

# BEYOND PLIGHT: DEFINING PATHWAYS TO OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BLACK MEN AND BOYS ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE



**ABFE**

A PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIP FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES

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# FOREWORD

In 2011, ABFE members asked us to coordinate a network of philanthropic professionals, who are committed to taking a deeper look at Black men and boys and the unique challenges and opportunities we face. We created the Black Male Funders Learning and Action Network (LAN). The overarching goal was to connect foundations in efforts to improve outcomes for Black men and boys. Early in the LANs' history, it identified four key objectives:

- to advance the work on mitigating negative images and portrayals of Black men and boys;
- to cultivate and support emerging leaders in the Black men and boys field;
- to explore the design of a shared measurement system that was asset based and provide opportunities for collective impact and,
- to organize philanthropic resources—both money and human resources—to advance a Black men and boys agenda around the country.

Words always matter and the late visionary, Dori Maynard, of the Maynard Institute, challenged the first objective early on. She expertly countered that society and this network needed to provide accurate narratives about Black males. Accuracy is the key ingredient that mitigates a persistent onslaught of negative imagery and perceptions about Black males. We know, too, that race matters, so viewing this work with a racial equity lens cannot be an optional filter, but serves as the most important one.

The LAN network explored what was taking place with Black males as it convened in places, including: Little Rock; Atlanta; Oakland; Pittsburgh; Jackson, MS; Baltimore; and Washington, DC. Each city offered great work by and for Black males. We learned about the accurate narratives that existed there, but were often untold, even within their communities.

When this work began, Tamir Rice was in preschool and Mike Brown was in middle school. Back then, Eric Gardner and so many other Black people were still breathing. Today, we have come to know their names and others, as if they were our own family. In fact, they were part of the American family, yet some people considered them less than family. Too many names have gained personal and global notoriety. Not from what they accomplished, but from how they died. And, yes, this work also began before and funders inspired America's first Black President, Barack Hussein Obama, urged the nation to be our brother's keepers.

Let this report serve as call to action for funders whose mission statements commit to the underserved. We hope this work will prompt grantmakers to look beyond a 3-5 year grant cycle and imagine optimal opportunities for Black males throughout their life cycle. We cannot afford to paint solutions with a color-blind and issue neutral brush any longer. John Powell's call for targeted universalism deserves more universal practice.

**Beyond Plight: Defining Pathways to Optimal Development for Black Men and Boys across the Life Course** is ABFE's contribution for creating better lives for us, and, by extension, our world. It is a long title, which challenges us to look beyond quick solutions. The observations and recommendations within *Beyond Plight* were based upon input from funders and practitioners who have invested resources and brain power into better outcomes for Black men and boys – some for their entire professional careers. We connected with key thought leaders, whose names you find on page three. These are people who have been committed to this work for some time and even invoke their lived & shared experiences – this isn't theory. It also continues the work of practitioners who looked into the early childhood aspects of optimal development, through our previously released report, titled, "Exceeding Expectations: A Shared Vision for Impact and Definitions of Success for Black Men and Boys".

As soon as this work was completed, it, in some ways, needed an update, because our society continues to evolve. New administrations come into federal, state and local offices and what they bring could advance or stifle this work. New leaders take the helm of service agencies, which have already been failing Black males, females and families for far too long. New crises emerge that challenge the safety net – even with common services we assume will always be there and available – like drinking water (Flint; Corpus Christi). This work isn't exhaustive; as it should continue to evolve to meet the challenges and because best practices can always get better. It is no less important, even as chapters will continue to be added. Most importantly, it cannot be placed on a shelf – this is where the work begins or becomes a spark that reignites current work, that cultivates a deeper commitment to the people it was created to support – Black Men and Boys.

We invite you to review this document as a tool that helps strengthen current strategies – even shift some, as needed. In fact, we insist that it should expand with your help and discovery. We do suggest, however, that investments in shiny new idea need to be cemented into the tenets of this optimal development frame, though. There are core considerations that don't change much in human development, even when nuanced to reflect cultural and environmental conditions. We also invite other funder networks to explore similar strategies in identifying core measures of optimal outcomes for identity groups they support. These issues cannot afford to shift as administrations come and go. We should want optimal development for our own lives and those we say we support. Does your mission statement call for anything less? Let's get to work.



# BACKGROUND: CONSTRUCTING A FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT IN BLACK MEN AND BOYS

In 2013, the Association of Black Foundation Executives' (ABFE) Black Male Funders Learning and Action Network (LAN) began examining the need for a common set of metrics to measure impact in the emerging field of study around Black men and boys. ABFE subsequently commissioned research to create a shared outcomes and indicators framework in order to measure progress on investments in Black male achievement that ABFE could then champion among philanthropic audiences. The framework aims to support the field in a number of strategic ways. Primarily, ABFE aims to:

- Reframe the debate on Black men and boys so that there is a more deliberate focus on achievement, successful pathways and optimal development. That is, ABFE wants to identify and amplify strengths that counter the seeming obsession with deficits—real or perceived—that appear to shape the Black male plight narrative that prevails in research, policy, and practice; and to
- Provide a snapshot of protective factors and associated success indicators and/or outcomes across the critical developmental stages of the life course (early childhood, middle childhood, early adolescence, late adolescence, early adulthood, adulthood).

The framework utilizes a social ecological approach in understanding the various levels of institutions, systems, and relationships that can either positively or negatively influence the lives of young males. These levels include: (1) the systems level – macro-level drivers of disparities embedded in public policy environments and economic/market forces; (2) the community level, which correlates with the people, stakeholders, and institutions in the immediate community; (3) the relationship level, which focuses on the immediate familial and social network of young males; and (4) the individual level – skills and capabilities that need to be strengthened in young males themselves. Having a positive impact on Black men and boys suggests that constituencies across these various domains possess a non deficit-focused orientation, a shared vision of success at each stage in the life course,

alignment of strategic developmental interventions, and shared quantitative and qualitative outcome measures.

Part of the charge given the group was to identify and assess protective factors found in research literature with a particular lens for those factors that are grounded uniquely in African American culture and communities. Drawing on John Powell's frame, ABFE's Learning and Action Network wanted to see more of the "targeted" in "targeted universalism" so that the field is clearer about how to design and measure investments for Black males over-and-above early childhood/youth development investments designed for the general public. Said differently by noted journalist and author, Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his critique of a 2016 presidential candidate:

"(his) basic approach is to ameliorate the effects of racism through broad, mostly class-based policies—doubling the minimum wage, offering single-payer health-care, delivering free education. This is the same 'a rising tide lifts all boats' thinking that has dominated Democratic, anti-racist policy for a generation. Treating a racist injury solely with class-based remedies is like treating a gunshot wound solely with bandages. The bandages help, but will not suffice."

A key outcome of the concluding phase of this research was to ensure that the framework reflected the deep knowledge and experiences of leaders who've been dedicated to improving the lives of Black men and boys. A collective of thought leaders including academics, advocates, and experienced practitioners who have researched and/or implemented male-focused programs gathered in North Carolina in the summer of 2014 and 2016 to help shape and refine definitions of success and optimal development across the life course. This group also critiqued and vetted protective factors, strategies, and associated measures. Based on their feedback, the framework was revised in a format that the authors hope helps to guide philanthropic investments in Black men and boys.



June 2016 Gathering of Thought Leaders from the Black Men and Boys Field

# MOVING BEYOND THE PLIGHT NARRATIVE

Historically, plight has primarily framed the societal and philanthropic investments in Black men and boys. Research over past decades has documented disparate results in school readiness, education, health, employment and other life outcomes. Media-driven narratives implicitly and explicitly describe Black males as dangerous (e.g. thug), lazy (e.g. dead-beat dad), or in other negative or pejorative terms. These words and images have reinforced and amplified the perceptions of inferiority, difference, pathology, and deficit. Furthermore, research agendas

Fortunately, there is an emerging consensus around the limitations of plight-driven intervention models. While many Black boys grow up in conditions where they face toxic stress and adversity, often driven by poverty, racism, and other debilitating conditions, there are many who succeed in spite of the adversity they face. Studying the subtleties that allow these resilient boys to thrive in the face of systemic inequities can lead to alternative thinking and new approaches in isolating the factors that can lead to positive outcomes even in difficult

