



A Call for Change:

A Preliminary Blueprint to Improve Educational Excellence and Opportunity for African American Males in Urban Public Schools

**Prepared by the Council of the Great City Schools
for the
National Summit on Educational Excellence and Opportunity for African
American Males**

August 27, 2012

**Council of the Great City Schools
and the
U.S. Department of Education**

**National Summit on Educational Excellence and Opportunity for African American Males
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***A Call for Change: A Preliminary Draft Blueprint for Action to Improve Educational
Excellence and Opportunity for African American Males in Urban Schools***

America's Great City Schools educate approximately one-third of the nation's African American male students. Many of these students do well and go on to take important leadership positions in their chosen fields. They make substantial contributions to the nation, raise and support loving families, and serve as role models for others.

Still, too many African American males do not realize their full potential in our schools. A number of reports and studies, including the Council of the Great City Schools' report—*A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*—indicate that too often our schools have not served these students well. In many cases, in fact, we have simply failed them.

To be sure, there is now broad consensus that the nation's urban public schools need to vastly improve the quality of education these students need to succeed in college and careers. Others—institutions at the local, state, and national levels—also need to do a better job, but the Great City Schools are stepping up to the plate, taking responsibility, and working to reverse the trend and provide the quality of life and future opportunities for our African American youth.

In this draft paper, the nation's leading urban school districts, academics and scholars, and community activists outline the steps that schools and others should take to increase African American male access to rigorous core instruction, elevate the quality of education, strengthen personal and social supports needed to bolster their achievement, and overturn the low expectations that were born of one group's misbegotten sense of superiority over another.¹

Also, the paper specifically addresses these areas of school-based policies and programs: early childhood education, reading, writing and intellectual development, mathematics, gifted and talented programs, college and career readiness, equity and access, effective teaching and

¹ Recommendations in this report were derived from a series of "solution briefs" commissioned by the Council of the Great City Schools with support from the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Foundation. Authors of the papers included Oscar Barbarin (Tulane University), Leticia Evans-Smith (NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund), George Garrow and Esther Kaggwa (Concerned Black Men), Robert Green (Michigan State University), Kevin K. Green, George White, and James Moore (Ohio State University) and Lamont Flowers (Clemson University), Robert Moses and Omuwale Moses (Algebra Project), Michael Nettles (ETS), Pedro Noguera (New York University), Aisha Ray (Erickson Institute), Hal Smith (National Urban League), Alfred Tatum (University of Illinois, Chicago), and Ron Walker, Rhonda Bryant, and Edward Fergus (Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color). All papers—in draft form—are available at the National Summit on Educational Excellence and Opportunity for African American Males.

learning environments, mental health and safety, out-of-school learning time, and partnerships and mentoring.

The recommendations in the paper are presented as discrete actions in designated categories. But the research on the improvement of urban schools and school districts clearly shows that academic gains are rarely realized by pursuing reforms in such separate and disconnected ways. Instead, the evidence shows that schools and districts with the largest academic gains among their African American students pursued the kinds of recommendations put forth in this Blueprint simultaneously to form a coherent strategy for improvement.

Each action step presented in this document—and others—are critical, but it is unlikely that, taken in isolation, any of them could result in better outcomes for the African American males in our urban schools. Instead, it is the combined force of these reforms and how they lock together that is likely to make the biggest difference for our students. Consequently, we are urging a strategic and systemic approach that uses the broadest possible array of action steps presented in this paper.

Still, it is clear from our familiarity with the broad policy strategies and more programmatic tactics that help improve urban schools that a more dedicated and focused series of steps need to be taken to support the attainment of African American males in our urban schools who have not been well served historically.

Many of these specific measures are articulated by the authors whose work undergirds this draft Blueprint. Underneath their proposals are concepts of academic rigor and full and equitable access to it; personal respect and support for our students and the talents, assets, and perspectives they bring to our classrooms; full inclusion and participation in the academic, health, and social-emotional life and benefits of schooling rather than ways to exclude, omit or ignore African American male students; community and parent engagement and buy-in; and adult accountability for results—from the earliest years through graduation and the transition into careers. Together, the authors and this Blueprint derived from their work argue for a fundamental shift in the historic role of schools to shift and sort children for the benefit of some and the detriment of others.

