

CRISIS IN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR YOUNG BLACK MEN: POLICY AND ACTION PLAN

Fifty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black males in America still do not enjoy the promise of education on equal terms; they continue to persistently represent the bottom of the distribution of virtually every conventional indicator of educational achievement. Nationwide, fewer than half of black males graduate from high school in four years –a 25% gap compared to white males.¹ The US Census estimates that over their working lives high school drop-outs, regardless of race, will earn on average \$270,000 less than will high-school graduates, a gap which continues to widen. Black male dropouts are more likely than their white counterparts to be among the ranks of the unemployed. And Black men who do not graduate from high school are 3.1 times more likely than are high school graduates to become incarcerated.² Compounding the crisis, studies find a significant gap in college graduation rates: statistics from 2006 indicate that 43% of black students graduated college, compared to 62% of white students, with only 36% of Black men graduating college.³ Given the predictive role education plays in overall success, resolving the current educational achievement gap faced by young Black men is an essential component of any set of winning strategies aimed at the pipeline crisis affecting these Americans.

THE POLICY GOAL

Our overarching goal is to demonstrably reduce the academic achievement gap of young Black males by raising their academic performance, graduation rates and college and employment readiness.

APPROACH

Although our Subgroup has a national mandate, given the magnitude of the issue we initially plan to focus our efforts locally in New York City. Accordingly, to achieve the above policy goal, we will employ three primary strategies:

1. Targeted investments in Harlem and Central Brooklyn that will improve outcomes for young Black men, which can later be replicated and expanded into other areas of the City (and nationally).
2. Support of select existing initiatives sponsored by the New York City Department of Education, CUNY and other foundations and organizations designed to improve educator quality and achievement of young Black men.

¹ Schott Foundation for Public Education, *Public Education and Black Male Students: The 2006 State Report Card*, 2006

² NERA Economic Consulting

³ “Black Student College Graduation Rates Inch Higher but a Large Racial Gap Exists.” *Journal of Black Higher Education* (Winter 2007), available at <http://www.jbhe.com/preview/winter07preview.html>.

3. Advocacy and Public awareness with public and private entities concerning of the need to focus on the attainment of young Black men.

In support of our policy goal and strategies we have developed a set of short-term and long-term action items.

Short –Term Goals

In the short-term, the Education Subgroup will focus on establishing a sustainable infrastructure for our subgroup and the work we plan to accomplish, build and expand on relationships with key stakeholders and work collaboratively with existing New York City Department of Education initiatives. Before the end of the year, we plan to execute the following tactical initiatives:

1. Design and draft a preliminary budget for the planning phase our project;
2. Rededicate subgroup members based on experience and willingness to make specified time commitments on a going forward basis;
3. Raise operating funds to support infrastructure and a Planning Grant to research and develop a detailed plan for implementation of strategic investments that will improve achievement for young black men;
4. Identify and select partner organizations aimed at leveraging existing expertise;
5. Raise public awareness and heighten media attention about our policy goal and innovative initiatives consistent with our goal;
6. Identify, consider and account for relevant legal issues that would impact the design and implementation of race or gender specific solutions;
7. Supporting existing programs geared at improving educator quality and acknowledging successful approaches to reducing the academic achievement gap of young Black men;
8. Initiate dialog and establish buy in from stakeholders (e.g. unions, teachers, parents, community leaders, etc.);
9. Provide volunteers for NYC DOE programming being designed to outreach to young people concerning the importance of education; and
10. Engage corporations and philanthropic organizations to leverage and sustain out impact.

Long-Term Goals

Although dependent on and subject to modification based on the results of our planning phase, our current long-term goals include:

1. Launching a set of targeted investments in Central Brooklyn and Harlem;
2. Increasing high school graduation rates and college readiness among target constituency;
3. Garnering financial support for various teacher related initiatives (e.g. skills programs, diversity programs geared at increasing Black male teachers, incentive programs for service in high need areas servicing targeted constituency, etc.);
4. Exporting effective programs to other areas in New York City as well as nationally;
5. Exploring and designing new winning strategies;
6. Continuing dialogue with critical stakeholders to obtain buy-in and feedback on our plans, including the New York City Department of Education, targeted schools, educators, unions, parents and students;
7. Obtaining expert input into a specific design and evaluation of programming we seek to develop or support for Black male students;
8. Engaging corporate leaders and public officials to build and sustain support and political commitment for our policy goal;
9. Identifying and soliciting widespread support for creative corporate initiatives, such as sabbatical programs, aimed at supporting winning strategies for Black males in the targeted areas; and
10. Supporting comprehensive research, including longitudinal studies, about Black male educational achievement, and applying the researched based methodologies to positively affect the education of young Black males.

STRATEGIC PLANING PROCESS

Our initial efforts will concentrate on identifying winning strategies for the approximately 172,000 Black male students in New York City schools.⁴ We will focus on

⁴ This information was obtained from the register data on the website of the New York City Department of Education at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/Stats/default.htm>. The breakdown of Black male students by school level is as follows: Elementary (76,992), Middle (33781), High School (49782), District 75 (7488), Alternative Schools (4153).

specific geographic areas with high concentrations of Black male students (the “target areas”). We have identified those areas as being Harlem and Central Brooklyn.

While no reliable data on Black male achievement in New York City has been made publicly available, studies show a significant gap in graduation rates. The Schott Foundation has estimated the New York City high school graduation rate for Black male students is 26%, compared to 50% for white male students.⁵ New York City Department of Education data summaries show Black male students graduating at a rate of 45.4%, compared to a 71.6% graduation rate for white male students.

As mentioned above, a critical short-term goal will involve researching and drafting a planning grant proposal. Contemporaneous with seeking funding for the planning phase we will pursue partnering with an established university or organization with experience in this area. During the planning phase, we will measure the success of our short-term efforts by our ability to complete tasks that move our work forward toward implementation. Those tasks include but are not limited to the following:

- Analyzing school and neighborhood data in Harlem and Central Brooklyn to identify target schools and grades;
- Obtaining expert input into development of appropriate criteria for measurement and outcomes for identification of existing winning strategies as well as strategies employed to achieve longer term goals;
- Identifying existing local programs that have adopted, and have a demonstrated track record of employing, winning strategies, or identify model programs for replication in those locations that lack existing resources;
- Undertaking an inventory of those existing services and programs located in our targeted areas and, if feasible, measuring them based upon the criteria developed in conjunction with the experts;
- Assessing requirements for implementation of winning strategies in targeted areas;

At the elementary level, almost 50% of Black male students can be found in three Regions: Region 6 (21%), Region 5 (16%) and Region 3 (13%), with another 11% in Region 2. At the junior high school level, 44% of the Black male students are concentrated in three Regions: Region 6 (20%), Region 8 (12%) and Region 2 (12%), while at the high school level, 44% of Black male students are in Regions 6 (19%), Region 8 (13%) and Region 3 (13%).

⁵ Schott Foundation for Public Education, *Public Education and Black Male Students: The 2006 State Report Card*, 2006. One of our team leaders is partnering with a policy expert in the field to draft a short policy paper analyzing trends in black male enrollment and outcomes in New York City. One of our team leaders is partnering with a policy expert in the field to draft a short policy paper

- Supporting and implementing those programs that have met our model for evaluating effectiveness and success;
- Exploring other funding opportunities for this project;
- Examining collaboration opportunities with the New York City Department of Education to support P-16 programs with proven success;
- Analyzing the best use of scholarship or supplement funding programs (e.g. traditional college scholarships, mentoring and after school programs, supplemental instruction and tutoring programs, etc.) in the target areas focused on elementary, middle and high school graduates; and
- Partnering with established public and private organizations and with the appropriate unions to increase the number of black male teachers in the targeted areas.

PLAN FOR DEVELOPMENT OF OUTCOME MEASURES

A model with metrics that gauge the effectiveness of the programs and solutions we implement will be designed in the planning phase. We will utilize this model and its metrics to analyze the success of our work toward achieving our longer-term goals. The driving principal behind any evaluation model will be to critically assess whether the strategy can be correlated to a meaningful improvement of academic performance, high school graduation and college completion rates of black males or a narrowing of the achievement gap.