**Figure I: The History and Legacy of Structural Racism**

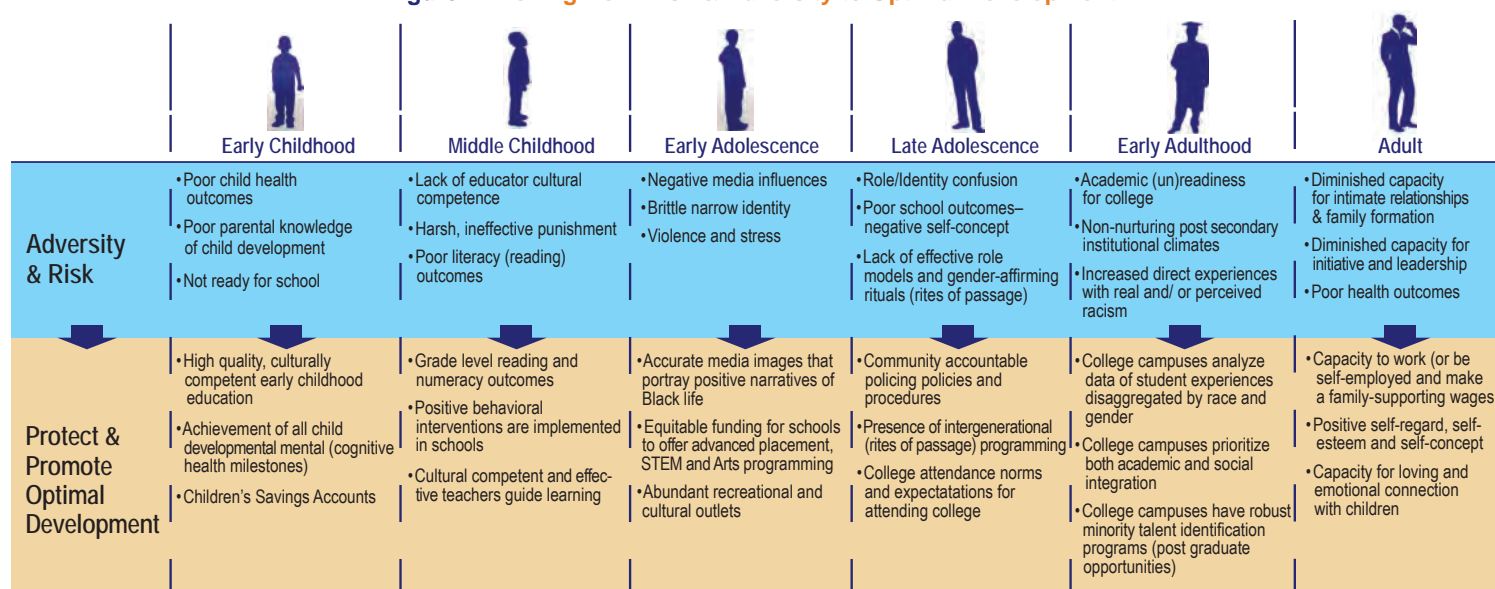
Contemporary challenges of today have their roots in a number of historical antecedents of racial discrimination and exclusion and whose legacy still impacts Black communities today.

- **The Homestead Act of 1862** allowed white settlers access and ownership of public land was denied to the then 4 million who then lived as slaves (American dream, sherraden).
- The **GI Bill of 1944** catalyzed the post World War II suburban land rush but whose housing benefits were denied to Black veterans.
- Enacted after Reconstruction, **Jim Crows** mandated segregation in transportation, schools, public places as well as, restrooms, restaurants, hotels and other establishments through 1965.
- **Redlining** referred to the private banking practice of denying investments and mortgage capital to minority communities resulting in massive disinvestment and neglect. These practices spread to other areas of household finance including credit cards, insurance and even student loans effectively denying Black communities means to acquire and build wealth and assets.
- The **Violent Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994**, dramatically expanded the reach of policing and the criminal justice apparatus into Black communities. Hallmarks of this law included “three strikes” and the deployment of 100,000 more cops. This law resulted in a dramatic increase in incarceration rates and damaged the employment prospects of substantial numbers of Black men.

have been devoted to the collection and interpretation of data that labels Black males as endangered, underachieving, at-risk, or vulnerable. Philanthropic and government organizations have responded to this narrow perspective by directing streams of funding into programs and policies that intervene on the individual level alone and not the structural, systemic, and historical factors that created the disadvantage. The plight narrative rarely, if ever, acknowledges the tremendous contributions, successes, and accomplishments of many Black males, their families, and communities despite the racial injustices over generations. (See Figure I. The History and Legacy of Structural Racism)

conditions. As opposed to funding interventions that address adversity and risk, this orientation allows for the strategic identification and application of protective factors (that is, conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that, when present, promote well-being and reduce the risk for negative outcomes). Identifying those sets of age- and developmentally-appropriate and culturally relevant protective factors will begin to illuminate a pathways to optimal development for Black males. (See Figure II. Moving from Risk and Adversity to Optimal Development)

**Figure II: Moving from Risk & Adversity to Optimal Development**



# LEVERAGING PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The identification and enhancement of protective factors offers a way forward by increasing resilience in the short-term and by contributing to the development of skills, personal characteristics, knowledge, relationships, and opportunities that offset risk exposure and contribute to improved well-being and positive outcomes in the long-term. Protective factors can promote resilience among Black boys by enabling them to maintain healthy functioning in spite of systems and policies that com-

promise their wellbeing (See Figure III Protective Factor Descriptions).

Working in collaboration with members of the ABFE LAN, we have identified five primary protective factors: a positive economic environment, culturally responsive service systems, a positive community environment, caregiver competencies, and positive social networks. Each factor is discussed in further detail below.

Figure III: Protective Factor Descriptions



## POSITIVE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Black families have the right to reside in communities that have a robust economic and community infrastructure that includes: decent and affordable housing, jobs that pay family-supporting wages, access to healthy food options, equitable school funding formulas and fair (i.e. non-predatory) financial services. Families in such communities are more likely to provide stable, safe, and nurturing environments in which to raise healthy Black boys.

**ATTRIBUTES:** *Equitable development and tax policies, stable and decent housing, employment opportunities, family-supporting wages with benefits, fair and affordable financial services, affordable goods and services, community (entrepreneurial) ownership, and wealth-building opportunities.*



## CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICE SYSTEMS

Black men and boys have the right to live in a society where the systems and institutions that serve them treat them with dignity and respect rather than with malice and prejudice. These systems should abide by fundamental principles of equity and inclusion and their leaders and representatives should engage Black men and boys in ways that are non-judgmental and culturally competent.

**ATTRIBUTES:** *Culturally appropriate staff who possess strong relational skills such as caring and empathy, culturally appropriate, relevant, and accurate curriculum for training and professional development purposes, utilization of media and materials that reflect positive images of Black males, culture of data analysis and accountability that periodically and systematically highlights disparities.*



## POSITIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Black boys who find themselves in communities with a strong pro-social and culturally affirming orientation (e.g., strong mediating and community institutions, caring adults and mentors, after school programs) are more likely to experience successful life outcomes than those who live in communities with a more punitive policy orientation (e.g., extreme disciplinary sanctions often accelerate public policy driven “pipeline from school to prison” orientation (Miller, 1996).

**ATTRIBUTES:** *Collective efficacy, caring community, informal social control, community vigilance, faith and/or spiritual organizations, shared perception of safe continuous community, safe spaces and activities, recreational opportunities, and neighborhood cohesion.*



## CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES

Parental and caregiver competencies are significant predictors of a child’s future capabilities, including cognitive and socio-emotional abilities, as well as a variety of psychological and physical outcomes in children later in the life course. A large body of research suggests that the absence of supportive family environments harms these outcomes.

**ATTRIBUTES:** *Emotional commitment to child, knowledge of Black child development context, maternal/paternal closeness, stable home, clear standards, discipline consistency, parental functioning, child advocacy skills, presence of co-parenting relationships, engagement with racial identity exploration.*



## POSITIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS

Black boys who are anchored in a dense network of social capital resources are more likely to experience successful educational outcomes than those who are not (Fernandez-Kelly, 1994; Johnson, Oliver, & Bobo, 1994). Social capital can be broadly defined as the contacts through which youth maintain their social identity and receive emotional support, material aid and services, information, and new social contacts. Such support can be obtained from individuals (e.g. immediate and extended family members, friends, co-ethnics, etc.) and/or institutions (e.g., churches, community-based organizations, etc.) (Coleman, 1988).

**ATTRIBUTES:** *Culturally elastic (e.g. code-switching) social skills, extended family/fictive kin networks, positive peer norms, friendship and social support networks, presence of mentors and sponsors.*



# HELPING BLACK BOYS DREAM: FORGING A PATH TO OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Pam Bailey, a NeighborWorks blogger, in explaining part of the premise of Ta-Nehisi Coates' must read book, *Between the World and Me*, writes that:

“Coates writes about growing up in West Baltimore, the home of Freddie Gray, the young black man whose death while in police custody helped spark the uprising that gained national attention. Based on what he saw on TV, he knew there was a world other than his own, one where he didn't have to be on guard and pretend he was tough all the time, which he called ‘the Dream.’”<sup>3</sup>

Mitigating risk and protecting Black boys from harm is an important but insufficient goal. Communities should not wait to react to the next Freddie Gray before they collectively begin to reimagine and proactively seek to create the environments that support their optimal development. Consistent with this definition, we define optimal development as the communities' right to self-determine the definition, determinants, assets, resources, outcomes, and conditions with which to produce a state of complete health and well-being from their diverse cultural worldviews, historical context, and aspirations. This right to self-determine informs a vision for Black boys and men across the life course and requires that communities abandon notions of deficit, pathology, and inferiority in order to imagine the ideal in context, conditions, and outcomes.

