

BEING BLACK

IS NOT A RISK FACTOR:



*Including a foreword
written by*

**CONGRESSMAN
JOHN LEWIS**



**STATISTICS AND
STRENGTHS-BASED
SOLUTIONS IN THE
STATE OF GEORGIA**



BCDI
Black Child Development Institute
ATLANTA

GEORGIA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 01 The Possibilities of Progress**
Tobeka G. Green, President & CEO, NBCDI
- 02 Foreword: We Are the Hopes and Dreams**
Representative John Lewis (Fifth District-Georgia)

04 SECTION 1: HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- 06 Overcoming Stereotypes and Biases: Making Classrooms and Therapeutic Spaces Safer for Young Black Children**
Dina C. Walker-DeVose, Ph.D.
Delton W. DeVose, Ph.D., LPCS, LCAS, CCS, ACS
- 10 Point of Proof: Premier Academy, Inc. Childhood Acute Mental Health Practices Program (CAMP)**
Atlanta, Georgia
- 16 How Culturally-Relevant and Culturally-Responsive Healing and Coping Strategies Support the Success of African American Children**
Fayth M. Parks, Ph.D.
- 18 Point of Proof: St. Joseph's/Candler African American Health Information & Resource Center**
Savannah, Georgia

22 SECTION 2: EDUCATION

- 24 "Flipping the Script" in Teacher Education: Cultivating Early Childhood Pre-Service Teachers as Seers of African American Children's Cultural Assets**
Morgan Faison, Ph.D.
- 28 Point of Proof: Sheltering Arms: Two Generations at Educare Atlanta**
Atlanta, Georgia
- 32 Black Teachers: 21st Century's Most Wanted**
Andrea Lewis, Ph.D.
- 34 Point of Proof: Purpose Built Schools**
Atlanta, Georgia
- 38 Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: Georgia's Black Children Need Engaged Parents**
James Young, Ed.D.

22 SECTION 2: EDUCATION (continued)

- 40 Science Advocacy and Policy for Black Children in Georgia: Being Black Does Not Have to be a Risk Factor**
Mary Atwater, Ph.D.
Rona Robinson-Hill, Ph.D.
- 44 Point of Proof: Read Right from the Start on the Cox Campus Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School**
Atlanta, Georgia
- 48 Advancing the Educational Opportunities of African American Early Care Providers: Understanding Culture, Climate, and Providing Support**
Raynice Jean-Sigur, Ph.D.

52 SECTION 3: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 54 Advancing Family Economic Success Helps Children Thrive: Racial Equity and Two-Generation Approaches are Key to Georgia Policy Solutions**
Taifa Smith Butler, MPP
- 58 Point of Proof: The East Lake Foundation**
Atlanta, Georgia
- 62 Recognizing the Diversity that Exists: The Engagement of Black Families in Early Literacy Practices**
Nicole Taylor, Ph.D.
- 66 Possibilities Beyond the Tensions: Black Family Engagement**
Cheryl Fields-Smith, Ph.D.
- 70 Point of Proof: Empowered Youth Programs, Inc.**
Athens, Georgia
- 74 Georgia Policy Variables and Benchmarks**
- 75 Endnotes**
- 77 Acknowledgements**



THE POSSIBILITIES OF PROGRESS

Most of us would define progress as a steady drumbeat, moving us forward, ever closer toward our goals. Yet, perhaps all too often, progress takes the form of steps forward, backward, and forward again, with some struggle. As former slave turned national leader Frederick Douglass so eloquently described in a speech, the struggle for progress is at the very core of our nation's compass as a land of opportunity, with "liberty and justice for *all*."

Despite much progress since the National Black Child Development Institute was founded on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement in 1970, we cannot deny that the ideals of our nation escape the realities of far too many lives. This is most often seen in the faces and forms of Black children and families who experience the failures of inequitable and inadequate systems to help them deliver on their potential.

There has always been a solution: A high-quality education remains the surest pathway I know to freedom—the ability to create a self-actualized life. It's why we fight each day to ensure that every Black child has the education supports and resources they need to succeed, starting before birth. As President and CEO of the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI), it galvanizes me and all of us at NBCDI in our fight to witness and work with advocates, educators, researchers, leaders, organizations, and families across the country who share this same view.

In support of our mission to improve and advance the quality of life for Black children and families through education and advocacy, in 2013 the National Black Child Development Institute released the first *Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: A Strengths-Based Look at the State of the Black Child* report. This series of reports was designed to reframe and redefine the narrative about Black children from one that overemphasizes their limitations and deficits to one that focuses on their unique and considerable strengths and talents.

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

The report weaves together three important elements:

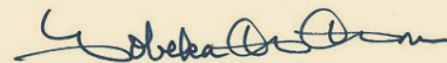
1. **Essays** by experts from across the state that focus on using the strengths of our children, families, and communities to improve outcomes for Black children through education and advocacy;
2. **Points of Proof** from organizations in Georgia that serve and support Black children providing comprehensive, innovative programs and services that build on their strengths and chart new paths to success; and
3. **Data** that indicates how Georgia's Black children and families are doing across a range of measures both state- and nationwide.

Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: Statistics and Strengths-Based Solutions in the State of Georgia is an affirmation of our children and families. It views our children through the lens of the promise of our progress, while understanding the struggles of our setbacks. Black children possess immeasurable brilliance and potential, as demonstrated by the stories and positive outcomes that are highlighted in this report.

To develop the report, we tapped into the dedication and innovation of contributors from the fields of education, health and wellness, family and community engagement, child welfare, and grassroots advocacy. This report emphasizes the importance of culturally-relevant and informed educators and environments that reflect the strengths of our children. Utilizing NBCDI's focus areas, we have engaged a range of perspectives while capitalizing on the diversity of thought throughout Georgia, one of the most opportune states for Black children and families in the country.

This report and the work it represents is a shining example of what is possible with an unwavering commitment to our children and to their excellence. We hope the telling of these stories further inspires your view of our children, as we collectively shape how they see themselves in the world, and that it impassions your advocacy for the equitable systems that support our families and communities. Together, we are shaping the future.

With deepest gratitude,



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



Foreword:

WE ARE THE HOPES AND DREAMS

REPRESENTATIVE JOHN LEWIS
(Fifth District-Georgia)

As I walk the halls of Congress, I often reflect on where my journey began, walking into a segregated classroom in Pike County, Alabama. Like every other Black child there, I represented the hopes and dreams of my family. My parents were sharecroppers determined that I would reach far beyond the limits of the Jim Crow Era South. Education was the pathway to my future, to opportunities which had escaped my parents' reach, yet were not out of sight for their children.

The wrenching "separate and unequal" experiences of these formative years became the fuel for my life-long passion to advocate for the human rights and dignity of all people. Moreover, I found a nurturing village in the classroom that built my resolve and integrity. As a student at Fisk University and member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, I led and organized sit-ins and marches in protest to the injustices of racism and segregation. Through those experiences, I recognized the inextricable link between freedom, justice, and education. The right to an equitable education had been unjustly denied for the same reasons we fought and continue to fight to secure this basic right. It is through education that Black children demonstrate that they are far from inferior. Education is the key to progress—not only for the individual, but for our families and communities as well as for our country.

We understand, then, that it is no coincidence that the National Black Child Development Institute was founded on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement to advance Black children and families through advocacy and education. The demand for justice and its demonstration through education is a part of our history, woven into the fabric of our families and into our struggle for our humanity. Importantly, with the publication of the *"Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor"* national and state reports, the National Black Child Development Institute makes the declaration of our humanity plain by highlighting the strength and resilience of Black children.

The importance of this message rings ever true as the rhetoric of our time seeks to define our children and families based on limitations. At such a time, it is up

**IN THE 2013-14 SCHOOL YEAR,
GEORGIA RANKED**

NUMBER 1 NATIONALLY

**IN THE NUMBER OF BLACK STUDENTS PARTICIPATING
IN GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS.**

Source: US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2013-14

to us to reassert the values and traditions that have helped us to overcome. That is why I am especially proud of the work represented in *"Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor: Strengths-based Solutions and Statistics in the State of Georgia"* publication. Throughout the state of Georgia, with the communities and families I represent, the fight for civil rights—for our humanity—and for our children continues through advocacy and programs that enrich their lives and nurture their spirits.

The fight continues in the development and preparation of our teachers, as they learn to cultivate classrooms that are responsive to the needs of Black children. It comes alive through the Empowered Youth Program in Athens, GA, where through a partnership with the University of Georgia, students are not only mentored and tutored, but also exposed to experiential learning and new cultures. It is realized through literacy programs promoting the importance of early language development in Savannah and programs at Premier Academy in Atlanta designed to respond to the needs of young children and their families.

The doors of life can open for every person when they hold the keys—education is one of those keys. We will fight to maintain the significant social and economic progress we have made since the Civil Rights Movement *and* push forward to secure a bright future for our children. As we continue the fight, it is incumbent upon us all that we never forget the importance of an equitable education and its roots on the Civil Rights battlefield. It is ever more important that we engage families and communities in today's battles. I am proud to say that "The Movement" is still alive across the state of Georgia through our educators, practitioners, caregivers, advocates, researchers, and our families. Families who, like my parents, work tirelessly to ensure their children have every opportunity to succeed.

There is no future out of reach for Black children. Across every corner of our great state, let us continue to work together to actualize the hopes and dreams of the next generation.





SECTION 1

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Healthy communities are strong communities. Positive outcomes for health and well-being are foundational components of Black community vitality, strength, and longevity. With disparities across health care access and equity, it is important to recognize and counter stereotypes in the therapeutic areas Black children and families rely on. Dr. Dina DeVose, Assistant Professor of Child and Family Development at Georgia Southern University in “Overcoming Stereotypes and Biases: Making Classrooms and Therapeutic Spaces Safer for Young Black Children,” finds that mental health providers must go beyond the classroom to gain exposure and knowledge to work with their African American clients in meaningful and respectful ways that do not isolate them.

Bridging the gap of healthcare access for Black children and families requires collaboration. Overall, this section presents collaborative programs designed to bridge the gap of healthcare access for Black children and families as well as strategies to develop strong social-emotional and behavioral health in children.



HEATH AND WELL-BEING

OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES AND BIASES:

Making Classrooms and Therapeutic Spaces Safer for Young Black Children

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A CHANGE IS GONNA COME

In 1964, African American singer Sam Cooke told us that “A Change Is Gonna Come.” His words, although more than five decades old, are slowly coming to fruition. Cooke’s music, an anthem for the Civil Rights Movement, reflected the Jim Crow laws, which were at the time largely practiced in the South. Jim Crow mandated segregated restrooms, restaurants, and other public places, including schools (Hansan 2011). Fifty years later, were he still alive, Cooke would have experienced the gradual removal of Jim Crow laws, and in fact, may have seen his grandchildren attend integrated public schools. What he might never have expected is a world that looked more like him.

The face of the United States is changing. Black, brown, and tan faces are becoming more plentiful, especially in the southern regions of the United States, and this trend is predicted to continue. The US Census reports that by 2020, more than half of American children are expected to be part of a “minority” or ethnic group, and by 2060, the total population of color (adults and children) is projected to be around 56 percent (Colby and Ortman 2015). In our state of Georgia, the population of children (defined as under the age of eighteen) already reflects the “browning” of America. The Kids Count Data Center reports that in 2015, 55 percent of Georgia’s children were of color, including those who identify as belonging to two or more races (Bridges 2015). We are, indeed, experiencing the change Cooke sang about.

When counselor’s beliefs about African Americans are influenced by stereotypical views and/or biased beliefs, it can lead to misdiagnoses and improper treatment, which may further isolate African Americans from effective treatment strategies.

STEREOTYPES PREVAIL

While the face of America is changing, evidence suggests that populations of color, particularly African Americans, continue to struggle. Racial bias, in both its explicit and implicit forms, continues to plague many despite a more inclusive American rhetoric. Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (Staats and Patton 2014). We hold biases against people without knowing it! These biases may be related to historical perceptions of African Americans left over from slavery and the Jim Crow era, passed down from generation to generation. African Americans, particularly men and boys, are often seen as aggressive, menacing, or engaged in criminal behavior (Patton 2014). We have seen this bias most recently displayed on news and television as we watch white police officers (and others) gun down unarmed African Americans with the defense of, “I was scared for my life.” From Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin to Tamir Rice, African American children have been stripped of their childhood and perceived as aggressive...expendable.

The stereotypes perpetuated by television and network news may have the strongest effect on individuals who do not have regular interactions with African Americans (Robert and Lichter 1988). Findings from the 2010 US Census reports suggest that while segregated neighborhoods are on the decline, they are doing so at a very slow pace. Census data reports that Atlanta, an area that is thought



to have a burgeoning Black middle class, is in the top twenty-five US cities where Black-white segregation is resistant to change (“Georgia Population Projections” 2010). Despite being free from Jim Crow laws and other discriminatory practices, such as redlining in housing systems (although some would argue this phenomenon still exists), African Americans still feel the effects of America’s bias.

In the absence of first-hand experiences with African Americans *and* the barrage of media portrayal of them in stereotypical ways, it is critical that we examine how our stereotypes and implicit biases seep into the very systems that are designed to educate and support our children.

BIAS IN CLASSROOMS

Cory Turner (2016) titled a recent National Public Radio (NPR) article, “Bias Isn’t Just a Police Problem, It’s a Preschool Problem.” This title aptly reflects a trend in early childhood settings across the country. Recent statistics indicate that African American preschoolers are 3.6 times more likely than white preschoolers to receive one or more days of suspension. This statistic is made more troubling when we understand that African American children make up only 19 percent of preschool enrollment, yet they represent 47 percent of preschool children receiving one or more days of suspension (Lewin 2012).

What accounts for this disparity in disciplinary practices? Implicit bias in the early childhood classroom has been identified as a partial explanation for disparities in the expulsion and suspension rates between African American boys and other preschool children. In a popular study from the Yale University Child Study Center, Walter Gilliam and his colleagues (2016) found that early childhood educators, both white and Black, observed African American boys more closely with the expectation that they would display challenging behaviors. The study also found that white and Black early educators held African Americans to different behavioral expectations.

Why does this matter? According to the US Department of Education’s Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings, suspension and expulsion can have significant adverse effects on young children, including (1) denying children learning environments that support healthy development and academic success; (2) delaying or interfering with the identification of underlying disabilities or mental health issues that may be screened for in early childhood settings; (3) increasing family stress and burden, as they must look for care for their children elsewhere, oftentimes on short notice; and (4) increasing the likelihood of expulsion or suspension in later school grades. Even when young children display aggressive or challenging behavior, the solution should not be to remove them from learning

environments. Rather, these are the children who could benefit the most from high-quality instruction, structured environments, and supportive teachers. In some cases, the addition of mental health interventions might be appropriate. These mental health providers, however, must also be culturally competent, aware of their own biases, and skilled to work with the unique stressors facing African American children and families.

BIAS IN THERAPEUTIC SPACES

African Americans become aware of the stereotypes that exist about them early in their lives. Some may choose to combat the negative stereotypes by behaving in ways that are opposite of the stereotype (Green 1998). For example, African Americans may feel compelled to work harder than their peers to counter the stereotype that African Americans are “lazy.” They might also be passive in the face of conflict to avoid being stereotyped as aggressive or “just another angry Black man, woman, or child.” While these examples may not seem problematic, they represent only a few of the ways African Americans must perform their daily roles with added pressure, stress, and anxiety.

Mental health counseling, a likely strategy to address stress and anxiety, has not always been our first choice. Historically, African Americans have chosen to lean on elders in their community and trusted religious leaders who understood their culture and beliefs (Snowden 2001). While these figures are important, they may lack the professional training necessary to address the specific mental health needs of the community. An important question becomes: Are the trained mental health professionals equipped with the skills necessary to counsel African Americans? The answer: Not all of them.

While all licensed mental health providers must have specific academic preparation in order to practice, there is variability in the type of education they receive. Even when academic programs are well designed, they only provide an introduction to issues of diversity and could not possibly prepare counselors to work with all cultures in a proficient manner. Mental health providers must go beyond the classroom to gain exposure and advanced knowledge in order to work with their African American clients in meaningful and respectful ways (Sammons and Speight 2008).

Both counselors and the individuals they serve bring to the counseling relationship their own identities, cultural values, beliefs, past experiences, and biases that must be accounted for. When a counselor’s beliefs about African Americans are influenced by stereotypical views and/or biased beliefs, it can lead to misdiagnoses and improper treatment (Croskerry 2013), which may further isolate African Americans from effective treatment strategies.

Change can be difficult—sometimes even frightening. However, educators and mental health professionals do not have to feel alone. Resources are available and easily accessible. The only requirement is an open mind and a willingness to embrace the growing diversity of our world.

OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES AND BIASES TO SUPPORT SAFE SPACES FOR CHILDREN

So how do we ensure that the professionals we trust to educate and counsel our children are prepared to work with the multitude of Black, brown, and tan children they will engage in their practices free from preconceived stereotypes of aggressive and criminal tendencies? How can we ensure that schools and therapeutic spaces are safe for our children? In our forty years of combined experience, here is what we suggest:

- Teachers and counselors must first look within. They should ask themselves, what stereotypes do I ascribe to that are demeaning to African Americans? How have I allowed these stereotypes to guide my practice? Confronting the negative and distorted images they hold about African Americans may be a good first step to creating healthier, more productive educational and counseling relationships. Harvard University’s Project Implicit (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>) provides an array of online tests that teachers and counselors can take to give them an idea of what biases they may hold. Becoming self-aware allows educators and counselors to better connect with African Americans and provide them with services that reflect greater cultural sensitivity.
- Once we know the biases we hold and the stereotypes to which we ascribe, we can then work to counter that negative messaging. This work will most likely require training and professional development opportunities. Both

mental health counselors and early childhood professionals are required to have ongoing continuing education as part of their professional growth. Seeking out opportunities that focus on issues of cultural competence will increase knowledge and could potentially enhance the educational or therapeutic outcomes for African Americans.

- Learning about African Americans from a workshop or training session is not enough. True cultural competence comes from the hands-on learning opportunities one has from



engaging with that cultural group. For educators, this work means extending the caring community of learners to incorporate African American families. These efforts may include ensuring classrooms are welcoming spaces, extending invitations to participate, being aware of the barriers to full involvement some families may face, and creating opportunities for two-way communication between the family and the classroom. For mental health professionals, this may mean immersing themselves in the community of their clients. Practitioners may spend time in African American communities, observing and participating in African American cultural events and developing positive relationships with trusted individuals who can provide honest feedback (Streets 2011). Educators and mental health providers can also rely on each other for support. In both settings, ongoing supervision and collaboration may be needed to assist teachers and mental health professionals in working with new populations and in situations they may find challenging.

- Finally, there are a number of resources available to professionals seeking to increase their knowledge, skills, and dispositions for working with diverse populations. Early childhood educators can lean on professional organizations, such as the National Black Child Development Institute (NBCDI) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Both organizations provide a multitude of articles, position statements, and “Points of Proof” that can help guide educators in their practices with young children. In addition, the US Department of Education, in their Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings, provides multiple web-based resources for providers. Mental health professionals can also lean on their professional organizations for resources and support. The American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Psychological Association (APA), and the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) provide ethical guidelines for working with individuals, a counseling framework for working with and advocating for diverse populations, and opportunities to connect with others in the field.

A change has already come. Beautiful faces of all races and ethnicities are learning, playing, and working together. But more change is required. Professionals have recognized the need for a more culturally-competent workforce in many service professions. Change can be difficult—sometimes even frightening. However, educators and mental health professionals do not have to feel alone. Resources are available and easily accessible. The only requirement is an open mind and a willingness to embrace the growing diversity of our world.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Point of Proof:

PREMIER ACADEMY, INC. CHILDHOOD ACUTE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES PROGRAM (CAMP)

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND VISION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Since opening our doors in 1971, Premier Academy has strengthened families by providing high-quality, affordable early care and education to over 25,000 children from low-income neighborhoods throughout the Atlanta metropolitan area. We are proud to offer holistic early care and education programs and services in high-quality learning environments that enhance children's cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development.

The Childhood Acute Mental Health Practices Program (CAMP) Project is a collaborative, preschool-focused initiative designed to promote and strengthen children's social-emotional and behavioral health in early care and education settings to ensure they meet developmental milestones and succeed in school.

In partnership with Premier Academy, the CAMP Project:

- offers comprehensive school-based services, including screenings, assessments, and treatments targeting students who exhibit social-emotional and behavioral needs in general education settings;
- trains preschool and elementary school teachers (K-3) on best practices in identifying, approaching, and referring students who show signs of psychological distress;
- provides supportive services, educational workshops, and family counseling to parents and caregivers; and,
- offers promising practices on child mental health to practitioners in the early care and education field.

The Childhood Acute Mental Health Practices Program (CAMP) Project is a collaborative, preschool-focused initiative designed to promote and strengthen children's social-emotional and behavioral health in early care and education settings to ensure they meet developmental milestones and succeed in school.

In line with these efforts, our ultimate goals for this initiative are to:

- provide early identification and treatment of behavioral and mental health issues to preschool-aged children;
- build the capacity of preschool and elementary school teachers (K-3) as partners in ensuring children's healthy cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development;
- increase the mental health literacy and advocacy skills of parents and caregivers; and,
- ensure continuity of mental health care for children from preschool through third grade.

Strong social-emotional and behavioral health is a key component to a child's overall development. By providing resources and services that meet children's mental health needs in supportive, nurturing environments (i.e., early care



and education settings, home), Premier Academy helps to ensure children reach their developmental milestones while continuing to learn, grow, and succeed.

WHAT MAKES YOUR ORGANIZATION A “POINT OF PROOF?”

The CAMP Project is dedicated to providing comprehensive supports and services to children and families that help them effectively manage life challenges, diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health disorders, and other issues that can affect academic success to ensure they reach their developmental milestones and achieve optimal health and wellness. Throughout the project, CAMP has improved:

- 92% of students’ social skills and interactions with others;
- 76% of students’ academic skills; and,
- 69% of students’ self-regulation skills.

CAMP provided parenting training to more than 100 parents and caregivers, which resulted in a decrease in negative discipline approaches and parenting styles. These program outcomes have also resulted in higher rates of developmental mastery and reduced rates of school suspensions, including less punitive interactions with students.

WHO DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION SERVE?

The CAMP Project primarily serves preschool-aged children between the ages of three- and five-years-old. Ninety percent of the children are from low- to moderate-income families living in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The demographic breakdown of families served is as follows:

- **Ethnicity:** 90% African American, 4% Hispanic/Latino, and 6% Biracial
- **Gender:** 75% male, 25% female
- **Family Status:** 66% single, 10% married, 12% cohabitating, 6% divorced, and 6% under the care of another family member (i.e., grandparent, aunt, uncle)
- **Family Educational Level:** 39% high school diplomas, 33% college educated, 28% did not complete high school or did not report their education level

CHILDREN WHO HAD A HEALTH CARE VISIT THAT INCLUDED A STANDARDIZED DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCREENING (SDBS) IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS

RACE	GEORGIA
	% RECEIVING SDBS SCREENING AMONG CHILDREN AGED 10 MONTHS-5 YEARS
Black	49% (78,440)
White	40% (106,763)
Latino	33% (31,510)

SUMMARY: In Georgia, Black children are more likely to receive a Standardized Developmental and Behavioral Screening (SDBS) to ensure they are on track developmentally, behaviorally, and socially from the start.

Source: National Survey of Child Health, 2011-12.

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS?

The CAMP Project works to achieve the following outcomes in partnership with participating children, families, teachers, and staff:

- Children receive mental health services from preschool through third grade.
- Parents and caregivers increase their mental health literacy to better support their children and themselves.
- Parents and caregivers are equipped with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to serve as more effective advocates for their children and their mental and behavioral health needs.
- Teachers are better equipped to manage the mental and emotional needs of the students in their classrooms.
- The stigma related to mental health among children, families, teachers, and staff is reduced.

Due to their involvement in the CAMP Project, Premier Academy has observed strengthened classroom management strategies among teachers and staff, and increased parent engagement and attentiveness among families. Parents and

Due to their involvement in the CAMP Project, Premier Academy has observed strengthened classroom management strategies among teachers and staff, and increased parent engagement and attentiveness among families.

caregivers have also used the information and resources received from partner workshops and trainings to become more involved with their children's health, well-being, and education while openly communicating with teachers and staff. Children have gained more self-confidence and learned positive conflict resolution skills from partners through group (i.e., puppet shows) and individual work, which has resulted in positive student behavioral outcomes in class.

To measure participant success, multiple assessments are completed at designated check points throughout the program. These assessments include Work Sampling Online, Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and the Ages & Stages Questionnaire Screenings (ASQ:3, ASQ-SE), all of which help track child participants' overall development, including their mental health and well-being. These tools help us to assess indicators aligned with social-emotional developmental milestones and behavioral changes. Completed by teachers, counselors, parents, and caregivers, these assessments evaluate children's developmental progress, including their quality and rates of classroom participation, social interaction, and overall academic achievement. The data from these assessments is then collected, evaluated, and aggregated by an independent source. Success is demonstrated by increased scores in some assessment areas and reduced scores in others. The project's goal is to see demonstrated improvement in the following skill areas: Self-Concept, Self-Control, Approaches to Learning, and Interaction with Others.



Black children and families are incredibly resilient, determined, and proud, strengths that—when used as levers—become key components to ensuring their lifelong success.

WHAT IS INNOVATIVE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S WORK WITH BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES? WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

The CAMP Project's theory of change seeks to approach our work from four perspectives—individual, family, school, and community—to promote and strengthen children's social-emotional and behavioral health in early care and education settings to ensure they meet developmental milestones and succeed in school. Because our children are deeply affected by their families, communities, and society, prevention strategies have included a range of activities that address multiple levels of influence. This comprehensive approach is more likely to have more lasting effects than any single intervention.

Using a collective impact framework, CAMP strives to address and support the mental health needs of program participants through a comprehensive and personalized approach. Our partners provide services to the same demographic population, primarily Black children and families from low-income communities. This approach allows us to utilize the unique insight and resources of our partners and other stakeholders in the Black community in Atlanta while providing exceptional continuity of services and care for our families. We achieve, and in some cases exceed, our desired program outcomes due to the efficacy of our service delivery model.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED?

From the beginning, the CAMP Project has sought to reduce the stigma of mental health or mental illness by using language that promotes healthy social-emotional development for children and families. The CAMP Project and our partners have also had a positive influence on the way practitioners in the early care and education field approach child mental health and wellness by employing terms that destigmatize these concepts and making programs like CAMP more accessible to children and their families.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE SUSTAINABLE?

Since its inception, Premier Academy and our partners have leveraged over \$250,000 from foundations and governmental agencies to expand the program and enhance the services provided. The CAMP Project was initially funded by the United Way of Greater Atlanta's "Dare to Forget the Box" Collective Impact Initiative. This model of mental health services at school-based centers has also been replicated by a handful of other states through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. These states include Colorado, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

CAMP's initial project plan included parent education workshops on mental health issues designed to empower them to effectively address the mental health needs of their children during a particularly critical stage of their development—birth to eight years—to ensure their long-term personal and academic success. During the first few trainings, families were fully transparent about their life stressors as it relates to parenting children with mental health issues. Based on their feedback, family programming expanded to help parents and caregivers cope positively with this stress while gaining effective parenting skills, tools, and resources.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE REPLICABLE?

The CAMP Project has demonstrated great promise for model replication, a vital outcome for our collaborative. We and our partners understand replication is primarily grounded in a program's ability to create a social impact that can be successfully duplicated in another location. Wholistic Stress Control Institute, a CAMP partner, has been working to develop a similar program with the Chattahoochee Early Learning Center. To yield similar program outcomes, we strongly recommend securing partners with a shared vision and targeted demographic. It is also important to develop effective communication systems between partners to allow and support frequent interaction and information dissemination. Partners must collaboratively work toward mutually developed goals and objectives designed to effectively meet the needs of the children and families served.

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

Black children and families are incredibly resilient, determined, and proud, strengths that—when used as levers—become key components to ensuring their lifelong success. The capacity of Black children and families to quickly learn and adapt is remarkable, especially when they are seen as partners in leadership and acknowledged for their efforts. When there is an explicit value gained, Black children and families have intentionally made positive decisions and changes in behavior while redirecting their focus to the most critical indicators of success, positive family interactions, conflict resolution, etc.

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

In order to fully address the social-emotional needs of children and families, it is critical for trusted providers to offer holistic programs and services in a nurturing, supportive environment. The CAMP Project helps communities recognize the supports needed to reduce the effects of adverse factors on the health and well-being of Black children and their families. In collaboration with local partners, this project provides knowledge, tools, and resources to prevent and reduce the labeling (and possibly the medicating) of Black children as they enter the K-12 educational system. The CAMP Project is fully committed to preparing Black children for positive and rewarding life experiences while working to ensure their lifelong success.

THE CHILDHOOD ACUTE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES PROGRAM (CAMP) HAS IMPROVED

92%
OF STUDENTS' SOCIAL SKILLS AND INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS AND
76% OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SKILLS.



HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

HOW CULTURALLY-RELEVANT AND CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE HEALING AND COPING STRATEGIES SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

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African American families and communities possess enduring adaptive strategies and coping mechanisms, which in turn promote well-being. Culturally-relevant and culturally-responsive healing and coping strategies support the social-emotional development and success of African American children. These healing and coping strategies were weaved into the fabric of African American families and communities in the midst of slavery and passed down through generations.

Many African American healing and coping strategies have been designed to support healthy development and psychological resilience. Coming-of-age rituals mark the transition into manhood or womanhood. African-centered youth and family rites of passage programs focus on character development to support personal growth and adult preparation. These community programs nurture cultural values, such as self-determination and unity, and character strengths, such as honesty, courage, kindness, and humility. These rituals impart moral reasoning, values, and social responsibility while celebrating individual attributes.

African American families are a storehouse of strength-based healing and coping strategies, which play a role in the mental, physical, intellectual, and spiritual survival of African Americans.

Social and behavioral science literature on race and cultural identity, resilience, and coping has advanced over the past fifty years. Researchers repeatedly find positive associations between child and adolescent academic achievement, healthy racial and cultural identity development, and family strength. In the science of resilience, psychologists have discovered that there is a set of human strengths that protect children in times of adversity: courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty, and perseverance (Snyder and Lopez 2007). Psychological resilience and coping are rooted in a particular worldview. African American families are a storehouse of strength-based healing and coping strategies, which play a role in the mental, physical, intellectual, and spiritual survival of African Americans (Caldwell-Colbert, Parks, and Eshun 2009). This is particularly important for child development because children model their coping styles and resilience strategies after the adults in their lives.

RACIAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Researchers have found that a healthy connection to one's heritage can have a protective and buffering function for youth of color facing multiple environmental stressors. Youth experiencing racism and discrimination can draw strength from group pride and feelings of belonging. The bonds of group membership are defined by feeling close ties to others in thought, experience, and emotion. In a study about academic achievement, researchers found high levels of racial pride can enhance academic motivation and success among African American boys (Butler-Barnes, Williams, and Chavous 2012; Okantah 2016).



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FAMILY STRENGTHS

Identifying strengths of African American families requires understanding the nuances of family systems, relational ties, functions, and activities of family life. While a conventional family unit is defined as a group consisting of parent(s) or caregivers and children living together in a household, African American families exist within an extended family system that includes community ties. Kinship structure involves fictive kinship, which are close social ties to people other than blood kin. Therefore, African American children's socialization looks different from Western models of nuclear family units (Marbley and Rouson 2011, 3). For all children, close ties to caring supportive adults who model adaptive coping contributes to healthy social-emotional development.

Strengths and coping strategies emerge from culturally-derived beliefs and values. For example, educational achievement and hard work has long been a highly-valued strength in Black families. Regrettably, school systems can undermine this quality and threaten the success of Black children's school success by marginalizing their experiences, through the propensity to stereotype (Steele 1997).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the success of African American children is facilitated by healing and coping strategies related to racial and cultural identity, family strengths, and spiritual/religious beliefs and practices. Despite the many challenges that oppression and discrimination create for African Americans, Black children's success is mediated by adaptive healing and coping strategies rooted in enduring cognitive-style, emotional, and behavioral patterns. These strengths-based beliefs, values, and practices shape a positive mindset and holistic well-being of African American adults and children.

HEATH AND WELL-BEING

Point of Proof:

ST. JOSEPH’S/CANDLER
AFRICAN AMERICAN
HEALTH INFORMATION
& RESOURCE CENTER

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND VISION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Established by St. Joseph’s and Candler Hospitals, the African American Health Information & Resource Center (AAHIRC) is a vital part of our ongoing commitment to improving the health of African American residents in Chatham County, Georgia. The AAHIRC was opened in November 1999 and was created out of the health system’s desire to improve the quality and quantity of health programs and services for the local African American community. The AAHIRC provides a comfortable and welcoming environment for Black children and families while taking a holistic approach to their health needs.

In response to the needs of neighborhood residents, the AAHIRC provides comprehensive community services, such as health screenings, health seminars, Internet access, computer classes, audiovisual and other written materials, a health resource library, professional health and wellness puppet shows, and health insurance assistance.

The center provides access to our health resource library to children and families in the community we serve. Housing hundreds of books on African American health and wellness topics, the library also offers audio and visual materials to visitors, including seven listening stations that provide health information on cassettes and CDs.

We also offer free puppet shows to daycares, schools, libraries, and churches. The puppet shows are designed to help children and youth build character while educating them on various health and safety topics, including the importance of

BREASTFEEDING AMONG BLACK MOTHERS IN GEORGIA

RACE	GEORGIA
	% OF MOTHERS WHO HAD DISCUSSION ABOUT BREASTFEEDING DURING PRENATAL CARE VISITS
Black	95%
White	88%
Latino	90%
Total	91%

SUMMARY: Black expecting mothers in Georgia are more likely to discuss breastfeeding with their doctors than any other race. Research shows that breastfed babies have lower risks of asthma, obesity during childhood, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and type 2 diabetes.

