

College Access and Completion among Boys and Young Men of Color: Literature Review of Promising Practices

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SUMMARY

This literature review examines challenges and promising practices for increasing college access and completion among boys and young men of color. While K-12 educators have focused greater attention on closing gender and racial/ethnic gaps in *academic* readiness for college, our review focuses on a more puzzling phenomenon. Wide gaps in college enrollment and persistence remain even among, for example, Black and Latino boys who reach the end of high school academically prepared for post-secondary education. Consequently, our review moves beyond issues of academic preparation to other factors that appear to mediate college access and success for boys and young men of color.

We begin by examining key challenges drawn from the available literature. We believe that these challenges represent the primary obstacles for boys and young men of color as they navigate preparing for college and persisting to completion. They are: (1) College Undermatch; (2) Imperfect Financial Aid Information and Support; (3) Racial and Stereotype Threat Linked to High School and Post-Secondary Dropout; (4) Experiences of Boys and Young Men of Color as Low-Income, First-generation to Attend Students; and (5) Lack of Equity-Focused Institutional Practices in K-12 and Post-Secondary Education.

Overall, the available literature indicates that a combination of individual interventions and institutional reforms is the optimal path toward supporting boys and young men of color to enroll in and complete college. Specifically, the literature we examined shows that the most promising interventions include an emphasis on identity development; strong relationships with adults and peers; high expectations from adults; group learning opportunities; family engagement; and fostering a sense of belonging, among many other practices. For high school students in particular, the literature indicates that development of college knowledge about the application process and financial aid as well as support toward making a strong college match are critical factors in access and completion. The literature also identified a number of institutional practices for achieving equity in college access and completion among boys and young men of color. High leverage institutional practices include leadership commitment to college completion (on the post-secondary side); inclusion of this commitment in the institution's mission and vision; a clear and transparent system of accountability; and extensive use of data. Finally, we explored in the literature collaborative efforts between K-12 and post-secondary institutions, which, using many of the practices above, have the potential to generate policies and practices that improve outcomes for students starting in K-12, and transitioning into and completing college.

This literature review underscores the urgent need for a combination of individual and institutional approaches to improve college access and completion among boys and young men of color. Work must be situated in both the high school (or earlier) and post-secondary contexts. An individual approach necessitates culturally relevant and responsive, research-supported interventions to address academics, college knowledge, and social and emotional skills and mindsets among students and their families. An institutional approach involves a longstanding commitment among leaders, administrators, teachers and faculty, community stakeholders, and students themselves within and across relevant entities to work in a highly collaborative environment.

In order to actively employ and sustain the promising institutional practices toward equity described in this literature review, leaders must demonstrate firm commitment, a clear vision aligned with the equity goal, and a robust system of accountability.

INTRODUCTION

The significant and alarming disparities in college enrollment, persistence, and completion between boys and young men of color and their non-Hispanic white and Asian¹ peers are well-established. The majority of research that examines college access and completion among boys and young men of color focuses on African American and, to a lesser extent, Latino students. Few analysts have focused on Asian and Asian Pacific Islander or other minority students.² For this reason, this literature review focuses on African American and Latino young men and boys, with greater emphasis on African American young men and boys. Equally concerning is the gender gap that has emerged across all racial and ethnic categories, but which is largest among men and women of color because of the dual effect of race and gender. These disparities hold true both nationally and in California. Nationwide, while Black and Latino students' enrollment has increased, they trail their white counterparts in educational attainment. In the U.S., of all individuals for whom an associate degree is their highest level of education, four percent are African American males and five percent are Latino males, compared with 31 percent who are white males (ACS 1-yr PUMS 2011). In 2010, two of five associate or bachelor's degrees granted to Latino students were earned by Latino males (Saenz and Ponjuan, 2012).

In California, of all individuals for whom an associate degree is their highest level of education, 3 percent are African American males and 10 percent are Latino males, compared to 23 percent who are white males. For Californians whose highest level of education is a bachelor's degree, two percent are African American males and six percent are Latino males, compared to 28 percent who are white males (ACS 1-yr PUMS 2011).