Unlike the constrained funding of public systems that will demand race neutral strategies and interventions, philanthropy, if it is courageous, can catalyze the types of investments that create the culturally grounded, safe environments where Black boys can be loved, protected, respected and they can trust that their dreams can become reality. We assert that a philanthropic narrative that asks audiences to define optimal development directly challenges the typical funder outcome guidelines that often state a preference for the absence of an undesired behavior rather than the presence of a desired condition. This shift in approach requires thinking critically, strategically and longitudinally about the “societal inputs” across the life course that will remake and enhance the environments that facilitate and fulfill the dreams of Black boys so that they prosper and thrive as Black men.

Philanthropy must lead on this critical issue. And it must lead with an orientation that believes that change will not come only from high-quality mentoring programs or investments in early childhood development alone. These types of time-limited, isolated programmatic interventions at specific points in the life course will be insufficient in producing the outcomes we seek. A collective impact and responsibility should be applied and placed in contrast to “isolated impact,” where organizations primarily work alone to, at least, ameliorate certain symptoms of social disorganization and, at most, attempt to solve social problems. Collective impact moves away from this, arguing that organizations should form internal and external cross-sector collaborative partnerships in order to make meaningful and sustainable progress on social issues. Moving forward, we hope that this body of work serves as a blueprint for the strategic alignment of resources based on the assertion that collective impact and responsibility promotes a set of patient and long-term investments in culturally competent programs and policies that are sustained across the life course.

Philanthropy can lead by modeling this catalytic framework for the collaborative partnerships and strategic investments that are needed to

support boys as they grow and develop into healthy, globally competitive men at the end of the pipeline. This process starts with funders mapping their giving patterns and reassessing their outcomes frameworks. It will require candid conversations with grantees and the Black men and boys they serve. Lastly, it will also require a commitment to aligning and building a set of durable philanthropic partnerships—locally and nationally—that can successfully leverage and influence public sector investments to create the programs and policies needed to produce positive outcomes.

Elements of collective impact/responsibility on behalf of Black men and boys should include the following:

- 1) A **common agenda** that embraces protective factors and articulates a vision for optimal development and success for Black males at specific points and across the life course;
- 2) A **shared system of measurement** with clearly articulated outcomes and indicators across the life course;
- 3) **Continuous communication** that disrupts (where needed) and reinforces an accurate narrative for Black men and boys;
- 4) **Mutually reinforcing activities** across systemic, community and familial actors that both protect (mitigate against risk and adversity) and promote (healthy and optimal development);
- 5) **Backbone support organizations**, that facilitate coordination and communication across the various philanthropic and public and private entities in the Boys and Men of Color (BMOC) space guiding the vision (the dreams of Black boys), building public will, advancing policy, mobilizing strategic funding.

If executed successfully, these efforts can help fuel investments that identify Black men and boys not as data points that society needs to save or fix, but can instead encourage investments that facilitate specific actions that nurture, protect and support our sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers.



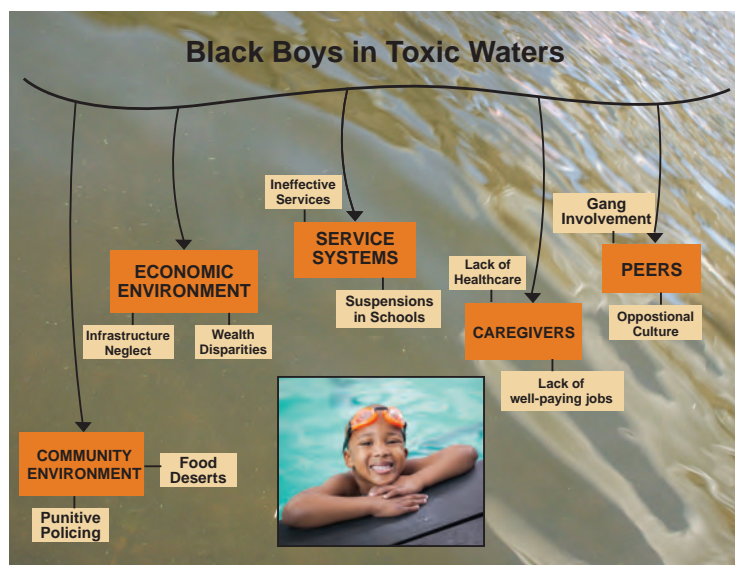
<sup>3</sup>Debating Diversity: delving deeper than definitions 1/29/16

# SOMETHING'S IN THE WATER: RACE, PLACE AND THE OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

The environment or context in which Black boys grow and develop matters greatly to their overall well-being. By context, we mean family, extended family, friend, and peer groups, neighborhood or community institutions, and the social, economic and political systems that influence their day-to-day lives. Context can either support and promote healthy development or hinder and inhibit it. As an analogy, let's think about context as the "water" and Black boys as "fish." Fish must navigate or swim through water that is either polluted, toxic and dangerous and unhealthy, or water that is full of nutrients and promotes and creates nurturing environments that support healthy growth and development.

Today, many Black families reside in urban and rural communities defined by concentrated poverty and racial segregation. Poverty can have toxic and harmful effects on normal growth and development. Poor families generally experience more chronic, uncontrollable, and adverse life experiences. While poverty is a predictor of potential mental health challenges and stress in households, it can also indicate lower levels of education, unemployment, food deserts, and over-policing in the broader community (See Figure IV. Black boys in Toxic Waters). Moreover, poverty is compounded by a set of service systems and

**Figure IV: Black Boys in Toxic Waters**



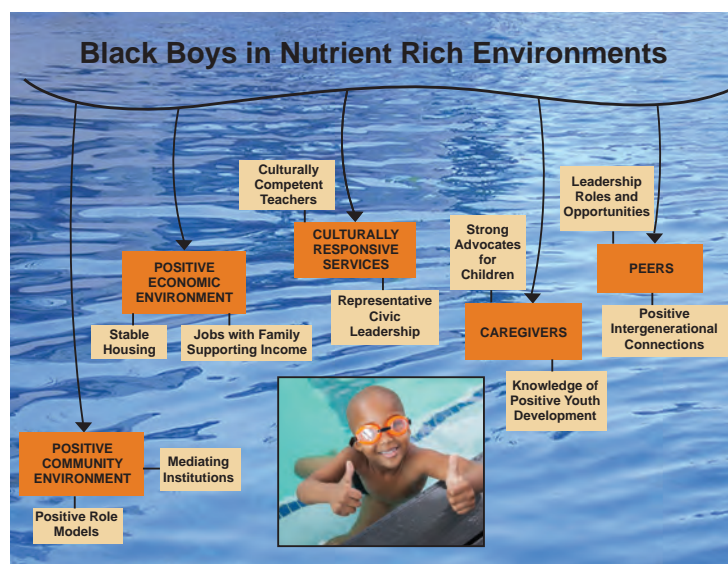
institutions that are less than supportive, if not openly hostile to Black males. The unchecked implicit and explicit bias becomes evident in inaccurate media portrayals of Black males, unfair stereotypes of young Black boys held by teachers in classrooms, perceptions by police officers that most Black men (and even boys) are dangerous and violent and therefore must be confronted with aggressive police tactics, or employers in the labor market who exclude job applications that have ethnic names.

In this context, Black boys (our fish) are growing up in water that is toxic and detrimental to their health. Unfortunately, the common

societal response is to blame the fish for their condition and not the toxic water in which they have to swim. If you reflect back on the British Petroleum Horizon Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010, the media aftermath did not blame the fish and fowl for their deleterious conditions. The media and general public rightfully blamed British Petroleum, they blamed the federal government for not responding quickly and adequately or for not providing proper oversight and regulation in the first place. Yet, the societal tendency is not to acknowledge the structural injustices, both historical and contemporary, that continue to pollute the water that Black boys have to navigate and swim. Instead, the tendency is to blame Black males for their condition and to label them as lazy, inarticulate, uneducable, un-trainable, and most importantly, as dangerous—and, therefore, unworthy of the substantial investments of time, energy and resources that are needed in order to improve the environments surrounding them.

Our frame of optimal development, therefore, suggests that we need to work to counteract the effects of the toxins in the water. To have a collective impact, there must be a collective responsibility for cleaning the toxins in the water. And distinct from previous iterations of collective impact, our approach is intentionally inclusive of youth, parents and caregivers, and all those institutions and systems that influence or directly impact the lives of Black boys. In this model of collective impact and responsibility, participants see themselves as contributing to the desired outcomes as shareholders, not stakeholders. As shareholders, they must lead a proactive dialogue that reimagines the ecology of their communities and identifies strategies and interventions across the life course that protects Black boys from harm and simultaneously seeks to promote healthy, safe and nurturing environments where Black boys can thrive and not just survive. (See Figure V. Black Boys in Nutrient-Rich Waters).

