gender and race, through the Geographic Profile of Employment and Unemployment program of the Bureau of Labor Statistics:  <a href="http://www.bls.gov/opub/gp/laugp.htm">www.bls.gov/opub/gp/laugp.htm</a></p> <p>Municipal leaders in smaller cities can use American Community Survey 3- or 5-year estimates on <i>Sex by Age by Employment Status for the Population 16 Years and Older</i>. The unemployment rate is calculated as the number of unemployed residents divided by the number in the labor force.</p>
Education	High School Dropout and Completion	<p>The U.S. Census American Community Survey provides tables on <i>Sex by Educational Attainment for the Population 25 Years and Over</i> for all demographic groups:  <a href="http://factfinder2.census.gov">http://factfinder2.census.gov</a>.                      See page 7 for resources that provide K-12 educational data for local school districts.</p>
Justice	Arrests	<p>The Arrest Data Tool from the Bureau of Justice Statistics provides information on the number of arrests in each major crime category between 1980 and 2009 for each law enforcement agency. Cities can view these data by race, gender, and status as a juvenile or adult offender. Local police departments may supplement these data.  <a href="http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=datool&amp;surl=/arrests/index.cfm">www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=datool&amp;surl=/arrests/index.cfm</a></p> <p>By comparing aggregate arrest statistics to resident demographics and tracking trends over time, city leaders can estimate the disproportionate engagement of young black men with the criminal justice system.</p>

States are also beginning to provide school superintendents and high school principals with feedback reports on the college enrollment and achievement of the students they graduate. While there are other ways of assembling information on how young black males in a community fare after high school relative to their peers, most of these methods require a relatively sophisticated understanding of education data and the capacity to conduct some analysis. Additional information on how cities can use postsecondary data is available in a separate NLC municipal action guide available at [www.nlc.org/iyef](http://www.nlc.org/iyef).

For a more in-depth template that can be used to track a wider variety of indicators, city leaders may wish to consult the Results Framework developed by PolicyLink's Promise Neighborhoods Institute, the Harlem Children's Zone and the Center for the Study of Social Policy, although city-level data are not available for all of the indicators listed in the framework. For more information, visit [www.policylink.org](http://www.policylink.org).

In addition to focusing on disparities in these indicators, cities may also consider approaching the information gathering process from a strength- or asset-based perspective. Many cities over the years have used the Search Institute's Developmental Assets framework to gain a better understanding of the positive qualities and experiences that youth need to become productive and responsible adults. To learn more, visit [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).

## *Work with Local Partners to Tell the "Story Behind the Numbers"*

Municipal officials who are committed to reducing disparities between black males and other residents often find it helpful to partner with local organizations that can add their perspective – and data – in telling the human story behind these high-level indicators. In the public sector, relevant information and expertise may be housed within an array of separate state, county, municipal and school district systems, and the public data are not always easily analyzed by race and gender.

Many cities are fortunate to have local organizations with expertise in locating, linking, and presenting this kind of administrative data. The National Network of Information Partners facilitated by the Urban Institute, for example, has members in 35 cities, and is expanding to other communities (for more information, visit [www.neighborhoodindicators.org](http://www.neighborhoodindicators.org)). For instance, in Oakland, the Urban Strategies Council has partnered with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) and the East Bay Community Foundation to support OUSD's African-American Male Achievement initiative. These partners work together to develop indicators for several key goal areas (e.g., middle-school holding power), track school attendance and chronic absence data, and analyze OUSD students' well-being and suspension and attendance patterns.<sup>13</sup>

In other cities, local institutions of higher education – often through centers and departments of geography or sociology – are well situated to assist cities in gathering, analyzing and reporting aggregate data on black male children and youth. Through its African American Male Mapping Project, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University has used GIS technology to portray the spatial mismatch between neighborhoods of opportunity and the areas in which more than one million black male children ages 14 and under live in seven large metropolitan regions: Atlanta, Ga.; Chicago, Ill.; Detroit, Mich.; Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, La.; New York City; and Washington, D.C. This analysis showed that the vast majority of younger black males live in neighborhoods of low

or very low opportunity as measured by a range of education, employment, and neighborhood health indicators, including some of the indicators listed on page 8.

In still other cities, foundations have taken a lead role in collecting and presenting data on key indicators of community well-being (see, for example, the Boston Indicators Project at [www.bostonindicators.org](http://www.bostonindicators.org)). Finally, children's report cards or scorecards that have been developed by a number of counties and a handful of cities can provide a template for this work. The following list of indicators suggests some of the information that city leaders have found important when discussing racial and gender disparities in their communities:

- **Family Outcomes:** child population by race and gender; teen births; children in single-parent households; referrals to child protective services; substantiated child abuse and neglect cases; children in foster care; poverty rates, including for children below the age of 18; homeownership rates and the proportion of families paying greater than 30 percent of their income in rent, by neighborhood; school meal program eligibility rates; enrollment of eligible families in public benefits and nutrition programs; access to mainstream financial services
- **Educational Outcomes:** access to high-quality child care and preschool; kindergarten readiness; gaps in achievement on standardized tests; grade-level proficiency in reading and math; truancy rates; suspensions and expulsions; participation in honors, gifted and advanced placement courses; participation in supportive service and high-quality out-of-school activities; number of children with lasting connections to mentors and other caring adults; school personnel representation except as custodians; high school graduation and dropout rates; college readiness, enrollment and completion rates
- **Workforce Outcomes:** unemployment and labor force participation rates; number of disconnected youth ages 16-24 (neither in school nor working); median earnings
- **Health Outcomes:** access to prenatal care; rates of underweight births; access to health insurance; incidence of child lead poisoning; substance abuse rates; childhood obesity rates; access to parks, playgrounds and grocery stores
- **Safety Outcomes:** homicides and violent crime rates; violent victimization of children
- **Justice System Outcomes:** arrest and referral rates; detention rates; commitments to out-of-home placement; recidivism rates

Cities such as Savannah, Ga., and Springfield, Ill., have collected data for many of these indicators to guide local strategies. In Springfield, the Mayor's Office of Education Liaison partnered with the Springfield Urban League and the African-American Student Achievement and Success Study Group to issue a 2008 report examining a broad range of academic outcomes for black students, including test scores, college and work readiness, school attendance and completion, discipline, teacher quality, and assignment to special education. In Savannah, the African-American Male Achievement Group produced a report the same year on the disproportionate out-of-school suspension rates for black male students in Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.

While quantitative data are crucial to understanding the challenge and tracking progress, city strategies for action may also be informed by focus groups and surveys that shed light on the experiences of young black males as they make the transition to adulthood, and the factors that have a strong influence on their choices and opportunities. Both the Savannah and Springfield studies contain information gathered from surveys of students and/or parents. Partnerships with schools, community and faith-based organizations, afterschool programs, and parent groups can help local officials seek feedback from youth and engage them in guiding the city's black male achievement agenda.