Sources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System, 2011
- American Academy of Pediatrics. 2012. “Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk.” *Pediatrics* 129(3): e827-e841.
- Harder, T., R. Bergmann, G. Kallischnigg, and A. Plagemann. 2005. “Duration of Breastfeeding and Risk of Overweight: A Meta-Analysis.” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 162(5): 397-403.

healthy eating and physical activity. The puppet shows also support healthy social-emotional development by promoting honesty and respect.

Sponsored by the University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension Service, the center’s 4-H Community Club is the premier youth development program seeking to promote positive youth development, learning, and community service and engagement. For more than four years, the center has been using the 4-H Community Club to create opportunities for youth to broaden their skills and aspirations while nurturing their full potential. With a strong health component, the club also supports youth’s understanding of healthy living, including nutrition, fitness, and food science along with other important topics such as childhood obesity and drug awareness.

The overall goal of this community initiative is to improve the health and well-being of African American residents in Chatham County by offering culturally-responsive,



The overall goal of this community initiative is to improve the health and well-being of African American residents in Chatham County by offering culturally-responsive, culturally-relevant, and culturally-accessible health programs and services.

culturally-relevant, and culturally-accessible health programs and services. Equally important, we address health disparities that adversely affect African American residents by:

- bridging the gap of health care access through health screenings and referrals;
- reducing the incidence of health conditions, such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and obesity, by providing free, accessible nutrition and fitness classes and programs; and
- improving technology skills through our computer assistance program.

The center has also been successful at increasing the trust level of African American residents who participate in our programs and utilize our services within the health system.

WHAT MAKES YOUR ORGANIZATION A “POINT OF PROOF?”

The St. Joseph's/Candler African American Health Information & Resource Center (AAHIRC) offers comprehensive resources, programs, and services that improve the quality of life for the entire community. In collaboration with local volunteers and other partners, the AAHIRC has become a central community hub, serving as a catalyst to a renewed sense of commitment to advancing the health and well-being of Black children and families. The AAHIRC has adapted an equity lens to view and approach public health issues; this empowers Chatham County residents to take greater control over their health, which has been essential to reducing and eliminating health inequities.

WHO DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION SERVE?

The St. Joseph's/Candler African American Health Information & Resource Center (AAHIRC) is dedicated to improving health services for African American residents

by tackling the most persistent public health issues impacting the local Black community. This includes gaining a better understanding of the community's needs, primarily the need for culturally responsive and culturally-relevant health information, and addressing the racial disparities in health outcomes. The AAHIRC primarily serves four neighborhoods in the Savannah area adjacent to the center's location. Close to the time our doors opened in 1999, the city of Savannah's 2000 Census Tract reported that the following demographic characteristics made up these neighborhoods:

- Most residents identified as Black/African American (10,768) with a smaller percentage identifying as white (2,690), Hispanic/Latino (114), Native American and Pacific Islander (109), and Asian (23).
- There were 7,187 females and 6,460 males who resided in these neighborhoods.

It is most likely that these statistics have changed since we opened our doors nearly two decades ago. However, we use the geographic information provided by our participants to ensure that we continue to reach our targeted population: Black children, families, and adults.

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS?

The St. Joseph's/Candler African American Health Information & Resource Center (AAHIRC) defines and measures success by addressing health disparities that adversely affect African Americans residing in Chatham County.

To assess the impact and quality of our programs and services, the AAHIRC conducts a tri-annual summary evaluation to facilitate the ongoing improvement of our program and service delivery model by identifying and addressing potential issues while increasing programmatic responsiveness and accountability to our residents and other community stakeholders.

The AAHIRC's overarching evaluation goals are (1) to better understand the community members' needs being addressed; (2) to identify community members' needs that are not being addressed; (3) to develop new strategies to address these issues; (4) to improve existing programs and services; and (5) to prioritize community needs and resources. The primary objectives of our evaluation reports are:

- to examine the merit of direct service interventions on the health behavior outcomes of center participants; and
- to measure and assess the extent the center has contributed, disseminated, and translated new knowledge to these participants.

The latest data demonstrates that the majority of the center's participants believe that the health seminars and workshops enhanced their knowledge about their personal health and other health-related issues, such as nutrition and chronic disease

Our mission at St. Joseph's/Candler's African American Health Information & Resource Center: "Rooted in God's love, we treat illness and promote wellness for all people."

management. Additionally, our participants reported a significant improvement in their computer and technology skills and an increase in employment opportunities as a result of learning how to write a resume and search for jobs on the Internet. Overall, 93 percent of our participants reported being satisfied with AAHIRC programs and services.

WHAT IS INNOVATIVE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S WORK WITH BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES? WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

The health care system strategically planted the St. Joseph's/Candler's African American Health Information & Resource Center within the neighborhoods where African American children, families, and adults live, work, and play. This community-based health education and technology center was the first resource center operated by a private hospital in the state of Georgia. The center has been successful in its approach due to our ongoing effort toward true reconciliation, healing, and harmony among Chatham County residents by building relationships that honor the heritage and culture of African American children, families, and communities. The AAHIRC emerged from many discussions among leaders of St. Joseph's/Candler and other individuals and organizations equally committed to improving the quality of health care for African American residents in Chatham County. To this day, the center continues to collaborate with local partner organizations, churches, civic groups, and governmental agencies, including the City of Savannah, the Chatham County Government, the Chatham County Health Department, and the Chatham County Board of Education.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED?

The St. Joseph's/Candler's African American Health Information & Resource Center is working to expand our programs and services to additional Chatham County residents. To resolve this issue, we have increased capacity by recruiting



interns from local colleges and universities while securing supplemental funding from the federal government and foundations over the past eighteen years.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE SUSTAINABLE?

St. Joseph's/Candler funds the St. Joseph's/Candler's African American Health Information & Resource Center in keeping with its mission: "Rooted in God's love, we treat illness and promote wellness for all people." The center's participants play an active role in shaping the programs and services offered by providing feedback and suggestions on our program and service delivery forms as well as our tri-annual summary evaluation.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE REPLICABLE?

The health of Black children and families is a direct reflection of their understanding of practical health information and resources that inform their decision to make healthy lifestyle choices. In order to design equally effective initiatives like the AAHIRC, organizations and governmental agencies must be willing to invest additional funding into preventive health resources, programs, and services. It is more cost-effective to support residents proactively, rather than reactively, improving their health and well-being. This preemptive approach significantly reduces health care costs, yielding considerable economic growth and sustainability for the community served.

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

When Black children and families are offered culturally-relevant and culturally-responsive knowledge, tools, and skills on health and well-being, they will take the necessary steps to improve the quality of life for themselves and their communities.

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

The primary purpose of the St. Joseph's/Candler's African American Health Information & Resource Center is to promote health and wellness as well as disease prevention by providing Black children, families, and individuals in low-income communities with the knowledge and tools needed to make informed decisions about their health and well-being through responsive educational seminars and workshops and existing, proven resources in Savannah, Georgia.



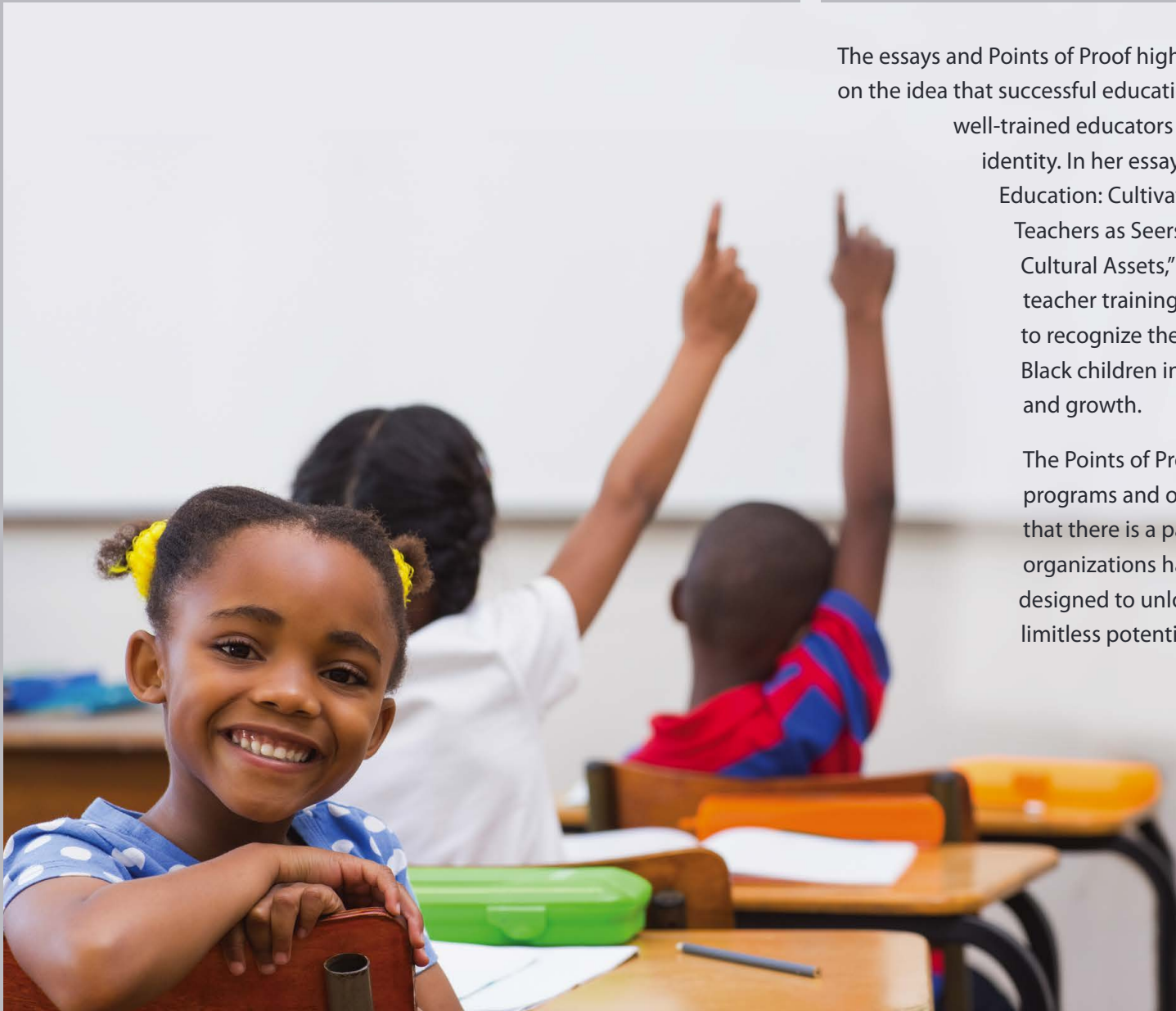
SECTION 2

EDUCATION

The essays and Points of Proof highlighted in this section are centered on the idea that successful education systems begin with diverse and well-trained educators who affirm children's culture and identity. In her essay, "Flipping The Script" in Teacher Education: Cultivating Early Childhood Pre-Service Teachers as Seers of African American Children's Cultural Assets," Dr. Morgan Faison emphasizes that teacher training programs must prepare teachers to recognize the cultural strengths and assets of Black children in order to promote their learning and growth.

The Points of Proof highlighted in this section are programs and organizations built on the belief that there is a path to success for every child. These organizations have carefully developed programs designed to unlock the brilliance, creativity, and limitless potential of Black children.

In addition, this section offers many more innovative best practices and ideas for supporting Black children's academic achievement from preschool through higher education.



EDUCATION

“FLIPPING THE SCRIPT” IN TEACHER EDUCATION:

Cultivating Early Childhood Pre-Service Teachers as Seers of African American Children’s Cultural Assets

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Black children comprise nearly 37 percent of Georgia’s early childhood students (prekindergarten to third grade) across many different localities—urban, semi-urban, suburban, and rural (Georgia Dept. of Education 2017). To truly connect with and shape young minds, teachers must understand how they see the world. Teachers must see through their students’ eyes and understand their shared frames of reference and lived experiences. Educators must become *seers of African American children’s culture*. Teachers must be adept in discerning African American students’ distinctive cultural assets and view these assets as keys for promoting student learning and growth within the classroom.

Yet, the task of recognizing and utilizing the cultural strengths and assets of African American children is no small feat in a society that positions whiteness as normative, while simultaneously refusing to acknowledge the existence and value of African American culture. The practice of African American cultural invalidation and denial can be especially prevalent among many white teachers, who currently make up 85 percent of the teacher workforce (Boser 2011). Many white teachers grow up in racially and economically isolated neighborhoods and communities, and by circumstance and socialization, come to overly rely on stereotypes about African Americans. Consequently, while gathering information to inform their classroom practices, many of these teachers construct inaccurate and incomplete pictures of African American children and their families.

“FLIPPING THE SCRIPT” IN COURSEWORK

To demonstrate, I begin this essay with a few reflections as an instructor of an early childhood teacher education course on this topic. The course was designed to assist

Teachers must be adept in discerning African American students’ distinctive cultural assets and view these assets as keys for promoting student learning and growth within the classroom.

students in naming and reframing cultural biases, stereotypes, and assumptions about students and families from backgrounds other than their own and at internal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural/societal levels. During the course, I introduced several concepts, including social justice, culturally-relevant/sustaining pedagogy, and community-informed curricula and care, to a group of mostly white, female, middle-class undergraduates. Course readings, discussions, and activities centered around the course goals: (1) to encourage and reward risk-taking and active engagement in difficult conversations; (2) to develop an inquiry-based stance toward cultural diversity, power, and equity; (3) to de-center white, middle-class culture; and (4) to cultivate teaching praxes that promote the achievement of diverse students.

**IN GEORGIA, 70% OF CHILDREN
PARTICIPATING IN HEAD START ARE BLACK.**

The Head Start Impact Study demonstrated that children who participate in Head Start are more advanced in cognitive and social-emotional development. As adults, Head Start children have a higher likelihood of graduating high school, attending college, and receiving a postsecondary degree, license, or certification.

Sources: Center for Law and Social Policy, Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2014; Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Head Start Impact Study



One of the course requirements was to complete a certain number of hours of fieldwork as mentors to early childhood education students in the local community. Rather than tutoring, the course incorporated a mentoring component that was specifically designed to (1) elevate students' one-to-one interactions and perceptions of early childhood students from diverse backgrounds; and (2) more generally, position the teacher-student relationship and social dynamic as the most important in-school factor mediating early childhood students' academic success. In keeping with the population of the local area, most of the early childhood mentees were African American. For their culminating project, students used multimedia to create documentary videos that highlighted what they learned about the community from the perspective of their mentees as well as what they gleaned about their assets, experiences, and aspirations.

For some students in the course, the mentoring assignment may have, in fact, been their first prolonged experience with African American children. Some students spoke of culture shock when entering predominantly African American early childhood settings or while getting to know African American children on their own terms. By and large, the students shared observations from their mentoring that reflected a tendency to pathologize African American families and communities. In doing so, students reified the centrality of whiteness, normalized their experiences, and projected their cultural values onto their mentees. While discussing their mentoring experiences in class, many of my students highlighted what their mentees *did not* have in terms of social, cultural, linguistic, and economic capital and what they *could not* do in terms of academic competence and behavioral capacity.

For example, a common concern among students was that their mentees were forced to take on the premature responsibility of supervising and caretaking for younger siblings and relatives. During this discussion, I reflected aloud that students were overlaying their cultural norms onto their mentees. Instead of normalizing their own childhood upbringings, I asked them to consider the potential assets of their mentees because they have taken on such caretaking responsibilities. I posed the question: How might teachers build upon the independence and problem-solving abilities that these students bring to the classroom?

Other students observed their mentees use of what they called "slang." In response to these comments, I introduced students to the linguistic structure of African American Vernacular English, and we explored the utility and transfer of this knowledge for the teaching and instruction of Standard American English. Still, others pointed out that fathers were notoriously absent and that their mentees suffered from the consequences of "broken homes." Some students even pointed out that African American boys especially exhibited "wild and uncontrollable behaviors." After some collective reflection on the pathologizing embedded within these comments, I assisted students in juxtaposing their observations alongside African American cultural norms related to communalism, fictive kinship, verve, and expressive movement (Boykin 1986).

I use this brief commentary to set the context for the question of whether or not traditional, undergraduate, teacher education programs are preparing teachers to work effectively with African American early childhood students.¹ To what extent do traditional, undergraduate teacher education programs challenge and provoke pre-service teachers to become seers of African American children's culture through an assets-based lens? Additionally, once teachers begin to reframe deficit perspectives, are they equipped with the agency that is needed to "flip the script" and welcome African American students' cultural assets into the intellectual and social life of the classroom? King (1991) defines *dysconscious racism* as an "uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (135). My concern is that without requiring cultural competence as a marker for pre-service teachers' readiness for the classroom, teacher education may collude in the dysconscious racism of new teachers, and ultimately, the underachievement of African American children.

"FLIPPING THE SCRIPT" ON AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE

Interrupting student teachers' prior notions of culture and operationalizing the term from a social foundations lens was a useful starting point for provoking new considerations among my pre-service teachers. According to Nieto and Bode (1992), "culture consists of values, traditions, worldviews, and social and political relationships created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, religion or other shared identity" (158). Beyond tangible manifestations of culture, such as preferred traditional cuisine, dress, and holiday observances, culture is an often unconscious, "dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, and worldviews that determine how we think, believe, and behave" (Gay 2000, 9).

