BEING BLACK
IS NOT A RISK FACTOR:

Including a foreword written by

CONGRESSWOMAN FREDERICA S. WILSON

STATISTICS AND STRENGTHS-BASED SOLUTIONS IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA

BCDI
Black Child Development Institute
FORT LAUDERDALE
GREATER TAMPA BAY
MIAMI

FLORIDA

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KEEP STANDING

I can recall many defining moments that have transformed the lives of Black children throughout American history. As future generations look back on this time—a time that has compelled us to relive battles from the Civil Rights Movement—I believe it will be a defining moment in our nation's history as well.

From the struggle against over policing in Black communities to the fight to uplift failing schools, racial tensions continue to gain national attention and spark public debate. This pivotal moment for our country creates great opportunity for us to redefine the course of generations for decades to come.

Yes, Black lives matter.

We have responded to the critical issues of our time by historically highlighting the strengths of Black families and communities while rejecting negative stereotypes. In 2013, the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) released the first *Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: A Strengths-Based Look at the State of the Black Child* report in support of our mission to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and families through education and advocacy. This series of reports is designed to reframe and redefine the narrative about Black children from one that overemphasizes their limitations and deficits to one that focuses on their unique and considerable strengths and talents.

Since the initial report, each subsequent report has been state-based, as we've worked with our National Affiliate Network to develop reports that amplify and highlight the strengths and needs of Black children and families. Like the national report and the state reports before it, *Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: Statistics and Strengths-Based Solutions in the State of Florida* serves as an important **resource** for policymakers, advocates, practitioners, parents, and caregivers alike.

The report weaves together three critical elements:

1. **Essays** by experts from across the state that focus on using the strengths of our children, families, and communities to improve outcomes for Black children through education and advocacy;

2. **Points of Proof** from organizations in Florida that serve and support Black children providing comprehensive, innovative programs and services that build on their strengths and chart new paths to success; and

3. **Data** that indicates how Florida's Black children and families are doing across a range of measures both state- and nationwide.

Not only is *Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: Statistics and Strengths-Based Solutions in the State of Florida* a resource, but a **rebuttal** as well. While Black children often face serious challenges, they possess immeasurable potential, as demonstrated by the stories and positive outcomes that are highlighted in this report. This view helps to change the way we see ourselves and the way we advocate for increased investments and policies to create equitable systems that support our children, families, and communities.

To develop the report, we tapped into the dedication and innovation of contributors from the fields of education, health and wellness, literacy, family and community engagement, child welfare, public policy, and grassroots advocacy. Mirroring NBCDI's six focus areas, we have engaged a range of perspectives while capitalizing on the diversity of thought throughout Florida, one of the most diverse states in the country.

Ultimately, this report is a **reflection** of the character, strength, and resilience of Black children and those who effectively support them. I am inspired by all who work with an unwavering commitment to excellence. Thank you for standing with us to harness the full potential of our children, families, and communities.

TOBEKA G. GREEN
President & CEO
National Black Child Development Institute

Foreword:

SPIRIT OF UNRELENTING ADVOCACY FOR BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

CONGRESSWOMAN FREDERICA S. WILSON
Florida's 24th Congressional District

As advocates for Black children, our challenge is to build and advocate for education systems in which every student has comprehensive wraparound supports that will sustain their overall health, well-being, and engagement in learning to set them up for academic success.

Education is a human right for all children. For Black children, educational programs can provide pathways to success that build on their strengths and outweigh the obstacles historically placed in their way. I witnessed the transformational power of education when I was a teacher and a principal, and still do, as the founder of the 5000 Role Models of Excellence, an in-school dropout prevention program that provides young boys of color with mentorship, tutoring, and other opportunities designed to keep them engaged in their education and prepare them for college or some other post-secondary training, or the military. As a public servant—congresswoman and former school board member—I also have seen first-hand the power of advocacy to change communities just as education transforms lives. To make a difference in the lives of Black children, we must all embrace an unrelenting spirit of advocacy, volunteering in our schools and community organizations, and advocating for education systems that truly prepare *every* child for success.

I learned the value of public service and community activism from my parents, who were civil rights activists and small business owners. Carrying forward in that tradition as an elementary school principal, I taught my students the power of advocacy when we successfully waged a battle to close down a multi-million dollar garbage plant across the street from our school. We all have an opportunity and responsibility to instill a commitment to public service in the next generation. As we advocate to raise academic standards and improve school systems, we can motivate them to get involved in uplifting our communities and making our institutions more inclusive and just.

I was motivated to found the 5000 Role Models of Excellence Project after noticing the need for positive male influences in the lives of so many of the boys at my school. For more than twenty-five years, our goal has been to provide young boys

with a carefully chartered path to manhood by pairing them with accomplished role models whose mentorship inspires them to succeed. 5000 Role Models of Excellence is designed to keep boys engaged in education by preparing them to successfully navigate college and their future careers, and grooming them to become future public servants.

We are building a culture of engagement by teaching our boys of diverse backgrounds the importance of giving back to their community. As part of our goal to prepare them to actively engage in the democratic process, we have added a game-changing new curriculum focused on improving reading and writing skills. We know that strong literacy and communication skills are essential to academic achievement and to building a stronger democracy with informed and engaged communities. This program supports successful young Black men who are prepared to advocate for themselves and their communities.

A core principal of the 5000 Role Models of Excellence program is that everyone must assume responsibility for preparing our children to effectively deal with the challenges and struggles that now confront today's youth in our communities.

This publication highlights examples from communities across Florida, where activists and community organizations are fulfilling their responsibility and taking action on behalf of Black children. For example, grassroots advocates in Miami-Dade County led a campaign that resulted in voters approving a special tax to create and fund hundreds of children's programs that serve and advocate on behalf of Florida's children, like the Children's Services Council (CSC) of Broward County.

CSC Broward County has established Broward Diversion Coalition, which works at the systems level in partnership with the state's attorney and public defender's offices to change policies to give more Black youth a second chance after an arrest (nationally, Black youth are diverted at a lower rate compared to their white counterparts[1]) and help them successfully transition into adulthood without the obstacle of having criminal charges on their records.

We must challenge educational systems and policymakers to invest on the front end in education and wraparound supports. As a member of the House Education and Workforce Committee, I have advocated for comprehensive wraparound services recognizing that supporting the overall health and well-being of children is essential to their academic success.

As advocates for Black children, our challenge is to build and advocate for education systems in which every student has comprehensive wraparound supports that will sustain their overall health, well-being, and engagement in learning to set them up for academic success.

As you read the *Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: Statistics and Strengths-Based Solutions in the State of Florida* report, I invite you to view Black children and youth through the eyes of those who advocate on their behalf, believe in them, and provide them with services and support to help them succeed. Highlighting Black children and families from a strength-based perspective instead of focusing on deficits, this report is a compilation of essays and Points of Proof from researchers, academics, and advocates from the Sunshine State who have dedicated their careers to uplifting young Black children.

We can learn from their experience and expertise, and together, advance Black children across our state and country.

MORE THAN 20% OF CHILDREN IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA ARE BLACK COMPARED TO SLIGHTLY LESS THAN 14% NATIONWIDE

Percent of children 0-8 years old by race

RACE	FLORIDA[a]	U.S.[b]
Black	20.16% (383,132)	13.49% (4,780,058)
White	43.26% (822,152)	50.21% (17,787,274)
Latino	29.41% (558,942)	25.49% (9,029,642)
Other Races	7.17% (136,193)	10.81% (3,830,035)

[a] U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 2010-2014 State Data*. 2014.
[b] U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 2014 National Data*. 2014.
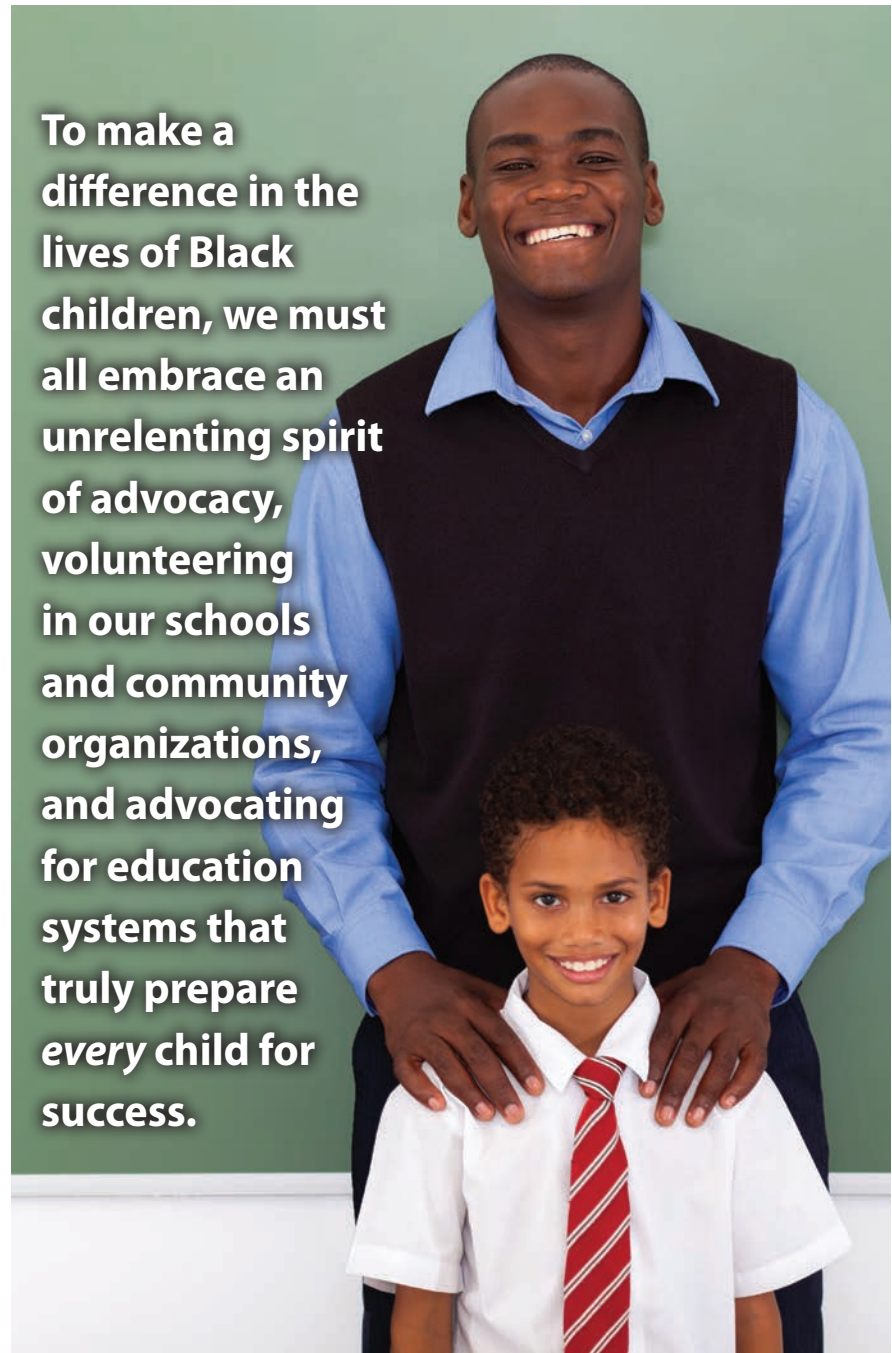
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EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND LITERACY

In his book, *The Community of Self,* author and clinical psychologist Na'im Akbar, Ph.D. asserts that "all valid systems of education have been geared toward furthering a people into the knowledge of themselves as a foundation for any other learning." The essays and Points of Proof highlighted in this section are centered on the idea that successful education systems—starting with high-quality early care and education—must be designed to affirm children's culture and identity. In her essay, "Which Came First—the Chicken or the Egg?," Cheron Hunter Davis, Ph.D. argues that we must use books as a means to affirm and educate young Black children on their culture and identity in order to improve literacy and cultivate a lifelong love of reading. Health and well-being are also essential to success in education. In their essay, "A Comprehensive Health and Wellness Model for Promoting Positive Youth Development," Oliver W. Edwards, Ph.D. and Jasmine Amber Jones, MPA challenge schools, community organizations, parents, and caregivers to foster healthy development and well-being instead of solely focusing on diagnosing and treating "problems" in Black children.

All of the Points of Proof highlighted in this section are programs and organizations built on the belief that there is a path to success for every child—from girls facing school suspensions to children living in the foster care system. For example, Lutheran Family Services' Head Start program creates a culture of achievement where everyone, including teachers, parents, and students, have a role in ensuring all children are ready for Kindergarten.

In addition, this section offers many more innovative best practices and ideas for supporting Black children's academic achievement from preschool through high school.
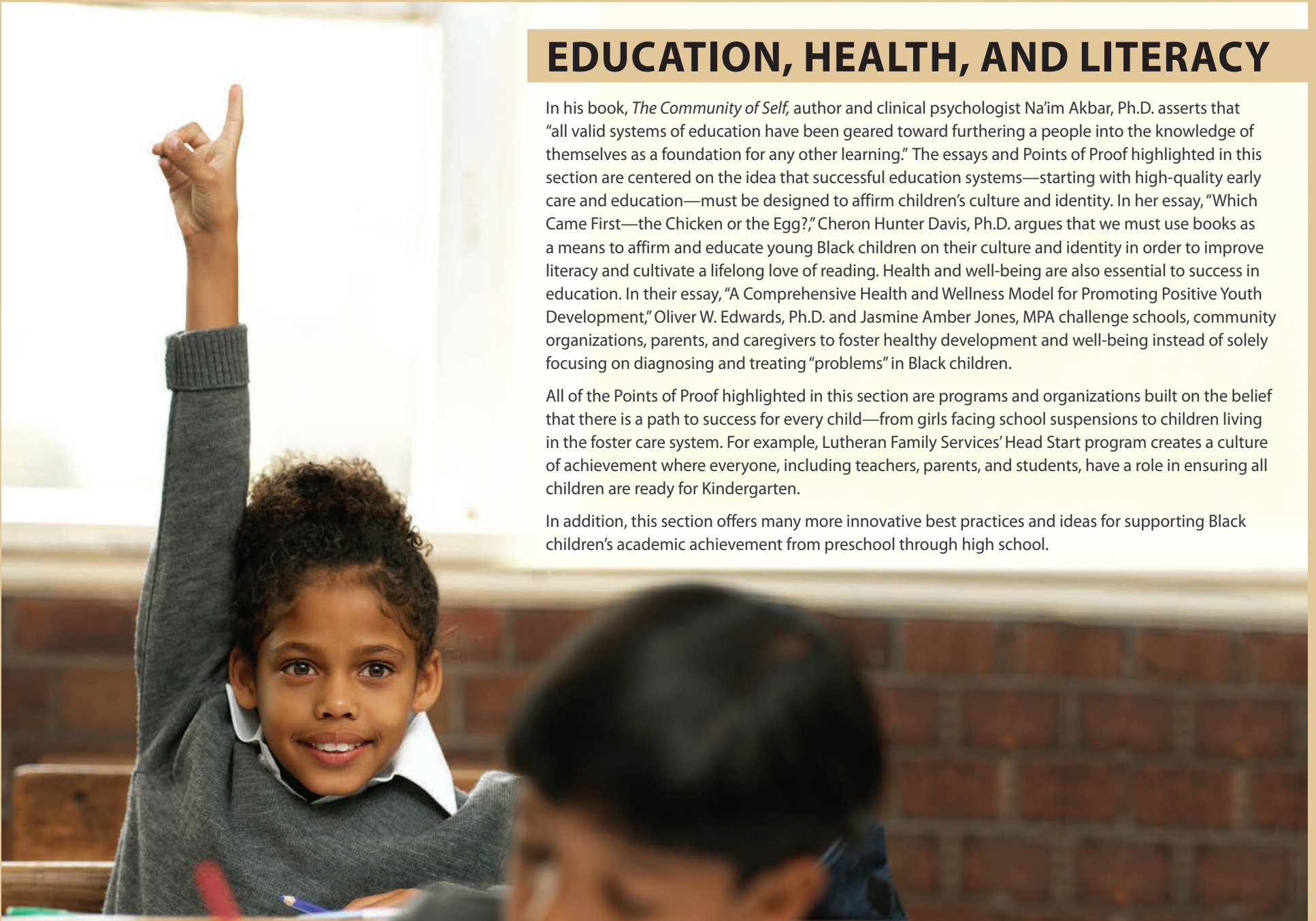
EDUCATION OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILD

Excerpt from *The Community of Self*

NA'IM AKBAR, PH.D.
Black Psychologist and Afrocentric Scholar

Educators almost unanimously agree to the need for a unique educational experience for African American children. There has been a growing recognition over the last 20 years of inadequacy of the American public and parochial school system in addressing itself to the needs of not only African American people, but increasingly to almost all of the American people. Education always has been recognized as the means by which a people gain control over their own thinking. This thinking should equip that people to satisfy and provide for their needs. The special cultural characteristics of a people require that they have a unique educational experience. At best, they can only use vestiges or adaptations of other people's educational concepts because each people's concepts have evolved out of their needs and characteristics.

Education, in its highest form, is no more than a process of attaining self-knowledge. One of the faulty assumptions that we have made in our attempt to obtain quality education for our children is to assume that we must assimilate the knowledge that has equipped other people to address their particular needs and utilizing the methods and contents of those people. We have assumed educational freedom to be the opportunity to imitate someone else's educational experience.

European American educators know that true education is based on self-knowledge and the skills and methods of education should optimize that process. The Western man's power and knowledge is based on his mastery and manipulation of the physical or material world. There is real power in such knowledge, but there are also limitations. The fact is that the Western man has developed a system of education which capitalizes on his greatest strengths based on his self-knowledge. In that educational system, the Western man has placed himself in the center of the conceptual world. Historically, the world is

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recorded from the limits of his ascent into civilization, and scientifically the world is structured on the limits of his models observation. This is not an objectionable trait of the Western system of education, but is instructive to educators from other cultural experiences. All valid systems of education have been geared toward furthering a people into the knowledge of themselves as a foundation for any other learning.

The African American educator, in his demand for integrated education, assumed that in sharing the educational environment of the majority of citizens, that he would in fact obtain the same level of mastery of his environment as the European Americans attained over theirs. This assumption has proven invalid and has served to even more effectively handicap the intellectual development of African American children, than did the earlier system of segregated education. The response to such failures of the system has been a recent cry for community control of education. However, these community controlled settings have been similarly unsuccessful because of their continued utilization of both the content and methods of the majority system. Even with "community control" of the educational environment, if our content does not develop the self-knowledge of the African American child, we have only a disguised system of providing some alien education.
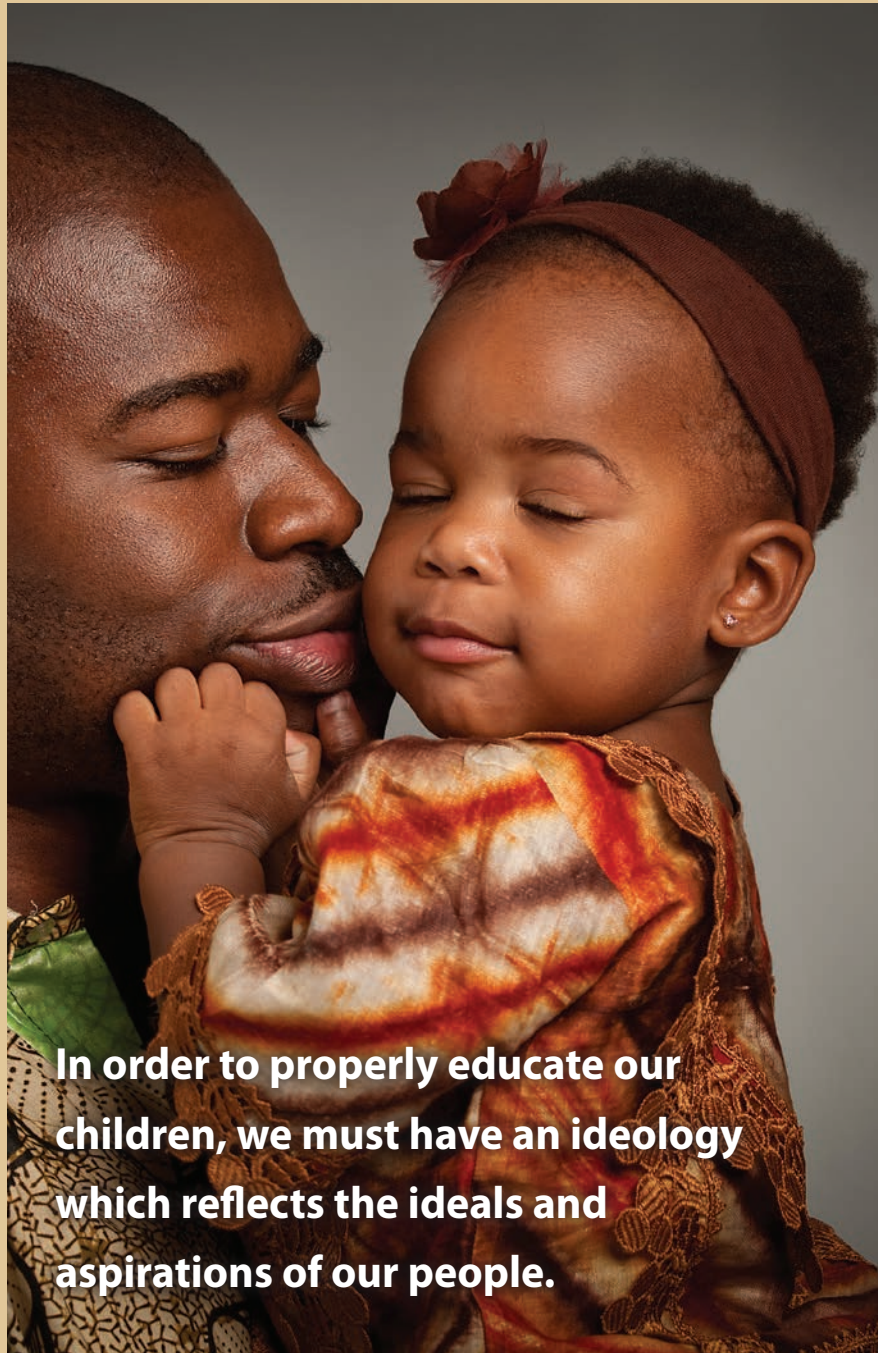
It is essential that we not confuse the physical presence of African Americans or non-African Americans as the sole criterion for an integrated educational system. We must begin with a philosophy which cultivates African American thinking for African American survival (self-thinking for survival of self). Such a philosophy would have to define us in terms of our needs and on the basis of our identity.

THE IDEOLOGY OF EDUCATING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILD

We must address ourselves to several critical questions when we approach the education of our children. The first question is: *What shall be the ideology of educating the African American child?* The answer to this question will guide our search both for content and methodology.