It is also important to gather information on local policies that may exacerbate achievement gaps between black males and other young people. For instance, do school districts have zero tolerance policies that lead to disproportionate numbers of suspensions or expulsions of black male students, pushing them out of school and into the juvenile courts? Do school policies favor out-of-school rather than in-school suspension, thereby disrupting further the education progress of affected students? Are local policies and practices contributing to disproportionate minority contact with and confinement within the juvenile justice system? Could the city do more to promote hiring of disadvantaged groups (e.g., at-risk youth, people with criminal records) for both summer and year-round jobs? Are local zoning and land use policies contributing to childhood obesity and poor health? A careful review of policies and practices can help identify where local governments may be part of the problem and have opportunities to make a difference.

### *Identify Key Stakeholders who are Working to Improve Outcomes*

A viable task force or leadership group on black male achievement will benefit from the active involvement of the mayor, city councilmembers, and community partners, including such diverse stakeholders as school superintendents, judges, police chiefs, college presidents, business leaders, foundation executives, community and neighborhood activists, faith community leaders, service providers, media representatives, youth, and parents. Several cities have also involved fraternities and local chapters of the NAACP, 100 Black Men of America, and Concerned Black Men to bolster their efforts. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders in cross-system planning reflects the multi-faceted nature of the achievement gap between black males and other residents. Moreover, identifying all of the existing community resources that have demonstrated results in improving black male achievement can provide a strong foundation on which to build during the planning phase.

Mayors in particular are in a unique position to identify and convene a high-level leadership team and leverage resources to facilitate staff-level implementation of its recommendations. In Milwaukee, Wis., Mayor Tom Barrett and three city aldermen partner with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the district attorney, and a variety of community and faith-based organizations (e.g., Running Rebels, Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, Urban Underground, and the Lighthouse Youth Center) as part of a citywide strategy to improve outcomes for black males. City leaders may also consider seeking representation on existing local, regional or state coalitions focused on black males or young men of color to ensure that their efforts are aligned with the city's goals and activities.

## *Establish a Shared Vision, Measurable Goals, and a Clear Plan for Making and Tracking Progress*

Equipped with data on racial and gender disparities and working in partnership with a broad cross-section of the community, local leaders will be in a better position to assess their cities' strengths, weaknesses, challenges, opportunities and investments in young black males. This assessment process will help participating stakeholders develop a shared vision for improving the outcomes of young black males, concrete and measurable goals, and a plan for making progress that has widespread community support. One strategy that city leaders can consider is the development of comprehensive local youth master plans similar to those recently developed in Nashville, Tenn., Grand Rapids, Mich., and Brighton, Colo. Just as these and other cities have made intentional efforts to engage young people in every aspect of their youth master planning processes, local officials planning black male achievement initiatives should invite the participation of black male youth and young adults from the very beginning. In addition, a mechanism for charting local progress – and designated staff responsible for performing this task – are essential for sustaining momentum and stakeholder engagement.

Communities with youth master plans have acknowledged that their vision for young black males is not different from their vision for any other young resident – local vision statements commonly offer some variant of the aspiration that “all children and youth have the opportunity to thrive.” Data on local disparities offer a reality check that this goal is out of reach for too many black male children and their families. As Mayor Barrett has said about local unemployment rates, “no one has been hit harder than African-American men.”



“It is an inconvenient truth that we have a murder epidemic on our hands where black men and boys are dying on the streets of America, and ending it will not be easy, but it is a fight we must all be in together.”

**- Mayor Mitch Landrieu, City of New Orleans, La.**

## Make the Case for Action

City officials have a powerful bully pulpit from which to make the case for action on behalf of disadvantaged black men and boys. They can draw media attention to the risks of not investing in the lives of young people and the payoffs of fostering successful transitions to adulthood. They can also mobilize the community to recruit volunteers and mentors, raise funds, advocate for changes in state and federal policies, and connect targeted families and individuals with key services.

In addition to using their local platform to galvanize the community, mayors and other city leaders are also in a position to elicit national attention to the issue of black male achievement. Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter and New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu's launch of Cities United, a new initiative to reduce violence-related deaths among black men and boys, has underscored the urgency of developing concerted local and national campaigns on this issue. Through their leadership, these two prominent mayors have already generated increasing awareness of the alarming toll that homicides inflict upon young black males in urban areas and the destabilizing effect this tragic loss of life has on black families and the communities in which they live.



"We must be willing to have an honest conversation about the things that are holding us back as a nation and ask ourselves, 'What are we prepared to do about them?' together. We must be willing to do something about a local and national epidemic not sufficiently talked about, much less tackled. There will be those who feel un-

qualified to speak, and those who will seek to distort the discussion in service of much different motives. But we will speak out, we will address, we will tackle black-on-black violence in our communities and we will do it together. As Dr. King wrote, we are bound together 'in an inescapable network of mutuality.' We will say what needs to be said but hasn't been. We will do what needs to be done but hasn't happened."

**- Mayor Michael Nutter, City of Philadelphia, Pa.**



## Action Steps

### FAMILY

Family instability is a prime factor contributing to the educational and employment crises confronting young black males, a disproportionate number of whom grow up in fatherless and single-parent households. Due to the absence of two stable earners, lower education levels of parents, barriers to collecting adequate child support, difficulties in sharing parental responsibilities, and other factors, children in these households are overwhelmingly more likely to live in poverty and struggle in school compared with children in two-parent households.<sup>14</sup> The emergence of disparities early in children's lives that steadily widen into adulthood reflects the multiple challenges and resource deficits among unstable families that are all too often transferred across generations.

A growing body of evidence suggests that the most opportune moment to break this cycle of intergenerational poverty is in early childhood – from before children are born until they enter kindergarten – and that progress in closing early achievement gaps can be sustained with ongoing support through the school-age years.<sup>15</sup> However, implementing successful prevention strategies also requires an emphasis on strengthening families and enhancing their capacity to meet the educational, nutritional, health and emotional needs of their children. In particular, parents must have sufficient knowledge and financial resources to place their children on a successful pathway, and more fathers must be engaged in providing parental support. Municipal officials can foster a family strengthening approach that improves outcomes for young black males in their communities by taking the following action steps:

#### *Create Opportunities for Positive Involvement of Fathers in their Sons' Lives*

Data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau show that nearly two-thirds of black children grow up in single-parent families, compared with about one-quarter of white children.<sup>16</sup> The National Fatherhood Initiative has drawn attention to a compilation of studies showing that children growing up in fatherless households are more likely to drop out of school, become incarcerated and experience other negative outcomes.<sup>17</sup> Efforts to strengthen families composed of unmarried parents and to promote emotional and financial support by noncustodial fathers can make a significant difference in the lives of these children.<sup>18</sup>

In recent years, city leaders and other policymakers have shifted more attention to the important roles that fathers must play in child-rearing. Municipal officials can learn from their peers in a handful of cities, including Milwaukee, Wis., New York City, Philadelphia, Pa., and Bryan, Texas, who have launched bold initiatives to reduce barriers to responsible fatherhood involvement. These cities have created opportunities to strengthen connections between youth and their fathers, often with a focus on reengaging noncustodial fathers in their children's lives.

