



CREATING A SOCIAL AGENDA TO SUPPORT EDUCATION REFORM

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INTRODUCTION

Education reform is a hot topic today in America, but the movement is not new. Education reform is tied to compulsory education and the rise of capitalism in democratic societies. Starting with the Progressive Era in the late 1800s until the present, various types of reform have been put on the public agenda, some implemented, and some not. All of the reform efforts had their supporters and their critics.

As one would expect, education reform ideas are not met with unanimity. But prominent reform idea on the table, the unanimous sentiment is the fact that children and youth of America are in need of a change in the mode, scope and direction of their educational experience. How this will be accomplished is the heart of the matter, particularly for children and youth who are members of economically-disadvantaged families.

BACKGROUND

At present, the most prominent reform idea on the table is outcome-based education. Outcome-based education is the standard from which government, businesses, and philanthropies are most heavily engaged.

The U.S. Congress set standards-based national education goals (Goals 2000), many of which were based on the principles of outcome-based education. However, all of the goals were not attained by the year 2000, as was intended. The standards-based reform movement culminated in The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001.¹

Although we have measureable results from NCLB, there is still a need to implement a reform agenda that will address educational challenges confronting children in the 21st century. As such, President Obama announced during his 2011 State of the Union address that his administration will replace the NCLB law, with the Race to the Top (RTT) program.² The centerpiece of the RTT addresses reform in four significant areas:

- Adopting internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding and retaining effective teachers and principals;
- Building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practices; and
- Turning around our lowest-performing schools.³

Finally, there is consensus that reform is needed to ensure that students have fair and substantive opportunity to learn, which is necessary for America to be globally competitive in the 21st century.⁴

¹ Wikipedia the free encyclopedia. Education Reform, p7

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_State_of_the_Union_Address,_President_Barack_Obama

³ The purpose of the RTT program is to spur effective reforms and strategies in states and local districts'- K-12 education. <http://www2.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/07/07242009.html>

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students who attend schools that are located in disinvested communities have a greater diversity of need and require more choices than they are currently offered. These young people often come from families that are affected by addiction and poverty. In many instances, they suffer from underdeveloped intellectual abilities, indifference to good health and cynicism about the values that American society embodies. As such, equitable access to high performing public educational systems can change the future trajectory of historically disadvantaged students.⁵

VISION

This document is designed to foster discussion concerning how CRP, a national management consulting firm, plans to structure a social agenda that focuses on children and youth who are at risk of not meeting the nation's educational reform standards. This population of young people includes economically challenged AFRICAN-AMERICAN⁶ boys and girls. We are also targeting children being raised in families affected by substance abuse or alcohol dependence.

CRP's goal is to support the progress of education reform by providing a social network that will help at-risk students⁷ systemically succeed in education.

PROFILE OF LITERACY AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES

In 1998, the Village Foundation reported that young African-American males had the lowest literacy⁸ scores of any native English-speaking population in the United States.^{9 10} Unfortunately, recent reports suggest that literacy outcomes for young black males have not improved significantly. For example, only 47 percent of African-American males completed high school in school year (SY) 2007-2008¹¹ (see Table

⁴ Schott Foundation for Public Education, *Yes We Can: The 2010 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, 2010, p.13, www.blackboysreport.org

⁵ Schott Foundation for Public Education, *Yes We Can: The 2010 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, presents disparities in educational achievement between black and white males.

⁶ African American, include black males and females, of African decent, who are US citizens.

⁷ Note: For the purposes of this paper, at-risk youth are vulnerable to intersecting problems, including: parents or a parent suffering from addiction; emotional and behavioral disorders associated with addiction; substance abuse; violent and risk taking behaviors; and poor connection to and performance in school. Evelyn Frankford, R. *Changing Service Systems for High-Risk Youth, Using State-Level Strategies*, American Journal of Public Health (April 2007). frankfordconsulting.com/publications.html

⁸ Adults age 16 or older are assessed in three types of literacy (prose, document, and quantitative). Literacy is defined as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *The Condition of Education 2007 (NECS 2007-064)*, **Indicator 18**. nces.ed.gov/fastfacts

⁹ Bobby William Austin, Ph.D, Village Foundation, *African American Males At Highest Risk For Illiteracy*, p3 (1998), discusses educational challenges that confront black males.

¹⁰ The Village Foundation was a national non-profit organization that worked to improve educational and economic opportunities for African-American men and boys. Findings presented by the foundation, were based on results from the 1992 National Assessment of Adult Literacy. <http://nces.ed.gov/p>

¹¹ Schott Foundation For Public Education, *Yes We Can: The 2010 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (2010). p13 www.blackboysreport.org

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1). Other findings show that only 9 percent scored at or above the proficient level in reading. The reading results were based on the 2009, Grade 8, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test¹² (see Table 1).

