

## SECTION V



# EDUCATION DISPARITIES IN OHIO'S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

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### Overview of Education Disparities in Ohio's African American Community

When considering how to improve the life outcomes for African Americans in Ohio, education is one of the most salient public policy arenas. The quality of education a child receives has life-long implications, as education gives us the opportunity and mechanisms to lead productive, rewarding and fulfilling lives. Overall, the State of Ohio is faring well in regards to education; Quality Counts 2009 ranked Ohio's education system as first in the Midwest and sixth nationally.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, there have been a number of gains for African Americans in Ohio across recent years from improvements in graduation rates, to a narrowing of the achievement gap.<sup>141</sup> Despite these gains however, far too many African Americans still attend schools that are under-funded and segregated, with fewer qualified teachers and less rigorous curriculums.

Education is an arena that has been under close scrutiny for decades, with experts and policy makers generating a constant stream of reforms that get moved in and out of schools before they are given an adequate chance to be effective. Current Ohio Governor Ted Strickland is working to address this by focusing on changes that can be institutionalized, and thus sustainable. He is working to implement a number of interventions aimed at raising the performance of all students including an extended school year, more comprehensive graduation requirements, and a plan designed to make school funding more equitable. These factors present a unique opportunity of forward momentum in achieving a more equitable education system.

Instinctually, we look to schools for the source of the achievement gap and make modifications there, but we also need to examine the entire system; a child's education is not the product of a school alone – it is impacted by all the social institutions he or she is situated within. Thus, education reform must be a holistic endeavor, one that we pursue relentlessly. In order to be truly effective, educational interventions must encompass housing, healthcare, and economic policies. Further, in order to achieve sustainable reform, we also must be mindful of how we implement these remedies. The vast majority of educational reform has been narrow in scope, limited in duration, lacked long term support, and does not pay attention to local particularities. If we are to take seriously the goal of creating a comprehensive, sustainable system of education for all of Ohio's children, the policies must not only be relevant, but the implementation seamless. The first step in this process is establishing the State of Black Ohio in education. The following are specific arenas both internal and external to education where reform can have a substantial impact. Included as well are recommendations for implementation. Our ultimate goal is to not only improve the life outcomes for African Americans in Ohio, but to strengthen the State as a whole, which can be achieved only when all students are reaching their full academic potential.

**Environmental Concerns** Educational inequities are particularly intractable due to the multitude of factors outside the space of the school that influence students' academic outcomes. Reviewing the laundry list of factors can be overwhelming; however, efforts to reform education must target these factors specifically in order to achieve sustainable change within our schools.

**Impact of Family** The family has long been understood to be a central contributor to a child's academic potential. A parent's SES, education level, and whether they are a one or two parent household, have

demonstrable impacts on their child's academic performance including: standardized test scores, grade point averages, levels of educational attainment, school absences, and teacher behavioral ratings.<sup>142</sup> Wealth has also demonstrated a positive relationship between both academic achievement and standardized test scores, and several researchers have argued that it can account for much of the racial achievement gap.<sup>143</sup>

Due to the historic pattern of inequities, (residential segregation and isolation from opportunity), African American families are particularly at risk. In Ohio in 2007, African American children constituted only 15 percent of the population, yet 44 percent of black children were in poverty, while 64 percent of non-Hispanic black children (ages 0-4) lived in a single parent household, and 57 percent of black children lived in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment.<sup>144</sup> It is not necessarily the case that undereducated guardians, lower income families, or single parent households are detrimental to their children's academic potential, but the host of related factors these conditions are associated with can be. They correlate with unstable housing which results in frequent school transfers, increased parental stress, decreased parental involvement, and a lack of parental skills to support the child in his or her educational endeavors. Thus, efforts to address educational inequities must extend into the family. Programs that teach parents how to mentor and tutor their children have demonstrated a tremendous impact on a student's academic performance, and programs that provide families with stable housing will accomplish far more than just raising the student's grades: they can raise the life opportunities for the family and entire community.<sup>145</sup>

**Neighborhood Factors** Intuitively, we know that a child's neighborhood impacts his or her academic performance; the research supports this as well. In fact, living in a disadvantaged neighborhood is equivalent to missing a full year of school, and these effects continue on even after a family has moved.<sup>146</sup> In many ways this is due to correlates such as decreased social capital and lower levels of parental involvement, but neighborhoods of concentrated poverty are also limited in terms of supplemental educational resources. The infrastructure and programmatic resources of a community directly impacts education; the presence of school facilities, libraries, and after-school and tutoring programs have a positive impact on a student's academic achievement.<sup>147</sup>

Thus, any educational interventions must take into consideration the conditions in which a school's population resides. Housing policy is school policy and until we address it as such our school reform efforts will continue to come up short. Those interested in narrowing the achievement gap, increasing the number of African Americans in college, and interrupting the pernicious cycle of poverty must consider interventions that deliberately link housing and school policy. For example, by providing safe and stable housing, one Texas study suggests that up to 14 percent of the black-white achievement gap could be closed.<sup>148</sup> Linking housing and education policy could be achieved by connecting No Child Left Behind to Low Income Housing Tax Credits. This could ensure families are given the opportunity to live in neighborhoods that provide them with immediate access to opportunity, and their children benefit as well through the access to high performing schools.

