

The Education Trust—West

# HEAR MY VOICE

STRENGTHENING THE COLLEGE PIPELINE  
FOR YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN CALIFORNIA



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## A NOTE ABOUT OUR DEFINITION OF YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

Our research focuses on young men who are African American, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, Hmong, or Laotian. We do so because these young men of color experience significant opportunity and achievement gaps compared to their peers as a result of systemic barriers in and outside of the educational system.



There is a harmful, dominant narrative about young men of color. The media and society more generally portray them not as students or scholars, and young men face these low expectations in school. Statistically, young men of color are less likely than their peers to attend a school with basic resources or support personnel like counselors, less likely to have access to a broad and rigorous set of college preparatory courses, and more likely to face harsh and exclusionary discipline policies. In the face of these and many other disparities, young men of color are more likely to be pushed out or drop out of high school and less likely to go on to and graduate from college. But the negative narratives and data fail to tell the more hopeful, and far more helpful, story—that of the countless young men of color who are succeeding in our schools and communities, and how that success has been achieved. We're far less likely, for example, to know about students like Miguel.<sup>1</sup>

Originally from Michoacán, Mexico, Miguel came to the U.S. in the back of a pickup truck at the age of two. When he entered kindergarten, he didn't speak English and his school misdiagnosed him as needing special education services. Throughout elementary school, he was given work below his grade level. His parents had only a first grade education, but they understood the value of education and encouraged him. He finished high school and is now a fourth-year university student with dreams of using his Communications and Fine Arts degrees in a creative career. Although Miguel still encounters personal and professional challenges on a daily basis—college professors who question his academic merits, the pressure of work and family commitments, and the financial struggle of being a self-supporting college student—he is on track to succeed.

Miguel is just one of thousands of young men of color who are making their college and career dreams a reality in California. But as Miguel's story illustrates, success is not easily achieved, and the obstacles are many. As a result, thousands of other young men of color fall through the cracks. Each year, close to 40,000 young men of color don't graduate with their high school class—enough to fill the Staples Center in Downtown Los Angeles almost twice.<sup>2</sup>



## AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR

While this brief is about young men of color, we acknowledge that young women of color also face a host of unique challenges, including lower graduation rates and college enrollment than their peers, and sometimes even more disproportionate exclusionary discipline compared to their White peers than their male counterparts. Existing research has begun to uncover these trends, and further investigation is warranted to understand how this diverse population of students can be better supported.

The impact on both these individuals and the state is significant. Without a high school diploma, these young men are more likely to be underemployed, thus limiting their options and paths for success later in life as well as in their young adult years. Almost 1 out of every 3 K-12 public school students in California is a Latino, Black, Native American, or Pacific Islander male<sup>3</sup>—making it clear that the economic future of the state will hinge on our ability to help the millions of boys and young men in our education institutions succeed in high school, college, and beyond. But in order to change outcomes for young men of color at scale, we must first understand their experiences and the practices and policies that can best support them.

With that goal in mind, this brief reviews current data and literature to understand how young men of color are faring around postsecondary preparation and success in California. We share stories from a sample of institutions—including our conversations with young men of color—to understand what practices can help young men of color succeed, and we provide recommendations for California practitioners and policymakers to ensure our P-12 and higher education systems are set up for young men of color to thrive on the path to and through college. We urge practitioners and policymakers to ensure young men of color have the supports *all* students need to be successful in college *in addition* to differentiated supports that can help young men of color overcome the additional hurdles they often confront above and beyond what most other students face.



# BARRIERS AND ASSETS

## BARRIERS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Young men of color face unique social and economic disadvantages that impact and are impacted by their educational access. Many of these barriers are rooted in institutional racism and implicit biases that marginalize students and their families, in school and beyond.<sup>4</sup> The impact of these barriers is evident from an early age. Children of color are more likely than White children to grow up in under-resourced communities, the result of decades of housing and economic segregation that have separated families of color from financial and educational opportunity.<sup>5</sup> These disadvantages carry into the later years, with many young men of color being the first in their families to attend college.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, boys and young men of color face challenges unique to their gender and race. They may encounter a stronger felt need to comply with peer pressures in high school compared to their peers<sup>7</sup> and pressure to conform to dominant forms of masculinity.<sup>8</sup> Young men of color often encounter negative stereotypes—perpetuated by media portrayals—that impact people’s perceptions of them.<sup>9</sup> For example, excessive portrayals of young men of color engaged in criminal behavior can lead people to view students as threats rather than thinking of their educational needs. Negative stereotypes can impact a young man’s own sense of self and can even lead some individuals to conform to those stereotypes—a phenomenon known as stereotype threat.<sup>10</sup> Stereotypes and bias—in addition to racism—can lead to harmful actions and policies that unfairly punish young men of color,<sup>11</sup> leading to higher levels of detention and incarceration than for men of other races,<sup>12</sup> even for comparable offenses.<sup>13</sup> All of these challenges and barriers can, understandably, have a compounding effect.