For instance, NYC Dads, the Mayor's Fatherhood Initiative launched by New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg in 2010, is a comprehensive effort to make city agencies father-friendly and remove barriers to positive fatherhood involvement. For instance, probation officers are receiving training to help fathers on probation address barriers to positive involvement with their children. NYC Dads also assists in the creation of "memorable moments" between fathers and their children, such as a pilot outdoor adventure program offered by the city's parks and recreation department. In addition, the housing authority provides child-friendly spaces at community centers where fathers can interact with their children and access education and employment services, counseling, support groups and parenting classes. Using a curriculum developed by an Austin-based psychologist, the Fatherhood Initiative in Bryan, Texas, offers parenting classes for fathers at the local Head Start program, churches and schools. Fathers have the opportunity to learn about healthy communication and relationships and participate in fun activities with their children.

"Fathers play a pivotal and irreplaceable role in the lives and development of children, and in strengthening and enhancing the family as the basic institution in the community. It is more important than ever that we celebrate fatherhood and put a spotlight on the positive impact that involved and engaged fathers have on black males in our society."

**- Mayor Harvey Johnson, City of Jackson, Miss.**

## *Enhance Fathers' Capacity to Financially Support their Children*

Programs that strengthen emotional connections between fathers and their children often go hand-in-hand with efforts to increase fathers' capacity as parents. In addition to offering parenting classes, city-led fatherhood initiatives work to improve fathers' ability and commitment to provide their children with sufficient financial support. For instance, the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative launched by Mayor Tom Barrett in 2006 connects fathers with programs that teach parenting skills and financial education. The city's annual Fatherhood Initiative Conference also assists fathers with drivers' license recovery and finding a job.

One common component of citywide fatherhood initiatives involves reforms that increase the likelihood that noncustodial fathers will pay child support, which not only lifts many families out of poverty but can also encourage more active father involvement. The Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative facilitates partnerships to offer fathers a credit toward existing child support debts owed to the state if they complete parenting workshops at the annual fatherhood conference. Similarly, New York City's Office of Child Support Enforcement has collaborated with other city agencies, including the departments of parks and recreation, probation, youth and community development and the housing authority, to boost compliance with child support orders. The office works with fathers to reduce unrealistic child support orders and unmanageable arrears that fathers have accumulated, leading to increased child support payments to custodial parents. These reforms do not occur in isolation, but instead complement larger efforts to improve fathers' ability to provide for their children. For instance, the Department of Youth and Community Development's Fatherhood Initiative funds community-

based organization programs that help participating fathers attain a GED and find employment, with fatherhood programming tailored toward the needs of young fathers and those who have been involved in the criminal justice system.



Left: Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett (middle) at a Milwaukee Brewers charity event

“With more than half of Milwaukee’s children being raised in a home by a single mother and high unemployment levels among African-American fathers, Milwaukee is breaking down barriers that stand in the way of responsible fatherhood. The Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative (MFI) builds on a proud community history of collaboration and has evolved into a resource support network that empowers MFI members to be involved, responsible, and committed fathers.”



**- Mayor Tom Barrett, City of Milwaukee, Wis.**

## Connect Families with Effective Parent Education and Support Programs

High-quality parenting support programs can help current and expecting parents learn how to keep their children safe and healthy, stimulate intellectual and emotional development, improve their financial capacity to raise their children, and connect with community resources that offer information, assistance and support networks. For instance, one of the most rigorously studied and prominent evidence-based models is the Nurse-Family Partnership. Through this program, registered nurses make regular home visits to low-income, first-time mothers from early in pregnancy until their child is two years old. The program has proven to be successful in improving prenatal health, reducing child abuse and neglect, supporting early learning and language development, increasing father involvement and family stability, and enhancing mothers’ economic self-sufficiency – outcomes which have important lifelong impacts on children and their communities.<sup>19</sup> Several cities, such as Baltimore, Md., Fargo, N.D., Kansas City, Mo., and Milwaukee, Wis., sponsor this and/or other home visiting program directly through their health departments, while other cities provide funding or coordination of home visiting programs run

by community-based organizations. Passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010 provided funding to states to expand evidence-based home visiting programs.

Cities are also using other forms of education and support to engage parents. A 2007 NLC report, entitled *Supporting Parents: Promising City Efforts to Promote Early Childhood Success*, offers a broad array of ideas for municipal leaders and numerous examples of how individual cities have tackled key challenges in this area. For instance, Hartford and other cities in Connecticut partner with the state's Commission on Children to help parents to be effective advocates for their children through the Parent Leadership Training Institute. Parents as Teachers, another model program with a long track record, has also published a Fatherhood Toolkit that may serve as a valuable resource for city officials.<sup>20</sup>

## Boost Family Incomes and Assets

The challenges experienced by families that live below or just above the poverty line negatively impact black male achievement in numerous ways. Lack of stable and safe housing, high rates of mobility across neighborhoods and school districts, home environments that are not conducive to learning, parental stress and family instability, inadequate health care and nutrition, and a dearth of high-quality child care options, early learning programs and out-of-school time activities can all contribute to worse educational outcomes for black male students.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, black families are substantially more likely than white families to be “asset poor,”<sup>22</sup> with little or no savings to weather a financial emergency, avoid unmanageable debt, or invest in education and homeownership. This wealth gap has widened significantly since the recent financial crisis and recession. Recognizing the link between poverty, student achievement and local economic vitality, cities are increasingly employing strategies to boost family incomes and increase their financial stability.

While the section on work in this guide highlights several local approaches to increase employment opportunities, many cities are also taking steps to ensure that families working in low-wage jobs are claiming all of the federal and state tax credits and benefits for which they are eligible. These programs include the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, child care subsidies, utility assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits and other nutrition benefits (e.g., school breakfasts and lunches, afterschool and summer meals). Many cities collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders to sponsor Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites and screen residents for eligibility to receive other benefits. In recent years, cities have increasingly focused on asset building as well. Since 2006, more than 50 cities have launched or begun to develop “Bank On” initiatives that connect residents with financial education and low-cost bank accounts as an alternative to check cashers and other fringe financial services.

## EDUCATION

Nothing is more important to the futures of our next generation of young black men than effective interventions to raise their academic achievement. Key action steps outlined in the section above – including efforts to strengthen the families in which they grow up and to ensure that young black

boys receive the early learning experiences they need to enter school ready to succeed – provide the foundation for this effort. The challenge for city leaders is to build upon this foundation and seek ways to improve educational outcomes for black males during their K-12 years. Potential action steps include:

### *Promote Reading Proficiency by the End of Third Grade*

One critical milestone in every child’s education is the ability to read proficiently by third grade, and young black boys are one of the demographic groups most likely to fall short of this key benchmark. Well-targeted interventions can help ensure that students learn to read so that they can then “read to learn” in subsequent grades. In Louisville, Ky., for example, a collaborative effort between the city, United Way, Jefferson County School District, and other key stakeholders has utilized coordinated data efforts, aligned educational goals, and diverse funding strategies to focus the community’s attention on the importance of promoting early literacy.

