

POLICY NOTES

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In this Issue

During the high school years, teens lay the groundwork for their future lives, in college and in the world of work. But too many African-American males spend those crucial years battling obstacles that can jeopardize their future success. The high schools that many Black male teens attend often struggle with inadequate funding, high

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Addressing Achievement Gaps

Black Male Teens: Moving to Success in the High School Years

Like high school students everywhere, Black male teens imagine bright futures for themselves — futures filled with college achievement and success in the work world. “Black male teens don’t wake up each morning saying, ‘I want to be a dropout; I want to be a school failure,’” **Gerry House**, a former school superintendent who now heads ETS’s Institute for Student Achievement, told an audience of several hundred assembled recently for a joint ETS/Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) symposium on Black males of high school age. “To the contrary, they have dreams and aspirations like their White peers.”

But for the nation's 1.7 million Black males of high school age, statistics suggest that those dreams are too often derailed by the sad realities of poverty, educational failure and racial bias. Only 52 percent of the Black males who began ninth grade in 2006 finished high school in four years, compared with 78 percent of White male ninth-graders, ETS Senior Vice President **Michael Nettles** told the conference audience; and of the Black males who finished high school in 2004, only 30 percent had completed the minimum requirements of a college-prep curriculum. In 2012, only 18.5 percent of Black men aged 25 to 29 held bachelor's degrees, and young Black men who drop out of high school are far more likely than their peers to be unemployed or incarcerated. "They're being sentenced to social and economic death," said CDF founder and President **Marian Wright Edelman**. "We've got to build a movement to stop it."

"Our public schools still represent our greatest hope to close opportunity and achievement gaps for Black children, but they also play a significant role in perpetuating those gaps."

— *Marian Wright Edelman, President, Children's Defense Fund*

But the ETS/CDF symposium "Black Male Teens: Moving to Success in the High School Years," held June 24 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., focused as much on solutions as on problems, spotlighting the charter schools and community programs that are pioneering better approaches to shepherding Black male teenagers through their high school years. Seventeen researchers, educators and advocates — among them, four young Black men who recently graduated from high school or college — participated in discussions during the symposium, the 17th in ETS's "Addressing Achievement Gaps" conference series, and the third of four planned ETS/

CDF symposia on the educational and life experiences of Black males. Two earlier ETS/CDF symposia dealt with the needs and experiences of Black males in early childhood and during the middle school years; the fourth symposium, planned for 2014, will deal with the college and post-college years.

"I remember being in classrooms and really feeling that my teachers did not want to see me succeed."

— *Michael Tubbs, teacher, Langston Hughes Academy*

The programs highlighted in the most recent symposium try to short-circuit what has become, for too many Black male teens, the internalization of a doom-filled narrative about their seemingly inescapable progression from low academic achievement to unemployment to prison time. "They feel that their fate is already determined and that failure is known," said conference speaker **Bakari Haynes**, Assistant Principal of Eastern Middle School in Montgomery County, Maryland. Apparently well-meaning talk about the importance of closing the test-score gaps separating Black and Hispanic youths from their White and Asian peers may end up reinforcing deeply held prejudices about the former's supposed intellectual inferiority, conference speakers suggested, perpetuating the very phenomenon that education reformers say they want to combat. Meanwhile, American culture is saturated with images of Black men as violent and threatening. "Our society has primed us about young Black males," said conference speaker **Judith Browne Dianis**, a lawyer who co-directs the Advancement Project, a Washington, D.C.-based civil rights organization. "What we see on TV — it gets in people's heads." Conference speaker **Michael Tubbs** — who in 2012, the year he graduated from Stanford University, was the youngest city council member elected in the history of Stockton, California —

described principals inviting him to visit their schools because, they said, the schools' teachers had never met a successful Black man. "That's a huge problem," said Tubbs, who teaches in a charter secondary school in Stockton. "We have to shift the narrative."

