



# My Brother's Keeper Task Force Report to the President

May 2014



(Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)



May 28, 2014

Dear Mr. President:

It is our privilege and duty to submit the first progress report from the My Brother's Keeper Task Force. As the proud fathers of sons, it is an honor to lead this initiative on your behalf.

Since the day of the Task Force's announcement, we have been overwhelmed with the public response to and support for your initiative. The country knows you are listening intently, and that you have made it a lasting presidential and personal commitment to ensure that all young people in America have ladders of opportunity.

In your Presidential Memorandum, dated February 27, 2014, you asked for a 90-day report on the Task Force's progress. This report is just that – a statement of progress. After 90 days, we have just scratched the surface of this complex issue and opportunity.

To understand the context, opportunities and challenges in the lives of boys and young men of color and other youth, we reviewed statistics, research and government programs and policies; we also went into communities – literally and virtually – to hear the perspectives of thousands of community members and leaders. These listening sessions have profoundly shaped our perspective on the path forward and have made several things abundantly clear.

First, across this country, there are communities and individuals already doing incredible work, making meaningful, often transformative, differences in the lives of boys and young men of color and helping to ensure that all young people have the tools and opportunities they need to succeed. *Your initiative has created a catalytic moment even for those who have been involved in this work for decades. As importantly, there are many more people and institutions ready and looking for a productive and impactful way to engage.*

Second, we heard from many boys like *Damon*, a third grader in Nevada. Damon shared that he had been chronically absent and not doing well in school until March, but now was doing better. When asked what happened in March, he said that he had seen his father after a long time; and that his father told him to do well in school. *The presence and positive engagement of parents and other caring adults is and always will make the greatest difference in these young people's lives.*

When talking to people in middle and low income neighborhoods, they make clear the inextricable dependence of this initiative on your broader agenda for economic growth and expanding opportunity. Children's wellbeing is heavily dependent on that of their families. Creating good jobs and increasing access to quality health care, childcare and education builds ladders of opportunity critical to parents and children.

We also heard from many young men who are in college or working – doing great things for their families and communities, and often overcoming devastating personal circumstances. Though disproving the prevalent negative narrative about boys and young men of color with their own example, these young men often made two heartbreaking admissions. First, that they had internalized parts of the negative narrative and thus (at times) felt the shame of being fearful of other boys and young men of color; and second, that they often diminish themselves as they go through their daily lives to be less threatening to others. *The prevailing narrative is pernicious and corrosive.* It feeds and excuses bias.

We have approached this initiative as a mechanism to highlight and build on what works inside and outside of government for improving expected life outcomes of young people and removing barriers to their success. There is much work left to do. Yet, in this first phase, we have found numerous ways we can achieve better results and empower more communities, beginning with making critical outcomes visible in our data and then highlighting and doing what works to improve them. But none of this can be done by the Administration alone. That’s why you are committed to working with communities, philanthropies, businesses, other organizations, and the Congress, including Members of the Congressional Black Caucus and Congressional Hispanic Caucuses, who are equally committed to achieving these goals, and who have a long record of accomplishment and advocacy in their own communities on behalf of these youth.

Today, we are pleased to report that a strong foundation for your initiative has been laid in the past 90 days. Agency representatives on the Task Force have worked tirelessly to assess programs and policies that have the potential to enhance positive outcomes and eliminate or reduce negative ones. Some of the proposals will begin a long process toward tearing down structural barriers. But this report is just the beginning. The challenges described in this report will not vanish overnight. And, as you have noted, the government cannot play the only—or even the primary—role in these efforts. Helping young people realize their full potential requires a sustained effort from all of us. Under your direction, the work of the Task Force and its supporting Federal agencies, and efforts by businesses, foundations, religious institutions and private citizens, will remain a priority for years to come.



Broderick Johnson  
Assistant to the President  
and Cabinet Secretary



Jim Shelton  
Deputy Secretary of Education

# Executive Summary

For decades, opportunity has lagged behind for boys and young men of color. But across the country, communities are adopting innovative approaches, opening doors, strengthening supports, and building ladders of opportunity for young people, including boys and young men of color, to help put them on the path to success. President Obama wants to build on that success.

That's why, on February 27, 2014, the President took action, joining with philanthropy and the private sector to launch an initiative to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people who are willing to do the hard work to get ahead can reach their full potential — using proven tools and focusing on key moments in their lives where we can help make a difference.

Over the last three months, we have had conversations with thousands of individuals and groups who care about this set of issues and share a common belief that, working together, we can help empower boys and young men of color and all youth with the tools they need to succeed.

Today, the Task Force is providing a 90-day report on progress and an initial set of recommendations.

This is a first step. In the coming months and years, the Task Force will build on the framework and initial recommendations offered here, and will work together with others to help ensure that all youth in America are on the path to success.

## The Challenge

Despite our advances as a country, boys and young men of color, in the aggregate, continue to face persistent challenges:

- **23.2% of Hispanics, 25.8% of Black, and 27% of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN) live in poverty**, compared to 11.6% of White Americans.<sup>1</sup>
- **Black, American Indian, and Hispanic children are between six and nine times more likely than white children to live in areas of concentrated poverty.** This compounds the effects of poverty, and further limits pathways to success.<sup>2</sup>
- **Roughly two-thirds of Black and one-third of Hispanic children live with only one parent.** A father's absence increases the risk of their child dropping out of school. Blacks and Hispanics raised by single moms are 75 percent and 96 percent respectively more likely to drop out of school.<sup>3</sup>
- We see significant **high school dropout rates—as high as 50%** in some school districts—including among boys and young men from certain Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander populations.<sup>4</sup>

- **During the summer months (June-August) of 2013, just 17% of Black teenage boys (ages 16-19) and 28% of Hispanic teenage boys were employed, compared to 34% of White teenage boys.** Overall in 2013, half of young black men (ages 20-24) were employed, compared to over two-thirds of young white men. This employment gap persists as men get older.
- While only 6% of the overall population, **Black males accounted for 43% of murder victims in 2011.**<sup>5</sup> Among youth ages 10 to 24, homicide is the leading cause of death for Black males and also among the leading causes of death for Hispanics, and AIANs.<sup>6</sup>
- **In 2012, Black males were 6 times more likely to be imprisoned than White males.**<sup>7</sup> Hispanic males were two and half times more likely.

## The Opportunity

As President Obama has said, “we are stronger when America fields a full team.” Improving life prospects and outcomes for young people, including young men of color, is the right thing to do not just for those individuals, but for our economy as a whole.

- As the Baby Boom generation reaches retirement age, a key economic imperative is **increasing the size of the labor force.** Over the next thirty years, the working age (16-64) population is projected to grow less than half as fast as it did over the preceding thirty years. Increasing labor force participation by enabling our young people, including young men of color, to join with workforce with needed preparation and skills is one way to mitigate the profound demographic challenges that we face and grow the economy’s potential.
- Adding to economic growth and opportunity will **help with America’s long-run fiscal challenge,** expanding the tax base and reducing costs.
- Additional investment in education can **more than pay for itself over the long-run.** One famous study tracked Black children who were provided with high-quality pre-school. By age 40, each initial dollar per participant spent on preschool returned more than \$16 relative to a control group. A large portion of the return was public savings, reflecting reduced crime and greater tax receipts from higher employment and earnings, among other factors.
- Helping today’s youth become better parents will also help future generations, expanding opportunity and increasing mobility. Studies have consistently found that the environment children are raised in during their first years has a major impact on their cognitive development and life prospects.

## Building Blocks for Success Across Key Life Stages

To ensure that all young Americans have the opportunities they need to reach their full potential, we must adopt approaches that empower all of our children with the tools to succeed as they move through key life stages. Research and experience have identified key milestones on the path to adulthood that are especially predictive of later success, and where interventions can have the greatest impact

At each of these markers, we see some children start to fall behind. Although the factors that influence success at each stage are complex and interdependent, by focusing on these milestones, doing what works and removing or avoiding roadblocks that hinder progress, we can provide young people the opportunity and the tools to get ahead.

1. Entering school ready to learn
2. Reading at grade level by third grade
3. Graduating from high school ready for college and career
4. Completing postsecondary education or training
5. Successfully entering the workforce
6. Reducing violence and providing a second chance

## Path Forward: Recommendations and Areas of Opportunity

The Task Force has identified initial recommendations and areas of opportunity at each of these key milestones or “focus areas.” The Task Force has also identified several cross-cutting areas of opportunity that span all focus areas.

### I - Cross-Cutting Recommendations and Areas of Opportunity

- **Seeing the Problems and Tracking Progress: Establishing National Indicators:** In order to address the problems outlined in this report, the Task Force in the coming months will make available and encourage adoption of critical indicators of life outcomes. The Federal government must also close gaps in data collection for currently invisible populations.
- **Provide Incentives to Learn and Do What Works:** There are strategies and practices that work to improve children’s life trajectories, but they are not being broadly adopted. We should expand public and private efforts to use evidence and outcome-focused approaches by rewarding evidence in programs and highlighting strategies and practices with promising and strong evidence.
- **Support Comprehensive, Cradle-to-College-and-Career Strategies Rooted in Local Communities:** There is no single “magic formula” for success. We must encourage and help catalyze local efforts that adopt comprehensive, cradle-to-college-and-career strategies rooted in communities themselves.
- **Recognize the Importance of Parents and Other Caring Adults:** No single factor is more important in the life of a child than the love and support of caring, committed adults. All sectors of society, as well as parents themselves—this is a collective responsibility—must do more to help ensure that parents and caregivers are equipped with the tools to help their children succeed and that more young people have access to mentors and effective mentoring programs.

## II - Focus Area Recommendations

### 1. Entering School Ready to Learn

- **Close the Word Gap and Support Enriching Home Environments:** By the age of 3, children from low-income households have heard roughly 30 million fewer words than their higher-income peers.<sup>8</sup> We can raise awareness and adoption of in-home and successful caregiver strategies that help provide an enriching learning environment.
- **Ensure Access to High Quality Early Care and Education:** “Pre-school for All” is a vital component of the Administration’s opportunity agenda. Focusing on expanding access to high-quality preschool and early learning programs—including through the Administration’s proposals for Pre-school for All—and providing training to teachers on behavioral management and bias are central to this effort.
- **Implement Universal Early Health and Developmental Screenings:** By expanding screenings and awareness to identify early delays and link families to support options, we can permanently alter the life trajectory of these children.<sup>9</sup>
- **Eliminate Suspensions and Expulsions in Early Learning Settings:** Increased awareness of the negative impact expulsion and suspension can have on young children is the first step to improving outcomes in this area.<sup>10</sup>

### 2. Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade

- **Support Joint Book Reading and In-Home Literacy:** Reading with an adult is an especially important way for children to learn to read, particularly during the crucial early years. Relevant agencies should work together with a wide range of individuals, community organizations and businesses to build and support a culture of reading at home and in communities.
- **Bring Successful Evidence-Based Practices to Scale, Starting with Early Literacy Screenings:** Schools and communities have developed a number of successful models that increase reading proficiency. The Department of Education and others should work to scale these and other best practices.

### 3. Graduating from High School Ready for College and Career

- **Maintain Momentum in Turning Around the Worst Performing Schools:** For the first time in history, high school graduation rates recently reached 80 percent, with gains largely driven by a 15-percentage point increase for Hispanic students and 9-percentage point increase by Black students since 2006. To maintain this momentum, we should focus on successful efforts to transform our country’s worst performing schools.
- **Help Schools and Families Recognize Early Warning Signals and Take Action:** Research shows that dropping out of school is not a single event but the conclusion of a series of distress signals that often go unanswered.<sup>11</sup> We

should encourage the adoption of early warning systems and other successful approaches that help schools and families recognize the problem, take action and put students on the path to graduation.