Comprehensive local strategies to promote reading proficiency by the end of third grade seek to address at least three key problems: lack of school readiness; chronic school absence; and summer learning loss. In response to a challenge issued by the National Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and the National Civic League, more than 124 communities submitted community solution action plans in March 2012 to compete for the annual All-America City Award. The 14 winners were recognized for their ambitious plans to ensure that more children are proficient readers by the end of third grade. Going forward, the Campaign is providing a broad array of resources as well as targeted technical assistance to support the work of city leaders in this pivotal area.

### *Recruit Mentors to Help Black Boys Stay on Track in School*

A substantial body of research suggests that mentoring programs can improve outcomes for disadvantaged youth, and that the benefits of mentoring accrue over time. For example, researchers have found that youth ages 10 to 16 whose relationships lasted at least one year experienced substantial benefits, with significant improvements in feelings of self-worth, perceived social acceptance, perceived scholastic competence, the value placed on school, and the quality of relationships with parents as well as decreases in drug and alcohol use as compared with non-mentored youths.<sup>23</sup> Given the barriers to advancement they face, young black males are particularly in need of these developmental supports.

Numerous cities have launched mentoring efforts that can benefit black males. The Mentoring Consortium in Oakland, Calif., includes more than 200 community and business partners that have signed up to provide mentors. In Baltimore, Md., city and community leaders have established a Mentoring Collaboration managed by the Family League of Baltimore City. This citywide initiative cultivates partnerships with the mayor’s office, police department, department of juvenile services, school district, community groups, faith institutions, service providers, and parents. In Newark, N.J., Mayor Cory Booker helped found the Newark Mentoring Coalition (NMC), an association of local afterschool programs and other nonprofits that deal with children. NMC started with 25 participating organizations and has increased that number to 60 organizations.



“Our young black males in Newark deserve to enjoy the very best opportunities in life. The Newark Mentoring Coalition and its partnering organizations help our children and youth turn their potential into reality through mentoring – a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring and knowledgeable individuals who can share their experience with young-

sters to provide them with guidance, support and encouragement. When we make a commitment to our young black men today, we are investing in our future!”

**- Mayor Cory Booker, City of Newark, N.J.**

## *Push for In-School Alternatives to Suspension and Expulsion*

Reviews of school discipline policies have documented the disproportionate impact of suspensions and expulsions on black boys, sometimes beginning in the earliest elementary grades.<sup>24</sup> In addition, research evidence strongly suggests that these sanctions cause students to fall even farther behind in school and thereby increase the likelihood that they will eventually drop out (or be pushed out) of school completely. For these reasons, a growing number of city and school leaders are reexamining their school discipline policies and testing alternative approaches that keep students engaged in learning while still maintaining standards for acceptable conduct in schools and classrooms.

As one element of the Jacksonville Journey, a comprehensive, community-wide anti-crime initiative, five Alternatives to Out-of-School Suspension (ATOSS) centers across this Florida city keep students who have been suspended in a structured and supervised environment where they continue to be engaged and supported in their school work. Elected officials in other cities, such as former Mayor Otis Johnson in Savannah, Ga., have used their bully pulpit to educate the community about the potentially harmful effects and unintended consequences associated with “zero-tolerance” policies that mandate suspensions or expulsions in a wide range of circumstances.

Other large urban school systems have seen promising results from school discipline policy reforms that they enacted with guidance from national organizations focused on racial justice. In 2007, the

Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPSS) requested the assistance of The Advancement Project, a national, nonprofit legal action organization, to help evaluate its school discipline policies for biased, inconsistent and academically harmful suspension practices. After analyzing school discipline data, the BCPSS school safety committee drafted a new code of conduct emphasizing prevention measures and interventions to limit suspensions, expulsions, and school-based arrests. In the first year of its implementation, out-of-school suspensions dropped by 26 percent. Similarly, the Denver Public Schools (DPS) rewrote policies to focus discipline within the school setting, directing school officials to limit out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to the police to the most serious offenses. DPS also requires schools to pay special attention to racial disparities in discipline through regular assessments of school discipline data.<sup>25</sup>

## *Work to Reduce Chronic Absence and Truancy*

Students cannot learn and meet goals for academic progress if they do not attend school on a consistent basis. For young children, the primary challenge is to address underlying problems – whether health, family, or school related – that contribute to chronic absence. Nationwide, as many as 10 to 15 percent of K-12 students miss nearly a month of school each year. In some cities, as many as one in four students are absent this frequently from school.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, city and school district leaders in communities as diverse as Baltimore, Grand Rapids (Mich.), and New York City have mounted sustained efforts to reduce chronic absence and achieved promising early results.

At older ages, truancy often emerges as the greatest concern and provides a clear warning signal of even more serious problems (from dropping out of school to teen pregnancy, substance abuse or youth violence) down the road. In response, community partnerships in many cities are utilizing truancy interventions to ensure that youth who are staying away from school, as well as the families of those young people, are connected to positive resources and supports. For example, police in York, Pa., conduct monthly curfew rounds and then take truant youth to a local community center staffed with caring professionals, rather than the police station, to help them access a wide range of services and counseling. Nashville's Metro Student Attendance Center – supported by a partnership among police, schools and juvenile courts – serves a similar purpose, achieving notable success in addressing the reasons behind students' absence from schools and reducing local truancy rates. The City of Omaha, Neb., funds six full-time Youth Attendance Navigators who are assigned to three middle schools, two high schools, and a local reengagement center to work directly with youth who have a history of poor attendance.

*"School districts are necessary but not sufficient to ensure the conditions for healthy communities. Helping our kids attend school every day matters for the child, matters for the family, and matters to the community."*

**- Dr. Tony Smith, Superintendent, Oakland Unified School District, Oakland, Calif.**

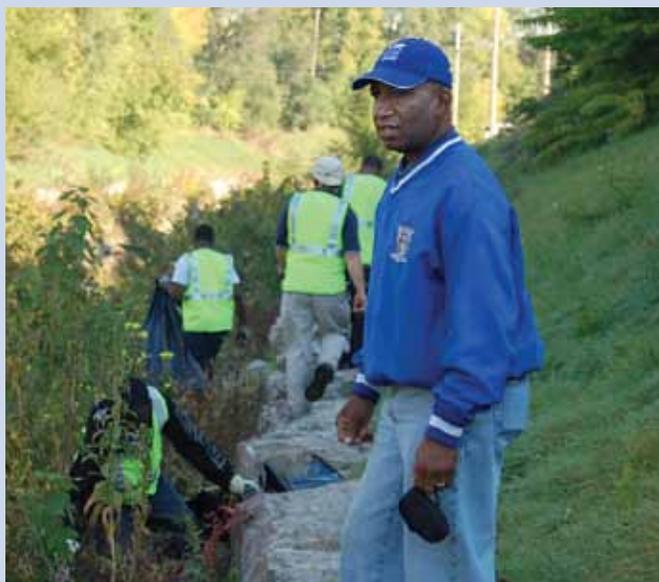
## *Develop Alternative Pathways to High School Completion*

At a time when roughly one-third of the nation's students leave high school without a diploma, cities are putting a growing emphasis on dropout prevention and recovery through multiple pathways to graduation, including: alternative high schools; credit recovery programs; flexible diploma and GED programs linked to job training; dual enrollment options; and other programs that offer wraparound services and connect classroom instruction with career and college readiness. While these pathways may also involve reengaging students in traditional high schools, several cities and school districts are working together to expand the number of alternative high schools available to students who struggle in traditional high school settings. Hallmarks of these alternative schools include a rigorous and relevant curriculum, project-based learning, close student-teacher relationships, youth voice and leadership development. Municipal officials are well positioned to connect students in alternative high schools with supportive wraparound services provided by city agencies and community organizations. At the same time, city leaders are also forging connections with postsecondary institutions and businesses to expand college and career options.