Overwhelmed by need

Historically, the nation's public schools have been seen as the engines of opportunity, the places where children from disadvantaged backgrounds mastered the skills they could use to build more prosperous lives than their parents'. However accurate or inaccurate that optimistic picture may once have been, today's reality is far more complicated, conference speakers made clear. "Our public schools still represent our greatest hope to close opportunity and achievement gaps for Black children," said CDF's Edelman, "but they also play a significant role in perpetuating those gaps." Schools serving large percentages of Black and Hispanic children spend less per pupil, offer fewer advanced courses, and employ teachers with less experience and less subject-matter expertise than do predominantly White schools, conference participants said.

"The schools high-poverty kids go to typically are overwhelmed by need. If we funded based on educational challenge, those schools would have much more."

— Robert Balfanz, research scientist, Center for Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University

Often, such heavily minority schools also enroll large percentages of low-income students whose academic challenges are compounded by family dysfunction, neighborhood violence, and inadequate nutrition, health care and social services — the collateral damage of living in poverty. "The schools high-poverty kids go to typically are overwhelmed by need," said conference



Conference speakers (left to right) Michael Tubbs, Janol Vinson and Darryl Briggs

speaker **Robert Balfanz**, a research scientist at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Social Organization of Schools. "If we funded based on educational challenge, those schools would have much more." But because schools are often financed through local property taxes, funding tends to follow ZIP code, with dollars flowing not to the schools serving the neediest students but rather to institutions like the affluent Connecticut high school Balfanz himself attended as a teenager — a place so advantaged, he said, that "the teachers [just] had to turn on the lights, and the kids would succeed."

"Our society has primed us about young Black males. What we see on TV — it gets in people's heads."

— Judith Browne Dianis, co-Director, Advancement Project

For Black male high school students, the fiscal and academic shortcomings of their schools are compounded by the hostility they often encounter from teachers and school administrators, conference speakers said. Black male students disproportionately

fill the ranks of the suspended and expelled, and studies show they are punished more harshly than White male students for identical behavior, said Dianis, of the Advancement Project. No evidence suggests that student behavior improves after a suspension, she said, and suspensions themselves hurt students, who find themselves at loose ends while out of school and behind on their classwork once they return. Indeed, students who have been suspended even once are twice as likely to drop out as students who have never been suspended at all, she said. “We saw these policies that really pushed young people out of school,” Dianis said.

Even more damaging is the criminalization of in-school misbehavior, with students arrested, handcuffed and sent to juvenile court over minor, highly subjective offenses, she said. In Florida, Black males account for 12 percent of the school population but 45 percent of school-based arrests, Dianis said, and 69 percent of those arrests are for in-the-eye-of-the-beholder misdemeanors like disorderly conduct and disruption of a school function. “At the end of the day, these young Black men are on the road to prison,” Dianis said. “Mass incarceration starts in kindergarten.”

Black male teens are treated so punitively because the adults they encounter in school each day have absorbed negative societal stereotypes that portray all Black men as violent, lazy and stupid, some of the conference speakers said. “I remember being in classrooms and really feeling that my teachers did not want to see me succeed,” said Tubbs, the California councilman. Even at his magnet high school, said conference speaker **Janol Vinson**, a recent graduate of Northern Kentucky University, he felt unappreciated. “You feel that you are here because they’re just using you as that token Black male,” Vinson said.

That context explains why the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans lists the celebration of success stories and the

debunking of negative myths among its top priorities, alongside more conventional commitments to improved early childhood education and literacy instruction, said **David Johns**, the Executive Director of the White House initiative. “Words matter,” said Johns, who spoke at a pre-symposium event. Teachers, he said, need “to know that there’s a reason to invest” in their Black male students.

Changing the music

If traditionally run public high schools are too often part of the problem for Black male teens, new ways of thinking can turn schools into part of the solution, conference speakers said. Whatever their race or income level, students achieve more in schools where they feel safe, supported and intellectually engaged, said conference speaker **David Osher**, a vice president of the American Institutes for Research (AIR). But when students face unusual adversity outside the classroom, school climate becomes especially crucial.