**Figure V: Black Boys in Nutrient Rich Waters**



<sup>4</sup>McKinney, M.H., Stevenson H., Winn DM (2013). Protection, Affection, Connection and Correction: A Strength-Based Approach to Supporting Boys and Men of Color (Biloxi MS). WK Kellogg Foundation Young Males of Color Conference



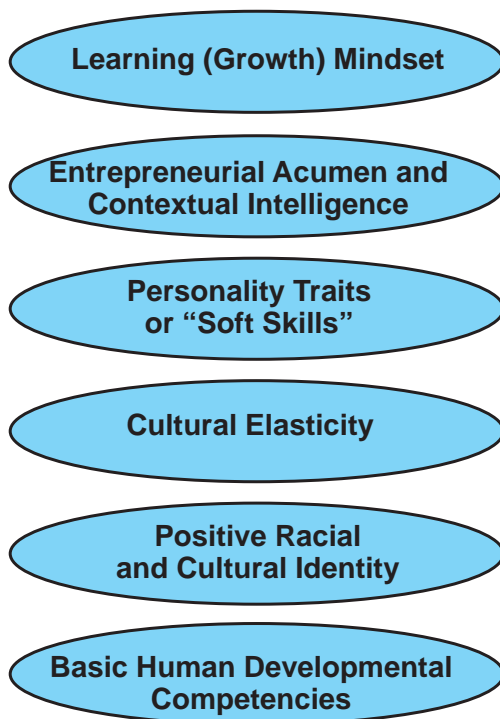
# PRODUCING GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE BLACK MEN: A LIFE COURSE APPROACH

It is generally accepted that stimulating learning environments, effective teachers, and high-quality educational experiences leading to post-secondary degrees are key to the formula for economic success. While the long-term economic benefits of degree attainment are well-known, the volatility of our emerging global economy suggests that tomorrow's workforce faces an economic environment that is marked by certain uncertainty.

These economic trends can be seen even in today's post-recession economy, where Black college graduate unemployment rates were almost double that of the general population. Even Black college graduates with prestigious STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) degrees experienced double-digit unemployment rates. While employer and other forms of labor market discrimination are potential culprits in the unemployment and underemployment debate, these trends also suggest that employers are seeking skills and qualities in their prospective workers that extend beyond specific degrees or credentials, and tomorrow's worker will need these skills in order to remain competitive.

Therefore, our efforts to create optimal environments for Black boys should extend beyond just creating nurturing learning environments, promoting good physical and emotional health, and fostering racial identity. Built into our collective efforts to produce "globally competitive Black men" are efforts to strategically instill both foundational and 21st century competencies that support resilience in the face of likely economic turbulence (See Figure VI. 21st Century Skills).

**Figure VI: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**



## **Learning (Growth) Mindset**

Describes a characteristic among individuals who believe that their intelligence is not fixed but can be honed and developed. Black boys who participate in stimulating learning environments and are encouraged to explore and ask questions when they get stuck, and who demonstrate (intellectual) curiosity and initiative are building the critical thinking and problem solving skills they will need later in life to be successful. Having a learning mindset can also be a useful trait in future economic downturns and volatile labor markets.

## **Entrepreneurial Acumen and Contextual Intelligence**

Entrepreneurial Acumen refers to an innate ability to be creative and innovative in the face of change and economic adversity. Given today's economy, the ability to "reinvent oneself" to retrain or retool in the aftermath of an unanticipated crisis, such as job loss, is paramount. Contextual Intelligence is defined as an acute sensitivity to the social, political, technological, economic drivers of change that define and drive future economies. (Sertl, 2014).

## **Personality Traits**

Commonly referred to as "soft skills," personality traits encompass the ability to think critically, reason analytically, solve problems, communicate clearly both orally and in writing, and collaborate and work in diverse teams that, increasingly, will transcend international boundaries.

## **Cultural Elasticity**

Social capital is critical to building the appropriate relationships and networks that help to facilitate economic and social mobility. Youth whose personal and institutional networks extend beyond the local neighborhood (i.e. bridging social capital) are likely to be more adept at code-switching than their counterparts whose networks are limited to the local neighborhood (bonding social capital) (Putnam, 2004). The ability for young black males to comfortably "code switch" and interact with a diversity of people from different cultural/ethnic and economic backgrounds is a critical competency and skill in a twenty-first century economy.

## **Positive Racial, Cultural and Gender Identity**

Children and youth who have strong, caring adults in their lives, and whose communities surround them with racially and culturally affirming activities and healthy notions of self that does not marginalize gender identities can have a positive effect on identity development and ensure young males possess strong morals, values, and positive attitudes toward school and their own personal outlook. Activities that also prepare Black youth for a myriad of biases they will encounter in the larger society as well as cultivate an understanding of structural racism are essential elements in developing cultural capital.

## **Basic Human Developmental Competencies**

These competencies encompass three domains: 1) Cognitive Development, which refers to skills like analytical and critical thinking and planning and problem solving skills; 2) Physical Health, or the ability to engage in healthy behaviors, diet and exercise, and risk avoidance behavior related to specific family/cultural factors; and 3) Emotional/Behavioral, which refers to healthy coping skills, the ability to self-manage and regulate behavior, and emotional intelligence and self-efficacy.

# LIFE COURSE DICHOTOMIES: MOVING THE NEEDLE FROM MITIGATING RISK TO PROMOTING OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Producing globally competitive, racially-conscious, resilient Black men at the end of the developmental pipeline does not happen without an intentional focus on facilitating optimal well-being at specific intervals along a developmental path. This framework embraces the adoption of a life course perspective that responds to the environmental threats and toxic conditions that often face Black men and boys. This nuanced perspective is often missed by a universal race-neutral developmental focus (See Appendix I. Universal Developmental Life Course Perspective). The Beyond Plight to Optimal Development framework embraces a racially- and culturally-conscious developmental approach to human development, defined by a series of age-related transitions. It seeks to acknowledge and disrupt structural racism and as well as confront instances of implicit bias that harm and stifle Black boys at critical and sensitive periods early stages of the life course with the potential to adversely impact long-term developmental trajectories. The more commonly used vernacular to describe this is the “school to prison pipeline.”

In the section that follows, we outline two opposing developmental contexts that transcend the six life course spans (See Figure VII: Life Course Dichotomies). In the first developmental context, the water is replete with “toxins” which describe the ecological and often structural challenges that threaten positive and healthy development among Black Men and boys. The context portrayed on the pages labeled “toxic environmental conditions” often represent the starting points and drivers for many public, private, as well as philanthropic efforts where funding is targeted to ameliorate or lessen these adverse conditions. Conversely, the second companion page labeled “optimal development”, proposes a set of field-informed suggestions for fostering the conditions that nurture and promote their optimal development. From a philanthropic standpoint, we advocate for investments in Black boys to be strategic in two ways: (1) building and strengthening those protective factors to enable

their success within inequitable circumstances, and (2) changing those institutional and structural policies and practices and the negative and inaccurate imagery that compromise the ability of Black boys to thrive. Said differently, we need to know what it takes to succeed and thrive in the face of adversity, and we need to eliminate the adversity that Black boys face.

Figures VIII. and IX. (Systems Indicators – Optimal Development - the water & Individual Indicators for Black Men and Boys - the fish) complete our toxic water versus healthy water analogy and allows constituencies to view perspective indicators that best nurture and promote optimal development for each of the (5) protective factors throughout the life course. The Indicators for Black boys appendix proposes (5) developmental indicators that are also strategically aligned across the life course. As audiences grapple, strategize and debate their own measures and indicators, an important caveat to raise about each of our indicator charts is that they are a tool to help guide local dialogue. Groups might argue that adults should have conversations about gender and masculinity much earlier in the life course than we have suggested or that attention to good jobs and wealth building (within the Positive Economic Environment protective factor) should be a priority at every stage of the life course. Audiences can view the charts and assess each strategy and indicator against their own priorities for developmental appropriateness at each stage in the life course. These charts can also be viewed in their totality, are the investments from systems and communities prioritized in Figure VIII. representative of the most effective interventions that best support optimal development. Additionally, are the skills, behaviors and competencies that are suggested in Figure IX. sufficiently comprehensive and robust to produce the globally competitive, healthy Black men that we aspire to produce. Our hope is that “shareholders” invest the appropriate time and energy to have substantive, developmental and comprehensive conversations that result in coherent plans and strategies that span the life course. It is also our hope this tool can help facilitate those conversations.