- **Encourage the Use of Fair Discipline Practices:** Black children are four times as likely as their White peers to be suspended from school.<sup>12</sup> And if a student has been suspended even once by ninth grade, he or she is twice as likely to drop out. To enhance school climate and improve school discipline practices, the Departments of Education, Justice and others should promote the use of alternative discipline practices to help teachers teach *and* keep kids in school.

#### 4. Completing Postsecondary Education or Training

- **Expand Access to Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate Courses and Rigorous College Prep:** While college matriculation rates have risen, graduation rates have not kept pace. By encouraging college-prep enrollment and supporting innovative approaches to providing access, we can help bridge this gap, and ensure that more kids graduate from high school with the tools they need to excel in college and beyond.
- **Improve College Advising Services and Support Tools:** Limited information constrains students' choices and hurts their decision-making. The Department of Education should work with guidance counselors and other college advising organizations to make good information widely available about retention, graduation rates and student debt.
- **Aim Higher in High School by Encouraging FAFSA Completion and Postsecondary Applications:** Planning for the future is an essential step before graduating from high school. States should establish systems that enable appropriate monitoring and support of FAFSA completion, and districts and schools should work with students and families to set and meet completion goals. Schools should also consider incorporating the college application process into class and graduation requirements.

#### 5. Entering the Workforce

- **Enact Broader Growth and Opportunity Agenda:** The best way to create additional job opportunities for young people is through implementation of the broader economic agenda. Investments in infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, job training and raising the minimum wage will pay dividends to the economy as a whole and improve employment prospects for all young people, including boys and young men of color.
- **Increase Entry-Level Job, Mentorship and Apprenticeship Options:** On-the-job training, job shadowing, apprenticeships and entry-level employment options allow young people to gain critical career skills and strengthen pathways to employment and increased earnings. More public and private employers can and should step up and expand these options; and the Small Business Administration and Department of Labor should facilitate these efforts.

- **Help Grow and Improve Summer Jobs Initiatives:** Jobs provide wages and structure for youth during the summer months, but they also help teenagers and young adults build “soft skills” like punctuality, teamwork and interpersonal communication that enhance job prospects. We should work with employers, mayors and others to expand upon successful summer jobs efforts, and to enhance the quality of existing programs.

## 6. Reducing Violence and Providing a Second Chance

- **Reduce Violence in High-Risk Communities by Integrating Public Health Approaches:** We should enhance work between Federal leaders, state leaders, mayors, and others to further implement and scale successful anti-violence and gang prevention initiatives already underway.
- **Encourage Law Enforcement and Neighborhoods to Work Hand-in-Hand:** Law enforcement works most effectively, and neighborhoods and streets stay the safest, when there are strong relationships between law enforcement officials and the communities they serve. The Department of Justice should continue to promote community-oriented policing strategies and efforts to build trust between communities and law enforcement.
- **Reform the Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems to Keep Youth on Track:** When young people come into contact with the criminal or juvenile justice systems, we must ensure that these interactions do not occur unnecessarily, and do not get them off track for life. We should promote successful alternatives to incarceration, continue to address inappropriate referrals and enforce the rights of incarcerated youth to a quality education.
- **Eliminate Unnecessary Barriers to Reentry and Encourage Fair Chance Hiring Options:** Our youth and communities suffer when hiring practices unnecessarily disqualify candidates based on past mistakes. We should implement reforms to promote successful reentry, including encouraging hiring practices, such as “Ban the Box,” which give applicants a fair chance and allows employers the opportunity to judge individual job candidates on their merits as they reenter the workforce.

# Introduction

*“If you work hard and play by the rules, you should have the opportunity to succeed, and your ability to get ahead should be determined by your hard work, ambition, and goals – not by the circumstances of your birth.”*

– President Barack Obama, *State of the Union (January 25, 2014)*

The Obama Administration has been guided by the core American principle that opportunity should be open to all. And despite some of the most difficult economic circumstances in decades, this Administration has made significant progress and achievements in education, employment, health, and criminal justice for all Americans. But boys and young men of color continue to face persistent and pernicious gaps in opportunities and life outcomes. Many of these disparities in outcomes are not explained by contextual factors, such as the level of education or family income.

At this early stage of the My Brother’s Keeper initiative, our understanding of current trends, review of the research and engagement with thousands of diverse stakeholders—including boys and young men of color themselves—give us great optimism about the potential that exists to improve meaningfully the expected educational and life outcomes for these boys and young men, and increase their economic, social, and civic contributions to the country.

Individual achievement is a result of a complex combination of many interdependent personal choices, cultural and social factors and institutional influences. This complexity has made the work of removing barriers and closing gaps an enduring enterprise, whether in education, economics, health or criminal justice. There is, however, evidence that removing systemic barriers and implementing a comprehensive set of promising and proven strategies, practices and programs can empower youth, including boys and young men of color, even those in the most difficult circumstances, to reach high levels of individual performance.

As the President has said, My Brother’s Keeper is not some big, new government program. The most meaningful interactions — the most powerful means of change — are through the relationships with parents, teachers, faith leaders, coaches and mentors that together shape our children and allow them to thrive. The biggest areas for opportunity will come from within individual communities; but there are many ways we can together empower and better support our youth, including boys and young men of color, their families and their communities.

The strategies and recommendations discussed in this report are designed in accordance with the fundamental principle that Federal and federally assisted programs and services may not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, color, or national origin.

Nothing in this document should be read to suggest otherwise. Consistent with that principle, My Brother's Keeper aims to break down barriers to success and to promote increased opportunity for all, regardless of sex, race, color, or national origin. Even in a tight budget environment, by working together to enable broad adoption of what works and to develop innovative approaches, we can continue to make progress for all our youth, including boys and young men of color, especially in communities of greatest need.

## Opportunity for All

The Obama Administration has a broad-based agenda for economic growth and expanding opportunity for all, and these policies remain highly effective in creating good jobs, restoring middle-class security and building ladders of opportunity for all Americans. Coming out of one of the country's most damaging recessions, this Administration has led efforts that have resulted in enormous progress for Americans:

- The private sector has added 9.2 million jobs in 50 consecutive months of job growth, which have put parents back to work and food on the table – although much more needs to be done.
- Millions of Americans have greater access to preventive care, including prenatal care, and treatment for preexisting conditions.
- Unprecedented educational reform has led to a historic high school graduation rate of 80 percent nationally—driven in large part by gains among Black and Hispanic students—and dramatic reductions in dropout rates.
- There has been a surge in college enrollment overall and among low-income, Black and Hispanic students, fueled in part by increasing and expanding Pell grants.<sup>13</sup>
- Through increased enforcement of Federal civil rights laws, more Americans now have the opportunity to learn, the opportunity to earn a living, the opportunity to secure a loan, and the opportunity to live where they choose, without being subject to unlawful discrimination.

These efforts and accomplishments are the foundation for creating opportunity for all Americans and the broad platform upon which the My Brother's Keeper Initiative will build.

## Who Are Boys and Young Men of Color?

The My Brother's Keeper Task Force was established to develop a coordinated Federal effort to improve significantly the expected life outcomes for boys and young men of color (including Black Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans) and their contributions to U.S. prosperity, so that all youth have an equal opportunity at the American dream. It is important to note that there is significant diversity within and among these groups of the population. Differences of language status, income, disability, sexual orientation and many other factors influence the identity and experience of these young people, just as any other population. In addition, challenges

facing boys and young men of color affect others as well. It is important to break down barriers wherever they exist and identify means of creating ladders of opportunity for all.

## Persistent Challenges: Context Matters

Despite overall progress, some Americans have lagged behind, have fewer opportunities available to them and continue to face roadblocks to success. One of these groups is boys and young men of color.<sup>14</sup>

- Boys and young men of color are more likely than their peers to be born into low-income families and live in concentrated poverty; to have teenage mothers; to live with one or no parent; to attend high-poverty, poor performing schools; to miss out on rigorous classes; and to have teachers that are inexperienced or unqualified.<sup>15</sup>
- In schools and in courts, these boys and young men too often receive harsher penalties for the same infractions as similarly charged White males, and are least likely to be given a second chance.<sup>16</sup>
- They have higher incidences of asthma, diabetes, and other illnesses which affect everything from school attendance to employment.<sup>17</sup> And, particularly detrimental to their academic and professional achievement, they are less likely to be diagnosed or treated early for intellectual, learning or emotional disabilities and are more likely to be enrolled in special education.<sup>18</sup>
- They are more likely to live in communities with higher rates of crime, increasing the likelihood of negative encounters with police and victimization by violent crime.<sup>19</sup>
- Role models and a strong network of caring, informed adults may be unavailable. Even for those children in the best circumstances, society provides negative reinforcement and at times explicit bias.
- Similarly, research suggests that Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and other sexual and gender minority (GBTQ) youth of color also experience high levels of systemic barriers to well-being compared to White LGBTQ youth.<sup>20</sup>

These challenges are complex and interwoven, but they are also surmountable with focused effort. Stories of triumph, despite these statistics, are inspiring evidence of this fact.

## The My Brother's Keeper Task Force

This initiative was launched with the belief that, by focusing on critical challenges, risk factors and opportunities for boys and young men of color at key life stages, we can improve their long-term outcomes and ability to contribute to society. By joining Americans together in this effort, seemingly intractable challenges can be overcome

ensure that all youth, regardless of the circumstances of their birth, have the tools and opportunities to succeed. Ninety days into this effort, this core hypothesis has only been reaffirmed.

At the launch of this initiative, the President issued a Presidential Memorandum (PM), *Creating and Expanding Ladders of Opportunity for Boys and Young Men of Color*, which established the My Brother's Keeper Federal Task Force (Task Force). Since that time, the Task Force has initiated efforts to begin to understand and describe the problem and formulated an initial set of recommendations and next steps. The PM gave the Task Force a number of responsibilities, including: (1) assessing the impact of Federal policies of general applicability to develop proposals that will enhance positive outcomes and eliminate or reduce negative ones; (2) developing a plan for an Administration-wide website and portal to make available data relevant to the broader community about successful programs and practices, and relevant contextual and outcome statistics; and (3) developing outreach strategies and coordinating with other stakeholders to highlight opportunities and challenges. The PM instructed the Task Force to provide a report on its progress and recommendations within 90 days.

Task Force members and representatives have met with and heard from thousands of stakeholders, held online and in-person listening sessions, and solicited a broad range of ideas and input. Senior Administration officials participated in large in-person listening sessions and roundtables in cities including Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, Houston and Los Angeles. Task Force members also completed extensive reviews of available literature, conducted site visits and worked to understand program and evaluation data. The voices and experiences of young people and those foundations and other private sector organizations that work with them guided Task Force findings and have informed the overall approach.

Task Force members and others working on the initiative believe it is critical to continue to engage in these listening sessions to seek input and bring people together to inform the ongoing work. This document offers a starting point and a path forward, but we do not have, and do not seek to provide, all the answers. Working with others, we hope and expect to build on this work in the months and years ahead.

The first deliverable outlined in the PM was for the Task Force to recommend a set of critical indicators of life outcomes. The Task Force engaged the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (Children's Forum), one of several Federal interagency statistical working groups, to help identify indicators within those currently published in a biannual report, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* (America's Children), and related publications. The Task Force then worked with the Children's Forum to identify and address data gaps in a manner consistent with Federal statistical standards – specifically, to produce reliable, objective, accurate and timely statistics.

The second deliverable was for Task Force members to identify any relevant programs and data-driven assessments within their respective departments or agencies for consideration in a public portal. These evidence-based programs and interventions will be included in the “What Works” online portal that will be launched in the coming months.

