



HOWARD
UNIVERSITY

TOWARD A POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE AGENDA TO ADDRESS THE SCHOOL-TO- PRISON PIPELINE

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INTRODUCTION

Knowing and using the right methods to help Black males maximize their academic achievement is an important tool in the effort to interrupt and eventually stop the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon. The efforts to maximize black male academic achievement have been stymied in some instances by laws and policies enacted after the Columbine High School shooting that have in effect created a school-to-prison pipeline. The application of zero tolerance has resulted in suspensions and expulsions beginning with pre-school programs, and the data show that racial disparities begin with pre-school. Before black children are allowed the opportunities to excel academically, they are often stereotyped and placed in situations that will eventually lead to engagement with the criminal justice system. Once identified as a disciplinary problem and subjected to multiple suspensions and expulsions, black boys (and some girls) fall behind of their grade levels. Their frustration and interaction with school resource officers and other law enforcement officials create monumental hurdles that are often too high for them to navigate. This interaction became a part of the genesis of the school-to-prison pipeline.

As a part of a sub grant from the Southern University System Foundation, which included a review of legislation passed in southern states that seem to fuel or reduce the prison pipeline, the Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy at Howard University convened a one-day forum of legislators, academics and policy and program experts. The attendees were charged with addressing the related issues of Black Male Achievement and the School-to-Prison Pipeline phenomenon. The parent project of this sub grant was the Five-Fifths Agenda for America, funded by the Kellogg Foundation. FFAA was conceived as an “agenda for America”, not one benefiting only Black people or Black men. The long-term agenda for FFAA was to help America resolve the conflict between its ideals

and actions in four ways: 1) increasing the number of Black males with baccalaureate degrees; 2) placing more specially trained Black male teachers in public K-12 schools; 3) establishing Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as institutional bases for long-term systemic change; and 4) bringing truth to the national conversation about the historical and current relationship between America and Black people, especially Black men, and impacting policy in that regard. The concept of the FFAA is based on sound human development research and research on black children showing that black males can achieve at high levels.

The focus of the day was on creating a policy and legislative agenda to address the School-to-Prison Pipeline. The convening was one effort to bring truth to the national conversation around black male academic achievement and stopping the prison pipeline.

Each conference presenter submitted a short paper outlining his/her intended remarks so that conference participants would be informed and engaged in the discussion. The result was a lively and candid discussion that engaged conference participants in a productive, problem-solving session that produced strategies and recommendations.

Conference Participants

Participation in the conference was by invitation only. Limited to 40 invitees, the invitation list was developed to maximize the opportunity for participation by current practitioners in the field of Black Male Achievement and the many sub contextual issues that determine the achievement success of Black male students. The invitation list was also designed to partner Black male achievement scholars with other academics and practitioners who had collected data and developed strategies for interrupting the prison pipeline that seemed to start when achievement tended to flounder.

Legislators from states currently engaged in legislative activity on these topics were invited to share strategies for passing timely and focused legislation. In those states where legislative activity had occurred, the legislator was encouraged to give an assessment of the legislation's effectiveness.

Opening Session

The opening session began with remarks by Dr. Elsie Scott, Director, Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy Center. This was the first conference hosted by the Center on this topic. Dr. Scott reiterated the conference purpose and reviewed the day's program outline. She reminded attendees that the invitation list was limited so that each participant could have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion and to have meaningful dialogue with each other.

Mrs. Patricia Walters, widow of the Center's namesake, Dr. Ronald Walters, spoke of her husband's commitment to public policy development that did not create unexpected consequences for those it was designed to serve. Mrs. Walters shared that many current practitioners in the area were his students and were professors at Howard University and other outstanding academic institutions.

The final item introduced during the conference opening session was a very timely video developed by Dr. Hakim M. Rashid, Professor of Human Development in the Howard University School of Education. He has spent many years of his professional career exploring the factors that contribute to feeding the school-to-prison pipeline. Dr. Rashid's research shows that Black males were more likely to become fuel for the pipeline because of the disciplinary decisions made in the public school systems. These decisions magnified the behavior of Black male students, often resulting in an overreaction from the school system.