Figure VII: Life Course Dichotomics:

## From Toxic → Healthy/Optimal





# EARLY CHILDHOOD



TOXIC



ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONDITIONS

<p><b>THREATS TO BLACK BOYS</b></p>	<p>The science on the importance of early childhood development is clear: active parental engagement and adequate caregiver resources are needed to support optimal developmental processes; good health and nutrition for physical development; age appropriate social, emotional, cognitive, and language development; and neighborhood and community services that are culturally respectful, readily accessible, affordable, and responsive. Systemic inequities that disproportionately Black communities impact the availability and quality of services and undermine the potential of Black boys by underfunding critical systems that support their cognitive abilities, social development, and physical health and direct impact their ability to be school ready.</p>		
<p><b>Environmental Conditions</b></p>	<p><b>Threat Description</b></p>		
<p><b>DISENFRANCHISED ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b></p>	<p>Legacies of racial and economic segregation have led to the sequestration of many Black households in high poverty communities or communities with fewer resources and opportunities.</p>	<p>Black households that reside in high-poverty neighborhoods or census tracts.</p>	<p><b>Indicators</b></p>
<p><b>UNDERFUNDED COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b></p>	<p>Due to economically and geographically discriminatory practices, Black households are in communities plagued by environmental hazards such as lead poisoning, which can cause cognitive defects, or poor air quality, which is linked to disproportionate asthma rates.</p>	<p>Black households with disparate health as a result of environmental hazards; Number of homes in flood plains, near toxic waste areas, etc.</p>	
<p><b>CULTURALLY NON-RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b></p>	<p>Childcare and healthcare workers lack training and resources in culturally competent practices. Consequently, families frequently receive less compassionate and thorough care. Families also are less likely to ask critical questions because they do not feel safe or welcomed.</p>	<p>Childcare settings undervalue cultural variations in learning and racial socialization practices; Industries claim a color-blind approach or assume equal treatment will lead to equity.</p>	
<p><b>CAREGIVER CHALLENGES</b></p>	<p>Parental/caregiver economic circumstances such as limited incomes or erratic work schedules impact the stability of the home environment. Overburdened parents capacity to show children care and compassion is threatened by the level of stress and capacity they have to devote to keeping their households financially stable.</p>	<p>Families experiencing unemployment or episodic/inconsistent employment opportunities.</p>	
<p><b>SOCIAL NETWORKS CHALLENGES</b></p>	<p>Parents/caregivers lack the time and capacity to make meaningful connections with informal networks of other families and advocates who are knowledgeable about child development.</p>	<p>Families connected with informal or formal sources of support; Number of trusted friends that can watch or supervise children; Number of trusted friends that have the time or capacity to hang out for an hour or two.</p>	






# EARLY CHILDHOOD



OPTIMAL



DEVELOPMENT

<p><b>OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BLACK BOYS</b></p> <p>By kindergarten, Black boys will be school ready, healthy, inquisitive learners who have benefitted from high quality and culturally responsive, early childhood and pre school experiences and comprehensive health care and thus, achieve critical developmental milestones in the early years.</p> <p><b>Optimal Indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies born normal/healthy birth weight</li> <li>• Boys are ready for school and other social environments</li> <li>• Boys exhibiting appropriate growth and development on common measures for early childhood</li> <li>• Boys exhibit signs of security, calmness, and emotional health</li> <li>• Black boys develop early positive racial self-concept</li> </ul>	<p><b>Strategies and Interventions</b></p> <p>Communities have equitable and adequate funding/resources to support early learning opportunities that lay the foundation for life long learning and post-secondary aspirations.</p> <p>Communities are safe and toxin free environments that offer opportunities for outdoor play and recreational opportunities exploration for boys and their peers and adults.</p> <p>Systems and providers apply culture and gender specific strategies, policies and practices that are responsive to the diversity of early childhood settings and work to continuously assess for improvements to program quality.</p> <p>Parents/caregivers have access to a variety of informational resources that help them to understand (Black) child development and the importance of instilling racial and cultural pride. Households should also possess books and digital media that present a positive narrative of Black males.</p> <p>Parents/caregiver have opportunities to connect with other families to socialize, foster a sense of community and cultural and racial pride and participate in gatherings and activities that contribute to the nurturing and growth and positive racial identity of Black boys.</p>		
<p><b>Protective Factors</b></p> <p><b>POSITIVE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b></p> 	<p><b>Indicators</b></p> <p>Equitable funding allocations for early childhood education, Pre-K and Early Head Start and Nurse Family Partnership slots and comprehensive health care services.</p>		
<p><b>POSITIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b></p> 	<p>Availability of safe (lead and toxin free) infrastructure, housing and facilities including parks, playgrounds and recreational spaces.</p>		
<p><b>CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b></p> 	<p>Educator, medical and other service provider networks possess tools and instruments to assess for quality and cultural competency in early care programming.</p>		
<p><b>CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES</b></p> 	<p>Households possess culturally &amp; geographically diverse books, digital media and other learning materials geared towards both adults and children.</p>		
<p><b>POSITIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS</b></p> 	<p>Boys are embedded in social family and social networks that promote racial pride and cultural socialization (i.e. teaching about family background) and children's identification with cultural beliefs, norms and practices.</p>		



TOXIC



ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONDITIONS

# MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

<b>THREATS TO BLACK BOYS</b>	During this crucial developmental period, Black boys find themselves in environments that are sometimes layered with challenges of implicit and explicit bias. Their schools are often filled with teachers who lack the tools to provide culturally relevant and ethnically-affirming opportunities that might otherwise inspire and stimulate excitement about learning. In addition, biased special education policies often over-identify Black boys for services and medicinal interventions to address “deficits,” or they end up disproportionately suspended or expelled. As a result, many Black boys fall behind academically or lose interest in school.	
<b>Environmental Conditions</b>	<b>Threat Description</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>DISENFRANCHISED ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b>	Lack of investment in school facilities, technology, and other infrastructure.	Funding allocations for periodic infrastructure- or technology-related improvements in schools.
<b>UNDERFUNDED COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b>	Key systems and institutional bodies lack racial and gender diversity in policy and decision-making roles.	Representation on key education or community governing bodies.
<b>CULTURALLY NON-RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b>	Black boys are disproportionately placed in special education programs and are also disproportionately suspended.	Differential diagnosis for ADD or developmental delays; Suspension rates among Black boys.
<b>CAREGIVER CHALLENGES</b>	Parents and caregivers lack knowledge and information on child development and how to advocate on behalf of their children in school and healthcare environments. Caregivers are also seen as incompetent and non-experts on their own children. Negative experiences with schools, in turn, cause caregivers to disengage with the school or to feel as if they can impact schools impact on their child.	Parental/caregivers reporting of visits to school on behalf of their children.
<b>SOCIAL NETWORKS CHALLENGES</b>	Some fathers are absent in the household due to incarceration or conflict with the custodial parent or caregiver. Fathers are also stigmatized as absent despite data suggesting that Black men are more present and active than fathers of every other race.	Fatherhood involvement beyond child support obligations



# MIDDLE CHILDHOOD



## OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BLACK BOYS

By the end of elementary school, Black boys are educated by culturally competent, effective teachers that have high expectations of them and establish a solid foundation and passion for learning that helps them to achieve grade level reading/numeracy proficiency. Representatives of systems i.e. education, health, do not unfairly judge or stereotype boys based on their implicit bias and parents/caregivers possess the knowledge, skills and confidence to identify, scrutinize and confront systems that harm boys.

### Optimal Indicators






- Boys who exhibit a learning (growth) mindset and achieve key learning milestones in reading and math.
- Boys report positive experiences with adults in formal and informal settings.
- Boys dietary options limit unhealthy food options.
- Boys exhibit a positive self-image and confidence in formal and informal settings.
- Boys exhibit increased awareness of their racial and cultural identity.



## OPTIMAL



## DEVELOPMENT

Strategies and Interventions		Indicators
<b>Protective Factors</b>   <b>POSITIVE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b>   <b>POSITIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b>   <b>CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b>   <b>CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES</b>   <b>POSITIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS</b>	Parents/caregivers have access to stable employment (or investment capital for the self-employed) opportunities that lead to wealth and assets through savings investments.	Households have adequate income to meet basic family needs and discretionary income for savings, investments and other asset building opportunities.
	Boys are afforded high quality curriculum and instruction that includes culturally relevant literary texts that reflect or are similar to their own personal or community experiences.	Boys are exposed to culturally-relevant text that portray accurate narratives and impact both reading achievement and motivation.
	Boys are taught by culturally competent teachers who possess the knowledge to confront their conscious or unconscious bias and the skills to implement classroom practices that do not unfairly penalize (refer to special education) or stereotype them.	Educators and administrators are culturally competent, and promote racial identity through classroom environments and teaching practices.
	Parents/caregivers are provided with information/programs that allows them to assess and evaluate their child's classroom experiences and teaching for bias and/or culturally relevant teaching and instruction.	Parents groups and family groups have access to classroom assessment tools, training, and other means to become knowledgeable and effective advocates for their children.
	Boys have access to intergenerational activities with Black male role models who expose them to vocations and expand their career aspirations beyond that of athletes and entertainers.	Increase in the number of activities representing the vocational diversity in the Black community.