“Black male teens don’t wake up each morning saying, ‘I want to be a dropout; I want to be a school failure.’ To the contrary, they have dreams and aspirations like their White peers.”

— *Gerry House, President, ETS Institute for Student Achievement*

“The more things that you’re struggling with, the more important these conditions are,” Osher said. An African proverb holds that “If you want the dance to change, you have to change the music,” said conference speaker **Tim King**, the founder and head of Urban Prep Academies, which operates a network of charter schools for boys in Chicago. “If we want to improve the outcomes for Black males, we have to change the music,” King said. “We have to change the way we do school.”

Those changes can take many forms, conference speakers made clear. “There’s no one pathway to get there,” said speaker **James Earl Davis**, interim dean of Temple University’s College of Education. “There are diverse pathways.” But in schools that successfully nurture Black male teens, the commitment to excellence begins at the top, speakers said, with leaders who believe in the potential of all their students and make sure that belief informs every aspect of their schools’ operations. “When the culture is really good, it can change the way students see themselves and give them the motivation to aspire to something higher,” said conference keynote speaker **Cassius Johnson**, program officer at the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which recently completed a study of secondary schools that promote high academic achievement among low-income students.

That cultural change is rooted in historical understanding, said conference speaker **Ronald Walker**, executive director of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color. “The leader has to be rock-solid, concrete in the belief that permeates his entire school that there’s a deep legacy of Black intellectual achievement and advancement that goes back generations,” Walker said. “We have to concretize the counter-narrative.” At Urban Prep’s all-male high school, where students wear jackets and ties to class every day, incoming ninth-graders receive their first jackets at a public assembly.

“For girls, you can tell them about college and college experiences, and many of them can kind of get that in their mind’s eye. Boys, you’ve got to show them. They’ve got to get on a bus.”

— *David Banks, President/CEO, Eagle Academy Foundation*

Then successful African-American men are called to the stage to pledge their support for the new class, as an announcer reads out a list of each man’s

academic degrees and the names of the educational institutions that conferred them. “It’s incredibly powerful,” King said. “We did it; you can do it.”

Schools that aim to put Black male teens on the road to college must begin early, conference speakers said — as early as ninth, or even sixth, grade. “For girls, you can tell them about college and college experiences, and many of them can kind of get that in their mind’s eye. Boys, you’ve got to show them. They’ve got to get on a bus,” said conference speaker **David Banks**, the head of the Eagle Academy Foundation, which operates all-boys charter schools in New York City and Newark. “Many of them have never set foot on a college campus, so it’s not real in their minds. You’ve got to take them through a dorm. They’ve got to be able to go in somebody’s room and sit on the bed. They’ve got to play video games in the student center.”

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— *Ronald Walker, Executive Director, Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color*

But aspirations alone are not enough to pave the way to college, conference speakers stressed: for Black male teens to succeed there, they must be exposed to a demanding, intellectually engaging high school curriculum. It’s not gang-abatement programs that get Black males into college, said conference speaker **Ivory Toldson**, an associate professor of counseling psychology at Howard University. “You get more Black men in college when you put in college preparatory classes, honors classes, reduce suspensions, and take them on college tours,” he said. Yet too many schools serving low-income and minority students offer a course of study that stresses

rote memorization and regurgitation of facts. “For many poor kids, but particularly for African-American kids, they are in schools [where] there is very, very little attempt to do the engagement,” said Osher of AIR. “At best, it’s test preparation. At best, it’s an attempt to realize pretty mediocre outcomes.”

“We must not revive a landscape of multiple differentiated diplomas that dummy down expectations for some students. We must not embrace the college track for some students and the technical track for others.”