The barriers mount up in school, too. Boys and young men of color are more likely than their peers to attend schools lacking basic resources like science labs, extracurricular programs, counselors, and health services.<sup>14</sup> They are also less likely to be enrolled in college preparatory courses, even when they attend schools that offer them.<sup>15</sup> They are more likely to be suspended and expelled, and Black males in particular

are more harshly punished for the same behavior as White students.<sup>16</sup> Black males are more likely to attend schools with school resource officers, which are law enforcement officers hired to provide security and crime prevention services at school.<sup>17</sup> Interactions with these officers increase the likelihood students will come into contact with law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

The result of these barriers? Only 76 percent of Latino boys and 67 percent of Black boys graduate from high school.<sup>18</sup> Only 33 percent of Latino men ages 25 and older have attended any college, and just 10 percent have a bachelor’s degree. Among Native American men of the same age, just slightly more have attended college—45 percent—and only 13 percent have a bachelor’s degree.<sup>19</sup>

**When we talked to young men of color about the obstacles they’ve encountered in getting to and through college, they tell us:**

**“My counselors look at me and say, ‘You should probably take this type of [lower level] math.’ I said, ‘Well, I’m taking AP calculus courses in the summer. I want to do this.’ They said, ‘Are you sure?’”**

— John, college student

**“We don’t have a multicultural center, which is something I truly believe in and want to fight for. But there is a lot of opposition within the student body and administration, saying it’s not needed. You just can’t put this whole group of people of color under one umbrella.”**

— Mario, college student

**“As far as the transition from high school to college, nobody in my family went to college. All of it is foreign. I couldn’t look to anyone for advice.”**

— Nate, college student



## BUILDING UPON THE ASSETS OF YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

The barriers are daunting and the statistics are grim. However, many individuals like Miguel are thriving. Together, they dispel the dangerous myth that boys and young men of color can't excel academically. These young men demonstrate remarkable resilience and make evident the many other assets that males of color bring to school: leadership, tenacity, the ability to build strong personal relationships and networks, connections to community and family, and more.<sup>20</sup> At a time when our communities need to connect boys of color with strong positive male role models, when schools need diverse educators, and when communities need to grow the next generation of business and civic leaders, California's young men of color represent a precious resource with limitless potential.



**When we talked to young men of color about their strengths and hopes for the future, they tell us:**

**"I really want to be given challenges; I know how hard [Advanced Placement] classes are, and that's only fair—you have to be dedicated. I know I need those classes because I really want to be a math teacher."**

— Will, high school student

**"I want to go to grad school and make an impact in the community I'm from by becoming an advocate, finding a way to stop gentrification. Low-income people are getting priced out. I want to have the credentials to go to city hall and say, 'I've been studying this housing policy and it's just not working for everyone.'"**

— José, college student

**"I started doing this leadership program [in college] to develop my leadership skills, and now I hold two positions in two clubs, including president. I believe the skills I've learned helped me get a job over the summer. As orientation leader, I was able to empower and encourage students and their families, doing things like talking to first-generation parents who don't speak English about college."**

— Marco, college student

**"Specialized programs really do help kids who are at a disadvantage in inner city schools. I feel like that's actually something I want to do: I want to start a program like that in Compton, that's going to give kids the tools to be successful and have positive role models in their lives."**

— Alex, high school student

**"I took AP classes my junior year. They were a struggle, there were lots of words I didn't understand. Even though I got Cs, I pushed through. Even in college, there have been some courses I failed and papers I struggled to write. But I retook them and got Bs. I'm grateful I've been able to learn from my failures."**

— Emilio, college student

# LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

## PRACTICES SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS

We set out to understand if and how high schools and postsecondary institutions are meeting the needs of young men of color and preparing them for postsecondary success. We conducted qualitative research, including interviews and site visits, in a select group of high schools, community colleges, and four-year universities demonstrating higher than average academic outcomes for young men of color. (See methodology box below).

We found that leaders in these institutions focus on creating the infrastructure and providing supports and services that will support all students. These leaders often held the view that quality leadership, instruction, and support services benefit all students, and particularly benefit traditionally underserved student populations. Generally, we heard about approaches that research and our own experiences in the field confirm are best practices. We describe some of these key themes on pages 8 and 9.

We *did not* find many examples of institutional leaders prioritizing tailored supports for boys and young men of color. We will discuss this more in the subsequent section.



### METHODOLOGY

To select a sample of high schools for investigation, we identified schools that served higher concentrations of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and where young men of color performed above average on a variety of academic measures. These measures included Smarter Balanced 11th grade English language arts and math assessment scores, four-year cohort graduation rates, and A-G completion rates.

To select postsecondary institutions for investigation, we identified four-year universities with higher six-year completion rates for young men of color, and community colleges with higher six-year young men of color completion rates, transfer rates, and remediation success. We honed in on institutions serving higher concentrations of students receiving Pell grants (as an indication of income status) and students of color.