For those who have already left school, municipal leaders can seek to build more effective pathways to workforce credentials via “Back on Track to College” models featuring enriched GED preparation, postsecondary bridging, and first-year support. For instance, the City of Newark, N.J., is one of several key partners that supports the Youth Education and Employment Success (YE<sup>2</sup>S) Center, one of a growing number of local “reengagement centers” springing up in cities across the country that connect youth who have dropped out of high school with a range of alternative education programs and wraparound services. One of the YE<sup>2</sup>S Center’s programs is Gateway to College, which is housed at Essex County College and enables youth to earn their diploma while also attaining college credit.

### **WORK**

Access to family-supporting jobs and career pathways is essential to breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and low achievement. The action steps in this section focus on establishing early attachment to the labor market and reengaging individuals who have



“As we analyzed the economic conditions in the City of Milwaukee that has adversely impacted black male unemployment, the city council adopted a strategic objective to target resources to specifically address barriers to this critical population.”

**- Alderman Joe Davis, City of Milwaukee, Wis.**

become disconnected from employment and education. City leaders can help black males gain valuable work experience through summer and year-round job programs and career exploration partnerships. They can also utilize their position on regional workforce investment boards to ensure that workforce development programs effectively serve individuals and neighborhoods with the greatest needs and pursue other resources that can be used for this purpose. With black males overrepresented among populations that have not completed high school, are involved in the juvenile justice or foster care systems, are reentering communities following incarceration, have a criminal record, or face other significant barriers to work, municipal leaders may consider a range of interventions that have been tested by cities and other entities and show promise in connecting hard-to-employ individuals to jobs.

### *Expand Opportunities for Early Work Experience and Career Exploration*

Early work experience is one of the strongest predictors of future success in the labor market. Because young people who are able to secure paid employment during their teenage years are much more likely to be employed as adults, the challenge of promoting work for young black males begins with efforts to expand job opportunities for teens. Summer youth employment programs, while hardly a new activity for cities, remain a key strategy for providing this early work experience to teenagers who otherwise would be unemployed. Baltimore, Md., Boston, Mass., Philadelphia, Pa., San Francisco, Calif., and Washington, D.C., are among the many cities that have sustained large-scale summer jobs programs despite federal budget cuts, often through the personal leadership of mayors who have committed local funds and reached out aggressively to business and nonprofit leaders. As economic conditions improve, a focus on boosting year-round work opportunities will become more feasible and important as well.

As suggested in the discussion of mentoring in the previous section, successful pathways to work also depend on an ability to grasp the range of career possibilities and the preparation or credentials required to pursue them. Mayors and other city leaders can work with schools, local businesses, and community partners to increase opportunities for career exploration at early ages so that black boys gain this critical exposure. They can also seek commitments from local business owners to offer job shadowing or part-time employment opportunities. The best career exploration efforts are tied to effective career and technical education programs (including postsecondary education options when appropriate) while avoiding the pitfalls of tracking in public schools that frequently have impeded the academic progress of young black males.

One exciting approach that builds upon many years of research regarding the “career academy” model is emerging in Nashville, Tenn., where the local chamber of commerce has led an effort with Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools to convert all of the city’s high schools into “academies” that enable students to learn through the lens of a career or academic theme in a highly personalized learning community.<sup>27</sup> Each academy is designed to expose students to a wide range of careers and opportunities, industry skills, and potential employers, utilizing a mix of classroom speakers, site visits, job shadowing and internships. The extensive involvement of the business community in this effort has been a key factor in its early success, ensuring close and ongoing connections to industry trends and local employers.

“We have forged a strong partnership between our public school system and workforce development agency to create innovative learning environments – like the one at the Baltimore City Career Academy – that not only provide effective academic instruction, but also hands-on employability skills development and real-world work experiences. In particular, these partnerships are yielding positive results for many young, African-American males who might otherwise not have had a ‘second chance’ to earn a high school diploma or be given the opportunity to move along a sustainable career pathway.”



*Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake speaks at the kickoff of the city's Safe Streets initiative, one of many local efforts that are improving outcomes for black males in Baltimore.*

Academy – that not only provide effective academic instruction, but also hands-on employability skills development and real-world work experiences. In particular, these partnerships are yielding positive results for many young, African-American males who might otherwise not have had a ‘second chance’ to earn a high school diploma or be given the opportunity to move along a sustainable career pathway.”

**- Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake,  
City of Baltimore, Md.**

## *Invest in YouthBuild Programs and Local Youth Corps*

The most effective interventions for disconnected youth combine elements of work and learning. Two models with strong track records – YouthBuild and youth corps – are currently serving large numbers of young black males, but federal and state investments in these programs are sufficient to serve only a fraction of those in need of such opportunities. Municipal leaders can respond by working with local businesses, civic groups, and foundations as well as a range of federal and state agencies capable of funding work projects to develop long-term plans for expanding and sustaining investments in these critical initiatives. Mayors and city councilmembers can also be compelling advocates for increased federal and state appropriations to support and sustain these efforts.

Without question, the pressures on city budgets have constrained options for investments of this nature. Many of the most successful strategies for supporting YouthBuild and youth corps expansion in recent years have tapped per-pupil education funding provided by states and local school districts. More flexible policies governing the establishment of charter schools and reenrollment of school dropouts in some jurisdictions have enabled an increasing number of YouthBuild and youth corps programs to take advantage of this funding and grant high school diplomas. For example, American Youth Works in Austin, Texas, and Crispus Attucks YouthBuild in York, Pa., operate charter schools and are among a group of 40 YouthBuild schools and programs participating in the National Schools Initiative designed and led by YouthBuild USA to strengthen and enhance their education capacity.

Reengagement centers that are being developed in a number of cities also represent a promising model that can help connect young people who have dropped out of school to alternative pathways for

high school completion, including but not limited to those offered by YouthBuild and youth corps programs. NLC recently launched a reengagement center network so that current reengagement centers (Boston, Mass.; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Newark, N.J.) and several others in the planning stages (Portland, Ore.; Omaha, Neb.; Dayton, Ohio; Camden, N.J.; Trenton, N.J.; and Denver, Colo.) can share best practices for successfully reengaging disconnected youth.