— Cassius Johnson, program officer,
Carnegie Corporation of New York

Ensuring broad access to a rigorous curriculum that will prepare all students for college is a central goal of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which lays out in detail what students should know and be able to do after 13 years of schooling in English and math. Advocates of the Common Core, which has been adopted by nearly every state, see it as a guarantor of equity for low-income children attending schools that have traditionally offered the kind of watered-down curriculum Osher described. But the Common Core and the tests that will assess it have not yet been fully implemented in classrooms, and opponents on both left and right are pushing back against the new approach, warned speaker Johnson, of the Carnegie Corporation. “We must not revive a landscape of multiple differentiated diplomas that dummy down expectations for some students,” he said. “We must not embrace the college track for some students and the technical track for others.”

The power of relationships

Beyond the debate over the Common Core, creating engaging school experiences for Black male teens

means ensuring that both teachers and curriculum are attuned to the culture from which students come, conference speakers said. Such cultural competence may suggest ways to make studies relevant to students’ lives — “In my class, I connect almost everything to hip-hop, because it works,” said Tubbs, the Stockton, California, teacher and councilman — and may help ensure that students receive positive messages about their racial identity. For conference speaker Vinson, the first African-American men he encountered in the pages of his high school textbooks were not scholars but slaves. “My high school did not prepare me to be a confident Black man in America,” Vinson said.

“Students who feel that their teachers care about them actually do better on achievement. It’s not just about teaching reading. It’s my relationship with the person who teaches me reading.”

— David Osher, Vice President, American Institutes for Research

To resist the potentially destructive impact that majority-White schools and colleges may have on their psyches, students of color — often aided by teachers of color — create so-called “counter-spaces” within those institutions, said conference speaker **Clarence “La Mont” Terry Sr.**, an assistant professor of education at Occidental College and the Associate Director of the Black Male Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. Counter-spaces are informal communities whose members offer mutual academic and social support and help each other resist the debilitating effects of racism, Terry said. One year, Terry helped students attending summer school in South Central Los Angeles investigate the oft-cited claim that more Black men are behind bars than enrolled in college. The students discovered that the truth is more nuanced — in fact, among younger Black men in California, more are in college than in prison, Terry

said. “It was a way to help them learn things about their world through math,” he said. “That’s typically what we think of as a sort of counter-space.”

“Kids couldn’t care less about where you graduated from. They want to know that you truly care about them and that you’re going to invest your time and your effort into making their experience worthwhile.”

— Bakari Haynes, Assistant Principal,
Montgomery County, Maryland

Although commentators often lament the underrepresentation of Black men among the nation’s teachers — less than 2 percent of K–12 teachers in the United States are African-American men — culturally competent instruction is ultimately less about skin color than about the quality of teacher-student relationships, conference speakers said. “You don’t have to be a Black male educator to teach Black students,” Tubbs said. “You just have to love Black male children.” Similarly, although students are shortchanged when their teachers lack a thorough grounding in the subjects they teach, credentials can’t substitute for caring, speakers said. “Kids couldn’t care less about where you graduated from,” said Haynes, the Maryland middle school administrator. “They want to know that you truly care about them and that you’re going to invest your time and your effort into making their experience worthwhile.” Relationships with teachers, whether good or bad, can have a powerful and lasting impact on students, noted conference speaker **Stacy Holland**, who heads the Philadelphia Youth Network, a nonprofit group focused on workforce development among young people. “Some of these kids never recover from these negative experiences,” Holland said, “just as some of them thrive because of the positive ones.”

Research bears out this anecdotal sense that relationships can make a crucial difference in the academic lives of struggling students, conference speakers said. “The things that drive achievement are the quality of the coursework the student does and the quality of adult relationships they have in the building,” said Balfanz, of Johns Hopkins. “In high-poverty schools, both those things are in short [supply], and that’s why we have low achievement.” The young Black men on the conference program spoke poignantly about the alienating anonymity of the schools they attended. “The school basically didn’t care for us,” said speaker **Mike Ruff**, who graduated from a Washington, D.C., high school this year, after turning around a checkered academic career that began with repeated truancy and suspensions. “That’s the kind of idea that we had.” In the Bronx high school he eventually dropped out of, speaker **Darryl Briggs**, a New York college student who earned a GED® at age 20, felt overwhelmed by the presence of thousands of other students, sometimes crammed into classrooms that lacked enough desks. “There were no personal connections in the school unless you were related to someone in the faculty,” Briggs said.