Children interact with the people, processes, and products of their cultural environment in both formal and informal home, school, and community contexts. Social interactions provide children with multiple opportunities to observe and participate in culturally meaningful skills and practices that shape their cognitive processes, including conceptualization, affect, and behaviors. Most importantly, children use the cultural skills and practices acquired through cultural socialization experiences to aid them in higher-level thinking, reasoning, and problem solving.

Leo Vygotsky (1978) premised his theory on the idea that learning and cognitive development is mediated by human social interactions within a specific cultural context. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has served to ground the continued study of culture and its significance in the African American context of teaching

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defines culturally-relevant teaching as a "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes."

and learning. Vygotsky's culturally-based variation in preferred learning styles is often a commonly cited example of the importance of culture in the ethnically diverse classroom (Hale-Benson 1986; Hilliard 1989; Irvine and York 1995; Shade 1989; Vazquez 1991). For instance, Hale-Benson (1986) finds that as African American children are socialized in predominantly African American families and communities, many develop cognitive patterns and behaviors that are reflective of "core" African American cultural norms and values, such as a preference for inferential reasoning, kinesthetic learning, collaborative work, and relational methods of instruction in classroom settings.

"FLIPPING THE SCRIPT" ON TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

Helping my students make links between the cultural context of learning and the cultural context of teaching and instruction was a constant exercise we engaged in throughout the semester. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defines culturally-relevant teaching as a "pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (20). Teachers operating within this pedagogical framework understand that students do not enter classrooms as *tabula rasas* or blank slates. To the contrary, culturally-responsive teachers acknowledge that all students possess a plethora of culturally-embedded experiences and understandings that can be used as learning resources within the classroom. Paris (2012) offers that instead of the term, *responsive*, the term and stance of *culturally-sustaining* pedagogy more accurately confronts deficit perspectives and mono-cultural practices. Teachers who employ culturally-sustaining pedagogy privilege learning opportunities that allow students to fully bring to bear their cultural identity and knowledge in the classroom and enable students to use their assets as launch pads for constructing new knowledge.

Teachers who take a stance that is counter to culturally-responsive/sustaining pedagogy run the risk of normalizing white, middle-class culture and thus

¹ For the purposes of this essay, traditional, undergraduate teacher education programs are defined as four-year, undergraduate, teacher education programs that lead towards initial certification.

alienating African American children from full participation in the life of the classroom. A culture-neutral or “colorblind” perspective is often adopted when teachers believe the acknowledgement of ethnically-based, cultural differences is counterproductive to equality (Howard 2015). Even those who are well-meaning but hold deficit perspectives about African American children will misinterpret their behaviors, misdiagnose their needs, and belie their intellectual capabilities (Irvine 2003). The deficit perspectives of teachers often results in observable apathy—low expectations, lack of care, and classrooms that emphasize rote memorization and lower-order thinking skills. These practices lead to a host of negative outcomes for African American children including school disengagement, school failure, and threatened life chances and opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATORS

- Although deficit perspectives are deeply entrenched, teacher educators must refuse to become indifferent to this problem. Rather, teacher educators must continuously re-evaluate program practices that mirror the broader society’s marginalization of African American culture. These reconsiderations occur when teacher educators illuminate the centrality of culture- and assets-based frameworks across teacher education coursework in meaningful and coherent ways.

- Undergraduate admissions procedures are most deserving of teacher educators’ continuous and thoughtful deliberation. As gatekeepers, teacher educators are responsible for attracting not only bright and competent learners, but also students who show exceptional ability to critically reflect and reconsider their assumptions and prior knowledge, especially around issues of injustice. Students who show these dispositional traits should be given priority in admittance to our programs; those that do not should be steered away from the profession.
- There is a robust body of research advocating for the recruitment and retention of African American teachers. Still, the number of African Americans entering and remaining in the field is not on par with the number of African American children in schools (Boser 2011). Teacher educators seeking to diversify their programs must begin to practice culturally-relevant recruitment practices by meeting these students in the communities—including high schools, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and community colleges—where they are.
- Equity within teacher education rests on the laurels of all faculty having some expertise in cultural diversity and social justice teaching and practices regardless of their individual research interests. All faculty members must buy into the notion that special skills and dispositions are needed from teachers of African American children. However, faculty buy-in must come through democratic consensus and faculty-wide professional development in culturally-responsive/sustaining pedagogies that will help to facilitate continued reflection, difficult conversations, and growth.

CONCLUSION

I have used the term, “flip the script,” throughout this essay as a metaphor for what is needed within teacher education. The script that has been written for Black children is one of ominous threat and failure because of a myriad of perceived deficits. Unfortunately, even learned educators have perpetuated the myth that being Black is a “risk factor.” However, when we uncover the cultural assets of African American children, the truth of their potential shines brightly. Freire states that, “educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language [with] which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of schools, and how they know it” (Freire 1997, 72). A debt is owed to African American children to be seen, heard, understood, and cared for (Ladson-Billings 2006). Teacher education must take the lead in re-writing a script of strength and resilience for African American children, extending them a seat at the table—for social justice cannot happen any other way.



EDUCATION

Point of Proof:

SHELTERING ARMS: Two Generations at Educare Atlanta

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND VISION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Sheltering Arms is Georgia's oldest and most respected nonprofit, early childhood education program. Our mission is to serve working families with high-quality, affordable child care and education and comprehensive support services, as well as to provide professional development for early childhood educators and community outreach. Founded by Atlanta volunteers in 1888, Sheltering Arms now annually serves more than 3,600 children, ages six weeks to five years old, and their families in sixteen centers, including Educare Atlanta, in five metro Atlanta counties.

Sheltering Arms' teaching philosophy is based on current research that defines developmentally-appropriate practices for children ages birth through five years. We work to facilitate children's ability to master basic school readiness skills in five essential domains: Physical Well-Being and Motor Development; Social and Emotional Development; Approaches to Learning; Language and Literacy Development; and, Cognition and General Knowledge.

These developmental domains are aligned with Georgia's Early Learning and Development Standards and The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. At Sheltering Arms, emphasis is placed on respect and appreciation of each individual's abilities and contributions. We believe that children learn best when:

- They are supported by sensitive, responsive, trusted adults who create nurturing environments that support and encourage exploration and independence.
- Teachers are intentional in offering choices and responding to their changing interests and abilities.

With support from Educare Atlanta's two-generation model, our children and families prove that they can and will succeed when given the resources and the opportunity. Our parents are active community leaders, industrious entrepreneurs, and engaged, supportive parents to their children.

- Their home language and cultural backgrounds are respected and reflected in all areas of the program, and parents are engaged in their child's early learning experience.
- Their day includes a balance of teacher-facilitated and child-initiated activities.
- They are active and engaged in activities that build on prior knowledge and that are designed to build their self-confidence, competence, and capability as self-directed learners.

WHAT MAKES YOUR ORGANIZATION A "POINT OF PROOF?"

Atlanta's Neighborhood Planning Unit-V¹ is considered one of Atlanta's most vulnerable communities. Despite the daily challenges they face, the children and families who walk through our doors are not merely surviving—they are *thriving*. Sheltering Arms has been nationally recognized for the success of its school readiness program. Our program graduates excel at impressive rates, well above average to their counterparts. With support from Educare Atlanta's two-generation model, our children and families prove that they can and will succeed when given the resources and the opportunity. Our parents are active community leaders, industrious entrepreneurs, and engaged, supportive parents to their children.

¹ The City of Atlanta is divided into twenty-five Neighborhood Planning Units or NPUs, which are citizen advisory councils that make recommendations to the Mayor and City Council on zoning, land use, and other planning issues. The NPU system was established in 1974 to provide an opportunity for citizens to participate actively in the Comprehensive Development Plan, which is the city's vision for the next five, ten, and fifteen years.



WHO DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION SERVE?

One hundred percent of the families we work with are African American. The vast majority of the parents and caregivers of our children are female (89 percent), and many caregivers are between the ages of twenty-six to thirty years old (32 percent). Thirty-eight percent of our parents and caregivers have a high school diploma and a comparable percentage (34 percent) have obtained a college degree or completed some college courses.

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS?

Sheltering Arms has developed the Atlanta Bridge to Self-Sufficiency, a practical and effective tool to help our families and staff define success. This user-friendly matrix supports families to determine their position in six key areas: Family Stability, Well-Being, Education and Training, Financial Management, Career Management, and School Readiness and Child Development. This tool is designed to help parents and caregivers identify and take short-term action steps to accomplish long-term goals.

One of our program participants, Destauni Williams, began her journey with Sheltering Arms' partner organization, The Center for Working Families, Inc. (TCWFI), in 2015. When she entered the program, Ms. Williams developed two goals: (1) to enroll her young son in an affordable, high-quality childcare program; and (2) to restore her finances through gainful employment, proper money management, and savings. Using the two-generation model established at Sheltering Arms' Educare Atlanta site, Ms. Williams has worked side by side with her TCWFI coach and Sheltering Arms' family support specialist to create and implement a plan of action toward her goals. With plans to excel in a career as a public health professional and educator, Ms. Williams is currently enrolled in a master's program at Georgia State University's School of Public Health while working as an AmeriCorps Health Educator at Sheltering Arms' Healthy Beginnings initiative. Ms. Williams is most thankful for the support and access to affordable, high-quality early care and education for her young son.

Sheltering Arms collects and applies feedback from families through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. To evaluate this data, Sheltering Arms works with two key evaluation partners: Emory University and Georgia State University.

Using our effective and unique approach, Sheltering Arms has yielded outstanding results:

- 3,547 children were safe and healthy because they attended one of our sixteen neighborhood centers that meet stringent health and safety standards.
- 100% of families received comprehensive family support services that helped them stretch their budgets, enhance parenting skills, and access community resources to maintain and improve employment, housing, health, and education.
- 100% of children benefited from specially-trained teachers and participated in ongoing developmental assessments.
- 98% of families reported being satisfied with the overall program.
- 92% of parents reported participating in their children's education, including taking part in parent meetings and classes, parent/teacher conferences, and center or classroom events.

WHAT IS INNOVATIVE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S WORK WITH BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES? WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

Dedicated to providing comprehensive programs and services to children and families, Sheltering Arms has taken an innovative approach to working with our partners to ensure the vision and mission of our organizations are well aligned. Our mutual commitment is critical to the success of our programs and services. To develop and implement a uniform service-delivery model with families across the continuum, we work to ensure all partners share an equal commitment to professional development to inform future work and best practices.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED?

Sheltering Arms has consistently overcome challenges through an unwavering commitment to the children and families we serve. One of our key challenges has been related to data collection and subsequent ability to demonstrate the impact of our programs and services. To address this issue, Sheltering Arms has developed and implemented a multi-pronged approach. In doing so, we have worked to:

- develop a system that allows teachers and staff to understand the real-time impact of their efforts across our partner organizations; and
- realign our organization's efforts to a shared strategy, including outcomes and a common vision among partner organizations, and the children and families of the NPU-V community. Sheltering Arms has formally met with key stakeholders, including families, staff, and leadership, while charting out the data elements that each partner collected. Our ultimate goal is to streamline the data

Sheltering Arms has learned that Black children and families are tenacious and resilient. Our children and families serve as living testaments to the power of the Black community's spirit and strength.

collection process for families while reducing the replication of our efforts, including programs and services, across partner organizations.

Using our two-generation approach, we have changed the way we work, requiring staff to be more collaborative both internally and externally. We are still working to improve this approach. With the understanding that "change does not happen overnight," Sheltering Arms is constantly revisiting, refining, and aligning our approach to ensure that we are providing the best possible service to our children and families. These changes require staff to be open to possibilities and opportunities to address these challenges, making it especially important for us to consistently keep our end goal at the forefront of our vision.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE SUSTAINABLE?

Sheltering Arms is sustained by multiple funding streams, including support from foundations, private agencies, and government entities. Our partners are supported through shared funding that allows our organizations to align our goals among the children and families we serve.

Our work is heavily shaped by the voices among residents within the community. The community members are empowered to express their needs and desires for their families. With word of mouth as our most effective form of advertisement, Sheltering Arms has learned the importance of incorporating families and their feedback into the design and delivery of our programs and services. Our Leadership Cohort and Parent Leadership Organization are key examples of these efforts. We understand that families value the view of their peers more than the voices of agency leadership and staff; both groups give parents and caregivers a platform to promote the programs and services we offer.



SHELTERING ARMS HAS YIELDED OUTSTANDING RESULTS:

100% OF FAMILIES RECEIVED
COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY
SUPPORT SERVICES.

92% OF PARENTS REPORTED
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR
CHILDREN'S EDUCATION,
including taking part in parent meetings and classes,
parent/teacher conferences, and center or classroom events.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE REPLICABLE?

The leadership and staff at Sheltering Arms has learned the importance of effective alignment and integration of programs and services that ensure the success of the children and families they serve. We have invested a significant amount of time and energy in creating a better experience for the children and families across Sheltering Arms' other fifteen locations. As with any relationship, there must be a high level of commitment, collaboration, and communication across all levels of the agency, including senior leadership and staff.

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

Sheltering Arms has learned that Black children and families are tenacious and resilient. Our children and families serve as living testaments to the power of the Black community's spirit and strength. Our program participants prove that Black children and families have the talent and tenacity to achieve, especially when given the chance to do so.

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

As an organization, we cannot do this work alone. A single organization cannot meet the multitude of needs experienced by families. Our partners play an integral role in ensuring we offer comprehensive programs and services that support the success of our children, parents, and caregivers. Similar to the adage, "It takes a village to raise a child," we believe it takes a "village" to support a family in ensuring they succeed at school, at work, at home, and in their community.

EDUCATION

BLACK TEACHERS: 21ST CENTURY'S MOST WANTED

ANDREA LEWIS, PH.D.

Chair and Assistant Professor of Education
Spelman College

Schools throughout the United States are becoming more diverse, and as a result, principals and district administrators are seeking more Black teachers to fill their classrooms. Recently, several reports have detailed the decline in Black teachers throughout America. Black teachers effectively engage and educate Black children by drawing on their strengths and resilience. This essay will address the decline of Black teachers and its consequence to the Black community.

Sixty-three years since *Brown v. Board of Education* and fifty-seven years after Ruby Bridges bravely integrated the William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, only 7 percent of teachers in America are Black. According to the Albert Shanker Institute, the number of Black teachers has declined, especially in urban school districts, across the nation.

The 2016 Georgia K-12 Teacher and Leader Workforce Report published by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement reports that the percentage of Black school administrators (34 percent) was considerably larger than the percentage of Black teachers (20 percent) in Georgia. Black teachers represent 43.2 percent of teachers in high poverty schools and 8.1 percent of teachers in low poverty schools. While mainstream America is in tune to mounting police harassment and violence in Black communities, many are oblivious to the silent and damaging loss of Black teachers and its negative effects in and to the Black community.

Given the escalating need for quality Black teachers in both Georgia and the United States, the focus of this dilemma needs to be the ability of teacher education programs to attract and retain more Black teachers. Black teachers are significant to the success of Black children, especially those from high poverty communities. They are more likely than their white colleagues to recognize competence and proficiency in Black students. The benefits of Black teachers include Black children being more likely to: (1) have a shared cultural connection with their teacher; (2) be referred to gifted and talented programs; (3) be considered capable of achieving success; (4) graduate from high school; and, (5) have ambitions to attend college. There is also a decline in special education referrals of Black children when they



have a Black teacher. Additionally, Black teachers can be positive role models for all students and assist in breaking down harmful stereotypes and preparing students to live and work in America's diverse society.

In the past, Black educators valued teaching because it afforded a stable middle-class income, especially since other careers were often not a reality as a result of discrimination. With the increase of substantial opportunities in other employment fields, Black teachers are no longer confined to teaching, especially in low-income schools.

Previous research suggested that Black teachers were more likely than white teachers to leave the teaching profession because of veteran teachers' advanced age and younger teachers' failure rates on national teacher competency tests. A 2016 report from The Education Trust shows that Black educators voiced frustration with being pigeon-holed into teaching low-performing students, assigned disciplinarian roles, and serving as the representative for every child of color in the school.

Upon reviewing literature on Black schools in the era of segregation, several themes emerge conveying the utmost importance of schools and teachers in the Black community. The research concluded that schools were more than educational facilities, and teachers served a greater purpose than merely educating young minds. Schools were the backbone of the community, providing a supportive environment with high expectations of academic achievement while reinforcing cultural values. Kunjufu

In 2015, Black 4th graders in Georgia scored
“PROFICIENT”
or above in reading at a higher rate
 than Black and Latino 4th graders scored nationally.

National Center for Education Statistics, 2015

(2002) and Fairclough (2009) argued that racism afforded countless Black students the opportunity to be taught by the best and brightest Black minds.