The graduation rates and achievement levels suggest that states and districts should make targeted investments that will provide core resources necessary for black males to systemically succeed in education.¹³ Additionally, other research suggest that gaps in literacy for African-American males would increase if the definition was expanded to include skills such as computer technology, health knowledge, workplace practices or other advanced literacy requirements.¹⁴

Table I presents African American males' high school graduation rates for SY 2007-2008, showing a significant gap (31 percent) between black and white males. We are also looking at a substantial gap (24 percent) on the NAEP, 2009 Grade 8 Reading Assessment.

Table 1: SY 2007-2008 African American and White Male Graduation Rates and 2009 NAEP Grade 8 Reading Assessment

Table 1	Black Male Students	White Male Students	Gaps
Graduation Rate	47%	78%	31%
% Proficient on NAEP	9%	33%	24%

Source: Schott Foundation for Public Education

Finally, "in an increasingly competitive global economy, the consequences of dropping out of high school are devastating to individuals, communities and our national economy," according to an Urban Institute report, **How Minority Youth are Being Left Behind**.¹⁵ As such, young adults who do not finish high school are more likely to be unemployed than those who complete high school. Employment indicators also suggest that these subgroups of young adults are more likely to receive low-paying jobs and fewer opportunities in a global economy.¹⁶

PROFILE OF LITERACY AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALES

The state of education for African-American females must be understood in a historical context and what we know about their human development and learning. Recent studies involving African-American females suggest that a high percentage of them attend schools in urban districts and their educational mobility is influenced by their race, gender and social economic status.¹⁷ Additionally, standardized tests such as the NAEP, SAT and ACT show that race, ethnicity and socio-economic status are strongly connected to tests scores, with economically challenged African-American and Hispanic females scoring lower than white and Asian-American children.^{18 19}

¹² Ibid. p28, (Schott Foundation For Public Education, 2010)

¹³ Ibid. p15. Graduation rates, disparities between Black males and White males. (Schott Foundation For Public Education)

¹⁴ The Village Foundation explains how literacy affects the economic status of African- American males.

¹⁵ [Gary Orefield](#), [Daniel Losen](#), [Johanna Wald](#), [Christopher B. Swanson](#). Urban Institute, *How Minority Youth Are Being Left Behind by the Graduation Rate Crisis*, <http://www.urban.org/index.cfm>

¹⁶ This graphic highlights the Center on Education and the Workforce projections of jobs and education requirement through 2018. (Schott Foundation, Education, 2010)

¹⁷ Christianne Corbett, Catherine Hill, Ph.D. Adresse St. Rose, American Association of University Women, *Where the Girls Are: The Facts about Gender Equity in Education 2008*, p.28 www.aauw.org/learn/

¹⁸ Ibid.

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For high school completion,²⁰ in 2008, 85 percent of African-American females ages 18-24 had high school diplomas, as compared to 94.9 percent of white and 77.9 percent of Hispanic females, respectively²¹ (see Tables 2 and 3). The following tables illustrate the disparities (i.e., 9 percent gap) between African-American and white females' 2008 high school completion rate. There also appears to be a considerable gap, (i.e., 17 percent) between Hispanic and white females. The differences may relate to Hispanic immigrant status.

Table 2 18-24 Black and White Females' 2008 High School Completion Rate

Table 2	White Women	Black Women	Gaps
Graduation Rate	94.9%	85.0%	9.9%

Source: National Center on Education Statistics

Table 3: 18-24 White and Hispanic Females' 2008 High School Completion Rate

Table 3	White Women	Hispanic Women	Gaps
Graduation Rate	94.9%	77.9 %	17.0%

Source: National Center on Education Statistics

Finally, research involving educational mobility of African-American females is difficult to track, because empirical descriptions of gender issues for them are limited. For instance, a number of studies involving race, ethnicity and traditionally disadvantaged students tend to focus on black males, while gender research may focus on white females.^{22 23}

The lack of gender-specific data is perhaps why more resources and prevention programs are not reaching economically-challenged African-American females, whereas, considerable emphasis have been placed around the educational reform needs of African-American males. As such, we must begin to direct our research and analyses more frequently toward educational and social support issues, that affect at-risk females. Far too many African-American females are subjected to violence, substance use or other co-occurring risky behaviors.