We then conducted phone interviews and subsequent site visits for a targeted subset of institutions based on initial findings. At the high school level, we interviewed school counselors, site-level administrators, district-level administrators, students, and parents. Within postsecondary institutions, we spoke with academic/curriculum administrators, admissions and financial aid officers, student support providers, and students.





## BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

are more likely than their peers to attend schools lacking basic resources like science labs, extracurricular programs, counselors, and health services. They are also less likely to be enrolled in college preparatory courses, even when they attend schools that offer them. They are more likely to be suspended and expelled, and Black males in particular are more harshly punished for the same behavior as White students.



**"One of the things we are working towards is that it's not college OR career, it's college AND career. It's about providing opportunity and options for all kids."**

*— James, school district administrator*

# P-12 BEST PRACTICES

## PRACTICE

**Having leaders dedicated to transformational change**

## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Strong individual leaders set long-term goals, stick around long enough to see them through, and aim to bring about lasting institutional change. Leaders often come from the community.

**Fostering a welcoming environment and maintaining high expectations**

School staff develop personal relationships with all students, help connect them to the school community through clubs/athletics/events, and develop a culture that celebrates student achievement.

**Enrolling all students in rigorous coursework**

School leaders and counselors put all students on a college-preparatory track, making A-G the default pathway, and offer plentiful remediation opportunities and support during and after school. They make advanced courses like Advanced Placement open to all students. They encourage 12th graders to take rigorous math and science courses rather than “coasting” through their senior year. They offer meaningful, well-developed career pathways.

**Providing broad academic and socio-emotional supports**

Schools create abundant opportunities—in school, after school, on Saturdays, and in the summer—for students to access tutoring enrichment. They provide middle-to-high school transition programs. They also provide socio-emotional supports and services to nurture the “whole” student, such as adult and peer mentorship, and they interrogate discipline policies to understand their impact on students.

**Supporting the transition to college**

School leaders create a palpable college-going culture, evident in college and career centers, college preparation programs like Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and free test preparation and testing. Staff raise awareness about college application and financial aid requirements and assist students in completing applications. This is done through college informational nights and one-on-one and group counselor meetings with students.

**Building relationships with families to support student success**

School staff frequently communicate college readiness expectations with families by hosting college and financial aid presentations. They create family resource and engagement centers where parents can drop in for one-on-one support and ensure resources are available in languages other than English.

**Analyzing data to identify and address needs**

School staff analyze longitudinal data to identify where gaps exist, explore systemic and other barriers, and develop action plans for improvement. They use data to understand trends and shape decisions, working with feeder schools and colleges along the way.

**Training staff on issues of bias and diversifying staff**

School leaders and staff understand how implicit bias impacts educational systems, and they train staff around how to counteract implicit bias. Leaders strive to employ staff whose backgrounds mirror the student population, including bilingual staff.

**Developing relationships with community partners and institutions**

School leaders prioritize the development of relationships with other institutions and organizations to support student success and ease student transitions along the school-through-career pipeline. Partnerships facilitate dual-enrollment options with community colleges, early outreach, priority registration/admission, leadership development, and college preparation and transition programs.

**“Most of us either went to school here or a place really similar to this. What we do and how we do it is guided by a lot of our background experiences.”**

— Daniel, high school administrator

**“I have a personal relationship with all of my teachers. When I don’t do well, they’ll get on me and ask, ‘What happened?’”**

— Felipe, high school student

**“We learned about A-G in middle school. And then once we got to high school, we were already in A-G classes. Even if you go through your whole high school career without knowing if you want to go to college or not, at least you know you’re on the road.”**

— Gabe, high school student

**“It’s about providing [students] the opportunity to learn beyond the first time. Otherwise, kids feel like, ‘you’ve given up on me, I give up on you.’ Why not turn that around and make them feel like they have [another] opportunity?”**

— Jimena, high school administrator

**“We are never turned away. The counselor walks you through the whole process of applying [for financial aid or to colleges].”**

— Justin, high school student

**“We didn’t know a word of English, we didn’t know anything about this country, how to go to college. With the help of staff here, our kids were not only able to adapt to the circumstances, but were taken by the hand: ‘This is the first step, then the next...’”**

— Pablo, high school parent

**“We’re now saying, ‘What are we doing as a system or a classroom that’s throwing up some hurdle for kids?’”**

— Steven, school district administrator



# POSTSECONDARY BEST PRACTICES

## PRACTICE

**Having leaders dedicated to transformational change**

## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Institutions hire strong leaders who are willing to stay and see through long-term goals in order to bring about lasting institutional change. Everything these leaders do is in service of a commitment to student success.

**Fostering a welcoming environment**

College leaders, faculty, and staff strive to make prospective, admitted, and enrolled students feel welcome through celebratory admissions events for specific student populations and by intentionally building a racially, ethnically, and economically diverse student class. They help students navigate the educational system and outreach to particularly vulnerable populations like undocumented students.