During the process of school integration, approximately 38,000 Black teachers and administrators in seventeen states were displaced through reassignment, demotion, or firing between 1954 and 1965. This loss was profound to the Black community because Black teachers served as surrogate parents, disciplinarians, counselors, role models, and advocates for Black students' overall development. When Black teachers lost their voice and positions in school desegregation, Black students lost advocates, cultural understanding, and professionals who believed in their academic abilities. Nationally, the loss of Black teachers during desegregation had a significant—and I believe an intended—consequence, on the quality of teaching that Black students received in public schools. Within segregated schools, Black teachers were often experienced, concerned, and familiar with the cultural norms of their students. The administrators had impressive credentials and lived in the community. Many Black educators traveled during the summer and participated in graduate studies and professional development to advance their learning and careers. The loss of Black teachers during school integration of the 1950s and 1960s mirrors the 21st century's challenge in declining rates of Black teachers and its impact on our children.

To increase the prevalence of Black teachers, we need innovative and collaborative approaches to recruitment and retention. In 1964, Malcolm X spoke at the founding rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in New York City and called for freedom, justice, and equality “by any means necessary.” This same radical methodology and attitude is imperative to advancing education in the twenty-first century Black community. We must attract and retain Black teachers with the same urgency as our enslaved ancestors, who traveled through dangerous terrains to reach freedom, and our grandparents and great-grandparents, who marched in the Civil Rights Movement. The imperative for Black teachers is here. The time to fight for our Black children is now.



EDUCATION

Point of Proof:

PURPOSE BUILT SCHOOLS

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND VISION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The mission of Purpose Built Schools Atlanta (PBSA) is to turn around failing schools while placing all students on a positive trajectory to ensure they succeed in school, college, and their career. Understanding that communities are the backbone for children and families, we work to revitalize the neighborhoods we serve in the process.

In doing so, Purpose Built Schools Atlanta works to:

- ensure every child has a high-quality neighborhood school;
- provide every child with a strong, project-based learning environment driven by a robust, early learning program, with a thematic focus on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), an individualized model for literacy and math, a focus on enrichment opportunities, and the development of twenty-first-century skills; and
- support our schools with comprehensive community programs and services designed to address external factors that may impede student achievement.

WHAT MAKES YOUR ORGANIZATION A “POINT OF PROOF?”

Purpose Built Schools Atlanta supports community sustainability and academic success by offering programs and services that promote economic growth, housing stability, and positive health outcomes for children and families. Committed to ensuring positive outcomes for students in and outside of the classroom, Purpose Built Schools Atlanta works to build a strong “birth to college” pipeline that fully supports “the whole child.” Recognizing this goal is not possible without addressing the needs of their neighborhood, Purpose Built Schools Atlanta works to ensure both the short- and long-term success of Black children, families, and communities.

Committed to ensuring that every child is college and career ready, we measure our success in the strides we make toward improving the academic skills of our students and the well-being of our community through comprehensive programs and services.

WHO DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION SERVE?

Through high-quality education, Purpose Built Schools Atlanta works to change the trajectory of children and families experiencing intergenerational poverty. Our schools often serve children from families with low incomes and low educational attainment. We serve children who need a high-quality education and wraparound support the most. Eighty-two percent of the parents and caregivers served by our schools have a high school diploma or lower education level.

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS?

Committed to ensuring every child is college and career ready, Purpose Built Schools measure our success in the strides we make toward improving the academic skills of our students and the well-being of our community through comprehensive programs and services.

In our first year, we have observed measurable gains in academic achievement and community engagement. When determining College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) scores, the Georgia Department of Education examines the percentage of students performing in the “developing” to “distinguished”



levels on the Georgia Milestones Assessment. In this range, we have observed the following gains during the 2016-17 academic year:

- 100% of our preschool students exceeded the 2016-17 benchmarks for the Atlanta Public Schools district.
- Our fifth grade students increased in proficiency by
 - 35% in Social Studies.
 - 27% in Math.
- Our fourth grade students increased in proficiency by 26% in Math.
- Our third grade students increased in proficiency by
 - 11% in English.
 - 16% in Math.

WHAT IS INNOVATIVE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S WORK WITH BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES? WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

Purpose Built Schools Atlanta has fostered strong partnerships with other organizations to ensure our children and families have increased housing stability, economic opportunity, and social-emotional support:

- **Chris180¹** provides on-site counseling services to our children who need therapeutic services outside of the classroom.
- The **Atlanta Volunteer Lawyer Foundation** offers ongoing legal services to our families. In fact, the foundation provides a full-time lawyer to work with parents on site at school.
- **Whitefoord Health Clinic** provides health and wellness services to our children and families.
- The **Atlanta Food Bank** distributes groceries to our families on site at school.
- **Playworks** supports the social-emotional development of our children through developmentally-appropriate activities.

We have also developed a program to promote economic stability among our children and families. This component of our community engagement programming affords parents the opportunity to work at one of our school sites for up to one year. Upon completion of our workforce development program, we create a bridge to more stable, long-term employment opportunities for families.

¹ CHRIS 180 (formerly CHRIS Kids) is a nonprofit organization in Atlanta that works to heal children, strengthen families, and build community through mental health counseling, training, provision of safe housing, and real-world skill building.

Purpose Built Schools Atlanta also takes a unique approach to our academic programs and services by providing the following:

- **Lower Ratios.** All students are supported with a lead teacher and paraprofessional in every classroom at our Thomasville Heights Elementary School site.
- **Ongoing Professional Development.** Instructional support coaches are provided to all teachers serving students in kindergarten through fifth grade.
- **High-Quality Early Learning.** We staff each of our early learning programs with two lead teachers and a paraprofessional to ensure children have frequent, positive student-teacher interactions and rich conversations.
- **STEAM and Project-Based Learning.** Teachers are trained to implement instruction of science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math into the core curriculum. Our rigorous academic enrichment program affords students the opportunity to participate in electives such as Robotics, Engineering, Dance, Chorus, Band, Spanish, Physical Education, and Art at the elementary school level.
- **Math and Literacy Labs.** We have developed subject-intensive labs to provide students who score significantly below state and national benchmarks in math and literacy with additional academic support. These labs provide differentiated instruction in a small group setting for forty-five minutes daily. With a ratio of 1:4, students are actively assisted by our math and literacy support teams throughout their participation in the program.
- **Continuous Progress Monitoring.** Students are given universal screeners regularly to ensure that we effectively respond to their needs while improving individual student instruction.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED?

Purpose Built Schools Atlanta serves a transient population due to housing instability within the surrounding neighborhood. This instability creates attendance and enrollment challenges, which have the potential to impact student learning due to varying attendance. To address this issue, we have identified and developed alternative strategies to support our children and families while improving student attendance and promoting academic success. We actively work to support families and children experiencing housing instability by creating new support staff roles at our schools, such as a Family Coordinator and Early Learning Family Educator. These roles are designed to establish a bridge between the school and the family while improving collaboration and communication among children, parents, caregivers, and staff.

DURING THE 2016-17 ACADEMIC YEAR:

100% OF PRESCHOOL STUDENTS
ATTENDING PURPOSE BUILT SCHOOLS EXCEEDED
THE 2016-17 BENCHMARKS FOR THE ATLANTA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS DISTRICT; FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS
INCREASED IN PROFICIENCY BY

35% IN SOCIAL STUDIES; AND, THIRD
GRADE STUDENTS INCREASED IN PROFICIENCY BY

35% IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE SUSTAINABLE?

Purpose Built Schools Atlanta receives financial support from various funders, including foundations, corporations, and local and state governmental agencies, such as Atlanta Public Schools. Atlanta Public Schools recognized that the needs of the Craver Cluster community outweighed the resources the school district could provide on its own. This realization resulted in a formalized partnership between Purpose Built Schools Atlanta and Atlanta Public Schools to collectively provide turnaround support that uniquely addresses the needs of the community we serve within the Craver Cluster.

To encourage active family engagement, we have also developed a parent advisory board that informs school-based decisions. Our community members are now zealous advocates for our PreK-12 program, often encouraging friends and family to enroll.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE REPLICABLE?

Strategic partnerships have played a vital role in our success. Closing “the opportunity gap” while achieving academic success is a slow and deliberate process. A long-term commitment to community transformation must be accompanied by a strategic plan with intentional and measurable goals toward academic achievement and community development. By focusing on children, families, and communities, Purpose Built Schools Atlanta is determined to improve economic and academic outcomes. Organizations serving similar populations should prioritize family and community engagement alongside

education and learning. To gain and sustain long-term outcomes, communities—including schools—must change. We believe this change starts with a high-quality academic setting that provides comprehensive, aligned, wraparound support as a core service to meet the needs of children, families, and communities.

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

Purpose Built Schools Atlanta sees our children and families as our greatest asset. In 2016, our initial year at Thomasville Heights Elementary School, we learned that fostering meaningful, supportive partnerships with families strengthens the entire school while ensuring the success of all Black children. These partnerships have led to increased parental involvement throughout the school, which has led to improved student attendance rates and parent attendance rates at academic conferences with teachers and staff. Despite many of the community challenges, our children and families show incredible resilience, as demonstrated by the strides they have shown in academic performance and community engagement and development.

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

In order to break the cycle of generational poverty and disenfranchisement, there must be a collective commitment and effort toward improving the lives of the children and families in our communities. Purpose Built Schools Atlanta understands the importance of school and community investment in ensuring positive outcomes for Black children and families. With appropriate supportive services for students and their families, all children—especially Black children—can succeed.



EDUCATION

BEING BLACK IS NOT A RISK FACTOR:

Georgia's Black Children Need Engaged Parents

JAMES YOUNG, ED.D.

Department Chair of Curriculum and Instruction
Clark Atlanta University

For more than twenty years, I spent time in school-communities providing support in the areas of parent involvement, curriculum development and assessment, evaluation of programs for young children, and after school support programs. As a consultant, I provided technical assistance on staff development and workshops on different aspects of early childhood and elementary education.

Throughout my career, I have identified two essential opportunities to advance education for Black children: building children's confidence and self-esteem and encouraging parents to advocate for their children's success.

BUILDING SELF CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Within a supportive environment, Black children can acquire the self-confidence and self-esteem that can make their existence fulfilling, even exhilarating. Parents, teachers, and school leaders must work collaboratively to ensure that Black children everywhere acquire the knowledge and skills needed to be educated and successful. Learning is intergenerational. Cultural literacy is transmitted from one generation to the next. To ensure that children have an opportunity to succeed requires an investment early in life.

Self-confidence comes from the quality of interaction between parents and children. Having confidence propels children upward. They learn to trust themselves. Even when they experience failure, they have the strength to persevere.



PARENTS AS ADVOCATES

Over the past four decades, despite all the efforts to reform, improve, or legislate education, public schools continue to fail too many Black students. Parents taking on leadership roles and advocating for their children's education are a powerful force for change in schools. Studies abound showing that children succeed academically and socially when their parents are involved in their education as well as serving as their advocates. Black families in particular often face multiple barriers to engaging with schools. For example, teachers and other program personnel often have low expectations for their engagement and little understanding or respect for their culture and experiences. Black children need strong, engaged parents to demand quality education that benefits their individual child, their family, and their communities.



Self-confidence comes from the quality of interaction between parents and children.

There are six critical paths to parent engagement:

- Be informed. Join the school PTA and stay active. Attend school board meetings.
- Follow the legislative agendas of organizations that are advocating for Black children and align with your values. Remember, children cannot speak for themselves.
- Learn the political and school language by attending and reviewing minutes from school board meetings or legislative committee hearings on education.
- Build relationships with teachers and administrators and keep lines of communication open.
- Work as a team to ensure school policy and funding decisions are supportive of Black children. Collaboration among parents is a powerful tool.
- Know your rights. Know the rights of children.

CONCLUSION

Preparation for life begins in childhood. Research demonstrates that effective parenting makes a critical difference. Parents should embrace their roles as constant teachers and leaders in their children's education. I encourage parents to play, interact and, above all, advocate for the success of Black children.

EDUCATION

SCIENCE ADVOCACY AND POLICY FOR BLACK CHILDREN IN GEORGIA:

Being Black Does Not Have to be a Risk Factor

MARY ATWATER, PH.D.

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RONA ROBINSON-HILL, PH.D.

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Ball State University

According to the Nation's Report Card (2015), the average science score in 2015 on the National Assessment Education Progress (NAEP) for fourth-grade students was higher for all racial groups with reportable results than those in 2009. In 2015, there was an increase of five points for Black students, which was greater than the three-point increase made by White fourth-grade students (The Nation's Report Card 2015). Georgia's education systems must improve to enhance the science learning of Black children. This essay offers policy recommendations that will ensure Black children in Georgia demonstrate this type of academic progress.

Early in their development years, Black students are equal to other groups in cognition, sensory, and motor abilities (Polite and Davis 1999). However, when Black students enter formal schooling, they begin to lag behind due to mismatches between the schooling process and their own culture (Atwater, Lance, Woodard, and Johnson 2013). A disconnect exists between Black students' knowledge—the cultural capital that they bring to school—and the curriculum and pedagogy in many classrooms. In addition, most instructional strategies focus on memorization and provide little historical

According to the Nation's Report Card, the average science score in 2015 for Black fourth-grade students increased by five points, which was greater than the three-point increase made by white fourth-grade students.

context. It is important for educators to connect science to students' culture and their everyday lives. Teachers should utilize inquiry experiences (such as science experiments) to enhance learning and incorporate opportunities for metacognitive thought and expository discussion (Park 2001).

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE BLACK CHILDREN'S SCIENCE LEARNING

1. Enhance Teacher Knowledge and Skills in Science Instruction

Providing pre-service teachers (PST) access to teach science in a practicum experience in a diverse classroom is one way to develop more competent science teachers with the skills and talents to advance science proficiency for all children. Davis (2008) reported effective science teaching helps students develop conceptual understandings and inquiry abilities to produce students that are scientifically literate and productive citizens. This will not happen if the teachers are not confident in their ability to teach science due to past experiences in secondary school and/or minimum access to science instruction





Teachers must be taught to reject the deficit model that has characterized much of the education of marginalized and oppressed students and embrace the truth that all children have resources that can be a foundation for quality science learning.

in elementary school. An ideal opportunity for pre-service teachers is to incorporate a practicum experience in their elementary and/or secondary science methods course. Through practicum experience, teachers will learn how to draw on the talents and strengths that students bring to science learning. Teachers must be taught to reject the deficit model that has characterized much of the education of marginalized and oppressed students and embrace the truth that all children have resources that can be a foundation for their quality science learning.

2. Create Hands-On Science Learning Environments

Formal science learning environments in public, private, and home-based learning institutions are rarely equipped with the resources to support authentic science instruction. Kwan and Tetley (2002) reported less than 40 percent of most schools are equipped to implement science instruction in kindergarten through fifth grade. Hands-on learning environments are critical to science



instruction. Children need direct experiences with materials, objects, and phenomena to encourage engagement and personal understanding of science lessons.

3. Enhance Assessment and Evaluation of Preservice Science Teachers

It has been a long-standing practice that teachers in Georgia are required to earn at least a bachelor's degree, complete a certification program, and post a passing grade on the state certification test. Georgia is taking action to enhance the assessment process for pre-service science teachers. Beginning in September 2017, a passing score on edTPA will be required for teachers of science in teacher preparation programs. The edTPA was developed by Stanford University and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). This assessment will require science teachers to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in real classrooms. The edTPA is science subject-specific (biology, chemistry, earth/space science, middle-grade science, physics, and science) for grades six through twelve and evaluates authentic teaching materials.

POLICIES: MOVING THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF BLACK CHILDREN FORWARD IN GEORGIA

Positive social-emotional development gives children the confidence to advance in science and all subjects. Teachers need to support Black children's positive social-emotional

IN 2015, THE PERCENT OF BLACK 4TH GRADERS IN GEORGIA SCORING AT THE
“PROFICIENT”
LEVEL IN SCIENCE WAS ABOVE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.

Source: US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12.

development in classrooms beginning very early in their education. The following culturally and contextually-relevant strategies are proposed:

1. Conduct and utilize research on the normative and positive social-emotional development of Black children. Utilize this developmental research to develop culturally-relevant social-emotional learning programs.
2. Integrate social-emotional competence strategies into academics. For example, reinforce literacy skills while promoting and teaching Black children social-emotional development skills.
3. Implement effective teacher education both pre-service and in-service, in social-emotional learning. This includes educating future teachers on the importance of supporting Black students' social-emotional development, understanding

how social-emotional development is related to academic outcomes, and how to integrate social-emotional development into their lesson plans.

4. Establish training for educators on the intersection of race and social-emotional learning. This includes how specific social-emotional learning standards and Black children's positive racial identity facilitates positive academic and developmental outcomes.
5. Incorporate the voices of key stakeholders, from both the school and children's communities, in the development of social-emotional learning programs.

Being Black does not have to be a risk factor in Georgia or the United States; it can be a factor for success when teachers and the stakeholders make the commitment to provide equitable opportunities for Black children to obtain quality teaching.



EDUCATION

Point of Proof:

READ RIGHT FROM THE START ON THE COX CAMPUS

Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND VISION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

In partnership with over 100 public and private agencies, the Rollins Center has only **one goal**: to ensure that all children in the state of Georgia will enter third grade with the capacity to read and to learn by the year 2020. All children can succeed, regardless of hearing loss, dyslexia, or generational lack of access to educational opportunities. None of these issues should be considered “risk factors,” but instead, opportunities for the human spirit to thrive.