The Western educator has assumed the child to be essentially material. The educational process thus is viewed as the development of skills and information for the manipulation of the physical world. However, such manipulation has turned out to be shallow when we observe the polluting consequences, the unreliability of the products, and the utterly destructive potential of such unguided technological effusion.

In a similar vein, we can see the inadequacy of such material skills in our own community. As a community of African people in North America, we are the most skilled African people in the entire world. We have a larger pool of resource skills than any other nation of African people on earth. Despite such an abundance of skills, we remain the economically, socially, politically, and psychologically most dependent people in the world. In terms of our ability to control our own environments and exercise control over our survival, we are the least effective people in the world. Because of this paradox, we can see more clearly the importance of education being more than skill development.

In order to properly educate our children, we must have an ideology which reflects the ideals and aspirations of our people. One component of such an ideology is the importance of seeing the child as a *Mind* developing in the environment of a physical body in a material world. Therefore, we immediately recognize the importance of devoting proper attention to the proper care of that physical body and environment. More importantly, though, we would move our attention away from the individual conception of the child which limits it in terms of its separate physical attributes. While continuing to be aware of the asset or limitation of those attributes, we would view the child more significantly in terms of its collective membership in the community of African American people of which it is part. We would begin to judge the child's behavior, not so much in terms of its personal convenience (or our personal convenience), but instead, as a part of the enduring

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community or nation of which it is part. Individual actions attain their significance by the degree to which those actions further or hinder the good of the community. For example, we would be more concerned about the selfishness of a temper tantrum than the personal annoyance of such behavior in an attempt to correct it. Rather than simply trying to change the behavior, we would want to teach the social consequence of such actions.

Our children must be equipped to avoid the propagandizing influences which direct them to self-destructive behaviors. Such influences as advertising and the mass media are concerned about furthering their own ends and are not concerned with the survival of our children. We are not so interested in counter-propagandizing our children as we are in developing such powerful images of them that they automatically counteract such destructive influences. As they develop love for the super collective self in the form of their own community, they systematically avoid influences which are destructive to themselves and their community.

In order to attain such reactions from the children, we must develop certain kinds of thinking processes within the child. We are concerned with the child's development of its inner self, its real self, its self as part of a majestic and enduring body (or tribe). The child's thinking is developed by the influences of its environment. Consequently, that environment should be constituted of a certain consistent moral climate. We need to develop in the children the kind of ethical mentality which makes them aware and respectful of a moral order in their universe. The moral climate should be one which operates on certain principles of respect and treatment of people as exemplified in the respect and treatment of the child. To cultivate that community consciousness in the child, it should be viewed as a community offspring, rather than just an offspring of its biological parents. The educational and home environment should be one that demonstrates a sense of collective responsibility both for the growth of the child, as well as its protection. The child, in turn, learns to see itself as secure in the community and responsible to all members of that community with the same respect that it gives to its biological parents and siblings. Such patterns of collective responsibility for child care and education were typical of our earlier history in the West, and are still practiced in traditional African and Asian societies. The loss of such a healthy pattern of child development is an example of dangers of imitating the patterns of an alien culture when one's mentality has not been shielded by a relatively thorough knowledge of self. It is only as a consequence of our present tendency to view the child only as a physical entity, rather than as a mental entity, that we moved out of that collective consciousness which permitted us to rear our children in this sharing modality.

The cooperative spirit that was the mainstay of traditional African societies and an instrument of survival in the slavery and oppressive environments of the West has been overwhelmed by the push for individualism. Individuality is a cardinal

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principle of the Western ideology and the increased assimilation of that value by African Americans has sabotaged one of our greater strengths. An Afrocentric educational system must restore the principle of ujima (Swahili word for collective work and responsibility).

An environment characterized by kindness and discipline develops a sense of security and self-mastery. The Western society in its present degeneracy, has come to disparage self-control under an ethic of "do your own thing." Such an orientation has glorified the abandon of living in accord with one's passions rather than under the governorship of one's will power as cultivated in self-mastery. The majority of the world's people recognize the relatively greater power of mental and moral control over physical abandon.

THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILD

The need for an ideology or a set of goals for the educational process becomes the basis for selecting what will occur in the educational setting. This brings us to our second critical question: *What shall be the content of education for the African American child?* The content is guided by the ideology since the educational content should only serve to advance the child in terms of the ideals of the group.

Educational content should first of all be based on the realities of life or on what is real. The contemporary society has so glorified fantasy and synthetic things

that they have become more attractive than reality. Programs such as Sesame Street exploit fantasy as a means of developing reading and counting skills. The assumption is that reality is not sufficient. Despite the superficial attractiveness of such methods, it places learning in an unreal context which though enjoyable, is deceptive. The present society's educational and social system has a tendency of indiscriminately combining fact and fiction. Such a combination has utility when fantasy is at least a representation of fact, but more often than not, the fiction takes our attention away from the fact and/or confuses the two. The unaware child becomes contemptuous of the real because it does not have the predictable smoothness of the false form. The child dislikes the real duck because it fails to talk like Donald Duck; it prefers the synthetic orange drink to the real orange juice because of its association with the fantasy world. Unfortunately, the involvement of the young mind with fiction rather than fact is ultimately for the purposes of exploiting them as consumers of things and ideas, rather than as producers of both.

If the child's education serves to alienate it from the natural world, it becomes disrespectful of nature and willingly abuses it. Environmental pollution, in the present world, is a painful illustration of such disrespect of the natural world. Another consequence is the pollution of self, both physically and mentally, when one becomes disrespectful of the natural processes of the body and natural powers of the mind. The rampant drug dependency among all segments of the society is a dramatic example of the problem of self-pollution which comes from a severe disrespect of the natural body and mind.

The person who eats and drinks body contaminants and seeks to counteract natural responses by additional chemical intake builds a vicious cycle which ultimately ends in premature death. The reliance on synthetic means for the alteration of emotional states shows disrespect for the power of the mind to control its moods. Such abuse of the natural is a direct consequence of an educational system which trains the child away from the natural world.

Educational content should always focus on and draw from the form and processes of the natural world. Reading, science, and arithmetic should draw from natural occurrences as its root. The child should be encouraged to see that inventions and synthetic things are either discoveries from natural or adaptations of natural processes. This perspective is important for the African American child who is too often awed by the mechanical ingenuity of the Western technologist and tends to be disappointed in itself because of the relatively limited control by African American people of such technology. Children can learn through such an educational process that nature is the real benefactor and humans simply, by out mental powers, can utilize the gifts and lessons of nature.

Education for the African American child should encourage observation and study of nature, so the child will learn of its equal access to the raw materials of the impressive empires of the present world. It is important that we sensitize our children to the origins of all things in the earth and in nature. In doing so, we provide the basis for our children to stand in awe of the real and in respect for creation, rather than fascination for that which has been drawn from nature.

Study of the natural world begins to encourage natural growth and development within the child. If they study the growth of plants, they begin to understand their own growth. If they study the cycles of seasons and the responses of nature to them, they learn of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth without fear. By observing insects and lower animals, they learn of sex roles, work roles, and cooperation. All of these lessons from the natural world serve as the springboard for learning principles regarding the function of the world.

Rather than the child growing to worship the material world, they instead are equipped to look beyond the material forms in their origins. They can learn to respect the material world without becoming a slave to it.

THE SCOPE OF EDUCATION FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILD

So we can see that our answer to the question of content reaffirms our ideology which is to develop the inner life of the child. The specific content becomes incidental so long as we follow the general guidelines of drawing from natural occurrences, natural processes, and building on these in our educational efforts.

We will gain additional insight into the question of educational content as we approach the third question of educating the African American child, which is: *What shall be the scope of education for the African American child?*

The scope of the African American child's education should be the entire universe! It should extend to the limits of science and into the theology of time and space. Because of the minority status of the African American child in the American environment, it is important that they see themselves from the perspective of a worldwide majority early in their education. Geography is a must, especially in conjunction with the appreciation of the value of land.

The child's perception of itself as a world citizen begins to counteract the limiting influence of the egocentric European American perspective by its very prevalence. The child who sees itself as continuous with the inhabitants of the largest land masses on earth will necessarily have a much more positive perception of themselves.

Individual actions attain their significance by the degree to which those actions further or hinder the good of the community.

Respect for the vastness of the universe and the inevitable order of all creation is also communicated through the study of astronomy. We want our children to be fascinated by the creation of space, rather than by the travel through it, because such perspectives begin to acquaint them with the vastness of their own mental potential. They are less likely to become addicted to the simple objects of man's construction. With such a broad scope of its worldview, the child begins to understand its purpose in life within a universal context.

Similarly, the study of history must reach beyond the recent boundaries of Euro-American civilization. Children must know early that George Washington may be the "Father of this Country," but the African is the father/mother of civilization! Children must understand that the roots of contemporary knowledge are found within the history of their own people. When the child is able to see the historical identity of itself and its nation of origin, it is much more adequately equipped to contend with the fictions of his present environment.

It is important for them to know of their history in America, but it must be presented to them, not as totality of their heritage, but as a brief developmental phase in an extensive history. The educational scope should focus on the community of humanity, as well as the local community. Western education has a tendency to be very limited in its view of people and, inevitably, the norm for humans is the Western Caucasian man.

This perspective is one of the most destructive agents to the self-concepts of our children. It is crucial that the child views itself from the perspective of the world community of people, rather than the limited perspective of the present educational system.

With such a perspective, they are much better equipped to assess their behavior and that of others with more universal standards of right and wrong. This cosmopolitan scope to education is also accomplished by the learning of languages, particularly those which bridge the gap between African people

on either side of the Atlantic. Particularly a language such as Arabic, which semantically and phonetically is more reflective of the historical expression of the African American than any European language. It would also tie the African American to millions of African people throughout the continent, as French and German languages tie the European Americans with their nations of origin.

Another vehicle for maintaining a broadened scope of the child's education is the study of world religions, their origins, and consistencies. In such a way, the child will view religion as a worldwide phenomenon and not in the limited senses of somebody's invention. They will understand religion as a body of knowledge geared toward guiding the complete development of humanity. Biology, psychology, and religion should be taught as extensions of each other in the overall view of humanity as a developing knowledge form. That form is dictated by people's biological, psychological, and ultimately, their religious experiences. The interaction of these components constitutes the complete development of human beings. Such knowledge lays the foundation for proper human development.

THE METHOD OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILD'S EDUCATION

The final question which must be considered in the education of the African American child is: *What shall be the method of that education?* If the previous three issues of ideology, content and scope have been adequately addressed in the educator's study, then this final question will be one of the most limited significance. The method of education will, on the one hand, be dictated by the answers to the above questions and the method will be incidental to the questions of content, scope, and ideology.

Generally, the educational method should be one that is as positive as possible. It should seek to build on strengths of the student, rather than constantly addressing its weaknesses. For example, creative attempts should be made to use the child's strengths in order to deal with its weaknesses. If a child has good reading abilities and poor mathematical abilities, the teacher can draw upon this reading skill to help motivate and improve its mathematical abilities, both by reading of the historical and natural occurrences of mathematical principles as well as studying ways of improving its own mathematical abilities.

Such a positive approach to education will build a love and respect in the child for education, because they will view the school as a place for success rather than failure. The educational process should always be one that maximizes success and minimizes failure. The more positive rewards the child is able to receive for its involvement in the educational process, the more it will come to value its educational experience.

The educational setting should be structured but with reasonable flexibility for the varied needs and aptitudes of the various students. The teacher should be both comfortable and confident with their authority, but should always be willing to use nature or other insignia of truth as the basis for authority. The extensive educational experiences should make such resources of truth more available to them as teachers.

The child should always be encouraged to develop self-mastery. An educational process which involves excessive passivity on the part of the student, results in an over-reliance on outside sources for the acquisition of knowledge, rather than confidence in the child's ability to discover for itself. Again, this is why observation and involvement in nature becomes such an important tool, because it demonstrates the consistent availability of information for those who observe.

Children should always be approached reasonably. They should be viewed as developing minds with adequate reasoning and potential. Therefore, one should approach unacceptable behaviors, as well as acceptable behaviors with reasonable explanations as to why. In many instances, such explanations will not be convenient, but the child's integrity should always be respected. Structured and instructional discipline is necessary and should be utilized as a means of maximizing the growth of the child. It encourages his or her avoidance of emotional solutions to problems. This, of course, means that the instructor must utilize similar restraint in the administration of discipline.

Finally, the most effective means of fostering the growth of knowledge within the child is by always attempting to demonstrate the relevance of that information to the child. Education should always be viewed and experienced as a means of widening self-knowledge and increasing the child's capacity to live effectively in his world. Therefore, it is critical that the material presented to the child always has relevance and applicability to the experiences of the child.

CONCLUSION

An effective educational system for the African American child should have in ideology which sees the child as a developing mind housed in a physical body which should be cultivated for the greatest amount of growth. The content of that education should foster such growth by relying upon the natural and moral world as the best source of information regarding normal functioning and development. The scope of the education should be universal. This fosters the child's perception of itself as having a crucial and an ongoing relationship with the entire natural world and the entire universe. Finally, the method of education should be positive, structured, and relevant. This develops a respect and high evaluation for the acquisition of knowledge.

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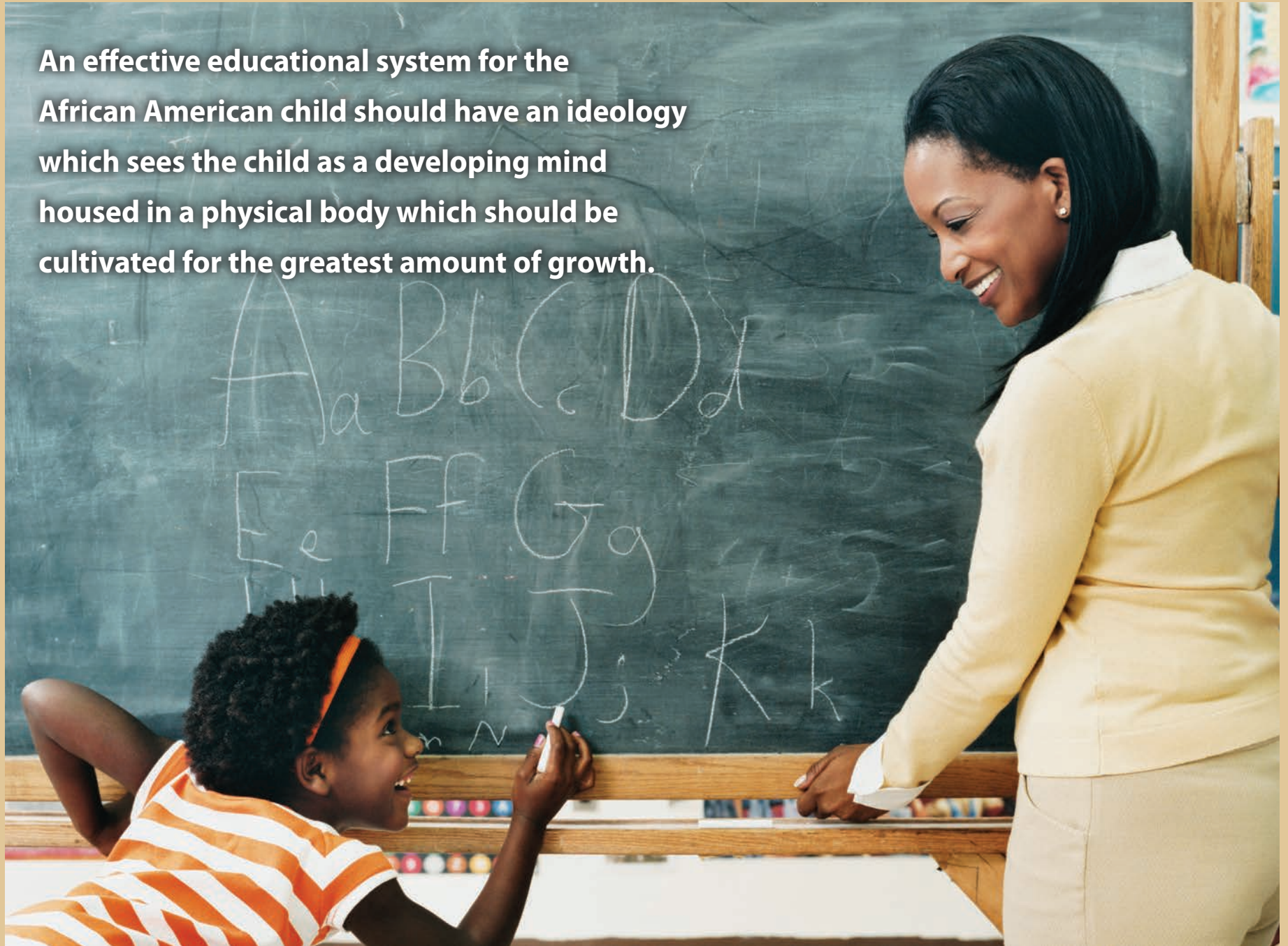
Point of Proof:

LUTHERAN SERVICES FLORIDA HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START

TAMPA, FLORIDA

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

Lutheran Services Florida (LSF) Head Start and Early Head Start programs are high-quality, holistic preschool intervention programs that are designed to ensure that infants, toddlers and preschoolers of color—including young Black children—from underserved communities are equipped with the Kindergarten readiness skills needed to succeed in Florida's public education system. When students left our program in August 2015, more than 80 percent of our four year old students were ready for Kindergarten in all domains except math. At the beginning of the school year, just above 20 percent of children were proficient in math. When they left our program, over 70 percent achieved Kindergarten readiness in this subject.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

This project fits into Lutheran Services Florida's mission to "educate, equip, and empower children, families, and staff through strong partnerships and efficient data-driven systems to close the achievement gap." Lutheran Services Florida Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide comprehensive wraparound supports to families in order to prepare all of our children for a successful start. As an organization, we understand that young African American children who have high-quality early learning experiences are better prepared for Kindergarten and have early school success.

The three primary goals of our Head Start and Early Head Start programs are to:

1. Engage parents and families in their children's learning and development;

2. Design intentional teaching practices in communities of learning to best support African American children from low-income communities; and

3. Create a culture of achievement where everyone is welcomed and valued.

When students left our program in August 2015, more than 80 percent of our four-year old students were ready for Kindergarten in all domains except math. At the beginning of the school year, just above 20 percent of children were proficient in math. When they left our program, over 70 percent achieved Kindergarten readiness in this subject.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

More than 6,000 children and families are served through Lutheran Services Florida Head Start and Early Head Start programs. All children and families must meet eligibility requirements and have an income below the federal poverty level. In addition, 10 percent of the children served in our programs must have an identified disability or a suspected disability or developmental delay. The children served through our Head Start and Early Head Start programs range in age from six weeks to five years old. While young children of all races and ethnicities participate in our Head Start and Early Head Start programs, approximately 3,700 children enrolled in our programs are African American.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

We define success by **the school readiness of our students as they leave our program and enter the public school system.** The services, referrals, and interventions provided by our dedicated staff support our families as they reach certain milestones throughout our program. Our short-term goal is for each child

to continuously progress as measured by our checkpoints during the winter and fall. Our long-term goal is for at least 80 percent of our children to reach Kindergarten proficiency in each domain before they enter Kindergarten. These areas of development include cognitive development (i.e., math and literacy), social-emotional development, physical development (i.e., gross and fine motor skills), and language development (i.e., English and Spanish language acquisition).

In order to ensure that our programs meet the needs of our children and families, Lutheran Services Florida engages in an extensive data collection and evaluation process with its Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The data evaluation process begins with anecdotal data from the children collected by classroom teachers and staff. Family assessments are also conducted by family services workers who collect and assess family strengths, needs, and progress. After this process is reviewed and approved by local program evaluators, the program outcomes are presented in an organizational report with guidance from our performance management team. Led by doctoral staff, our performance management team analyzes the data using quantitative and qualitative methods to identify trends and make programmatic decisions. In addition to sharing individual student data with parents, aggregate data is regularly shared with the governing body, Board of Directors, and community members of Lutheran Services Florida and reported to the Office of Head Start at the federal level.

The measures that define our impact include the knowledge, skills, and behaviors most predictive of early school success. Our evidence-based assessments measure and compare data about our children with developmental milestones for children in a similar age range, from six weeks to five years old. Assessments include predictors of early school success that are aligned with both the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework and the Florida Early Learning Standards. They are field tested to be both valid and reliable. In order to ensure children's personal achievement and advancement, each child's progress is measured and monitored on a regular basis.

WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

Lutheran Services Florida Head Start and Early Head Start programs are successful for several reasons. In addition to using the individualized and holistic design of the Head Start and Early Head Start model, Lutheran Services prides itself on the competency and dedication of our teaching staff and management team. As an organization, we are proud to uphold high standards while striving towards data-driven outcomes and continuous process improvement.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

This project has faced challenges with the implementation of regular assessments based on the skill level of the staff collecting and entering the data. There is always a margin of error if staff do not select the appropriate checkpoint level based on the individual child's knowledge, skills, and progress. Lutheran Services Florida is in the process of curtailing data entry errors. We are currently implementing a process to ensure that 100 percent of our children are assessed by reviewing checkpoint assessment summaries. Also, all teachers and education leaders are required to complete the Interrater Reliability Assessment Certification process to be certified as a reliable assessor for school readiness.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

Lutheran Services Florida Head Start and Early Head Start programs are embraced by the community, because we are located in the community we serve. A Head Start provider to the city of Belle Glade since 1982, Lutheran Services Florida is the largest Head Start grantee in the Southeastern region of the United States and one of the largest grantees in the country. Lutheran Services Florida serves more than 6,000 children and families in the State of Florida in the counties of Duval, Hillsborough, Palm Beach, and Pinellas. We have more than 1,300 full-time and contracted employees and serve more than 4 million meals per year.

Since each community is unique, the populations we serve play an integral role in shaping our services, with parents sharing a valuable governance role in our organization. In fact, selection criterion for program eligibility and enrollment is established according to the local community's needs. The staff is hired from within the community to build a support system that is cognizant of families' unique cultures, values, and beliefs.

This project is replicable in any community in the country that is dedicated to closing the achievement gap through high-quality, data-driven early educational prevention and intervention methods.

We believe that local and state government agencies should invest more in these types of methods. Lawrence Schweinhart, who conducted the Perry Preschool Project, discovered that high-quality early care and education does more than pay significant returns to young children and their families. He noted the tremendous benefits to others in society, including taxpayers, as the costs associated with special education services and student grade repetition are lowered. When young children from underserved communities are better prepared for Kindergarten, they are more likely to receive higher grades in school, graduate from high school, meet future labor force demands, and increase their lifelong earning potential.

Since each community is unique, the populations we serve play an integral role in shaping our services, with parents sharing a valuable governance role in our organization. In fact, selection criterion for program eligibility and enrollment is established according to the local community's needs. The staff is hired from within the community to build a support system that is cognizant of families' unique cultures, values, and beliefs.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

The most important takeaway of this program is that Black children who are receiving high-quality, data-driven early care and education are better prepared for early school success. In turn, these children are prepared to meet and exceed expectations for school readiness.

PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT: PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN AGED 3 AND 4 YEARS OLD ENROLLED IN PRESCHOOL BY RACE[a]

RACE	U.S.	FLORIDA
	2010-2014	*2010-2014*
Black	51%	54%
White	50%	52%
Latino	40%	44%
Total (All Races)	47%	50%

[a] Kids Count Data Center. *Young Children Not In School By Race.* http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9012-young-children-not-in-school-by-race?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/2/11/false/1485,815/4039,2638,2597,1353/17977,17978.

REFLECTION: Black children in Florida are most likely to be enrolled in preschool than any other race. Children of all races in Florida are more likely to be enrolled in preschool than those nationwide.

"WHICH CAME FIRST—THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG?"

Preparing Black Students to Cross the Road to Reading Success

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STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Since 2012, Florida law has required the 100 lowest performing elementary schools in reading to extend the school day by one hour to provide supplemental reading instruction.[1] All of Florida's elementary schools are evaluated annually, and the 100 lowest are identified by school reading performance. Schools across the state reported increasing the number of minutes of reading instruction, increasing staff, and providing varied instructional techniques during the added hour. And while average school reading performance did improve among the lowest performing schools, the increase was not significant beyond what is expected on a yearly basis. More notable than the intervention strategies, however, was that the lowest performing schools enrolled a larger number of racially and ethnically diverse students and students eligible for free or reduced lunch. This trend begs the age-old chicken or egg coming first question: Are our Black students failing the schools? Or are the schools failing our Black students?

Preschool through second grade students are, for the most part, emergent readers and rely heavily on adults to provide them with information. For many students, particularly Black students, elementary school can be their first encounter with real academic demands and an increasingly difficult curriculum.[2] The context of classroom life is complex, with teachers and students working together to create the structure.[3] Students are exposed to literature in a more frequent and increasingly complex manner. Teachers read aloud to students daily during early schooling. Nancy Larrick's 1965 essay "The All-White World of Children's Books" brought attention to a longstanding tradition in children's literature that excluded Black children and children of other racial and ethnic groups.[4] Her essay made

Teachers are on the front line shaping how and what children learn. Therefore, they must be provided with a cultural framework for matching text selections to the backgrounds of their culturally diverse students.

educators aware of the dearth of characters representing various racial and ethnic groups and their cultures and pointed out that the few non-white characters in children's books were stereotyped or unrealistic. Since then, a great many works by and about people of color have been published, so quality literature for Black children is available. However, this body of multicultural literature is often ignored by teachers of those students. Janet Hickman was one of the first researchers to examine how children respond to literature in a classroom setting. Hickman found that children refer back to books read aloud long after the actual event,

PERCENT OF 4TH GRADERS SCORING AT OR ABOVE "PROFICIENT" ON THE 4TH GRADE READING PROFICIENCY TEST[a]

RACE	% SCORING PROFICIENT OR ABOVE (FLORIDA)	% SCORING PROFICIENT OR ABOVE (U.S.)
Black	20%	18%
White	49%	46%
Latino	34%	21%
Total (All races)	39%	36%

[a] Institute for Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics. *2015 Reading State Snapshot Report.* http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2015/pdf/2016008FL4.pdf.

REFLECTION: Reading proficiency rates are unacceptably low among children of all races in Florida and nationally.

sometimes through artwork or discussions.[5] Reading aloud to emergent readers is important, but it is also important that Black students see positive depictions of themselves in texts. Rudine Sims Bishop, researcher and expert on multicultural children's literature, maintained that students who do not see their culture represented in the literature they read are more likely to devalue their importance in society and in school, asserting that multicultural literature has the power to be a lifeline for students from diverse backgrounds, because it validates their existence.[6]

For primary students of color, the validation of their existence and importance of their role in society comes largely from books read aloud, but also from images seen on television. Negative images of Black youth are ubiquitous. We often see on the evening news young Black citizens being victimized, marginalized, and criminalized. Sadly, many young Black students who may struggle to read the headlines on the front page of the local newspaper see the injustices play out in their communities. For these students, marginalization in their communities is a tradition rooted in deep racial oppression and generational poverty. This marginalization is particularly evident in the lack of access to equal education resulting in lower reading achievement scores in impoverished communities with larger numbers of Black and Latino students.

Teachers are on the front line, shaping how and what children learn. Therefore, they must be provided with a cultural framework for matching text selections to the backgrounds of their culturally diverse students. Teachers must be able to use the students' prior cultural knowledge as a foundation or support for learning, and this can only be achieved by leveraging home knowledge with that of curriculum goals.[7] The need for preparing teachers to put on culturally sensitive lenses through which they view and evaluate the pedagogy and ideology of their teaching practices has been addressed in professional literature since the 1900s.[8] So, how might teachers provide age- and culturally-appropriate early reading experiences for emergent readers of color while simultaneously validating the lived experiences of these students?

Reading aloud to emergent readers is important, but it is also important that Black students see positive depictions of themselves in texts.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHERS

*Honest Discourse with Self and
Others about Thoughts, Prejudices, Beliefs*

From a young age, children notice differences, just as adults do. Rather than not acknowledging that these differences exist, teachers should guide the understanding of young students through open discourse. Young students need an opportunity to explore their observations and beliefs about differences among their peers without fear of judgment or prejudice. Teachers should understand the benefits of providing students with positive experiences related to diversity. Professor of Urban Education Gloria Ladson-Billings has called for the incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy—a method by which teachers blend home and community experiences into their teaching practices. This method affirms Black children's cultural identities and allows them an opportunity to embrace themselves in a positive light. School-based knowledge is important, but by utilizing and incorporating home- and community-based culture into student learning, teachers develop the whole child and encourage high academic achievement.[9]

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Teachers who are successful in educating students of diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds know the importance of linking their instructional practices with the realities children face in their lives outside schools. It is a very delicate, intricate process that requires extreme care for both students and their families. The obligation is for teachers not to become experts, but rather to become familiar, concerned consumers of the worlds and contexts from which their elementary students arrive at school.

Awareness of Personal Biases and How Such Ideas May Impact Interactions with Elementary Students

It has been said that hindsight provides clarity. In the world of education, especially reading, there is little room for backpedaling. Reflection? Yes. Reexamination? Certainly. There is also a need for honest introspection with regard to personal biases by teachers. In order to avoid the further marginalization of students from diverse backgrounds, teachers of all races and cultures have the opportunity to acknowledge their own prejudices. Research continues to show that avoiding taboo subjects, such as race, can mean we do not address racial and social disparities and may even perpetuate those disparities. In an age of layoffs and budget cuts, it is not hard to understand the hesitation of teachers, regardless of their own culture, to tackle issues of diversity in the classroom.

Another barrier to racial dialogue is the perception of America as a post-racial society, especially in the wake of the 2008 presidential campaign and subsequent inauguration of America's first Black president, President Barack Obama. The term has, in some ways, become a buzz word for the notion that America has completely moved beyond its past indiscretions regarding race. All teachers, regardless of race, should be equipped with training that allows them to, at the very least, validate the experiences of their students of color. While these topics may be difficult to tackle, they are most important in moving us closer towards a truly post-racial American culture.

Diverse Texts That Display and Celebrate Cultural Diversity

Students' access to high-quality, culturally conscious literature is restricted, especially when those students do not belong to the social, cultural, or economic mainstream. Schools with predominately low-income students typically lack the resources, funding, and highly qualified teachers available to students whose parents are members of higher income brackets. High-quality pedagogy that is reflective and sensitive to the needs of these students beyond the watered-down, test-driven standard curriculum is critical to these underserved schools

and communities. Teachers and caregivers should provide young students with frequent opportunities to visit libraries, select books, and participate in read alouds in order to foster greater appreciation for the literary experience as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Creating more aesthetic, pleasurable reading experiences is more likely to encourage lifelong readers. For Black students in low-performing schools, books are seen as "tools to learn" rather than promoting an authentic appreciation for reading. In order to combat this phenomenon, teachers, parents, and stakeholders must engage in dialogue that addresses how high-stakes testing has negatively impacted the reading instruction within these schools. Moreover, parents would benefit from training that emphasizes the importance of reading aloud to children from birth, including how critical early reading readiness is to overall literacy achievement.

So, which came first, the chicken or the egg? Or does it even matter? Our discussions should center on preparing teachers for cultural responsiveness, racial sensitivity, and multicultural pedagogy that addresses the needs of young, Black, emergent readers for whom books will provide a window into the world both inside and outside of their communities. We must re-focus our discourse with a tremendous sense of urgency to address the critical need of providing essential educational opportunities for our young Black students in order to ensure their academic and personal success.

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A COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH AND WELLNESS MODEL FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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Traditionally, educators and medical professionals emphasized the implementation of treatments and strategies to help children and youth reduce problem behaviors rather than focusing on fostering their school functioning and overall well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Race and ethnicity are neither explanatory nor definitive variables. Explanatory variables explain or predict outcomes. Definitive variables delimit or determine characteristics. Knowing a person's "race" cannot explain or predict their individual behavior. Similarly, recognizing a person's ethnicity does not offer any specific insight into their abilities, limitations, or their capacity to achieve success and significance. We believe humans are all one race. Of course, we are not suggesting humans are color blind with respect to the commonalities and differences associated with skin color. Bigotry exists and manifests merely by virtue of what people see when they first notice the color of a child's skin. This notwithstanding, we contend human subgroups are more clearly identified as ethnic groups that are defined by similar ancestral, social, cultural, or national experiences and history. As such, ethnically inherent attributes, or genotypes associated with ethnicity, cannot drive a person's risk for adverse outcomes. Rather, persons from all ethnic groups have potential to excel and positively transform the direction of history.

Consistent with this worldview, we assert that each African American child has the potential to impact a nation similar to how Martin Luther King Jr. profoundly, pervasively, and positively changed the country and indeed the world. This statement is particularly tenable because even children and youth who to some persons may be considered more susceptible to adverse outcomes are able to thrive developmentally, succeed academically, and attain greatness.[1]

Regrettably, however, African American children and youth too frequently face bias and stereotyping that often lead to lowered expectations due to their ethnic identity.[2] These preconceived notions regarding their abilities hinder their psychoeducational and psychosocial development in school. In fact, African American students are often disproportionately placed in alternative and special education programs, partly due to preconceived notions and lower expectations.[3] It is therefore incumbent upon those who advocate on their behalf, such as parents and teachers and preachers and even researchers, to recognize the obstructions placed in their path, yet accentuate their capabilities and potential as we encourage them along a course toward greatness.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Despite the discrimination they encounter, extraordinarily large numbers of African American children and youth realize sustainable success inside and outside the school context.[4] These African American children and youth who experience physiological, psychoeducational, and psychosocial wellness typically have access to multiple developmental assets including nurturing parent(s), other supportive family members such as grandparents, and community support from groups such as faith-based organizations.[5] In addition, they are educated in academic environments that offer contextual resources, such as low student-to-teacher ratios, caring and competent school staff, involvement in extracurricular activities including science and sports clubs, and access to school-based mental

health professionals.[6] They also benefit from proper nutrition and exercise that provide them with sufficient energy to diligently pursue social, academic, and psychological excellence.[7]

These assets and resources are associated with Positive Youth Development (PYD), a promising prosocial framework that highlights the strengths and contextual resources rather than the vulnerabilities, disabilities, and risks of children and youth.[8] Traditionally, educators and medical professionals emphasized the implementation of treatments and strategies to help children and youth **reduce** problem behaviors rather than focusing on fostering their school functioning and overall well-being.[9] PYD proponents repudiate this tradition and advance a proactive and primary prevention framework that concentrates on **promoting** health and wellness in all facets of a young person's life.[10] Of course, when using PYD in our work with African American children, we do not exclusively emphasize the positives at the expense of the obstacles they face; that is, we recognize that many African American children experience prejudice and disadvantages, and we provide them support to mitigate these challenges. Yet, our focus is on employing African American children's multiple abilities and resources to enhance their health and wellness. We call this the "conceptual pathways model" to advance optimal human development.[11] Ensuring that the children have access to adequate nutrition and appropriate caloric intake, that they engage in consistent exercise, and that they utilize their social support networks are important methods of advancing health and wellness and promoting PYD.[12]

A COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH AND WELLNESS MODEL

In our work with children and youth, we are now using the CREATION Health® Wellness Plan to promote PYD and enhance youth developmental outcomes. This plan was developed by leaders at Florida Hospital in Orlando.[13] The hospital operates under one license as a single system with multiple campuses and treats more patients than any other hospital in the United States.[14] CREATION Health® uses a health promotion approach that utilizes scientific evidence to strengthen health and wellness.[15] The acronym CREATION refers to the following eight principles: (1) Choice, (2) Rest, (3) Environment, (4) Activity, (5) Trust, (6) Interpersonal Relationships, (7) Outlook, and (8) Nutrition.[16] The developers of this wellness plan indicate that consistently practicing these eight principles result in better overall health and wellness,[17] factors that predict PYD.[18]

Research supports the efficacy of several of the eight principles noted above. For example, children who are physically active and receive adequate nutrition and appropriate calorie levels are better able to maintain a healthy weight.[19] They tend to perform better in school, and they are evaluated more favorably than peers who do not have a healthful[20] diet or engage in exercise.[21] Further, constructive social

support networks involve interpersonal relationships that tend to minimize stress or prevent the symptoms of stress.[22] The conceptual pathways model suggests nutrition, caloric intake, exercise, and participation in social support networks are readily modifiable variables that can be employed in health promotion approaches to enhance school functioning and PYD.

Rather than focusing primarily on reducing problems in children, we encourage schools and community organizations to offer programs that promote healthful eating, exercise, and connection with a constructive social support system in order to heighten healthy decision-making in families. In the case of schools, establishing school garden projects can help students and school staff plant and harvest fruit and vegetables for use in school meals to encourage tastier and more healthful school meals.[23] Planting, harvesting, preparing, and consuming these foods all involve exercise, appropriate nutrition, and social connections. What's more, schools can design resource-rich environments to advance PYD by providing students and families with knowledge, resources, and information related to healthful eating, exercise, and social support. These strategies increase their opportunities to consume nutritional meals and engage in proper exercise on their own or with a supportive accountability social network. We have designed school health promotion activities to accomplish these very objectives.[24]

Community agencies can also be instrumental in children's nutrition, exercise, and social support. For example, faith-based organizations are potential models for good dietary habits by preparing healthful, tasty meals and serving them at dinners they host for families.[25] Establishing regular bike rides and other faith and fitness-type programs are opportunities to promote health in the faith-based environment. Community members who serve as child and family mentors are also prospective sources for establishing social support connections that inspire a desire for health and wellness.[26]

Relative to the family, research shows that children and youth who participate in family meals experience multiple academic, behavioral, and psychosocial benefits.[27] In fact, eating at least four meals weekly together as a family appears to be a threshold that advances positive health and psychosocial benefits for children and youth.[28] Schools, communities, and families can establish a "youth charter" in which significant adults in a student's life unite to voice a common set of objectives and expectations to the student in several ways.[29] We maintain that resource-rich schools and PYD-strong communities offer African American families health promotion strategies, such as school and community conferences and support networks, to strengthen continuing and comprehensive health and wellness.[30]

[20] Healthful describes diet, exercise, and lifestyle choices that will create good health, such as fruits and vegetables, exercise, and outdoor activities. Healthy describes the state of being fit and disease-free.

CONCLUSION

The PYD framework suggests that all children and youth can thrive and maximize their development, even those who experience disadvantages in life. Circumstances that may be considered challenges, such as household poverty, can be viewed as opportunities to develop resilience and growth rather than serve as risks of adverse outcomes.[31] Fundamental foundations for success include emphasizing our conceptual pathways model, which provides families with education about and access to the eight principles of CREATION Health.® This PYD approach advances health and wellness rather than emphasizing child and youth poverty, problems, and risks.

Rather than focusing primarily on reducing problems in children, we encourage schools and community organizations to offer programs that promote healthful eating, exercise, and connection with a constructive social support system in order to heighten healthy decision-making in families. In the case of schools, establishing school garden projects can help students and school staff plant and harvest fruit and vegetables for use in school meals to encourage tastier and more healthful school meals.

Point of Proof:

GIRL POWER, WORLD LITERACY CRUSADE OF FLORIDA, INC.

MIAMI, FLORIDA

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

With a vision of social change, Girl Power is designed to provide programming for girls that builds confidence, competence, and pride; re-engages girls in academic settings by supporting their success; and works with them to avoid incidents that may require them to come into contact with or under the supervision of the juvenile justice system. Girl Power provides day and afterschool programs designed to promote and foster positive social skills and behavior as well as to improve academic performance in adolescent girls ages 11-17. Over the past sixteen years, Girl Power has reduced in-school and out-of-school suspensions by 85 percent; helped 90 percent of participants improve their academic performance; and sustained a 90 percent success rate of helping previously-arrested girls avoid further interaction with the juvenile justice system.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

Girl Power provides mentoring and intervention programs focused on personal growth and academic enrichment. The program serves girls and their families in a half-dozen sites across Miami-Dade County. Girl Power is unique as a gender-specific, multi-dimensional program that directly addresses the environmental factors and circumstances that isolate girls from the education system and the workforce. Working with young girls who are not realizing their academic potential, who repeatedly face school discipline, and who have interactions with the juvenile justice system, Girl Power provides programs and services that lead them to new pathways to success.
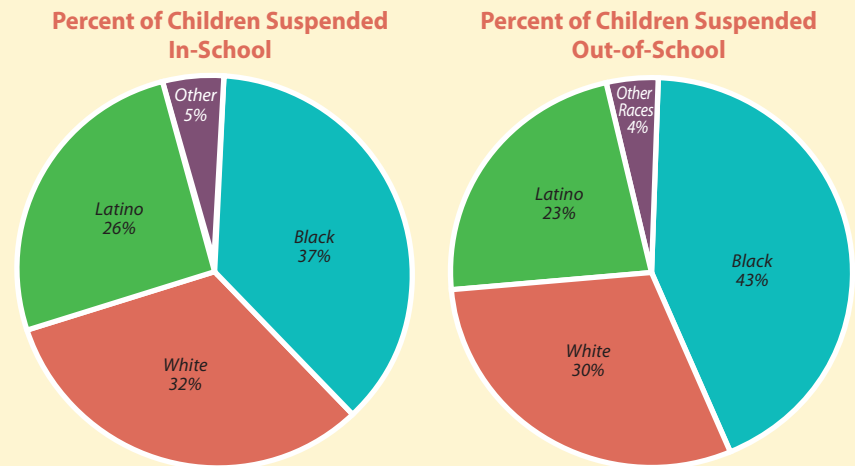
WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

Girl Power operates programs, primarily for middle school and high school girls, including the following:

- **The Girls Rock After School Program and Summer Camp:** This program serves middle school girls who need additional support to ensure their academic success by re-engaging them in classes and addressing issues related to delinquency and post-traumatic stress disorder. Year-round education programs help girls develop positive self-esteem, improve their academic performance, and increase their level of physical fitness.

- **Post Arrest Diversion Program:** This program ensures that an arrest does not derail girls' chances for success by diverting them from entering the justice system and providing wraparound services that support their future goals and overall health and well-being. For girls 17 and under who have been arrested for nonviolent offenses and who are under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Justice or the Juvenile Services Department, this intervention program includes work readiness services, life skills training, character development, health and wellness, and individual and group counseling.

- **Alternative to Suspension Program:** For girls who are placed on two or more days of out-of-school suspension from Miami-Dade County schools, this full-day program offers enrichment and self-awareness trainings and activities, such as journal writing, conflict resolution and reconciliation, life skills, physical exercise, yoga, meditation, and alcohol and drug awareness.

- **Sister Circle Mentoring Initiative (SCMI):** For girls ages 13-18, SCMI is a year-round program for girls who need additional support and positive influences. This structured mentoring program matches girls with an adult volunteer who serves as a constructive "role model" and provides support, counsel, and friendship.

Girl Power is unique as a gender-specific, multi-dimensional program that directly addresses the environmental factors and circumstances that isolate girls from the education system and the workforce.

SUSPENSION BY RACE[a]

Percent of Children Suspended In-School

Other 5%
Black 37%
White 32%
Latino 26%

Percent of Children Suspended Out-of-School

Other Races 4%
Black 43%
White 30%
Latino 23%

[a] Florida Department of Education. *Student Discipline Data School Year 2014-15.* http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/students.stml.
[b] Florida Department of Education. *Florida PK-20 Education Information Portal, 2015-2016.* http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/students.stml.

REFLECTION: While Black children comprise 23% of the public school population in Florida,[b] Black children make up 37% of children who receive in-school suspension and 43% of children who receive out-of-school suspension. The suspension rates among Black children are higher than among any other group.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

Girl Power's gender-specific programs are designed with an understanding of the connection between the environment surrounding adolescent girls and protective factors that can help them stay engaged and succeed in school and avoid delinquency. We target the following outcomes in all program participants:

- 85 percent of all girls will increase school engagement and positive attitudes towards school.

- 85 percent of all girls will improve or maintain school attendance and activity participation.

- 85 percent of all girls will improve academic performance or maintain a "C" average or better.

- 90 percent of all girls will not be arrested or re-arrested during middle or high school.

- 85 percent of all girls will not be suspended or re-suspended during the current school year.

- 90 percent of all girls will have positive gender identity.

Data is collected by program directors and case managers and evaluated by an independent source.

WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

Girl Power is designed to be responsive to community needs. To identify the gaps and needs in the Central Miami service area, the program relies upon interviews with principals as well as school/student performance data to assess the need for additional academic enrichment programming. Based on community assessments, these tailored, gender-specific programs provide girls with decision-making tools and life skills to help them recognize that they have choices.

Strong community partners that support Girl Power's mission make it possible to provide a cost-effective, high-quality program. Girl Power uses in-kind space on-site at five public schools. Our second largest in-kind investment is by Family Counseling Services of Greater Miami, Inc., which connects program participants who need intensive mental health and substance abuse counseling with these services using cognitive behavioral therapy models. Our third largest in-kind source of support is from Concerned African Women whose Independent Parent Council program provides training to the parents of girls served in our programs.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

Gender-specific programs face a number of critical challenges including the ongoing struggle for gender equality and inadequate financial investment in gender-specific programs by major foundations and government agencies. Girl Power has also experienced a lack of long-term research on gender inequality; fragmented efforts to respond to violence against women and girls on a local, national, and international level; and inefficient evaluations and evidenced-based approaches to fill the gaps of gender inequality.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

Published by Columbia Law School's Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies, the 2012 study "Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected" states that many adolescent girls face abuse, neglect, and abandonment at home. The over-policing and criminalization of girls of color in schools and communities are gaining more awareness nationally. These issues cause girls of color to be isolated from education systems at an alarming rate, pushing them into the school-to-prison pipeline. Research further demonstrates that Black girls receive more severe sentences when they enter the juvenile justice system than do members of any other group of girls; they are also the fastest growing population in the system.[1]

The single most important thing we can do to support girls is to fund and develop evidenced-based programs that provide comprehensive, safe, and educational environments for girls **before they reach middle school.** This approach is likely to be the most cost-effective in preventing them from becoming disconnected from school and the workforce and providing the support they need to become successful in their education and future careers.