## *Explore Ways to Create Transitional Jobs for Young Black Men*

Transitional jobs (TJ) programs create temporary, wage-paying positions as “stepping stones” on the path to unsubsidized employment. While YouthBuild and youth corps programs combine these types of work opportunities with intensive education and support services, a broader range of transitional jobs models have also achieved substantial, immediate employment gains for diverse populations in many communities and several states. Some of the most compelling research findings in this field come from efforts to help individuals returning from prison – TJ programs enrolling individuals within three months of their release from prison have reduced recidivism rates by 16 to 22 percent.<sup>28</sup>

Particularly in a struggling economy with high levels of joblessness, it is essential that city leaders pursue all options for expanding employment opportunities. For young black men who are virtually shut out of the job market, transitional jobs can serve as a crucial lifeline and connection to the mainstream economy. Several cities – including Chicago, Ill., Providence, R.I., and Newark, N.J. – are currently utilizing either local tax revenues or federal grant funds to support TJ programs for individuals with major barriers to employment, including but not limited to young black men. In New York City, the Center for Employment Opportunities provides short-term transitional jobs immediately upon release from prison, and this carefully evaluated model is now being replicated in California, several other New York cities, and Tulsa, Okla. Additional TJ information is available through the National Transitional Jobs Network at [www.transitionaljobs.net](http://www.transitionaljobs.net).

## *Ensure Equal Access and Effective Targeting in Workforce Development Programs*

While most federal investments in workforce development have eligibility criteria that focus on low-income or disadvantaged populations, local implementation of these programs often excludes those with the greatest barriers to employment, including many young black males. For example, regional workforce investment boards that cover multiple jurisdictions may spread available resources across an entire metropolitan region rather than concentrating funds on high-poverty neighborhoods (and the young black men who reside in them) with the greatest needs. At the same time, federal performance standards mandated by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) frequently induce workforce development providers to screen out the hardest to serve, including black males and others with low levels of literacy or multiple barriers to employment.

Municipal leaders, who have a policy voice (often underutilized) on WIA’s regional boards, can be forceful advocates on behalf of underserved populations, using their influence and leverage to insist on fair and

equal access to workforce development programs. They can also demand accountability for outcomes/ results, pushing for performance management efforts that reward success in working with target groups such as young black men and either strengthen or discontinue contracts with underperforming providers. City officials can look more broadly for resources to support workforce development efforts, pursuing options such as Food Stamp (SNAP) Employment and Training funds and stimulating discussions on creative uses of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funding as part of a larger strategy to prevent early pregnancy and parenting and reduce long-term dependency.

Municipal leaders can also look for community partners (e.g., civic groups, local foundations, or chambers of commerce) with an interest in promoting entrepreneurship and better employment opportunities, and then work with them to identify ways of expanding training and resources for young black men interested in starting their own businesses or learning new skills. For example, the City of Portland's Economic Opportunity Initiative (EOI) funds community-based organizations that provide financial and/or technical assistance for low- to moderate-income small business owners through its microenterprise program.<sup>29</sup> Each project is tailored to specific groups of low-income residents and assists participants – more than half of whom are members of racial or ethnic minority groups – in accessing the technical and legal services, capital, peer support, and mentoring needed for success. Contracted organizations are held accountable for providing appropriately personalized services and increasing the incomes and/or assets of the identified group by 25 percent over three years.

Other innovative, community-based models that city leaders may consider scaling up include the UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education's Black Worker Center (BWC), which operates a successful education and training model through its Black Leaders in Green (BLING) Construction Institute.<sup>30</sup> BLING partners with black building and construction trade leaders to develop educational curricula that prepare black youth ages 16–25 for careers in green construction. The program aims to develop workers' leadership skills and establish a base for shared understanding and networking among workers, contractors, community partners and university entities that strengthens the workforce pipeline in the black community.

## *Promote Linkages to Foster Care and Juvenile Justice Systems*

Cross-system approaches are a key to success for all initiatives seeking to meet the needs of disconnected youth. Such integrated strategies are particularly important for young black males who have been involved in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. Innovations such as those developed by the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, including its Opportunity Passport, can play a critical role in helping foster youth make successful transitions to independent living and adulthood. Promoting full and fair access to Chafee grants for transitional living support and education can also expand supports available to young black males who are aging out of foster care.

For youth coming into contact with the juvenile justice system, effective diversion and reentry strategies are both essential. Mayors and other city leaders can be catalysts for new juvenile diversion efforts, reaching out to judges and prosecutors and promoting alternatives to incarceration, particularly for nonviolent offenses and first-time offenders. National efforts such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) and the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change

initiative can provide valuable research support and linkages to state policy reforms related to diversion efforts. Many city leaders are already working to develop or expand local reentry programs in response to an influx of individuals returning from prison, but it is important to ensure that these efforts include a strong focus on youth and young adults. For example, Boston, Mass., promotes juvenile reentry by helping youth re-enroll in school upon returning from detention facilities.

## *Reduce Employment Barriers for those with a Criminal Record*

With a disproportionate number of black males reentering communities from prison each year and returning to prison at high rates, cities have become more focused on helping people with criminal records transition into their communities to prevent recidivism. Even with records for minor offenses that occurred a long time ago, these individuals have difficulty securing steady jobs. In response, cities and counties are setting an example by taking steps to reduce obstacles to municipal and county employment. Cities may offer tax credits, bid incentives for city contracts and wage reimbursements for businesses that hire people with criminal records, or establish community benefits agreements and first-source hiring to facilitate reentry. A comprehensive overview of these approaches prepared by the National Employment Law Project in collaboration with the National League of Cities is contained in a 2010 publication, *Cities Pave the Way: Promising Reentry Policies that Promote Local Hiring of People with Criminal Records*.

One very promising approach is reflected in city policies that “ban the box” on initial municipal job applications indicating whether applicants have ever been convicted. Except where state and local laws exclude people with convictions from specific jobs, this approach ensures that criminal records are only taken into account after an applicant has been identified as a serious candidate or deemed “otherwise qualified” for a position. Cities with “ban the box” measures – including a total of at least 30 cities and counties, including Boston, Mass.; New Haven, Conn.; Chicago, Ill.; Minneapolis, Minn.; and San Francisco, Calif.; – still conduct initial background checks for certain occupations, such as law enforcement or jobs that involve handling money or working with children, the elderly or other special populations. However, these “ban the box” measures ensure that municipal employers first consider applicants based on their skills. In addition, eight of the cities have extended their “ban the box” policies to include city contractors. By demonstrating their commitment to removing barriers to employment, city officials are then in a stronger position to encourage private employers to overcome their reluctance to hire people with criminal records.



## Resources

The following organizations have developed resources and initiatives that city leaders may find useful in meeting the needs of black men and boys:

### **2025 Network for Black Men and Boys**

The 2025 Network for Black Men and Boys is a national collaborative effort of several organizations and individuals. Its mission is to collaboratively develop and implement an initiative for the educational, social, emotional, physical, spiritual, political and economic development and empowerment of black men and boys in the United States. The network is currently housed at the 21st Century Foundation, which seeks to advance strategic black philanthropy aimed at having a positive impact on social and economic issues in the black community.