Panel One: Discussion on Black Male Achievement

The first panel discussion was dedicated to addressing the multitude of issues that influence Black male achievement. This panel was facilitated by Dr. Kenneth Anderson of the Howard University School of Education. The panel participants were Dr. Oscar Barbarian, Chair of the Department of African American Studies, University of Maryland; Dr. Ivory Toldson, Director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, U.S. Department of Education; and Mr. Warren Bell, Director of the Honore' Center for Undergraduate Student Achievement Initiative, Southern University New Orleans. Mr. Bell shared his time with one of the students enrolled in the Honore' Center program, Mr. Louis Blackmon, III.

Dr. Anderson opened the session by discussing the presence of law enforcement/school resource officers in schools and their increased involvement in disciplinary matters. He believed that their increased presence contributed to the large number of young Black men being captured by the pipeline. He encouraged the panel to explore the role of school resource officers.

Using his published article, *Halting African American Boys' Progression from Pre-K to Prison: What Families Can Do!* as a starting point, Dr. Barbarin shared his personal and family history. He acknowledged the murder of an uncle and the problems of nephews adjusting in school and society at-large. He recounted the effects of poverty on his development and his desire to avoid spending the rest of his life on welfare and living in the 'projects'. He concluded that his path through childhood poverty was and is not unusual. He credited Black women and others in his life who made him feel special and encouraged him to succeed.

According to Dr. Barbarin, this care and attention to the development of Black males was a critical variable in stopping or interrupting the school-to-prison pipeline. He referenced the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) that divided young Black males into three groups based on their propensity to enter the pipeline. The young men in the study were in grades

K thru 8. His research showed that these young men experienced adversity early in life. Adversity could include early childhood trauma, physical or psychological, or poverty. The young men were typically very active but not necessarily suited for the typical classroom. They did not fit and their behavior became the cause of their suspension or expulsion. Because of their inability to fit in, Dr. Barbarin believed that Black boys were targeted and punished for the same behavior that was excused in their non-Black counterparts.

This behavior targeting seemed to occur most often to Black boys in grades 2 thru 6, but there was also a 'kindergarten effect'. The assessment of pre-K teachers appeared to change and Black boys were seen as problematic because of their active behavior. Teachers also began to downgrade the perceived 'closeness' of their relationship with the Black male student. The problematic label followed the student and created a dramatically different trajectory that was downward. Dr. Barbarin concluded that "African American boys were emotionally disengaged and had higher levels of internalizing problems. To them, popularity was more important: it was a part of being an alpha male. It made them a little more aggressive, eager and intent on being popular". This was different from non-Black boys.

Dr. Barbarin concluded by offering two paths to improving Black male achievement and interrupting the pipeline. First, there must be an acknowledgement that Black males have learning challenges that are compounded by the mere fact that they are Black males. These challenges must be detected, acknowledged and not allowed to persist. Teachers and families must be active participants in protecting the development of basic skills and continuously assessing the skill level. Secondly, the community must increase the availability of mentors to help show Black males the way to successfully navigate school and society.

The second presenter was Dr. Ivory Toldson, Executive Director, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Toldson's presentation was centered on the role of school resource officers in feeding the school-to-prison pipeline. Dr. Toldson asserted that the school resource officer is usually a police academy graduate in most states. The transition from police academy graduate to school resource officer was likely not the career path most would have chosen. Therefore, it can be assumed that an incident in the police academy graduates' past destined them to work in the public schools with Black children. Dr. Toldson provided numerous examples of aggressive behavior from school resource officers culminating with Ben Fields flipping and dragging a young Black female student in South Carolina's Richland Two School District. The incidents of aggressive school resource officers have been caught on camera and illustrate that school resource officers of all races display the same kind of behavior.

In his presentation, Dr. Toldson explored two important variables in the school-to-prison pipeline. First was the broad arrest authority granted to some school resource officers by state legislatures. Second was the distribution of resource officers to certain schools based on the racial demographics of the student population. South Carolina was the example used of a state that had passed legislation that broadly defined 'school disturbance' and allowed school resource officers to arrest students. This was the classic route for initial entry into the pipeline.