The single most important thing we can do to support girls is to fund and develop evidenced-based programs that provide comprehensive, safe, and educational environments for girls before they reach middle school.

EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND LITERACY

BEATING THE ODDS:

Promising Practices, Real Results

KEVIN D. GORDON, ED.D.
Provost
St. Petersburg College
Downtown | Midtown | Palladium

Our children bring to the classroom an innate ability to learn. From birth, they learn to walk, talk, and discern their surroundings in a manner that exemplifies some of the highest levels of language and information acquisition.

Many young African American children enter Florida's schools with big, bright eyes filled with hope and enthusiasm, eager to excel in their Kindergarten classrooms. Our children bring to the classroom an innate ability to learn. From birth, they learn to walk, talk, and discern their surroundings in a manner that exemplifies some of the highest levels of language and information acquisition.

Historically, schools in our country have not invested in African American children, especially during segregation. African Americans received what was left over without access to modern books, facilities, and other resources. In spite of that, African American children have excelled in all aspects of academe, including the arts, sciences, and humanities. In vocations they have ascended to prominent roles in society, including doctors, lawyers, professors, expert tradesmen, and professional athletes.

The disparity in educational investment by race is not a phenomenon of the past. In recent years, we have seen a new trend in education. Many of our schools have re-segregated through unitary status[1] with the promise of "neighborhood schools," negating many of the gains made through Brown v. Board[2] and the era of desegregation. In fact, since 1991, more than 35 school districts across the country have been granted unitary status.[3] In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court concluded that desegregation initiatives in most school districts across the nation could no longer be upheld.[4]

SEGREGATED SCHOOLS AND PINELLAS COUNTY FAILURE FACTORIES

In Pinellas County, Florida, this phenomenon has led to our schools being dubbed "Failure Factories" by the *Tampa Bay Times*. In December 2007, the Pinellas County

PUBLIC SCHOOL POPULATION BY RACE IN THE 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEAR[a]

RACE	% BLACK STUDENTS	% WHITE STUDENTS	% LATINO STUDENTS	STATE TOTAL (ALL STUDENTS)
All Grades PK-12	23%	39%	32%	2,792,234

[a] Florida Department of Education. *Florida PK-20 Education Information Portal, 2015-2016*. http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/students.stml.

School Board ended integration by voting unanimously to end busing as a means to integrate schools, resulting in schools that consisted primarily of Black students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Promises for additional resources were broken, teachers walked off the job, and middle-class families fled neighborhoods with poorly performing schools. What remained were conditions conducive to some of the most stagnant student achievement rates and highest concentrations of poverty in the entire state of Florida.[5]

These Failure Factories, which are a result of this policy decision, led to five schools in particular becoming some of the worst in the state.[6] Located within a six-mile radius of one another, 95 percent of the African American students in these schools did not pass the standardized tests in reading or math. This has resulted in neighborhoods with the highest levels of academic failure in the entire state of Florida.[7]

This story gained national attention and prompted outcry from concerned local educational advocacy organizations and outrage from local leaders.

FLORIDA 1ST-12TH GRADE PUBLIC SCHOOL POPULATION BY RACE, 2015-2016 COMPARED TO FLORIDA PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN K-12TH GRADE GIFTED EDUCATION PROGRAMS BY RACE, 2015-2016

Florida Public School Population by Race, 2015-2016[a]

- Other 6%
- Black 23%
- White 39%
- Latino 32%
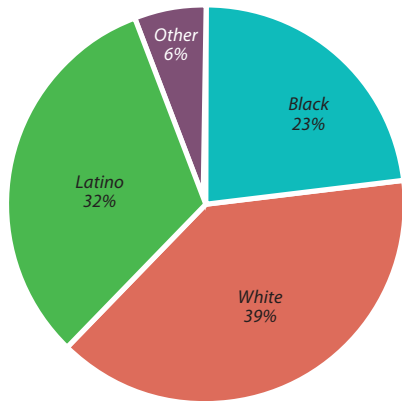
Percent in Gifted Programs Among All Enrolled Gifted Students[b]

- Other Races 6%
- Black 9%
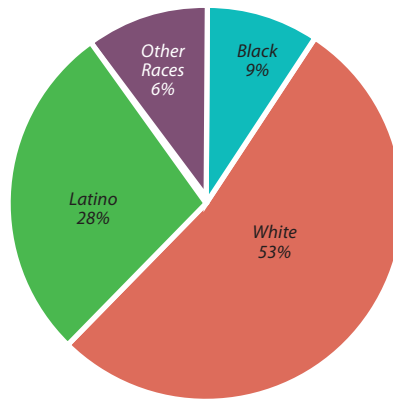- White 53%
- Latino 28%

[a] Ibid
[b] Florida Department of Education. *Florida PK-20 Education Information Portal, 2015-2016.* https://edstats.fldoe.org/SASLogon/login?service=https%3A%2F%2Fedstats.fldoe.org%2FSASPortal%2Fj_spring_cas_security_check.

REFLECTION: While Black children comprise 23% of public school population in Florida, only 9% of children enrolled in gifted education programs are Black.

Congresswoman Kathy Castor wrote a letter to the U.S. Department of Education requesting a full investigation for potential violations and educational malpractice, which resulted in a visit from the U.S. Department of Education Secretary and an investigation by the Office of Civil Rights.[8]

While the impact of segregation on academic achievement among African American students is profoundly evident in Pinellas County, Florida, this issue also exists in other parts of our state and our country. However, other districts show much stronger academic results for students. In Florida, some districts' reading rates are two to three times higher than those in the lowest performing schools in Pinellas County.[9]

In order to learn what has worked in other districts around the state, we should seek out best practices and consider the impact of family and community engagement while actively pursuing partnerships with business and civic organizations.

NASHVILLE EXAMPLE: EQUITY IN EDUCATION RESOURCES

As Brown intended, desegregating schools is a good first step towards improving student performance, but many argue that this is not enough to close the opportunity gap. Several studies indicate that there were and still are achievement benefits for African American students who attend racially integrated schools, particularly in reading. In addition to the integration of students, many advocates for education reform argue that the proper allocation of resources and funding has a greater impact on test scores.[10] This exact approach was taken in Nashville, Tennessee.

In Nashville, as in many parts of the country, economic disenfranchisement resulted in segregation as many poor and low-income families became trapped in pockets of concentrated poverty. Around 1998, this reality caused many elementary schools to re-segregate with many predominantly African American schools remaining in areas of concentrated poverty. To ensure equity in education, the city made the choice to allocate additional resources to schools in low-income communities and give families the choice to attend "enhanced option schools." The administrators of these enhanced schools were permitted to reduce class sizes, extend the school year, and choose to offer additional student services, including after-school tutoring and wraparound supports, such as health and social services.[11]

These enhanced option schools reportedly had 25 percent fewer students per class and an extra twenty days of instruction each school year. Further, between the years 2000-2003, they increased teacher salaries by $4,000 to $6,000 and offered on-site preschool and afterschool care.[12] It was also reported that 17 percent of school staff positions provided comprehensive student services, such as school

nurses, psychologists, guidance counselors, or home-school coordinators—unlike non-enhanced option schools, which had only 7 percent of their school staff dedicated to similar services.[13]

As a result of enhanced option schools and the focus on equity in resources, the effects of re-segregation were somewhat mitigated. While African American students were attending enhanced option schools, they made significant gains, significantly increasing proficiency in math.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

Another promising practice that is highly regarded as a method of increasing the academic achievement of African American students is the use of culturally responsive educational practices by teachers. Teachers of African American students have implemented practices that have allowed their students to excel.[14] Through teacher transparency and emotional connectedness among each student and the entire class, these teachers have built positive and meaningful relationships with their African American students while facilitating a safe, productive learning environment.[15] These teachers attend to their students by listening to them, instilling confidence in them, and maintaining high expectations for them. They are also skilled at reconnecting disengaged students, ensuring individual and collective student success.[16]

Aside from enhanced resources and cultural responsiveness, other strategies have proven to be successful in promoting the academic achievement of African American students in Florida. One such strategy that has shown significant promise is Multi-Input and Melodic Learning,[17] a multi-sensory approach that evokes deeper, more sustained learning by adding tonal and rhythmic stimuli.[18] While this concept is not new, it is not widely used by teachers as an instructional approach for African American students. However, it is thought to have significant implications for the academic success of African American students, males in particular.[19] In fact, it has been successfully used in educational television, such as Sesame Street and Schoolhouse Rock. In addition, there are a number of educational programs that incorporate Melodic Learning, including ST Math+Music,® Flocabulary, Earworms Musical Brain Teaser,® and TUNEin to Reading.[20]

LITERACY: FOUNDATION FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

To improve reading levels for African American students, early intervention is critical. Learning to read is the foundation for academic achievement. Winning Reading Boost, a foundational reading program, guarantees results in as little

Teachers of African American students have implemented practices that have allowed their students to excel. Through teacher transparency and emotional connectedness among each student and the entire class, these teachers have built positive and meaningful relationships with their African American students while facilitating a safe, productive learning environment.

as 90 days. It specifically targets students in third through fifth grade who have not learned to read. However, this program can be used with students as early as second grade.[21]

This highly engaging program uses a 90-day, 36-step approach that incorporates music and learning to help students learn letter sounds and decode words:

> *It incorporates the research-based principles of reading instruction, as required by Core Knowledge, including phonemic awareness and phonological awareness, systematic, explicit phonics instruction, vocabulary development, fluency and oral reading skills, and reading comprehension strategies.*[22]

In a pilot conducted at one of the schools designated as a "Failure Factory" by the *Tampa Bay Times,* there were some very promising results after only twenty-eight days of the 90-day program. On the Consortium on Reading Excellence (CORE) Phonics survey, a score of 150 or above indicates that students can read and decode most of the text that they encounter. The students in the pilot improved their

reading skills by 100 percent, increasing the number of students who had a score of 150 or better from 40 percent to 80 percent.[23] On the Test of Word Reading Efficiency, which measures the students' ability to read real words, students improved their decoding skills by 75 percent. In addition, on the test and retest of oral reading fluency, students improved their scores by 100 percent.[24]

CONCLUSION

While we have seemingly insurmountable odds as it relates to equitable resources and education for African American children in Florida, there is so much to be excited about and even more to advocate for. Now more than ever, families have access to early care and education programs, such as Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Programs (VPK), Head Start, the Early Learning Coalition, and other highly regarded early learning programs. By using grassroots approaches that engage families, empower parents, and compel community organizations to act, we can hold those responsible for educating our most precious resources—our children—accountable.

Through strategic partnerships with businesses, community agencies, and higher educational institutions, we can identify best practices, the latest research, and tools needed to help our communities thrive. By providing access to community resources such as health care, social services, GED and college programs, and technical and vocational training, we can create pathways to healthy and flourishing communities. Successful families create successful communities—and successful communities create successful schools.

By using grassroots approaches that engage families, empower parents, and compel community organizations to act, we can hold those responsible for educating our most precious resources—our children—accountable.

Point of Proof:

THE CHILDREN'S FORUM: *TEACHER EDUCATION AND COMPENSATION HELPS (T.E.A.C.H.) EARLY CHILDHOOD® SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM*

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

While the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program does not work directly with children, we work with early learning educators who have chosen a career that impacts the development and well-being of children. Reducing staff turnover through increased compensation and teacher education ensures that a stable, nurturing, and enriching environment can be accessed by all children, particularly those living in poverty. Black children and their families are disproportionately represented within this population. The increased education that our scholars receive positively impacts not only the children they teach in the classroom, but the children they raise and the children they mentor in their communities.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

Our three program goals include increasing the education, compensation, and retention of the early childhood workforce. These goals directly align with the Children's Forum mission of providing leadership and advocacy to achieve high-quality and accessible early care and education for all children. The T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program links training, compensation, and a strong commitment to improving the quality of early care and education experiences for young children and their families. Toward this objective, T.E.A.C.H. provides scholarships for early childhood teachers and facility directors to work toward earning college degrees and staff credentials in early care and education. The

IN FLORIDA,

46% OF HEAD START AND

43% OF EARLY HEAD START TEACHERS ARE BLACK,

WHILE NATIONALLY BLACK TEACHERS REPRESENT 28% AND 26% OF HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START TEACHERS RESPECTIVELY.[a]

REFLECTION: Black educators are well-represented in Head Start and Early Head Start in Florida.

[a] Center for Law and Social Policy. *CLASP DataFinder.* http://www.clasp.org/data.

program requires a partnership between the scholarship recipient, the sponsoring employer, and the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship Program to cover full tuition and related expenses.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

Participants in the T.E.A.C.H. program all work within the field of early care and education. The average age of our scholars is forty-seven years old and 99 percent are women. Of those, 56 percent are women of color. The scholars we work with earn an average hourly wage of $9.64 (minimum wage in Florida is currently $8.05). While 60 percent of the people who accept a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship begin with only a high school diploma or GED, the average Grade Point Average (GPA) in their college programs is 3.28.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

We define the success of the program through the positive outcomes and experiences of the scholars who participate. The following objectives are of critical importance to us as we administer our project:

- Increasing income for well-trained teachers to promote the professionalization of the field, which will justify a living wage, reduce turnover, and attract qualified educators.

- Decreasing the number of early childhood teachers and their families who will be dependent on state and federal assistance to close the gap in earned wages and cost-of-living expenses.

- Reducing teacher turnover so children and families will have consistent relationships with their childcare teachers and stable learning environments through the child's early years of growth and development.

- Increasing the educational attainment of the early childhood workforce, which has been positively correlated with high-quality learning environments, improved school readiness, and overall healthy child development.[1]

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN THIS PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL?

T.E.A.C.H. engages in a self-study every two years and is fiscally accountable to the Florida Office of Early Learning. Some indicators of success include: 1) opportunities for outreach with the community; 2) number of scholars who successfully complete contracts for credentials and continue towards a college degree; 3) testimonials about the impact a T.E.A.C.H. scholarship has had on a scholar's life; and 4) the feedback we receive about the effect of advancing one's training has had on the children and families served.

In addition, for each of the past two years, the Florida Legislature has increased the annual appropriation for the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program, resulting in a $10 million dollar budget for the 2016-17 fiscal year. Specific survey data is collected each year to evaluate the impact of T.E.A.C.H. on the early care and education (ECE) workforce. In 2015, 98 percent of responding employers reported positive changes in their participating teachers, and 99 percent of scholars would recommend T.E.A.C.H. to others. More than 2,000 scholarships were awarded in 2015, which resulted in 13,692 credit hours completed. The staff turnover rate for T.E.A.C.H. Scholars was 6 percent compared to a national rate of 30-40 percent. There was a 10 percent average wage increase for T.E.A.C.H. Scholars earning an associate degree, and turnover for this group of scholars was 3 percent.

WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

Shared responsibility and community partnerships are both key components of the success T.E.A.C.H. enjoys. Supportive counselors assist scholars as they navigate the potential challenges encountered by many nontraditional students who are either returning to school or enrolling for the first time. This model is different from a standard tuition grant in that both the scholar and the sponsoring employer receive supports to ensure success. In addition to paying 80 percent of tuition and 90 percent of the cost for books, T.E.A.C.H. provides a Student Access Stipend that assists with travel, Internet, and general expenses incurred through their education. Scholars are also provided three hours of paid release time per week to encourage active engagement with their studies. Finally, T.E.A.C.H. reimburses the sponsoring employer for the release time provided.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

One interesting challenge involves the substantial increase in funding for the T.E.A.C.H. program. Rarely is increased funding seen as a challenge, but in our case, given the limited timeline for expenditure, outreach efforts had to increase exponentially. We have embraced a slightly different type of outreach focusing more on targeted ECE populations rather than a global outreach approach. Aside from the additional funding timeline, community partners and stakeholders often share concerns about the expense of supporting potential scholars. T.E.A.C.H. Florida continuously emphasizes the critical importance of teachers' education in creating a stable, enriching, and effective early learning program.

WHAT ROLE DOES THE POPULATION THAT T.E.A.C.H. SERVES PLAY IN SHAPING THE SERVICES PROVIDED?

T.E.A.C.H. Florida receives feedback from its scholars, sponsors, higher education representatives, and governmental partners using a variety of feedback methods. Regularly scheduled evaluation ensures that input from T.E.A.C.H. Scholars is integrated into continuous program improvement and development of the annual plan. These evaluations also ensure that scholars are able to provide feedback on the quality of their educational experiences, which informs improvements to the higher education system. T.E.A.C.H.

Florida also convenes an Advisory Committee to keep various partners abreast of trends across the state and ensure that the scholarship program reflects the ever-changing needs of our diverse early childhood workforce.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT REPLICABLE?

In 1990, the nonprofit Child Care Services Association in North Carolina began an education and compensation scholarship program for twenty-one childcare workers in three counties. The same program, known today as the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program, has spread to twenty-four

states and the District of Columbia. Florida's program began in 1995 with three pilots in three local communities. Now, it is implemented statewide. Last year, we served 3,165 scholars working in 1,548 child care programs. Our advice to other projects is to build and maintain positive relationships, work collaboratively with your partners and stakeholders, have confidence in the value of your product, and hire qualified employees who embrace the mission and vision of the organization.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

T.E.A.C.H. is committed to giving teachers and directors, many of whom come from underserved and under-supported environments, an opportunity to grow professionally so that they can have the greatest impact on the population of children they continue to serve. Increasing a teacher's education leads to high-quality learning environments for all children, preparing them for future success.

More than 2,000 scholarships were awarded in 2015, which resulted in 13,692 credit hours completed. The staff turnover rate for T.E.A.C.H. Scholars was 6 percent compared to a national rate of 30-40 percent. There was a 10 percent average wage increase for T.E.A.C.H. Scholars earning an associate degree, and turnover for this group of scholars was 3 percent.

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS/CERTIFICATIONS FOR HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START[a]

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS/ CERTIFICATIONS	HEAD START TEACHERS		EARLY HEAD START TEACHERS	
	Florida	*U.S.*	*Florida*	*U.S.*
No degree or credential	2%	1%	3%	5%
CDA credential or state equivalent	9%	3%	68%	36%
Associates in Early Childhood or related field	21%	24%	16%	30%
BA in Early Childhood or related field	56%	58%	11%	26%
Graduate degree in Early Childhood or related field	13%	13%	1%	3%

[a] Ibid.

REFLECTION: Professional education and development programs, including T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® Scholarship program, are designed to increase the number of educators in early care and education with Associate's and Bachelor's degrees.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION TEACHER COMPENSATION[a]

	FLORIDA	U.S.
Head Start Teachers	$28,254	$29,632
Early Head Start Teachers	$24,263	$26,015

[a] Ibid.

REFLECTION: The compensation that educators in early care and education receive does not reflect the importance of their role in supporting the cognitive and social-emotional development of children in the most critical period of their development.

Point of Proof:

FOUNDATION FOR FOSTER CHILDREN: *EDUCATION+ PROGRAM*

WINTER PARK, FLORIDA

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

Established in 2008, the mission of the Foundation for Foster Children is to "[enhance] the lives of children in foster care through support and advocacy to create opportunities for a brighter future" in the state of Florida. Our programs and services are designed to address the needs of children and youth in the child welfare system to ensure they become successful, independent, and contributing members of our community. Although children of all races are equally as likely to experience abuse and neglect, national data shows that Black children enter and remain in foster care at significantly higher rates than their white counterparts. Since its inception, the Foundation for Foster Children has provided approximately 48 percent of its programs and services to African American children and youth. The Foundation for Foster Children's Education+ Program serves as a shining example of our children's ability to rise above circumstance to achieve personal and academic success.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

Developed by the Foundation for Foster Children, the Education+ Program supports the academic performance and advancement of foster children and youth through comprehensive academic services. Our program's services include but are not limited to: individualized student needs assessments, private in-home tutoring and advocacy for students with developmental disabilities, delays, and diagnoses. In order to effectively identify and address the needs of these students, the Education+ Program develops and meets specific programmatic objectives.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

In Central Florida, more than sixty children are removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment each month.

During the 2014-15 academic year, the Education+ Program served children living in or receiving case management services in Seminole, Orange, and Osceola County. Of these students, 30 percent were African American, 27 percent were Caucasian, 29 percent were Latino or Hispanic, 14 percent were multi-ethnic, and 1 percent identified as other. Fifty-four percent of those students were female and the remaining 46 percent were male. Forty-three percent of these students were in high school, 13 percent were in middle school, 42 percent were in elementary school, and 2 percent were in preschool.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

The Foundation for Foster Children defines success of the Education+ Program through the achievement of positive short- and long-term outcomes. In the short-term, the goal is to enhance students' self-esteem, increase motivation and participation in extracurricular activities, and support greater self-regulation. Desired long-term outcomes include an increase in grade promotion, high school graduation rates, matriculation into college or vocational programs, gainful employment, and self-sufficiency.

To measure the success of the Education+ Program, we develop annual goals using a logic model. During the 2014-15 academic year, our programmatic goals were as follows:

- 75% of children will receive services for at least three consecutive months.
- 25% of students will participate in at least one program event.
- 75% of students will be satisfied with the program.
- 75% of students will have positive self-esteem.
- 75% of students will have positive motivation.
- 75% of students will show an improvement from pre- to post-testing.
- 75% of students will have a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher.
- 80% of students will improve or maintain letter grades.
- 50% of students will participate in extracurricular activities.
- 80% of students will be promoted to the next grade level.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN THIS PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL?

Both formative and summative methods have been utilized to evaluate the progress and outcomes of the Education+ Program. Qualitative and quantitative data is collected and analyzed to determine the needs and monitor the progress of each student using guided intervention tools and strategies, including report cards, surveys, and grade-level competency assessments. Program outcomes are evaluated on a quarterly basis through the comparative analysis of pre- and post-GPAs, grade level competency assessments, and survey scores throughout the duration of the Education+ Program.

During the 2014-15 school year, the Foundation for Foster Children met or exceeded the following desired outcomes by the end of the Education+ Program:

- 97% of children received services for at least three (3) consecutive months.
- 36% of students participated in at least one program event.
- 90% of students were satisfied with the program.
- 94% of students showed higher levels of positive self-esteem.
- 94% of students were more motivated.
- 75% of students showed improved test scores.
- 76% of students improved or maintained a GPA of 2.0 or higher.
- 100% of students improved or maintained their letter grades.
- 54% of students participated in extracurricular activities.
- 97% of students were promoted to the next grade level.
- 86% of senior high school students graduated with a post-secondary plan.

WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

The success of the Education+ Program can be attributed to the dedication of knowledgeable and experienced staff, the presence of an engaged Board, and strategic collaborations. Education+ Program supports and advocates on behalf of foster children, youth, and families to enhance the academic achievement of children by working to improve the quality of each student's educational experience and foster their academic success. Program staff act as liaisons and resources for the school system and child welfare system to ensure that information is appropriately shared. Education+ Program employs evidenced-based best practices developed through extensive research and program evaluation.

This year, we have strengthened our strategic partnership with our largest partner, Community Based Care of Central Florida. By collaborating with this organization, we have been able to expand our program to include all foster children requesting

tutoring and educational assistance in Orange, Osceola, and Seminole counties. In an effort to continue to improve our programs and services, the Foundation for Foster Children has also fostered a meaningful partnership with the Orange County Public Schools (OCPS). Other organizations that we collaborate with include the Department of Children and Families, IMPOWER, Children's Home Society of Florida, Devereux, One Hope United, Legal Aid Society, Florida Guardian Ad Litem Program, and Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services. The Foundation also works with the Foster Parent Associations, the City of Orlando, and the court systems for each county to ensure that foster children in our communities are provided with the resources and tools needed to succeed.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

Children and youth in the foster care system experience frequent changes in their residence and the schools they attend. These abrupt changes often result in lower academic performance. In fact, 65 percent of adults formerly in foster care reported attendance in at least seven schools from Kindergarten through 12th Grade. Research shows students lose four to six months of educational advancement with each institutional change, which means the average number of school changes can result in nearly two to three and a half years of learning loss. In addition to repeated school transfers, mandatory appointments, frequent home visits, home placements, and court appearances add to the perpetual feelings of anxiety that many foster children already experience.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

The Education+ Program levels the playing field for children in foster care by providing them with an opportunity to be successful regardless of life circumstances. Through the Education+ Program, children in foster care are afforded the opportunity to be supported and advocated for as we create opportunities for a brighter future for children and youth in Florida's child welfare system.

RACE OF CHILD ADOPTED
BETWEEN OCTOBER 1, 2013 AND SEPTEMBER 30, 2014[a]

RACE	FLORIDA	NATIONAL
Black	25.00%	19.10%
White	55.50%	47.80%
Latino	12.60%	21.70%

REFLECTION: Black children are more likely to be adopted in Florida than the national average.

PERCENTAGES OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN 2013 BY RACE[b,c]

RACE	FLORIDA	US
Black	32%	24%
White	47%	42%
Latino	15%	22%

REFLECTION: Black children make up a higher percentage of those in foster care in Florida than in the United States overall.

[a] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. *Race/Ethnicity of Public Agency Children Adopted: 10/1/2013 - 9/30/2014.* http://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/race-2014.

[b] Some states allow children to remain in the foster care system until their 18th birthday while other states have age limits that extend a few years beyond this. Florida's foster care system ends at 21 years.

[c] Kids Count Data Center. *Children in Foster Care by Race and Hispanic Origin.* http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6246-children-in-foster-care-by-race-and-hispanic-origin?loc=11&loct=2#detailed/2/11/false/36,868,867,133,38/2638,2601,2600,2598,2603,2597,2602,1353/12992,12993.

The Education+ Program levels the playing field for children in foster care by providing them with an opportunity to be successful regardless of life circumstances.

SECTION 2

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Engaged, empowered parents and caregivers can ensure healthy brain development, build resiliency in children, and use their voices to advocate for their children's educational attainment. They are the first and most fundamental source of knowledge, culture, and well-being for their children. With this knowledge, Kiesha Moodie, M.Ed. uses design thinking to create intensive support and training sessions to effectively engage parents and caregivers as advocates for their children's education, as described in her essay, "Improving Family Engagement and Advocacy by Design." In his essay on "coparenting," Dr. Christopher Warren's "Figuring It Out for the Child" initiative provides holistic support and parenting education to unmarried parents as they learn to work as a team to support healthy cognitive and social-emotional development in their young children.

Organizations highlighted in this section are deeply engaging whole families and communities to support positive outcomes for children. The first Point of Proof, the BRIDGES program at the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County, presents a strong model for community engagement in marginalized Black and Latino communities. This program model is designed to ensure positive educational attainment for all children by drawing on the strengths of families, empowering them to have a vision for their community and to take ownership in driving change. Overtown Youth Center is a youth development initiative designed to foster resilience and ambition through comprehensive programs and services, including family and community support. Lastly, Sarasota Community Studio is an innovative community engagement program in which the neighborhood's children took the lead in community development, asset mapping, and advocating for policy changes that positively impacted their community.

Overall, this section presents innovative programs and strategies designed to ensure that Black families and communities are equipped with tools and resources necessary to support and advocate for the success of every Black child.

Point of Proof:

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COUNCIL OF PALM BEACH COUNTY

BOYNTON BEACH, FLORIDA

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

The mission of Children's Services Council (CSC) of Palm Beach County is to enable children and families to unlock their full potential by identifying and addressing children's needs through the engagement of all members of the community. With a focus on "place" and a commitment to engaging marginalized Black and Latino communities, CSC Palm Beach County developed ten neighborhood-based hubs (BRIDGES) to streamline and simplify access to prevention and intervention programs and services. By filling traditional gaps and scaffolding support, the BRIDGES initiative is gaining traction on achieving optimal child development through parental involvement and capacity building and by drawing upon the neighborhoods' strengths and resources.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

CSC Palm Beach County strives to ensure all children in Palm Beach County are born healthy, live free from abuse and neglect, are ready for Kindergarten and utilize quality afterschool and summer programs. We ensure neighborhood children are reading at grade level by the end of third grade as a result of heightened parental and community capacity. By working collaboratively with residents, BRIDGES strives to ensure these neighborhoods—in spite of decades of disinvestment, unemployment, and concentrated poverty—become places that enable all children and families to thrive.
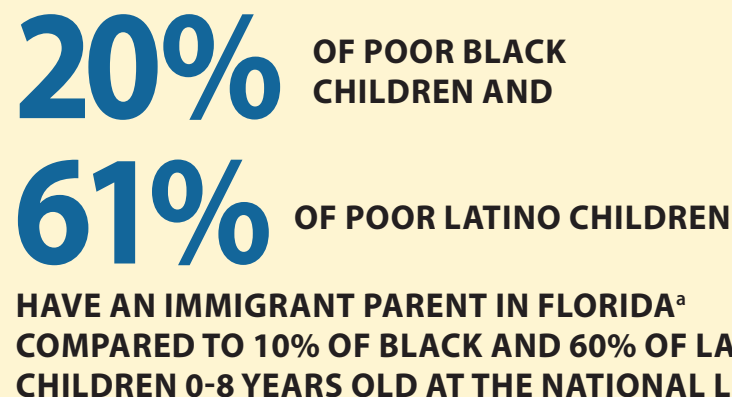
BRIDGES' goal is to draw upon the strengths and resources of these neighborhoods to heighten awareness about how families can support and keep their children healthy, safe, and strong. Grounded in the principle that all parents want the very best for their children, families and community stakeholders collectively engage in the mission of ensuring the health and well-being of all children and families in the neighborhood at large.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

The majority of our participants are families with children 0-8 years old as well as pregnant women and their partners. When BRIDGES conducts an intake on a new member, we capture information on the entire family. Thus, broader participants consist of children 0-17 years old (60 percent) and parents between 18-39 years old (30 percent).

As of June 2016, BRIDGES has served 19,696 individuals in Palm Beach County, with sixty percent of the individuals describing themselves as Black. Of those describing themselves as Black, two-thirds are African American and approximately one-third are Haitian. In terms of age, nearly half of the individuals are children 0-8 years-old. Sixty-five percent of families served indicated that they received food assistance (i.e., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance [SNAP] or Women, Infants and Children [WIC] programs). Few families felt comfortable disclosing their income (31 percent), and among those who responded, the median monthly household income was $824.

20% OF POOR BLACK CHILDREN AND
61% OF POOR LATINO CHILDREN

HAVE AN IMMIGRANT PARENT IN FLORIDA[a] COMPARED TO 10% OF BLACK AND 60% OF LATINO CHILDREN 0-8 YEARS OLD AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL.[b]

REFLECTION: The percentage of poor children 0-8 years old with at least one immigrant parent is higher among poor Black children 0-8 years old in Florida compared to that of poor children at the national level.

[a] U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 2010-2014 State Data.* 2014.
[b] U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 2014 National Data.* 2014.

Families transition from program participants to members and begin to take ownership of solutions toward creating a shared vision of a "community" that is welcoming and supportive; where families know and watch out for their neighbors; where service providers are non-judgmental and see the potential rather than the circumstances.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

From the beginning, CSC Palm Beach County envisioned BRIDGES as a holistic, long-term strategy for improving child outcomes. It was designed to serve as a trusted community presence and universal connector of isolated single services. Recognizing that many of the BRIDGES' families face challenges other than maternal/child health concerns, BRIDGES reaches out to other community stakeholders, partners and providers to support the family and neighborhood in a family-first/family-centered approach. Once families have had their immediate needs addressed, they are engaged in multiple family and community reflection exercises, sharing their individual and collective hopes, dreams and visions. Parents receive an orientation to existing resources located right in their own neighborhoods, one-on-one coaching, connections to educational opportunities, job training, and other resources.

Families transition from program participants to members and begin to take ownership of solutions toward creating a shared vision of a "community" that is welcoming and supportive; where families know and watch out for their neighbors; where service providers are non-judgmental and see the potential rather than the circumstances; where opportunities for education, employment and career development are accessible to anyone who is willing and ready; where safe, affordable housing is the rule instead of the exception; where families can easily access healthy and affordable food; and where children can grow up healthy, safe and strong.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN THIS PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL?

Using a full-time evaluation analyst, BRIDGES has been involved in a developmental evaluation over the past five years. Measures initially used to demonstrate the progress in BRIDGES include: (1) saturation; (2) retention; and (3) immersion.

(1) **Saturation**—By comparing the number of intakes with families from target census tracts relative to the population count established by the U.S. Census, we learn whether BRIDGES has been recruiting families with young children from our target geographic areas. To date, BRIDGES has achieved more than 90 percent saturation in its target geographies.

(2) **Retention**—By looking at the number of families who return after their first visit, we learn how successful BRIDGES is in bringing families back by offering relevant activities, a warm welcoming environment, and excellent customer service. In the first few years, BRIDGES retained approximately 50 percent of families, and now more than 75 percent return to participate in programs or activities offered after their initial visit.

(3) **Immersion**—By looking at families who participate in a variety and number of activities, we learn how successful BRIDGES has been in effectively engaging families over time. Through immersion (defined by participation in nine or more different types of activities), it is hypothesized that families would gain capacity and competency, leading to them feeling more supported and resourceful. To date, 46 percent of BRIDGES families in target geographies have achieved immersion.

We are on the cusp of deepening family engagement in every aspect of the BRIDGES program, including evaluation design, our definition of credible evidence, and scorecards and dashboards to communicate impact.

WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

BRIDGES is the fourth iteration of place-based community initiatives introduced by CSC Palm Beach County. Through lessons learned and due diligence, the following became some of the guiding principles for BRIDGES:

- **Community-Led, Strength-Based**—BRIDGES was not intended to be another service provider focused on fixing deficits; rather, BRIDGES is grounded in the premise that parents and communities want the best for their children. The strategy is geared towards families and stakeholders becoming owners of the mission and critical components to the solution.

- **Targeted Focus**—We recognized that in order to cultivate community-level change we needed to focus on a specific, manageable geographic area and engage with as many families as possible. Informally, a sense of connection, hope, and solidarity develops amongst families in which they start to trust and support each other.

- **Evaluation**—A fundamental element of BRIDGES is its focus on evaluation. Through collective processes, we defined what would demonstrate success, including how this success is measured and how efforts, interim results, and outcomes are connected through a logic model. There is continual emphasis on the importance of capturing meaningful, accurate data. On a regular basis, data is used to assess whether we are producing the conditions needed to impact our ultimate goal. A quarterly data report is reviewed not only by directors, but also by line staff and used to strategize, make improvements, and celebrate successes.

BRIDGES' staff and community members are encouraged to think creatively and test solutions that are responsive to the community's needs and aspirations

instead of prescriptive and unchangeable models. This critical thinking, reflection, innovation and teamwork is the story behind the data.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

In 2011, when BRIDGES became operational in the ten neighborhoods, it was viewed as an "outsider" with no authentic ties to the communities we served. However, BRIDGES staff, eager to help build parental and community capacity, found themselves faced with families in search of solutions to immediate, life-sustaining needs, such as language barriers for new undocumented immigrants, homelessness, domestic violence, and substance abuse. At the onset, BRIDGES struggled with the dilemma of: a) determining the most effective way to help families meet these needs in a way that empowered them; b) gaining the trust and respect of the communities; c) convincing families this initiative was not another "here today, gone tomorrow" experiment; and d) achieving long-term, sustainable change in the midst of neighborhoods where all residents wanted to do was get out!

After addressing families' immediate needs, the focus shifts to identifying individual gifts and talents and the ways in which they can be used collectively to help parents achieve the goals they have for their children. BRIDGES, neighborhood residents, local organizations, and cross-sector partners work to develop an inclusive process that empowers participants from talk to action in support of achieving results for all residents, including children and families.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT REPLICABLE?

To replicate the model, it is imperative to have the following five core components:

(1) **Outreach**—To raise awareness, interest, and involvement in the activities BRIDGES sites offer;

(2) **Engagement Activities**—To build parents' knowledge about healthy child development and increase positive parenting practices;

(3) **Navigation**—To facilitate and connect families with resources available in the community;

(4) **Coordination of Services**—To involve BRIDGES staff in actively reaching out and working with community-based organizations and businesses to increase accessibility for families; and

(5) **Partnership and Strategic Alliances**—To increase collaboration among providers, leverage ideas, skills, resources, and passion to produce better outcomes for children.

A fundamental element of BRIDGES is its focus on evaluation. Through collective processes, we defined what would demonstrate success, including how this success is measured and how efforts, interim results, and outcomes are connected through a logic model. There is continual emphasis on the importance of capturing meaningful, accurate data.

WHAT HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION LEARNED ABOUT THE PARTICULAR STRENGTHS OF BLACK FAMILIES AND CHILDREN?

Our experiences have reaffirmed our belief that every Black parent wants what every parent wants for their family—healthy, safe, and strong children; thriving communities; a high-quality education; safe and affordable housing; and jobs and careers that create financial stability and wealth. Black families want to be co-developers and architects of their fate. They are not interested in being silent bystanders, but active participants in dismantling barriers and building bridges.

In the midst of adversity, Black children and families have the ability to see the glass as half-full when the world around them says its half-empty—not out of desire, but out of necessity. They rise to the occasion, unwavering and willful, fortified by the resilience of their ancestors, and determined to succeed against all odds. Drawing upon the richness and diversity of their cultures, traditions, and life experiences, Black families press on, finding strength in their relationships—with their creator, each other, and their community.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

Today, BRIDGES recognizes the road to engagement and sustainable impact in Black communities, where resident voices have long been discounted, begins and ends with a strong foundation of trust through relationship-building. Success includes simultaneously acknowledging the ability and resiliency of families to co-invest in the problem-solving process, while helping to build new and strengthen existing individual and community capacities.

Instead of "doing for," BRIDGES learned to "do with" neighborhood residents, local organizations, and cross-sector partners to meet immediate needs and to achieve better long-term results in public safety, education, housing, employment, and other key areas. To combat traditional silos and vacuums, communities need safe local gathering places or hubs for families to connect socially, share/receive information, and gain local access to countywide resources.

For Black children, families, and communities, success happens when we ask permission to enter, pay homage to the indigenous leaders, learn and respect the culture(s), approach with optimism, project a willingness to try anything, adapt to change, embrace failure as opportunities, ask instead of telling and consistently involve and engage residents at every stage. Only then will we collectively achieve success.

IMPROVING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND ADVOCACY BY DESIGN:

A Human-Centered Approach

KIESHA MOODIE, M.ED.
Managing Director, Alumni and Community Impact
Teach For America

Over the past two years, ROOTS has drawn more than 700 students and parents who work collectively with program leaders and facilitators towards identifying and meeting their needs.

The factors that contribute to student success are layered and complex. One of many factors is a family's level of engagement and advocacy for their child's education. Through human-centered design, we can use a family's contextual factors to develop strategies to effectively engage parents and caregivers as advocates for their child's education. This method allows for practitioners to engineer a human-centered strategy that takes into account the needs of parents and caregivers. Design thinking was initially a tool for improving products by constantly generating creative ideas that respond to consumers' needs.[1] However, the process lends itself to the development and assessment of strategies that address many challenges outside of traditional product design. Over the past nine years, I have incorporated design thinking into the family engagement strategies that I have developed and implemented in the education sector.

THE FIRST STEP: DEFINE THE PROBLEM.

Identifying a problem means being specific, searching for the actual causes, and *suspending assumptions*.[2] Defining a particular problem allows one to hone in on the nuances and complexities that surround the issue in order to maximize understanding and efficiency.

When I became a teacher, there was no shortage of issues to choose from. I first began my educational career as a Teach For America Corps member. I met with parents during the school-wide distribution of report cards every quarter throughout the academic year. I remember sitting down with parents for the

first time and realizing that they did not know how to interpret the meaning of their child's report card. After continued touch points with my students' parents, it became apparent to me that some of the parents were unable to fully engage in their child's education because they were not offered the resources needed to engage or to interpret the school information they were given.

I never fully appreciated or understood just how fortunate I was to grow up in a household of educators. My mother's ability to navigate the educational system and advocate on my behalf played a crucial role in my academic success and the confidence I had in my abilities. If I did not suspend my assumptions, I would not have been able to realize that my initial assessment of the problem was biased and incomplete as I solely considered my experiences, while ignoring those of my students' parents. At that point, I committed to creating a family engagement program designed to ensure that my students—and others like them—had a zealous advocate who effectively advocated on behalf of their personal and academic success.

THE SECOND STEP: UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES SURROUNDING A USER'S EXPERIENCE AND IDENTIFY NEEDS.

This second phase allowed me to develop unique solutions to better meet the needs of parents and caregivers in order to support advocacy for their children's education. The work involved in creating a supportive parent engagement environment is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The strategies should be dictated

Through human-centered design, we can use a family's contextual factors to develop strategies to effectively engage parents and caregivers as advocates for their child's education.

by the common needs and behaviors specific to the given population. Therefore, it is important to understand the population and their needs and to decide which needs one plans to serve. I wanted to reach students and families in areas with the highest need across Miami-Dade County: Liberty City, Overtown, Allapattah, and Little Haiti.

THE THIRD STEP: BRAINSTORM AND IDEATE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM.

To learn more about the specific needs of my target population, I collected additional information through conversations and workshops with local community leaders and organizations. While parents knew where to find information on their child's progress, many did not know how to interpret the information on school and district websites. They wanted to know if their children were on track, which courses they needed to enroll their children in, and how to support their children in math and reading at home.

Parents also wanted to know how to communicate with their child in the midst of household tensions and neighborhood violence. However, many of these parents had limited knowledge on how to do so. Many students were also frustrated about the conditions of their neighborhoods, including the lack of businesses and vibrant parks in their communities like the ones available across town. They did not know how to negotiate the desire to escape their community with the guilt of leaving, and only wished they had someone to talk to about it.

With this knowledge, I was able to travel across the country to observe how schools and organizations were curating spaces to promote deep levels of engagement amongst students and parents who faced similar challenges.

THE FOURTH STEP: TRANSFORM YOUR ABSTRACT CONCEPT INTO A PHYSICAL FORM OR PROTOTYPE THROUGH INTERACTION AND EXPERIENCE.

After many conversations with parents and students, I started to develop workshops and spaces that addressed the specific and immediate needs they shared. This phase of design thinking is known as prototyping.

THE FIFTH STEP: TEST YOUR IDEA IN ORDER TO LEARN HOW WELL YOUR SOLUTION REMEDIES THE PROBLEM YOU SOUGHT TO ADDRESS.

I tested the effectiveness of my approaches by incorporating feedback that I received from participants and modifying them accordingly.

Eventually, I designed a product that incorporated the most effective and impactful components of family and community engagement to involve parents and respond to the demand. With the support of our parents, students, partners, and Teach For America, we launched Realizing Our Own True Strength (R.O.O.T.S.) Miami in 2014.

The ROOTS Summit is a full-day of personal and professional development workshops designed to facilitate active parent engagement, student involvement, and educational advocacy by equipping families with the knowledge and tools needed to succeed. The goal of our first summit was to reach 100 students and 25 parents. Over the past two years, ROOTS has drawn more than 700 students and parents who work collectively with program leaders and facilitators towards identifying and meeting their needs.

In order to establish common ground, at the beginning of the ROOTS Summit, students and parents are invited to consider and clarify their vision for themselves and their community. Students and parents are then assigned to a "village" to reflect on their stories and the power of their voices while creating a space for individual and collective healing. In addition to "village" spaces, we offer a range of skill-building sessions with separate tracks for our students and parents. We collaborate with 40 organizations and volunteers to leverage their unique and valuable skills and expertise to meet the needs of our participants.

Our ROOTS Core Committee provides intensive support and training to session leaders to craft workshops that take the strengths and needs of our diverse learners into consideration. In order to maximize program participation, we consider the socioeconomic factors that may also affect participation.

To increase the accessibility and appeal of our events and programs, meals, transportation, and educational giveaways are provided to program participants.

In order to improve programming, ROOTS has continuously surveyed its participants to determine the program's impact in our community. Using a human-centered design approach, I was able to define and address the needs of many families in Miami-Dade County. By engaging with that community, I understood their experiences while identifying their unique needs, wants, and fears. Through the iterative process of ideation, prototyping, and testing, I was able to develop a successful product, ROOTS, which is responsive to those families' needs.

The use of this design-thinking framework can be very effective and beneficial in educational settings and other contexts. I have found this approach to be transformational in expanding my capacity to foster family engagement and advocacy in high-need communities in Florida's Miami-Dade County.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Point of Proof:

OVERTOWN YOUTH CENTER

MIAMI, FLORIDA

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

The Overtown Youth Center (OYC) is a place where Black children and families have been succeeding for over a decade. OYC has become a "go-to" model for youth and family development because of its ability to help vulnerable youth make a positive transition into adulthood. Throughout its history, OYC has graduated 100 percent of its high school senior class with 95 percent of its alumni making a successful transition to college, vocational school, the military, and/or the workforce.

The mission of the Overtown Youth Center is to inspire and empower youth and families by fostering hope through enrichment services. OYC accomplishes this mission by offering year-round academic and enrichment programming that takes a holistic and comprehensive approach to address the diverse needs of its target population by implementing a national youth development model from Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI).