## A Cradle-to-College-and-Career Approach

The Task Force was asked to focus on key stages in the lives of young people, from early childhood to pathways to college and career. In doing so, it has become apparent that, on the path to adulthood, there is no single moment that defines or determines future success. Recent research suggests positive impacts of evidence-based interventions at multiple critical junctures along the way.<sup>21</sup> Promise Neighborhoods grantees and other organizations are implementing cradle-to-college-and-career strategies that are increasing school attendance, improving academic performance and raising high school completion and college enrollment rates.

There are numerous indicators of health and well-being that contribute to overall life outcomes. The Task Force has worked to identify a handful of outcomes that serve as key building blocks in the path to adulthood – achievement at each milestone allows for a successful transition to the next life stage and is highly predictive of later success. By focusing on these key milestones, and providing for successful development *across* life stages, we can provide all our youth with the tools to build successful lives.

To this end, six universal milestones are especially important and serve as the basis for the Task Force’s work and recommendations:

1. Entering school ready to learn
2. Reading at grade level by third grade
3. Graduating from high school ready for college and career
4. Completing postsecondary education or training
5. Successfully entering the workforce
6. Reducing violence and providing a second chance

At each of these life milestones, some individuals start to fall behind. Once a young person falls behind, success becomes exponentially more difficult. As part of its 90-day report on progress, the Task Force has identified an initial set of recommendations and areas of opportunity to increase achievement at each of the critical milestones. The Task Force has also identified several cross-cutting areas of opportunity that span all focus areas.

While these steps are a starting point, My Brother’s Keeper is and must be a long-term effort. The Task Force and others involved in the initiative will continue to listen, gather input, engage experts and stakeholders, develop additional recommendations and encourage community solutions well beyond the initial 90-day assessment period.

# Cross-Cutting Recommendations

Through the Task Force’s initial assessment of the impact of policies and programs of general applicability on boys and young men of color, several cross-cutting strategies emerged for how to more effectively approach the work of improving educational and life outcomes for all populations. These strategies include:

- Enabling comprehensive, cradle-to-college-and-career community solutions;
- Learning from and doing what works;
- Making data about critical life indicators more transparent; and
- Empowering parents and engaging other caring adults

## A Comprehensive Approach

The need for a comprehensive approach — preventing or addressing a range of issues at each step along the path from birth to adulthood — resonates deeply with virtually all stakeholders and is increasingly supported by research and scores of practical examples. Yet, the public and private sectors have primarily taken narrower, “silver bullet” approaches to improving outcomes. Many schools, for example, struggle to deal with impacts of trauma; the causes of traumatic stress; and the role of physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing; and they underestimate the potential power of parents in creating high-performing learning environments.<sup>22</sup> The collective work of community members and public and private agencies pursuing roughly the same goals for young people and their families is often fractured and weakened by longstanding organizational, cultural and systemic barriers.

The emerging “collective impact” movement is demonstrating that with public and private support and technical assistance, schools, communities, cities and regions can take more comprehensive, outcome-focused approaches to improving the lives of young people. These strategies can help improve outcomes for all disadvantaged youth and help to remove barriers to opportunity.

For example, through the Promise Zones Initiative, the Administration is partnering closely with hard-hit urban, rural and tribal communities to create jobs, to increase economic activity, improve educational opportunities and reduce violent crime. Each Promise Zone has developed evidence-based plans for revitalization, grounded in partnerships between local government, business and community leaders. For example, in San Antonio, progress is already visible: in the last three years, the graduation rate at the target high school has risen from 46 to 84 percent,<sup>23</sup> and chronic absenteeism among 8<sup>th</sup> graders has fallen from 33 to 8 percent.<sup>24</sup>

There are four cross-cutting areas where we believe the public and private sectors can make a difference and improve young people’s lives by taking more comprehensive, coordinated, outcome-focused approaches to addressing problems.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: Encourage and support comprehensive cradle-to-college-and-career community solutions.** Nationwide, programs are being tested that adopt a more comprehensive approach to addressing problems and barriers facing youth.

- 1.1 At the Federal, state and local levels, agencies and others should take advantage of opportunities to encourage comprehensive approaches to improving outcomes for youth in schools and communities;
- 1.2 Decision-makers and practitioners, especially educators and others who work with youth, should be trained to understand and incorporate into strategies and practices the interdependency of education, employment and criminal justice outcomes with social, emotional and physical wellbeing, including the impacts of traumatic stress;
- 1.3 Current comprehensive “place based” programs and emerging effective practices should be further studied and highlighted for adoption by other communities;
- 1.4 Public and private entities should increase their capacity to lead and coordinate this work, including by seeking /providing technical assistance as appropriate; and
- 1.5 The development of new tools and resources that enable aligned and integrated strategies, including data systems, and provide appropriate privacy protections, should be supported.

## Learning From and Doing What Works

The first step in *doing* what works is *knowing* what works. To this end, the Task Force reviewed current programs and practices to assess their impact and make recommendations. The Task Force examined existing “clearinghouses” and convened listening sessions to hear how existing research and evaluations are used by decision-makers and practitioners to understand best practices. This initial assessment of existing research has revealed four critical findings: (1) many studies lack conclusive findings about the impacts on specific populations; (2) many users lack awareness of and incentives to find and do what works; (3) significant gaps exist in evidence-based solutions due to the often prohibitive cost and complexity of evaluations; and (4) similar factors impede evaluation and funding of many small or community-based programs that have strong anecdotal results.

Several programs are attempting to address this challenge across government. For example, the Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund at the Department of Education supports further evaluation and expansion of programs with promising and strong evidence. The maximum size of the grants is determined by the level of evidence provided. The Department of Education has also created mechanisms to allow similar priorities to be used in its other competitive programs. These efforts will help fill important knowledge

gaps, improve existing programs for youth and create innovative strategies with the potential to improve outcomes significantly.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Encourage decision makers, practitioners, and large and small providers to use evidence-based approaches and track what works.**

- 2.1 Public and private agencies should adopt “Do What Works” policies and systems to prioritize strategies, practices and programs that demonstrate promising or strong evidence of improving leading indicators and outcomes, and encourage grantees and partners to do the same; and
- 2.2 Federal, state, local and private agencies should invest in and build the methods, systems and tools to enable even small- or low-resourced organizations to monitor and evaluate their performance.

## Critical Outcomes

The first step in working with external stakeholders to highlight opportunities, challenges, and efforts affecting boys and young men of color and their peers is making data about their critical life outcomes more transparent.

In accordance with the PM, the Task Force recommended 43 critical indicators for inclusion in an online “data dashboard” that will provide a comprehensive view of the environments and outcomes for boys and young men of color and their peers. The Task Force intends to work with the Federal Statistical Agencies to make these and other relevant statistics available at the national level. Additionally, the Task Force will work with state and local agencies, innovators and social entrepreneurs and other stakeholders to create new tools and resources that allow local communities to use their local data to understand and develop strategies to improve youth outcomes.

Working with the Children’s Forum during its first 90 days, the Task Force identified the following list of potential national indicators. Statistics by gender within race/ethnicity are currently available for a number of these indicators; but for most, calculations were requested and performed before estimates could be provided by gender within race. Additionally, a set of desired indicators are shown below where further conceptualization and measurement is needed before appropriate data sources can be identified and statistics by gender within race/ethnicity are calculated.

### Early Care and K-12 Education

The following are key indicators of learning and progress from the early years through elementary and secondary education, including center-based care enrollment and mathematics and reading achievement. Metrics on school climate/discipline, high school completion and advanced course participation will highlight preparedness for continuing education and workforce entry, or if youth are at risk of falling off track toward college and career opportunities.

Indicator Title	Age Range			
	(0-5)	(6-12)	(13-17)	(18-24)
Children in center-based care (ages younger than 5 not yet in K)	X			
Reading achievement (including students with disabilities)		X	X	
Mathematics achievement (including students with disabilities)		X	X	
AP/IB/Dual Enrollment Participation			X	
Suspension and Expulsion (including suspension of students with disabilities)	X	X	X	
High school completion				X
Attendance at high poverty schools for recipients of free and reduced price lunch		X	X	
Children with disabilities enrolled in high poverty schools (percent)		X	X	

### Postsecondary Education

Enrollment and completion of a college education generally increases the likelihood of employment opportunities and economical security.<sup>25</sup> The following indicators capture postsecondary enrollment and attainment, including college remedial course taking.

Indicator Title	Age Range			
	(0-5)	(6-12)	(13-17)	(18-24)
College enrollment rates				X
Enrollment in (postsecondary) remedial classes				X
Some college (without degree)				X
Associate degree				X
STEM BA attainment				X

### Jobs and Earnings

These indicators represent postsecondary and employment outcomes, signaling differences among young men and adults across racial/ethnic groups (including those disconnected from both education and job opportunities) with varying levels of workforce participation and earnings.

Indicator Title	Age Range			
	(0-5)	(6-12)	(13-17)	(18-24)
Neither enrolled in school nor working (both)			X	X
Labor force participation rates				X
Median earnings				X

Unemployment rate				X
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## Environment and Family Structure

A child's well-being and future outcomes can be significantly affected by the various home and environmental conditions to which they are exposed. These indicators capture a few of the other contextual characteristics that might impact a child or young person's ability to persist through the cradle-to-college and career pipeline.

Indicator Title	Age Range			
	(0-5)	(6-12)	(13-17)	(18-24)
Births to young adult women				X
Adolescent births			X	
Family structure	X	X	X	X
Secure parental employment				
Child poverty	X	X	X	
Child maltreatment	X	X	X	
Housing problems	X	X	X	X

## Health

A child's physical health, well-being, access to quality care and lifestyle habits can affect his or her chances of successfully pursuing educational and career attainment. The indicators below highlight variations in health quality, including high-risk behaviors.

Indicator Title	Age Range			
	(0-5)	(6-12)	(13-17)	(18-24)
Usual source of health care	X	X	X	
Diet quality	X	X	X	
Obesity		X	X	
Low birth weight	X			
Asthma (selected characteristics)	X	X	X	
Regular cigarette smoking			X	
Alcohol use			X	
Illicit drug use			X	

## Criminal Justice and Violent Crime Interaction

The metrics below represent variations in the prevalence of violence and incarceration across selected demographics.

Indicator Title	Age Range			
	(0-5)	(6-12)	(13-17)	(18-24)
Imprisonment rate				X
Juveniles in juvenile correction facilities		X	X	
Youth victims of serious violent crimes		X	X	
Nonfatal victimization rates				X
Homicide rates		X	X	X

## Indicators Requiring Further Measurement Prior to Identifying Data Sources and Calculating Statistics by Gender within Race/Ethnicity

Indicator Title	Age Range			
	(0-5)	(6-12)	(13-17)	(18-24)
Adolescent mortality (death rates ages 15-19)			X	X
Untreated tooth decay	X	X	X	
Diagnoses of HIV infection among adolescents and young adults			X	X
Emotional and behavioral difficulties	X	X	X	
Living in concentrated poverty (census tract >20%)	X	X	X	X
Exposure to violence	X	X	X	
Adolescents who have an adult in their lives with whom they can talk about serious problems			X	

**RECOMMENDATION 3: Make information about life outcomes for boys and young men of color and their peers more visible by improving data collection and transparency.** Uncollected data and data that are not calculated currently mask disparities in outcomes between subpopulations, leaving whole groups invisible.

- 3.1 The Federal departments and agencies (“Federal agencies”) that comprise the Children’s Forum should produce the critical indicators of life outcomes described above on an ongoing basis; and
- 3.2 The Children’s Forum should further consider and identify gaps in data and develop a plan consistent with agency missions and authorities to address these data gaps and limitations. To help the Children’s Forum build support for such data improvements, the plan should include the scope, time and resources required to produce the new or improved statistics.