**Building relationships with families to support student success**

College leaders and staff view families as critical partners in students' education and ensure they are informed about financial resources to pay for college. They build relationships with families and are sensitive to diverse cultures in communications and promotional materials.

**Supporting the transition to and through college**

Colleges raise awareness around, and help students access, financial and other resources in high school and once enrolled. They identify ways to streamline processes and systems to improve access to resources, from guided pathways and onboarding processes to summer bridge programs that help students acclimate to college. Colleges also reduce hurdles in course registration, financial aid, and counselor access.

**Providing broad academic and socio-emotional supports**

College faculty and staff provide enrolled students ongoing supplementary, personalized academic and non-academic support services. They identify students' needs and ensure they don't "fall through the cracks" by using academic early alert systems and structured interventions. And, they support affinity groups and multicultural centers.

**Streamlining and expediting the academic experience at community colleges**

Colleges use multiple measures to streamline course placement and remove other barriers preventing students from transferring and/or completing their degree. They redesign developmental education courses as corequisite courses that are college-level while providing targeted supports to boost student learning. And, they revise course prerequisites and create new course sequences to ensure early student success.

**Analyzing data to identify and address needs**

Administrators and faculty analyze data to identify gaps between student subgroups. They evaluate potential institutional obstacles to student success and areas for improvement. They create action-oriented equity plans with goals based on identified disparities. Colleges also develop student and advisor dashboards to improve communication and coordination, and they use predictive analytics to support early intervention.

**Diversifying faculty and training faculty/staff around bias**

College leaders employ faculty and staff who reflect students' backgrounds and experiences. They provide trainings that "set the table" for conversations that support diverse learners and close achievement gaps, including facilitated inquiry into culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum.

**Developing relationships with community partners and institutions**

College leaders develop relationships with other entities supporting the school-through-career pipeline. Leaders from community colleges and universities partner to facilitate transfer preparation. Postsecondary leaders partner with nonprofit organizations and municipalities to improve college preparation and access, financial aid, and mentorship.

**"Our charge is to continue to bring in students from across the socioeconomic spectrum, across ethnic diversity. We really feel that that is a part of our goal in building a freshman class."**

**—Amy, university admin.**

**"You have to be respectful of the institution and the culture of that family. Whether it's a piece that we're printing, something on the website or an event, we really consider the family as a whole."**

**—Carlos, university admin.**

**"Sometimes it has to come down to a very real level. I see a STEM student and I literally walk them over to the [support office for that program]. We have to make sure all students have equal access to resources and services."**

**—Stefan, community college admin.**

**"The African Student Programs and the residential Pan-African Theme Hall [at this university] made me think, 'Ok, I'm going to be comfortable here.'"**

**—Darius, high school student**

**"You want people to come to the table. We are really looking at how we continue to not make them feel okay but also not make them feel judged."**

**—Michael, community college administrator**

# SUPPORTS AND SERVICES SPECIFICALLY FOR YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

As we found from our site visits and interviews, many young men of color are successful when provided the supports to which all students should have access. But, even in these better-than-average schools, young men of color continue to face challenges. The young men we heard from, and thousands of others across California, continue to face historical and structural inequities—racism, stereotyping, and low expectations, to name just a few—that can make postsecondary access and success further out of reach than it is for many other students. For this reason, it is not enough to offer a foundational level of quality instruction and support and expect that all students will excel. It is crucial that California’s K-12 and secondary schools provide young men of color with *additional, tailored resources* to support their college going and completion and begin to address some of these longstanding inequities.

**What kinds of supports should schools consider? Well-regarded researchers like Shaun Harper and Tyrone Howard generally agree on the following:<sup>21</sup>**

**SUPPORT INTENTIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS.** Young men of color can access a great deal of academic and socio-emotional support through their peers. Peer groups—which may be in the form of clubs, affinity groups, student centers, or leadership training opportunities—help students feel a sense of belonging. Through these groups, students can get advice on responding to racism and racial stereotypes, and they have the opportunities to reflect on themselves as men within the broader society. One student shared about the power of groups like these, *“Just the presence of a club like the African Student Program increases the inclusion message. Knowing there are resources available for us goes a long way.”*

**ENSURE TEACHERS AND FACULTY REFLECT THE ETHNIC AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS OF STUDENTS.** This allows boys and young men of color to find common ground with their teachers and professors and see themselves in the adult role models surrounding them. As one student shared, *“It would be a big thing for us to see more instructors of our color, because it would give us the hope that we can get to where he is or maybe past where he is.”*

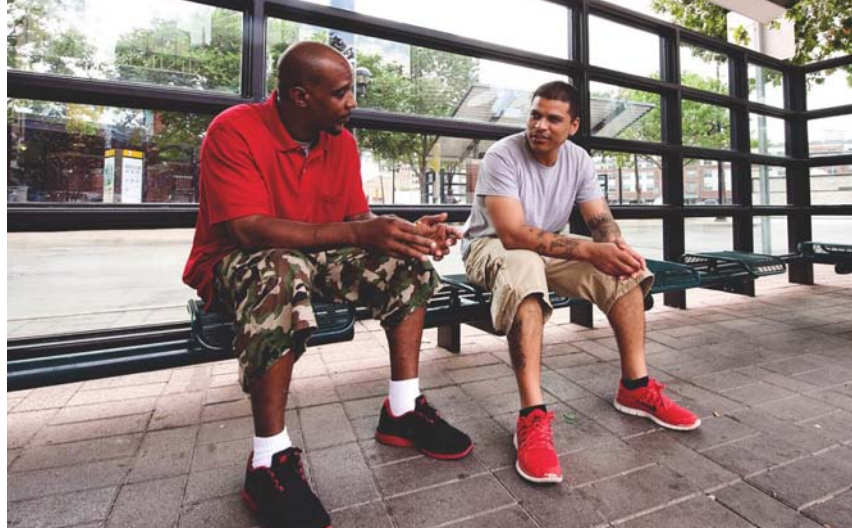
**SUPPORT CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY.** Students feel more engaged in their learning when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Culturally relevant interactions can help students overcome obstacles in the classroom and promote positive identity development. Umoja is one such program and has gained traction in recent years. The program has developed across a number of community colleges in California to provide resources that enhance the educational and cultural experiences of students, and Black students in particular. **Read more about Umoja in the “Spotlight” on page 12.**

**CONNECT BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WITH MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES.** Mentors can play an influential role in students’ personal and professional lives by encouraging them and providing advice to help students explore their academic and life options. This is especially true when mentors receive high-quality training and are of the same race and gender as the students they mentor. Colleges should connect students with peer and adult mentors who can serve as role models and encourage help-seeking behaviors in students. One student we spoke with talked about the powerful role his mentor played in his plans for the future: *“My senior year of high school I had a mentor, a PhD student,*



*who has inspired me to go to grad school. We've had discussions about research on racial theory, and I want to do my own research as well."*

**ENGAGE IN PROACTIVE ADVISING.** Young men of color are more likely to feel they belong and are more likely to succeed academically if someone makes a point of contacting them, forms and sustains a personal relationship with them, and connects them with resources on campus. Advisors or counselors should meet with students at regularly scheduled intervals and check in between meetings through "high-touch" forms of support like text messaging.



**PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT IN THE TRANSITION TO, AND THROUGH, COLLEGE.** Helping young men feel comfortable in a college environment is critical, especially when students are joining learning communities that are predominantly White. Colleges should provide summer bridge/transition programs that specifically help prepare students for the start of college, gain study skills, and reflect on their identity as male students of color on a college campus, alongside peers. It is particularly important that young men of color are made aware of where support resources exist, how to access them, and how to seek out support when needed. **Read about how a high school increased the number of male students in its AVID program in the "spotlight" below, and read an example of how institutional partnerships can improve college readiness on page 12.**

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that young men of color are not a homogeneous population, but instead carry multiple identities. To ignore the complex identities of these young people—which intersect across race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and many others—would be a disservice to their lived experiences. As such, strategies for supporting their success must be inclusive yet nuanced, taking into account each person's unique context and experiences. We must also apply an anti-deficit framework like the one Shaun Harper proposes when considering how to better support young men of color—one that shifts responsibility from the student to the institutions with which the student interacts, so that questions such as "Why are young men of color disengaged?" shift to "What compels young men of color to pursue leadership and other opportunities for engagement on campus?"<sup>22</sup>

## **SPOTLIGHT:** ENGAGING YOUNG MEN OF COLOR AROUND COLLEGE PREPARATION

Administrators and staff at **Citrus Hill High**, part of the Val Verde Unified School District in Riverside County, are working to address a problem they identified in recent years: the disproportionately lower rate of male enrollment in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a program that prepares first-generation high school students for postsecondary opportunities. School staff noticed that fewer male students were participating than females, so they decided to launch recruitment events to target male students and drum up interest in AVID as a promising way to improve college preparedness. Staff members also went to feeder middle schools, asking teachers to identify students who might be interested in AVID, and then asking those students *"What is it that you want out of life, and how are you going to make a plan to get there?"* as a way of introducing students to the resources they are able to access through AVID. They also assessed what institutional barriers might be contributing to the unequal gender balance. At one school, for example, administrators identified that the existing master schedule made it challenging for student athletes to participate. As a result, the school changed the AVID and master schedule to make AVID classes and related support accessible at different times. These changes have led to an almost equal male-to-female ratio in the AVID program.

## SPOTLIGHT: PARTNERING ACROSS THE PIPELINE TO INCREASE COLLEGE READINESS

Educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and municipalities are proving that strong, intentionally developed partnerships can help prepare young men of color for college success. In one instance, administrators for **Long Beach Unified School District** (LBUSD) and **Cal State Long Beach** (CSULB) began discussing the fact that many entering young men of color, and Black males in particular, were struggling in math courses upon enrolling at the university. Leaders of both institutions saw the unique benefits of a partnership because CSULB was already implementing initiatives focused on outreach, retention, and preparation of Black students and had the ability to coordinate services across multiple university departments. The institutions partnered to implement the Math Collaborative, a program designed to provide a series of college preparation supports for a group of Black males starting in 9th grade at one of the local high schools. These ongoing supports include a summer academic boot camp between each year of high school that incorporates leadership training, one-on-one mentorship that continues throughout the school year, and SAT preparation; 15 hours of tutoring per week throughout the school year; information on the high school-to-college transition; and a number of opportunities supporting wellness and culturally relevant learning. Since many participating students have successfully enrolled at CSULB or other colleges after high school, the partnership will likely expand to three other high schools and may include Latino males. Administrators shared that *“We’re seeing stronger partnerships among campus support services and young men being more engaged in their education by taking advantage of campus resources.”*

## SPOTLIGHT: PROVIDING TARGETED ACADEMIC AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

Programs that address multiple needs—academic, socio-emotional, and other—may carry the greatest promise for helping young men of color succeed in college. **Umoja** is one such program and has gained traction in recent years. Named after the Swahili word for *unity*, the program has developed across 57 community colleges in California to provide resources that enhance the educational and cultural experiences of students, and Black students in particular. While the program looks different depending on the college, the goals and strategies range from improving pedagogy, to integrating instructional and student services, to supporting student persistence and retention.

**Chaffey College**, located in the city of Rancho Cucamonga in San Bernardino County, has created Umoja-supported classes across various academic departments, where faculty are trained around culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. Another critical component is mentoring. The college has created a targeted program within Umoja that provides men of color with dedicated mentors who also connect students with financial and other resources. A mentor shared that his explicit goal is to get young men of color interested in education, *“so they don’t think they’re at a dead end.”* He talked about *“showing students another way”* so they are able to navigate between different cultures. **Pasadena City College** in Los Angeles County also has a version of this program. Called “Ujima” to signify collective work and responsibility, it enrolls participants in a pathway program that provides structured first and second-year experiences for students, including common learning experiences and research opportunities for students in the cohort. Students in Ujima say the program provides critical supports to them during difficult times: *“Being in Ujima helps in terms of being with people of the same color as me. In college, being by yourself is really difficult, but when you see people like you that have a goal as well, it helps you push towards your goal.”* Umoja students across the state are 25 percent more likely to stay in community college, have a higher grade-point average, and be ready for transfer-level work in less time.<sup>23</sup>



# RECOMMENDATIONS

We could share a long list of things that must be done to improve educational excellence and equity in California. However, because this report focuses on boys and young men of color specifically, our recommendations focus narrowly on the supports and opportunities that will most directly impact the success of young men of color. Many of these supports must be implemented by practitioners locally, in both our K-12 schools and our institutions of higher education. For this reason, we begin with recommendations for school, district, and higher education leaders. But the urgency of the topic also signals the need for coordinated efforts at the state level. We therefore include recommendations for state leaders as well.

## P-12 DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERS

- 1 Foster a welcoming environment with high expectations.** Involve boys and men of color in the school's academic and extracurricular community, and recognize their successes and potential. Engage young men of color in efforts to understand their experiences and needs and when shaping policies and practices to support them. Offer mentorship and small learning communities to connect students to adults, peers, and school. Engage with community partners to expand capacity and strategically identify resources in providing mentorship and other services.
- 2 Connect families to financial aid.** Share information about college and financial aid with families. Provide direct application support to ensure all students complete financial aid and college applications. Hold parent meetings in multiple languages and translate materials.
- 3 Relentlessly analyze data. Identify and address students' needs by disaggregating data by race and gender and reviewing it with staff and administrators.** Identify disparities, review policies and practices that may be contributing to gaps across ethnicity and gender, and develop action plans to support students falling behind. Track, report, and analyze early warning indicators (i.e. chronic absenteeism, credit accumulation, suspensions) and use them to drive student-level interventions.
- 4 Confront implicit and explicit biases.** Incorporate implicit bias training into ongoing educator development.
- 5 Improve staff diversity.** Use research-based practices to analyze and adjust recruitment and retention practices for increasing staff diversity. For example, prime high school students and paraprofessionals to be future educators.<sup>24</sup> Hire bilingual staff to work with students and families.
- 6 Make college preparatory coursework the default curriculum.** Expand access to and successful completion of college and career-preparatory coursework, especially A-G, for all students. Make sure that a student's language or disability status doesn't stand as a barrier to enrollment in these courses. To help all students succeed academically, expand learning time and offer tutoring, credit recovery, and enrichment options.
- 7 Build a college-going culture.** Implement and expand evidence-based academic and social programs (such as Umoja) that support college preparation and transition for young men of color. Decrease the student-to-counselor ratio at the high school level to increase student support around course taking and postsecondary planning.

### COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY LEADERS

- 1 Make equity the priority.** Launch institution-wide efforts focused on setting gap-closing goals and monitoring progress around improving opportunities for students of color and students from low-income families. Consider how recent student equity funding allocations from the state can support these efforts. Engage young men of color in efforts to understand their experiences and needs when shaping policies and practices to support them.
- 2 Engage in data-based inquiry.** Create data systems to track student outcomes, identify disparities, review policies and practices that may be contributing to achievement and opportunity gaps, and develop action plans to support students who may be falling behind.
- 3 Improve access to financial aid.** Increase student awareness of financial aid resources, and address food, housing, and other material needs that students may have.
- 4 Support transitions.** Provide transition programming, such as summer bridge, and ongoing supports to ensure young men of color have consistently supportive resources throughout college.
- 5 Streamline the academic experience.** Remove barriers to college transition and completion by examining advising strategies and course-taking patterns that impact student success. Design corequisite courses to streamline developmental education and improve graduation rates.
- 6 Improve staff diversity and inclusion.** Expand curricula in teacher and staff training programs to engage candidates in behaviors that reduce racial and gender biases. Hire diverse faculty and administrators who are reflective of the student body and their experiences.

### STATE LEADERS

- 1 Demand equitable access to college-preparatory courses.** Provide stronger oversight and guidance to school districts around their obligation to ensure students have equitable access to college preparatory coursework and a broad range of courses. This includes publicly releasing cross-tabulated K-12 data by race and gender, providing training to districts on analyzing access to coursework, and requiring county offices of education to monitor district access to coursework.<sup>25</sup>
- 2 Attack teacher bias.** Require teacher preparation programs, school districts, and postsecondary institutions to include implicit bias training as part of educator development programs.
- 3 Strengthen the state role in higher education.** Re-establish a state commission with the authority to vision, plan, and coordinate higher education activities. Set and monitor statewide gap-closing goals for college going and completion with specific attention to racial/ethnic and gender gaps. Develop a clearinghouse for disaggregated data on high school to postsecondary transitions and persistence that is accessible to policymakers and practitioners.
- 4 Expand access to financial aid.** Expand access, particularly Cal Grants, for students at the lowest income levels. Increase award levels to help cover more non-tuition costs, and ensure students have access to year-round financial supports.
- 5 Replicate proven practices.** Invest in evidence-based higher education completion initiatives. For example, require community colleges to use multiple measures of assessment for placement and develop corequisite courses, similar to the shift CSU is undertaking.<sup>26</sup> Encourage the creation of structured pathways to degree, certificate, or transfer.



# FORGING AHEAD

**"I feel like the hype is getting accepted into the university, but with good enough grades, you'll get in. Universities need to better communicate and incorporate a retention program to make sure you stay here. Life can hit you and once you are here, they shouldn't babysit us, but they should make sure they're doing everything in their power to help us have a successful college career."**

— Josh, college student

While thousands of young men of color across the state are getting to and through college every year, the voices of students and staff remind us there is much work ahead. If we truly want young boys and men of color to succeed, then we must—as the student here so aptly put it—do everything in our power to support them as scholars. In addition to ensuring all students have access to the core elements that make a school great for all students, practitioners and policymakers must develop more specific programs, services, and supports that meet the unique needs and speak to the dynamic and countless assets of young men of color.

Miguel and other young men with whom we spoke are not the exceptions, but they are also not yet the rule. Too many of the barriers they face are hurdles their own educational institutions put up along their path. Supporting these students means getting serious about doing everything possible so that our schools, colleges, and universities foster—not hinder—their success. To ensure Miguel and every one of his peers can reach their dreams of one day graduating from college and pursuing a career of their choice, we can—and must—do better for California's young men of color.



**"The microaggressions that occur between the faculty, staff, and students are staggering. I experience it all the time as a Black staff member here, so I can only imagine how discouraging that is for an 18-year-old student."**