The program model includes: 24-hour case management; in-school, after school, and summer services; tutoring, homework assistance and other academic support; counseling; behavior management; and college preparation, particularly in the areas of reading and mathematics. OYC also offers programs and services that focus on character development, team building skills, life skills, physical fitness, nutrition and health and wellness. This includes culinary classes, fine arts training (i.e., dance, music, spoken word, visual arts, creative writing, etc.), transportation and exposure to various careers and experiences. Finally, OYC provides opportunities for increased parent and guardian involvement in support of their children's educational and social development through its parent involvement programming. OYC is also the only organization in Miami that implements this youth development program model.

The Center's goals are to 1) be an integral part of the community; 2) promote lifelong learning and success for inner-city youth and citizens; and 3) help build resilient children who become contributing and engaged members of society.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

OYC programming targets Overtown youth and families who qualify for Title 1 Services, ages 8-25, who show low academic performance, experience a lack of safety in the community and have limited access to productive activities during out-of-school hours. The Center currently serves more than 400 youth and families composed of the following demographics: 74 percent African American, 15 percent Hispanic, and 11 percent Haitian. Fifty-six percent of these youth are male and 44 percent are female. Within this target population, approximately 95 percent qualify for Title I services based on U. S. Census poverty estimates.

The most recent U.S. Census data further illuminates the need to support youth in this community. The estimated Overtown crime index is 55 percent higher than Miami's overall average, and the Miami crime index is 82 percent higher than the Florida average. The estimated violent crime rate is also 55 percent higher than Miami's overall average. An astonishing 49 percent failed to obtain a high school (HS) diploma. This is alarming considering that 80 percent of the nation has obtained a HS diploma. With a median income of approximately $15,000 to $20,000 annually and 36 percent reporting less than $10,000 in annual income, more than 41 percent of families with children and 46 percent of individuals live below the poverty level compared to 9 percent and 12 percent respectively, nationally. Fifty-five percent of residents age 17 and older were unemployed, and an OYC parent survey revealed similar results with only 43 percent of reporting parents employed. The remaining 57 percent were unemployed.

Of the estimated 5,135 households in Overtown, 2,392 are families. Three percent (129) of families are headed by a grandparent raising grandchildren. Primarily a rental community, Overtown has an astounding 62.3 percent rate of households that report spending more than 30 percent of their income on monthly rent. A clearer picture of economic hardship for children and families emerges when this finding is coupled with the fact that only 54 percent of eligible workers age 16 and up are in the labor force, with an unemployment rate of 14.8 percent (nearly double the City of Miami's at 9.6 percent).

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

OYC defines success as the moment when its vision for a community full of positive contributing citizens (PCCs) is manifested. OYC defines PCCs as students who have entered into a post-secondary educational institution, vocational school, the military and/or obtained gainful employment and are

making a worthwhile impact in their local community. To accomplish this, OYC's short-term goals include:

- 90% of OYC seniors will graduate from high school;
- 85% of OYC students will have on-time promotion in school;
- 85% of OYC's youth will maintain or increase satisfactory grades, behavior and/or attendance; and
- 85% of OYC alumni will be on target to become Positive Contributing Citizens (PCCs).

OYC's long-term goal is to have at least 90 percent of its alumni return to the Overtown community and take over the work of mitigating poverty and its associated outcomes to transform the community back into one "void of lack," because it is filled with resources and productive citizens. Also, OYC ultimately hopes to replicate the work it is doing in Overtown to inner-city communities around the nation.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN THIS PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL?

The success of OYC's programming is measured through an array of internal and external data sources. Internally, OYC has students work with their coordinators to complete an annual "Barriers to Success" checklist, which measures obstacles involving school, family, individuals, or peer issues that may interfere with a student's achievement. Coordinators and students also work together to create an Individual Success Plan (ISP) outlining students' academic, personal, and social goals, as well as the strategies they will use to reach them. The plan is discussed, revised and measured at least once quarterly by the coordinator and the student based upon data that is collected from observation and case notes. Students are monitored daily, and case notes are entered twice monthly to tie students' progress back to the ISP.

In addition to its internal measures, OYC also tracks success by examining whether students have good attendance, favorable progress reports and maintained or improved grades. This is done through curriculum-based assessments, standardized test scores, teacher assessments, parent testimonials, behavioral monitoring, school referral records, pre-, mid-, and post- iSteep test scores (a research-based model for improving achievement for all students), and surveys. Diminished referrals for inappropriate behavior (according to school referral records) and direct observation by OYC's in- and out- of-school programming staff are also taken into account. Progress reports and report cards are distributed at least once quarterly. In addition, some of OYC's funders complete program monitoring to gauge the effectiveness of OYC's programming. While OYC consistently receives positive scores on these

reports, the biggest measure of OYC's success is the progress being made by the young adults who are doing well in school and in life as a result of OYC's programming.

OVERTOWN YOUTH CENTER SUCCESS STORY

One such young adult who has come through the Overtown Youth Center's (OYC) program and grown up to become a successful Positive Contributing Citizen (PCC) is 24-year-old **Reginald L. Abel**. Reginald began attending OYC's program when he was in the fifth grade. As the oldest of three children being raised by a single mother, Reginald admits that life was not always easy, and his family sometimes faced challenges. However, he credits OYC with being a "safe haven" for him and his family, exposing him to many opportunities. The center provided him with the support he needed to do well in school, become a first generation college graduate and make a successful transition to young adulthood.

"*When I was younger, OYC helped expose me to so many things [and not just] seeing what was in my community. Whether it was going to the president's inauguration or taking a trip to New York for professional development, I was exposed to a lot of things my peers weren't, and I was able [to realize] what and where I wanted to be,*" Reginald shared. He also credits OYC with helping him to figure out which college he should attend by taking him on college tours and prepping him for the college experience. "*I applied to lots of schools, but I didn't know where I wanted to go. Then I went to Florida State for [the] first time. [OYC] really guided me and made my transition to college a lot smoother.*"

According to Reginald, OYC went above and beyond their commitment to him and his family by providing him with immense support so he could concentrate solely on his classes while in college. "*OYC really gave me security while I was in school. My parents didn't know much about college, but I still had a great amount of support from my OYC family. There were people I could turn to if I needed help; that was one thing that set OYC apart. They made sure my family had food while I was away and gave me the financial and academic assistance necessary to lead me in the right direction and make sure I was on [a] good path to success. Growing up in single parent homes, we worry about our families [when we leave them]; but I never had to worry about my family because OYC took care of them. They took care of everything and let me go and experience things without the worry,*" Reginald shared.

Reginald also credits OYC with inspiring in him a love for travel. Thus far, he has been to the Bahamas, Costa Rica, Mexico, and the United Arab Emirates and is planning a trip to Thailand. "*Doing a lot with OYC in my younger years made me want to see more. It challenged me to broaden my horizons and have the courage to go out of the country*

REGINALD L. ABEL

The single most important thing people should know about OYC is that its effectiveness could not have been achieved without the implementation of wraparound services for children and families by people who not only understand the needs of Black children and their families, but make it their daily mission to use their gifts, talents, and passion to support them.

to see places that a lot of my friends and family members can't see. Then I come back to motivate them to do the same thing," he said.

Reginald graduated from Florida State University in December 2014 with a dual Bachelor's of Science in Finance and Marketing. He is now a member of Teach For America and began teaching seventh grade math to students in Houston, Texas in August of 2016. Reginald will also begin a Master's program in January of 2017 at Florida State University, where he will continue his study of marketing. He ultimately desires to work for a marketing firm doing Integrated Marketing Communications.

Reginald said he doesn't think he would be where he is in life had it not been for OYC. "I'm appreciative of OYC and I'm definitely helping them out in any way I can. I would love to come back and speak to youth currently in the program so they can see someone who looks like them and [who] has been where they are [and] show them they can do anything," he concluded.

Reginald Abel is a shining example of OYC's success and the embodiment of what it encourages all of its youth to aspire to.

WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

OYC is successful because it implements a comprehensive, holistic approach to youth development. To effectively and efficiently deliver high-quality services

to its target population, OYC develops partnerships with parents, schools, and community organizations. OYC understands that it takes a village to (effectively) raise a child. Therefore, it does not operate in silos and is very strategic when choosing who to hire to impact the lives of the youth and families it serves. As a result, the agency is run by qualified and compassionate staff who work tirelessly to ensure youth and families have the resources they need to succeed in school and in life. Having a program that operates year-round (in school, after school, and during the summer) gives OYC an advantage that other agencies do not have. Youth and families are able to build important, consistent relationships with mentors they love and trust who fill in the gaps for many who lack good support systems. OYC also consistently searches for innovative curriculums and approaches to implement its educational and enrichment components to ensure youth are not only engaged, but retaining what they learn. All of these methods of implementation help OYC achieve its goals.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

OYC, like many community-based nonprofits, has faced several challenges throughout its history. One of the major challenges is that the need in the community is greater than the resources available to address it. Therefore, OYC is constantly working to ensure it can continue to deliver quality programming and serve more youth and families without depleting its resources. OYC has grown tremendously over the last few years, and sometimes it is a challenge to keep up with the growth as it relates to programming and staffing. Some of the ways OYC has addressed these challenges are to aggressively seek out funding and build relationships to establish expansion projects at school-based sites to serve more youth.

OYC also sometimes faces the challenge of losing qualified staff to more lucrative opportunities, as well as having existing staff overextended in their responsibilities. OYC triumphs over these challenges by finding innovative funding sources, creatively designing programs, and building relationships that can be leveraged to perform the necessary work. Finally, the Overtown neighborhood is also in the process of major development and gentrification. Therefore, OYC faces the challenge of remaining relevant as the population and demographics in the neighborhood change.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

OYC is embraced by the community. In addition to its enrolled youth and families, the Center is a safe haven and common meeting ground for many residents and organizations. OYC is consistently engaging with the population it serves to determine what the needs of the community are. Therefore, the population plays a major role in shaping the services provided. For example, through outreach and

community surveys, OYC determined older youth had too much idle time and needed to learn basic college readiness/career skills. OYC then implemented an IE2 (Inspire. Educate. Employ.) Program designed to keep youth off the streets and engaged in productive activities that equip them to succeed in the twenty-first century marketplace.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT REPLICABLE?

In every community, there are youth who may have more challenges to overcome than others due to socioeconomic conditions that make it more difficult to succeed in school or in life. The services that are provided by OYC and SEI can be provided in any community and are most effective in communities where wraparound services are critical. Organizations that are serious about changing the trajectory of systematically impoverished communities should consider comprehensive program models like OYC's replica of SEI. These programs work because they take into consideration a number of factors critical in tackling issues that are significant barriers to success. While comprehensive models may be a little more expensive than traditional afterschool programs, the impact is often greater and spans significant targets of influence (i.e., the child, the family, the school system, the community, etc.). Government entities should explore models that are "grassroots" by definition and informed by communities who are the consumers of government services.

Grassroots organizations are often in the trenches, thus giving them an unmatched understanding of critical components that are effective for elevating the communities it serves to the next level. Therefore, OYC encourages funders, government entities, and communities all over the nation to work to understand the needs of the people they serve and make the necessary investments to implement programs that work most effectively for their intended target markets. Funders should not mandate that an organization stick to a prescribed method without knowing whether or not said method will be effective in the community where the organization it is funding is located. Additionally, communities and government entities must embrace collective impact as their approach to achieving optimal results.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

The single most important thing people should know about OYC is that its effectiveness could not have been achieved without the implementation of wraparound services for children and families by people who not only understand the needs of Black children and their families, but make it their daily mission to use their gifts, talents, and passion to support them.

Point of Proof:

SARASOTA COMMUNITY STUDIO

SARASOTA, FLORIDA

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

Between 2009 and 2014, hundreds of young children in the Central-Cocoanut neighborhood of Sarasota led place-based community change efforts to catalyze the transformation of this predominantly Black neighborhood and surrounding community. The results were powerful: increased engagement and involvement of residents of all ages, and increased awareness and responsiveness of agencies and systems, to benefit all children and the neighborhood as a whole. Children invented playful, neighborly approaches to asset-mapping, networking, data-gathering, storytelling, advocacy, stewardship, and conflict resolution to powerfully change the narrative about the community within and beyond the neighborhood. They demonstrated to themselves and others that they are undeniably talented, diligent, and capable of improving the community together.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

Built upon five years of efforts by neighborhood children, Sarasota Community Studio was established as a creative space in the Central-Cocoanut neighborhood of Sarasota, Florida for neighbors to come together to invent powerful approaches to community change. As a local hub established by residents, the goal was to become a 47-block area, where the entire neighborhood, including children, are thriving.

Sarasota Community Studio was founded upon the recognition that a community is not built, it emerges. It emerges as people and great ideas coalesce around the positive, when neighbors are making decisions and taking action as primary community change agents. As a neighborhood transforms, it becomes possible for change to scale out and positively affect the broader community.

Sarasota Community Studio was also founded upon the recognition that children are particularly talented as neighbors. They are naturally inclined to be curious, playful, social, and joyful. They are storytellers and boundary-crossers. These are

Many community initiatives start with the belief that certain neighborhoods are weak or damaged and need to be fixed and that the primary sources of improvement exist outside the neighborhood. When ideas and efforts instead are recognized as first emerging among residents, the locus of power and decision making shifts from experts to citizens, and truly democratic decision making becomes possible.

not only the qualities that make great neighbors, but also the very qualities of social innovators. As children intentionally take on their identity as neighbors to make the neighborhood even better than it already is, they become increasingly recognizable as valued "neighborkids."

There are four key domains to the work of Sarasota Community Studio, with children leading efforts in each domain:

1. **Community Building**—Activities that strengthen connections among residents and generate a sense of welcome and neighborhood spirit while sharing information, making decisions, and taking action together for the sake of the neighborhood and broader community.

2. **Community Data**—Activities that gather and generate regularly updated neighborhood-scale information about how children and the neighborhood are faring; this data informs decisions and actions to bring about collective well-being.

3. **Talent Development**—Activities that help children recognize, develop and contribute their talents as neighbors using a positive, relationship-based, neighbor-oriented approach that is an alternative to typical social service models, which tend to orient around children's needs and problems.

4. Communications—Approaches for sharing information through stories, pictures, and maps that help to change how people talk about the neighborhood and make decisions.

Sarasota Community Studio was founded upon the belief that together in these ways, neighbors can help their communities thrive by following the lead of "neighborkids." In doing so, children thrive too.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

Central-Cocoanut is a 47-block neighborhood in Sarasota, Florida. Of the 2,100 people who live in the neighborhood, more than 500 of the residents are children; 300 are up to the age of ten and 175 are up to the age of five. Racially, more than 50 percent of residents identify as Black/African American, while 40-45 percent identify as white. Ethnically, more than 10 percent identify as Hispanic/Latino. More than 70 percent of the neighborhood's children identify as Black/African American.

In Central-Cocoanut, both children and adults express a love of the neighborhood and a desire to stay. Oftentimes, however, families move out due to housing conditions. Reasons cited by neighbors include the disrepair of buildings, exorbitant utility bills, disrespectful treatment by landlords, and the rising cost of rent. A housing survey conducted by neighbors in 2013 revealed that about half of all households rented rather than owned their homes and more than forty houses were abandoned.

The median family income in Central-Cocoanut is $26,000, which is half the rate for all families living in Sarasota. Twenty percent of all households have a family income below $15,000, which is twice the rate for all households in the city of Sarasota.

As such, many people in Central-Cocoanut know how to navigate hardships and harness existent resources to thrive.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

In order to gauge whether and how efforts to bring about the intended changes are working, a strategy was outlined to continually assess both the efforts and the actual change in the community. An application of the Results-Based Accountability framework was

drafted to identify outcomes relating to "how much" and "how well" the efforts develop, as well as "who is better off and how," in terms of:

- Number, diversity (age, race, ethnicity), geographic distribution, and interconnectedness of residents involved in the efforts.
- Number, frequency, quality, and interconnectedness of the efforts.
- Increase in neighborhood identity, as reported by people directly participating in efforts, as well as periodic and systematic surveys of residents from the neighborhood documenting their sense of community, neighborhood attachment, knowledge about the neighborhood, sense of hope, and sense of agency.
- Increases in child well-being, measured in terms of happiness/emotional grounding, learning, loving relationships, and community contribution.
- Changes in neighborhood well-being, measured in terms of improved quality and availability of affordable housing, decreased abandoned and boarded-up buildings, increased employment and family income, improved social justice, decreased crime and arrest rates, and an increased sense of community.

To begin, changes that may signal "tiny initiating events" of transformation are documented through pictures and stories. As related community datasets become available, it will be possible to systematically measure and track changes in well-being over time.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN THIS PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL?

Sarasota Community Studio is currently participating in a cross-site case study with eight other place-based community change initiatives in cities across the United States. This case study effort is coordinated by the Population Change Learning Community associated with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Center for Healthier Children, Families, and Communities and is funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. It is intended to assist the local community in reflecting upon its development and progress, in order to spot and harness success as it emerges.

Indicators of success to be tracked over time include: 1) number and diversity of residents (particularly children) and local organizations/agencies involved in the overall efforts; 2) number and range of neighbor-led efforts to promote child/family well-being; and 3) improved infrastructure for the efforts, including increased availability to neighborhood-specific datasets. In the future, it is expected that a range of indicators of child/family well-being will be available through the neighborhood, the school district, and various city or county agencies both at the individual and neighborhood scale, in order to identify and track changes in these indicators.

WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

The efforts of Sarasota Community Studio have been oriented around the wisdom and talents of "neighborkids," meaning children who own their identity as neighbors with intentionality. In Central-Cocoanut, hundreds of children made positive contributions to the neighborhood over a span of five years before the Studio was established, not through schools or formal services or programs, but voluntarily as neighbors. Most of the children who contributed were up to the age of ten. They now have a "demonstrated track record" of caring and contributing to the neighborhood and community. The Studio was established as a response to these contributions, building upon the neighborhood spirit that the children created.

Because neighbors initiated and led these efforts as "first investors," this is community change-making that is "inside out *from* the inside out." It begins with neighbors who already love the neighborhood and recognize and appreciate the talents of children and others who live there. Many community initiatives start with the belief that certain neighborhoods are weak or damaged and need to be fixed and that the primary sources of improvement exist outside the neighborhood. When ideas and efforts instead are recognized as first emerging among residents, the locus of power and decision making shifts from outside experts to residents, and truly democratic decision-making becomes possible.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

The greatest challenge faced by Sarasota Community Studio has been the relative unfamiliarity people have with place-based approaches to comprehensive community change. There are also biases about children; it is often assumed that because they are young, they can be the beneficiaries of efforts, but not the legitimate leaders or primary agents of change. Neighbors are often assumed to be less knowledgeable, less skilled, and less sophisticated than professionals associated with formal institutions. These assumptions are held by funders, policymakers and leaders of some of the institutions that most directly influence the well-being of children and families. These assumptions and biases will likely continue to pose challenges to child- and resident-led change initiatives in the future unless they are acknowledged and examined. In Sarasota, they have made it difficult to secure the funding and related resources. Although the efforts are now dormant due to a lack of funding, the traditions and practices initiated by "neighborkids" continue to influence the broader community's orientation to children and neighbors as change makers, and similar efforts are now growing in nearby St. Petersburg, Florida.

They revived the annual celebration of local civil rights history, prompting the county historical society to formally acknowledge this history as well. The local elementary school re-examined library policies that were promoting income-based disparities. The school district and Sheriff's Department reorganized their data so that neighborhood-specific patterns of student success and arrests were finally shared publicly.

Even still, the efforts of Central-Cocoanut "neighborkids" and Sarasota Community Studio experienced unprecedented success. Not only did the network of connections within the neighborhood become strengthened, but policies changed as well. Children led efforts to redesign and transform a neighborhood park. They revived the annual celebration of local civil rights history, prompting the county historical society to formally acknowledge this history as well. The local elementary school re-examined library policies that were promoting income-based disparities. The school district and Sheriff's Department reorganized their data so that neighborhood-specific patterns of student success and arrests were finally shared publicly. These successes were made possible through the steadfast actions of Central-Cocoanut neighbors coming together around the children.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

While the efforts of Central-Cocoanut "neighborkids" and the Sarasota Community Studio have been widely embraced by neighbors, with vocal support from the city mayor, local newspaper editorial staff, and leaders in

various sectors, the efforts are not currently funded sufficiently to realize its full potential. Children and fellow residents of Central-Cocoanut continue to carry out the efforts with volunteer support. The founding co-executive director of Sarasota Community Studio is now working with neighbors in the nearby city of St. Petersburg, Florida to develop a parallel effort that is now receiving financial support. Children in the two neighborhoods are now connected, with some preliminary collaborations forming. As such, sustainability for this approach is emerging.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT REPLICABLE?

These efforts are now serving as the model for similar efforts in the Lake Maggiore Shores neighborhood of St. Petersburg, Florida, with an emphasis on the well-being of babies and very young children. Lake Maggiore Shores is also a predominantly Black neighborhood, where more than 90 percent of residents identify as Black/African American. The learnings and insights from Central-Cocoanut are being applied in order to generate a similar resident-oriented approach that follows the lead of "neighborkids." Children have formed a "Neighborbaby Fan Club" to welcome and champion babies who are born into or move into the neighborhood.

These efforts are a living example of a key point recently made by Principal Associate and CEO of Community Science, Dr. David Chavis on the Community Science blog:

For true collaboration, there must be recognition of equal power among all those at the table, preferably from the very start. Many community organizations have not attained that level of power (or stature) within their community when [a] coalition is formed. Basic power inequities are never resolved until residents are seen as bringing equal or greater value to the table than the larger institutions. Funders and technical assistance providers need to be prepared to assist in this challenging process.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

When community development starts from within, the community's progress is infused with the wisdom of the neighborhood and "neighborkids." When Black residents take the lead in uplifting their community, they counter negative narratives and draw on the strengths and beauty of Black culture. In Sarasota, we are thoughtfully (and playfully) engaging the neighborhood in community transformation with Black children leading the way.

FIGURING IT OUT FOR THE CHILD:

Shifting Conceptions of Roles, Expectations, and Accountability in Unmarried Parents

CHRISTOPHER A. WARREN, PH.D.
Project Coordinator, The "Figuring It Out for the Child" (FIOC) Initiative
Family Study Center at University of South Florida - St. Petersburg

The "Figuring It Out for the Child" (FIOC) initiative is based on the core principle that all parents, including parents outside of the traditional marriage unit, can communicate effectively and work as a team to create an atmosphere that provides their children with a stable foundation that meets their developmental and emotional needs.[1] With the preponderance of recent national family research data focusing on the number of children being born to out-of-wedlock parents, it is critical to investigate the ways in which these families are capable of providing a stable and healthy upbringing for their children.