“You don’t have to be a Black male educator to teach Black students. You just have to love Black male children.”

— Michael Tubbs, teacher, Langston Hughes Academy

Providing institutional structures that ensure the development of close adult-student relationships is crucial to improving the academic performance of Black male teens, conference speakers said. “Students who feel that their teachers care about them actually do better on achievement,” said Osher, of AIR. “It’s not just about teaching reading. It’s my relationship with the

person who teaches me reading.” In a school enrolling 5,000 students, it might take a staff of 500 to ensure that every child can have a close relationship with an adult, Balfanz said – an expensive proposition, but no more expensive than forcing failing students to repeat ninth grade, which cost the nation \$2.4 billion last year and yielded only a 25 percent success rate, he said.

“It’s not gang-abatement programs that get Black males into college. You get more Black men in college when you put in college preparatory classes, honors classes, reduce suspensions, and take them on college tours.”

— Ivory Toldson, associate professor of counseling psychology, Howard University

Close ties between students and caring adults ensure that problems will be caught before they blossom into crises, Balfanz said. “Kids signal early and often that they’re struggling in school. It really is in early adolescence when you make the decision ‘Is schooling for me?’” he said. “That’s when kids who don’t feel engaged start missing school, start getting in trouble, start not doing their work.” Adults sometimes assume that young teens will grow out of such behavior, he said, but in high-poverty schools, such behaviors just get worse; it’s crucial to set up a cadre of adults who react to the first sign of trouble. “As soon as a kid struggles in a test, you intervene. You don’t wait for them to fail the class,” Balfanz said. “As soon as a student has suddenly missed three days in a week, you find out why.” Teachers, who must plan lessons and grade work for 75 to 150 students, don’t have time to form close relationships with more than a handful of their students, he said; schools need to set up a “second shift of adults” to take on the work of monitoring and intervention.

Cultivating such relationships has positive repercussions for discipline, as well as for academic achievement, conference speakers said. In his first year as a middle

school assistant principal in Maryland, Haynes found most of his time taken up with disciplining the African-American and Hispanic boys who lined the bench outside his office all day long. “I was tired of making the phone calls home — such-and-such has been suspended, such-and-such has cursed out this teacher, such-and-such has threatened to do x, y and z,” Haynes said. “It was consuming so much of my time, and it was disheartening.”

To change his relationship with these struggling students, Haynes co-founded an after-school club called Distinguished Gentlemen, monitoring students’ schoolwork and leading field trips to both a local jail and local college campuses. “My approach is really just common sense,” Haynes said. “If you don’t have these programs in place, you know exactly what’s going to happen.”

More direct efforts to change school discipline policies can also bear fruit: In Denver and Baltimore, said speaker Dianis, of the Advancement Project, conduct codes have been rewritten — the Denver version requires monitoring and reporting of racial disparities in discipline — and graduation rates are rising. “We have to be able to show these successes,” she said.

Missing fathers, struggling sons

Erasing the expectation of Black male failure, strengthening adult-student relationships and infusing school culture with high aspirations is every bit as crucial to instruction as teaching the three Rs, conference speakers said. The successful schools recently identified by the Carnegie Corporation of New York conceive of youth development not as a separate program but as an integral aspect of their work, said Johnson, the Carnegie program officer. “Everything we’re talking about is a part of the curriculum and is a part of what makes a curriculum rigorous,” said King of the Urban Prep Academies.