Dr. Toldson's assessment of the legislative definition of 'school disturbance' suggested that any student's action that was viewed unfavorably by a school official would be covered. This would include a declaration from a school official that a student's behavior was 'obnoxious'. Not only was the definition of school disturbance broad, the application of the law was not balanced. Namely, Black students were accused of creating a school disturbance much more often than non-Black students,

based on Dr. Toldson's research. This pattern leads to an increase in the number of Black students caught in the pipeline trap.

To his second point, school resource officers were most often assigned to schools with large minority student bodies, Dr. Toldson called this an 'uneven distribution' of school resource officers. The unequal application of the law and a concentration of school resource officers in schools serving minority students have fueled the increase in minority students entering the pipeline.

Dr. Toldson asked why this level of security is needed at public schools. He pointed out that many institutions use security officers, but few of them were police academy-trained law enforcement officers who were likely to have had career problems that relegated them to working in the public schools. A new assessment of the level of security warranted in our schools is needed.

In his conclusion, Dr. Toldson addressed the role of people who interact with young Black males. They often have preconceived notions of these students and of how they were supposed to perform in the classroom and behaviorally. These behavioral expectations prevented many teachers from using proven practices for connecting with young Black males. Dr. Toldson concluded that stemming the flow of young Black males to the prison pipeline had less to do with their 'behavior, characteristics or attributes'. It was more about the consistent application of proven practices to reach and connect with these young men.

Mr. Warren Bell brought practical experience to the effort to create an alternative to prevent young Black males from entering the pipeline. He is Director of the Honore' Center for Undergraduate Student Achievement Initiative at Southern University, New Orleans. Mr. Bell was joined by Mr. Louis Blackmon III, who is scheduled to complete the program and graduate in May 2017.

The Honore' Center was named after military leader and Southern University Alumnus Lt. General Russel H. Honore'. The Center, according to Director Bell, was designed to create a 'holistic and structured living and learning environment'. It serves young Black males by providing them with academic and advisement support, weekly speakers, counseling, tutoring services, weekly life skills sessions and field trips. Each young man came from a 'parent eligible household' and lived in a dormitory environment for up to five years. Household eligibility meant that the student qualified for financial aid from the state to cover tuition costs. They were provided meals, textbooks, a personal computer and development courses, if needed. They received a monthly stipend and had to adhere to a high standard of appearance, dress, conduct, decorum and behavior in class.

Each Center participant receives a written academic and personal assessment from which a contract is developed. The contract explains the services provided by the Center and the expectations of the Center for each participant. Included in the contract is the possibility of the forgiveness of any financial obligation that the student might have incurred in the program. The obligation would be forgiven in exchange for a two-year commitment to teach in the state's public school system. Students have the opportunity to exercise the two-year teaching option at any time after graduation.

Mr. Bell's presentation of the Honore' Center's program objectives was personal. He shared his own life story and recounted the challenges he navigated as a young father. He empathized with the program participants' selection and maturation process. He is committed to helping each participant maximize his opportunity to benefit fully from the services of the program. To underscore the success of the program, Mr. Bell shared the time allocated for his presentation with a Honore' Center 5th year student, Louis Blackmon III.

Mr. Louis Blackmon III expressed his thanks for the opportunity to address the body, and he recounted the challenges of growing up in New Orleans in the midst of guns and gangs. His father died

in the streets, and he had to look for eating utensils, spoons and forks, outside, on the ground, before he could start a meal at his grandmother's house. He was a good high school athlete, playing football, but a poor academic student.

Mr. Blackmon immersed himself in the Honore' Center programs with very positive results. His grades improved from Cs and Ds to an overall 3.4 GPA in his junior year of college. He volunteered in his community. He has been elected student body president, and a fellow Honore' Center student has been elected vice president. He is excited about completing the program and beginning his teaching of young Black men who are like him.