The Atlanta Speech School is seventy-nine years old, beginning as a school for children who were deaf, but growing quickly into a more complex constellation of language development-focused programs and services. Today, the school is composed of four schools, five clinics, and a professional development center—the Rollins Center for Language and Literacy—and has earned a rising national reputation as the educational equivalent of a “teaching hospital.” In fact we see the illiteracy crisis as a public health crisis. We see the illiteracy crisis as a public health crisis. It was Frederick Douglass who said, “Once you learn to read, you are forever free.” We take his words as the best articulation of our vision and our goal, acknowledging that he said it almost a century before we joined in this work.

Delivered through live and online training to teachers across our city, state, and country, the Rollins Center’s Read Right from the Start (RRFTS) program distills all the lessons that have been learned throughout the Atlanta Speech School’s history. In combination with state-of-the-art national research, these lessons powerfully magnify the impact of Rollins training for teachers of children from birth through third grade. Drawing from extensive experience, we know that with the right opportunity across the birth to third grade continuum, every child can reach her or his full potential.

It was Frederick Douglass who said, “Once you learn to read, you are forever free.” We take his words as the best articulation of our vision and our goal, acknowledging that he said it almost a century before we joined in this work.

WHAT MAKES YOUR ORGANIZATION A “POINT OF PROOF?”

Each year, we impact the lives of 8,000 children—most of whom are African American—through the live coaching of 860 teachers, and over 250,000 other children through the 25,000-plus educators enrolled in our Cox Campus online. With more than 17,000 Georgia members logging onto the campus, we now partner with 30 percent of the 37,000 teachers who educate children from birth to five in Georgia. Using today’s broad range of digital technology, we intend to reach out to each of the 38,000 early elementary teachers in every county across the state within a short timeframe.

WHO DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION SERVE?

The Rollins Center’s geographic service area focuses first on Atlanta, and now, thanks to the development of the Cox Campus, on all of Georgia and beyond. The Cox Campus gives us a new and powerful tool designed to flood the landscape with highly engaging digital learning. It reinforces the work done in live training settings while standing alone on its own merits, as an independent evaluation has shown. As such, the Cox Campus expands our service area dramatically. However, all the Cox Campus work is driven by the lessons learned from the live training foundation from which it springs.

We have been very fortunate to work intensely with our partners at so many sites in Georgia. Our teams of live facilitators currently serve eight Metro Atlanta YMCA early learning centers, three Head Start and Early Head Start centers in Metro Atlanta, eight early childhood partner sites around Northeast Georgia, fourteen Atlanta Public Schools prekindergarten sites, fifteen metro Atlanta early learning

centers, four partner Early Head Start sites, and seven public elementary schools in the Frederick Douglass Cluster of the Atlanta Public Schools. As indicated earlier, we take Frederick Douglass's name very seriously. However, we take more seriously the ironic fact that the cluster named for him has been one of the lowest performing school districts in the state of Georgia—not just the city of Atlanta, prominently known as the hometown of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We are awed by the justice-restoring idea that central Atlanta is now rising up with power. One of the elementary schools in the Frederick Douglass Cluster showed the best rate of improvement on standardized tests in the entire state in 2016.

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS?

The Atlanta Speech School synthesizes and uses the country's best research to provide teacher training to statewide partners and educators in order to break the cycle of illiteracy and resulting poverty and lack of economic opportunity that has hundreds of thousands of families in Georgia—and tens of million across the United States—trapped. In partnership with over 100 public and private agencies, our Rollins Center is driven and energized by the expectation that every early childhood educator in Georgia will have the skills to effectively prepare each child to meet or exceed grade level reading requirements by the end of third grade by the year 2020.

Evaluation is measured by changes in teacher behaviors that have been influenced by RRFTS, as measured by fidelity and CLASS¹ scores, as well as language and early



literacy outcome measurements for children enrolled in the programs. This is measured by standardized assessments in vocabulary, phonological awareness, and language scores. An independent evaluation of the Cox Campus funded by the Hearst Foundations is available upon request, as are numerous live training evaluations of our work in the state of Georgia.

WHAT IS INNOVATIVE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S WORK WITH BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES? WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

At the Rollins Center, we know from seventy-nine years of research and practice that the environment or climate in which children learn language and literacy must be the equivalent of "good soil." A nurturing environment ensures that our "seeds" do not merely survive, but rather, thrive. With a positive climate, children—born with the capacity to acquire language, learn to read, and eventually create meaning through writing—will develop vocabulary, understand concepts, and gain critical thinking skills. And most importantly, they will feel the inspiration to have something worth writing about. We, alongside their family, celebrate the milestones of every child, from a baby's first babble all the way to their kindergarten graduation speech and their biggest books in third grade. We value children's voices to question, to wonder, and to feel. For a more immediate sense of what this looks like, please visit our website at www.readrightfromthestart.org to view our two big picture videos, "The Promise," for birth to five teaching and "Every Opportunity," for kindergarten to third grade teaching. "Every Opportunity" quickly went viral last fall and has been viewed more than 70 million times on Facebook and YouTube.

Despite this success, we understand it takes more than two videos, of course, to do the work required. It takes a strong bond with Black African American teachers, children, and families. We are privileged to do this work in partnership with them to help build their capacity while ensuring long-term sustainability for our communities. First and foremost, we engage teachers with the motivation and the skills to provide the necessary strategies for instruction that build the skills children need to be proficient by third grade. Unlike many other professional development programs, we are free and universally accessible on the web. We are also "curriculum-proof," so teachers can implement these strategies for success, regardless of the program they are currently using.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED?

Our greatest challenge is to ensure we stop cheating our workforce—who are dedicated early care and education professionals—by allowing them to be seen and treated like "babysitters." As Congressman John Lewis states, early childhood

¹ The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) is an observational instrument developed to assess classroom quality in preschool through third grade classrooms.

teachers are the Freedom Riders of the twenty-first century, taking children to destinations that would be unimaginable and impossible without them. We have so cheated our workforce by assigning the task of “babysitting” to early care and education professionals.

The Rollins Center is dedicated to providing early care and education professionals with high-quality professional development. We have rapidly built a team of thirty-seven masters level and PhD educators, most with deep experience and understanding of the same settings we are now working to influence. We have been embraced by school systems and departments in state government in Georgia and built upon that strength. We are now partnering to disseminate an intervention initiative we helped to develop called “Talk With Me Baby (TWMB)” within Atlanta’s Grady Hospital, the largest public hospital in the state. This initiative is designed to empower parents, nurses, doctors, clerks, and other staff to understand the power of talking with babies. Grady Hospital program will serve as the national flagship example of this practice in a hospital setting. Relying upon the staff at Grady we will create a TWMB course on the Cox Campus that will be available to every birthing hospital and OBGYN and pediatric clinic in the country by fall 2018.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE SUSTAINABLE?

The project is funded by the James M. Cox Foundation, one of the largest foundations in the Southeastern United States, as well as a growing list of other local and national funders from as far away as New York and Ohio. In addition to our funders, all of the work we have done has been collaborative with communities, schools, and early care and education settings. The teachers and staff in these schools and centers are one of the primary sources of information around instructional development, serving as real-time, real-classroom teachers on the Cox Campus.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE REPLICABLE?

We have quickly discovered that our work in training teachers at a handful of sites in Atlanta needed to be scalable to effectively create sustainable change. Twelve years ago, the Rollins Center focused on live coaching and teaching. However, because of teacher turnover, we were doing the same trainings every year while reaching only a limited number of teachers. But thanks to the powerful support of our funders, we developed the Cox Campus program four years ago to provide a scalable program that any teacher can access, regardless of geographic location. This program has helped to create a critical mass of high-quality language and literacy teachers who also understand social and emotional development.

As Congressman John Lewis states, early childhood teachers are the Freedom Riders of the twenty-first century, taking children to destinations that would be unimaginable and impossible without them.

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

As we train teachers on how to break the cycle of illiteracy among children and families, the words of Lillian Smith about “how we got here” is never far from our minds. Ms. Smith, author of the 1949 memoir, “Killer of the Dream,” noted that Jim Crow’s etiquette amounted to a “crippling dance” that white and Black Southerners learned at an early age:

So we learned the dance that cripples the human spirit, step by step by step, we who were white and we who were colored, day by day, hour by hour, year by year until the movements were reflexes and made for the rest of our lives without thinking.

Tragically, the behaviors forced on African Americans for survival in the South for generations are continued in our schools today, and they continue, as Ms. Smith writes, killing dreams and denying children the opportunity to be who they were intended to be.

For example, we can go into virtually any preschool or elementary school in Atlanta and see countless African American children walking single file in completely unnecessary and crushing total silence. This behavior is often dictated by having each child place his right hand on the shoulder of the child in front of him, while “catching a bubble” (blowing air into his mouth extending his cheeks) and placing his left forefinger over his pursed lips. Of course, there is a painful logic—or *illogic*—behind these measures. The history and current reality of disparate consequences for noncompliant or noticed African American children arguably demand the highest priority on their “safety.” This narrow definition of “safety”



The promise of African American children is limitless when they have sufficient and equitably distributed language and literacy resources in the earliest years of life—across the continuum from birth through third grade.

results in the self-defeating generational cycle of children ultimately left totally unsafe as youths and adults by these crippling early childhood experiences.

The strength of the Cox Campus stems directly from the strength of African American children, families, and educators. Most of the Rollins live training settings are predominantly African American, as are many of the students and teachers filmed on the Cox Campus—a learning hub that highlights the application of early brain and literacy development research with the greatest fidelity possible. African American children and families thrive with access to quality language and literacy experiences that are differentiated, explicit, and rich with dialogue between caring adults and curious children. During our live trainings over the past decade, we have continuously seen our children soar as they engage in complex inquiry and interactions with their teachers that empower them to acquire language, establish secure relationships, and take risks as learners—three key components to ensuring strong, early brain development for our children.

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

The promise of African American children is limitless when they have sufficient and equitably distributed language and literacy resources in the earliest years of life—across the continuum from birth through third grade. It is imperative that their teachers and administrators receive appropriate pre-service and in-service training and coaching that equips them with the skill and collective will necessary to end our country's history of silencing African American children's voices, ensuring they reach their full potential and glory in the bright future they so rightfully deserve.

EDUCATION

ADVANCING THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN EARLY CARE PROVIDERS:

Understanding Culture, Climate, and Providing Support

RAYNICE JEAN-SIGUR, PH.D.

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Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education
Kennesaw State University

Early care providers seem to be perceived as individuals who do not require advanced degrees in order to educate and work well with young children and families. Researchers on brain development and high-quality education continuously debate this concept in their findings (Committee on Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce 2011). According to some studies, early childhood educators who have higher education, including bachelor's degrees, and specific training in the care of early learners improve the quality of childcare programs. Other studies focus on the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs, in which educators receive coaching and supervision in the classroom environment. It should be noted however that those teacher preparation programs that focus on (a) developmentally-appropriate and intentional instruction and (b) child-teacher relationships with ongoing instructor and supervisor support appear to be most effective in equipping educators with the knowledge and skills needed to promote child success.

Despite the findings of these studies, our field continues to struggle with encouraging and supporting early care providers to earn postsecondary degrees. According to the Georgia Child Care Report (Maxwell et al. 2009), 7 percent of infant-toddler teachers and 11 percent of preschool teachers have completed an associate's degree in early childhood education, while 2 percent of infant-toddler teachers and 4 percent of preschool teachers have received their bachelor's

When teacher preparation programs develop and offer courses that focus on diversity, it sends a message to students that diversity is appreciated and valued.

degree in the field. Nationally, African American women make up 14 percent of the workforce in early care and education (Gould 2015). Many of these early care providers who return to colleges and universities are nontraditional students with the following characteristics: (1) are over the age of twenty-four; (2) work full-time; (3) have dependents; (4) live off-campus and may need transportation to commute to classes; (5) may have previously attended college; and (6) may have additional responsibilities including military service, other jobs, and family obligations.

HIGHER EDUCATION CULTURE AND HIGHER EDUCATION CLIMATE

When establishing higher education opportunities for African American early care providers, the factors of higher education culture and climate need to be investigated. Culture is defined as a set of beliefs or practices with lasting effects on life perceptions, choices, and relationships. Postsecondary institutions tend to have formal cultures with structured, academic course offerings based on theory. These institutions are usually outcomes-based and cater to the traditional student. This culture strongly contrasts with the instructional culture of many early care and education providers, which focus on flexibility, developmentally appropriate practices, and the learning process.

Therefore, institutions and stakeholders must develop a culture that values, supports, and welcomes African American early care providers and other diverse students onto postsecondary campuses. Higher education programs in early learning should proactively seek feedback from nontraditional students on what will make the school culture inviting and supportive. The climate should ensure



that every student feels welcomed and valued on-campus and that their area of study will positively and profoundly influence the lives of our children and the future of our society.

MOVING FORWARD

Teacher preparation programs are now being established to promote bachelor's degrees in birth through five or birth through kindergarten education. In the state of Georgia, there are currently five birth through kindergarten undergraduate teacher preparation programs. These programs often attract a diverse student population with many African American and Latina students, thus changing the typical population of the undergraduate teacher candidate, many of whom are white women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four years old. Many of the students in these programs want to remain in the early care and education field while significantly improving the lives of young children and families. Graduates of these programs have become teacher leaders at their workplaces, earning "Teacher of the Year" awards and becoming mentors for their colleagues who want to go back to school but are unsure of the process. These program graduates have also gone on to graduate school, becoming early childhood special educators, child development specialists, and child advocacy lawyers. African American childcare providers, like their diverse colleagues, are making strides in the field of early care and education.

It is important for stakeholders in this field to continue to support and promote the attainment of their higher education goals. These stakeholders include state agencies, community and technical colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), as well as public and private colleges and universities. HBCUs are still the primary institutions to educate and graduate African American teacher candidates with their undergraduate degrees.

IN GEORGIA, 71% OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT STAFF IN HEAD START ARE BLACK. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT BLACK STUDENTS PERFORM BETTER WITH BLACK TEACHERS—ACADEMICALLY, SOCIALLY, AND EMOTIONALLY.

Sources: Center for Law and Social Policy, Head Start Participants, Programs, Families, and Staff in 2014; Economics of Education Review, Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Colleges, universities, and state agencies should also work together to develop ideas for recruiting and providing scholarships for teachers to retain them in the field of early care and education. Traditional recruitment strategies (i.e., high school day visits to college campuses, program exhibits at professional conferences) are still valid. However, additional approaches need to be implemented:

- Professional development can be provided to early childhood educators through summer institutes at colleges and universities led by faculty and staff. The summer institutes should afford potential teacher candidates the opportunity to meet future instructors and get an idea of campus life prior to admission.
- Graduates from teacher preparation programs are also some of the best recruiters. Program graduates often share promising practices on how to attend postsecondary education while balancing personal responsibilities and other activities.
- Many early care and education providers start their postsecondary academic career at technical colleges. Therefore, the process of establishing and maintaining relationships with faculty and administrative staff at technical colleges is vital. Colleagues at these institutions can serve as invaluable resources in promoting advanced educational opportunities to their students, especially when articulation agreements exist.

REDESIGN STRATEGIES

Colleges, universities, and state agencies must develop programs and pathways that encourage and promote advancement in higher education while addressing the unique needs of African American early care providers. Courses should incorporate diversity, social justice, and global awareness. When teacher preparation programs develop and offer courses that focus on diversity, it sends a message to students that diversity is appreciated and valued. Programs should also offer classes at nontraditional times, such as evenings and weekends, and offer courses online. Early care and education providers can also benefit from hybrid courses. Hybrid courses are classes that are offered face-to-face once a week for discussion and support and have an online component, including established readings and assignment modules. Many teacher candidates appreciate the flexibility of online coursework so they can complete their assignments at their own pace.

REGROUPING

Faculty mentor relationships and student support groups for African American early care providers are critical. Faculty members can serve as mentors to help

Early care and education providers are the backbone of the education workforce laying the foundation for lifelong learning. When we recognize, value, and support the vital work they do with our youngest learners, we invest in the betterment of our children, our families, and our communities.

students understand the culture of the institution and navigate academic processes and systems, including advisement and field placement. Students should also be encouraged to form support groups that offer a safe, open platform for them to discuss balancing work, school, and life. Student support groups can also offer helpful resources and services, such as a book sharing library, child-care swap, and basic technology support.

REWARDING

Finally, it is critical that early care providers receive increased salaries and other financial incentives for pursuing advanced degrees. Early care providers receive very low wages but do highly needed and respected work (Whitebook and Howes 2014). We must develop and implement innovative strategies to increase the salaries of childcare workers without increasing tuition and fees for families. Early care providers are the backbone of the education workforce laying the foundation for lifelong learning. When we recognize, value, and support the vital work they do with our youngest learners, we invest in the betterment of our children, our families, and our communities.


Early care providers are the backbone of the education workforce laying the foundation for lifelong learning. When we recognize, value, and support the vital work they do with our youngest learners, we invest in the betterment of our children, our families, and our communities.





SECTION 3

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Parents and caregivers who are engaged, informed, and empowered can ensure healthy brain development, build resiliency in children, and use their voices to advocate for their children's educational attainment. They are the first and most fundamental source of knowledge, culture, and well-being for their children. With this knowledge, East Lake Foundation serves as the "community quarterback" organization, providing families and children in the East Lake community in Atlanta with a comprehensive array of programs and services to sustain and revitalize the community.