— Jesse, Community college staff member



- 1 Here and throughout, names have been changed for anonymity.
- 2 This figure includes African American, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander males.
- 3 While Hmong and Laotian students also face opportunity and achievement gaps, the California Department of Education and most other data sources do not disaggregate data for these students, but rather include them in the Asian student population.
- 4 Many researchers have written extensively about the challenges faced by young men of color, including Shaun Harper, Frank Harris, Tyrone Howard, Pedro Noguera, Victor Saenz, and Luke Wood.
- 5 See, for example: David Bacon, "From Foreclosure to Redlining: How America's Largest Financial Institutions Devastated California Communities" (San Francisco, CA: California Reinvestment Coalition, 2010), [http://www.calreinvest.org/system/resources/W1siZiIsIjwMTevMDQvMTgvdMTdNTVfMTVfNjM4X0ZvcmljYjG9zdXJlX3RvX1JlX1JlZGxpbnluZy5wZGYvX0V0Foreclosure\\_to\\_Re\\_Redlining.pdf](http://www.calreinvest.org/system/resources/W1siZiIsIjwMTevMDQvMTgvdMTdNTVfMTVfNjM4X0ZvcmljYjG9zdXJlX3RvX1JlX1JlZGxpbnluZy5wZGYvX0V0Foreclosure_to_Re_Redlining.pdf); Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.
- 6 Kara Dukakis, et al., "College Access and Completion among Boys and Young Men of Color: Literature Review of Promising Practices" (Stanford, CA: John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, 2014), <https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/publications/college-access-and-completion-among-boys-and-young-men-color-literature-review>.
- 7 Ronald F. Ferguson, "Aiming Higher Together: Strategizing Better Educational Outcomes for Boys and Young Men of Color" (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2016), <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/aiming-higher-together-strategizing-better-educational-outcomes-boys-and-young-men-color>.
- 8 Tyrone Howard, "The Counter Narrative: Reframing Success of High Achieving Black and Latino Males in Los Angeles County" (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Black Male Institute, 2017), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6BCVAZoBjwvR0thcWxYTUplckU/view>
- 9 Rachel D. Godsil and Alexis M. Johnson, "Transforming Perception: Black Men and Boys" (New York, NY: Perception Institute, 2013), <http://perception.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Transforming-Perception.pdf>.
- 10 See, for example: Claude M. Steele, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010).
- 11 Nazgol Ghandnoosh, "Race and Punishment: Racial Perceptions of Crime and Support for Punitive Policies" (Washington, D.C.: The Sentencing Project, 2014), <http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Race-and-Punishment.pdf>.
- 12 Annie E. Casey Foundation, et al., "A Time for Action: Mobilizing Philanthropic Support for Boys and Young Men of Color" (2014), [http://www.calendow.org/wp-content/uploads/A-Time-For-Action\\_ExecSummary\\_Final\\_digital-for-download.pdf](http://www.calendow.org/wp-content/uploads/A-Time-For-Action_ExecSummary_Final_digital-for-download.pdf).
- 13 Tyrone Howard, "The Counter Narrative: Reframing Success of High Achieving Black and Latino Males in Los Angeles County" (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Black Male Institute, 2017), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6BCVAZoBjwvR0thcWxYTUplckU/view>.
- 14 See, for example: Annie E. Casey Foundation, et al., "A Time for Action: Mobilizing Philanthropic Support for Boys and Young Men of Color" (2014), [http://www.calendow.org/wp-content/uploads/A-Time-For-Action\\_ExecSummary\\_Final\\_digital-for-download.pdf](http://www.calendow.org/wp-content/uploads/A-Time-For-Action_ExecSummary_Final_digital-for-download.pdf); Terry K. Flennaugh et al., "Authoring Student Voices on College Preparedness: A Case Study," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 2, vol. 50 (2017): 209-221. The latter study specifically shares perspectives of Black students about the lack of resources that are needed to support their postsecondary transitions.
- 15 See, for example, Office of Civil Rights Data Collection 2013-14, available at <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/>.
- 16 Catherine P. Bradshaw et al., "Multilevel Exploration of Factors Contributing to the Overrepresentation of Black Students in Office Disciplinary Referrals," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 102, vol. 2 (May 2010): 508-520.
- 17 Tyrone Howard, "Why are we criminalizing Black students?" *EdWeek*, Mar. 21, 2017, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/03/22/why-are-we-criminalizing-black-students.html>.
- 18 California Department of Education, 2015-16 Graduates file, <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/page2.asp?level=State&subject=Graduates&submit1=Submit>.
- 19 U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014. Based on 5-year estimates.
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- 22 These sample questions were pulled from Shaun Harper's anti-deficit framework. While his framework focuses on Black students, it is useful in thinking about other young men of color subgroups as well. Another helpful planning resource is Shaun Harper's *Eight Standards for Black Male Campus Initiatives*.
- 23 Campaign for College Opportunity, "What Works Now: Umoja Community" (Los Angeles, CA: Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015), [http://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2015-State-of-Higher-Education\\_Blacks\\_Umoja-WWN.pdf](http://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2015-State-of-Higher-Education_Blacks_Umoja-WWN.pdf).
- 24 These recommendations are based on the work of Dr. Travis Bristol. For additional recommendations in this area, see, for example, <https://sites.ed.gov/whieaa/files/2014/01/Resource-Slides.pdf>.
- 25 For additional recommendations, see: California State Auditor, "College Readiness of California's High School Students: The State Can Better Prepare Students for College by Adopting New Strategies and Increasing Oversight," Report 2016-114, (Sacramento, CA: State Auditor's Office, 2017).
- 26 Larry Gordon, "CSU to Overhaul Remedial Education, Replace No-Credit with Credit-Bearing Courses," *EdSource*, Mar. 21, 2017, <https://edsources.org/2017/csu-to-overhaul-remedial-education-replace-no-credit-with-credit-bearing-classes/579081>

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## OUR MISSION

The Education Trust–West works for the high academic achievement of all students at all levels, pre-K through college. We expose opportunity and achievement gaps that separate students of color and low-income students from other youth, and we identify and advocate for the strategies that will forever close those gaps.



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