¹⁹ The findings of *Where the Girls Are*, highlight large disparities in educational achievement by race / ethnicity and family income. According to its authors, the availability of more standardized data would provide an even clearer picture of educational effectiveness and progress in the United States, as well as prompt more specific pedagogical and policy solutions aimed at closing the achievement gap." *Christianne Corbett, Catherine Hill, Ph.D. Andresse St. Rose* www.aauw.org › [Learn](#)

²⁰ The status completion rate indicates the percentage of individuals in a given age range (18-24) who are not in high school and who have earned a high school diploma or an alternative credential, irrespective of when the credential was earned.² The rate is calculated using Current Population Survey (CPS), data. It focuses on an overall age group as opposed to individuals in the U.S. school system, so it can be used to study general population issues. <http://nces.ed.gov/p>

²¹ National Center for Education Statistics , <http://nces.ed.gov/p>

²² Encyclopedia of African Americans: p254 <http://book.goo.com/books?...>

²³ The report, *Where the Girls Are* considers gender differences in educational achievement, with attention given to race/ethnicity and family income level. However, the authors acknowledge that despite the vast amount of literature on education, analysis of gender differences *within* racial/ethnic and income group is surprisingly uncommon. For example, the report cited Lubienski's review of mathematics education research from 1982 to 1998, which revealed that only 3 of the 3,011 articles considered ethnicity, class and gender together. The author also noted that even some of the U.S. Department of Education's reports do not disaggregate scores by gender within family income levels or racial /ethnic groups. That being said, understanding disparities by gender / race/ethnicity and income, could benefit all women. p10 www.aauw.org › [Learn](#)

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CHILDREN LIVING IN FAMILIES AFFECTED BY ADDICTION

The children of parents who are substance abusers and alcohol abusive represent a considerable portion of students who are poor and those who live in urban districts. According to data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):

“Alcoholism and drug addiction is taking a toll on the American family. As a result, 8.3 million children in the United States (approximately 11 percent) live with at least one parent who is in need of treatment for alcoholism or alcohol abuse. Countless others are exposed to illegal drug use in the family.”²⁴

The effect that addiction has on these children can impact their ability to learn and participate effectively in a school setting. Children of addiction (or COAs) are at significant greater risk for:

- Mental illness or emotional problems, such as depression or anxiety;
- Physical health problems; and
- Learning problems, including difficulty with cognitive and verbal skills, conceptual reasoning and abstract thinking.²⁵

In addition, “children whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs are almost three times more likely to be verbally, physically or sexually abused, and four times more likely than other children to be neglected, according to the SAMHSA data.²⁶ Scientific evidence also suggests that children of alcoholics are four times more likely than non-COAs to develop alcoholism or other drug problems.”²⁷

Finally, children of addictive parents need more intervention, as well as emotional and behavioral support. Their families also require sociological assistance that will enable them to create a home environment that will help their children achieve a better education.

CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

One of the most difficult aspects of education reform is centered on the educational needs of children who live in poverty. Research has suggested that poverty poses a serious challenge to a child’s ability to succeed in school.²⁸ Additionally, “living in poverty in the early childhood years can lead to lower rates of school completion, while affecting a child’s physical and mental health,” according to a 2010 National Center for Education Statistics study.²⁹ Moreover, growing up in poverty can negatively affect a child’s working memory, due to chronic psychological stress of his or her bordered environment.³⁰

²⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Survey on Drug Use and Health *Children Living with Substance Dependent or Substance-Abusing Parents: 2002 to 2007*, April 14, 2009 <http://oas.samhsa.gov>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Susan Aud , Mary Ann Fox, National Center for Education Statistics, Educational Statistics Services Institute, American Institutes for Research, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*, July 20, 2010, p. 16

²⁹ Ibid. p. 16.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 16.

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Research also suggests that statistical rates for children living in poverty were higher for Blacks (34 percent), American Indians /Alaskan Natives (33 percent), Hispanics (27 percent) and Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders (26 percent). For “children of two or more races, the poverty rate was (18 percent), Asians (11 percent) and whites (10 percent),” according to NCES data.³¹

Finally, children of poverty face a paradox of uncertainty in society. Most distressing is the pervasiveness of their intellectual underdevelopment. As such, our nation must address the extraordinary educational problems that affect our most vulnerable children and youth.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

The effect of family income remains a strong indicator when assessing students’ abilities and achievement levels. Several indicators have shown that children from economically disadvantaged³² families are more likely to score lower on local assessment tests. For example, results of the 2009-2010 District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System (DC-CAS)³³ showed that close to 34 percent of economically disadvantaged students scored at or above the proficient level in reading, and 32.99 percent performed at or above the proficient level in math (see Tables 1 and 2).

Tables 1 and 2 present results of the 2009-2010 District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System (DC-CAS) in reading and mathematics, at grades 3 through 8 and 10.