**Children's Health** As discussed in Chapter 10 of this report, African Americans face a vast array of health disparities in the quality and availability of healthcare, which has strong educational implications. African American children are particularly vulnerable, beginning at birth. Nationally, African American women are twice as likely as white women to receive late or no prenatal care, resulting in lower birth weight babies.<sup>149</sup> In Ohio, in 2004, African American women were twice as likely (14 percent) to have a low birth weight baby than white women (7 percent).<sup>150</sup> Lower birth weight babies go on to suffer from

long-term disabilities, impaired physical and cognitive development, and decreased health overall throughout childhood, revealing a great significance in this disparity.<sup>151</sup>

Those living in lower income neighborhoods are subjected to a wide variety of additional environmental factors that depress health outcomes: the presence of lead and the prevalence of environmental pollutants in older homes; the general inaccessibility of preventative health care (including dental and vision); the lack of exercise and increased mental stress children suffer from living in unsafe neighborhoods; and overall poorer nutrition. These factors contribute to a cycle of academic underperformance as, not surprisingly, student achievement is closely related to mental and physical health. One recent calculation estimates that health disparities account for as much as 25 percent of the black-white achievement gap.<sup>152</sup> Clearly, education policy alone cannot solve this problem. Education and health policy decisions need to be made in tandem, as all children must have mental and physical health needs met in order to achieve full academic potential. Health insurance must be expanded to cover all children and preventative health care must be readily available. Full-service health clinics in schools could provide the much needed medical services, and low-income schools should have a full-time nurse on staff.

**Early Childhood Education** One educational policy that has long been on the radar of policy makers in Ohio is early childhood education, and with good reason. The first three years of a child's life are critical in laying the foundation for lifelong academic success. During this time, children acquire skills such as the ability to think, speak, learn and reason, and by the age of 5, 90 percent of a child's brain is developed.<sup>153</sup> Far too many African American children are at risk of suffering from the debilitating effects of living in concentrated poverty; in Ohio, non-Hispanic African American children ages 0-4 constitute 31 percent of those living below the poverty level, although only 14 percent of the young child population in the State is black.<sup>154</sup>

By the time low-income children reach preschool they are already being outperformed by their middle-class counterparts;<sup>155</sup> thus, in order to close the achievement gap, it is critical that African American children are provided with a high quality early childhood education. Ohio has made great strides in providing high quality preschool to every child. With \$270 million budgeted for early care and education for FY 08-09, nearly 8,000 more children will be given access to high-quality pre-kindergarten.<sup>156</sup> Ohio can expect a high return on this long-term investment; a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland found that every \$1 spent on preschool programs would net \$1.62. Another report demonstrates how providing two years of high quality preschool to 57 percent of three year olds (as opposed to the 27 percent served in 2004) would result in a net gain of \$372 million for the State by reducing the number of children in special education, increasing the number of those prepared for the workforce, and eventually keeping them out of the criminal justice system. <sup>157</sup> There is still work to be done in the field of early childhood education in areas such as access (Ohio was ranked 35th out of the 50 states for access for 4 year olds) and in designing a more comprehensive system of support.<sup>158</sup> Early childhood education programs that have had tremendous success include the Perry School Program and the Abecedarian project; both have provided additional ancillary services such as family support, home visits and group meetings. <sup>159</sup>

**K-12 School Issues** Perhaps the most easily accessible policy solutions for closing the achievement gap and creating a more just system of education reside within the school. A tremendous body of research exists within each of the categories below, discussing why they matter, particularly for African Americans, as well as programs and interventions that have demonstrated success. A brief summary

follows, discussing how each is experienced in Ohio, as well as some examples of policy solutions that could create a more just and equitable system of education.

**Graduation Rates** The disparities in graduation rates are stark, particularly for African American males. In Ohio, one study based on the 2003 cohort reports that while 84 percent of the white high school population is graduating on time, only 57 percent of African Americans are.<sup>160</sup> Another study focusing on the 2005/2006 cohort finds that only 49 percent of African American males in Ohio are graduating.<sup>161</sup> As with early childhood education, addressing graduation rates would have a tremendous impact on Ohio's economic vitality. By 2020, \$2.6 billion would be added to Ohio's economy just by raising the African American graduation rate to that of white students.<sup>162</sup> In order to raise the graduation rate for African Americans, specifically African American males, intervention programs focusing on retention must be put into place. Partnerships between schools and community organizations can provide academic and emotional support to at-risk students through tutoring and mentoring programs. Finally, schools should examine other arenas that are highly correlated with drop-out rates such as discipline practices, and design a comprehensive intervention program to curb student attrition.