Panel One: Question and Answer Session:

Dr. Anderson, the session moderator, summarized each panelist's presentation and posed a question to kick off the Question and Answer session. He started the discussion by referencing the *Classroom Not Courtroom Initiative* launched by Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe in 2015. The initiative is a "multi-agency, administration-wide push to reduce student referrals to law enforcement, reduce suspensions and expulsions, address the disparate impact these practices have on African-Americans and students with disabilities, and address the emphasis on subjective offenses like disorderly conduct" (Virginia Commonwealth Department of Education). Dr. Anderson briefly explained the role that data plays in this and other initiatives and the problems that it could create. Different institutions and systems generated different data sets. The data sets were used to make policy decisions that allocated resources. Dr. Anderson cautioned the group that they must be careful of data linkages and data linked to prove or disprove a point.

One of the conference participants raised concerns about the creation of data that ignored behavior that is 'developmentally consistent' with a Black male student's age and maturity level.

Instead, the data tracked and recorded that behavior as an aberration and assigned a negative value to it. Non-Black males could commit the same act and have it credited as developmentally consistent behavior.

Another conference attendee cautioned that collecting data for the sake of data was counterproductive to the ultimate goal of preventing or interrupting the pipeline.

Dr. Anderson shifted the discussion to talk about examples of policy successes. 'Beyond the Box' was offered. This is a U.S. Department of Education inspired program to "increase access to higher education" for young people who may have interacted with the justice system through juvenile arrest and adjudication or criminal arrest and conviction.

Higher education institutions were encouraged to stop asking questions about prior criminal justice contact that student applicants may have had. Elimination of this question served to help eliminate barriers to re-entry. A positive higher education experience dramatically reduces the likelihood of returning to prison.

Dr. Toldson returned the discussion to the collect and analysis of data by referencing his article, *"Black Male Teachers: Becoming Extinct?"*. His first observation was that "Black people needed Black people who believe in Black people enough not to believe every bad thing they hear about Black people". Sayings like "there were more Black men in prison than in college" and "Black teachers are extinct" have been stated as fact for so long that they were almost proverbs.

Some research data, about the plight of Black males, suggests conclusions that are not supported by the data. Dr. Toldson offered research from the University of South Carolina that concluded that 50% of Black males would be arrested by the time they are 23 years old. The point being made by Dr. Toldson was that Black people must look behind the data. Those in research must ask, "Show me the numbers".

The morning Q&A session ran longer than planned. It was filled with meaningful and intellectually challenging questions about the session. This was a testament to the relevance of the research and the personal magnetism of the presenters.

Using Academic Achievement to Stem the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The second morning session featured Dr. Ronald Mason, Jr. as speaker. Dr. Mason served as President of the Southern University System, and he conceived the concept of the Five-fifths Agenda for America (FFAA). He currently serves as President of the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) in Washington, DC.

The debate over whether, and if so how, slaves would be counted in determining the population of a state was an essential component of a compromise to secure the support of southern states in ratifying the U.S. Constitution in 1787. It was agreed that slaves would count as three-fifth of a white man. This historical action laid the foundation for Dr. Mason's effort to create a program that addressed the 'five-fifths' of a white man, or the whole Black man. FFAA focuses on creating a supportive and nurturing environment that supports young Black men from a wide variety of backgrounds. These young men entered the Five-Fifths Agenda programs at various levels of academic preparedness.

The aforementioned program objectives and admissions requirements allowed for the Center to find "hidden stars" in the Black community and nurture them until their true value became apparent. Dr. Mason pointed to the program's success rate in attracting and retaining young Black males as proof that the formula applied in the FFAA worked. Retention and success in the program was driven by the combination of selecting the right participants and equipping them with the tools that contributed, significantly, to the likelihood of success.

Luncheon Speaker

The District of Columbia Public Schools, recognizing the challenges of educating Black males to maximize their potential, decided to implement a single gender school for males. This school will open in the fall of 2016. While the school is open to all males, the demographics of the District guarantee that the majority of males in the school will be Black. The luncheon speaker for the conference, Dr. Benjamin Williams, has been selected as the Principal of the Empowering Males High School, Washington, DC.

Dr. Williams shared his compelling personal story of the struggles and challenges he had to surmount so as not to become a victim of the school-to-prison pipeline. He uses his own experiences to assure young Black males that he is committed to their success.