The 2025 Network focuses its work in five key areas: education, fatherhood and families, employment and wealth, health, and criminal justice. The campaign's publication, *We Dream a World: The 2025 Vision for Black Men and Boys*, is a call to action to strategically address the problems that hinder black men and boys and outlines a comprehensive agenda of reform to significantly change their life trajectories.

To learn more, visit [www.2025bmb.org](http://www.2025bmb.org).

### **Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE)**

Established in 1971, ABFE's mission is to promote effective and responsive philanthropy in black communities. ABFE is one of many leaders in the field that have participated in a broad movement to direct more philanthropic dollars to black men and boys. Since 2006, ABFE has partnered with the Open Society Foundations, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Casey Family Programs, and the California Endowment as a national network of philanthropic institutions supporting grantmaking that improves outcomes for black men and boys. As part of its ongoing efforts to inform the field of philanthropy around effective and responsive grantmaking strategies within black communities, ABFE has begun to track grantmaking in black men and boys initiatives to learn what it takes to successfully advocate internally for this type of focused investment.

For more information, visit [www.abfe.org](http://www.abfe.org) or contact Marcus Walton, director of programs, at [mwalton@abfe.org](mailto:mwalton@abfe.org).

### **Black Star Project's Million Father March**

Founded in 1996, the Black Star Project is committed to improving the quality of life in black and Latino communities of Chicago, Ill., and nationwide by eliminating the racial academic achievement gap. The Million Father March, a signature effort of the Black Star Project, grew out of recognition of the power of male involvement in the education of black students. On the first day of school each year

since 2004, black fathers, relatives, and significant male caregivers across the country are asked to take children to their first day of school. The Black Star Project also encourages K-12 schools and Head Start and other preschool programs to participate in this event. Additionally, the Black Star Project elicits the support and participation of local school councils, community organizations, parent associations, faith-based organizations, government agencies, elected officials, chambers of commerce and businesses.

To learn more, visit [www.blackstarproject.org](http://www.blackstarproject.org).

### **Campaign for Grade-Level Reading**

The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a collaborative effort by foundations, nonprofit partners, states and communities to move the needle on third grade reading proficiency and address the developmental and academic targets that children need to be successful. The work promotes policies that better coordinate and align services, improve instruction and evaluation, and tackle obstacles to achievement, such as chronic absence and summer learning loss. The campaign aims to make grade-level reading proficiency for all children by the end of third grade a national priority.

To learn more, visit [www.gradelevelreading.net](http://www.gradelevelreading.net).

### **Center for Family Policy and Practice (CFFPP)**

Founded in 1995 as the policy arm of the Ford Foundation's Strengthening Fragile Families Initiative, CFFPP examines the impact of national and state welfare, fatherhood, and child support policy on low-income parents and their children. Its mission is to strengthen society through the expansion of opportunities for low-income parents – mothers and fathers – to protect and support their children. Citing the effects of the Great Recession, hiring practices, and men's inability to access social welfare services, CFFPP's report on *Comprehensive Advocacy for Low-Income African American Men and their Communities* calls for the provision of holistic services, the dismantling of structural barriers, and the assurance that black men and women be afforded their full economic and social rights so that they can make contributions to their families and communities.

To download the report, visit [www.cffpp.org/publications/Comp\\_advocacy.pdf](http://www.cffpp.org/publications/Comp_advocacy.pdf).

### **Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)**

Founded in 1969, CLASP seeks to improve the lives of low-income people by developing and advocating for federal, state and local policies to strengthen families and create pathways to education and work. As a key partner in the 2025 Network for Black Men and Boys, CLASP authored the Network's report, *We Dream a World: The 2025 Vision for Black Men and Boys*, which outlines a strategic and ambitious policy agenda for improving outcomes for black men and boys in the areas of health, education, employment, fatherhood and families, and justice.

To download the report, visit <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/documents/files/2025BMBfulldoc.pdf>.

## Children's Defense Fund (CDF)

CDF is a nonprofit child advocacy organization that has worked for more than 35 years to ensure a level playing field for all children. Its Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all of the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. It pays particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown. The Black Community Crusade for Children (BCCC), co-convened by CDF with the late Dr. John Hope Franklin and Dr. Dorothy Height, was launched in 1990. Over the past two decades, BCCC's successes include the CDF Freedom Schools® program; the Harlem Children's Zone; youth leadership development programs that have trained 20,000 young leaders; economic empowerment work in 77 "Black Belt" southern counties; and the placed-based policy work of PolicyLink. BCCC has organized to confront a deepening crisis faced by black children and is calling on America to take action.

To learn more, visit [www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/black-community-crusade-for-children-II/](http://www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/black-community-crusade-for-children-II/).

## Collaborative for Building After-School Systems (CBASS)

Leaders from six afterschool nonprofit intermediary organizations formed CBASS, a partnership dedicated to increasing the availability of quality afterschool programming by building citywide afterschool systems. With funding from CBASS and The Atlantic Philanthropies, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) conducted a study to identify promising strategies used by afterschool programs to recruit and retain middle and high school-aged black and Hispanic males. The study included a review of relevant literature and interviews with leaders from 10 successful programs identified by CBASS intermediaries.

To download the report on *Recruiting and Retaining Older African American and Hispanic Boys in After-School Programs*, visit [www.ppv.org](http://www.ppv.org).

## College Board Advocacy and Policy Center

Early in 2010, the College Board issued a report entitled, *The Educational Crisis Facing Young Men of Color*. This report was the culmination of two years of qualitative research into the comparative and, in some cases, absolute lack of success that males of color are experiencing as they traverse the education pipeline. This research focused on conversations that engaged groups of black, Latino, Native American and Asian American individuals in a series of discourses designed to identify the issues confronting these young men. The findings were a powerful reminder of the disparate educational outcomes of different groups in the United States. The College Board's Educational Experience of Young Men of Color initiative seeks to identify existing – and needed – research around this issue and provide an overview of the legal landscape within which solutions must be developed.

To learn more, visit <http://youngmenofcolor.collegeboard.org/>.

### **Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. (CBCF)**

CBCF is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy, research and educational institute that aims to help improve the socioeconomic circumstances of blacks and other underserved communities. CBCF's report, *Breaking Barriers: Plotting the Path to Academic Success for School-age African American Males*, analyzes the social, emotional and cognitive factors that affect black male students' well-being and school success and recommends policies that support educational equity.

To download the report, visit [www.cbcbinc.org/images/pdf/breaking\\_barriers.pdf](http://www.cbcbinc.org/images/pdf/breaking_barriers.pdf).

### **Coalition Of Schools Educating Boys Of Color (COSEBOC)**

The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) is a networked learning community of educators, researchers, policymakers and caring adults that is re-imagining and transforming the schooling experience for males of color. COSEBOC supports school leaders with high-quality professional development and works directly with a collaborative network of schools to build a supportive environment for teaching and learning that nurtures success in boys of color. The intended long-term outcome of this coalition will be to fully equip boys of color to achieve academically, socially, and emotionally. These schools will serve as models for the educational community, enabling educators to replicate promising practices.