Essays featured in this section highlight opportunities to engage and uplift Black families from diverse perspectives: Georgia's two-generation policy initiatives, district and school-level policies and practices, and literacy and language development. Overall, this section presents innovative programs and strategies designed to ensure that Black families and communities are equipped with tools and resources necessary to support and advocate for the success of every Black child.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ADVANCING FAMILY ECONOMIC SUCCESS HELPS CHILDREN THRIVE:

RACIAL EQUITY AND TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES ARE KEY TO GEORGIA POLICY SOLUTIONS

TAIFA SMITH BUTLER

Executive Director
Georgia Budget and Policy Institute

The future of Georgia is linked to the hope and promise of 2.5 million brilliant and valuable assets: our children. However, the bright future of Georgia's children stands to be diminished if we cannot guarantee they grow up in families that participate fully in the state's economy. Every Georgia parent needs unfettered access to economic opportunity in order to build a solid foundation and a secure future for themselves and their children. Too many children today face tremendous obstacles as their well-being and economic mobility are often linked to their parents' income, race, or the neighborhoods where they reside.

Georgia's leaders, policymakers, and advocates can better target public policy solutions that promote and foster a two-generation approach, integrate economic inclusion strategies, and prioritize racial equity. These efforts can ensure all families have an economically secure future where children experience optimal development and mobility and the state's economy remains strong.

TWO-GENERATION APPROACH IS THE FIRST STEP TO EFFECTIVE POLICY

Federal, state, and local leaders who serve children and families recognize improving family economic security and well-being requires a two-generation approach. This is a way to look at a family as a whole and address the needs of both parents and children together, not in isolation or in separate ways. "Two-generation

Georgia's leaders, policymakers, and advocates can better target public policy solutions that promote and foster a two-generation approach, integrate economic inclusion strategies, and prioritize racial equity.

policies offer policymakers the chance to break the generational cycle of poverty and replace it with opportunity" (Mosle, Patel, and Stedron 2014). Providing opportunities to meet the needs of low-income children and their parents can measurably improve outcomes—including social and emotional development, vocabulary acquisition, and educational success—by helping them make progress together (Mosle et al. 2014).

A RACIAL EQUITY LENS CAN IMPROVE ECONOMIC INCLUSION AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

To truly build a more promising future for children of color and Georgia as a whole, leaders need to commit to creating an inclusive economy. People of color are projected to constitute the majority of the state's residents in the next thirteen years. Therefore, addressing racial gaps in income, health, wealth, and employment can help the economy reach its full potential (PolicyLink 2013, 2).

Policymakers can make tremendous progress by focusing solutions on two critical areas that can strengthen family economic success and improve racial equity for families of color. They are:

- improving income and addressing disparities in pay by race and gender, and
- bolstering work supports, education, and training.



Children get just 3,000 days, from birth through age eight, to attain optimal brain development, live in secure and nurturing families, gain access to the best education, and thrive as a result.

IMPROVE INCOME AND ADDRESS PAY DISPARITIES

Family income strongly influences a child's educational success. For families suffering in deep poverty, a \$10,000 increase in annual income averaged over the first five years of a child's life triples the odds that the child will finish high school (The Aspen Institute 2017). There are several ways that public and private sector leaders can positively influence this disparity.

Public policy interventions can:

- *Promote pay equity for women by closing the earnings gap, especially for women of color.* Women working full-time in Georgia earn seventy cents for every dollar white men earn and Black women earn just sixty-four cents (Johnson 2016b). Poverty for Georgia's working women could fall by nearly half if women earned the same income as men in comparable circumstances. Equal pay could add \$14.4 billion to the state's economy (Johnson 2016b).
- *Increase after-tax income through a Georgia Work Credit, or state Earned Income Tax Credit.* A Georgia Work Credit would provide up to a few hundred extra dollars a year for low-wage workers like cashiers, mechanics, and nurses. More than a million Georgia families could qualify (Tharpe 2015).

BOLSTER WORK SUPPORTS, EDUCATION, AND TRAINING

In addition to equal pay and living wages, working poor families need the security and economic mobility that comes from access to stable housing, affordable high-quality child care, and the skills to obtain long-term employment. Black and Hispanic women are the least likely to secure a college degree and the most likely to work in low-wage jobs compared to white women in Georgia. Without targeted work supports, like housing assistance or affordable housing and child care assistance, these families struggle financially month-to-month and experience persistent toxic



RACE OF CHILDREN ADOPTED

CHILDREN IN GEORGIA ARE ADOPTED AT A RATE THAT IS NEARLY DOUBLE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.

RACE OF CHILD ADOPTED BETWEEN OCTOBER 1, 2013 AND SEPTEMBER 30, 2014 (FY 2014)

GEORGIA	
RACE	PERCENTAGE OF ALL ADOPTED CHILDREN
Black	32%
White	51%
Latino	8%

U.S.	
RACE	PERCENTAGE OF ALL ADOPTED CHILDREN
Black	19%
White	48%
Latino	22%

SUMMARY: Black children in Georgia were adopted at a rate that was nearly double the national average between October 1, 2013 and September 30, 2014

Source: US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

stress, which can cause damage to a child's brain development and social and emotional health. Public policy interventions can do the following:

- *Improve child care assistance to serve more low-income families.* This requires increased investment in state spending to support these families and policy change to allow parents pursuing postsecondary education and training to benefit from the support (Tharpe 2015).
- *Increase postsecondary education access and completion by providing assistance based on the needs of students and families.* Georgia's two financial aid programs targeting low-income students have an extremely limited reach. The state's most popular merit-based state scholarships help only 30 percent of low-income students and 20 percent of Black students in Georgia's university system.

CONCLUSION

The long-term strength of Georgia's economy is inextricably linked to the economic security of *all* of Georgia's families. "An inescapable requirement for building an opportunity society is improving the life chances of Black Americans" (Rodrigue and Reeves 2015).

Children get just 3,000 days, from birth through age eight, to attain optimal brain development, live in secure and nurturing families, gain access to the best education, and thrive as a result. Georgia's leaders can implement two-generation strategies with a focus on racial equity to build a more inclusive economy for all.

Let's begin today!



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Point of Proof:

THE EAST LAKE FOUNDATION

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND VISION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The East Lake Foundation was founded in 1995 to revitalize a suffering neighborhood into a vibrant community where all residents can thrive. The foundation's primary goal is to end the generational cycle of poverty in the East Lake community with intentionality. To do this, the foundation provides the tools for families in The Villages of East Lake and students in the Foundation's education pipeline to build a better life for themselves and future generations through cradle-to-college education, mixed-income housing, and community wellness. The East Lake Foundation serves as the "community quarterback" organization, working with residents and public and private partners to provide a comprehensive array of programs and services to the community to sustain the revitalization in the East Lake community in Atlanta. The foundation operates programs and through integral partnerships, supports other programs and services that transform place and build promise.

WHAT MAKES YOUR ORGANIZATION A "POINT OF PROOF?"

Charles R. Drew Charter School and our early learning partners (East Lake Early Learning Academy, Sheltering Arms East Lake, and the Cox PreK Program) represent the cradle-to-college education pipeline in the East Lake community, serving nearly 2,000 students annually. This pipeline serves students from 6 weeks old through high school completion.

In May 2017, Drew Charter School graduated its inaugural senior class. One hundred percent of the senior class has been accepted to college and 85 percent of these students enrolled in college in the fall of 2017. The class is comprised of eighty-two students, 98 percent of whom are African American, more than 80 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged, and 40 percent of whom will be the first in their family to attend college.

Charles R. Drew Charter School and our early learning partners (East Lake Early Learning Academy, Sheltering Arms East Lake, and the Cox PreK Program) represent the cradle-to-college education pipeline in the East Lake community, serving nearly 2,000 students annually.

WHO DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION SERVE?

The East Lake Foundation target population is families who live in The Villages of East Lake, the 542-unit, mixed-income community in the East Lake neighborhood where 50 percent of the housing is publicly subsidized and 50 percent of the housing is at market rate. The vast majority of families are African American. We also serve the children of Charles R. Drew Charter School and our early learning partners, the East Lake Early Learning Academy and Sheltering Arms East Lake. Overall, Drew Charter School serves more than 1,700 students, is approximately 80 percent African American, and more than 50 percent of our families qualify for free and reduced lunch. In Drew's Elementary Academy, the school is economically and racially diverse. The Junior and Senior Academy serves a higher percentage of African American children, and a larger majority of these qualify for free and reduced lunch.

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS?

Our ultimate goal is to break the generational cycle of poverty for families that we serve—a goal that will be measured in the long-term. We monitor progress on a number of short-term goals related to housing, education, economic stability, and wellness. Our successful outcomes include (but are not limited to) the following:

- 100% of Villages of East Lake children are enrolled in our education pipeline;
- 100% of Drew Charter seniors graduate on time;
- 100% of Drew Charter seniors are accepted into college and have a postsecondary plan; and,
- Median income of residents in The Villages of East Lake, primarily those in subsidized units, increases year over year.

The project is evaluated annually and we use quarterly data analysis to examine the effectiveness of our programming with the target populations. While examining overall outcomes (is the target population better off because of our work?), we are also focused heavily on our effectiveness in engaging and enrolling our target populations in our programs.

WHAT IS INNOVATIVE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION'S WORK WITH BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES? WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

We believe real community change requires a coordinated, holistic approach based on social equity. Quality and a focus on sustainability is key to neighborhood revitalization. Serving as the community quarterback, The East Lake Foundation has proven that working with residents and public and private partners, while providing the right combination of comprehensive programs and services is transformative for the community.



WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED?

One of the biggest challenges we've faced has been the changing demographics of the broader neighborhood outside of The Villages of East Lake. The changing demographics, which have impacted home prices and lowered the affordability of the neighborhood, have threatened our ability to serve children in our target population across the full education pipeline. In return, we've had to work diligently with partners to enact changes (some legislative) that will protect opportunities for low-income children to access our education pipeline. All of this has been achieved through community advocacy and buy-in. We are also beginning to address the issue of neighborhood affordability by developing and implementing an affordable housing strategy with trusted partners.

We expect this challenge will need to be addressed over time.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE SUSTAINABLE?

The East Lake Foundation is funded through individuals, grants, foundations, and a partnership with the East Lake Golf Club, which supports the foundation through charitable contributions of its corporate members. Overwhelmingly, the community embraces the initiative, placing an extremely high value on the

education options provided through the cradle-to-college pipeline. Community members engage in other programs and services offered by the initiative as well. The high demand for our programs is evidenced by the extensive waitlists to access the education pipeline, as well as the high membership level for our wellness partner—the East Lake YMCA—and our golf and life skills program, The First Tee® of East Lake. In our Resident and Community Support program, which provides the wraparound services for The Villages of East Lake, we solicit feedback from participants and potential participants through post-program feedback forms and occasional community surveys.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE REPLICABLE?

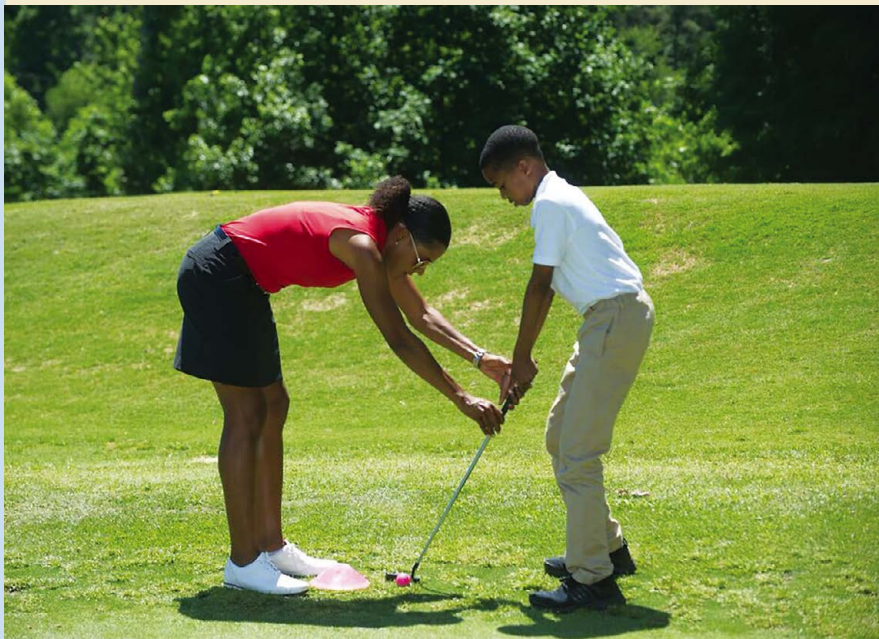
The success of the East Lake Initiative has served as a blueprint for a national model of holistic community revitalization through Purpose Built Communities (PBC), established in 2009. Today, there are sixteen additional Purpose Built Communities across the country that are successfully creating opportunities for residents and building strong, economically diverse communities that thrive. We, along with the PBC network, continue to stress the importance of the establishment of a community quarterback (like the East Lake Foundation) as the key to coordinating and managing partnerships in the revitalization.

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

First and foremost, we have learned that Black children, regardless of family economic status, can and will achieve at the highest academic levels. Our school, Drew Charter School, continues to rank among the highest in the city of Atlanta, and our children (largely African American, with more than 50 percent qualifying for free and reduced lunch) continue to perform as well as or better than other schools regardless of race or income levels of the students. Additionally, we have learned that with the right supports in place (financial coaching, credit repair counseling, resume writing assistance, job search guidance, etc.), our families in The Villages of East Lake (more than 95 percent African American) are advancing in economic security and financial management.

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

We believe that without a holistic approach to community revitalization, we would not have achieved the same level of success in our work. Education is arguably the most important lever, but without stable, high-quality housing and wraparound supports for the entire family, children are not well positioned to overcome adversity and thrive.



100%

OF DREW CHARTER SENIORS
GRADUATE ON TIME

100%

OF DREW CHARTER SENIORS
ARE ACCEPTED INTO
COLLEGE AND HAVE A
POSTSECONDARY PLAN



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RECOGNIZING THE DIVERSITY THAT EXISTS:

The Engagement of Black Families in Early Literacy Practices

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Early childhood is a critical window of opportunity for every child, especially as it relates to literacy learning (Pinkham and Neuman 2012). Many educators are speaking up about the importance of family engagement in language and literacy development before children reach kindergarten. To better prepare young children for school success, many educational initiatives (i.e., US Department of Education 2016) have chosen to focus on the predictive role of family engagement in early literacy. Based on a synthesis of family engagement literature, family engagement in literacy can have the following impact on children and families:

1. Enhance children's overall learning and family well-being
2. Foster an ongoing, reciprocal, strengths-based partnership between families and their children's early care and education programs
3. Ensure parents and caregivers sustain learning activities at home and advocate for literacy programs and resources in their communities to support early literacy and language development in their children (Halgunseth et al. 2009).

While research has found positive associations between family engagement in literacy and outcomes for prekindergarteners and kindergarteners, we should consider whom the literature is representing. Researchers suggest that the traditional paradigm for family engagement in literacy focuses on the deficiencies of parents while aiming to adapt

The tradition of storytelling preserves culture and affirms children's sense of self while developing their early literacy skills.

parents to the methods applied by the schools (Scott et al. 2012). As many of the studies related to family engagement and literacy are based on the dominant population of white, middle-class families, they do not represent the diversity of students in public schools.

The challenges faced in education related to family engagement require us to go beyond the basic "one size fits all" approach. As informative as studies on family engagement in literacy have been, most continuously overlook the needs of Black families, specifically as it pertains to the impact on children's literacy achievement when their cultural knowledge or everyday activities at home are not represented in literature. For example, in their study, Roberts, Jurgens, and Burchinal (2005) found only a few modest associations between specific family literacy practices and children's language and literacy development in Black families. Overall, the magnitude of the individual correlations between the specific literacy practices and the measures of children's language and literacy development in the study was considerably less consistent and generally not as large as compared to previous studies with white families. The findings of Roberts and her colleagues' research provide evidence that the "best ways for families to engage in literacy" approaches often prescribed in schools may not fully address the needs of Black families. This factor may not be surprising as these standards provide an expectation for culturally-diverse families to mirror mainstream families in home literacy practices; when they do not mirror them, tension arises that creates a "deficit" or "deficient" view of these families (Whitehouse and Colvin 2001).



While early childhood practitioners and family engagement efforts may benefit from understanding previous research on family engagement in literacy, it is necessary to focus on the individual strengths of Black children and families. To appropriately address strategies and innovations for Black families to engage in literacy with their children, educators must capitalize on their strengths. A strengths-based perspective does not ignore the challenges Black families encounter in a society where struggles have persisted. Rather, it urges early childhood practitioners to focus more on building relationships than looking for deficits. It also calls on early childhood practitioners to draw on “funds of knowledge” (i.e., historical and cultural knowledge and skills) that families use to thrive individually and collectively.

Traditionally in the Black culture, religious and community affiliations have been a source of support and learning for families. If these home life experiences are recognized, parents can be guided and shown how these activities are meaningful, literacy-enriched experiences. Engagement in literacy for Black families may also include strong ties to functions in the home and routine practices. For example, we can highlight the way cooking or sharing a meal incorporates important literacy practices. Moreover, the tradition of storytelling preserves culture and affirms children’s sense of self while developing their early literacy skills.