### Availability of Local Level Indicators

The Task Force has focused primarily on nationally representative datasets. Some Federal data sources are currently available to provide select indicators at more localized geographic scales. In particular, the Census Bureau’s annual American Community Survey and the decennial Census tabulations are publically available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Many State and local governments and non-profit organizations also make available numerous indicators to examine life outcomes for youth, including boys and young men of color. The Promise Zones effort is systematically developing an inventory of measurement initiatives that may be useful for individuals and communities interested in performing place-based data analysis. The Task Force encourages the continuation of these efforts.

## Empowering Parents and Engaging Other Caring Adults

**All parents should support their child’s intellectual, emotional, and financial well-being.**

Parents, guardians and other caring adults play the most important roles in determining young people’s life trajectories from cradle-to-college-and-career. In fact, a child’s greatest advantage is the love and support of a strong and stable family. The research clearly indicates the benefits to children who have two actively engaged parents.<sup>26</sup>

Family structures and economic stability are large drivers of parents’ ability to provide necessary supports and guidance to their children.<sup>27</sup> Work schedules, custody arrangements and other factors exacerbated by low income make it difficult for many parents to have time for quality engagement with their children. If parents and families are themselves struggling financially or lack education, their children are much less likely to achieve good educational, economic, and social outcomes. Research shows that increasing family income and access to full-time employment can improve child outcomes.<sup>28</sup> The importance of economic stability extends beyond parents who are living with their children. Beyond child support obligations, the employment status and financial and nonfinancial resources of a child’s non-resident parent or a second adult

can have an important effect on his or her wellbeing. Increasing employment and earnings opportunities for parents therefore can help two generations.

The Administration has a number of initiatives underway to support mothers, fathers, and other custodial adults in their efforts to raise their children successfully, as well as support other relatives and guardians. Families today are headed by opposite-sex couples, same-sex couples, single parents, grandparents, and other family members.<sup>29</sup> We must ensure that we are continuing to align efforts across the Administration and society more broadly into a common framework to promote evidence-based practices, including those aimed at strengthening families and removing barriers to parents' and other caretakers' engagement with children.

## Teen Parenting

The Administration continues to invest in expanding programs found to prevent teen pregnancy. Yet recognizing that some teens do become parents, programs and tools must be designed to improve young parents' engagement with their children and address the unique challenges they face. Teenage parents are less likely to finish high school or attend college, and more likely to be poor as adults.<sup>30</sup> Currently, nine percent of young men between the ages of 12 and 16 are fathers or will become fathers before they turn 20. A disproportionate number of these fathers are Black.<sup>31</sup> Children born to teen parents are more likely to have poorer educational, behavioral and health outcomes over the course of their lives than children born to older parents.<sup>32</sup> Any efforts to educate and empower parents must also include specific strategies for teen parents in addition to continuing efforts to reduce teen pregnancy.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.1: Address socio-emotional, behavioral, and health issues of children by educating and providing resources to parents, particularly teen parents.** Parents, especially teen parents, need information on how to identify their children's needs and how to address those needs.

4.1.1 Public and private agencies should increase the use of existing approaches to parent education and training with strong evidence of success, including existing home visiting programs.

4.1.2 Federal agencies should take coordinated action to build on these efforts by developing more resources and guidance to professionals working with expectant teens, teen parents and caregivers, in order to empower young people to make decisions that promote healthy families.

## Children of Incarcerated Parents

The growth in the incarcerated population over the past two decades has significant implications for the families and children of those incarcerated. Roughly one in nine

Black children and one in 28 Hispanic children has an incarcerated parent at any given time, compared to one in 57 White children.<sup>33</sup> Having an incarcerated parent may be associated with economic hardship, housing insecurity, and developmental challenges in children.<sup>34</sup> Young teens under supervision or who have been incarcerated face a unique set of problems. Despite the fact that an estimated 30% of incarcerated teen males have their own children, parenting programs within juvenile correctional facilities are rare and accommodations for visitation are minimal.<sup>35</sup> There is significant evidence that maintaining familial connections during incarceration reduces recidivism and helps children of incarcerated parents stay on track for good life outcomes.<sup>36</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 4.2: Help incarcerated parents enhance their parenting and other skills while providing more opportunities for them to stay connected with their families.**

4.2.1 The Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) should focus its parenting curricula on implementing evidence-based practices throughout all BOP facilities, continue to sponsor events like the Universal Children's Day, and pilot a variety of visitation programs for parents and their children nationwide, including televisiting programs.

4.2.2. The Department of Justice should encourage state correctional institutions, juvenile facilities, and local jails to do the same.

## Family Violence

Children in households marked by intimate partner violence suffer significant psychosocial, behavioral, and academic problems.<sup>37</sup> And violence in families and relationships contributes to families being separated.<sup>38</sup> With nearly 17 million children living in homes with intimate partner violence,<sup>39</sup> more needs to be done to prevent family violence, protect and support the victims of family violence and give families the tools to build healthy relationships.

**RECOMMENDATION 4.3: Existing Federal, state and local programs should implement or augment strong family violence safeguards and engage men as leaders in ending violence against women.** The Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women's Consolidated Grant Program to Address Children and Youth Experiencing Domestic and Sexual Assault and Engage Men and Boys as Allies grant program engages men as leaders and role models to develop, maintain, or enhance programs that work with men to prevent domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and/or stalking. This program can serve as a model for other efforts to engage men in ending violence against women.

## High-Quality, Sustained Mentoring

In addition to parents, other caring adults have a pronounced impact on young people's lives. Many successful adults credit a teacher, coach, faith leader or some other mentor with helping them raise their aspirations or navigate difficult times. Specifically, youth with high-quality, sustained mentors are more likely to engage in positive behavior and less likely to engage in negative behavior.<sup>40</sup> Through direct and sustained high-quality mentoring, young people can personally and directly observe how an individual maneuvers through failures, pitfalls and other challenges *before* actually achieving a goal. Despite the demonstrated importance of high-quality, sustained mentoring, a recent survey of young people ages 18-21 found that one in three young people will reach age 19 without the benefit of a mentor.<sup>41</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 4.4: Launch a public-private campaign to actively recruit high-quality, sustained mentors for all youth and improve the quality of mentoring programs.**

- 4.4.1 To launch this campaign, relevant Federal agencies should support or augment partnerships with national networks capable of recruiting large numbers of mentors (e.g., faith-based communities, fraternal organizations, businesses, nonprofits and other entities promoting mentoring).
- 4.4.2 Public and private entities should, as appropriate, develop and promote common definitions and performance measures of quality mentoring, redesign competitive grants that include mentoring to require alignment with evidence-based practices for mentoring, and spur innovation, advance research, and support the scale of programs that work.
- 4.4.3 The Office of Personnel Management and Federal Mentoring Council should, as appropriate, promote the idea of public employee mentorship (e.g., through a mentoring challenge), while the Department of Transportation, with other agencies as appropriate, should coordinate and augment its various education and mentoring programs to further engage youth and align them with evidence-based practices.
- 4.4.4 The Corporation for National and Community Service should consider increasing support for building mentoring programs through AmeriCorps.
- 4.4.5 The Department of Education should consider encouraging increased access to sustained mentoring relationships through service learning opportunities for college students.

# Focus Area Conclusions and Recommendations

In addition to the cross-cutting recommendations provided above, the Task Force assessed specific interventions in six focus areas. These focus areas are the intervention points at which public and private efforts can build on what works to achieve the universal goals.

## Entering School Ready to Learn

**All children should have a healthy start and enter school ready — cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally.**

The earliest years of a child's life are critical for building the foundation for success in school and beyond. During these years, children's brains develop rapidly, influenced heavily by their experiences.

Children who live in poverty, including disproportionate numbers of children of color, face an array of environmental factors that harm their development and life outcomes.<sup>42</sup> With gaps between children from lower- and higher- income families beginning in infancy, efforts to narrow disparities and facilitate economic mobility must start at the very earliest ages and focus on the two groups of individuals who are most influential in children's lives: parents/caregivers and teachers.

Our recommendations focus on building the evidence base concerning effective parenting programs and strategies, and on ensuring parents, teachers, and other caregiving adults have the resources to address the social, emotional, behavioral, and physical needs of children.

## Keeping Young Children in School and on Track

School suspension and expulsion can influence a number of outcomes across developmental domains, health and education.<sup>43</sup> For example, students who are expelled or suspended are up to 10 times more likely to drop out of high school.<sup>44</sup>

This can start in the very earliest years of life. Expulsions in early childhood settings, which range from 6.7 per 1,000 preschoolers enrolled in state-funded programs nationally to 27.4 per 1,000 for children attending childcare, are by far the highest for Black Americans, especially boys.<sup>45</sup> Increased awareness of the negative impact that expulsion and suspension can have is the first step to improving outcomes in this area.

Our recommendations to reduce suspensions and expulsions from early learning settings will allow families and caregivers to address children's physical, socio-emotional and behavioral needs as early as possible.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.1: Eliminate suspensions and expulsions in preschool and other early learning settings.**

- 5.1.1 The Departments of Education and Justice, state and local leaders and private stakeholders should learn from the success of efforts to highlight and address suspension/expulsion rates and disparities through transparency, accountability and technical assistance and expand the effective strategies and practices to the remaining states.
- 5.1.2 The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services should increase early care providers' and teachers' access to evidence-based resources for addressing behavior management and bias and by providing blueprints to help build positive classroom norms and cultures.
- 5.1.3 Federal and state agencies should encourage and support the use of mental health consultants in early childhood settings to build the capacity of all teachers and caregivers to address behavior problems and foster social emotional development.
- 5.1.4 The Departments of Education and Justice should offer technical assistance to educate communities and policymakers on suspension and expulsion rates, the potentially harmful effects of suspension and expulsion, and ways to avoid those practices where feasible.
- 5.1.5 Parents should help ensure: (1) that their children have the social, emotional, and behavioral skills, and supports to successfully attend preschool; and (2) that they know their rights when their children are at risk of suspension or expulsion. Appropriate Federal agencies, including the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and Justice should provide information and assistance to achieve these goals.

**Close the Word Gap and Support Enriching Home Environments**

Research indicates that differences between children of low-income families and their more affluent peers lead to early learning disparities. One study showed that, by age 3, children from low-income households have heard roughly 30 million fewer words and engaged in fewer back-and-forth conversations than their higher-income peers.<sup>46</sup> These gaps affect what a young child learns, and are later associated with significant disparities in school readiness and long-term educational outcomes.<sup>47</sup> By building on parents' strengths to reduce disparities in "parent/caregiver talk"—described as directing speech and engaging in positive back and forth communicative interactions with young children—we may be able to enhance the cognitive stimulation in children's earliest environments and narrow early disparities.

In order to learn and do well in school, children need more than cognitive enrichment; and they also need a strong social-emotional foundation and secure attachments with their parents and caregivers.<sup>48</sup> Secure attachments and social-emotional health, as well as meeting other important developmental milestones, are associated with overall wellness, healthy relationships, and school readiness and success. Prior recommendations regarding parental education and support will also contribute

significantly to creating enriching home environments and addressing the cognitive needs of children. For example, home visitors can work with mothers and fathers and guardians in areas such as early childhood health, cognitively enriching activities and skills to improve social-emotional, communication and physical development. They can also be key to connecting families who need assistance with screening or more comprehensive evaluations, and appropriate services, from hearing screening to early intervention services to address developmental delays or disabilities, and more specialized supports.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.2: Close the word gap and help parents provide for an enriching home environment.**

- 5.2.1 The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services should support low-cost training, reminders and tips (e.g., a program to send texts with helpful tips to parents) to help parents improve their skills at developing children cognitively, socially and emotionally;
- 5.2.2 Hospitals, early care centers and other organizations in close contact with parents, especially new parents, are positioned to provide education and training to parents. These efforts would complement home visiting programs that are already in place in many communities;
- 5.2.3 The technology sector should be engaged on the opportunity to develop innovative strategies and tools to close the word gap. Recent studies have demonstrated the potential of technology enabled solutions to help bridge the 30 million word gap and support more enriching home environments; and
- 5.2.4 The Department of Education should ensure that efforts to close the word gap include appropriate supports for English Language Learner students and Limited English Proficient parents.