"A curriculum within a school is much, much more than just what you see in a book and what a teacher teaches from a lesson plan." Even as schools begin to implement the Common Core State Standards in their classrooms, "the principal has to balance that with another common core," said Walker, of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color. "And that other common core talks about the character of young men, building the character of young men, being able to build the notion that young men are reliable and resilient and can persevere and must be confident." As schools work to instill this second common core, they must turn for help to the families and communities from which their Black male students come, speakers said. At the Eagle Academy for Young Men in New York, Banks said, parent meetings are held on Saturday mornings, because that fits family schedules better than the weeknight meeting times often chosen to suit the convenience of school employees. Organized networks of volunteers encourage other parents to attend these meetings; as a result, hundreds do. "It's easy for a parent to not show up if she gets an automated phone call from the school or you put the flier in your child's backpack," Banks said.

"We have so many dads who are not there. Who's going to help in this transition into manhood?"

— David Banks, President/CEO, Eagle Academy Foundation

"It's a lot harder to not show up when you have that one-on-one contact and connection." For schools, another crucial resource is the group of informal mentors whom conference speaker Walker calls the "community faculty" — the crossing guards and barbers and church members who know the teenage boys in their neighborhoods and can administer tough love when necessary. When he worked as a principal, Walker said, he tried to build bridges between schools and community members by holding faculty meetings in local churches or housing projects.

"It's a global race to the top, and this country is losing."

— David Banks, President/CEO, Eagle Academy Foundation

Supplementing these informal mentoring relationships are more structured efforts to replace what is missing from the lives of too many African-American male teens: a father. "We have so many dads who are not there," said Banks, of Eagle Academy. "Who's going to help in this transition into manhood?" Mentoring programs have a range of goals, from encouraging academic achievement to promoting healthy relationships. At The Brotherhood/Sister Sol, a Harlem-based nonprofit that provides a comprehensive array of educational, employment and community services for young people, the first order of business is permitting an emotional expressiveness that can seem off-limits to young Black males — allowing boys to act like boys, to shed "this false iron mask that boys in the 'hood have to wear," said conference speaker **Khary Lazzarre-White**, the program's executive director. Once boys' loyalty has been earned through play and food — "You can do anything you want as long as there's pizza," Lazzarre-White joked — the focus can turn to more serious matters: summer reading lists, college tours, overseas trips. "If everything underneath it is love, then you can move to discipline," Lazzarre-White said. "Then you can talk to young men about the realities they're going to face, the obstacles they're going to face."

Overcoming those obstacles may mean helping with practical matters that are barely speed bumps to affluent young people but can derail their less-advantaged peers. When the young men in his program return home after their first year of college, finding them well-paying summer jobs in the business world is just the first step, Lazzarre-White said. With their first paycheck weeks away, students need help



ETS Senior Vice President Michael Nettles

shopping for blazers and dress shirts, paying for public transportation to their new workplaces and buying lunch. “We’ve had to invest a substantial amount of money just to allow them to take a paid job that will allow them to remain in college,” Lazarre-White said, “let alone the unpaid internships that working-class kids cannot take, that middle-class and wealthy kids take.”

An economic imperative

The barriers confronting Black male teens threaten not only the well-being of individuals but also the long-term economic health of the nation, conference speakers said. Historically, the United States has tolerated a two-tiered educational system, in which those at the top were educated for elite jobs and those at the bottom — often members of minority

groups, including African Americans — found blue-collar work or were consigned to a life of poverty and failure. But that de facto caste system, never morally acceptable, is no longer economically feasible, conference speakers said. By the end of the decade, nearly 65 percent of American jobs will require some postsecondary education, and few jobs requiring only a high school diploma will pay enough to support a middle-class family, said Johnson, of the Carnegie Corporation. President Obama has called for 60 percent of people between the ages of 25 and 34 to hold a two-year or four-year college degree by 2020; for Black males to meet the president’s target would require nearly quadrupling the numbers of degrees they are currently awarded each year, ETS’s Nettles said. “Beyond overcoming unjust discrimination, in our economy the surest way to acquire capital is to acquire skills and knowledge through education,” Nettles said. “That reality will only deepen over time as the global economy grows increasingly reliant on workers with higher levels of skills and knowledge.”