PERCENTAGE OF BLACK CHILDREN WHO WHO SPENT SOME TIME READING FOR PLEASURE ON AN AVERAGE WEEKDAY

GEORGIA	U.S.
86% (121,376)	93% (1,483,300)

SUMMARY: Nationally, Black children (93%) are more likely to spend time reading for pleasure on an average weekday than white or Latino children. In Georgia, the vast majority of Black children (86%) also enjoy reading for leisure on a weekly basis.

Source: National Survey of Child Health, 2011-12

The reality is that there needs to be consideration and training for those who work with Black families in the areas of family engagement and literacy. “Black culture” cannot be considered one dimensional. Families represent various countries, languages, dialects, socioeconomic statuses, educational backgrounds, and other diversities. It is essential that teachers and other educational professionals learn as much as they can about the strengths and “funds of knowledge” that families embody, along with contexts of cultural bias in which Black children and families are embedded. It is critical for us to make conscious decisions about engaging with Black families as we lead and support them in being advocates for their children’s literacy development, starting at an early age.

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FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

POSSIBILITIES BEYOND THE TENSIONS:

Black Family Engagement

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Based on fifteen years of interviews, focus groups, and observations with more than eighty Black families, this essay presents a synthesis of research identifying three major strengths in the beliefs, values, and strategies Black parents employ to remain engaged in their children's education. These strengths include a strong sense of community, self-agency and self-determination, and a love of learning. The families represented include parents who enrolled their children in local public schools as well as parents who made the decision to homeschool their children. Collectively, their experiences corroborate decades of research focused on documenting the marginalization of Black parents' engagement in their children's education. Based on this research, this essay presents policies and practices administrators and teachers can implement to support and encourage engagement among Black families and how Black parents express care for their children's education despite their marginalization.

STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Whether homeschooling or enrolling children in traditional schools, Black families expressed a strong sense of community and interconnectedness. My research has relied heavily on community nomination in the recruitment process for focus groups and interviews. Using community nomination, parents referred potential participants across many types of networks within schools and outside of schools. Moreover, community nomination revealed the strong network among African American families. In fact, the diverse and strong networks of African American families enabled me to have five schools represented within my dissertation study and five states represented in my study of homeschooling, though the majority

Research shows that Black homeschool families value instructional strategies that edify their children's self-image and identities as African Americans by infusing an Afrocentric perspective into their learning.

were located in Georgia. The diversity of Black families' social networks stands in contrast to their white counterparts who frequently have strongly established networks based within their children's schools (McGrath and Kurilof 1999). Instead, African Americans build community networks through their children's participation in sports and other extracurricular activities, church-based activities, professional organizations and employment networks, and within their neighborhoods.

Through their diverse networks, African American families collaborate to overcome oppressive policies and systems to ensure educational equity for their children, schools, and communities. For example, one of the schools in my dissertation experienced severe overcrowding, resulting in many children having to stand up on their school buses. Parents coalesced to advocate for their children, which forced the school board to allocate additional buses to alleviate the problem. Similarly, parents worked together to petition the school board for a new gymnasium and expansion of their cafeteria to alleviate effects of overcrowding.

One issue school leaders, teachers, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) leaders must address is the impact of intergenerational differences in family engagement beliefs and practices among Black families within one school and across schools in the US (Fields-Smith, Williams, and Shoemaker 2015). Grandparents increasingly find themselves serving as primary caregivers. Thus, engagement in their grandchildren's learning will likely be different. In addition, younger parents do not always share the same communal ideas regarding collective collaboration as older parents. Therefore, even with our strong sense of community, there will be diversity within the community that must be considered as we develop opportunities for Black families to engage in their children's learning.



Teachers and school administrators must collaborate with Black parents to effectively develop and implement family engagement strategies that honor and celebrate the inherent strengths and values of our children, families, and communities.

SELF-DETERMINATION AND SELF-AGENCY

Black parents and caregivers will take matters into their own hands when they are denied access to quality education or when the conditions surrounding our access to education becomes over burdensome and detrimental to our children (Anderson 1988; Siddle Walker 1996; Williams 2005). Over the past decade, homeschooling has increased by 90 percent in the Black community (Ray 2015). The rise in homeschooling among Black families represents parents' response to conditions that plague Black education in many schools, including discipline disproportionality, overrepresentation in special education, underrepresentation in gifted education, teachers' low expectations, and school safety (Fields-Smith and Williams-Johnson 2009; Fields-Smith and Wells Kisura 2014; Mazama and Musumunu 2016). Contrary to popular thought, homeschooling is present in families of different education and income levels. Among the forty-six families represented in my study, only four families included parents with professional or doctoral degrees. Moreover, family income levels included low-, middle-, and upper-income ranges.

Research shows that Black homeschool families value instructional strategies that edify their children's self-image and identities as African Americans by infusing an Afrocentric perspective into their learning. Unlike many traditional schools, these parents do not wait until February to provide their children with historical and contemporary role models in an array of industries. These Black home educators explore connections to the African continent prior to slavery, ensuring their children know Black history beyond Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. **The flexibility of homeschooling also provides parents the opportunity to explore**

slavery from a strengths-based perspective rather than a lopsided perspective of inferiority. Moreover, homeschooling enables Black parents to put their faith into practice as they educate their children while integrating their spiritual beliefs into their children's learning.

LOVE FOR LEARNING

As can be observed in Black homeschooling literature, parents want their children to be equipped to direct their own learning and explore and discover the answers to questions they posed themselves. Black parents inherently understand that to foster a love of learning in their children they must allow children to have a voice and participate actively in the learning process. Black parents are choosing homeschooling to give their children what is missing in schools: teachers that engage their children by being ready, willing, and able to listen to their questions, ideas, and interests.

Unfortunately, the high pressure and focus on test scores and standards can make fostering Black children's love of learning less valued in public schools. It is likely that much of this tension contributes to many of the discipline issues experienced by Black children today. Black parents with children in public schools and those homeschooling provided accounts of situations where teachers placed a greater emphasis on children's behavior than children's interest.

PARENT EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AGES 0-8 BY RACE

Georgia:

RACE	LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	SOME COLLEGE OR MORE
Black	12% (46,470)	25% (98,305)	63% (248,516)

U.S.:

RACE	LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL	HIGH SCHOOL	SOME COLLEGE OR MORE
Black	11% (517,070)	27% (1,271,715)	62% (2,977,746)

SUMMARY: In Georgia, there is a higher percentage of Black parents with postsecondary education than nationwide.

Source: ACS, 2015 (national) and 2011-15 (state)

Five questions school leadership, teachers, and other stakeholders should consider to effectively engage Black parents:

- In what ways has the school/teacher communicated a balance of student achievements and areas of improvement to Black families?
- Have you internalized your harmful assumptions about the Black parents and children you serve? Where do these assumptions come from? How are these assumptions countered?
- What are the strengths of the Black parents and children you serve? How can these strengths be leveraged to foster strong partnerships and open, honest communication?
- In what ways has the school/teacher established mutual trust among the Black communities they serve? How can the school/teacher start or continue to strengthen positive relationships among Black children and families?
- What avenues are available for parents to engage in authentic dialogue regarding their children's learning experiences or the school community overall?

Teachers and school administrators must collaborate with Black parents to effectively develop and implement family engagement strategies that honor and celebrate the inherent strengths and values of our children, families, and communities.





FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Point of Proof:

EMPOWERED YOUTH PROGRAMS, INC.

ATHENS, GEORGIA

WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND VISION OF YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Empowered Youth Programs, Inc. (EYP) offers academic enrichment, counseling, and experiential learning experiences to children and youth in our local communities through comprehensive programming, including our Summer Academy, Saturday Academy, Academic Advisement Program, and Fall and Spring Exam Lock-Ins.

Summer Academy

EYP's Summer Academy promotes hands-on inquiry, exploration, and understanding of new places, people, and cultures. Past summer academies have included camping trips and weeklong excursions to destinations as close as Savannah, Georgia and as far as Sydney, Australia. Our program also offers academic enrichment services and activities that promote critical thinking, team-building, problem-solving, communication, and decision-making skills.

Saturday Academy

Concurrent with the academic year, EYP's Saturday Academy supports students in mastering the core competencies of academic subjects (i.e., math, science, history, reading comprehension, and vocabulary) that serve as prerequisites for advanced-level courses. Held at the University of Georgia's College of Education, our program encompasses five academic rotations, including math, science, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and self-discovery, or character education. We also work to ensure that our students receive an hour-and-a-half homework assistance each Saturday. Certified teachers and graduate students serve as instructors, tutors, and advisors to our students throughout the program.

We know we are successful when Empowered Youth Programs, Inc. looks like a family: our students show up bright and early every Saturday morning, are excited to learn, and treat each other with kindness and respect.

The goal of this program is to ensure each participant is equipped with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to be postsecondary ready upon high school graduation.

Academic Advisement and Monitoring

EYP's Academic Advisement Program offers academic counseling and monitoring to ensure that academic performance is maintained or improved with the ongoing support of academic advisors. Advisors are either master's level school counselors-in-training or teachers from the local school district. This component of our program, Partnerships for Enhancing Postsecondary Outcomes, ensures that participants are on track for enrollment in a postsecondary institution regardless of their grade level. This data collection has become an integral and standard part of each participant's academic advisement plan. The goal is to assist students in developing an academic road map or plan for high school coursework designed to effectively prepare them for acceptance and attendance at a postsecondary institution.

EYP partners with families and communities to inspire our students to achieve high academic performance through challenging and innovative learning opportunities that foster the unique talents and strengths of every student, with a special focus on African American children and youth.

WHAT MAKES YOUR ORGANIZATION A "POINT OF PROOF?"

Established in 1989, Empowered Youth Programs, Inc. (EYP) has been in existence for nearly three decades in three states with little to no program funding. We have proven that students of any race, culture, gender, or



socioeconomic background can benefit from the programs and services we offer to their local communities. Our program alumni have gone on to graduate from various postsecondary institutions, from local community colleges to prestigious colleges and universities, such as Duke University and our very own University of Georgia (UGA). In fact, one of our program graduates joined EYP as a sixth grader, graduated from high school, and went on to college at UGA—Georgia's flagship university—and now leads the elementary school division of EYP with his mother. Now, that is what we call **sustainable impact!**

WHO DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION SERVE?

Empowered Youth Programs, Inc. serves children and adolescents in prekindergarten through twelfth grade (PreK-12) in Clarke County and other surrounding communities in the state of Georgia. Ninety to 95 percent of our program participants are African American, with the number of male students compared to female students varying from year to year. Approximately 85 percent of our program participants come from families with low incomes.

PERCENT OF GEORGIA STUDENTS GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL BY RACE

GEORGIA		
RACE	2013-14	2014-15
Black	65%	75%
White	80%	83%
Latino	64%	72%

U.S.		
RACE	2013-14	2014-15
Black	73%	75%
White	87%	88%
Latino	76%	78%

SUMMARY: Between the 2013-14 school year and 2014-15 school year, the graduation rate for Black students in Georgia increased by 10 percentage points, which exceeds the progress made by any other group in Georgia and all races nationally.

Sources: K-12 Public Schools Report Card, GA Governor's Office of Student Achievement; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Consolidated State Performance Report, 2010-11 through 2014-15. (This table was prepared November 2016.)

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION DEFINE AND MEASURE SUCCESS?

We know we are successful when Empowered Youth Programs, Inc. looks like a family: our students show up bright and early every Saturday morning, are excited to learn, and treat each other with kindness and respect.

While our short-term outcome is to have our students fully engage in the learning process on a weekly basis, our long-term outcome is to have our students successfully advance through each grade level from kindergarten through twelfth grade. We work to ensure that our programs are evaluated using several methods. Developed in 2004, the Empowered Youth Programs, Inc. (EYP) Impact Questionnaire is specifically designed to evaluate the impact of our programs. We have three versions of this instrument: (1) the parent version; (2) the student version; and (3) the teacher version. Feedback from parents and caregivers has been one of the best indicators of student success. We strongly believe that EYP has been successful in accomplishing our programmatic goals when our students experience individual growth and success.

WHAT IS INNOVATIVE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION’S WORK WITH BLACK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES? WHAT MAKES IT SUCCESSFUL?

Empowered Youth Programs, Inc. (EYP) is successful not because of *what* we do, but rather *how* we do it. We owe much of our success to the positive relationships we have fostered with our students and families. EYP also believes in setting and maintaining high standards—including accountability and discipline—for our students, families, and staff. We never ask our program participants or their families to do anything that we, as EYP staff, are not willing to do. Understanding the importance of building relationships and setting high yet attainable goals allows us to reach our objectives each year.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED?

Funding is—and will always be—a challenge that all community-based organizations and programs face at some point in their existence, and the Empowered Youth Programs, Inc. (EYP) is no different. Despite this challenge, we have offered our programs and services in three states—North Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia—since 1989. Dr. Deryl Bailey, currently an associate professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia, has worked to develop some version of this program (i.e., Gentlemen on the Move, Young Women Scholars, Empowered Youth Programs) in each of these states, where he and his wife have worked as education professionals. Both a challenge and an opportunity, it is important to ensure that we recruit program staff that is well-suited to support our work, whether as volunteers or paid workers (when funding is available).

IN THE 2011-12 SCHOOL YEAR, A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF BLACK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TOOK THE SAT OR ACT IN PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE THAN AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL.

Georgia	33.7%
U.S.	14.9%

Source: US Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, 2011-12

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accountability and discipline—for our
students, families, and staff.

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE SUSTAINABLE?

We have received program funding from various stakeholders including corporations, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and governmental agencies. Some of our funders have included the University System of Georgia’s African American Male Initiative; the Emmanuel Episcopal Church’s Community Grant Program; the Verbrugge Family Foundation and Covenant Methodist Church and other local funding agencies. Because program funding does not determine our existence, sustainability has not been an issue. Each year, the students we serve shape what we do. This model is a direct reflection on our commitment to “give kids what they need, when they need it, and in the ways that they need it.”

HOW IS THIS INITIATIVE REPLICABLE?

To achieve similar success, it is critical for organizations to understand that they are the sum of how their participants think and behave. If we are to positively change the trajectories of our children and families—particularly those in the African American community—we must change the way we think about, talk about, and engage with African American students and their families.



African American students need and deserve unconditional love, acceptance, and support; nurturing and safe caregivers and environments; high expectations and levels of accountability; healthy boundaries with developmentally-appropriate consequences; and high-quality education and learning opportunities.

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

Black children and families are proud, diligent, and determined to succeed. Nothing compares to witnessing the pride and joy of our students and loved ones as we recognize and celebrate the hard work, strides, and goals they have accomplished throughout the school year at our culminating community event.

From high marks on their exams to accolades on their projects, we are just as proud of the everyday milestones students achieve with the ongoing support of our dedicated and caring staff at EYP.

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

Cultivating strong, supportive relationships with children, families, and communities are vital to our program's success. However, consistency, discipline, accountability, and persistence are just as important.

Over twenty years ago, our founder, Dr. Bailey, met a teacher who had the gift of encouraging her African American students to excel in her class, even when they had difficulty in other courses. Given her success, Dr. Bailey asked her how she did it. The teacher simply stated: "On their worst day, I look into their eyes and I don't see the person that they currently are, but I see the person that I know they can become."

GEORGIA POLICY VARIABLES AND BENCHMARKS

\$3,891

Georgia's Preschool Program Spending
Per Child Enrolled* (2016 DOLLARS)

Georgia's Preschool Program
spending has declined

32% since 2002.

80,825 Total state
program enrollment

\$314,460,869

Total state PreK spending

20,774

Federally funded Head Start enrollment, ages 3 and 4

- Child care centers are required to encourage parent involvement, communicate regularly with parents, allow parents access to the center, and give written policies to parents.
- Sets copayments for child care subsidies at 8% of income for a family of three at 100% FPL (\$20,420).
- State has comprehensive, free-standing standards for social-emotional learning at the preschool level but not at the K-12 levels.
- Georgia provides supports (such as scholarships, professional development, and paid planning time) for lead and assistant teachers to help them attain credentials and enhance their skills.
- Georgia has not adopted Medicaid Expansion.
- Income eligibility for public health insurance for children (Children's Health Insurance Program or CHIP) is above 200% of the federal policy level (FPL).
- The state minimum wage is \$5.15 per hour.

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

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

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

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

ENDNOTES

OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES AND BIASES: MAKING CLASSROOMS AND THERAPEUTIC SPACES SAFER FOR YOUNG BLACK CHILDREN

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HOW CULTURALLY-RELEVANT AND CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE HEALING AND COPING STRATEGIES SUPPORT THE SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

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“FLIPPING THE SCRIPT” IN TEACHER EDUCATION: CULTIVATING EARLY CHILDHOOD PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS AS SEERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN’S CULTURAL ASSETS

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NBCDI encourages a diverse presentation of ideas and opinions. Readers should note that an organization or idea's inclusion in this report does not necessarily constitute an endorsement on behalf of NBCDI and that the findings, recommendations, and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of NBCDI, nor of our funding partners.

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