# EARLY ADOLESCENCE



TOXIC



ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONDITIONS

THREATS TO BLACK BOYS	During this period, boys should be building on the foundation of their elementary school years. For those who had previous negative school experiences, middle school can further reinforce their feelings of inadequacy. They can begin to internalize negative stereotypes and messages consistently being provided about them in media, at school, and in their communities. Finding a positive sense of self, especially amidst the emotional and physical changes of puberty, can be extremely difficult. Teachers have low expectations, trust, and care for these teenage boys and research has suggested that many are even intimidated by Black boys at this age. This negative dynamic at school can overshadow boy's interest, leading to a narrowing of the child's own perspective regarding future possibilities and pathways. For instance, students interests' are often assumed to be those that are most stereotypical to Black boys: music and sports. This stereotyping frequently results into early entrance into the school-to-prison pipeline through over policing, school push-out, and criminalization. Youth are also often not given a lot of resources outside of sports and therefore might find challenges finding an identity where society is not making a space for them. In terms of socio-emotional development, boys who lack access to healthy relationships and examples may begin to adopt and internalize dangerous American ideals of hyper-masculinity that are patriarchal, sexist, and homophobic. This phase may also mark experimentation with drugs and alcohol.		
Environmental Conditions	Threat Description		Indicators
DISENFRANCHISED ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT	Communities lack funding to support critical after school programs that could address skills deficits.	Funding levels among school districts to support expanded day or additional academic support for struggling students; Funding disparities per-pupil.	
UNDERFUNDED COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT	Absence of recreational outlets or other "safe places" where Black boys can explore, play, and learn.	Mediating institutions and/or community places open for children and youth.	
CULTURALLY NON-RESPONSIVE SERVICES	Schools impose harsh discipline practices and suspend Black boys disproportionately.	Number suspended or expelled from school.	
CAREGIVER CHALLENGES	Black Boys live in households often under extreme economic pressure, which frequently leads to caregiver substance abuse, mental illness, or substance abuse;	Rates of substance abuse and depression.	
SOCIAL NETWORKS CHALLENGES	Communities lack visible positive Black male role models that could model healthy and positive concepts of masculinity and racial identity.	Black boys reporting a caring male presence in their lives.	

# EARLY ADOLESCENCE








OPTIMAL



DEVELOPMENT



<p><b>OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BLACK BOYS</b></p>	<p>By the end of middle school, Black boys are educated by culturally competent, effective teachers that have high expectations of them and ensure that they are academically ready, to pursue a college preparatory track in high school. Black boys also possess connections to mediating institutions that facilitate access to formal services and informal cultural and social supports.</p> <p><b>Optimal Indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boys connect with adults who help them build and hone life skills (financial literacy, career pathways exposure, etc.)</li> <li>Boys pursue daily activities in sports (formal and informal) that encourages daily exercise.</li> <li>Boys welcome challenges, take calculated risks, attribute success to effort, see failure as an opportunity to learn.</li> <li>Boys who report a diverse network of friends outside of their immediate peer group.</li> <li>Boys feel make affirmative connections to their family history and Black history.</li> </ul>		
Protective Factors	Strategies and Interventions		Indicators
<p><b>POSITIVE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b></p> 	<p>Systems/institutions expose Boys to a variety of career opportunities in the STEM fields, public service, entrepreneurship as well as build a foundation for understanding money/financial capability concepts</p>		<p>Activities and events that promote/discuss different career paths where connections are made between educational outcomes and financial projection.</p>
<p><b>POSITIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b></p> 	<p>Local community policing and public safety strategies employ strategies that address 1) diversity of officers 2) confront implicit bias 3) build trust and authentic engagement in Black communities.</p>		<p>Public safety policies/programs emphasize transparency and equity and actively engage local communities in their creation.</p>
<p><b>CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b></p> 	<p>Public systems identify interventions for boys who may be grappling with emotional/behavioral distress associated with their emerging racial and gender identities that do not stigmatize or criminalize their behavior.</p>		<p>Utilization of culturally competent interventions that do not criminalize boys behavior Expand policies and practices that increase racial awareness in pre-service preparation and ongoing professional development opportunities.</p>
<p><b>CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES</b></p> 	<p>Parents/caregivers seek resources and support to promote cultural awareness and race/cultural socialization (i.e. researching and storytelling of ancestry/ family history in their households.</p>		<p>Parents/caregivers, family and extended family promote racial pride/socialization and family identity (i.e. teaching family background, storytelling).</p>
<p><b>POSITIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS</b></p> 	<p>Boys have access to age appropriate networking opportunities led by committed and caring mentors and sponsors that engage them in leadership development (Rites of Passage), and racial bias (prep for bias) training and participate in local projects and activities that build community.</p>		<p>Black boys are engaged in constructive activities with adults and other elders that prepare them for bias and racism.</p>





# LATE ADOLESCENCE



TOXIC



ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONDITIONS



<b>THREATS TO BLACK BOYS</b>	<p>Black males during this phase are physically maturing, gaining a sense of independence, exploring their sense of masculinity, and developing a stronger sense of their own racial and gender identity. In their environments, they continue to face disproportionate bias whether conscious or unconscious. This bias often manifests as harsh disciplinary policies that suspend, expel or arrest them. If they are off-track academically, negative stereotypes imposed on them are further internalized and, as a result, many psychologically disconnect from school and have a difficult time visualizing a positive future for themselves. A lack of equitable funding for majority-minority school districts leads to diminished resources to: 1) address academic deficits through summer academic opportunities, 2) increase the availability of advanced placement courses and 3) help build student resumes through meaningful leadership/internship and job opportunities. The developmental challenges associated with independence and defiance, common to all teenagers, becomes a large issue for Black boys because they are less likely to be seen as just children and more likely to be treated as adults in all facets of life.</p>	
<b>Environmental Conditions</b>	<b>Threat Description</b>	
<b>DISENFRANCHISED ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b>	<p>Lack of employment options for young males to get early working experience.</p>	<p>Scarcity of youth employment opportunities.</p>
<b>UNDERFUNDED COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b>	<p>Overexposure to community violence and other stressors related to crime and community trauma.</p>	<p>Exposed to violence in their community.</p>
<b>CULTURALLY NON-RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b>	<p>School policies do not prioritize hiring practices that encourage and prioritize racial and gender diversity.</p>	<p>Teachers of color in schools and school districts.</p>
<b>CAREGIVER CHALLENGES</b>	<p>Due to years of inequity, parents/caregivers often lack knowledge of community resources that might support college preparation, soft skills training, or other opportunities to make their children college and career ready.</p>	<p>Percent of Black children who are first generation college students.</p>
<b>SOCIAL NETWORKS CHALLENGES</b>	<p>Black Boys have difficulty finding positive social networks that do not subscribe to hyper- and toxic-masculine ideas; Black boys have limited positive social networks and pursue connections with “surrogate families” such as gangs.</p>	<p>Affiliation with gangs.</p>








OPTIMAL



DEVELOPMENT

# LATE ADOLESCENCE

<p>By the conclusion of high school, young males are academically prepared and ready to pursue post secondary opportunities credentials that will best support their career aspirations. Young males also possess connections to mediating institutions that foster encourage their pursuit of post secondary credentials or college-going behavior and can facilitate the connections/relationships required to build a strong resume and portfolio of both academic and non-academic experiences.</p> <p><b>Optimal Indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boys take advanced placement/college preparatory courses as well as the SAT or ACT.</li> <li>Boys engage abstain from developing unhealthy habits with alcohol and other substances.</li> <li>Boys develop a healthy concept of masculinity/identity.</li> <li>Boys interact with an increasingly racially and economically diverse peer network.</li> <li>Boys engage in meaningful community service, volunteer and civic activities that can be reflected on their resumes.</li> </ul>			
Protective Factors	Strategies and Interventions		Indicators
<p><b>OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BLACK BOYS</b></p> <p><b>POSITIVE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b></p> 	<p>Black males are prepared for post-secondary educational and vocational opportunities, including equitable access to Advanced Placement courses and International Baccalaureate and Dual Enrollment programs.</p>		<p>Equitable funding formulas for school districts that enable school districts to provide afterschool academic and career enrichment activities to Black boys.</p>
<p><b>POSITIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b></p> 	<p>School, systems and mediating institutions create opportunities to engage in developmentally appropriate safe risk taking to learn new skills, explore experiences, and foster meaningful volunteer and internship opportunities.</p>		<p>Equitable participation in meaningful internships, summer jobs, volunteer opportunities and unique experiences arranged by the schools or other community programs.</p>
<p><b>CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b></p> 	<p>Create a culture of continuous assessment and analysis of embedded racial disparities in systems and institutions.</p>		<p>Annual or bi-annual audit of racial disparities in schools, healthcare and juvenile and criminal justice systems.</p>
<p><b>CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES</b></p> 	<p>Parents/caregivers are connected to a web of supportive service opportunities through formal and informal institutional networks that provide health and mental health wellness services.</p>		<p>Parents and caregivers with knowledge of culturally competent health and well-being medical service providers.</p>
<p><b>POSITIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS</b></p> 	<p>Black males are embedded in bridging social capital networks that foster college-completion or post-secondary credential completion and support exploration of their career aspirations.</p>		<p>Black male participation in college preparatory or school to work programming outside of their school environments.</p>