Table 1: 2009-2010 DC CAS Reading Results

<i>Economic Status</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number in Group</i>	<i>Reading</i>					
			<i># Tested</i>	<i>% Tested</i>	<i>% BB</i>	<i>% Basic</i>	<i>% Prof.</i>	<i>% Adv.</i>
Economically Disadvantaged	2010	22,549	22,128	98.13%	18.04%	43.60%	33.62%	4.75%
	2009	22,805	22,452	98.45%	14.96%	44.73%	36.28%	4.03%
Non-Economically Disadvantaged	2010	9,838	9,488	96.44%	9.85%	29.26%	44.20%	16.68%
	2009	9,921	9,456	95.31%	8.82%	30.92%	46.53%	13.73%

Source: D.C. Office of State Education

³¹ Ibid. p 16

³² Eligibility for free or reduced –price school lunch is a commonly used indicator of family income level. Students from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free lunch. Families with incomes between 131 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced–price school lunch. For the period July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009, for a family of four, 130 percent of the poverty level was \$27, 560, and 185 percent was \$39,220.
<http://www.fnsusda.gov/cnd/lunch/>

³³ The DC-CAS is a standards-based testing program, which means it measures specific skills disregard for each grad by the District of Columbia. The different student groups are identified by Washington, D.C. Public Schools (DCPS). If there are fewer than 10 students in a particular group, results are not reported for that group. The goal is for all students to score at or above the proficient level.

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Table 2: 2009-2010 DC CAS Math Results

<i>Economic Status</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number in Group</i>	<i>Math</i>					
			<i># Tested</i>	<i>% Tested</i>	<i>% BB (1)</i>	<i>% Basic</i>	<i>% Prof.</i>	<i>% Adv.</i>
Economically Disadvantaged	2010	22,549	22,179	98.36%	21.13%	39.36%	32.99%	6.52%
	2009	22,805	22,428	98.35%	21.07%	38.41%	32.23%	8.29%
Non-Economically Disadvantaged	2010	9,838	9,531	96.88%	13.46%	27.56%	40.57%	18.40%
	2009	9,921	9,460	95.35%	13.94%	28.17%	39.34%	18.54%

Source: D.C. Office of State Education

The above results are emblematic of the gaps between success and failure of youth who are poor, in fragile families, in chaotic environments and mired in dysfunctionality and stress. As such, it is clear when viewing the tables, that changes in structure and policy alone will not do the job that is desired in the new reform scenario. What is needed is a defined co-partner to support reform, a co-partner that is geared to social development, which complements and paves the way for education under the reform initiatives.

THE NEED FOR A SOCIAL SUPPORT AGENDA

The development of a social support agenda or safety net for economically challenged African-American boys and girls, and children of addiction is of the utmost importance, if we are to bring these young people to the end statement that we are seeking: A child whose life choices are not truncated by the known risk of poverty and addiction.

IT IS BETTER TO PREVENT THAN TO CURE

This being said, a prevention program must be created that will be a model around which a safety net is created and American youth are supported through the twin difficulties of adolescence and being children of poverty or addiction.

A PILOT PROJECT

CRP is proposing that a pilot project be developed that would be the foundation for a self-sustaining infrastructure to support a safety net for children of poverty and addiction.

This infrastructure would be Web-based and would include faith-based and educational institutions, local government agencies and youth-serving organizations that address the particular behavioral health indicators for children of addiction. The idea is to create a Web site where children can go for help with respect to all of the indicators associated with the issues, in one place. Social workers, pastors, teachers, health professionals and mentors could also use the site to find resources to help youth in a specific predicament. The idea is to create a common network from which those wishing to act as stakeholders, mentors and professionals in the lives of these children can find the necessary tools to begin preventive action, as well as to find what can cure the problem.

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OUTCOME

There is much that has been studied and written around the issues of education, poverty and addiction. This project will synthesize that material and create models of care and concern as well as pathways for youth and parents to use in real time and in everyday life.

- CRP will create a national social education infrastructure.
- The infrastructure will be based on the work coming out of proposed White House Dialogues.
- A national report on the findings proposed by CRP would summarize the dialogues.

The Social Educational Infrastructure

This resource entails the creation of an Internet/Web-based infrastructure that would contain programs and models built around models of prevention and care. This site would allow for the building of learning plans for youth and tool kits for professionals and adult mentors.

Youth would be able to frame personal lifestyle changes as learning plans and together with parents and mentors develop timetables, personal development agendas, and social networks to connect with life coaches who will help guide their development.

White House Dialogues on Social infrastructure

The national White House Dialogues would bring together youth stakeholders, mentors and organizations that can create a sustaining group or network to support this work and to solidify the cross-cutting efforts involved in sustaining prevention and behavioral health efforts. The goal is to secure a continuum of prevention and care that will allow youth in poverty and members of addicted families a childhood that is safe and healthy; one that will also permit them to benefit from the educational process that is set before them.