A Positive Future for Black Boys

BUILDING THE MOVEMENT

Schott | FOUNDATION *for* PUBLIC EDUCATION

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McCormick Tribune Foundation

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The broad distribution of these seminal reports has catalyzed an extraordinary level of action in foundations, organizations, schools, and communities across this country. In many cases, this action has directly involved Black men and youth in efforts to mobilize public will to effect the radical changes necessary to improve educational and life outcomes for themselves, their children, and the children of their communities.

Foreword

Rosa A. Smith, Ph.D., President/CEO of The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2001-2007) has led the foundation and this nation on a journey in which the educational plight of America's African American boys was revealed. She has raised tough questions about the failure of our public schools to educate these children beyond the reach of our hungry prisons and toward a future filled with promise and opportunity for a meaningful and productive life. Churning out a flood of articles published by respected education journals, magazines, and newspapers, including *Education Week, Educational Leadership, Poverty and Race Research Action Council, American School Board Journal, the Boston Globe, the Bay State Banner, The American Prospect,* and *The School Administrator*, Dr. Smith, a former urban school superintendent, has continued to express her moral outrage at the nation's decades-long neglect of its most vulnerable citizens.

Under Smith's leadership, The Schott Foundation commissioned a series of reports on the status of African American male students in America's public education system and convened a series of think tank and working conferences, attended largely by African American education leaders – men and women, including the voices of youth – to more clearly define the problems and possible solutions so as to create *A Positive Future for Black Boys*. The broad distribution of these seminal reports has catalyzed an extraordinary level of action in foundations, organizations, schools, and communities across this country. In many cases, this action has directly involved Black men and youth in efforts to mobilize public will to effect the radical changes necessary to improve educational and life outcomes for themselves, their children, and the children of their communities.

The Haley Farm gathering, on which this publication reports, followed two others that laid the groundwork for furthering Schott's *A Positive Future for Black Boys* initiative. The scenario planning meeting, facilitated by Gerald Harris of the Global Business Network in 2003, was followed by a meeting at the McCormick Tribune Cantigny Conference Center in Chicago in 2004, where participants using the previous scenarios work agreed on a road map for creating *A Positive Future for Black Boys*. At Cantigny, participants identified three key strategies that need to be acted upon to secure the societal and institutional changes necessary to improve educational and life outcomes for Black boys: (1) to focus on public policy to ensure that federal and state education policy decisions serve the interests and needs of Black boys and other vulnerable students; (2) to engage new and broaden existing community efforts to work for positive change on behalf of Black boys; and (3) to build a national, broad-based movement to create public will for change.

Parent and community organizing for school reform have a long history, a lot of which has been researched and is well documented.

At Haley Farm, participants explored the challenges of building a national, grassroots-based movement to generate the public will for change in America's public schools, in particular, focusing on community organizing as the tool for movement building. Parent and community organizing for school reform have a long history, a lot of which has been researched and is well documented. Some of the most recent efforts have included more sophisticated organizing strategies that have brought together large numbers of stakeholders to build relationships and alliances that are being effective at forcing change in schools and school systems by issuing and acting on clear, pointed demands. According to organizing theory, change becomes possible when organizing efforts are successful at changing the balance of political power that enables the inequities to exist in schools that serve low-income children and families. Increasingly, as grassroots leadership is

developed, these organizing efforts will be led by people of color who represent a wide range of ethnic and culturally diverse communities, typically the communities most seriously affected by the inequities in our public education systems.

This report is authored by Rinku Sen, an organizer and journalist, who is the publisher of *ColorLines Magazine* and President/Executive Director of The Applied Research Center, an organization devoted to advancing racial justice through strategic use of research, public policy, advocacy, and journalism. Building upon the extensive documentation of the Haley Farm event captured by consultants Alma Powell, Marie T. Oates, and Michael Holzman, Sen lays out a framework for how stakeholders can begin organizing themselves and their communities to become agents of change for their schools. Guided by examples and worksheets, The Schott Foundation for Public Education encourages readers to use this publication to begin organizing efforts or strengthen existing efforts in their own schools, neighborhoods, and communities.

Creating a national movement for the improvement of America's public schools that results in sustained public will for change is the only way that we will be able to successfully create the future we envision in *A Positive Future for Black Boys*. While Black communities must lead and organize the effort to secure successful educational and life outcomes for their children, all communities must join in the fight to ensure that a high quality public school education becomes the right of all of America's children.

As we carry on the legacy of Dr. Rosa A. Smith's work to ensure that all of our Black boys have the opportunities they need to experience a positive future, The Schott Foundation for Public Education demonstrates its ongoing commitment to this legacy by naming the ultimate indicator of its ten year benchmark for success in 2015 as, "Black male students, the sector that is currently the least well served and most vulnerable, are routinely graduating on par with rising national graduation rates." Schott will be working hard to make sure that this goal becomes a reality and we look forward to doing our part to ensure that a national movement will make it happen.

Lynson Moore Beaulieu

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The Schott Foundation for Public Education

Introduction

The nation increasingly recognizes the growing crisis affecting the life chances of five million Black boys in the United States. Nationwide, schools are graduating a dismal 42% of Black males who enter the 9th grade. Enormous disparities in achievement levels and graduation rates exist regardless of the family's socio-economic levels. Discrimination in school discipline and special education, among other things, has created the kind of dramatically disproportionate statistics that help build the school-to-prison pipeline. For example, Black students comprise only 17% of public school students, but 41% of special education placements, 85% of which are boys. Following this pattern to its logical end, Black men are also overrepresented in the country's criminal justice systems and prison populations.