“Beyond overcoming unjust discrimination, in our economy the surest way to acquire capital is to acquire skills and knowledge through education. That reality will only deepen over time as the global economy grows increasingly reliant on workers with higher levels of skills and knowledge.”

— Michael Nettles, ETS Senior Vice President

Of course, promoting America’s economic development isn’t the only reason to improve the education of America’s children. “Education isn’t about the economic,” said Dianis, of the Advancement Project. “It opens up a whole world to you that’s not about what kind of widget I am in this society.” But

in an increasingly globalized economy, every citizen will need to contribute if the country is to flourish, conference speakers said. “It’s a global race to the top, and this country is losing,” said Banks of the Eagle Academy Foundation. “If you don’t understand it from a moral imperative, understand it from an economic imperative. If you don’t love Black boys, that’s all right — can’t force you to love me. But if you don’t help to invest in Black boys and transform their lives, you do that to your own detriment.”

“Generally, our attention is drawn to the extremes, but one significant ‘takeaway’ from today’s symposium is that most Black male teens reside in the middle; their experiences are not always at the margins. Yet, Black males in the middle are often overlooked and not given the attention needed.”

— James Earl Davis, Interim Dean,
Temple University, and Symposium Rapporteur

Improving the well-being of Black male teens is a pressing priority that can no longer be neglected, conference speakers said. “We don’t have a generation to get it right,” said speaker **Edward Tolliver**, who directs the Black Male College Explorers Program, a college exploration program for at-risk teens, held at Florida A&M University. If graduation tests linked to the Common Core State Standards are implemented without any further effort to improve the schooling of low-income and minority students, dropout rates for those students will likely double, said Johnson, of the Carnegie Corporation. Convinced of the importance of early childhood education, reformers are sometimes tempted to start afresh, focusing their efforts on a new generation of children, he said. But that temptation must be resisted. “If we only start fresh, we end up giving up on millions of students who are already

in the education pipeline,” Johnson said. “They don’t have the opportunity to start fresh.” And the time to address the problem is now, speakers said. “These are not acts of God, these realities. These are acts of human beings and wrongheaded values in our culture that we have the power to change,” said Edelman of CDF. “Nobody’s going to save our children if we don’t do it.”



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dropout rates and large numbers of inexperienced or underqualified teachers. Black male teens are less likely than their White peers to be exposed to a curriculum demanding enough to prepare them for college-level coursework and for jobs in a competitive, globalized economy. And negative stereotypes of Black men as lazy, violent and intellectually inferior may influence teachers’ perceptions, exposing Black male students to destructively punitive discipline and depriving them of the supportive relationships they need to navigate school successfully.

But across the country, charter schools and community programs are finding better ways to shepherd Black male teens through their high school years, creating positive cultures that provide rigorous instruction undergirded with loving adult guidance. With the American economy increasingly dependent on the contributions of every citizen, it is crucial that Black male teens receive the academic and social supports they need to thrive in high school and beyond.

That was the message of “Black Male Teens: Moving to Success in the High School Years,” the 17th in ETS’s series of “Addressing Achievement Gaps”



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symposia, and the third of four planned conferences on the educational needs and life experiences of young Black males. The symposium, which took place in Washington, D.C., on June 24, was co-sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF). The two earlier ETS/CDF symposia covered the experiences of Black males in early childhood and during the middle school years; the fourth symposium, planned for 2014, will deal with the college and post-college years.

The most recent symposium featured discussion by 17 researchers, educators and advocates. CDF President Marian Wright Edelman and ETS Senior Vice

President Michael Nettles offered opening and closing remarks, and Cassius Johnson, program officer for the Carnegie Corporation of New York, delivered the keynote address. Sessions were chaired by Gerry House, President of ETS's Institute for Student Achievement; Cedric Jennings, Director of the Washington, D.C., Council's Office of Youth Programs; Selvon Waldron, Director of development and grants at Life Pieces to Masterpieces, which runs after-school and weekend programs for young African-American men in Washington, D.C.; and Lester Young Jr., a member of the New York State Board of Regents.