In St. Petersburg, Florida, FIOC is part of a large-scale clinical trial sponsored by the National Institute of Health (NIH) examining whether or not delivery of a new Focused Coparenting Consultation (FCC) model to unmarried African American parents having their first child together can cultivate coparenting skills and improve later developmental outcomes for their child.[2]

During recruitment and intake phases of the study, virtually *all* couples at some point refer to one another using the ubiquitous term, my "baby momma/baby daddy" (BM/BD). This loaded term that suggests no relationship between the parents is unusually common with unmarried African American couples, and in some ways is the antithesis of coparenting. While coparenting reinforces shared responsibility, "baby momma/baby daddy" behavioral expectations infer distance and disconnection from parental responsibility and accountability as a family unit. Coparenting (not co-parenting) is a term that now exists in the scientific lexicon largely because of the untiring efforts by the study's Principal Investigator, Dr. James McHale, to redefine the concept as a three-person, always triangular concept. Unlike the term "baby momma/baby daddy," the term coparenting

POOR CHILDREN 0-8 YEARS OLD WITH SINGLE/COHABITING PARENT VS. MARRIED PARENTS

RACE	FLORIDA[a]		US[b]	
	% living with Single/ Cohabitating parent	*% living with married parents*	*% living with Single/ Cohabitating parent*	*% living with married parents*
Black	77.60%	18.33%	80.33%	15.16%
White	55.22%	40.08%	55.22%	41.26%
Latino	55.25%	42.35%	56.79%	40.82%

ABOVE POOR CHILDREN 0-8 YEARS OLD WITH SINGLE/COHABITING PARENT VS. MARRIED PARENTS

RACE	FLORIDA		US	
	% living with Single/ Cohabitating parent	*% living with married parents*	*% living with Single/ Cohabitating parent*	*% living with married parents*
Black	45.99%	49.38%	49.59%	45.98%
White	20.28%	76.90%	16.58%	81.73%
Latino	29.70%	68.10%	31.62%	66.05%

[a] U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 2010-2014 State Data*. 2014.
[b] U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey 2014 National Data*. 2014.

REFLECTION: The majority of poor Black children in Florida have parents who are not married, which is consistent with national data.

supports the concept that every child is born into a three-person unit with two parents; and that the adults in this primary triangle **share** responsibility for the child's lifelong health.

Although a handful of studies have begun exploring the potential for coparenting in never-married families, this particular project is notable because all enrolled families—whether receiving the FCC sessions or not—receive "Resource and Referral" services that connect them with assistance. These services are important, because many of the families we serve live at or just above the poverty level. These "Resource and Referral" services include employment assistance, career training, anger management, couples counseling, access to maternity and baby clothes, housing assistance, temporary utility bill and rent assistance, invitations to quarterly Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital Healthy-Start sponsored "Community Baby Shower" events, invitations to community fatherhood support groups, and access to free health screenings.

The financial strain on parents often exacerbates tensions between them. This anxiety frequently leads to fractured parent/child relationships as collateral damage. The study has a dual focus on coparenting skills development and meeting the human needs of each parent through a robust "Resource and Referral" component. Both of these components are designed to honor parents and strengthen them to meet the high standards that all parents strive toward—whether they are coparenting or in a traditional, marriage-based parenting relationship.

COST OF CENTER-BASED CHILD CARE BY FAMILY TYPE

CHILDCARE TYPE	% OF SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY INCOME	% OF MARRIED-COUPLE FAMILY INCOME
Infant Care	35.0%	12.1%
4-year-old Care	30.8%	10.7%
School-aged Care	15.9%	5.5%

REFLECTION: Single parents contribute a significantly higher portion of their income to expenses, such as child care, which can place a greater financial strain on their households.[a]

[a] Child Care Aware® of America, *Parents and the High Cost of Child Care 2015 Report*. http://usa.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Parents-and-the-High-Cost-of-Child-Care-2015-FINAL.pdf.

PROGRAMMATIC EVOLUTION

The FIOC program is one that is decidedly grassroots as it was co-developed, shaped, and vetted by African American community leaders in St. Petersburg, Florida. In partnership with university-based family researchers, these leaders worked together to develop a manualized curriculum that also spoke to the hearts and real-life circumstances of families in the community. The curriculum was initially given life by funding from the Juvenile Welfare Board—a publicly-funded organization with a mission to improve the lives of Pinellas County's children and families through programs, partnerships, and advocacy. Then, the program was piloted in a field trial sponsored by the Brady Education Foundation. This organization promotes collaboration between researchers and educators with a particular focus on the development and evaluation of programs that are strength-based, effective, and sustainable. In the Brady study, FCC was offered to twenty families in the St. Petersburg area, primarily from the city's predominately African American south side.

From 2012-2014, the study tested the efficacy of FCC by working with unmarried expectant parents on the development of conflict resolution techniques and communication skills and followed the families into the early postpartum months after the baby's arrival.[3] Results were striking. Parents considerably reduced their negative and ineffective communication behaviors, mothers reported feeling

less depressed, and both parents positively shifted their perspectives on the importance of the father's engagement in the child's life. Analyses of videotaped interactions of babies playing together with mothers and fathers at three months postpartum revealed family unity and evidence of a blossoming connection between the baby and the father that was wholeheartedly supported by the mother. These powerful outcomes provided the basis for the NIH's decision to dedicate funding to scientifically study FCC in a "randomized clinical trial" (RCT) to compare coparenting outcomes in seventy-five families receiving the FCC intervention at the transition to parenthood with seventy-five families receiving "treatment as usual" available to unmarried parents in the community.

The nature of science stipulates that the efficacy of interventions can only be definitively determined by comparing a treatment group with a control group. This study is no different. At the point of enrollment, families who are referred to FIOC are randomly assigned to one of two groups: 1) an intervention group that is offered the FCC or 2) a control group that is not. Recognizing that all referred families are likely to be in need, Dr. McHale refused to undertake a project in which only half the families would be thoughtfully attended to by the project staff while the rest were given only passing attention. A control group is a risk in any clinical trial but a travesty in a project such as FIOC, which is positioned to meaningfully connect with families in a time of great need and an opportune time in child development. Honoring all required elements of RCT methodology, Dr. McHale assures that the study addressed the question of whether a coparenting intervention affects coparenting while simultaneously providing all families with ongoing access to a "Resource and Referral" Navigator. In their role, the "Resource and Referral" Navigator helps maximize parents' successes in accessing "treatment as usual." The Navigator speaks with every couple to determine what specific social services they might be seeking and helps to connect them with those services in order to assist them in caring for their soon-arriving child. In the new FIOC program, both groups receive the "Resource and Referral" assistance. However, the intervention group is offered FCC as well. This single idea has allowed the assessment of the impact of FCC while bringing a decidedly human element to the research study in order to ensure that *every* family enrolled in FIOC will benefit in a tangible way.

SHIFTING THE PARENTING PARADIGM

It will be several years before results of the RCT are known, but the marriage of the "Resource and Referral" component to the FCC is already yielding powerful anecdotal observations of a socially significant shift amongst parents currently enrolled in the study. When couples meet with the "Resource and Referral" Navigator as a parenting "team," they can identify the individual services one or both of the parents may need and the services that address their needs as a family. Early experiences in the NIH study have revealed that more often than not,

the parents will communicate and collaborate on issues related to the *family unit* prior to seeking individual resources. This revealing outcome would only have been visible in a situation in which the mother and father were treated as a *family* by the professionals working with them. This situation sets a staging ground for successfully shifting towards a paradigm in which each parent puts the needs of the baby and family unit before their own individual needs. Additionally, shifting from a "BM/BD" paradigm to a coparenting paradigm allows both parents to re-humanize each other through the acknowledgement of their value and worth as parents.

LOCAL IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

The University of South Florida-St. Petersburg's base of operations for the FIOC program is located just minutes away from the heart of the target area for the study. The neighborhoods served have the highest concentration of poverty in the city. More than 80 percent of African American children are born out of wedlock and over 25 percent of African American men are unemployed.[4] Of the twenty-seven families enrolled in the NIH study thus far, in year one, fourteen families requested additional support with individual or family counseling; nine fathers sought and received employment support (five having already gained employment and another four currently enrolled in career training programs); three couples decided, after solving their communication issues through the FCC, that they intend to get married; and, ten families have asked how they could recruit other families into the program. In addition, each of the families enrolled in the FCC intervention group spontaneously noted that referring to each other as "BM/BD" now seemed awkward, and any instances when the term surfaced were more out of habit than intent.

The nature of how the study is being implemented has provided a rather intriguing look into how social service providers are poised to respond to the rising number of coparents. In the project's first year, several instances were encountered in which resource agencies were not quite prepared to deal with an unmarried, but unified family unit. The structure for many existing services is based on serving a single mother with an absent father. Only two agencies had existing structures that anticipated and allowed support of families with a nonresidential, noncustodial parent who is fully involved in the child's life. The very notion that a father could be romantically unattached to the mother—but fully engaged in the life of the child and attentive to the mother's well-being—seemed a foreign concept in some instances, leaving families in limbo on how to access services. Adjusting existing service systems to support children and their families, including their mothers *and* fathers, demands a new perspective guided by the coparenting lexicon. As the work inspired by the FIOC project takes further root, it will be worth further investigation and advocacy to encourage widespread restructuring and reimagining of future treatment of "as usual" family services in order to optimally serve children and families who embrace and practice nontraditional—but decidedly triadic—family dynamics.

Adjusting existing service systems to support children and their families, including their mothers and fathers, demands a new perspective guided by the coparenting lexicon.

SECTION 3

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

The educators, families, and community members that serve, uplift, and inspire children must also hold policymakers and community leaders accountable for providing quality education systems and supporting the healthy development of Black children. The essays and Points of Proof in this section offer innovative and strategic policy solutions with a common theme—they are involved in or support grassroots, community-based campaigns to drive change in policy at the systems level. Florida Children's Council highlights how Florida is truly unique as the only state in which residents in each county can vote to set aside public funding for programs that serve children. In their essay, "A Winning Initiative," Diana Ragbeer, M.A. and Christine Selby, M.S. describe the campaign that led voters to approve a property tax increase to create a "funding source dedicated to the well-being of children and families in Miami-Dade County." The Children's Services Council of Broward County collaborates with multiple government agencies at the systems level to engage youth who need a second chance to avoid a criminal record by providing them with wraparound supports and the opportunity to re-engage in their community by playing an active role in their education.

In the final essay of this publication, Huberta Lowman, Ph.D. and Barbara Haile, D.S.W., M.S.W., M.A. elicit a strong call to action: "a call for the restoration of the village" to all members of the Black community to get involved in grassroots advocacy and cultural policy to support all Black children, as written in their essay, "Cultural Policy." This essay identifies a strategy to uplift Black children that incorporates the themes that flow throughout this publication as it affirms our culture, addresses political and economic disenfranchisement, and deeply engages families and communities in the academic and personal success and well-being of Black children.

Point of Proof:

FLORIDA CHILDREN'S COUNCIL

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

The Florida Children's Council is an association of Children's Services Councils (CSC) from across the state of Florida, which promotes best practices and professional standards and influences state policies related to the health, well-being, and education of Florida's children. A CSC is a countywide special district created by ordinance and approved by voters to fund programs and services for children. Florida is the only state with laws empowering a community to do so. The Council focuses on the collective goals of the CSCs by educating policymakers, businesses, and other organizations about the significance of strategic investments and comprehensive system development.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

The Florida Children's Council, a non-profit, serves as the statewide umbrella organization for CSCs. The Council's mission is to promote a broad range of public policy that builds effective primary prevention and early intervention systems and supports Florida's children and families by engaging and enhancing the collective strengths of the individual CSCs of Florida. While many organizations address the needs of children, no other entity provides such an umbrella for leadership, system integration, coordination, and oversight focusing on the status of children and families. Florida's CSCs are located in highly populated and demographically and economically diverse counties, capturing more than 50 percent of Florida's population of young children.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

Florida is home to more than 2.6 million children ages birth through 11 years old. Here, more than 1 million children younger than age 18 live below the federal poverty line. In a state as diverse as Florida, we work on behalf of all children,

There is a great need to address issues specific to racial equity to ensure all policies, programs, and services emanating from the state and community level are reflective of the needs of the entire community with approaches that are inclusive of differing cultures and needs.

but also focus on equity and cultural sensitivity as guiding principles of our work through our CSCs. CSCs are located in counties throughout the state and focus on creating programs and opportunities for children in underprivileged communities. Having local representation to address the specific needs and issues of each community is significant to ensuring change. Trends in many areas show that the rate of negative outcomes for the state's children—especially children of color—are increasing, and the appropriations for programs are decreasing.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

The Florida Children's Council defines success as ensuring children of all ages are healthy, safe, and prepared to learn through programs funded by our member CSCs and facilitated throughout the state. The Council's short-term outcome is to continue to support state and community investments in primary prevention and early intervention programs. Given children have needs regardless of their age, CSCs invest in services for older children as well. The greater outcome is to have programs reach and impact families with children at a younger age, decreasing the number of services they will need as they grow.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

Working on behalf of children, youth, and families can be challenging. Adding to this, there is a great need to address issues specific to racial equity to ensure all policies, programs, and services emanating from the state and community level are

reflective of the needs of the entire community with approaches that are inclusive of differing cultures and needs. To this end, the Council has initiated a series of focused presentations and discussions on racial equity. Earlier this year, we brought together CSCs for an in-depth conversation focused on racial equity, demographics, poverty, and the implications they have for the work of CSCs. These efforts are the beginning of long-term discussions on how our work can be strengthened through collective thinking and informed by grassroots advocacy campaigns taking place in communities throughout Florida. The Council will continue to lead the effort by bringing CSCs and partners together for discussions focused on these issues. This work is deliberate and focused, yet not without challenges. The Florida Children's Council recognizes the importance of these issues, and this effort remains a current and future focus of the Council's work.

Related to public policy efforts, educating and engaging key leaders can be challenging. Florida's term limits result in turnover of legislative leadership and an average of two-year leadership appointments in the Governor's agencies. Turnover in key leadership positions presents implementation challenges as leadership is typically focused on immediate outcomes rather than integrated efforts designed to produce long-term benefits. Additionally, frequent changes in elected officials and appointed leaders result in ever-changing priorities, further complicating efforts to keep leaders' priorities aligned with long-term benefits to communities.

These challenges are offset by consistent and deliberate work focused on the economic benefits to better support children, youth, and families. Using CSCs' efforts as demonstrated models of success provide invaluable proof points for effective delivery systems that best support children and families.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

The funding source for each CSC is determined by the governing structure, independent versus dependent. An independent CSC has voter-approved taxing authority that establishes a dedicated funding source for programs and services benefiting children, youth, and families. This approach works through an annual levy of ad valorem taxes whereby a portion of property taxes fund prevention and early intervention services benefiting children, youth, and families in the community. The approximate average annual cost to the taxpayer is

Our most important takeaway reflects back to our mission: 'invest in primary prevention and early intervention programs.' Early investments provide the highest returns, and local investments achieve effective community buy-in and direct returns to the communities that need services most.

between $25 and $80, depending on the county. With these funds, CSCs are able to support programs that meet the specific needs of the people living in the community.

A dependent CSC performs essentially the same functions as independent CSCs but do not have taxing authority. For dependent CSCs, the funding primarily comes from the county's property tax revenues and falls under the county's annual budget.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT REPLICABLE?

Communities and funders interested in replicating our proven success will not only leverage local dollars to secure millions in state and federal matching money and private donations, but also invest local resources in evidence-based services and supports for children, youth, and families. Creating a statute for CSC development in other states would require a lengthy process; however, the outcomes yielded are well worth the time and effort. Whether in full or in part, implementing the elements of our CSC and Council design would allow communities to maximize local resources; ensure accountability of programs; build strategic partnerships in creating a system of care; and provide training for parents, service providers, community leaders, and policymakers.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

Our most important takeaway reflects back to our mission: "invest in primary prevention and early intervention programs." Early investments provide the highest returns, and local investments achieve effective community buy-in and direct returns to the communities that need services most. Through the collective impact of our CSCs and support grants, the programmatic design of the Florida Children's Council develops and shapes statewide policy, advocates for child and family issues, shares best practices of all initiatives and works to expand services statewide.

Using CSCs' efforts as demonstrated models of success provide invaluable proof points for effective delivery systems that best support children and families.

THE CHILDREN'S TRUST:

A Winning Initiative for All Children in Miami-Dade County

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From the glitzy abundance of South Beach and Brickell Avenue to the grinding challenges of Liberty City, Overtown, and Opa Locka; from the congested heart of downtown Miami to the rural migrant agricultural communities surrounding Homestead and Florida City—this, and more, is Miami-Dade County, Florida, home to 2.5 million residents who have proud roots in a multitude of countries and who speak Spanish, English, and Haitian Creole. Of utmost importance are the children who call Miami-Dade County home. Nearly 550,000 of Miami-Dade residents are between the ages of 0-17. Of those, 28 percent live in families with insufficient means, with disproportionately high numbers of Black (African American and Haitian) children living in poverty, as seen in the data table below.

When called upon to unite for the betterment of its youngest and most vulnerable citizens, Miami-Dade residents have repeatedly risen to the occasion, agreeing in overwhelming numbers and during the height of the nation's recent economic recession, to tax themselves to create and fund hundreds of children's programs. In 2002 and again in 2008, Miami-Dade County residents volunteered to increase their own taxes to better serve their children.

IN MIAMI-DADE COUNTY[a]	ALL CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS	HISPANIC	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	HAITIAN	WHITE, NON-HISPANIC, & OTHER
All Children 0-17	544,914	330,218	92,049	33,826	88,821
% of Children 0-17 by Race/Ethnicity	100%	61%	17%	6%	16%
All Children 0-17 Living in Poverty	151,486	86,452	41,182	13,767	10,085
% of Children 0-17 in Poverty by Race/Ethnicity	100%	57%	27%	9%	7%
% of Children 0-17 in Poverty within each Race/Ethnicity	28%	26%	45%	41%	11%

[a]2010-2012 ACS 3-Year Estimates and Calculations by Trust Staff.

In 2015-16, the Trust invested $9.6 million in early childhood development through the Quality Counts initiative, a child care quality-improvement system aimed at improving the environment of child care centers in Miami-Dade through professional development and a quality rating system. This initiative provided 1,433 hours of quality improvement supports and helped 77 programs achieve accreditation.

Despite daunting statistics, all children living in Miami-Dade have dreams of a bright future and the right to conditions that will allow them to pursue those dreams. This belief is the premise from which The Children's Trust, a funding source dedicated to the well-being of children and families in Miami-Dade County, was born.

CREATION OF THE CHILDREN'S TRUST

Miami-Dade offers a vivid, verifiable example of how a large, multi-cultural community can be galvanized into action on behalf of its children. When called upon to unite for the betterment of its youngest and most vulnerable citizens, Miami-Dade residents have repeatedly risen to the occasion, agreeing in overwhelming numbers and during the height of the nation's recent economic recession, to tax themselves to create and fund hundreds of children's programs. *In 2002 and again in 2008, Miami-Dade County residents volunteered to increase their own taxes to better serve their children.*

In the late 1980s, recognizing that the needs of children in Miami-Dade County far exceeded the resources and support systems available, a group of committed individuals launched a drive to address this problem. Using a Florida statute that allowed for an initiative known as a Children's Services Council, the group advocated for a two-part referendum in 1988. However, while voters overwhelmingly recognized the need to help the county's children, they still declined to fund the initiative through tax revenues.

A decade later, however, David Lawrence, Jr., retired *Miami Herald* publisher, Founding Children's Trust Board Chair, and chair of the late Governor Chile's Blue Ribbon Commission on School Readiness, spearheaded a new initiative. Given a second opportunity and with much more funding, another campaign was launched to convince Miami-Dade voters to approve an independent special district and a dedicated funding source for children.

A WINNING CAMPAIGN

In 1999, a children's summit was held in Miami-Dade to assess the community needs and conditions of its children. The data showed a 9 percent rate of low birthweight babies; a Pre-K enrollment of approximately 8 percent; a high school graduation rate of 25 percent; a teen birthrate at 14 per 1,000; and a high rate of families with children under 18 living in poverty. One of the strongest recommendations was the need for a dedicated source of funding for children's programs by turning the existing Miami-Dade Children's Services Council, which had existed for many years without a dedicated source of funding, into an independent special taxing district. This district would levy property tax dollars and create a long-term, committed source of capital to fund supports for children and families within Miami-Dade County.

The winning initiative turned into a full-fledged campaign that included the creation of a political action committee (PAC), fundraising, regular polling, and solicitation of feedback from similar efforts of the seven other CSCs in Florida.

Pre-campaign polling demonstrated that the tax referendum had a 50 percent chance of passing, and that voters were interested in several conditions, which all boiled down to "trust:"

- The entity needed to be independent from the Board of County Commissioners;
- The tax referendum must have a sunset date when voters will decide whether to continue funding based on the entity's effectiveness in serving Miami-Dade's children; and
- The fund would not supplant existing resources.

Advocates on behalf of Miami-Dade's children launched an impressive campaign engaging the teacher's union and other labor organizations, large congregations, the United Way, the Chambers of Commerce, and child advocacy groups and providers. They raised approximately $1 million of private funding; engaged full-time employees and more than 300 volunteers with additional personnel dedicated to key voting blocks of Cuban, African American, and Jewish communities; and held twenty-three town hall meetings about The Children's Trust. A speakers bureau was deployed and a phone bank reached out to all "super voters" (the 50,000 voters who had voted in the previous five elections). The campaign was highly successful: the vote was 2-1 in favor and The Children's Trust was established in September 2002.

In 2008, pursuant to the five-year sunset provision and despite being at the height of the economic recession, Miami-Dade residents voted to reauthorize The Trust and to once again shoulder a one-half mill ad valorem property tax to fund its operations. This time, the county-wide electoral result: **85.44%** in favor.[1]

A COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND RESULTS

The Children's Trust has now existed for well over a decade as a publicly-funded umbrella organization that serves hundreds of thousands of Miami-Dade children and parents through hundreds of high-quality educational, health, safety, and other programs with a commitment to collaboration, accountability, and results. Trust priority investments have been made through 215 contracts with 128 agencies in the areas of parenting, early childhood development, youth development, health and wellness, family and neighborhood supports, community awareness and advocacy, and program and professional development.

Complementing the Quality Counts initiative with direct service, The Trust invested $2.5 million dollars to provide 1,430 early child care slots. Funding these slots allows parents to work while children foster cognitive, social-emotional, and language development, including early literacy skills.

In 2015-16, the Trust invested $9.6 million in early childhood development through the Quality Counts initiative, a child care quality-improvement system aimed at improving the environment of child care centers in Miami-Dade through professional development and a quality rating system. This initiative provided 1,433 hours of quality improvement supports and helped 77 programs achieve accreditation. Complementing the Quality Counts initiative with direct service, the Trust invested $2.5 million dollars to provide 1,430 early child care slots. Funding these slots allows parents to work while children foster cognitive, social-emotional, and language development, including early literacy skills.

In addition, the Trust invests approximately $1.4 million in early childhood developmental screenings, assessments, and early interventions with the intent of preventing developmental delays. Last year, 723 children were screened and 276 children received intervention programming. Due to these services, fewer children have repeated grades later in their academic career, reducing educational costs to school programs and improving the quality of family relationships.