For more information, visit [www.coseboc.org](http://www.coseboc.org).

### **Council of the Great City Schools**

The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition of 65 of the nation's largest urban school systems. Its mission is to educate the nation's most diverse student body to the highest academic standards and prepare them to contribute to our democracy and the global community. In October 2011, the Council released a report titled, *A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*, which focuses on the social and educational factors shaping the outcomes of black males in urban schools and pulls together disparate work on black male achievement. The report examines black male outcomes in the following areas: readiness to learn; black male achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), with a specific focus on selected big city school districts; college and career preparedness; school experience; and postsecondary experience.

For more information, visit [www.cgcs.org/Page/204](http://www.cgcs.org/Page/204) or contact Sharon Lewis at [slewis@cgcs.org](mailto:slewis@cgcs.org).

### **Grantmakers for Children, Youth, and Families (GCYF)**

GCYF is a membership association of grantmaking institutions. Its mission is to engage funders across all sectors to continually improve their grantmaking on behalf of children, youth, and families. GCYF's Healthy Men, Healthy Communities (HMHC) initiative is a network of grantmaking institutions committed to increasing the strategic investment of philanthropic dollars to reduce the disproportionately negative life outcomes for men and boys of color and low-income communities.

Through this initiative, GCYF will serve as a learning and mobilization venue for funders who, regardless of their specific areas of grantmaking, seek to understand how direct service, research, policy analysis, community advocacy, movement building and other field-building tools can impact efforts to achieve long-term social change for men and boys of color and their communities.

For more information on HMHC, visit [www.gcyf.org/?HealthyCommunities](http://www.gcyf.org/?HealthyCommunities) or contact Natacha Blain at [nblain@gcyf.org](mailto:nblain@gcyf.org).

## **Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity**

Established in 2003, the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University partners with people, communities, and institutions worldwide to think about, talk about, and engage issues of race and ethnicity in ways that create and expand opportunity for all. Through interdisciplinary research and other working partnerships, the Institute aims to deepen the understanding of the causes and consequences of racial and ethnic disparities, in order to stimulate change to bring about a society that is fair and just for all people.

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Institute has been working to expand the knowledge base and academic scholarship on black males. A report on its African-American Male Initiative highlights project activities that include a review of social science literature on black males, interviews with a national advisory board, a project mapping the isolation of black males from opportunities, and a national conference on the ways in which school and prison systems interact to create poor outcomes for black males.

To view the report and other Kirwan Institute resources, visit <http://research.kirwaninstitute.org>.

## **Knight Foundation Black Male Engagement Challenge**

In 2011, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the Open Society Foundations' Campaign for Black Male Achievement joined forces to launch the Black Male Engagement Challenge (BME), aimed at demonstrating the existing positive role of black males, celebrating their efforts publicly, creating a BME community by connecting them to each other, and increasing the impact of the community-building efforts in which these men were already engaged. The initiative envisions black men and boys leading in solutions, participating in decision-making and fully engaged in all issues and opportunities affecting their communities.

For more information, visit [www.knightfoundation.org/funding-initiatives/black-males-initiative/](http://www.knightfoundation.org/funding-initiatives/black-males-initiative/).

## **National CARES Mentoring Movement**

The National CARES Mentoring Movement was founded in 2005, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, as Essence CARES. To engage black male and female mentors, the organization created local CARES Mentor-Recruitment Circles, a collaborative, supportive network of volunteers who train and connect adults to local mentoring programs as well as group mentoring and academic enrichment pilot programs in some cities. The mentors that they have recruited now serve more than 125,000 young people as

role models, tutors, reading buddies and graduation coaches in schools, youth-support organizations and reentry programs.

To learn more, visit [www.caresmentoring.org](http://www.caresmentoring.org).

## **Open Society Foundations Campaign for Black Male Achievement**

The Open Society Foundations launched the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA) in June 2008 as a multi-issue, cross-fund strategy to address black men and boys' exclusion from economic, social, educational, and political life in the United States. The campaign responds to a growing body of research that reveals the intensification of black males' negative life outcomes. It builds on the foundation's U.S. Programs' mission to support individuals and organizations that nurture the development of a more democratic, just society, as well as the Open Society Foundations' expertise and past work to reduce incarceration, promote racial justice, and support youth engagement and leadership development.

Since its launch in May 2008, the campaign has engaged in exploratory grantmaking, philanthropic partnership development, and strategic planning, which has helped narrow its strategic focus to three areas that profoundly shape the life outcomes of black males: education, family and work. The campaign has laid the foundation for work that can create lasting change in the lives of black men and boys in America. Its philanthropic strategy focuses on attaining educational equity, strengthening family structures, and increasing family-supportive wage work opportunities for black men and boys. This municipal action guide was developed with support from the campaign.

To learn more, visit [www.soros.org/topics/black-male-achievement](http://www.soros.org/topics/black-male-achievement).

## **Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink**

The Promise Neighborhoods Institute at PolicyLink combines the leadership of PolicyLink, the Harlem Children's Zone, and the Center for the Study of Social Policy to provide resources and guidance to build and sustain burgeoning Promise Neighborhoods. The Institute, a nonprofit, independent organization, assists Promise Neighborhoods in connecting local resources to wrap children in education, health, and social supports from the cradle-to-college-to-career, and serves as a link to federal, public, and private investors. The Institute also provides Promise Neighborhoods communities with leadership and management coaching, communications strategy, and other resources.

With support from Open Society Foundations, the Institute assists federal Promise Neighborhood grantees and other placed-based coalitions that have adopted the Promise Neighborhood model as they incorporate programs to improve outcomes for black men and boys into their comprehensive strategies for community revitalization.

To learn more, visit [www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org](http://www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org).

## **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Forward Promise Initiative**

Forward Promise, a new initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is focused on promoting opportunities for the health and success of middle- and high-school aged young men of color. This initiative focuses on “opportunity factors” that can play a critical role in helping young men grow up healthy, get a good education and find meaningful employment. For the first phase of this project, the foundation sought the best ideas to help these young men succeed in life, school and work, in recognition of the hurdles that many face in their efforts to do so. These ideas will be used to identify promising programs, policies and approaches to evaluate what works, and spread successful models to communities that need them.

For more information, visit [www.rwjf.org/vulnerablepopulations/product.jsp?id=72888](http://www.rwjf.org/vulnerablepopulations/product.jsp?id=72888).

## **Schott Foundation for Public Education**

Founded in 1991, the Schott Foundation for Public Education’s mission is to develop and strengthen a broad-based and representative movement to achieve fully resourced, quality preK-12 public education. The foundation’s report, *Yes We Can, The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, shows that only 47 percent of black males graduated from high school in 2007-08. It also highlights communities, school districts and states that are doing relatively well in their efforts to enhance opportunity and raise achievement levels for black male students.

To view the report, visit <http://blackboysreport.org>.

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