Since 2002, The Schott Foundation for Public Education has identified Black boys as the canary in the coalmine of public school education. The situation of Black boys sets the floor in public education and indicates the quality of education available to all other groups of students as well. The Foundation operates on the theory that improving educational outcomes for Black boys will also lead to improvements for other groups, which is what Schott found in their search for high schools with exemplary four year graduation rates for African American male students. In the three high schools in Ohio that received The Schott Foundation for Public Education's 1st Annual Achievement Award in 2005, each was found to have outstanding records for generating high levels of achievement for Black boys as well as for all other groups of students in their schools. Further, a study of the New York City high schools with the poorest records for Black boys reveals that those schools also do poorly with all other student groups. As Greg Hodge, a former Board of Education member from Oakland, California, put it, "we were clear that if you did it for Black kids…that all children in the country would benefit from whatever it was that you were trying to do."

The Foundation has undertaken numerous activities to determine the scope of the problem and to engage diverse leaders concerned with this issue in identifying and pursuing potential solutions. In 2003, with initial funding from the WK Kellogg Foundation, Schott invested in a scenario planning process, led by Gerald Harris of the Global Business Network. Scenarios are not predictions or strategies; instead, they are descriptions of different futures specifically designed to highlight the risks and opportunities involved in specific strategic issues. The point is to entertain a number of different possibilities in order to make better-reasoned choices from them.

Convening select stakeholders in Boston and New York City concerned about the status of Black boys in public education, the group set out to identify and think through possible scenarios that would lead to a more strategic approach to problem solving and increase the probability of success. The scenario planning process work was based on two questions: First, "How will the American primary education system evolve over the next 20 years?" followed by a supporting question, "What challenges and opportunities will arise for improving the educational success of Black boys?"

As a result of their exploration of these two questions, participants identified two key drivers for framing the development of their scenarios: 1) shifts in the political will of the dominant culture, and 2) changes in technology and modes of education. These drivers led to the identification of four possible scenarios that allowed participants to fully explore over a period of 20 years into the future very different perspectives on what education in America might mean for Black boys.

In May 2004, with support from the McCormick Tribune Foundation, Schott hosted a two-day follow-up meeting at the Cantigny Conference Center in Chicago, Illinois. Participants included public officials, school administrators, education advocates, and scholars. Again led by Gerald Harris of the Global Business Network, participants continued the scenario-based work, this time moving into a scenario analysis process. This part of the process was designed to allow participants to create a road map for the educational future of Black boys using scenario analysis and the expertise and ideas of the participants. At Cantigny we asked: "How might we leverage synergy of purpose, strategically create scenarios, and build on the rich legacy of 'overcoming' to create, systematically, a better future for Black boys?"

As a result of their work on scenario analysis, Cantigny participants settled on three primary strategies for creating a brighter future for Black boys:

- *Focus on public policy.* As participants identified the critical role of early childhood education, equitable school financing, and the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, they came to agree that many of the changes necessary for improving educational outcomes for Black boys required changing public policy, whether in federal and state legislation or in school-level regulation and practice.

- *Engage new and broaden existing community efforts.* Very simply, participants felt that many more people must get involved in multiple efforts. This certainly includes individuals and families, and also includes local institutions such as faith-based institutions, small businesses and larger corporations, local colleges and universities, and both private and public foundations. Some asserted that many of the best models for improving educational outcomes emerge from civil society—the non-profit organizations that provide needed services in local communities in innovative ways—and that these models could be replicated within the public education system.

- *Build public will for change.* Cantigny participants recognized that there is currently insufficient public pressure to keep the issues of Black boys at the top of the national agenda. They called for a massive public will campaign using effective communications strategies to generate and channel public outrage and action to change the situation.

These three primary strategies comprise mutually reinforcing elements of a larger strategy to improve educational and life outcomes for Black boys.

One year later, The Schott Foundation sponsored a third meeting at the Alex Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee, which the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) bought in 1994 as a site of leadership development and renewal for CDF and their Black Community Crusade to Leave No Child Behind. CDF makes the Haley Farm available to other social justice organizations, particularly those concerned with children, racial justice, and education.

The Haley Farm meeting incorporated the same range of participants and some of the actual participants who had attended the Cantigny conference. This meeting focused more pointedly on a question implied by the three imperatives listed above. Those goals—changing public policy, working directly with communities, and creating a public commitment—seemed to require a new approach. This new approach would need to expand the number of people beyond those already involved in providing services, managing good schools,

or addressing specific policy issues. For all of the elements to come together, The Schott Foundation concluded that we needed to build a movement that would commit itself to the goal of generating a positive future for Black boys.

Building a movement requires a critical first step, which is the building of organizations in which to anchor the movement. Too few community organizations are focused on this question in a way that has actually improved outcomes for Black boys. Too few parents and young Black men are involved in the change efforts. We lack a truly public demand for schools and districts not just to do better, but to ensure that every student, as indicated by the higher performance of Black male students, is able to excel academically and look forward to an educated adulthood and successful life outcomes.

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With this in mind, the Haley Farm gathering was designed to explore the question, "What would it take to build a movement for Black boys and their education?" To help guide the discussion, The Schott Foundation asked long time organizer and writer Rinku Sen to create a template for the meeting based on her book, *Stir It Up: Lessons in Community Organizing and Advocacy*. Highlighting best practices in community organizing, participants were asked to read specific chapters in the book in preparation for the meeting.