The Empowering Males High School was founded on three pillars that guide Dr. Williams and his staff as they develop the new single-gender male high school. The pillars were character, high expectations and love.

According to Dr. Williams, the school wanted to ensure that it developed young men who are curious about lifelong learning and have the strength of character to be change agents. These change agents are created by setting a high standard for behavior and performance. Setting and enforcing high standards for Black males is very important. Dr. Williams reminded conference attendees that varying standards in classrooms, schools and society contributed to the pipeline population.

Setting high expectations is another pillar of the school. “The expectations for Black males differ from others sitting in the classroom,” said Dr. Williams. “Black males in our school are taught to reach for the stars. If they did not reach the star they would land on the moon”, reasoned Dr. Williams. This will give them a higher perch to try for the stars again.

The staff at the Empowering Males High School will use love to create a nurturing and positive environment. They will avoid chastising and degrading young men or putting them in situations where they will be rejected.

The school acknowledges the value of exposure. Students have to compete globally. To be competitive, students have to be exposed to cultures outside of their school and neighborhoods. Exposure could begin by taking students outside the city so that they can experience and enjoy the rural communities that surrounded the District.

Dr. Williams said, “My goal, literally in four years, is to have 600 young men walk down to City Center, the White House or walk somewhere where people will turn their heads because they (Empowering Males High School students) were dressed in jackets and ties.”

Panel Two: Developments and Strategies for Stopping the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The moderator for Panel Two was Ms. Oleta Garrett Fitzgerald, Southern Regional Director of the Children’s Defense Fund. She opened the session by discussing the influence that conservative think tanks, like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), have on the development of state legislation. Ms. Fitzgerald offered numerous examples to support her point. The actions by ALEC and similar organizations have influenced welfare reform, crime reporting and punishment.

Ms. Fitzgerald credited Dr. Ronald Walters with helping to organize Black state legislators into caucuses to address the onslaught of conservative legislation at the local level. A discussion of the potential impact of this conservative legislation was led by Dr. John Hope Franklin and other Black scholars. It was concluded that the implementation of the conservative agenda would put the Black community in worse shape “since slavery”.

Ms. Fitzgerald contended that some young Black males were born into the prison pipeline. They were “geared towards prison rather than success”. According to research done by the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), poverty routed these young men to the prison pipeline. Household income, significantly below the poverty level, placed some young Black males into extreme poverty and hastened their likelihood of becoming victims of the pipeline.

Ms. Fitzgerald made additional remarks related to the work done by the CDF before introducing presenters for Panel Two. Presenters for this panel were Attorney Daniel J. Losen, Director, Center for Civil Rights Remedies, University of California at Los Angeles; Attorney Jeree Thomas, Just Children Program, Legal Aid Justice Center and Campaign Manager for RISE for Youth, Richmond, Virginia; and Joseph M. Grant, Graduate Assistant, Ronald W. Walters Leadership and Public Policy Center, Howard University.

Mr. Losen began his remarks by giving a statement about the mission of the Center for Civil Rights Remedies. The organization’s mission is not to just provide information about the problem, but also to suggest remedies so that policy makers will have direction when they begin addressing the issues. “It is not just admiring the problem”, said Losen. A significant part of the remedy is the collection and analysis of data. Losen pointed out that data has to be collected in a way that allows you to look at race and gender, not just race. Some states collected this data in an appropriate format; but the data was often not timely. According to Losen, national data from schools and school districts related to discipline matters is often two years late. This creates an obstacle to timely analysis and response.

Data are used to figure out what works and to provide justification to policy makers when they are allocating state and federal funds. Losen pointed out that after Hurricane Sandy, President Obama gave school districts options about how to use some federal funds. Data are available on the use of

resource officers but not on the effectiveness of school counselors. School districts chose to allocate funds to school resource officer positions. This demonstrates a “disconnect” between addressing problems that need attention and having the data to support those decisions, said Losen.

The Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) is a pioneer in collecting data and reporting school expulsions and suspensions as they affect African American students, according to Losen. He cited a 1970s publication from CDF entitled *School Suspensions: Are They Helping Children?* As a result of the work done by CDF, Losen’s organization created a document, *Closing the School Discipline Gap*. The publication focused on the high rate of suspensions and dropouts, low achievement and the lack of a sense of security in schools. The lack of a sense of security seemed to be a catalyst in the expansion of suspensions. The expansion did not occur equally across the board. Black students were suspended at a higher rate. Black males were suspended at an even higher rate. To support this claim, Losen presented data from 2011 and 2012. The data showed that 23.2 percent of African American middle and high school students nationwide were suspended at least once. “This meant that some districts across the country suspended Black students at the rate of 50, 60, 70 or 80 percent,” said Losen. The most affected group was Black males who were suspended at the secondary level at an average rate of 34 percent. Most of the suspensions were for minor matters: dress codes, truancy, tardiness or disrupting a line.

Losen cited research from two African American scholars that documented implicit bias among teachers. The experiment gauged how a Black or white-sounding last name influenced disciplinary decisions among Black and white teachers. Names that sounded Black, tended to result in more disciplinary referrals.

The attitude of the school administrator also influenced the rate of suspensions at high schools. Losen said that principals who had a “get tough on kids, kick out the bad kids, good kids can learn attitudes” expelled or suspended Black students at a higher rate.

Losen concluded his presentation by pointing out the “restorative practices” in the Denver School District. The school district began to apply practices supported by research. The racial gap between the suspensions of Black and white students began to close. Suspension rates came down and achievement scores rose.

The next presenter was Ms. Jeree Thomas, a Virginia attorney. Ms. Thomas specializes in providing legal representation for juveniles. She pointed out that she had clients between 5 and 19 years old. Most of her clients and their families are low-income, young families with children experiencing issues in education and the juvenile justice system. Ms. Thomas referred to data that reports on the numbers of young people, nationally, who have been expelled or suspended from schools. The report showed that large numbers of minority students are expelled for 365 days with no educational services. In practice, these young people, 40,000, had missed an entire year of academic instruction.

Ms. Thomas’ organization also focuses on helping students prepare to reenter school and society after being incarcerated in a juvenile institution. She cited an example of a state-supported program that partnered incarcerated students with local artists. The students were able to have weekly visits with local artists as relief from their periods of incarceration. In another project, incarcerated students are allowed to work with Ms. Thomas in the development of Public Service Announcements (PSA). The announcements promote “reinvesting in supportive environments for youth” and “community based alternatives to incarceration”. Closing old and dilapidated juvenile prison facilities would be a giant step in that direction. These old buildings were not wired for internet

so students were not able to complete requirements for their GEDs online. With the cost of juvenile incarceration in Virginia at approximately \$142,000 per student, per year, Ms. Thomas' organization hoped to convince Virginians that it is cheaper to invest in better public schools and creative alternatives to juvenile incarceration.

Finally, Ms. Thomas urged the creation of a partnership with local police. The chief of police in Richmond, Virginia worked with Ms. Thomas' group to develop a program that would avoid the creation of an official criminal complaint. This would keep young people out of the juvenile system. She also encouraged the creation of a memorandum of understanding between the local police and the school district so that the role of school resource officers was clear. This prevented resource officers from handling disciplinary matters that should be handled by school administrators.

The final presenter for this panel was Mr. Joseph Grant, a graduate assistant and member of the Walters Center team. He had the responsibility for collecting, organizing and analyzing data on legislation passed by the states that was related to the school-to-prison pipeline. Specifically, Mr. Grant wanted to quantify the volume of legislation enacted by the states, identify states that had begun to address the issues raised from Zero Tolerance Disciplinary Policies and introduce an interactive database program that would easily access the legislation. To make the data collection more relevant, Mr. Grant limited the states to those with a significant Black population. Data were collected from the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. These states have the largest concentration of Black males that are 18 years of age or less according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Mr. Grant said that he reviewed already established databases to collect information on states that had taken legislative action on bills that would affect the pipeline. The primary databases used were National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the National Caucus of Black State Legislators

(NBCSL), and the South Carolina Legislative Council. Other legislative databases added later included the Education Commission of the States (ECS) and the National Alliance of Black School Educators.