## **Implement Universal Developmental, Behavioral, and Health Screenings**

As many as one in four children through the age of 5 are at moderate or high risk for a developmental delay or disability.<sup>49</sup> Given the great potential that universal screening and early supports can offer, the Task Force encourages universal developmental, behavioral and health screening and supports.<sup>50</sup> By identifying delays and linking families to supports and services as early as possible, we can strengthen efforts that permanently alter the trajectories of children who otherwise would not have access to such programs. In addition, regular health and developmental screenings can help ensure that a child's healthcare and developmental needs are identified and met, allowing them to excel in school and beyond.

Low-income children lag behind their more affluent peers for the age at which a diagnosis of a developmental delay or disability is made, in spite of the fact that they are at a higher risk for problems.<sup>51</sup> A delayed diagnosis leads to delayed delivery of services and interventions. Well-documented trends find that children of color, including

Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Black children, are over-represented in special education programs.<sup>52</sup> If we lower the age of detection, more children benefit from early intervention, and some may avoid the need for special education later in schooling.

In 2012, American Indian and Alaska Native and Black children were more likely to be identified as a student with an intellectual disability under IDEA, Part B, than were the children ages 6 through 21 in all other racial/ethnic groups combined. American Indian and Alaska Native students were 60% more likely to be identified for an intellectual disability, while Black children were over twice as likely as other groups to be so identified. Similarly, in 2012, American Indian or Alaska Native students were 90% more likely, Black students were 50% more likely, and Hispanic students were 40% more likely to be identified as a student with a learning disability. The racial and ethnic disparities continue in the identification of emotional disturbance. American Indian and Alaska Native and Black children were more likely (70% and 120%, respectively) to be identified as a student with an emotional disturbance.<sup>53</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 5.3: Provide universal access to developmental, health, and behavioral screenings to reduce delay in providing needed services to children.**

- 5.3.1 The Department of Health and Human Services should help ensure that states, localities, and districts understand how to leverage existing health insurance, including Medicaid, CHIP and the Marketplace, to provide universal vision, dental and hearing screening, and appropriate interventions (e.g., eyeglasses) at little or minimal cost to all children.
- 5.3.2 Federal, state and local agencies should seek to enable more families, especially low-income families, to obtain free or low-cost screening and corrective services.
- 5.3.3 The Departments of Health and Human Services and Education should build upon existing relationships and explore new partnerships with nonprofit organizations that deliver health services to young children and families to increase access to screenings and appropriate follow-up services as needed.
- 5.3.4 The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services should undertake efforts to increase public understanding of developmental milestones, how regular screenings help raise awareness of a child's development and disparities in the awareness of and access to screenings among families. Specifically, the Departments of Health and Human Services and Education should increase outreach to publicize their "Birth to 5: Watch me Thrive" initiative.
- 5.3.5 Appropriate research bodies should seek to better understand the disparities in the screening, diagnosis, and treatment of disabilities for children, including boys of color, and their long term cost of missed early identification.

We need to study and bring more awareness to the reasons why children are being placed in special education programs and whether alternative forms of behavioral

management and training for teachers should be employed before placement decisions are made.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.4: Study and develop effective implementation models focused on ensuring the appropriate placement of children in special education programs.**

- 5.4.1 Solicit public input on how best to address the identification of students for special education, including identification by disability category, misdiagnosis, educational placements, and disciplinary actions.
- 5.4.2 The Department of Education should collaborate with stakeholders to scale up and implement research-based strategies that improve K-3 literacy and behavior, including implementation of models to ensure children are not misdiagnosed and inappropriately placed in special education programs.

### Improve Access to High-Quality Early Care and Education

Children who attend high-quality preschool programs score higher on math and reading assessments in the elementary grades, are less likely to need special education services or to be held back a grade, and are more likely to graduate from high school. It is important to focus on increasing the availability of and participation in high-quality early care and education, including evidence-based home visits, high-quality infant and toddler care, and preschool. Participation in high-quality early education programs has lifelong benefits.<sup>54</sup>

Good childcare matters too, and there are creative ways of helping to make it more accessible. For instance, the Department of Housing and Urban Development gave preference to applicants for its Choice Neighborhoods funding for including in their applications a plan to include additional quality early care capacity, especially for low income families.

Studies show that Black and Hispanic children from low-income families often start kindergarten behind their White peers in early math and pre-reading skills.<sup>55</sup> Young children of color are more likely to be enrolled in low-quality early care and education than their White peers.<sup>56</sup> Further, Hispanic children are the least likely of all groups to attend any early care and education programs.<sup>57</sup> When Hispanic families do enroll their children, these programs tend to be lower in quality, including employing less-prepared teachers and having less student diversity, fewer resources, higher student/teacher ratios and larger classes.<sup>58</sup> To ensure children enter kindergarten ready, we must strive to make high-quality early learning programs available to all children, especially those from low-income families, English Language Learners, and those with high needs. In addition, we must provide parents with the tools necessary to identify high-quality early childhood programs, and ensure that parents who have limited proficiency in English well are able to identify and access those programs as well.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.5: Reduce the school readiness gap by expanding access to quality early care and education programs for all children.**

- 5.5.1 The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services should build upon efforts to provide access to and improve early care and education programs for all children, including through better integration and alignment of early learning services with high standards for program quality and child outcomes.
- 5.5.2 The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services should disseminate best practices used by states to reduce the school readiness gap and increase the share of low-income children attending high-quality early care and education programs.
- 5.5.3 Parents should be aware of the quality of the early and preschool programs in which they enroll their children. Public agencies should ensure appropriate information is transparent and easily accessible, including by facilitating development of easy to use tools to help parents access and understand the information.

## **Improve Early Childhood Workforce Recruitment, Training and Professional Development**

While parents are foundational to their child’s development, we know that millions of parents have to go to work every day and rely on child care and other early learning programs to care for and teach their children. Because the adults who work in these programs are the key to their quality and success, we recommend improving recruitment, training and professional development—including in cultural competency—for childcare programs, including those in homes.

As noted, in addition to cognitive stimulation, children need a healthy social-emotional base. We must ensure that the early childhood workforce is adequately equipped to be sensitive to stressors and potential trauma, and to respond to children’s needs with consistency, nurturing, support and understanding. We know that children from low-income families are often at higher risk for experiencing trauma and having numerous stressors in their lives, including food insecurity, living in dangerous neighborhoods, witnessing domestic violence, experiencing maltreatment. Adolescents who experienced early maltreatment were suspended from school more than twice as often as those who had not had those early experiences.<sup>59</sup> Recent work also has documented some teachers’ biases towards students. One study found that teachers draw different implications from children’s pretend play, depending on the child’s race.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, all early childhood programs should have access to mental health specialists or consultants to assist children with high needs and to help their teachers in preventing or resolving concerns before problems escalate.

**RECOMMENDATION 5.6: Provide training in evidence-based strategies and practices to early childhood teachers on recognizing bias, addressing the social and emotional needs of children, and enhancing cognitive development.**

- 5.6.1 The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services should support training for educators in social-emotional development and securing meaningful attachments and bonds, providing sensitive and receptive care-giving, assisting children in regulating their emotions and behaviors, giving positive feedback, and avoiding harsh and inappropriate discipline.
- 5.6.2 The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services should encourage the use of mental health and infant-toddler specialists or consultants in training programs, and promote broad dissemination of information and support on how to handle these issues to formal and informal providers.
- 5.6.3 Research-based curricula and training resources should be made accessible to childcare professionals and childhood development and teaching programs, including those at Minority Serving Institutions and other programs that enroll diverse populations.
- 5.6.4 The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services should raise awareness about the research on racial biases in early learning settings and provide self-monitoring tools and tips to avoid differential perceptions and biases.

## Reading at Grade Level by Third Grade

**All children should be reading at grade level by age 8—the age at which reading to learn, and not just learning to read, becomes essential.**

Reading well at an early age is essential to later success in education, employment and life. When provided frequent, quality reading experiences in the home and high-quality in-school reading instruction, nearly every child can learn to read by the third grade.

Yet significant disparities in reading proficiency exist between students of color and their peers. Recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data shows that while more than half of fourth-grade students in most racial and ethnic subgroups scored below proficiency in 2013—signaling a need for strong reforms in literacy instruction for all students—there is a particular need for attention to reading levels among Black, Hispanic, and American Indian and Alaska Native students. In 2013, 83% of Black students, 81% of Hispanic students, and 78% percent of American Indian and Alaska Native students scored below proficiency, compared to 66% of White students.<sup>61</sup>

Students who are not reading at proficient levels by the end of third grade are more likely to struggle throughout their school years, which in turn leads to higher dropout rates and fewer students being college and career ready.<sup>62</sup> Increasing proficiency rates and closing the achievement gap are among the most persistent educational challenges we face. Making significant progress for all children, including boys and young men of color, will require integrated strategies involving general and special education, home and school, and other public and private community stakeholders.

### Supporting Joint Book Reading and “Home” Literacy

A child’s literacy skills prior to kindergarten, as well as his or her reading skills at the conclusion of kindergarten, are highly predictive of future reading proficiency.<sup>63</sup> During these critical years, reading with an adult is an especially important way to familiarize children with books and promote early awareness of written language and interest in reading.<sup>64</sup>

However, children growing up in low-income families are less likely to have books in the home and to read to than their peers. As of 2007, 56 percent of young children were read to everyday; however, a lower percentage of children residing in poor households (40 percent) were read to every day compared with children residing in higher income households (60 percent).<sup>65</sup>

Both school and community engagement are needed to support parents and other adult caregivers in strengthening home literacy and to provide students with broader opportunities to read with adults. Preschools and elementary schools can support all

families by training parents and caregivers to use effective tutoring and joint book reading strategies, such as listening to children read.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.1: Launch a public and private initiative to increase joint and independent reading time outside of school and build a reading culture in more homes.**

- 6.1.1 Media outlets, public housing authorities, libraries, faith communities, and other organizations that reach large audiences should collaborate to increase joint reading and build reading cultures in more homes;
- 6.1.2 The Department of Education should work with private partners and others to create national book sharing programs and engage other adults in reading with children, which could include recognition systems for adults who read a certain number of books with children; and
- 6.1.3 The Department of Education should support free and low-cost training, reminders, tips, and supplemental reading materials for all parents and other caregivers to reinforce and teach early reading skills.

## Scaling the Use of Evidence-Based Instructional Practices

Schools have demonstrated that multi-tiered support systems can ensure that student needs are identified early and addressed with tailored and appropriate interventions that improve reading proficiency.<sup>66</sup> Many Federal and external efforts have been launched to strengthen the design of key elements of these systems and many new initiatives and organizations are working to support their implementation. Five strategies and practices are common to these efforts: (1) universal screening for literacy; (2) routine progress monitoring; (3) multi-tiered, differentiated instruction using evidence-based reading strategies; (4) multi-tiered behavioral frameworks and evidence-based social and emotional supports; and (5) strong collaboration between general education and special education.

While many approaches to improve reading outcomes have been attempted and debated in recent decades, accelerating the development, adoption, and implementation of evidence-based approaches will be critical to preventing and overcoming reading difficulties in young children.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.2: Enhance and expand efforts to develop and promote best practices for teachers to address instructional and classroom issues such as early literacy screening.** The Department of Education should build on its efforts to develop and share evidence-based best practices to improve reading instruction, drawing on the work of federally-funded research, and technical assistance centers such as the IRIS Center, the National Center on Intensive Intervention, the School-wide Integrative Framework for Transformation Schools, and others. In addition, districts and schools will need assistance building capacity to support implementation of data-based individualized instruction for students with severe and persistent learning and/or behavioral needs.