The meeting agenda consisted of presentations by participants, large group discussions, and small group explorations of specific questions. Following an initial presentation of a template for organizing, participants, most of whom were not community organizers, grappled with what it would mean to approach this issue with the goal of building community capacity to focus on public policy and institutional practice. While the group acknowledged community organizing as the best way to generate public pressure for states and school districts to implement effective solutions, the notion of building an activist base on this issue presented important challenges. In the next three sections, this report reflects the most promising ideas that emerged during discussions that followed the introduction of the template.

The Template

Sen's template, comprised of four worksheets, can serve as a guide for working through the basic steps of building first a local or regional campaign, which can then be linked to a larger national movement. Using the template, Haley Farm participants worked to define the appropriate constituency as well as promising policies and practices. (Blank worksheet templates can be found in the Resource Section at the end of this report.) These ideas, in addition to others gathered from the successes of schools and districts, created an outline for a unifying platform of policy demands from which the groups could pick and choose. Finally, participants discussed the potential challenges of moving in an activist direction.

Those at this gathering affirmed the need to develop local campaigns as well as to push for greater coordination to generate statewide and national impact. Sen adapted the ideas from community and labor organizing to describe the process by which local organizations can change a specific policy or practice.

An organizing approach to any issue differs from a direct service approach or a pure public policy approach. At its heart, organizing takes up the question of power—who has it, who is shut out from it, how is it being used, and how can we change the relationship between Black boys and the institutions that determine their life chances. Organizing requires involving the people most affected by a particular policy

in identifying a solution and fighting for it. In that way, it does not rely most heavily on experts, technicians, or good-hearted institutional decision-makers. By contrast, in direct service, an organization often identifies the problem and the solution, raises the necessary resources, and provides the needed programs or services without necessarily engaging the local community or the larger institutional systems in the process. Likewise, although public policy advocacy also has the goal of changing the rules ostensibly to make things better, it can take place entirely without the involvement of communities and/or those most affected by the problem.

What follows in **Worksheet #1: Elements of Organizing** is a laying out of the elements of organizing, specifically comparing campaigns to those of movements. The worksheet includes brief explanations in each section. The movement column reveals a distinction between closely managed campaigns with highly centralized decision-making structures, and the characteristics of a social movement. The essential differences are of scale and structure. Campaigns are always very tightly planned, but the activities that characterize movements are often quite spontaneous. While campaigns must always have organizational leadership, movements are more diffuse. The organizations participating in a movement may be less formal and less established. A number of Haley Farm participants had experienced the civil rights movement, and they remembered the ways in which students in one state were inspired to sit in at segregated lunch counters largely by seeing or hearing about another group doing the same thing somewhere else. Over a short period of time, all of these disconnected efforts to desegregate lunch counters saw themselves as part of a larger movement to end Jim Crow laws in the South and win civil rights, including the right to vote, for Black Americans.

Movements emerge when there is a combination of: 1) a constituency making a visible demand on the larger society; 2) an array of public tactics that are easily replicated from place to place, and; 3) a proactive policy demand that expands rights rather than simply defends the constituency from attack. When engaged simultaneously, these actions can lead to a sustained campaign for change.

In the case of seeking better educational and life outcomes for Black boys, two things need to be done. Concerned people must figure out how to build effective local campaigns and then these local campaigns need to be connected to similar efforts in other places. As we prepare to take advantage of a mass movement for improving the life chances for Black boys, we can create friendly conditions to push for the most ambitious possibilities. As you begin work on your own campaign/movement, use Worksheet #1 to document the characteristics of your initiative.

The next section explores in more detail questions about developing a constituency and a set of demands, and reflects the ideas and struggles of Haley Farm participants in imagining and defining these.

Worksheet #1: Elements of Organizing

Elements of Organizing	Campaigns	Movements	Ours
Constituency • The people most directly affected by the problem and the change	Specific characteristics, i.e. Black boys aged 14-19 living in a particular neighborhood Unified, shares the same interests Recruited to be "members"	Broader (Black boys, their families, and their neighbors) Unified Not always "members," may move in and out of organizations	
Decision-making	Centralized in one organizational body, such as a campaign committee or Board of Directors	Decentralized among lots of local organizations and committees May be centralized to determine large scale national action	
Leadership • Reflects the presence of a following, people who are influenced	Many different people	Many at the base, plus a few national figures, often highly visible	
Research • Empirical, data or experiences that reveal a trend • Theoretical, based in ideas about how the system could work	Identifying symptoms and source of a problem Identifying potential solutions and precedents	Points to large-scale system of injustice	
Demands • What you actually want to implement • Work out the specifics before going public	Each campaign has its own set of demands Campaigns have multiple demands: primary (the program you want set up) or procedural (a blue ribbon commission is appointed to examine the problem)	Single non-negotiable goal	
Target • The person who has the power to grant your demands • Always an individual	One primary decision-maker, multiple secondary and tertiary decision-makers Not to be confused with opponents	One primary decision-maker, multiple secondary and tertiary decision-makers	
Tactics • The activities your group uses to achieve its goals	Multiple Escalating	Multiple, but with some prominent tactics used repetitively	
Media • Owned and earned	Local and national	National and international	
Allies	Individuals and organizations	Individuals and organizations	
Timeline	Sustained, broken into phases	Sustained, broken into pha	

Building a Constituency of and for Black Boys

The single most important ingredient in any effective organizing campaign is the constituency. A constituency is always comprised of the people most directly affected by the institutional problems. In this case, the critical and too often ignored constituencies are the young adult Black males themselves, along with their parents, guardians, and other concerned adults who bear the burden of dealing with the failures of public school systems. The organizing process is essentially one of creating a constituency—a group of individuals that exercises political power—out of a random set of individuals who recognize and are seeking to solve a problem.