IMPACT

The Children's Trust has a robust Research and Evaluation Department dedicated to assessing community indicators and outcomes from its programs and services.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—the nation's Report Card on what our students know and can do in basic curriculum subjects and reading assessment—has shown the following improvements for Miami-Dade County's children from 2009 to 2015:

Fourth grade students' basic reading level has improved. The number of Black fourth grade students reading at or above basic level has increased by 10 percent (an increase of 5 percentage points) from 48 to 53 percent while white, non-Hispanic students have remained steady at 86 percent. While not a statistically significant change for the metric, it indicates positive movement in closing the achievement gap.

High school graduation rates for Black ninth grade students completing high school within four years increased by 32 percent (an increase of 17 percentage points) from 53 to 70 percent from 2009 to 2015. This statistic compares favorably with white, non-Hispanic students who improved their graduation rate by 20 percent (an increase of 15 percentage points) from 73 to 88 percent within that same period.

From 2005 to 2014, **Black teen birth rates** dropped by 47 percent in Miami-Dade County. The number of births among 15-19 year old Black teenagers went from 59 to 31 births per 1,000. National data shows that Black teen births have dropped by 41 percent (from 59 to 35 births per 1,000 among 15-19 year old Black teenagers).

The Children's Trust has had a positive impact on many children in Miami-Dade County, particularly those who have needed and benefitted from its programs and services the most: our children of color.

In the years to come, The Trust will continue to fund an expansive and high-quality portfolio of prevention and early intervention programs for all children, because all children are *our* children.

THE CHILDREN'S TRUST – RACE/ETHNICITY OF CHILDREN SERVED BY INITIATIVE, 2013-14

CONTRACT YEAR 2013-14	TOTAL CHILDREN SERVED	HISPANIC	AFRICAN AMERICAN	HAITIAN	WHITE/ OTHER	% HISPANIC	% AFRICAN AMERICAN	% HAITIAN	% WHITE/ OTHER
Early Childhood Development	5,705	4,084	757	405	437	72%	13%	7%	8%
HealthConnect in Our Community	5,448	2,991	552	1,549	332	55%	10%	28%	6%
HealthConnect in Our Schools	78,079	45,092	23,849	4,101	5,037	58%	31%	5%	6%
Out of School	26,678	15,903	8,003	1,587	1,125	60%	30%	6%	4%
Parenting	1,151	510	317	296	28	44%	28%	26%	2%
Resource Network	190	137	26	2	25	72%	14%	1%	13%
Service Partnership	3,715	1,934	1,357	322	95	52%	37%	9%	3%
Youth Development	9,620	4,905	2,698	1,238	734	51%	28%	13%	8%
Grand Total	130,586	75,556	37,559	9,500	7,813	58%	29%	7%	6%
TOTALS (163 contracts)									
In Miami-Dade County[a]									
All Children 0-17	544,914	330,218	92,049	33,826	88,821	61%	17%	6%	16%
All Children 0-17 Living in Poverty	151,486	86,452	41,182	13,767	10,085	57%	27%	9%	7%
# contracts serving 30% or more		117	56	21					
% contracts serving 30% or more		72%	34%	13%					
# contracts serving 50% or more		96	38	11					
% contracts serving 50% or more		59%	23%	7%					

[a]2012-12 American Community Survey 3-year estimates, Tables S0901, S0201 (Haitian ancestry). B17001 (B, H, I) and Calculations by Trust Staff.

Point of Proof:

CHILDREN'S SERVICES COUNCIL OF BROWARD COUNTY

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

Arrest rates for Black youth are disproportionately higher than for white and Hispanic youth, yet nationally, Black youth are diverted at a lower rate than their white counterparts.

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT A "POINT OF PROOF"?

Since 2002, the Children's Services Council (CSC) of Broward County has provided highly structured diversion interventions to youth with low-risk offenses. Arrest rates for Black youth are disproportionately higher than for white and Hispanic youth, yet nationally, Black youth are diverted at a lower rate than their white counterparts.[1] Since 2010, CSC Broward County has served more than 7,600 youth in its programs, and data demonstrates that 56 percent of youth served identified as African American or Black. Of these youth, 86 percent did not acquire a new law violation twelve months following successful completion of the program, demonstrating that services are reducing juvenile delinquency rates in the community and positively impacting the personal lives of the families served.

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT'S ELEVATOR SPEECH?

New Diversion Alternatives for Youth (New DAY) programs incorporate restorative justice interventions, parent and community engagement, case management services, and pro-social activities to ensure youth successfully complete the program and avoid charges on their records. The overarching goals of these programs are to reduce the recidivism rate of low-risk juvenile offenders and to prevent the escalation of crime in our communities. Diverting youth from entering the delinquency system by providing services that will enhance their resiliency and decision-making skills help youth thrive and successfully transition into adulthood without the obstacle of having juvenile criminal records. These services align with CSC Broward County's mission of "enhancing children's lives and empowering them to become responsible and productive adults by allowing them to take

responsibility for their actions while increasing protective factors so that future law violations are less likely."

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THIS PROJECT?

Participant demographics for the most recent completed fiscal year reflect that 56 percent of youth served were between the ages of 16-19 and 41 percent were 13-15 years old. Black youth represented 56 percent of the participants served, white youth represented 37 percent, and 5 percent of youth were multi-racial. Further, 81 percent of participants identified as Non-Hispanic and 19 percent identified as Hispanic. The majority (64 percent) of families served reported a household income of less than $30,000.

HOW DOES THIS PROJECT DEFINE SUCCESS?

Short-term outcomes for this project include the successful completion of all diversion requirements set by the State Attorney's Office, which allows the youth to avoid court and to increase their level of protective factors. Successful completion is defined by youth completing a minimum of 15 (up to 30) community service hours, attending school daily, and addressing their individualized sanctions at their respective programs. In order to successfully complete the program, it is also expected that youth will not obtain any new charges. Longer-term outcomes consist of youth not reoffending for both 6-months and 12-months after successful completion of the program.

With a commitment to ongoing support at a systems level (i.e., funding, provision of technical assistance, ongoing collaboration, data collection, and continuous quality improvement), communities can implement similar programs with similar successes.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN THIS PROJECT IS SUCCESSFUL?

The most significant measure of impact is low levels of recidivism. This has been consistently identified in the past several years. Across all of the funded programs, recidivism rates have averaged approximately 12 percent. This outcome demonstrates that programs are successfully preventing youth from reoffending once they complete services, making a lasting impact on their decision making skills and path towards successful transition into adulthood.

New DAY programs are evaluated by the Research and Evaluation team at CSC Broward County. Research managers thoughtfully select performance measures to evaluate CSC Broward County's programs and services. Data collection is done through a web-based system in which providers enter individual-level data for each participant at required time intervals. The research managers monitor data quality and integrity and work with providers to ensure that tools are being administered appropriately and that the correct data is reported. Providers have access to the juvenile justice database in order to access delinquency records and obtain law violation data for each participant while they are in the program and up to 12-months post completion.

WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

This project is successful because a broad community coalition is working at the systems level. The Broward Diversion Coalition meets on a monthly basis and is

comprised of all diversion service providers, funders and referral sources, such as the State Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, and the Office of Civil Citation. Additionally, programming is successful because a variety of interventions are offered to meet the needs of youth with diverse concerns, including behavioral health issues. When a diversion provider can't offer a specific service, i.e., substance abuse treatment, the provider links the youth to additional resources. Promising and evidence-based practices are utilized to ensure quality programming, including the Restorative Justice Philosophy, Functional Family Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Positive Youth Development activities.

At the program level, there is extensive monitoring and technical assistance provided to each diversion provider. During programmatic monitoring, the provider is evaluated on their service delivery through the review of client files. In addition, program staff members are also observed during service provision. Further, the CSC contract manager and the provider engage in ongoing communication when any questions or concerns arise related to diversion programming.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAS IT FACED?

Systemic changes in the juvenile delinquency system have posed challenges to this project in the past. The first challenge was to establish trust with the State Attorney's Office so that the office would feel comfortable making referrals. This was accomplished by choosing evidenced-based practices that monitored fidelity and demonstrated results. As trust has grown, the State Attorney's Office refers youth with more challenging backgrounds and higher level offenses.

The second challenge occurred several years into the project when law enforcement began issuing notices to appear in court to youth at the time of arrest. This practice led to program youth with court records, which contradicted the purpose of the program. All stakeholders united to resolve the issue by establishing a system of cancellation of notices to appear when youth entered the diversion program, thereby preventing court records.

The third challenge was the implementation of the civil citation state statute (SB 985.12), which provides first-time misdemeanants with a citation instead of an arrest. Getting buy-in from law enforcement to provide youth with civil citations was difficult and the State Attorney's Office was an integral part of achieving trust from law enforcement to provide youth with this new opportunity.

The final challenge was establishing a coordinating body to ensure civil citation referrals were linked to the appropriate services that would meet the unique needs of each youth. The Broward County Commission funded the Office of Civil Citation as the coordinating body.

At a time when disproportionate contact between people of color and the justice system is at the forefront of national conversation, it is important to implement system changes that engage youth and provide them with opportunities to be successful.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT SUSTAINABLE?

CSC Broward County has funded these programs since 2003. As a local government entity, CSC utilizes property taxes to fund this program. In 2003, the community witnessed a high number of youth arrests in Broward County for minor crimes, with Black youth being arrested at disproportionately higher rates than the general population.

The involvement of the State Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, Broward County Courts, Broward County Office of Civil Citation, law enforcement, and community providers demonstrates the community's commitment to the success of this project. Focus groups were conducted with referral sources, diversion providers, and the participating youth and their families prior to releasing the most recent Request For Proposals. These focus groups were conducted to gauge the level of success of current programming and to seek input about the need for additional services for the next iteration of programming.

HOW IS THIS PROJECT REPLICABLE?

The project is replicable through community commitment (including funding) and collaboration. Existing promising and evidence-based practices comprise the core program components. With a commitment to ongoing support at a systems level (i.e., funding, provision of technical assistance, ongoing collaboration, data collection, and continuous quality improvement), communities can implement

similar programs with similar successes. It is also important to acknowledge all youth have unique needs, so service delivery and interventions must be individualized, taking into consideration many factors. Some of these factors include individual support systems, mental health issues, substance use issues, sexual behavioral concerns, and ensuring that linkages to needed resources are available and provided.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

Ongoing community collaboration and commitment to successful outcomes is essential to the success of diversion programming. Therefore, key stakeholders, such as the State Attorney's Office, the Office of the Public Defender, the Office of Civil Citation, and the Department of Juvenile Justice, must be involved in ongoing conversations that reinforce their commitment to diversion programming. At a time when disproportionate contact between people of color and the justice system is at the forefront of national conversation, it is important to implement system changes that engage youth and provide them with opportunities to be successful. Thus, ongoing communication with stakeholders, especially among youth and their families, is an important component of our success.

WHILE BLACK CHILDREN COMPRISE

23% OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL POPULATION IN FLORIDA,

BLACK CHILDREN MAKE UP

40% OF CHILDREN EXPELLED BOTH WITH AND WITHOUT CONTINUING EDUCATION SERVICES.[a]

REFLECTION: Black children disproportionately face harsh discipline at school.

[a] Florida Department of Education. *Student Discipline Data School Year 2014-15*. http://www.fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/edu-info-accountability-services/pk-12-public-school-data-pubs-reports/students.stml.

CULTURAL POLICY:

A Call for Collective Black Community Commitment to the Socialization of the Black Child

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INTRODUCTION

In Florida, not unlike other states within the union, children grow up in rural as well as urban settings that shape the quality of their lives and bend their developmental trajectory towards health or in some cases towards dis-ease and dysfunction. For Florida's Black children, the settings in which they are reared present unique challenges as a result of the cumulative impact of historical racial and gender discrimination and oppression, and the concomitant effects of long-term poverty and deprivation. The percent of Black households living in poverty in Florida is 23.9 percent, compared to 9.8 percent for Caucasians.[1] However, for families that include Black children, the poverty rate is 39 percent, in contrast to 15 percent for those with Caucasian children.[2] An overall poverty rate of 24 percent for families with children in Florida and of 21 percent nationally suggests that the state of Florida's investment in its children is not prioritized and that the United States, as a nation, is failing its children.[3] With high rates of poverty come food insecurity, poor housing stock, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, under-resourced schools, disproportionate rates of crime within the community, and higher morbidity and mortality rates. Children and families living in these environments must literally fight for their survival against monumental odds.

In this essay, we propose the use of cultural policy as a strategy for the collective Afrikan American community to safeguard Black children from the threats posed by white supremacy and ensure their healthy development. (***Note:*** Afrikan is spelled with a "k" here to acknowledge the fact that most Afrikan languages do

NEARLY

33% OF BLACK CHILDREN IN FLORIDA LIVE IN POVERTY

COMPARED TO

24% NATIONALLY.

not include the letter "c.") Cultural policy involves the recalibrating of the norms, values, and expectations for Black children by the Afrikan American community. Taylor et al. define cultural policy as the "values, attitudes, and behaviors promoted by a people sharing common origin, experience, or location."[4] On the other hand, public policy may be defined as "an agreement (formal or informal) about how an institution, governing body, or community will address shared problems or attain shared goals."[5] Cultural policy, in contrast, is designed to empower Afrikan American communities, institutions, and organizations to exert influence over the problems we confront by fostering a sense of agency. Thereby, Afrikan American grassroots organizations, agencies, institutions, and businesses join together to create a holding environment that reflects the standards, values, norms, and behaviors inherent to Afrikan American culture and that promote cultural excellence.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF AFRIKAN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Most (63 percent) Black children in Florida grow up in single-parent households.[6] For 15 percent of Afrikan American families in Florida, the heads of households lack a high school diploma.[7] Labor force participation rates for Afrikan Americans living in Florida stand at 62 percent.[8] The median income for Black families in Florida is $34,563, significantly below the median income of $47,463 for the rest of the state.[9] These statistics underscore the kinds of stressors that many Afrikan American children are coping with and bring with them into the educational setting.

The educational statistics for Black youth in Florida are extremely dismal, with 80 percent of Black fourth graders reading and computing below grade levels.

The construction and adoption of cultural policies by Afrikan American community leaders, scholars, organizations, agencies, institutions, and businesses working collaboratively and cooperatively is offered as a model for organizing the knowledge, skills, resources, and energies of the Afrikan American community around a culturally relevant socialization process for Black children.

Graduation rates for Afrikan Americans in Florida were the lowest for all race/ethnicity groups during the 2014-15 academic year at 68 percent, and only 66 percent of Black graduates completed high school on time.[10] Yet, research undertaken by scholars such as Barbara Sizemore[11] and Asa Hilliard III[12] indicates that poverty does not necessarily determine educational achievement and outcomes. In 2015, the unfortunate response of the Florida State Board of Education to the failures of the Florida educational system was to propose the lowering of educational standards and expectations for Afrikan American youth. In comparison with Asian, Caucasian, and Latina/Latino students, the standards proposed for Afrikan American youth in reading and math were the lowest. The implications of this kind of policy making are far-reaching. Most evident is the continued perpetuation of the myth of Black inferiority, which denies the humanity of Afrikan people and suggests that they are far less capable of academic pursuits than other groups of people.

Florida's dismal educational record with regard to Black children and its disregard for the health and well-being of Afrikan Americans are implicated in the

disproportionate involvement of Black youth in the juvenile justice system as well. In 2012, Florida spent 1.9 times more per prisoner than per student.[13] In 2011, Black youth represented 56 percent of those in residential placements, although Afrikan Americans in total account for only 17 percent of Florida's population.[14] In 2010, 66 percent of the youth held for robbery and 52 percent of those held for weapons offenses were Black youth.[15] It is our contention that these unfavorable statistics are the result of neglect, unjust policies and practices, and discrimination, as well as the collective abandonment of Afrikan American cultural values and absence of control over those institutions that socialize our youth.

CULTURAL POLICY

The construction and adoption of cultural policies by Afrikan American community leaders, scholars, organizations, agencies, institutions, and businesses working collaboratively and cooperatively is offered as a model for organizing the knowledge, skills, resources, and energies of the Afrikan American community around a culturally relevant socialization process for Black children.[16] This model is designed to fill the gap left by the disintegration of Afrikan American neighborhoods that once worked together to protect, nurture, and socialize Black youth. The continued legacy of the *Maafa*[17] (see reference below) has left the Afrikan American community weakened and fragmented by draconian policies that have resulted in the over-incarceration of Black men, women, and youth; political and economic disenfranchisement; miseducation as the standard for education, and other atrocities.

We propose a seven-step process for developing cultural policies.[18] These steps include (1) identifying the cultural policy that will be targeted; (2) developing a marketing plan for the cultural policy; (3) selecting strategies that embrace and encourage the implementation of the identified cultural policies by key players and assigning roles to various sectors of the community; (4) delineating those behaviors that indicate that our children and committed members of the Afrikan American community are engaging in actions compatible with the messages; (5) monitoring our progress with the implementation of the designated strategies; (6) conducting rituals that reinforce a sense of connectedness and commitment as a community to the cultural policies that we create and that acknowledge our successes; and (7) evaluating the effectiveness of our efforts. These steps are recursive and overlapping and should become institutionalized by the community through their adoption by the various leaders, agencies, organizations, institutions, and businesses. An example of this model appears in Table 1.

Cultural policy can serve as a reminder to the Afrikan American community that the socialization of Black children is our collective responsibility (Ujima). It is a call for the restoration of the village that is needed to raise healthy, secure, and well-functioning Black youth.

CONCLUSION

It is imperative that Afrikan Americans direct the socialization process of Black children and youth if they are to exhibit the outcomes that the Afrikan American community desires.[19] Cultural policy can serve as a reminder to the Afrikan American community that the socialization of Black children is our collective responsibility (*Ujima*).[20] It is a call for the restoration of the village that is needed to raise healthy, secure, and well-functioning Black youth. Through the implementation of cultural policies that reflect the cultural excellence inherent in the history, culture, and legacy of Afrikan people, we challenge the feelings of inferiority that imprison many Afrikan Americans, and we tackle the cultural misorientation[21] that undermines our Afrikan self-consciousness.[22] Furthermore, we foster self-determination (*Kujichagulia*), defining ourselves and speaking for ourselves through the establishment of cultural policies that unify us (*Umoja*)[23] around the goal of ensuring cultural socialization that reflects the excellence and potential of Afrikan American youth.

[17] Maafa is a Kiswahili term coined by Dr. Marimba Ani, which represents the Holocaust of the enslavement of Afrikan people, the scattering of Afrikan people throughout the Diaspora, and the continued legacy of racism and oppression that Afrikan people are experiencing.

TABLE 1: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING CULTURAL POLICY

STEPS IN CULTURAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT	CRITICAL QUESTIONS	EXAMPLES	KEY PLAYERS
Identifying a cultural policy/ policies	What messages do we wish to convey to Black children in the areas of education, health, relationships, etc.? What messages do we wish to convey to Black children about who they are, what their possibilities are, their history, etc.?	Black children enjoy reading, writing, solving problems, and engaging in creative activities. Black children are intelligent and gifted. Black children are knowledgeable about the history and achievements of Afrikan people.	
Selecting marketing strategies for the cultural policy	What images, symbols, music, books, films, and other media can best portray the cultural policy?	Adinkra symbols, such as the *Aya*, which symbolizes resourcefulness, hardiness, endurance, perseverance, etc. Young, Gifted, and Black (Song) The Great Debaters (Movie, 2007)	
Implementing the cultural policy	What strategies are needed to implement the cultural policy? Who will implement these strategies?	Parents: Expose children to books about Afrikan/Afrikan American history; view films about Afrikan American history, etc. Educators: Inclusion of courses on Afrikan/ Afrikan American history, in curriculum, etc. CBOs: Establish book clubs; implement programs about Afrikan American history, etc. Business Owners: Post images of Afrikan American heroes/heroines in place of business; play videos/films featuring positive Black images; offer prizes to youth for educational achievements, etc.	Parents Community leaders Afrikan American community-based organizations Social/fraternal organizations Educators Social service agencies Business owners
Delineating behaviors that support the cultural policy	How will we know that key players are implementing the cultural policy?	Parents: Check books out of the library regarding Afrikan American history, etc. Educators: Develop lesson plans that include Afrikan American history, implement programs, etc. CBOs: Implement programs for parents/youth on Afrikan American history; have images of significant historical figures in buildings, etc. Business owners: Offer support/prizes for program implementation to educators, CBOs, etc.	
Monitoring progress	How well are we doing? Do we need to make midcourse adjustments and modifications?	Hold periodic community meetings to evaluate progress.	
Conducting rituals	How do we effectively engage our community in the implementation of the cultural policies that we have established?	Conduct a ritual to celebrate the community coming together to implement cultural policies and publicly acknowledge roles of each player. Conduct a ritual to acknowledge successes of youth, parents, and organizations, in implementing cultural policies.	
Evaluating Outcomes	Did we carry out the strategies that we committed to? How well did we implement these strategies? What are the outcomes that have occurred? What impact has this process had on our youth, families, communities, organizations, etc.?	Hold several community meetings to get community input about the effectiveness of efforts thus far. Compile and analyze objective data collected by various organizations/agencies, etc. Conduct interviews, focus groups, etc.	

FLORIDA POLICY VARIABLES & BENCHMARKS

State spending per child enrolled in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program (2015 Dollars):[1]

$2,304

Total state program enrollment in Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program:[2]

166,522

Total state spending on Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program:[3]

$383,703,444

Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4:[4]

33,596

- Child care centers are required to encourage parent involvement, communicate regularly with parents, allow parents access to the center, and give written policies to parents.[5]

- Sets copayments for child care subsidies at 9% of income for a family of three at 150% FPL.[6]

- State has comprehensive, free-standing standards for social emotional learning at the preschool level but not at the K-12 levels.[7]

- All licensing staff is required to complete a six-hour module addressing infant-toddler development.[8]

- Meets the American Academy of Pediatrics' EPSDT screening recommendations.[9]

- State has not adopted Medicaid Expansion.[10]

- Income eligibility for public health insurance (CHIP) is above 200% of the federal policy level (FPL) for children.[11]

- The state minimum wage is $8.05 per hour.[12]

ENDNOTES

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A note about the use of the words African American and Black

The descriptive terms "Black," "African American" and "culture" are defined and used in so many different ways in social science literature that we believe a note of explanation is in order with respect to their use here.

At the National Black Child Development Institute, we operate from the assumption that race and culture are separate concepts—race being based on skin color and culture being based on socialization. Because the characteristics and trends we are most concerned about in this discussion are both racial and cultural in origin, we use the term "Black" to describe children and families who are both racially Black and of African origin throughout the diaspora. To stay true to the language of other writers, however, African American also appears in their direct quotes and references to their original research, even where their descriptive reference is both racial and cultural.

When, however, we are specifically talking about cultural patterns, we use "African American" to describe learned values, traditions, beliefs and behaviors with specific reference to Black people of African ancestry, recognizing that there is variation between and within groups of specific geographic and historical origin as well as generational variations.

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