The legislative database review covered a seven-year period, 2008 through 2015, and resulted in 488 legislative bills being introduced and 146 bills passing. The database search used keywords such as juvenile delinquency, truancy, zero tolerance and school to prison pipeline.

The legislation that was introduced and passed fell in the following categories: expansion and reduction of juvenile justice services; improving juvenile justice facilities; redistribution of juvenile justice cost to local governments; changes in the conditions under which juveniles are incarcerated; expansion of the disciplinary juvenile justice charges; gang prevention; school-to-prison pipeline and zero tolerance policies.

The state legislation that has been introduced to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline shared some fundamental characteristics, said Mr. Grant. Those characteristics included broad state-based community participation; a complete review of state and school district disciplinary policies; a reassessment of how to respond to student behavior issues; reaffirmation of school district responsibility to address student behavior matters; a redefinition of the role of school resource officers and strategies for reintroducing expelled or suspended students to the school environment.

Mr. Grant surmised that states had implemented a two-prong approach to interrupt the pipeline. The first approach was to overhaul the states' entire juvenile justice system. The states of Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and Texas have used this approach. The second prong of the approach was to overhaul the zero tolerance school disciplinary policy. Some states used this approach in combination with the first prong. Those states were Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Public policy decisions that affect school discipline are usually set by state legislatures. Mr. Grant provided a brief description of the demographics of the legislatures in the states of the study. Based on Mr. Grant's review, these legislatures are overwhelmingly composed of white males who are over 50 years of age and Republican. Mr. Grant expressed his doubt that these legislators would be sympathetic to concerns of young Black males.

In concluding, Mr. Grant acknowledged that more research needs to be done. His future research objectives, related to this project, include an effort to further define the database and make it more interactive friendly, continue to monitor and evaluate state legislation, and expand the sources used to track state legislation on this topic.

Questions and Answers from Panel Two

At the end of the panel presentations, Ms. Fitzgerald opened the discussion for questions and answers. One of the first questions was on the use of data in relationship to racial disparities. Attendees were encouraged to monitor matters that they thought reflected racial disparities as the precursor to taking formal action with the government. The U.S. Office of Civil Rights will respond to matters that demonstrate extreme racial disparities.

Another question was raised about how to influence policy makers at the local level. It was suggested that data could play a role in the influence game. A panelist suggested that policy makers are most influenced by what works. Being able to use data to support a policy change improves its chance of being adopted.

The session concluded with Mr. Losen offering to share model legislation that has worked in California and others states where he has worked.

South Carolina Representative Gilda Cobb-Hunter expressed her interest in having the panel present at the annual meeting of the National Caucus of Black State Legislators in New Orleans.

Breakout Group Reports

The breakout groups occurred near the end of the conference day. Attendees had participated in multiple forum discussions to clearly define the complex sub-contextual issues that influence both aspects of the phenomenon. One aspect of the phenomenon was a discussion of Black male achievement. Academicians, legislators and practitioners laser focused their attention on the many issues that influence the success of young Black males trying to navigate a public school obstacle course. The course appears to have been created by the community, school systems and the criminal justice system. The earlier discussion confirmed that many Black males enter the public school system at an academic disadvantage. Many have already been labeled as “problem students” from their pre-first grade experiences. Issues of restlessness, being physically too big for their age, attention deficiency, failure to master early reading and writing skills, motivation, hunger from the lack of breakfast and lack of respect for authority converged with zero tolerance school disciplinary policies. This convergence introduced young Black males to in-class suspensions, out-of-school suspensions and expulsions very early in their public school careers. It is no wonder that Black male achievement suffers and makes excellent kindling for the prison pipeline.

The second aspect of the phenomenon was the school-to-prison pipeline. Young Black males become likely passengers in the pipeline early in their school careers. Multiple suspensions and expulsions serve as a wind at the back of these young men. The wind blows them into the clutches of school resource officers. This interaction converts a routine disciplinary issue that was previously

handled by the school system administration into a criminal justice system issue handled by an agent of the local law enforcement authority.