A constituency is different from a "stakeholder." A stakeholder can be anyone who has an interest in the issue: teachers, school administrators, business leaders, politicians, taxpayers, and so on. But these groups of stakeholders do not suffer the direct effects of a system that fails to educate Black boys. They do not have as much to gain as do Black boys and their families if there are substantial systemic changes, and in fact, some of these stakeholders may perceive a threat in the substantial systemic changes being sought by the constituents. People who are committed to the organizing framework believe that those with the most to gain will drive a campaign to be both more ambitious and more pragmatic than anyone else can make it. In addition, democratic principles require that we involve the people directly affected in institutional decisions that affect their lives.

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Several participants argued for the need to have Black boys themselves contribute to the vision of a high quality education. Tom Payzant, former Boston Public Schools superintendent now teaching at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and Carlton Jenkins, former principal of Linden-McKinley High School in Columbus, Ohio, now at Beloit Memorial High School in Beloit, Wisconsin, both noted the important feedback they got from surveying Black male students directly, including those who had dropped out before graduation. "It's important to talk to out of school youth," said Payzant, "about what led them to drop out of school and how the system does not have the capacity to meet their needs." Both administrators have used that feedback to think through changes and solutions.

The group acknowledged that there has been too little involvement of Black youth in this issue. Some of the gap stems from adults having a paternalistic attitude toward young people; another portion comes from simply not knowing how to involve them. As one participant stated her confusion about this goal, she said, "I just don't think that a five-year-old can or should have to fix his own education. I feel that it's our responsibility as adults to take care of them." But to see all youth as five years old avoids the task of creating mechanisms through which to involve young people in shaping their own education. A fifteen-year-old, for example, can contribute as a full participant to an inclusive political discussion, and such participation is key to his or her personal and leadership development.

Others said that the potential constituency appears uninterested in these issues, or that we've already lost too many Black boys to the streets to get them back. In the words of another participant, "Impoverished

boys often have no understanding of alternatives to the world in which they find themselves, one where the role models are too often ex-felons." That may be true, but it doesn't remove the imperative for community leaders to reach out to those same youth with opportunities to develop and pursue such alternatives. Omowale Moses, Executive Director of The Young People's Project, asserted that, "young Black men want to be noticed and listened to. Why do you think they're standing out on the corner in the open? If we listen, we'll find out what they think needs to happen."

It is challenging to develop a group culture that treats youth and adults as equal participants, while assigning each appropriate roles in the campaign. Greg Hodge, a former school board member from Oakland, California, reflected, "there was a lot of conversation in the Black Community Crusade for Children and in the youth development circles about how will we really support the capacity of the young people as part of this movement, as partners. Not to pat them on the head and say, 'Oh, it's so nice.'" Participants noted that they could learn a great deal from an entire field of political work known as youth organizing and development.

Worksheet #2: Outreach Planning provides templates for thinking through the work of identifying and engaging constituent groups. When we're identifying the constituencies we want to work with, it's important to get as specific as possible about subgroups and characteristics because that information will influence the outreach method and the structure into which people are invited. In listing the kinds of young people who should be enlisted, participants thought of young people in middle and high schools, students at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as well as Black students in mainstream higher education settings, and Black boys and young men involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. As those most likely to be directly impacted by the problem, it would also be important to reach out to mothers, grandmothers, foster, and adoptive parents of Black children, fathers, uncles, brothers, people living and working in urban areas with low performing schools, and leaders in the faith-based community.

Any organization working with a constituency has to have an outreach strategy that involves talking to large numbers of people in order to find potential leaders and members. Outreach might include the broad category of street outreach (a brief conversation about the problems with individuals one meets at school, on the playground, at the park, and so on, that nevertheless gets a name and phone number for follow-up), doorknocking to reach people at home, or house meetings that are organized by campaign members to engage their friends, neighbors, coworkers, and their families. If your constituency is organized in some social network such as a church, then group presentations may make sense. Many groups use a participatory research project to learn more about the issue while they identify potential members. Surveys are the most common tools used to gather information of this sort.

Worksheet #3: Assessment of Potential Allies provides a framework for thinking through your relationship to and any potential work with allies. In identifying a constituency, it is easy to veer off into stakeholder mode. Some of the people we'd like to engage, however, will fall more into the category of allies than constituents. Allies are asked to take part in, but not to control the campaign at the same level as those most affected. Some of the potential ally groups participants identified include: African American teachers, technology experts, civil rights organizations, immigrant rights groups, superintendents, principals, schools for teacher education, elected officials, teacher's unions, mayors, budget analysts, and Black professionals.

The group then must create a structure through which members can plug themselves into research, decision-making, and collective advocacy and action. The structure can be more or less centralized or egalitarian, but it must exist. Structureless groups, which may appear to be very democratic, can experience problems with accountability. In the absence of clear roles and responsibilities, excessive burdens or excessive power often fall to one or two people.

Worksheet #2: Outreach Planning

In each box of the first column, write down the specific constituent you want to reach. Working across the row, note the activity you will use to reach out, where these activities will take place, what you will be asking for, and so on. Each constituency may require multiple activities; answer the questions for each activity across the row. *See page 22 for blank worksheet.*

SAMPLE

Constituent	Activity	Place	Organizer Role	Asking For	Follow Up	Potential Pitfalls & Obstacles	Solutions	Timelines
Parents and Grandparents	Street outreach	Playground Schools Grocery stores	5-10 minute initial conversation	Come to a community or house meeting Give phone number	Reminder call Ask to take role in meeting	At school, people are on their way in or out, must be really quick	Set up personal visit	Daily 3-5 p.m.
	Doorknocking	Home	15 minute conversation	Come to meeting Host house-meeting	Call	Safety concerns Can't get in	Double team	Daily 4-7 p.m.
	House-meetings	Home	30 minute presentation, discussion	Participation—new house meetings, sign on to campaign, make donation/pay dues	Call/personal visit	Host doesn't do necesary work to invite people	Check in with host for meeting	As scheduled

Worksheet #3: Assessment of Potential Allies

Remember that few people get involved out of pure altruism in an issue that doesn't affect them directly. When recruiting allies, it's important to think through their potential self interest, what they can contribute and what rewards they will seek from their involvement in the form of control, credit, money, or other things. In the potential cost category note that some allies may have conflicting interests that you will have to take into account (i.e. teacher's unions that want to limit hours teachers must work when your group is demanding that schools remain open into the evening to provide literacy and tutoring).

List the potential ally group in the first column and work your way across the chart. In the last column decide whether or not you will reach out, and list any conditions for doing so. *See page 23 for blank worksheet.*

SAMPLE

The People	Organization(s)	Self Interest	Contribution	Potential Cost	Reach Out Yes or No
Tobacco companies	Phillip Morris	Appear to be supporting Black community. Sell cigarettes.	Money. Corporate voice.	Public acknowledgement of their support; appears that we endorse smoking.	No, unless they're willing to forego public credit.

Jonah Edelman, Executive Director of Stand for Children, described the structure they use to activate parents around local school issues, which then feeds into a larger structure for changing state policy.

> *"We organize Action Networks at schools where we've got two coordinators. There are at least 20 members composed of people who have signed a pledge, and then we work in a high school cluster. So that's the way to reach a majority of schools in a particular school district. You grow from a base, out. The chapter works on local issues, local campaigns. The Action Team works on the statewide issues. For the outreach, we do one-on-one, face-to-face conversations, presentations, community meetings, and house meetings. And we've just started door-to-door membership canvassing, so people are out there tonight in targeted precincts knocking on doors, recruiting members, and identifying leaders who we then recruit and train into the structure, to form teams."*

In one example of effective organizing, Stand for Children's Nashville, Tennessee chapter won a $32 million increase in school funding. Members sent 4,000 postcards and made hundreds of phone calls to Council members, distributed thousands of yard signs, gave community presentations, and turned out in large numbers to public hearings. At the state level, the Tennessee chapters working together won $25 million in new state funds for pre-k education.

Constituencies can also be identified by geography or demographics. John Beam, Director of the National Center for Schools and Communities, conducted an analysis of schools nationwide that had the highest rates of "drop off," that is, students who do not graduate in four years from 9th grade, regardless of the reason. He found that there are 2,000 schools across the country with a drop off rate of 40% or higher that have at least 300 students. "Since the mid-90s," said Beam, "schools that are losing at least 40% of their kids in the 'drop off' rate have increased by 75%." The important thing from an organizing standpoint, Beam argued, is that these schools are concentrated in a small number of urban districts. Of the 78 schools that lose 70% or more of their students, the vast majority are in six cities: New York, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. "Nationally, of the hundreds of thousands of kids who disappear at the 40% per school level, one in 20 is from a school in just five California cities. One in 10 is from six cities in Texas. We're talking tragedy, but we're also talking incredible opportunities for organizing," he said. Beam encouraged the group to consider some kind of coordinated campaign to deal with the drop off rates, which would require building a constituency particularly in those cities. Organizing a constituency and campaign on that basis would allow us to address repetitive problems and replicate good models.

The key questions about a constituency then, are "Who are they?" and "What do they want?" The only way to discover those answers is to talk with and listen to the members of that constituency.

A movement for Black boys will require the participation of many people, but especially those most directly affected by the problem. All of us will be broadly called a constituency demanding educational change, but if we want Black boys and their families to be at the center of that effort, we need to reach out to them directly and build opportunities for them to lead at every stage of the fight.

Demands

A good organizing campaign also has very clear demands. In crafting proposed solutions, several things are important. First, the solution should be based on our analysis of what has caused the problem. **Worksheet #4: Research** can help your group to work through the details of questions that may be generated as you think about what your demands should be. When we talk about racial disparities in education, for example, we have to show the ways in which policies and practices have shaped those statistics. Without that, people will come up with their own reasons, such as "Black boys really don't want to learn."

Second, our proposals need to include all the details of how the solution would work – the research or other credible basis upon which the solution is based, whether new funding is needed and, if so, where the money would come from, exact language for a new policy, how new teacher training would take place, and so on.

Finally, we need to write into our solutions a monitoring and evaluation system for tracking and measuring the results.

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Above all, it is critical not to make vague requests for change without addressing a broad range of specifics, including those identified above. Often, policies and practices have unintended consequences. For example, we might secure a new policy that in its implementation punishes another group or that actually worsens conditions for the intended beneficiaries.

We can create demands based on great programs and policies that are already working to raise the educational achievement of Black boys. There are dozens of local programs that have had a dramatic effect. Carlton Jenkins, during his tenure as principal of an urban high school in Columbus, Ohio, developed promising practices at the school level. Under Jenkins' leadership, the high school had a counseling group and full-time psychiatrist who worked with family members. An advocate also worked directly in the building.

Jenkins urges more schools to establish practices that create cross-cutting relationships. "In real estate they say, 'Location, location, location'. In education I say, 'Relationship, relationship, relationship.' And if you have that, things are going to happen. But you have to be committed for the long haul." Jenkins also required his staff to conduct home visits. Prior to their high-stakes testing process, administrators teamed up with student advocates to "sit on the porch drinking lemonade with Ms. Howard and all the other neighbors down the street talking about what needed to happen."

Janet E. Jackson, President/CEO of United Way of Central Ohio, described Project Grad, a program of the United Way that pumps an infusion of resources into a high school and its feeder schools. It operates from a comprehensive school reform model to increase high school graduation rates and college admissions and graduation rates. Jackson presented the example of how the program worked in one Columbus high school. "In 1999, there were only 61 students who graduated from Linden-McKinley High School; only 18 had plans to go on to college. Last year (2004) 100 students graduated from Linden-McKinley. Forty were Black male students compared to only 19 Black male students in the graduating class of 1999. Fifty-two African American seniors (including 15 males) earned merit awards valued at $1,000 per college per student, and 60% of the seniors had college plans, up significantly from 1999. If we know that this level of

Worksheet #4: Research

This worksheet is designed to help a group identify the things it needs to know in order to: 1) Reveal racial and gendered disparities in public schools; 2) Tie those disparities to policies and practices; and 3) Craft solutions. List the questions you need to have answered in the first column, then work across the chart to think through where you might get the information, what you intend to do with it, who will be responsible for gathering and analyzing it, any training or support that the team needs, and the products you may design to take the information public.

The chart below includes one full and two partial examples. *See page 24 for blank worksheet.*

Question	Source	Research Format	Why Do We Want It?	Who Does It?	Training Required	Potential Problems	Solutions	Goals/ Timeline
Do local schools discipline Black boys disproportionately?	School	Get data from the school Needs to be disaggregated by race, gender, violation and punishment Create public document	To identify discrimination against Black males in discipline	Research Committee	How the district keeps and reports data If data isn't kept, what to do?	School doesn't keep data or doesn't disaggregate	Conduct survey of White and Black families Create reporting tool to track incidents, compare punishments Develop enough anecdotal evidence to demand new data collection by school	Request data by 3/15 Review data by 3/30
What is the actual discipline policy?	Principals							
How are teachers trained to maintain discipline?	Teachers							

SAMPLE

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investment works to improve outcomes, then we can demand that our districts invest at this level starting with middle schools."

Other participants proposed demands that cut across institutions. Numerous people pointed to the importance of universal pre-kindergarten programs that include comprehensive health screenings. This would require commitments from public health departments as well as education departments. Massachusetts State Senator Dianne Wilkerson said that, "A demand should include support of education from non-education state departments, like health, housing, law enforcement, environmental, etc., and make whatever changes are necessary to facilitate the achievement of quality education for Black boys and other vulnerable populations." These kinds of demands are rooted in the understanding that institutional practices can reinforce or contradict each other, and that those dynamics end up affecting students.

As mentioned above, movement level demands – nationally unifying and focused on expanding rights as opposed to defending against attack – have to be crafted with additional care. The Haley Farm group discussed the possibility of demanding that every state establish a constitutional right to a quality public school education for every child, with the goal of moving toward a federal constitutional amendment. Constitutional amendments are no easy thing to achieve; in their development, they require a level of detail in the legislation that most other policy changes do not, and their standard for passage is higher than for other kinds of legislation, including eventual ratification by three-fourths of all the states. The Haley Farm working group on state and national policy said that, "we must have a bilateral approach that looks at both the federal and state levels, and we should be ready to do battle if the constitutional amendment door opens."

Closing the Achievement Gap

It may be helpful, then, to think of demands at the school, district, and state levels. Below is a comprehensive list of demands the group generated. Many of those at the school level may need to be implemented at the district level in order to benefit more schools and students.

Examples of demands that can be generated at the school level:

- Set policies/goals that are measurable and focused on Black male student on-time graduation with college-level preparation.

- Place youth advocates in every building, the numbers of which are based on the size of the student population.

- Hire parent advocates who are present for the support of parents in every building.

- Require quarterly home visits and weekly phone calls of a constructive nature from teachers and principals to parents of students who are earning less than C average grades or are clearly underperforming even if their grades are on average a C or even better.

- Require monthly reporting to the public on accountability objectives for the success of Black male students.

- Establish, monitor, and achieve hiring goals for African American male and female teachers (and other teachers of color).

- Establish and support school-parent advisory groups.

What they do have in common is a broad, college preparatory curriculum accessible to all students and an emphasis on teacher quality, either through selective hiring or continuous in-service professional development.

A few schools and districts are edging toward closing the achievement gap and are having Black boys graduate at a rate of 75% or higher. This is in marked contrast to the national average of 42%. What can we learn from these schools as we seek solutions?

A quick look at four schools shows that it is possible to raise the graduation rates for Black boys. While none of these schools has closed the achievement gap, most of their Black male students get to grade 12 on time and graduate from high school in the standard four years. These are all large urban high schools with diverse student bodies, typically 30% African American. Per student expenditures in these districts vary from a low of $4,300 in Long Beach, California to over $16,000 in New Rochelle, New York. One school, Montgomery Blair High School in Montgomery County, Maryland (just across the border from the District of Columbia), draws its students from an upper-middle class community; the others draw their students from average or working class communities. Student to teacher ratios vary from a low of 16:1 to a high of 27:1.

What they do have in common is a broad, college preparatory curriculum accessible to all students and an emphasis on teacher quality, either through selective hiring or continuous in-service professional development. Many are moving toward "academy" or "learning community" forms of organization. Discipline policies are neither draconian in application, nor unusually innovative in implementation; however they are frequently characterized as treating students in a "fair" manner. Two schools encourage parent participation, primarily through the traditional route of Parent Teacher Associations.

For an experienced observer of American public schools, these would seem to be typically good schools, all but one of which are in districts where administrators have embraced strategic planning, goal-setting, data-driven decision-making, standards-based curriculum, and a certain amount of shared decision-making. Long Beach and Montgomery County, Maryland are the outstanding examples of this trend, each seeking—and finding—school improvement in a systematic way.

Michael Holzman, Ph.D.

Demands that can be generated at the district level:

- Collect, disaggregate, and disseminate student data by race: All schools report on achievement patterns, graduation numbers/rates, and drop-out numbers/rates disaggregated by race, gender, and school zip code. Disaggregate data to look out for overrepresentation of Black male students in Special Education programs, underrepresentation of students of color in Gifted/Talented programs, and discriminatory implementation of discipline policies.

- Require schools to create supportive professional environments for African American teachers (and other teachers of color) through diversity and career development training opportunities that improve the school's professional climate.

- Require districts to offer college preparatory curricula in all high schools, including a variety of honors and advanced placement courses. In California, only 17% of high schools provide the curriculum required to attend state universities. In Boston, only 2 of 17 high schools provide the chemistry and biology classes needed for college entrance.

- Each school must have an up-to-date, well-resourced working library. In New York City, 418 schools do not have them.

- Commission a study of district progress on successfully educating and graduating Black males ready for college in order to create a sense of urgency. Require annual updates on the study indicators.

- Organize high quality out of school programs to extend learning time and opportunities.

- Allow only in-school suspensions that include a program of continued learning while in suspension.

- Keep schools open into the evening to provide free reading and math tutorial support for students, as well as adult learning opportunities for parents and community members.

- Rescind zero-tolerance policies which disproportionately affect African American male students and replace with more reasonable discipline policies.

Demands that can be generated at the state level:

- Establish legislation for higher education that provides incentive and scholarship dollars for universities to attract, retain, graduate, and successfully license African American teacher candidates (and other teacher candidates of color). Teacher preparation programs should be held accountable for the diversity and quality of the teachers they produce.

- All schools must be funded equitably—45 states have faced or are currently facing school financing lawsuits. Legislatures can closely examine funding formulas to ensure that they are aligned with the goal of closing the achievement gap and pass and fund legislation—including legislation for compensatory funding—as necessary to meet that goal.

- Full-day, high quality universal pre-kindergarten programs that ramp-up by serving special needs and the lowest income children first.

- State boards of education and chief state school officers hold districts accountable for meeting state targets for reducing achievement gaps and closely supervise and provide needed resources to districts that continue to maintain large achievement gaps and reward districts that close their achievement gaps.

- Governors make closing the achievement gap a state policy priority and goal and hold the state department of education accountable for achieving that goal; the state legislature legislates, appropriates, and allocates funding adequate to the task of meeting that goal.

- Schools of education diversify their faculty, improve their curricula for training teachers to work effectively with diverse students, and train teachers and administrators to use data, multiple assessment strategies, and effective partnerships with families to inform their efforts to close the achievement gap from the earliest grades on.

Developing the demand is the part of the process that allows us to imagine and build good schools. Demands need to be very specific, with all of the details of financing, implementation, and evaluation worked out with the constituency's input. We can pose both substantive demands which are the programs and practices we want, or procedural demands, which are usually designed to help all the parties understand the problem better. Procedural demands should always lead to the substantive, and one substantive demand should lead to the next one. It is important to be both ambitious and realistic, with the premium on ambition. Disenfranchised groups are frequently timid about making demands, having been trained over generations to expect less from "the system." The organizer's job is to raise those expectations. Remember that you can always scale back a demand during negotiations, but it is much harder to move the other way.

Challenges and Questions to Resolve

While the group accomplished a great deal over the course of three days of meetings, it held multiple opinions about two issues. The first was whether and in what ways to name Black boys as the primary group of concern in struggles to improve education. The second was how much to rely on and push for government systems to change these educational outcomes.

Although the entire group came together because of each participant's agreement with the notion that there is a crisis in the education of Black male students, there was a split on the question of carrying that analysis into organizing and campaign rhetoric. Those in favor of being explicit in both describing the problem and designing the solution, especially its evaluation measures, felt that if they are not named specifically, the issues that affect them so disproportionately, such as over-identification into special education, will be ignored. After all, systems can improve broadly, while continuing to leave out those at the very bottom. Those who expressed discomfort with being explicit cited their desire to build universally good schools and to reach out to other vulnerable populations such as English Language Learners and Latinos.