# EARLY ADULTHOOD



TOXIC



ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONDITIONS

Threat Description		Indicators
<b>THREATS TO BLACK BOYS</b>	This phase is marked by increased independence and responsibility. For those individuals pursuing post secondary opportunities, college means increased financial responsibility, often in the face of rising tuition. A primary challenge is increasing graduation/completion rates. A number of factors influence this outcome including the quality of K-12 education experiences. Given their economic backgrounds, many have to balance work and school, if they can find reliable work. Finally, Black males often experience isolation in institutional climates (especially for those attending predominantly white institutions). These institutions can be indifferent to their academic and social needs and often fail to successfully integrate Black boys into campus cultures.	
<b>Environmental Conditions</b>		
<b>DISENFRANCHISED ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b>	Students assume a greater proportion of the responsibility for financing their education through student loans.	Student loan high-debt rates.
<b>UNDERFUNDED COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b>	Lack of academic preparation leading to a lack of college readiness.	Overrepresentation in developmental education.
<b>CULTURALLY NON-RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b>	Institutions neglect their responsibility for ensuring that Black young men feel welcomed and integrated into campus culture.	Culture of collecting data on “institutional climate” by gender and race.
<b>CAREGIVER CHALLENGES</b>	Ongoing economic and financial stress experienced by family and extended family may distract or cause students to postpone their education or drop out of school altogether.	Over-representation in dropout and stop-out rates.
<b>SOCIAL NETWORKS CHALLENGES</b>	Lack of connections to racially and economically diverse social networks that might facilitate post-graduate employment opportunities.	Lack of racially and economically diverse social and professional networks.



# EARLY ADULTHOOD








OPTIMAL



DEVELOPMENT



<p><b>OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BLACK MEN</b></p>	<p>Black males arrive in post secondary environments adequately prepared for the academic rigor of post secondary education and possess the prerequisite soft skill to complete their degrees on time and establish relationships with fellow students and staff and their relevant networks. Graduates possess a core set of 21st skills that include critical thinking, problem solving and communication and are embedded within social network that stimulate and support their career ambitions.</p> <p><b>Optimal Indicators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young men persist from semester-to-semester and do not “stop out”.</li> <li>• Young men possess a social justice acumen and a consciousness tied to the advancement of people of color.</li> <li>• Young men have positive experiences with instructors and institutional representatives.</li> <li>• Young males have a regular source of health care.</li> <li>• Young men possess the confidence and aspire to pursue leadership positions.</li> </ul>		
Protective Factors	Strategies and Interventions		
<p><b>POSITIVE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT</b></p> 	<p>Systems and Institutions provide affordable options to attend college or pursue other post secondary credentialing opportunities.</p>	<p>Young men understand affordability/costs options of their post secondary pursuits.</p>	
<p><b>POSITIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT</b></p> 	<p>Talent identifications programs drive participation into college bridge or pipeline programs that connect to careers for the 21st Century.</p>	<p>Young men identified for further graduate school education opportunities.</p>	
<p><b>CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES</b></p> 	<p>Post secondary institutions analyze data and set progressive targets and create “Equity Plans” to make black make matriculation, retention, and completion rates equitable.</p>	<p>Post secondary institutions demonstrate a commitment to data analysis that disaggregates data by gender and race to help drive increased graduation rates.</p>	
<p><b>CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES</b></p> 	<p>Parents/caregivers are aware of financial aid and scholarship options that result in less debt accrued including access to emergency aid to deal with unforeseen life events.</p>	<p>Parents/caregivers have knowledge of secondary sources of education financial support.</p>	
<p><b>POSITIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS</b></p> 	<p>Males are connected to other socially conscious and influential networks that are responsive to the needs of education and emotional needs of Black students or other students of color.</p>	<p>Males pursue both formal and informal leadership roles that help advance the call of other students of color.</p>	

# ADULTHOOD



TOXIC



ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONDITIONS

THREATS TO BLACK BOYS	Compared to earlier periods, developments during adulthood are more personal and less predictable, aside from full physical and cognitive maturity. This period is marked by career exploration and career advancement or the acquisition of additional skills, credentials and/or advanced degrees. Partner relationship and family formation occur during this period as well as expansion in peer and professional networks. This phase is also characterized by increasing social responsibility, productivity, and an acknowledgment of personal limitations. For many Black men, employer discrimination is still a reality and many encounter bias through unfair stereotypical views that suggest that they do not possess the skills required to succeed in the labor force. Many lack the diverse racial and economic trusted networks that might help them to overcome this challenge. Further complicating this issue is the disproportionate number of Black males with criminal records that act as barriers to work.		
Environmental Conditions	Threat Description		Indicators
DISENFRANCHISED ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT	Unemployment and underemployment of Black men.	Black males unemployed.	
UNDERFUNDED COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT	Inadequate workforce pipeline and job training and placement among area workforce agencies and community colleges.	Job placement rates of workforce agencies.	
CULTURALLY NON-RESPONSIVE SERVICES	Job discrimination and employer bias.	Employment discrimination complaints.	
CAREGIVER CHALLENGES	As caregivers, Black men bear emotional and social strain as a result of stress associated with ongoing bias that they encounter in society.	Mortality rates due to physical and emotional stress.	
SOCIAL NETWORKS CHALLENGES	Lack of robust social networks, both strong and weak ties that facilitate development and career advancement.	Lack of racially diverse social and professional networks.	



# ADULTHOOD

## OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT FOR BLACK MEN

By adulthood, Black men have equitable access to careers and professions that will enhance overall household economic well-being. They will also have equitable opportunities to accumulate wealth and assets that can be transferred to support their families and communities and that wealth is inherited by future generations. Due to the positive experiences and influences in their upbringing, Black men possess a resilient and positive self concept/image, have the capacity to engage in healthy, loving relationships and express their commitment in action(s) to the betterment of Black community.

### Optimal Indicators

- Men gainfully employed in jobs w/benefits and pursue securing important assets (investments, homeownership and business ownership)
- Men possess and display healthy diverse concepts of masculinity that are respectful of LGBTQ communities.
- Men are able to form relationships with life partners and companions and start families.
- Men are conscious of their need to engage in behaviors that prolong life (healthy eating and exercise).
- Men “give back” by participating in intergenerational programming that serve Black boys.

### Protective Factors



POSITIVE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT



POSITIVE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT



CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES



CAREGIVER COMPETENCIES



POSITIVE SOCIAL NETWORKS

### Strategies and Interventions

Black males focus on wealth building opportunities through homeownership or entrepreneurship and business development.

Black males engage in activities that “give back” to their communities through intergenerational opportunities to engage youth and their elders.

Black men serve in leadership/civic roles and advocates for systems accountability and changes in policy and practices that result in racial inequities.

Men possess the temperament and capacity to engage in caring relationships with life partners, spouses and children.

Black males are connected to diverse racially and economically social and peer networks while maintaining respect for, and connection with the Black Diaspora.

### Indicators

Increased homeownership equity and business ownership rates

Engagement in mentorship programs or other volunteer opportunities that support the Black (or broader) community.

Black males who report stable relationships with their spouses, companions and children.

Black males who report stable relationships with their spouses, companions and children.

Black males not only report career-oriented, professional social networks but meaningful connections to the Black Diaspora and other ethnicities and cultures.