**RECOMMENDATION 6.3: Establish a “Principal and Teacher Leadership Corps for the Improvement of Early Literacy”.** The Department of Education should, as appropriate, collaborate with philanthropies and education organizations to study the efficacy and develop effective implementation models for evidence-based practices to improve early literacy, including: universal screening for literacy; routine progress monitoring; multi-tiered, differentiated instruction using evidence-based reading strategies; multi-tiered behavioral frameworks, including evidence-based social and emotional supports; and strong collaboration between special education and general education to improve literacy and close achievement gaps.

# Graduating From High School Ready for College and Career

**Every American child should have a postsecondary option.**

The Obama Administration has expanded college access for millions of young people. The Country has seen the highest college enrollment rates in our history and the highest high school graduation rate on record (80%). The dropout rate for all students is down. Yet there are still youth at risk. We know that many boys and young men of color and their peers leave high school without a diploma or the preparation needed to succeed in college or a career. And having a postsecondary option has been shown to be critical for success in later stages of life for all young people.<sup>67</sup> Among other things, higher levels of education lead to higher wages and strong, vibrant communities.

## Creating the Conditions for High-Quality Education for All

Researchers are making progress in identifying the underpinnings of school success. The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research identified essential components (Essentials) for school success: (1) effective leaders who work with staff to implement a clear and strategic vision for school success; (2) collaborative teachers who are committed to the school, participate in professional learning, and work to improve the school; (3) involved families who have strong relationships with school staff and support learning; (4) supportive environments where the school is safe and orderly and teachers have high expectations and are engaged with their students; and (5) ambitious instruction where classes are academically demanding and engage students by emphasizing the application of knowledge.<sup>68</sup> Research has found that schools strong on these essentials were 10 times more likely to improve student learning gains in math and reading than schools weaker in these essentials.<sup>69</sup>

Research has also demonstrated the importance of expanded learning time in schools to open new opportunities for students to grow, providing more time for student engagement and deeper attention to academics; greater enrichment classes and activities that complement school curricula; and more time for teacher collaboration and development. Summer learning loss is a significant contributor to lowered achievement, and certain high-quality out of school time and summer learning programs have been found to sustain or accelerate learning and reduce incidences of violence and crime.<sup>70</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 7.1: Build on efforts to track the allocation of resources across schools to highlight disparities and opportunity gaps for students.**

Building on the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights Data Collection and other sources, the Department of Education should work with states, districts, education leaders and concerned stakeholders to track and report the distribution of resources across schools, especially quality teachers, rigorous courses, art, music and other elements of a “well rounded” education.<sup>71</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 7.2: Encourage positive school climates with the social, emotional, and behavioral supports to ensure success for all students.**

7.2.1 The Department of Education should support new programs that aim to create school environments that focus on social-emotional learning and trauma informed practices, as well as attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers and leaders; and

7.2.2 Public and private entities should also identify, encourage, and publicize successful models of these learning environments and practices.

**RECOMMENDATION 7.3: Utilize Expanded Learning Time in School and Out of School Time (OST) to engage students and accelerate socio-emotional and academic learning and health.**

7.3.1 Develop new opportunities to expand learning time in schools, including in those schools with concentrations of low-income students;

7.3.2 Expand effective OST programs, especially those improving learning outcomes and reducing risks;

7.3.3 Launch an initiative to significantly reduce summer learning loss including increased research and evaluation, guides and technical assistance to existing programs and new model development; and

7.3.4 Summer and after school employers are positioned to create models to enable, incent and support continued learning by young employees. Federal, state and local agencies should support and partner with these efforts.

## Increase Attendance and Reduce Dropouts

Research shows that dropping out of school is not a single event but the conclusion of a series of distress signals that often go unanswered for years.<sup>72</sup> Identifying student needs is imperative for the timely delivery of appropriate services that can address students’ socio-emotional and behavioral needs, and prevent them from dropping out of school. Three early warning signs are measurable as early as the beginning of middle school and can predict students’ increased likelihood of dropping out of school: poor attendance, failing grades in either reading or mathematics and a record of discipline problems. With one or more of these indicators, there is a greater than 75% probability

that the student will drop out of school within six years.<sup>73</sup> By tracking such indicators, schools can identify students in need of support before they drop out.

Students who are chronically absent have substantially lower academic outcomes on key college readiness indicators.<sup>74</sup> In a given year, between 5 million and 7.5 million students miss more than 10 percent of school — 18 days or more.<sup>75</sup> Failure to attend school regularly, especially in the early grades, can severely impair a child’s ability to participate in a rigorous curriculum.<sup>76</sup> And when instruction is designed to be cumulative over time, missing classroom instruction can be especially problematic. During our listening sessions, many advocates asked the Task Force to focus on causes of absenteeism, such as bullying, and the impact it can have onGBTQ and Asian American and Pacific Islander (and AAPI) communities.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.1: Identify and accelerate the adoption of promising and evidence-based practices, including early warning systems, to reduce dropouts.**

- 8.1.1 The Department of Education, working in conjunction with technical assistance providers and others as appropriate, should support schools and school systems nationally in implementing early warning systems.
- 8.1.2 Working with private stakeholder groups and other state and district partners, as appropriate, the Department of Education should develop a compendium of state laws governing alternative graduation pathways to highlight and share effective practices;
- 8.1.3 The Department of Education should analyze the districts contributing the most to the national dropout rate to determine what prevention practices are currently in place and what additional support is needed and seek to coordinate its technical assistance as appropriate.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.2: Launch a National Absenteeism Initiative.**

- 8.2.1 Federal agencies should seek to make federally collected information about chronic absenteeism available (e.g., data from the Civil Rights Data Collection) to enable states, districts, and local stakeholders to make use of the data.
- 8.2.2 Federal, state and local agencies should focus on identifying and addressing underlying causes of absenteeism, which can include asthma and other chronic illnesses, bullying, transportation, responsibility for siblings and housing problems.
- 8.2.3 The Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice and Housing and Urban development should, as appropriate, collaborate with state and local public and private leaders and agencies, including public housing authorities, to highlight the importance of regular school attendance and to improve programs that assist chronically absent students and their families through direct outreach.

## Accelerate Efforts to Transform High Schools with the Lowest Graduation Rates

Each year, more than one million young people drop out of school.<sup>77</sup> A disproportionate number are boys and young men of color. Across the nation, there are great disparities in quality among schools and in the outcomes they achieve. Our recommendations center on reducing the number of low-performing schools and increasing the number of schools that lead students to college and productive careers, especially low income, struggling or disconnected students.

High schools, early colleges, next generation career connection schools and alternative pathways to graduation provide promising options for all young people, including boys and young men of color. Such programs can be particularly helpful to students with disabilities, those involved with the judicial system and older students who lack a high school diploma or an industry recognized technical credential.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.3: Increase focus on transforming the schools and districts producing the majority of the country's dropouts.** Federal agencies and their public and private partners have invested in transforming “dropout factories” into model schools.

- 8.3.1 Federal, state and local agencies and, as appropriate, private organizations should continue to accelerate efforts to use models with promising and strong evidence to transform the high schools that account for the majority of the nation’s dropouts into high performing schools with strong postsecondary and industry connections;
- 8.3.2 Federal, state and local agencies and, as appropriate, private organizations should also develop and improve alternative pathways to high school equivalency and postsecondary education for over-age older youth who are not on-track to high school graduation; and
- 8.3.2 Best practices drawn from successful school transformation efforts should be more broadly disseminated and converted to tools and resources for those attempting similar work.

## Promote the Use of Alternatives to Exclusionary Discipline Practices

Despite significant evidence demonstrating the damaging impact of exclusionary discipline, suspensions and expulsions are widely used as a form of punishment.<sup>78</sup> The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), conducted by the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights<sup>79</sup>, has demonstrated that students of certain racial or ethnic groups tend to be disciplined more than their peers. For example, Black students without disabilities are more than three times as likely as their White peers without disabilities to be expelled or suspended and more than half of students who were

involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement are Hispanic or Black.<sup>80</sup>

To enhance school climate and improve school discipline policies and practices, the Departments of Education and Justice released a school discipline guidance package in January 2014.<sup>81</sup> The package includes a set of “Guiding Principles” to assist schools and districts in reevaluating their discipline policies and practices. These principles can help schools and districts take initial steps to reduce reliance on exclusionary and discriminatory discipline practices. Even relatively simple actions, such as removing suspension as a consequence for low-level offenses, can have a significant impact on suspension rates.

Successfully implementing our recommendations will help schools and districts adopt alternatives to exclusionary discipline that have been shown to be effective in reducing student misbehavior.

**RECOMMENDATION 8.4: End discriminatory discipline policies and implement supportive school discipline models.**

- 8.4.1 The Departments of Education and Justice should continue to vigorously enforce Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discriminatory discipline and encourage stronger State implementation of discipline provisions.
- 8.4.2 To address the growing need for more technical assistance on how to eliminate unlawful discrimination in school discipline practices, the Departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services should establish the ED-DOJ-HHS School Discipline Collaborative for Prevention in Schools, and coordinate available technical assistance resources to better serve the nation’s highest-need districts (e.g., districts with the most severe disparities in discipline and the highest rates of exclusionary discipline practices).
- 8.4.3 The Departments of Education and Justice should develop policy guidance regarding the intersection of school discipline and students with disabilities.

# Completing Postsecondary Education or Training

**All Americans should receive the education and training needed for quality jobs of today and tomorrow.**

In 2018, 63 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education.<sup>82</sup> It has been well-documented that higher levels of education lead to higher wages for individuals and, in turn, higher tax revenues for federal, state and local governments. Additionally, more education leads to increased public engagement of Americans in the life of their communities, regions and states.<sup>83</sup> The economic and civic health of the nation depends on a well-educated citizenry, and ensuring that all citizens, including boys and young men of color, are able to participate and successfully leverage educational opportunities is critical for the nation's future.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, occupations requiring a postsecondary education are projected to grow faster between 2012 and 2022 than jobs requiring a high school diploma or less. Jobs requiring a postsecondary education are projected to grow by 14 percent compared to a nine percent growth rate for jobs requiring a high school degree or less. Employers can play a key role in developing a pipeline of skilled workers to meet these needs by offering youth exposure to career opportunities from early on, such as through summer jobs and internships, so that young people and their parents are able to make smarter education and career decisions from the start. At the same time, access to and success in postsecondary education will continue to play a key role in developing ladders to jobs and positive employment outcomes for youth.

However, young men of color enroll, persist in and complete postsecondary education at significantly lower rates than their peers.<sup>84</sup> Many factors influence their access to and success in postsecondary education.

Financial constraints, limited access to information and guidance to help make informed choices, and, for some, lower college expectations and aspirations contribute to lower enrollment.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, many who enroll have other personal circumstances and responsibilities that pull them away. For many young men of color, these factors often combine to make it more difficult for them to stay in school and complete the program.

## Enrollment and Access to Higher Education and Training

Students who lack information to make good choices about higher education and training are at distinct disadvantage. Data shows that many students don't receive adequate advising. For instance, Hispanic males lag behind their Black and White male peers in the percentages that received college entrance advice from a school counselor,

teacher, or coach or completed college applications and financial aid submissions, which increases the probability of actual enrollment in addition to securing aid.<sup>86</sup>

When students of any background lack preparation and support in making choices about higher education, this can have consequences for postsecondary success. Despite strong evidence that providing students and parents with information about outcomes at a given school can improve their own selection of college – and a student’s future outcomes – many students and their families often make uninformed college choices.

Our recommendations aim to enhance awareness of postsecondary opportunities, increase higher education applications, improve college selection, and increase the enrollment of all students, including young men of color, in higher education and training.

**RECOMMENDATION 9.1: Improve college advising services and supports to assist students in the college selection process and increase enrollments.**

- 9.1.1 The Department of Education, in partnership with other Federal agencies, should: work with guidance counselors and other college advising organizations to incorporate college persistence, graduation and debt information into their services and tools to help students and their families in the college selection process.
- 9.1.2 The Department of Education and the Corporation for National and Community Service should support expansion of evidence-based college access and success programs.

**RECOMMENDATION 9.2: Expand the FAFSA Completion Project and work to ensure every student has access to postsecondary options.**

- 9.2.1 States should establish systems that enable appropriate monitoring and support of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion by school districts and other affiliated entities. Districts and schools should set and work with students, parents and other stakeholders to achieve goals for increasing FAFSA completion.
- 9.2.2 The Department of Education should also add or expand partnerships with other public and private stakeholders that can help further simplify or automate FAFSA completion and increase reach into diverse and low income communities.
- 9.2.3 Other Federal agencies should work to provide youth with access to and information about available financial aid, including the Department of Labor supporting youth in Job Corps and the Department of Education informing adjudicated youth about the availability of financial aid.

9.2.4 Schools and districts should consider incorporating the college application process into class and graduation requirements ensuring almost every student has at least one postsecondary option.

## Completion of higher education and training

Getting to college is not, however, the end game. Low college persistence and completion rates across all populations have significant real and opportunity costs for both individuals and the nation. Many students who attend but do not complete college are saddled with debt, but cannot attain the level of earnings to make the initial investment prudent.<sup>87</sup>

Lack of academic preparation is one of the leading barriers to postsecondary persistence and completion.<sup>88</sup> Each year, rather than being able to enroll immediately in entry-level general courses that are required in almost any postsecondary program of study, millions of college students must first take non-credit-bearing developmental or remedial courses.<sup>89</sup> These students take longer to complete the required coursework. As a result, some fail to persist, and those who complete their programs may incur additional costs

However, outcomes differ for students with similar levels of academic preparation. There is growing evidence that “mindset” – defined as whether a student believes he *belongs* and will be valued in a setting, that his schoolwork has relevance for important life goals and that intelligence can grow and improve with effort — significantly impacts persistence and performance. Research also suggests that mindset can be positively influenced through both specific short-term interventions and longer-term individual and group norms.<sup>90</sup>

Feelings of isolation and lack of support are often a part of the story for students who struggle or leave school. There is evidence that providing well designed formal and informal supports including peer and mentor relationships can increase the chances of a student persisting in college.<sup>91</sup>

Systemic barriers to completion also stall or derail persistence. Stories are common of credits lost because of transfers between similar institutions and from community college to universities. The cost of college and the availability of aid remain challenges to persistence well after initial enrollment.

**RECOMMENDATION 9.3: Increase College Completion by Expanding students' access to and successful completion of rigorous courses, such as Advanced Placement/ International Baccalaureate and dual enrollment options in high school.**

- 9.3.1 Initiate a campaign to increase access to and participation in rigorous courses, including pre- and actual Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment courses for all students, beginning with those who have been identified as academically ready based on appropriate indicators. Schools, districts and other appropriate organizations should be encouraged to automatically notify parents and students of their readiness for such coursework and to support students' enrollment;
- 9.3.2 Expand evidence-based strategies and programs that increase advanced course preparation in earlier grades;
- 9.3.3 Stakeholders should identify and promote approaches to increase access to AP and other advanced courses via technology;
- 9.3.4 Federal, state and local education agencies should collaborate to ensure all high school students nationwide have access to (including the financial support needed to participate in) at least four AP/IB courses or to be able to enroll in college classes through dual enrollment options.

**RECOMMENDATION 9.4: Increase development and adoption of promising and proven college completion and transfer strategies.**

- 9.4.1 The Department of Education, in collaboration with others, should support the identification, development and scaling of practices and programs with promising and strong evidence of increasing college completion, including (1) increasing high school academic preparation and early postsecondary credit accumulation; (2) accelerating remediation; (3) improving mindsets; (4) reducing feelings of isolation, lack of support, and stereotypes; and (5) improving passage rates by redesigning core and gateway courses.

# Entering the Workforce

**Anyone who wants a job should be able to get a job that allows them to support themselves and their families.**

Many men and women of all races and ethnicities navigate effectively through the early life stages and often proceed on a course that results in a job that provides a decent livelihood. However, Black men experience lower labor force participation rates and are more likely to be unemployed than other men. And among those who are employed, men of color have lower earnings than other men in the same occupations, and more of them tend to work in services, sales, and other jobs with relatively lower earnings. The employment and earnings disparity by race is particularly sharp for low-income workers, both in terms of accessing one's first job and, later, for finding new jobs and moving up in the labor market.<sup>92</sup> Ensuring that all young people have the tools and opportunities to enter the workforce successfully is a goal we must strive to reach. Where there are barriers to participation, we should seek to remove them. Where there are too few opportunities, we should seek to expand them to ensure that all young Americans have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

The Administration is engaged in an effort to make our training system more “job-driven,” focusing on identifying the skills that employers need and ensuring that training programs prepare workers with those skills and connect them to jobs – particularly for disconnected youth. Later this summer, a full report on the Administration's Skills Agenda will inform and be informed by the Task Force's work.

Recognizing the breadth and complexity of improving employment opportunities for all Americans, our recommendations focus on increasing positive employment and career opportunities and paid jobs for teenagers and expanding hiring in good entry jobs and apprenticeships both of which have strong relationships with future employment and earnings.

## Disconnected Youth

Youth sometimes referred to as “disconnected” are of particular concern. This group includes youth between the ages of 14 and 24, who are low income and either unemployed, not enrolled in or at risk of dropping out of school, involved in the justice system, homeless, or in foster care.<sup>93</sup> There are approximately 6.7 million youth in the United States who exhibit one or more of these risk factors.<sup>94</sup> Disconnected youth are not a homogeneous group, but young men of color are disproportionately represented.<sup>95</sup> Disconnected youth struggle with a range of issues that can impact their success in the workforce including, but not limited to, growing up in a single-parent household, having a child at an early age, lacking stable adequate housing, lacking secondary education, lacking job-skills training, physical or mental health challenges, substance abuse and learning disabilities. In addition, having a criminal record—one dimensions of disconnection that particularly affects young men of color—severely affects one's

employment prospects. Addressing the special needs of these disconnected youth through education, training, and other essential services is critical to America's economic future and workforce.

These recommendations build on the active efforts of the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies, which are launching Performance Partnership Pilots. The pilots will be designed to empower communities to help improve outcomes for disconnected youth, low-income 14-to-24-year-olds who are not working, not in school or at risk of dropping out, or face the additional challenges of being homeless, in foster care, or involved in the justice system. Pilots will support comprehensive local efforts to address the disparities facing high need youth, encourage the use of evidence-based practices and test promising new practices. Federal agencies will evaluate these pilots and use lessons learned to consider how to expand and improve existing initiatives based on what works.

### **Providing paying job opportunities that build early career skills**

Employment as a teenager, especially jobs developing critical career skills within manageable hours, can lead to higher earnings later; but youth who grow up in poverty or have other hardships have a particularly hard time transitioning successfully into the world of work.<sup>96</sup> Their parents and other relatives may not have strong networks to help them find jobs or give them advice about where and how to get one.<sup>97</sup> Many youth seeking their first job or a part-time job frequently are limited to places close to where they live or near public transit routes. Many neighborhoods lack robust retail and service sectors where youth often get their first experiences.<sup>98</sup>

Programs that provide subsidies to employers to offset the costs of providing on the job training to particular target groups have consistently been found through evaluations to have a positive effect on employment and earnings, at least for those over 18 years old.<sup>99</sup> Registered apprenticeships, which include intensive long-term structured curricula developed by industry and sponsored by firms, result in an occupational license or certification that has substantial positive effects on lifetime earnings.<sup>100</sup> Our recommendations are aimed at increasing opportunities for training in high-demand fields and expanding hiring in good entry jobs and apprenticeships.

Pre-apprenticeship programs help steer young workers toward Registered Apprenticeship programs and provide a promising career ladder for young workers. As part of the Administration's efforts to double the number of apprenticeships within the next 5 years, we should ensure that apprenticeship opportunities are available to all Americans, including populations such as young men of color.

Summer youth employment programs are common in many cities across the country and help provide a paid work experience at an important time in a young person's life when they are making decisions about their future careers.

**RECOMMENDATION 10.1: Increase awareness and use of pre-apprenticeships as good entry-level jobs.**

- 10.1.1 Public and private entities should encourage job-shadowing opportunities for youth.
- 10.1.2 The public and private sectors should partner to increase the number of quality summer and after school jobs, paid internships and entry-level opportunities available to all young people, including disconnected youth.
- 10.1.3 The Small Business Administration and the Department of Labor should work with the private sector to develop and disseminate tools and resources that prepare more youth for entrepreneurship and apprenticeship opportunities.
- 10.1.4 The Departments of Education and Labor should leverage career and technical education and registered apprenticeship programs to expand private sector provision of quality apprenticeships.

**RECOMMENDATION 10.2: Increase the availability of holistic employment programs which help overcome barriers to employment, including those that affect boys and young men of color.**

- 10.2.1 Federal agencies should expand access to programs with proven results with challenged populations, such as Job Corps and the National Guard Challenge Corps and Re-Integration of Ex-Offender (RExO) programs; and
- 10.2.2 To help key service providers in these areas ensure that youth with disabilities, special health needs, and those living with HIV/AIDS have access to equal employment opportunities, the Departments of Labor and Housing and Urban Development should develop a “Getting to Work” Curriculum.

**RECOMMENDATION 10.3: Strengthen case for summer youth employment opportunities.**

Because summer jobs programs typically target high school students, or high school age youth, evaluations of these programs do not focus on employment outcomes as much as education and behavior/criminal engagement, because employment results need to be tracked for many years. The Department of Labor plans to initiate long-term evaluations using NYC’s lottery data, education and employment data for the past ten years (10,000 young people per year are enrolled into the program randomly, of the 40,000 per year that apply). This new study will provide a stronger design to estimate employment outcomes over time.

## Exposure to Career Opportunities from Early On

Youth who grow up in poverty or experience other hardships have a particularly hard time transitioning successfully into adulthood and the world of work. This transition is especially difficult if they have not had positive adult role models or lack exposure to and information about careers and postsecondary educational opportunities.

Experiences and opportunities in teen and young adult years play a significant role in determining an individual's employment and earning potential for the rest of his or her life. Expanding opportunities for careers and educational achievement will affect subsequent employment outcomes.<sup>101</sup> Education is perhaps the most fundamental factor affecting employment, but without clarity in terms of employment potential and opportunity, youth and their parents are not well informed to make the best decisions about their education options.

Positive employment and career opportunities and paid jobs as a teenager can increase the chances for low-income youth, including young men of color, to break out of a cycle of poverty, unemployment, crime and incarceration. Early employment, including internships and summer jobs, also provides youth important experience about the world of work and what is expected at the workplace—so called “soft skills” such as punctuality, team work and interpersonal communication. Carefully planned employment during high school can build human capital and represent an important step on a career pathway while also building self-esteem, learning about personal responsibility and producing income.

But preparing young people for employment should begin even before they reach their teen years. Research confirms the importance of social networks and social capitals in how low-income youth receive information about employment, including learning about career options and finding jobs.<sup>102</sup> Over 50 percent of workers, regardless of ethnicity, income, or age, report that they found their jobs through networks – family and friends, school connections, community and business contacts. The challenge for low-income young men of color is that their social networks are often limited regarding career and higher education options, preparation required to qualify for good jobs or training programs, or characteristics employers look for when they are hiring.

**RECOMMENDATION 10.4: Increase efforts to provide youth with the information and guidance to overcome barriers to work.** Internships and job shadowing opportunities can be critical to capturing the imagination of youth early on, so that their education and training decisions are better informed by what is possible. Employers, educators and training providers for high-demand sectors, such as computer programming and high skill manufacturing, should develop initiatives that reach youth early on, including coding workshops in schools.

# Reducing Violence and Providing a Second Chance

**All children should be safe from violent crime; and individuals who are confined should receive the education, training and treatment needed to have a real chance at a second chance.**

On the path to adulthood, youth may fall victim to violence or experience an interaction with the criminal justice system that permanently alters their trajectory for the worse. While crime has generally decreased across the United States in recent years, violence continues to plague many communities, and disproportionately affects communities of color. Among Black males ages 10 to 24, homicide is the leading cause of death; it is among the leading causes of death for Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native males in that age range.<sup>103</sup>

Persons of color disproportionately have contact with law enforcement or are victims of violent crime.<sup>104</sup> One half of all Black males have at least one arrest by age 23, compared to about 38 percent of White males in the same age range.<sup>105</sup> Another study reported that, in 2012, Black males were six times, and Hispanic males two and a half times, more likely to be imprisoned than White males.<sup>106</sup> It has been shown that Black youth face disparate treatment, i.e., harsher punishment, in the juvenile justice system.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, all of our criminal justice data needs to be improved and forensics made as scientifically accurate as possible. Fuller data on stops, questioning, frisking, searches, arrests, detention, convictions, and sentences and the reasons for them will help us better understand the problems.

Our recommendations focus on promoting community-oriented policing practices; improving trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve; adopting a public health approach to preventing and reducing violence and criminality; addressing over-incarceration in the criminal justice system; and improving overall outcomes by helping youth get the education, treatment and training they need to succeed in life despite a criminal record.

## Strengthen the Relationship Between Law Enforcement and the Communities They Serve

Compliance with the law starts not with the fear of getting caught, arrested or even incarcerated, but with respect for one another and respect for the institutions that guide our democracy. Enforcing the law starts not with suspicion and force, but with relationships founded on trust and respect. We have an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to strengthen connections between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. We can do this by enhancing procedural fairness in the

administration of the law, working to eliminate bias in our systems of justice and addressing strained relationships where needed. We must identify strategies to ensure lawful policing and promote the adoption of community oriented policing as a core operational philosophy for law enforcement agencies.

Law enforcement agencies, too, benefit from a trusting relationship with the communities they protect and serve. Law enforcement officers have challenging and often dangerous jobs — working to keep communities safe. Improved relationships between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve can lead to greater access for police to information that can facilitate preventing and solving crimes by breaking down “no snitching” codes and distrust of police authority.<sup>108</sup> Finally, research shows that law enforcement officials who work in environments with strong characteristics of trust report less stress and higher job satisfaction.<sup>109</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 11.1: Institutionalize community oriented policing practices in the field and employ methods to address racial and ethnic bias within the juvenile and criminal justice systems.**

11.1.1 The Department of Justice will establish the National Center to Build Community Trust and Justice to build capacity in communities and build the evidence base around enhancing procedural justice, reducing bias and supporting reconciliation in communities where trust has been harmed; and

11.1.2 The Department of Justice should also promote the expansion of successful engagement models that promote constitutional policing and community oriented policing as core operational philosophies in the field; build on efforts to provide training on racial bias and disparities to prosecutors, defense counsel, judges, probation officers and others involved as decision makers in the criminal justice system; and vigorously enforce federal laws to protect the rights of youth and other individuals involved in the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

## Youth Violence and Victimization

The Report of the Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence (2012), highlights the devastating impact of violence and trauma on our youth — from reduced cognitive functioning, to decreased abilities to connect with others, to reckless behavior. In particular, the report highlights the need for support services for such children, to provide them with the opportunity to recover and reconnect with their communities. Social, emotional, behavioral and mental health supports for victims of violence and trauma is critical to their recovery.<sup>110</sup> Research shows that Black youth are substantially more likely to be victims of violent crime than other racial groups.

Violent gangs are a burden on law enforcement and public health systems in our country. In 2011, approximately, 90 percent of gang-related homicides in this country took place in Metropolitan areas.<sup>111</sup> Intervention and suppression efforts alone are not enough to solve the youth gang problem in our communities. Discouraging young

people from joining gangs in the first place is crucial to preventing violence and victimization.

Effective youth violence prevention strategies can reduce violence and injuries as well as costs in the healthcare and justice systems. Communities can implement tools to identify, screen and assess exposure to violence and trauma, and in doing so, intervene earlier to mitigate the harmful effects of violence and trauma on the development of children and youth. These efforts enhance relationships within families, improve violence prevention activities within schools, and make the physical and social environment within communities safer and more conducive to positive interactions.

**RECOMMENDATION 11.2: Integrate public health and positive youth development strategies into federal, state and local approaches to reducing violence in high-risk communities.**

11.1.1 Federal leaders, state leaders, and mayors should continue to implement violence and gang prevention initiatives already underway. For example, the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention should engage motivated mayors to focus efforts on decreasing high murder rates among youth and incorporating public health approaches in its strategies. This work should be encouraged and studied so that we can learn from past efforts and find ways to incorporate public health approaches;

11.2.2 Federal, state and local partners should enhance coordinated efforts to prevent youth violence, with a focus on analyzing incidences of violence and murder. These efforts should build on work already underway to support and study public health and positive youth development strategies; and

11.2.3 The Departments of Justice and Health and Human Services should encourage adoption of practices that have significantly reduced violent crime at the individual and community levels. State, local and tribal leaders should consider replication of such approaches, which will soon be described and accessible on the CDC's STRYVE website and are currently described on CrimeSolutions.gov and the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices.

## Youth in the Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems

We must be aware of policies that have a disproportionately negative impact on boys and young men of color, and other groups, including severe sentencing laws and an overreliance on confinement. Nine states have moved away from sentences that rely heavily on confinement and incarceration.<sup>112</sup> Other jurisdictions are realizing the cost savings of effective community-based services to promote positive outcomes for young people as an alternative to more costly correctional institutions.<sup>113</sup> Reducing contacts between youth and the juvenile and criminal justice systems is the first goal. But when there is contact, we must ensure that systems support positive social development and academic achievement. Change may start with improving policies and practices across

systems that unnecessarily refer youth to law enforcement and the courts, in particular, suspension and expulsion policies in schools. And it may continue with efforts that ensure the justice system equips incarcerated juveniles, including boys and young men of color, with the education, training and treatment they need to successfully reenter the community.

Among youth in juvenile correctional facilities, only 47 percent earned high school course credits. Among those aged 14 to 21, only 8.2 percent of the youth enrolled in a GED program, and only 6.6 percent earned a GED or obtained a high school diploma.<sup>114</sup> To address this issue, facilities must provide academic and career and technical instruction tailored to a student's needs, and comparable in quality to traditional public schools. The average prevalence rate of youth with disabling conditions in state juvenile corrections systems was 33.4%.<sup>115</sup> For detained youth with disabilities, facilities must implement individualized education plans (IEPs), consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

**RECOMMENDATION 11.3: Reform the juvenile and criminal justice systems to reduce unnecessary interactions for youth and enforce the rights of incarcerated youth to a quality education.**

11.3.1 The Departments of Justice and Education should continue to address inappropriate referrals to the juvenile and criminal justice system by enforcing Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in the administration of juvenile justice and by continuing to support and work with juvenile court judges and juvenile defenders to ensure rights are protected throughout.

11.3.2 Federal state and local law enforcement officials should increase the availability of diversion programs to keep youth out of the juvenile justice system; increasing availability and use of alternatives to incarceration, especially for status and misdemeanor offenses; enhancing educational and training programming for juveniles in secure placement; finding ways to ensure youth have effective assistance of counsel in proceedings; enabling youth to re-enroll in school after confinement; reducing unnecessary criminal referrals and suspensions and expulsions; and addressing Disproportionate Minority Contact should be a priority of Federal, state and local officials.

11.3.3 Law enforcement and corrections officers and leadership should be educated and trained on the effects of mental health on behavior. Promoting evidence based strategies in this area will also help keep youth out of the system.

## Barriers to Employment, Education and Civil Engagement

Criminal histories keep many young people from getting a job, securing housing, or attaining higher education, loans or credit – when they are otherwise qualified, have paid their debt to society and are unlikely to reoffend. The long-term—sometimes *lifetime*—impact of a criminal record is of particular concern when it comes to getting a job.<sup>116</sup> Helping those who have served their time and paid their societal debts to pursue an education, compete for a job, attain stable housing and be productive, contributing members of our communities helps us all. Most companies perform background checks, and many have overly-broad “no-hire” policies that screen out anyone with any history of contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>117</sup> Other collateral consequences of a criminal conviction may include a loss of voting or other constitutional rights or suspension or revocation of a driver’s license.<sup>118</sup> Employers that give justice-involved youth opportunities at a job, and otherwise enact policies that help reduce unnecessary and overly broad collateral consequences of a criminal record, are helping to improve public safety and improve lives. Strategies in this area should be appropriate to the age and circumstances of the individual.

### **RECOMMENDATION 11.4: Launch an initiative to eliminate unnecessary barriers to giving justice-involved youth a second chance.**

- 11.4.1 Large employers, including the Federal government, should study the impacts of requiring disclosure of juvenile or criminal records on job applications and consider “banning the box.” Federal, state, local, and private actors should support public campaigns focused on eliminating forms of discrimination and bias based on past arrest or conviction records.
- 11.4.2 Legal and other services focused on addressing successful reentry are acutely needed to address accuracy and expunge criminal records, reinstate licenses and reduce excessive fines. Relevant agencies should work with civil legal services providers, including the Legal Services Corporation, state and local attorneys general, and the private bar to expand awareness of the need and access to these services.
- 11.4.3 The Department of Health and Human Services should provide information about the circumstances in which justice-involved youth can receive health coverage and access to necessary treatment.

## Conclusion

From birth throughout their lives, many boys and young men of color consistently face barriers to success. Too many boys and young men of color still do not make it to college or start a career. Rather, they are detained or imprisoned, are burdened for life by an arrest or criminal record, fall victim to violence, or fall behind academically. Too few have the support of caring adults. Lack of support and training for professionals who interact with youth, as well as the continued effects of racial and ethnic biases, add to the economic, social and familial instability that contributes to boys and young men of color being left behind. However, our findings and recommendations affirm that coordinated efforts across society can improve the life chances and outcomes for all youth, including boys and young men of color. By intervening at key moments in life, using evidence-based strategies and comprehensive approaches, we can remove barriers, expand opportunity, and improve outcomes for all.

Over the last 90 days, the Task Force has identified a number of areas where the Federal government can use its convening power and lead by example to help ensure all youth, including boys and young men of color, have opportunities to succeed. This initial report outlines key areas for further focus, providing recommendations to improve life outcomes for young people. But the work of the initiative is just beginning. In the coming weeks, months and years, the Task Force will continue to assess progress and determine what works, make data available, and hold listening sessions with communities and individuals around this important goal.

My Brother's Keeper is not some big, new government program. Rather, from its creation, it has been an all-hands-on-deck effort to bring together individuals, communities, civil and faith leaders, philanthropy and the private sector to address a long-recognized problem for our country as a whole. The Obama Administration intends to do its part, and we encourage the private sector, philanthropic and other organizations, individuals and communities to take up this challenge. We hope that this report will be the beginning of many announcements, deliverables and actions taken to help all young people reach their full potential.

While we seek to create greater opportunity and remove barriers to young people's success, we will continue to encourage all youth to seize every opportunity and pursue excellence despite any odds they may face. As they move through life, they must take responsibility for their success. But, we must remember that the responsibility is not only theirs, but ours as well. We must make sure that they are able to take advantage of opportunities for success, and make sure America's youth understand that realizing these opportunities is truly possible for each of them.

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