In the end, this group settled on "most vulnerable population" language, but it may be helpful to consider this transcript of a small group dialogue:

> **Senator Dianne Wilkerson:** *It is vital to mention Black males, otherwise they will be the last group reached.*

> **Wendy Puriefoy:** *Con. Advances for Black boys should be the evaluation unit.*

> **Sharon Adams-Taylor:** *Our demand has to include Black boys.*

> **David Hornbeck:** *A great school system will automatically produce a great education for Black boys.*

> **Rosa A. Smith:** *Black boys must be the litmus test.*

> **Damon T. Hewitt:** *We need to restructure the education system in a way that does not allow the system to write anyone off. Does this mean to prepare all students for a full post-secondary education?*

> **Wendy Puriefoy and David Hornbeck:** *Express this in terms of standards, accountability, resources. Develop targets, such as legislation, using Black boys as the measure of success. "Black boys" means most vulnerable, some places it will be Latino boys, Hispanic girls.*

> **Senator Dianne Wilkerson:** *It has to be about Black boys—every state has to meet their needs with accountability, effective teaching, and adequate resources.*

> **Damon T. Hewitt:** *Require each state to look at its Black boys and other vulnerable populations and to design an education system that prepares them and all children for post-secondary education, giving them the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully graduate from a four-year college and compete in the global economy.*

Consensus: An education system that prepares all children for post-secondary education, equipping them to compete in a global economy and requiring every state to measure the effect of their efforts on its most vulnerable population.

The Haley Farm group also clearly felt some ambivalence about relying on the "system" vs. relying on Black communities themselves. Several included communities and families in their lists of what had caused the problem. One referred to the breakdown of tight-knit social relationships when she said: "The village is not doing the job it used to do. Community doesn't do the job to treat all the boys in our society equally. People are taking little responsibility for others' children." Communities must create a system which promotes and reinforces consistent, positive expectations and examples of what it is to be a positive Black male.

Participants listed "demands" to make on parents and communities. Omo Moses, of The Young People's Project, asked a series of questions about how we see the root of the problem and how we balance community and systemic responsibility. "Is it the lack of resources? Once we get the resources, then what? Where is the drive for social responsibility and engagement? How do you get at drive, and will, a thirst for education, success, and integrity? With all the resources, if we don't get at that where do we end up? The tendency is to attack the system. When do we as a community ask ourselves the hard questions and address our own baggage? We have internalized our plight so much."

Can children in school now afford to wait for the system to improve, and likewise, can communities by themselves provide all the education children need?

The desire to simply bypass a dysfunctional system and create solutions directly has led many people, including some Haley Farm participants, to develop sophisticated educational programs, ranging from tutoring to the multi-service model of the Harlem Children's Zone, which provides educational, health care, and counseling to families. Even some direct action organizations have added significant social service programs to their strategic roster. ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) organizes thousands of parents in communities across the country to make systemic demands, and it also runs several charter schools in large cities.

Other questions underlie this one about whether the burden is primarily on the community or on the system. Where do the greatest number of resources lie, including human, financial, and material? What should Black families expect back from the larger society to which they have contributed so much? Can children in school now afford to wait for the system to improve, and likewise, can communities by themselves provide all the education children need? How can we design an organizing process that allows communities self-determination and involvement in the implementation and monitoring of a systemic victory? Each community that takes up the issues of Black male students and their education will have to answer those questions for themselves.

Conclusion

This report was designed to spark the thinking of those who wish to build an equitable public education system, one that makes room for parents to be involved at every level of their children's education, and one that provides fair resources to its most vulnerable students. Fair in this case may mean more rather than equal if we are to address the historic lack of resources and the punishment that has been directed toward Black male students in our public education system. None of these fights will be easy to pick or to win, but there are enough encouraging precedents to warrant moving forward. Indeed, there is no other real choice.

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Constituent	Activity	Place	Organizer Role	Asking For	Follow Up	Potential Pitfalls & Obstacles	Solutions	Timelines

Worksheet #2: Outreach Planning

The People	Organization(s)	Self Interest	Contribution	Potential Cost	Reach Out Yes or No

Question	Source	Research Format	Why Do We Want It?	Who Does It?	Training Required	Potential Problems	Solutions	Goals/ Timeline

Worksheet #4: Research

Notes

Vision Statement

The Schott Foundation for Public Education's vision is that all children—especially children that school systems have historically failed, such as poor children and children of color—graduate from excellent and well-resourced public schools capable of college success and full participation in a democratic society.

Mission Statement

The Schott Foundation's mission is to develop and strengthen a broad-based and representative movement to achieve fully funded quality preK-12 public education. Specifically, The Schott Foundation seeks:

• Fully funded quality public schools for all children regardless of their residence

• Universal and accessible, high quality and culturally appropriate early care and education

• Representative public policy leadership, with a focus on cultivating more women and people of color to become decision-makers

• Black boys as the litmus test for schools educating all children well

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Examples of other publications by The Schott Foundation include:

Public Education and Black Male Students: The 2006 State Report Card
June 2006 by Michael Holzman, Ph.D.

Making It Work for Early Education and Out of School Time Professionals
January 2006 The Schott Foundation for Public Education and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay.

Ensuring High Quality Early Education for All Children in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
June 2005. A report of the 2005 Schott Fellows in Early Care and Education.

Black Boys: The Litmus Test for Public School Education
The Schott Foundation for Public Education 2004.

Achieving Gender Equity in Public Education
October 2003. A Schott Foundation Report.

To view all of The Schott Foundation's publications, please visit: www.schottfoundation.org