**Discipline** African Americans are also disproportionately represented in discipline statistics; they are not only more frequently disciplined, but also experience more severe punishments than other non-black students, even after controlling for behavior or transgression. This phenomenon has long been documented across the country, and Ohio is no exception. In 2002, African Americans represented 36 percent of all suspensions, although they only constitute 16 percent of the total K-12 population.<sup>163</sup> It is particularly important to note the gendered aspect of this; African American males are most frequently targeted for severe disciplinary policies. In 2004-2005, 20 percent of Ohio's Black male students had been subjected to an out-of-school suspension, and three times as many black male students as white students were expelled, although there are four times as many white students in Ohio.<sup>164</sup>

Suspension and expulsion not only have profound effects on the students' academic performance and achievement, but also have long-term deleterious impact on the viability and stability of the State. Not surprisingly, a strong connection has been demonstrated between school discipline and the criminal justice system.<sup>165</sup> Termed the "school to prison pipeline," this linkage has far-reaching effects from decreasing the pool of skilled workers to destabilizing the family and community.

Certainly, schools must maintain a climate of safety and order, and discipline is a critical component of this. Although zero tolerance policies are the norm in most school districts across the State, researchers have discovered that they are not necessarily the most effective. Removing the student from the classroom or school interrupts their education, and ultimately does little to curb disruptive behavior. Violence prevention experts have identified a number of alternative approaches to school discipline that are more effective in decreasing negative behaviors, limiting out of classroom punishments, and promoting a more cohesive and safe school environment. Discipline reform, when done in conjunction with cultural competency and behavior management training for teachers, can make great strides in promoting a safer school environment, more stable communities and a more economically viable state.

**Academic Performance** Academic performance (and the associated achievement gap) reflects pervasive inequalities in our education system. The good news about the achievement gap is that it is narrowing; on average, across the past ten years, African American students have made gains at faster rates than white students and these trends are occurring across most subjects and grade levels.<sup>166</sup> The

performance of Black fourth graders, for example, has increased at an annual rate of 13 percent across the past 9 years, while the average student's performance only increased by 6 percent.<sup>167</sup> The bad news for achievement gaps, however, is that they are large and as such they are not closing quickly enough. Furthermore, the gap exists across both racial and economic lines. The gap between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students is stark, but so too is the gap between African Americans and Whites, regardless of economic status. In fact, economically disadvantaged whites in Ohio actually outperformed African Americans who were not economically disadvantaged.<sup>168</sup> This gap is evident not only in measuring proficiency, but also when comparing students performing beyond the basic level. For example, disaggregated data for math achievement at the fourth grade level in 2006 shows 67 percent of African Americans in Ohio performed at grade level, while 93 percent of whites did. The difference is even more apparent in comparing those ranked 'proficient' or 'advanced'. While 53 percent of whites performed at the proficient or advanced level, only 18 percent of African Americans did.<sup>169</sup>

Like any educational intervention, closing the achievement gap is not simple or straightforward; there are multitudes of intersecting factors that contribute to it. Thus, any efforts to close the gap must be multifaceted and carefully constructed. While many programs have had success in closing the gap by addressing a singular issue (such as teacher quality) longitudinal research suggests that these changes are often not sustainable as they are dependent on a single champion within the district to energize the reform and carry it forward. If we are to take seriously the charge of closing the achievement gap, there are a number of contributing factors that must be addressed specifically such as teacher quality and the segregation of academic under-performers, and the overall approach must be multifaceted, dynamic, and flexible. Certainly it is challenging, but as many schools have shown us across the nation, and even within the borders of our own State, it is possible.

***Tracking/Ability Grouping: AP courses & Special Education*** Tracking, or ability grouping, is a significant issue for African American students because it not only acts as a segregating mechanism within schools, it also depresses academic and life-long opportunity for those relegated to lower tracks. African Americans' under-representation in advanced placement courses, and overrepresentation in special education, indicates a broken system and calls for immediate attention and intervention to ensure that all children are receiving a high quality, appropriate education.

***Advanced Placement*** Much like the achievement gap, there is both good and bad news regarding African Americans' participation rates in advanced placement courses. On one hand, across the past three years, more African Americans in Ohio have enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and taken the associated year-end exams. For example, in Ohio, in 2002, only 681 African American students took at least one AP exam, while in 2007, five years later, 1,312 completed at least one. While this is a significant stride, there is still significant ground to be gained. In 2007, while Blacks constituted 11.7 percent of the high school population, only 6.5 percent completed an AP exam. Of that percentage, only 2.6 percent scored a grade 3 or higher. African American students should be fully represented (and succeeding) in these advanced courses as they serve as primers for higher education and are strongly predictive of college readiness, acceptance, and persistence.<sup>170</sup>

***Special Education*** At the other end of the ability grouping spectrum is special education, and as we might expect given their relative absence in advanced placement tracks, African Americans are overrepresented. In 2005 in Ohio, 9.2 percent of all African American students age 5-15 reported a mental disability, compared to only 5.9 percent of white students.<sup>171</sup> During the 2004/2005 school

year, 4.79 percent of black male students were classified as having mental retardation, twice as many proportionally as white students.<sup>172</sup> Particularly enlightening is the research that demonstrates African Americans' overrepresentation in "high-incidence" categories- those with a more subjective diagnosis (as opposed to hearing/visual impairments which require a physician for diagnosis.) This indicates a distinct bias in the cultural construction of "disability" and requires us to pay close attention to frequency and source of referrals. <sup>173</sup> Finally, African Americans experience special education differently; once diagnosed they are often excluded from "mainstreaming" (being educated within the general education classroom) at rates higher than their white peers.<sup>174</sup> In order to address these issues of over- and under-representation in special education and advanced placement tracks respectively, detailed statistics need to be collected at the school level focusing on admittance into specific tracks, and in the case of advanced placement, persistence. These statistics should also track referrals in order to identify any high referral rates from a specific teacher or counselor. Schools and districts must adopt early intervention or pre-referral policies that go beyond the current "wait to fail" approach. Tracking on both ends of the performance spectrum is harmful in many ways; it contributes to in-school segregation, limits the life outcomes of students of color, and undermines the economic viability of the State.

**Teacher Quality & Retention** A tremendous body of research exists demonstrating the impact of teacher quality on student performance. Some have suggested teachers have more influence on student achievement than any other characteristic of the school. One study finds that a high quality teacher can overcome some of the familial factors contributing to the achievement gap.<sup>175</sup> On average, African American students and low-income students have higher rates of teacher turnover, lower quality teachers with fewer years of teaching experience, and more teachers who are teaching outside their field of expertise.<sup>176</sup> In Ohio in 2005, for example, 1 in 8 teachers in high-minority elementary schools were not highly qualified, compared to 1 in 50 in low-minority schools.<sup>177</sup>

Teacher turnover also carries with it a number of substantial risks; students are negatively affected by teachers moving in and out of the classroom, and districts suffer as well. As teachers leave the district, schools face a multitude of costs required to replace him or her such as advertising, training, mentoring, and professional development. Researchers estimate that in Ohio, high rates of teacher turnover are costing up to \$206 million dollars a year.<sup>178</sup> This is particularly troubling given that lower-income urban districts experience higher rates of teacher turnover. In Ohio, approximately 20 percent of teachers in urban, low-income schools left their positions as compared to only 11 percent on average in public schools.<sup>179</sup>

In order to address these issues, the State must continue working to ensure high-poverty, low-performing schools have high quality teachers. The Ohio Teacher Incentive Fund (OTIF), in year three of five, has been implemented in select schools and districts in Columbus, Cleveland, Toledo, and Cincinnati in order to meet this goal. While more information is needed to determine whether this program would be feasible and successful on a state-wide scale, it is a critical first step in working towards ensuring that high-need students have access to high quality teachers. The Kirwan Institute recommends conducting ongoing research on the Ohio Teacher Incentive Fund, and replicating successful components in a state-wide expansion.

Teacher quality and attrition go hand in hand, as do the policy interventions to address these issues. The primary reason teachers cite for leaving their school is stressful working conditions, even above salary.<sup>180</sup> Teachers are often overwhelmed by the challenges they encounter in a low-income urban

district including student discipline issues, lack of resources and a lack of administrator support. Thus, programs such as OTIF may not have a far enough reach to retain high quality teachers. Teachers' education programs and continuing education opportunities need to focus specifically on the unique challenges of teaching in a low-income urban district. Furthermore, new teachers must be mentored and guided through the early years of teaching.<sup>181</sup> This process, called induction, designed explicitly to support and retain new teachers, has demonstrated notable success.<sup>182</sup> Providing academic and emotional support to teachers in order to attract and retain high quality teachers to urban districts is a critical intervention that can have a profound effect on students of color.

There are also a number of housing assistance programs in place across the nation that are designed explicitly to attract and retain high quality teachers to high-need districts. California offers teachers a 3-7 percent down payment loan with interest forgiveness for a three year commitment to a high priority school, and Connecticut offers down payment assistance in conjunction with low interest mortgages to teachers in a priority or transitional school district.<sup>183</sup> Ohio must continue to make deliberate efforts such as the above to assess which teachers truly are effective, attract them to high-need districts, and provide incentives for them to stay at high poverty, low performing schools where they are needed most.

The Ohio Department of Education recognizes this as a critical issue, and is currently working to ensure all students in Ohio receive high quality instruction from a highly qualified teacher. As part of this effort we recommend implementing a teacher retention research project in high-need schools and districts. Schools with high levels of teacher turnover should be identified, and extensively studied to determine the causes of teacher attrition. Relevant, targeted initiatives could then be implemented in order to address the conditions causing teacher/staff/administrator attrition. Through the comprehensive identification of contributing factors to teacher turnover, relevant, targeted best practices could be crafted that successfully provide students of color the opportunities to receive high-quality instruction from qualified teachers.

### District/Statewide Issues

**Racial/Economic Segregation** Of all of the in-school factors, researchers agree that none have the long-term deleterious academic, economic, psychological, and social impacts as the pervasive racial and economic segregation present in Ohio's public schools.<sup>184</sup> In fact, the concentration of low income students within a given school building is one of the strongest predictors of academic success, second only to familial influences.<sup>185</sup> In Ohio's six largest metropolitan regions, over half of all poor students are segregated into high poverty schools and of these, 94.4 percent are classified in the three lowest achievement categories.<sup>186</sup> As we might expect, there is a strong racialized component to economic segregation. African American students attend schools that are 2 to 3 times more impoverished than those of their White counterparts, with the average African American student attending schools with a poverty rate of 61 to 78 percent.<sup>187</sup> What's worse, Ohio is leading the nation in the increase of African American hyper-segregation in education. A report conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center found that from 1993/1994 to 2005/2006, the percent of black students in nearly all minority schools (<5 percent white) increased 18 percentile points, to 28 percent. This is a larger increase than any other state in the US experienced.<sup>188</sup>

If we are to take seriously the goal of creating a more equitable system of education, remedying the persistent and pernicious racial and economic segregation must be at the forefront of our efforts. Some

school districts across the country such as Wake County Public Schools System have demonstrated success in closing the achievement gap by limiting the number of low-income students and students performing below grade level within each building. Many consider Wake County to be an anomaly however, as they have a somewhat unique county-wide school system. Nebraska, however, is moving beyond the limitations of regional fragmentation with the establishment of “Learning Community Agreements” in education.<sup>189</sup> This progressive education plan includes all districts, involves over 105,000 students, and is based on a tax sharing plan that allocates school funding based on need. The plan, which has passed into law but is yet to be implemented, is based on focus schools, magnets, and pathway schools that are designed explicitly to achieve a diverse student body. Certainly racial and economic segregation is a difficult issue to address, as the conditions that create this segregation in the first place seem intractable, but until we do, our efforts will likely amount to tinkering within the system, as opposed to creating real, sustainable change for all students.

**Testing/Assessment** Testing and assessment are hotly debated topics in the field of education. Tests have been found to be culturally biased, narrow in scope, and in many ways, constrain the curriculum. Furthermore, their “high stakes” application, or the practice of using them to confer rewards, overextends their original purpose (as student achievement assessments), and may ultimately distort the outcomes.<sup>190</sup> On the other hand, assessments have also been very enlightening. Due to mandatory data collection and required analysis on all subgroups, we are now able to identify schools that may be high performing overall, but are failing to educate low income or African American students.

Despite the many flaws inherent in mandatory educational assessment, it is unlikely that it will be eradicated anytime soon. Ohio is one of the three states that is moving towards a more revealing system of analysis; instead of comparing overall performance, value-added assessments are being conducted, measuring individual students’ progress over time.<sup>191</sup> This gives parents, teachers and schools a more accurate vision of how much the school is contributing to the child’s learning, evaluating the school based upon the real progress it has made, as opposed to a universal standard. This method of evaluation has the potential to be far more enlightening, equitable, and useful, however, it too is not without flaws, and we caution against over-reliance on it for determining (and rewarding) teacher efficacy.

While value-added assessment is certainly an improvement over our current system of testing, in many ways it does not go far enough in measuring the effectiveness of a school. Certainly, standardized tests do capture some of the knowledge students have garnered in school, but true knowledge and intelligence is less about what you know, and more about how you use it, when you use it, and why it matters. Proponents for demonstration-based testing or performance-based assessments emphasize that even if the achievement gap, as measured by standardized tests, is closed, that does not mean we have achieved a level of parity in learning. Education is about more than rote memorization: it requires reflection, adaptation, innovation, performance, and analytical skills that quite simply cannot be measured through a paper and pencil, closed answer test. Revising our system of grading and assessment is a leap that moves us beyond how we measure learning currently, which is necessary in order to not only close the achievement gap, but the lifelong opportunity gap.

**Funding** Perhaps the most difficult, confounded, and intractable issue in education is school funding. Clearly there is no easy solution, as statewide legislators and policy makers have been working to remedy the funding paradigm for years. The primary reason this issue is so complex is due to the interaction and impact of the aforementioned factors on a child’s ability to learn. It is difficult, if not

impossible, to assign a number or create a financial formula that can measure the impact of a high poverty neighborhood, or an undereducated parent in poverty.

Examining the issue of school funding is necessary and enlightening in order to understand the racialized history of our school systems and the impact that history has on funding today. Furthermore, it illuminates the need for comprehensive educational interventions that cut across sectors. High and low opportunity neighborhoods are so deeply entrenched in our society that they have become naturalized, as have the policies and practices that create and perpetuate them. Schools receive inequitable funding because they rely heavily on property taxes. Due to historical factors such as redlining, and more current practices such as exclusionary zoning, we have neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and families without access to stable housing or wealth building mechanisms such as homeownership. School district boundaries are then drawn in a way that isolates these high-need, low income families into segregated, under-funded schools, and, because they reflect “natural” community and geographic boundaries, are accepted and defended as sacrosanct. These students are then placed in double jeopardy because they have higher needs, but their schools receive less funding. And to make matters worse, these schools are typically older, with aging infrastructure, and higher operational costs. Taken together, all these factors illuminate how intractable the issue of school funding is, and why crafting an appropriate solution is so difficult.

Clearly, school finance reform is critical and has been a long time coming; however it must be paired with policies that consider the health and viability of the entire neighborhood as well (see chapter 8). Governor Strickland’s statewide forums and commitment to school funding reform can serve to position Ohio as a national leader in the creation and promotion of a more equitable funding process. However, funding can only move a school so far; in order to create a more equitable system overall, we must simultaneously address the factors that create disparities in the first place.

**Community/Parental Involvement** As important as the time students spend in school is, some research suggests that even more critical is the time they spend outside of the classroom. Low-income students have demonstrated comparable gains to their higher-income peers during school, but lose ground after school and over the summer.<sup>192</sup> Some districts are addressing this by extending the school day or switching to a year-round model of education which has shown tremendous success, but it is not always economically feasible. By making the walls between the school and community permeable, equipping parents to fully participate in their child’s education, we can make great strides in providing the academic support students need.

Family, community members, neighbors, the religious community, and other caring adults in a child’s life create a web of support that nurtures and encourages growth and development, and acts as a protective mechanism against the innumerable challenges a low income child of color faces. Programs are needed that put children in touch with caring adults and encourage and support these relationships. Parents can also be mentored in order to better support their children academically. Formally connecting parents to the school has not demonstrated success in improving the academic performance of children in the school, but it does correlate with fewer behavioral problems, and students’ increased likelihood of completing secondary school.<sup>193</sup> Children not only need nurturing and guidance, but also safe physical spaces within a community such as parks, libraries, and recreation centers that sponsor or house programs committed to the success of the children in the community. Achieving this has been shown to positively impact a student’s academic achievement, but also their motivation, attitude towards school, and readiness to learn.

**Higher Education & Workforce Development** Ohio needs to have a strong education pipeline, from birth through K-16, but it also needs to prepare students to enter into productive, sustainable careers. Thousands of African Americans fall through the cracks in our disjointed education system, and even more fail to see the relevance an education has on their lives. Building a strong system of education not only improves the lives of African Americans, it lifts up all Ohioans by making the State and its localities more economically competitive.<sup>194</sup> With the current state of the economy and increasing globalization, Ohio needs to capture the talent, skills, intelligence, and unique contributions of everyone in order to remain economically viable, and in order to emerge as a strong national and global leader.

**Career Preparation** As mentioned in chapter 4, a critical component for building a strong State of Black Ohio is targeted economic development. In order to build an economically stable state we must have a highly skilled workforce. One of the biggest obstacles businesses across Ohio face in thriving and expanding is their ability to attract and retain highly skilled, dependable employees.<sup>195</sup> Workforce development efforts such as school-to-career or school-to-work programs can provide the mechanism to increase labor market skills, connect students to viable employment opportunities, attract new businesses to the State, and provide existing businesses the human capital they need to succeed. Historically, vocational schools and programs have operated as racial sorting mechanisms, with students of color deterred from pursuing higher education and steered into lower-skill jobs. These programs must be mindful of this history and must be designed in a way that does not foreclose on students' career or education options. Properly designed and implemented, career training programs and schools can provide students the opportunity to pursue sustainable, profitable employment and the educational foundation to continue their education if they so choose. Schools that successfully accomplish this are currently operating across the country. For example, the Austin Polytechnical Academy in Chicago prepares students for jobs in advanced, high-tech manufacturing. A unique coalition of education, labor, business, government, and community organizations is not only lifting up students by providing them with a life-long foundation to succeed, they are strengthening the economy and viability of the State of Illinois.<sup>196</sup> Jobs are becoming more and more specialized, and require training and education that many African Americans are simply not receiving. Equitable, comprehensive schools and programs that open up a student's career and education opportunities must be implemented in order to ensure all students are fully prepared to take part in our changing economy, and to secure the long-term stability and economic viability of Ohio.

**Higher Education** Much has been written about the positive effect higher education has on one's life opportunities, as well as the under-representation of African Americans in our colleges and universities. One of the first steps necessary for remedying this is formally connecting our K-12 education system to postsecondary education. *Education Week's Quality Counts 2008* report indicates that Ohio is lacking in many key areas: alignment policies for courses and assessments between high schools and higher education, college preparation required in order to graduate high school, and the presence of a State definition of college readiness.<sup>197</sup> The Ohio Department of Education is actively working to address these issues: the State has defined what students need to know to be ready for college and enacted requirements that students complete college-prep courses before graduating from high school. The "Seniors to Sophomores" program is another substantive example of progress, allowing high school seniors the opportunity to earn both high school and college credit simultaneously.<sup>198</sup> Currently, approximately 375 students are participating in this pilot program, at no cost to them.<sup>199</sup> Policies and programs such as these are positive steps toward making Ohio a national leader in creating a seamless

education pipeline and making Ohio a more economically viable state.

It is estimated that, by 2012, more than 60 percent of the jobs in Ohio will require some college education. Yet, only 28.7 percent of the population over the age of 25 completed four years or more of college and 18.5 percent of the black population has a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>200</sup> Overall, Ohio ranked 40th in the percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree.<sup>201</sup> There are a number of critical issues that contribute to the decreased presence of black men and women in higher education. Most obvious are the disparities in quality of P-12 education, as well as the numerous factors addressed above that continue to depress the achievement levels of African Americans. Also implicated are the over-reliance on a biased system of testing and admissions, limited access to and difficulty navigating the system of financial aid for parents, and the increasing attack on diversity in higher education in recent years. The doors of colleges and universities must be open to African Americans, and deliberate efforts must be made towards retention, as well. Seventeen percent of African Americans attending a four-year university graduate in four years, and only 36 percent graduate in six years.<sup>202</sup> Clearly, our workforce needs are not matched by our current system of education; and, our State's population is not being served by the cycle of injustice and inequity.

Ensuring that all students reach their full academic potential, and providing all students with opportunities for sustainable employment, can improve entire communities by attracting new businesses, improving housing values, and stabilizing families. Nationally, if African Americans had the same education and commensurate earnings as whites, their national wealth could increase by as much as \$118 billion.<sup>203</sup> The K-16 pipeline needs to be seamless and school-to-career programs prevalent and effective in order to ensure African Americans have a genuine opportunity for a meaningful, stable, and secure future with possibilities for continued career advancement. By creating workforce development and higher education programs that are focused specifically on the inclusion of African Americans, we will not only meet the workforce needs of the State, we will create a more sustainable future for all Ohioans.

**Workforce Development** Much attention has been paid lately to workforce development, and rightfully so. Our economy has shifted over the last four decades, but our workforce development efforts have not been responsive to these challenges. The declining economy is changing all that; no longer can Ohio afford to have countless African Americans unprepared to take part in our economy. This has implications for career preparation programs and STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) as discussed above, but those Ohioans outside of K-16 education must have ample opportunity to train for 21st century employment as well.

All eyes are on the federal government right now, anticipating new federal economic stimulus policies that will hopefully carry our nation in a new direction. Obama has expressed his goal of creating at least 3 million jobs by the end of 2010, a number of which are expected to come in industries such as the high tech field and "green" energy.<sup>204</sup> The creation of these jobs, however, does not necessarily ensure the inclusion of African Americans; those who are best positioned to take advantage of these jobs are those who have historically had access to opportunity. As government stimulus programs have a history of operating in ways that leave African Americans behind, deliberate efforts must be made to ensure history does not repeat itself. <sup>205</sup> Robert Reich, the former Secretary of Labor, proposes one approach to equitable workforce development to ensure those populations historically excluded are included. He recommends that all stimulus-funded contracts provide 20 percent of jobs to: "the long-term

unemployed and to people with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level,” and 2 percent of all funds be allocated for training such populations.<sup>206</sup>

Regardless of what federal economic policies are enacted, state level programs must align resources and programs to ensure all Ohioans, particularly African Americans, have the training and experience necessary to secure stable employment with opportunities for advancement. Ensuring employment opportunities reach those who most need them is the only way to move Ohio’s economy into the 21st century.

### Recommendations for Sustainable Reform

Without question, all of the above is important information to take into consideration in crafting educational policies. However, with that having been said, knowledge is not nearly enough. As one interviewee said, “It’s not that we don’t know what’s wrong. We do. It’s that we need to scale it up, incentivize it, and we need the political will to fix it.”

Report after report outlines the dire conditions of our State’s schools and the precarious position of African Americans in society as a result. Teachers and researchers alike have broken the education system down into every imaginable nuance and held them up for examination, and most have emerged announcing the next magical silver bullet; the singular remedy that has the potential to close the gap, to equalize the graduation rate, and to fix the system entirely. Unfortunately, as we’ve learned the hard way, facilitating equity is not that easy, but it is also not impossible. There are a number of things we KNOW can work based on experience. However, as the interviewee so succinctly stated, we need the political will. We need long-term commitments to reform of the system both from the bottom up and the top down. Cherry picking the most convenient, least disruptive, and least objectionable solutions may be the easier route, but it will not be the most sustainable, or successful one.

Much has already been said about some of the types of remedies that can achieve the education system our African American boys and girls deserve. There are a few remaining overarching considerations that should guide the reform process. Following are some final thoughts on how to move forward, how to achieve a 21st century education system that truly leaves no child behind.

**Stop School Bashing** Since the mid 1950s, schools have come under increasing scrutiny and innumerable reports have been published that deconstruct the schools. Schools are an easy target; public data is available that demonstrates schools’ shortcomings, and as a publicly funded institution, people want to ensure their money is being used wisely. Certainly, not everyone has good intentions in their criticisms, but many do; many are looking to simply highlight disparities in order to create a more just system. Placing schools under constant attack regardless of intentions has a number of unintended consequences. It can decrease public support, lower student morale, and put teachers and administrators on the defensive, reducing the time they can dedicate towards students. Furthermore, a myopic view of schools’ shortcomings obscures the schools’ successes. We need an honest evaluation of the performance of our public schools, including the tremendous positive impact many of them have, in order to identify and implement scalable programs.

**Localize the Approach** One common theme across many of the interviews is the incredible diversity that can be found within Ohio, with one interviewee referring to Ohio as a series of nation states. Ohio has tremendous diversity within its borders from the urban city centers to the rural regions. This can pose unique challenges for policy makers as a “one size fits all” approach will inevitably fail, particularly

when applied to education reform. Education initiatives should draw on regional particularities and strengths, and should take into consideration local history. By recognizing and capitalizing on the amazing array of diversity across the State, Ohio can craft education reforms that are relevant and appropriate, and thus more likely to succeed in the long run.

***Sustainable Reform*** With the close linkage between education and the economy, all Ohioans are heavily tied to the state of education; thus it is expected that the calls for school reform be emphatic, and enduring. Certainly public interest and commitment to education reform is beneficial. Without it levies could not be passed, and the function of public education as a democratic institution would be undermined. It poses a series of barriers when reform initiatives are moved in and out of the school before they are given the opportunity to be effective. On average, researchers have found that any education reform will not reach its full impact until 5 to 7 years after implementation, a timeline that far exceeds the lifespan of most initiatives. Education reform must also be an integral part of the budget and the culture, as programs that are dependent on one individual often fail when that individual leaves the school or system.

Ohio needs to set clear goals, incentivize them, implement programs to meet them, and allow the programs time to mature. All pilot programs and state-level initiatives must be subjected to ongoing rigorous evaluation and the programs should be revisited and modified periodically. Programs aimed at education reform cannot be implemented then neglected; continuous evaluation and program modification are critical parts of the process necessary to ensure that programs stay on track to achieve the districts' and schools' goals.

***Defining Education*** Ohio already has a number of explicit goals for our system of education. Detailed standards are set across nearly every subject area and for every grade level. Without a doubt, having academic standards is necessary and beneficial. However, over-reliance on them can lead to a narrowing of education, particularly for the low income schools that are already at risk if they do not post adequate gains on standardized tests. Inevitably, state-administered tests have a direct and immediate impact on what is included in the curriculum as well as the way it is taught. Asking students to regurgitate facts as the primary means of measuring achievement denies them the opportunity to learn how to use and apply the knowledge in more creative ways. Building a populace that has a well-rounded, comprehensive education has social, moral, democratic and economic benefits, and would help move Ohio into a stable, prosperous 21st century.

***Comprehensive Educational Policy*** Most policy reforms work within sectors; education policy is relegated to what goes on within the school, or how schools are constructed. This is problematic and ineffectual however, because those students coming into the school are not isolated from the effects of other social institutions. As previously mentioned, the capacity a child has to learn is based on factors wholly outside the purview of the school, yet we expect schools to be able to equalize students' academic performance. Taking seriously the goal of educating each and every child residing within the State of Ohio requires us to reach into communities and homes with policies that lift up and provide for our children. Education reform requires a strong, seamless education pipeline, equitable funding, high teacher quality and desegregated schools, but it also requires addressing children's physical and emotional needs. Comprehensive educational policy that includes housing and healthcare provides a strong foundation for learning, and gives schools a real chance to provide all children the education they need.

## Summary

As those who work to address educational inequities know, educational reform is neither tidy nor immediately possible. Despite the approaches many reformers try to sell, there is no singular magic bullet that can instantly provide African American children the education they need and deserve. The racialized inequities present in education have been inscribed in the foundation of our educational system since its inception, and have been reinforced across history through both education and housing policy. In order to disentangle our education system from this discriminatory past we need comprehensive systemic reform, not changes that amount to little more than tinkering. Certainly the efforts made across the past decades to reform schools and close the achievement gap have not been made in vain. However, they have done little to disrupt the status quo in education and thus are inherently limited.

Creating an equitable system of education is a moral imperative; the mere presence of the achievement gap has long-term psychological and social impacts as well as profound consequences for our legitimacy as a democracy. Furthermore, it is an economic imperative. The stability of our State in the increasingly globalized economy depends on the education and productivity of all of our citizens. Building the political will and establishing financial support of a more equitable system of education will not only create a strong "State of Black Ohio," it will position Ohio as a national leader in progress. While this stands as a daunting task, Ohio has a tremendous amount of resources that may enable our political leaders to achieve the necessary systemic changes, if the appropriate reforms are implemented.