School discipline policy and state legislation were discussed as potential sources of the pipeline problem and the solution. The solution was broadly described as any activity that would interrupt or stop the decimating effect of the pipeline.

Armed with the information shared in the earlier sessions on Black Male Achievement and Stopping the School-to-Prison Pipeline, conference participants divided themselves into two breakout groups to brainstorm strategies to positively address the two-prong phenomenon.

The first breakout group was moderated by Dr. James Moore, III, Executive Director of the Todd Anthony Bell National Resources Center on African American Males at The Ohio State University. This group focused on Black Male Academic Achievement. The second breakout group, focused on Stopping the Prison Pipeline, was moderated by Mr. Don Cravins, Senior Vice President for Policy at the National Urban League.

The following summarizes recommendations from each session.

Strategies for Increasing Black Male Academic Achievement

- Provide training to help school staff overcome implicit bias towards Black males
- Create the environment that acknowledges and encourages Black families and communities to positively impact Black male achievement
- Make the curricula for Black male students reflect a blend of vocational and academic programs that create comprehensive schools
- Create nurturing and safe environments for Black male students through university and school partnerships

- Strengthen base curriculums and enrichment programs
- Lower the student-teacher and student-counselor ratios
- Increase funding formulas and allocations to school districts, specifically schools serving Black males, to fund the additional and expanded services needed
- Create more robust data systems that users are able to access in real time. The data must be readily accessible and easily shared across public school and non-school stakeholders.
- Increase the number of enrichment and extra-curriculum activities accessible to Black male students
- Restructure and adapt schools to student needs rather than having the student adapt to the school
- Provide all students access to a quality education.

Strategies for Stopping or Interrupting the Prison Pipeline

- Redefine zero tolerance school disciplinary policies and their application
- Redefine the role or totally eliminate the use of school resource officers
- Host a communitywide discussion on how technology can be used to assist in the education of young Black males
- Increase diversity among teachers with an emphasis on increasing the number of teachers of color;
- Modernize the definition of disorderly conduct so that the conduct is not defined as criminal
- Reduce the size of classes
- Provide social services to parents through the school that their children attend

- Develop and implement an aggressive re-entry plan for juvenile justice system institutional populations.

These recommendations could provide the foundation for revised public policy that utilizes the data and expertise brought together for this conference.

Conclusion

Toward a Policy and Legislative Agenda to Address the School-to-Prison Pipeline was the theme of a gathering of academics, practitioners, policy makers, legislators and researchers. The overarching goal of the group was to improve Black male achievement as a way to stop or interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. This broad gathering of presenters met in an intimate setting to engage each other in hopes of identifying realistic solutions that could be implemented now. Small tweaks to interpretation and implementation of public policy could yield some immediate returns. Legislation, some already in effect, was identified that requires states to totally revamp their school disciplinary policies while overhauling the state's juvenile justice system.

It was universally agreed that schools feed the prison pipeline through the enforcement of harsh, and often subjective, disciplinary decisions, unevenly applied to minority students. The presence of armed school resource officers serves to escalate civil disciplinary matters into criminal events. The public venue was full of instances of school resource officers overreacting and creating a military encampment environment rather than an open and safe public school.

The attendees were positive and optimistic about disrupting the pipeline and eventually decreasing the number of Black males caught in this phenomenon. They were also optimistic about improving Black male achievement. The experts in attendance were adamant that the behavior of young Black males would be much less threatening if teachers, administrators and school resource

officers understood the development of this group of students. A better understanding would help schools reach Black males academically and this would counter disruptive behavior patterns. If the Black male student is engaged in the academics of learning, they are less likely to be bored, devious and searching for entertainment while in the classroom.

Saving and nurturing young Black males, as they make the journey to adulthood, is critical to the development of strong and emotionally secure Black men. Failure to use alternative approaches to teaching Black males and recognizing their unique emotional development patterns would dramatically increase the flow of students to the pipeline.

The participants felt that such a waste of Black human capital would irreversibly damage the Black community negatively and generationally.

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