Finally, the paper does not try to lecture anyone else on what they need to be doing to improve conditions for African American males, although there is more than enough work to go around. Instead, the paper is meant to be a broad roadmap for urban schools to follow as they strive to improve the academic attainment of their African American male students. It is both a forum for soliciting input and help from others, and a public commitment to improvement.

We hope that this work and what flows from it will benefit and inform the work of President Obama's Commission on African American Education and, more importantly, will help galvanize the urban public schools that serve so many African American male students to move urgently on behalf of these valuable young people.

EDUCATION AND SCHOOLING

A. School-based Policies and Programs for Equity and Access

In many cases, schooling in America has not been set up to meet the academic needs of too many African American males and other historically underserved students. In fact, the institution was organized and operated to sort children in ways that matched society's perceptions of students. If we are to begin addressing the needs of all students, urban schools could start by pursuing the following steps:

1. Articulate in the school district's mission statement a clear belief that all students, including African American males, are valuable and can achieve at the highest levels.
2. Ensure that African American males have comprehensive access to a core curriculum in their schools, and ensure that curriculum is grounded in rigorous college and career-ready standards for all.
3. Closely monitor instruction for African American males to ensure that the content or rigor of their courses are not being diluted or watered down.
4. Implement early intervention strategies for African American males if data on early-warning indicators suggest that they are falling behind.
5. Review the school district's instructional policies and programs to ensure that they are comprehensive, systemic, and integrated enough to address the economic, social, emotional, and psychological needs of African American males at both individual and institutional levels. Develop a plan for the evaluation of these policies and practices for their effectiveness with African American males.
6. Pursue aggressive and research-based school turnaround initiatives in schools with large numbers of African American males that have chronically failed their students, and transform them into centers of excellence. Explore special academies for African American males.
7. Encourage and guide African American male students to participate in extended-time academic programs—in school and out-of-school—to strengthen literacy, math, and science skills. Involve families in this effort and encourage their active involvement.
8. Ensure that African American males have full access to positive behavioral supports and interventions, and access to mental health and diagnostic services.
9. Clearly differentiate instructional and behavioral interventions to ensure they are sensitive to the ethnic, racial, and socio-economic differences among African American and Latino males.
10. Review policies and practices to ensure they are not stigmatizing students while they are attempting to provide supports to them. Consider policies and practices at both the individual and institutional levels of change, and at the school and district levels.

11. Develop a strong system of social supports, mentors, and interventions to create an environment for positive interpersonal interactions for African American males.
12. Ensure that parents and guardians of African American male students are actively encouraged and welcome to attend and participate in school and Parent Teacher Organization or Parent Teacher Association (PTO/PTA) activities. Students are less likely to be ignored or mistreated if their parents or guardians are visible regularly in the schools. In addition, parents should have ample choices of excellent educational opportunities for their children.

B. Early Childhood

The need for early childhood programming for African American males is profound and overdue. Yet the nation has not seriously confronted or addressed the inequalities and disparities facing some children from their earliest years—inequities that contribute to negative outcomes over a life-time. The research indicates that early childhood programs can produce substantial benefits for students and that urban schools should:

1. Establish high-quality educational and developmentally appropriate preschool and early childhood programs and supports to which African American males have full access to. These programs should have small teacher-to-child ratios, an age-appropriate curriculum that is integrated across subjects, well-trained teachers in child development, and mechanisms for engaging parents or guardians.
2. Set clear goals for the developmental progress of African American children participating in early childhood programs. Monitor student progress, evaluate the results regularly, and follow students as they move up the grades.
3. Ensure that early childhood programs also connect developmentally to kindergarten and first-through third-grade curriculum, address social, emotional, health, nutritional, and physical development needs of children, and use developmentally appropriate assessments.
4. Consider implementation of home visitation efforts, pre-school centers, and pre-school classes in the schools to address the multiple needs of some African American males.
5. Ensure that teachers and aides in early childhood programs serving African American males are early-childhood certified; have adequate training in child development (particularly as it applies to African American males); understand the effects of negative stereotyping and the appropriate use of assessments, and are compensated commensurate with other teachers. Provide mentors in cases where teachers struggle.
6. Make sure that early childhood programming that serves African American males is staffed with appropriately trained teachers, aides, parent-resource personnel, community liaisons, nurses, psychologists, and social workers. (Early grades could use these supports as well.) Staff compensation should be in line with others in the district.
7. Make certain that pre-school programming includes services starting at age two and spanning two years; that parents or guardians have the opportunity to volunteer and participate in program decisions; that there is a curriculum in place that focuses on language and early