OPTIMAL



DEVELOPMENT



Figure VIII. Systems Indicators – Optimal Development (The Water)













	 EARLY CHILDHOOD	 MIDDLE CHILDHOOD	 EARLY ADOLESCENCE	 LATE ADOLESCENCE	 EARLY ADULTHOOD	 WORKING AGE
Positive Economic Environment	Equitable funding allocations for early childhood education, Pre-K and Early Head Start and Nurse Family Partnership slots and comprehensive health care services.	Households have adequate income to meet basic family needs and discretionary income for savings, investments and other asset building opportunities.	Activities and events that promote/discuss different career paths where connections are made between educational outcomes and financial projection.	Equitable funding formulas for school districts that enable school districts to provide afterschool academic and career enrichment activities to Black boys.	Young men understand affordability/costs options of their post secondary pursuits.	Increased homeownership equity and business ownership rates.
Culturally Responsive Services	Educator, medical and other service provider networks possess tools and instruments to assess for quality and cultural competency in early care programming.	Educators and administrators are culturally competent, and promote racial identity through classroom environments and teaching practices.	Systems ensure their professionals utilize culturally competent interventions that expand policies that increase racial and gender awareness in pre-service preparation and subsequent training opportunities.	Annual or bi-annual audit of racial disparities in schools, healthcare and juvenile care and criminal justice systems.	Post secondary institutions demonstrate a commitment to data analysis that disaggregates data by gender and race to help drive increased graduation rates.	Engagement and connections to strong legal/civil rights advocates that work to identify and disrupt unfair and discriminatory practices that impact the Black community.
Positive Community Environment	Availability of safe (lead and toxin free) infrastructure, housing and facilities including parks, playgrounds and recreational spaces.	Boys are exposed to culturally-relevant text that portray accurate narratives and impact both reading achievement and motivation.	Public safety policies/programs emphasize transparency and equity and actively engage local communities in their creation.	Equitable participation in meaningful internships, summer jobs, volunteer opportunities and unique experiences arranged by the schools or other community programs.	Young men identified for further graduate school education opportunities.	Engagement in mentorship programs or other volunteer opportunities that support the Black (or broader) community.
Caregiver Competencies	Households possess culturally & geographically diverse books, digital media and other learning materials geared towards both adults and children.	Parents groups and family groups have access to classroom assessment tools, training, and other means to become knowledgeable and effective advocates for their children.	Parents/caregivers, family and extended family promote racial pride/socialization and family identity (i.e. teaching family background, storytelling).	Parents and caregivers with knowledge of culturally competent health and well-being medical service providers.	Parents/caregivers have knowledge of secondary sources of education financial support.	Black males who report stable relationships with their spouses, companions and children.
Positive Social Networks	Boys are embedded in social family and social networks that promote racial pride and cultural socialization (i.e. teaching about family background) and children's identification with cultural beliefs, norms and practices.	Increase in the number of activities representing the vocational diversity in the Black community.	Black boys are engaged in constructive activities with adults and other elders that prepare them for bias and racism.	Black male participation in college preparatory or school to work programming outside of their school environments.	Males pursue both formal and informal leadership roles that help advance the call of other students of color.	Black males not only report career-oriented, professional social networks but meaningful connections to the Black Diaspora and other ethnicities and cultures.

Figure IX. Individual Indicators for Black Men and Boys (The Fish)

	Males are Physically Healthy	Males have Strong Cognitive/Intellectual Skillsets	Males possess High Socio-Emotional Competencies	Males Have Strong Racial, Cultural and Gender Identities	Males have Strong and Diverse Social Networks
 EARLY CHILDHOOD	Babies born normal/ healthy birth weight.	Boys exhibiting appropriate growth and development on common measures for early childhood.	Boys exhibit signs of security, calmness, and emotional health.	Black boys develop early positive racial self-concept.	Boys are excited and ready for school and other social environments.
 MIDDLE CHILDHOOD	Boys dietary options limit unhealthy food options.	Boys who exhibit a learning (growth) mindset and achieve key learning milestones in reading and math.	Boys exhibit a positive self-image and confidence in formal and informal settings.	Boys exhibit increased awareness of their racial and cultural identity.	Boys report positive experiences with adults in formal and informal settings.
 EARLY ADOLESCENCE	Boys pursue daily activities in sports (formal and informal) that encourages daily exercise.	Boys connect with adults who help them build and hone life skills (financial literacy, career pathways exposure, etc.)	Boys welcome challenges, take calculated risks, attribute success to effort, see failure as an opportunity to learn.	Boys feel make affirmative connections to their family history and Black history.	Boys who report a diverse network of friends outside of their immediate peer group.
 LATE ADOLESCENCE	Boys abstain from developing unhealthy habits with alcohol and other substances.	Boys take advanced placement/college preparatory courses as well as the SAT or ACT.	Boys develop healthy concepts of masculinity and reject misogynistic or homophobic behaviors.	Boys interact with an increasingly racially and linguistically diverse peer network.	Boys engage in meaningful community service, volunteer and civic activities that can be reflected on their resumes.
 EARLY ADULTHOOD	Young males have a regular source of health care.	Young men persist from semester-to-semester and do not “stop out.”	Young men possess the confidence and aspire to pursue leadership positions.	Young men possess a social justice acumen and a consciousness tied to the advancement of people of color.	Young men have positive experiences with instructors and institutional representatives.
 WORKING AGE	Men are conscious of their need to engage in behaviors that prolong life (healthy eating and exercise).	Men gainfully employed in jobs w/benefits and pursue securing important assets (investments, homeownership and business ownership)	Men are able to form relationships with life partners and companions and start families.	Men “give back” by participating in intergenerational programming that serve Black boys.	Men possess and display healthy diverse concepts of masculinity that are respectful of LGBTQ communities.

# MOVING A COLLECTIVE AGENDA FOR BLACK MEN AND BOYS: HOW CAN PHILANTHROPY INFORM RESEARCH AND LOCAL ACTION

## **Integrate ABFE's Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities (RPBC) Framework**

ABFE's principal mission is to promote effective and responsive philanthropy in Black communities. ABFE's Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities (RPBC) framework is designed to increase the capacity of all of philanthropy to their work more effectively. For Black communities this means advocating for grant making that builds on the values of self-help, efficacy and the overall strengths of Black communities. Through its framework, ABFE proclaims that responsive philanthropy does not mean "reactive" philanthropy, instead ABFE's RPBC advocates for a form of grant making that is forward thinking and considers the projected experience of Black communities in the future. This notion of philanthropy in Black communities complements the Beyond Plight to Optimal Development frame as we advocate movement away from a narrative of Black boys often to narrowly focused on "plight" to one that doesn't limit the possibilities and futures of Black boys. The RPBC framework components of utilizing research to highlight embedded inequities, constituency engagement, cultivating leadership, and advocating for fair and equitable policies are the ingredients for creating a policy platform that can effectively engage policymakers and community stakeholders.

## **Reassess Philanthropic Outcomes Frameworks**

Philanthropy brings its own set of challenges to this emerging work. Chief among these challenges is the categorical nature of funding. Funding in communities tends to flow in ways that address singular issues: schools, social services, workforce development etc. Addressing problems becomes these institution's reasons for existence. This phenomenon sets up competition among all the problems and among all the organizations set up to deal with the problems. In this context, collaboration and sharing of resources can threaten organization's survival. Government and philanthropy operates in much the same way. Because they focus on specific problems or perhaps focus on different parts of the life course, they operate or sustain silos that discourage the authentic and sustained collaboration that is needed to make the patient and transformational investments in systems and institutions. In the words of President of the North Carolina NAACP, William Barber, "you can't change life cycles on a grant cycle." Without agreement to shift funding priorities and practices, efforts to improve outcomes for Black men and boys are likely to succumb to the inertia of historical funding patterns of the past.

## **Inform the Work of Black Men and Boys Initiatives**

My Brother's Keeper, Cities United, the Campaign for Black Male Achievement and BMe Community efforts are emerging in both urban and rural settings across the American landscape. Black communities are galvanizing and putting in place their own versions of collective impact strategies and interventions aimed at improving outcomes for young males. It is our hope that these efforts are thoughtful, strategic and that the lead organization(s) responsible manage a number of important tasks and activities including:

- Map community investments in Black men and boys to ascertain whether interventions are deficit-based or assets based investments
- Engage shareholders in a focused learning and technical assistance agenda that incorporates best practices from the Black men and boys field so that they have the collective knowledge to construct the developmentally appropriate environments that promote optimal development
- Illuminate and advocate for change in those institutional and structural policies and practices that foster continued racism and inequity and compromise the ability of Black boys to thrive
- Devise strategies to identify funding and investment gaps that would otherwise strengthen and sustain those protective factors that enable success across the life course

## **Invest and Test Interventions that Focus on Optimal Development/Protective Factors**

Perhaps a precursor to a generation of new investments in Black men and boys, is a need to compile and summarize the research available about "what we already know" or the what is the current evidence base of successful or promising interventions for Black boys. Philanthropy should support research that identifies the universe of evidence-based or informed interventions and programs an isolate the impact those programs have had on Black boys. The results of this research can be adapted to guide new investments in Black boys and their communities.

Philanthropy should prioritize investments in both formative and summative evaluations of said interventions and programs that target empirically supported protective factors and other evidence-informed initiatives targeted to Black men boys. Specifically philanthropy should foster a closer connection between Black researchers and the application of promising models in the emerging My Brother's Keeper, Cities United, the Campaign for Black Male Achievement and BMe Community seek creative ways to disseminate research findings, showcase effective models and practices through clearinghouses, convenings and social media and build the technical assistance infrastructure that bring these innovations to scale.

- Create a data-informed common understanding of the nature and magnitude of challenges confronting Black men and boys framed around each of the protective factor domains



# NOTES



**ABFE**

A PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERSHIP FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES