



2015 CHAMPION OF CHILDREN REPORT:

Boys of Color, Boys at Risk
Executive Summary



KIRWAN INSTITUTE
for the Study of Race and Ethnicity



INTRODUCTION

The past year has brought national attention to the violence and challenges facing too many young men and boys of color, and their families, in communities across the country. Our national dialogue has provided another opportunity to examine the intersection of race and gender, and how it continues to influence opportunities to succeed.

Understanding the challenges, the resilience of, and opportunities for, our boys of color is necessary to move forward as a united community. We must deal directly with the fact that the outcomes for boys of color have been so dismal for so long, that we have gone through a process of what noted scholar Pedro Noguera refers to as “normalization.” As a society, we’ve grown accustomed to the fact that certain groups will be over-represented in domains we associate with failure (incarceration, unemployment, etc.) and under-represented in domains associated with success.

As a community, we can and must do better. We cannot afford to allow so many of our systems to fail Black and Latino/Hispanic boys, and expect that our future health and well-being as a community will not be jeopardized. In this report, we take the learnings from our last two reports and apply them to boys of color. From our 2013 report, we draw on the importance of neighborhoods of opportunity for success, and the types of structures that foster healthy outcomes for children. From the 2014 report, we bring the understanding of how corrosive toxic stress is for child development and the potential for success in every facet of life.

While the data and research we review this year are challenging, this is also a story of hope. As a community, we have begun the work to put our boys of color on a path to success. We highlight many of the promising programs and interventions which are fostering hope, resiliency and opportunity for boys of color in our community.

Challenge: Prolonged poverty can depress life outcomes

Poverty, and the stress associated with it, has a significant negative effect on mental, emotional and physical health. When it is consistent and unrelenting it becomes toxic, and impairs the cognitive development in children. It is well-documented that children living in poverty are more likely to display delayed cognitive, language, and socio-emotional development.¹ This has far-reaching consequences like lower lifetime earnings, more involvement in crime, and more mental health problems.² Persistent poverty in early childhood is especially problematic, but even transient poverty has been found to have negative mental health consequences. In Franklin County, 25% of our children under 18 live in poverty. For boys of color, this figure is almost 40%. Further, African American families represent approximately half of all TANF, Food Stamps and Medicaid recipients in 2013.³

Challenge: Our neighborhood environments have a powerful effect on educational outcomes

Although poor children of all races suffer when exposed to negative neighborhood conditions, research shows that Black and Latino/Hispanic children are far more likely to live in areas of “high poverty” or “concentrated poverty” (20 or 40 percent or more of the residents live below the poverty line, respectively) than White children. As documented in our 2013 Franklin County Children’s Report, African American children are more likely to live in neighborhoods where poverty rates are double what is found in the typical neighborhoods for White children in the Columbus Metropolitan Statistical Area. We know that prolonged exposure to extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods during childhood negatively impacts cognitive ability and primary and secondary educational outcomes, impeding access to college and economic mobility.⁴ The depths of this crisis, particularly for Black youth, are perhaps best revealed by a 2010 finding that nationally, the average Black male had performed below the basic level in every grade and in every subject on the National Assessment of Education Progress for the past 20 years.⁵

We know that neighborhoods and family environments have powerful effects on educational outcomes, and we need to ensure that both of these environments are equipped with the resources that support and encourage scholastic success and positive life outcomes. Research documents that much of the variation in cognitive skills and behavior can be attributed to family or neighborhood effects, and not in-school dynamics.⁶

Challenge: Implicit racial biases act as invisible barriers to opportunity, and we all have them

Implicit bias refers to attitudes or stereotypes that influence our decisions and behaviors without our conscious awareness. It differs from intentional bias because it is activated involuntarily without our awareness or intentional control⁷ and may even conflict with our explicit or declared beliefs.⁸ Indeed, the vast majority of the information we receive each day is absorbed without us ever being aware. And many of the messages we receive about Black and Latino/

Hispanic boys encompass harmful and pervasive stereotypes. These ubiquitous messages become embedded into our subconscious minds. Even when it is our intention to remain unbiased, we may unknowingly engage in discriminatory behaviors that adversely affect their life outcomes. Thus, these implicit associations work to create invisible, but powerful, barriers to opportunity for boys of color.

Challenge: Discipline, criminalization & the challenges of navigating school systems, perceptions, and biases

We have several decades' worth of research documenting the over-representation of Black and Latino/Hispanic males in the criminal justice system, and in school discipline. Nationally, Black youth are incarcerated at six times the rate of White youth, while Latino/Hispanic youth are incarcerated at double the rate of White youth.⁹ Black students are expelled three times more frequently than White students.¹⁰ Though they made up just 16% of students enrolled in 2011-12, they accounted for 31% of all in-school arrests. And this disparity begins almost immediately.¹¹ In preschool, 48% of preschool children who are suspended more than once are Black.¹²

Research in psychology documents a self-fulfilling expectation of delinquent behavior. Students who are labeled as defiant or problematic "are more likely to internalize these labels and act out in ways that match the expectations that have been set for them...."¹³ As Dr. Pedro Noguera points out, schools most frequently punish the students who have the greatest need: "often it is the needs of students and the inability of the schools to meet those needs that causes them to be disciplined.... Too often schools react to the behavior of children while failing to respond to their unmet needs or the factors responsible for their problematic behavior."¹⁴

The stories we tell ourselves and each other about our young boys of color matter. One study in particular examined the narratives parents, teachers, and Black boys themselves used to describe Black boys as it relates to educational achievement, and the impacts these narratives can have.¹⁵ The researchers found most of the narratives are negative, fatalistic narratives that undermine scholastic success, and reinforce the broader narrative that these boys are beyond hope, or in peril.¹⁶ Given the outcomes in education we see for our Black and Latino/Hispanic male youth, this research suggests that "our collective perceptions of Black boys may keep them from performing at the highest level."¹⁷



Our Opportunity: Creating a “new normal” for our boys of color in Franklin County

This report documents the many challenges facing our young boys of color, challenges that if left unaddressed, imperil their successful entry into adulthood and their ability to be flourishing, productive members of our community. However, it is also clear that such research does not fully capture the experience of boys of color in our community. Indeed, there are contexts in which our young boys of color are thriving, where others have high expectations for them, and the boys themselves feel confident and capable. In this report we also highlight what is essential for creating an environment where boys of color can thrive. Research tells us that taking the following steps as a community can have a tremendous effect on our boys of color:

- ◊ Assuring healthy neighborhoods and supporting resilient families
- ◊ Embracing a new narrative of resilience and high expectations
- ◊ Challenging our implicit biases
- ◊ Repairing the pipeline to educational success

We document some community programs, along with others, that have begun to pave the way to opportunity for boys of color in our community. These critical efforts are working to expand opportunities, provide mentoring and guidance, and reduce barriers to success efforts and will be essential to assuring all children succeed and thrive in our community.

For more information about Champion of Children and to obtain the full report please visit: www.liveunitedcentralohio.org/champion-of-children

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