literacy and is aligned with the curriculum of later grades, and that these programs offer health screenings, nursing services, and free or reduced price meals.

8. Eliminate the use of out-of-school suspensions to discipline students participating in early childhood programming.

C. Reading, Writing, and Intellectual Development

Critical to the academic success of students, particularly African American males, is the instruction they receive in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. New standards being pursued by many states and local school districts have the potential to improve academic achievement, but urban schools will need to ensure that all students have the academic literacy skills necessary to access rigorous course content. To address the literacy needs of African American male students, the best evidence suggests that we should:

1. Define the content of classroom instruction for African American males (and others) around college and career-ready English-language arts (ELA) standards (and math) at every grade level. Multi-disciplinary texts at every grade level should be appropriately rich and complex for that grade, with instruction that engages students in close and careful reading to draw evidence and meaning from the material.
2. Make sure school and district instructional programs used with African American male students are integrated across subjects; teach sentence and text structure and vocabulary; blend reading and writing; provide differentiation according to student needs, and use appropriate assessments to inform progress.
3. Review the instructional materials used in classes with large numbers of African American males to ensure that those materials prioritize language development from the earliest grades; include content and reading lists that will motivate and engage students to read more; encourage discussion, and build comprehension across subjects. Supplement basal texts if necessary. Do not buy or use materials that do not nurture strong language development among African American male students.
4. Incorporate the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000)² in curriculum development, professional development, and classroom instruction, including the importance of providing explicit instruction to build phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension strategies, particularly for African American male students who may be at risk for reading problems. However, avoid overly narrow approaches to literacy development that rely exclusively on phonics and/or “leveled texts,” and programs that have shown little impact, and do not emphasize comprehension, understanding, and broad intellectual development.
5. Use various supports and data to determine if, when, and how to implement ELA interventions with African American male students. Avoid placing African American male students in interventions or remedial classes based solely on test scores or any single criterion.

² National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching Children to Read*.

6. Provide principals and teachers who are working with large numbers of African American males with comprehensive professional development on the multiple vital signs of strong literacy development.
7. Ensure that assessment results on reading and writing are used by teachers and other academic staff to inform instructional strategies for African American males, but do not reduce their achievement to the sole measure of test scores.
8. Decline to hire new teachers in urban schools who lack adequate training in reading, writing, and intellectual development to work with African American male students.
9. Develop a defined and ethical research agenda around effective literacy strategies with African American males to better determine what works and doesn't.

D. Mathematics Achievement

African American males are significantly under-represented in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, and few urban school systems graduate large numbers of students with the skills necessary to pursue postsecondary education and careers in this field. The best evidence on this issue suggests that urban schools should:

1. Define the content of classroom instruction for African American males (and all others) around college and career-ready standards in mathematics at every grade level. Curriculum and texts at every grade level should include strong examples of the most important math concepts and applications that will be studied in depth.
2. Make sure that math programs and materials serving African American male students include experiential projects, observations, investigations, applications of interest to students, and group discussions. Math programs should also include connections to STEM careers, offer tutoring, provide field trips, and offer mentors with strong math backgrounds.
3. Consider using the same high-quality math teacher (i.e., looping) with small groups of African American male students who stay together in 90-minute math classes for four years of high school, and extended learning opportunities to summer math programs to prevent summer learning loss. Also consider the use of teachers who are dedicated solely to math instruction (i.e., differential staffing) with African American males in upper elementary grades.
4. Use multi-tiered systems of support or response-to-invention approaches to determine if, when, and how instructional interventions in math are needed with African American male students. Avoid placing African American male students in interventions or remedial classes based solely on test scores or any single criterion.
5. Monitor the course-taking progress in math of every African American male student to ensure that he is successfully taking a core sequence of math courses throughout the secondary grades, including Advanced Placement math and science courses.

6. Make extensive use of peer-tutoring among African American males to support their mathematics learning and confidence. Also enlist nearby African American college students with strong math skills to serve as tutors and mentors.
7. Provide district leaders, principals, and teachers who are working with large numbers of African American males with comprehensive and regular professional development, common planning time, professional learning communities, and extensive summer math academies to strengthen math-content knowledge, pedagogical techniques and math applications that will engage African American male students (e.g., use of technology, demonstration lessons, co-teaching, and differentiation).
8. Encourage parents and guardians to support their African American sons in their study of mathematics and science. Create math activities for students and their families to help with the transition into high school.
9. Ensure that assessment results in mathematics are used by teachers and other academic staff to inform instructional strategies for African American males, but do not reduce their achievement to the sole measure of test scores.

E. Gifted and Talented Programs

Low participation rates in gifted and talented programs among African American males suggest that school districts need to do a better job of identifying and recruiting exceptional students, ensuring that advanced coursework is broadly available to all students, and supporting the skills necessary for students to be successful in these courses. The research in this area indicates that urban schools should:

1. Routinely collect and analyze disaggregated data on the numbers of African American male students who are enrolled in or placed into gifted, Advanced Placement, and honors classes by type of class and school, compared with the total numbers of African American males districtwide, to ensure that these students are not under-represented. Develop a comprehensive plan for building a pipeline for these students to high-level courses.
2. Remove or modify artificial restrictions to identifying students as eligible for gifted and talented programs. These restrictions may include the use of standardized achievement tests as a sole or major criterion, admission fees, perfect attendance, no behavioral infractions, official transcripts with applications, no grade below C in any course, restricted hours and locations for applying, parent contracts, applications delivered in person, and more..
3. Provide professional development for staff and teachers on how to recognize African American males who could benefit from gifted programs.
4. Establish aggressive efforts to recruit these African American male students into advanced and gifted programs.
5. Evaluate the results of participation by African American males in gifted programs to ensure barriers do not inhibit success.

F. Special Education

Urban public schools often have some of the best special education programs available, but too many African American male students get routed to special education when they have not been adequately taught basic reading and math skills or when there is a behavioral issue that has been mistaken, wittingly or unwittingly, as a disability. The research in this area indicates that urban schools should:

1. Establish explicit and measurable goals for decreasing placement and participation rates of African American males in alternative or special education programs that too often restrict access to high quality core instruction. Be transparent about data that are collected and monitor progress toward goal attainment.
2. Review special education identification rates in your district to determine whether African American males are being over-identified as disabled, particularly in the areas of emotional disturbance and intellectual disability, and if the data shows over-identification, develop a districtwide plan for addressing the issues.
3. Ensure that district accountability procedures address disproportionate placement of African American males in special education or watered down courses. Provide professional development on goals, procedures, and programs.

G. College and Career Readiness

Dropout rates among African American males in too many urban school districts are excessively high. In addition, many students emerge from our schools without the preparation they need to be ready for college or careers. To reverse these trends, urban schools should:

1. Establish priorities and initiatives in the African American community or launch local campaigns to underscore the centrality of education from the earliest years, the importance of staying in school, and the need to prepare financially for college. Establish “promise” type programs like the “Pittsburgh Promise” where college will be paid for by the local community if a student stays in school, graduates, and is accepted to college. Encourage and monitor participation by African American males. Advocate federal support and incentives for such endowments.
2. Have local communities establish specific, measurable goals over five and ten years to raise college admission and graduation rates among students in the community, particularly African American male students. Develop community-wide plans for meeting goals.
3. Encourage African American male participation in various test-prep and test-familiarity efforts in schools so students are ready for and savvy about college-entrance examinations. But, do not interpret the results as the sum total of any student’s knowledge or potential.
4. Encourage local colleges and universities in communities with large numbers of African American students to create and promote incentives to recruit, enroll, support, and graduate large numbers of African American male students. States should reward universities who improve retention and graduation rates for African American students.

5. Require colleges and universities to track college enrollment, degree completion, and degree attainment of African American male students, if they don't do so already.
6. Have local school systems and urban school systems clarify the skills students will need to be successful in college without remedial work. Provide opportunities for students to earn college credit through university/community college partnerships.
7. Encourage colleges, universities, and others to establish more comprehensive research programs to explore gaps in our knowledge about African American male achievement. Programs researched would include those on promising and effective practices; necessary resources and strategies to overcome barriers; innovative ideas and approaches; ways of overcoming the impediments of weak academic attainment; strategies to attract African American male students back into school or preventing their dropping out, successful programs with other populations and in other countries, and needed family and community supports.

H. Teaching and Effective Learning Communities

One of the ways in which too many African American males are denied full access to high-quality instruction involves the inequitable distribution of teachers in major city and other school systems. The result is that some students are taught by the best teachers, but many with the greatest needs are taught by the weakest. The research indicates that urban school districts should:

1. Provide financial, course-load, and other incentives for the district's most effective teachers to teach in schools with the highest percentages of struggling students, particularly struggling African American males.
2. Charge professional-learning communities (PLC) in schools with large numbers of African American males with including these students in teachers' deliberations and planning.
3. Modify the district's teacher-recruitment strategy to aggressively seek out and recruit African American male teachers who are at the top of their classes academically.
4. Ensure that each school in the district has a parent/family/community partnership in place that involves the African American community in decision-making, and builds outreach, communications, and parent involvement.
5. Ensure that schools in the district have a supportive learning environment that enhances African American students' sense of success, safety, and value in society.
6. Develop and implement aggressive school attendance efforts targeted at those African American males who don't attend school regularly each day.
7. Develop self-assessment tool to assist schools/districts in their pursuit of ongoing school improvement. The tools should merge research on effective schools with promising practices for working with boys of color and measure progress in seven core areas – assessment,

parent/family/community partnership, curriculum and instruction, school environment and climate, school leadership, school counseling and guidance, and school organization.

MENTAL HEALTH, DISCIPLINE, AND SAFETY

Schools often do not do an adequate job of supporting the social-emotional health of students and providing needed personal supports to students, particularly African American males. Moreover, too many African American males are pushed out of classes because of suspension and disciplinary policies that some have characterized as leading inexorably to the justice system. An emphasis should be placed on creating leaders, not potential prisoners. To address some of these challenges and barriers, research and best practices indicate that urban schools should:

1. Set up a local task force with multiple stakeholders to review suspension and expulsion data on African American males to see if they are differentially punished for the same offenses. Develop short-term steps to ensure that students being suspended are provided the instructional supports they need, so they do not fall behind. In the longer term, hold principals and others accountable for disproportionate suspension rates in their schools.
2. Encourage teachers to make personal and individual connections with each child in their classes, particularly African American males who appear isolated or troubled. Also ensure that teachers have the training they need to provide competent classroom management, use cooperative learning strategies, encourage class discussion and student engagement, and build a sense of personal efficacy and responsibility among students.
3. Organize schools with large numbers of African American males into smaller units, if possible, to encourage more personalized attention. Other strategies like departmental teaming, house-schools, and looping (i.e., the use of the same teachers with a group of students over multiple years) sometimes are also effective in creating more personal attention for students.
4. Monitor school climates to ensure they are positive, supportive, and responsive to students and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and connectedness. Schools should promote student well-being, respectful communications, social/emotional learning, safe opportunities for students to express themselves constructively, and ways to honor and celebrate student achievement and diversity (i.e., racial, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity and age, language and culture).
5. Help school staff understand the connections between race and discipline patterns in the case of African American males.
6. Revamp school district disciplinary policies to restrict harsh punishments for minor offenses, eliminate zero-tolerance policies that sometimes entrap disproportionate numbers of African American males, and reduce the numbers of out-of-school suspensions. Create alternative disciplinary procedures and response-to-intervention strategies to address behavioral issues.
7. Be proactive in identifying and addressing issues of equity, and don't be afraid to seek technical assistance or funding from others to support initiatives. Don't wait until a civil

rights complaint has been filed against the school district before admitting there is a problem or doing anything about it.

8. Develop or adopt and implement positive behavior programs and strategies beginning in the early grades for all students. Strategies could include positive behavior interventions, personal responsibility, victim/offender mediation and reconciliation, anti-bullying, social-emotional learning, and peace making.
9. Create programs that help smooth the transition from elementary school to middle grades and from eighth grade to high school (i.e., bridging programs) for African American males to minimize a sense of disconnectedness at a time when so many students begin to think about dropping out.
10. Provide avenues and opportunities for African American males to talk about their emotions and feelings to help reduce stress and the need to act out. Ensure that counseling and psychological staff are trained on signs of serious emotional and behavior problems, and are able to provide assistance or referrals. Establish mental health screening processes if necessary. Protect counseling staff and other support staff as much as possible during budget cuts.
11. Conduct regular evaluations of school mental health and safety programs, expenditures, and staffing to ensure their effectiveness. Evaluation results should be presented to the school board on a routine basis and accountability mechanisms should be established.
12. Create safe passageways between home and school for African American males living in neighborhoods marked by violence. Work with law enforcement to coordinate efforts.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING TIME

Research is quickly demonstrating that programs that extend the school day, school week, and school year are producing significantly better student achievement when these opportunities are structured to build on and enhance what students are learning during the school day. Some of these programs are provided through the schools, but many are offered through community-based organizations with strong links in the African American community. Best practices and experience in these areas indicate that urban schools should:

1. Encourage enrollment of African American males in community-based youth development programs that include physical development, skill building, social and emotional support, positive relations with adults and peers, and study time. Out of school learning should also include decision-making skills, work habits and expectations, leadership development, and time management
2. Actively enlist the participation of families, parents and guardians in these out-of-school learning programs with their children and youth, particularly during the summer.
3. Enlist schools and community-based organizations in programs or projects that enable African American males to link their aspirations to actual opportunities, and that emphasize

students' assets, capacities, self-worth, and talents rather than deficits. Collaboration with schools should help create a more seamless network of support for youth.

4. Coordinate academic activities of community groups with the schools so that both reinforce each other.
5. Work with African American male youth to create clear personal goals for their academic, financial, and career aspirations.
6. Work to retain African American male youth in mentoring and community-based programs for at least two years, so they develop connections with adults, peers, and programs.
7. Set up awards programs for African American males who have accomplished goals and attained significant milestones.
8. Create opportunities for African American male students to apply their knowledge outside of school to school-related activities in order to build greater connections to school.
9. Coordinate programs not only with local schools and school districts but with local postsecondary colleges and training programs so African American males have a number of ways to access postsecondary opportunities.

PARTNERSHIPS AND MENTORING

Urban school leaders and others have assembled this paper to lay out a game plan for improving opportunities for African American males, but schools will not be able to address all the challenges successfully on their own. Experience and research indicate that community partnerships and the mentoring of other adults can be critical in the lives of many African American males.

A. Establishing Partnerships

Urban schools should:

1. Perform a basic needs assessment prior to developing any partnership between schools and community organizations to determine what African American male students need in-school and out-of-school that community-based organizations can help fill. This process should define the focus of the partnerships.
2. Review school district policies to ensure that they define the goals, purposes, and priorities of partnerships to work with African American male students; how partners will be selected; what expectations will exist for partnerships; how long the partnerships will last; how conflicts will be resolved; how frequently the parties will meet for planning and coordination purposes; how the partnerships will be evaluated, and how these expectations will be communicated to interested groups.

3. Educate school staff and teachers on the integral need for and benefits of partnerships that work with African American male students, so school personnel don't view the collaboration as a supplemental "add-on" where participation is optional.
4. Evaluate potential partnerships with community organizations based on their experience in the African American community, their track record with similar school partnerships, their history in implementing programs, their past results over an extended period, their policies and practices related to the vetting of staff and possible abuse of children, and the plans and sources of funding they have to maintain a presence in the schools.
5. Establish a clear set of procedures (either through a Memorandum of Understanding or other means) for how volunteers are placed in or assigned to schools or students to ensure that African American males have equitable access to organizational resources and assistance. Procedures should be clear about the goals of the program; which types of students will be recruited for and served by the program; how recruitment will be executed; when results are expected, how progress will be determined; how the partnership will interact with staff and teachers, and how the program will help meet student needs.
6. Determine who is responsible and accountable for what in the partnership arrangement and what the roles of the partnering organizations are. (Typically, schools would be responsible for access to African American male students, space in the buildings to conduct a program, and other supports, while the community-based organizations would be responsible for program activities that are consistent with their agreement with the schools). Work out who pays for what in the partnership, be they in cash or in-kind payments.
7. Design and provide to school and/or community-based staff the professional development and volunteers necessary for the partnership program to reach its full potential on behalf of African American male students.
8. Assign a staff member from the central office to serve as liaison to community organizations that have a strong presence in the African American community, and can help coordinate and communicate their work on behalf of the district's students.
9. Cultivate partnership relationships that are productive and enjoyable; that utilize shared decision making, effective communications, and a defined structure, and that actually foster rather than hinder collaboration with community-based organizations serving the African American community.
10. Ensure that partnerships include connections with mental health agencies, nutrition groups, family services organizations, recreation outlets, and the like.
11. Evaluate the partnerships based on the goals set jointly by the school district and community groups for the improvement of the academic performance and social well-being of African American male students. Evaluate intermediate goals as well, and disseminate the results for others to see.

B. Developing and Overseeing Mentoring Programs

Urban schools should:

1. Determine goals for a mentoring program meant to assist African American males either academically or otherwise, and decide whether the mentoring will be one-on-one, group, community or school-based, or some combination of approaches. Ensure that the design of a mentoring program reflects best practices in matching mentors and students based on relevant criteria.
2. Clarify that mentors do not have the roles of tutors or disciplinarians. Mentors need to have a trusting relationship with young African American males. School staff should be informed of what this role is and what it is not.
3. Have the mentorship program target problem and high-risk behaviors (e.g., delinquency or violence, drug use, absenteeism or high suspension rates) exhibited by African American males who may lack responsible male adults in their lives.
4. Recruit responsible African American adult mentors from the community to pair with district students before and after school and on weekends. Set up clear screening procedures and background checks for mentors and professional development to support their relationships with African American male students.
5. Carefully match mentors with young African American mentees based on interests, goals, demographic similarities, interview results, and other factors. Enlist the support and assistance of school administrators, counselors, and social workers in identifying students for mentoring and to coordinate efforts.
6. Mentoring activities with young African American males should include such key activities as exposing them to higher education and career paths, personal relationship building, joint reading and discussion sessions, and sports and recreation.
7. Provide professional development for mentors throughout their relationship with their young African American male charges, and ensure that mentors are in touch with their organizations at least monthly to discuss progress and challenges.
8. Require a mentoring relationship with young African American males of at least 12 months and ideally of three years. Care must be taken to ensure that the relationship does not end with the student thinking that he has been abandoned (again) or that it has ended because of something he did or did not do.
9. Set up special parent training workshops, particularly for single mothers who may be having difficulty with their African American sons, on how to be a positive role model and catalyst in lives of their male children. Other workshops might include relationship building, monitoring, stable home environments, drug prevention, avoiding violence, effective parent-child communications, gang involvement, and the value of staying in school.

FINAL NOTE

This draft Blueprint was developed to encourage a national discussion on the steps that urban schools and others could take to improve their performance with the many African American students that have not been served well in our settings. Other constructive ideas are welcome.

The focus of the paper has been on schools, where young people spend so much of their time, but it does not mean to exclude a broader audience of actors who have a major role to play. They include the justice system, the world of entertainment and sports, higher education, housing and the health-care sector, local/state and federal governments, the private sector and the business community, the philanthropic community, the faith-based community, the news media, and many others.

All will need to be enlisted to ensure that ALL children nationwide inherit the excellence and opportunity that America promises.