Additionally, across all racial groups, women complete college in much higher numbers than men. Nationally, of those whose highest education is an associate degree, 43 percent are male while 57 percent are female. Looking at those for whom a bachelor's degree is the highest level of education, 53 percent are female and 47 percent are male.

In California's population that earns associate degrees as their highest level of education, 44 percent are male and 56 percent are female. The gender gap narrows slightly among those who earn bachelor's degrees, where 48 percent are males and 52 percent are females. The net effect of both racial and gender disparities amplifies the chasm in post-secondary success for boys and young men of color (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

¹ Excepting among discrete Asian sub-populations, including Hmong, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Khmer youth.

² A notable exception is Robert Teranishi. See, e.g., Teranishi, Robert (2012). *Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Students and the Institutions that Serve Them*, *Change: The Magazine of Higher Education*, Vol.44, p.16-22 (2012). Teranishi reports that half of all Asian American and Pacific Islander students attend community colleges, and many of their ethnic groups (including Indonesians, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, Guamanian, Tongan, and Samoan students) have some of the lowest high school graduation and college degree attainment rates in the United States.

Ample documentation in the literature links post-secondary educational disparities at least partially to the social experiences of boys and young men of color. In one review, for example, David Kirp (2010) has noted that “as early as kindergarten, nearly a quarter of African American boys, three times more than their white counterparts, are already convinced that they lack the innate ability to succeed in school.” As they progress in their education, their behavior and social responses to school norms are frequently misread by teachers and school administrators as non-adaptive or otherwise problematic (Noguera, 2009), which often leads to a number of additional negative consequences, including disproportionality in school discipline and educational attainment in high school (Morris, 2012). Gilberto Conchas (2006) observes that among high poverty families of Latino boys, the standard of academic success is often pegged at high school completion; after high school graduation, a number of Latino boys are expected to work and contribute to family income. Gender disparities in the early elementary school experience also may contribute to the gap in post-secondary completion between males and females. Nancy Lopez (2003) points out that where young girls tend to stay at home with adult figures and in school, boys are more often allowed to spend time outside of school away from home where peer influence is intensified.

More recently, a phenomenon has emerged among a sizable subset of low-income, minority, and/or first-generation to attend students who are academically ready for college and yet do not enroll in a post-secondary institution that matches their academic qualifications or, for that matter, any institution at all. Research suggests that this phenomenon significantly affects not only college matriculation but also completion (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). Both researchers and practitioners identify a number of institutional, as well as individual-level challenges that may be responsible for this trend, and point to practices that may ameliorate it. This literature review will explore these challenges and relevant practices, with a particular focus on African American and Latino boys and young men and what may be missing from existing approaches and programs charged with increasing their college going and completion. Given the target population, we focus primarily on issues in the college knowledge³ (Vargas, 2004) and social and emotional learning, skills and mindsets⁴ that are associated with college going and post-secondary success. As well, we examine those college-going factors that appear to be unique to the experiences of boys and young men of color.

³ Topics addressed in college knowledge frameworks include advice on college preparation, financial aid, and planning, issues that are particularly relevant for low-income, first-generation, or minority students.

⁴ Social and emotional skills and mindsets involve the knowledge and attitudes necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL website, adapted from definition of social and emotional learning -- <http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning>). The National Academy of Sciences organizes 21st century skills into three domains: the cognitive domain involves reasoning and memory; the intrapersonal domain involves the capacity to manage one's behavior and emotions to achieve one's goals (including learning goals); and the interpersonal domain involves expressing ideas, and interpreting and responding to messages from others ((2012). *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century*. Committee on Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills, James W. Pellegrino and Margaret L. Hilton, Editors. Board on Testing and Assessment and Board on Science Education, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.)

CONTRIBUTING CHALLENGES AND RELATED PROMISING PRACTICES

1: College Undermatch

Challenge

A number of scholars have described the problem of “college undermatch,” involving a mismatch between students’ academic qualifications and where they eventually enroll. As a result, students who are qualified and prepared to go to a four-year college can end up in community college or no college at all, which significantly decreases their chances of completion. Undermatch is distinct from “fit,” which moves beyond academics to also include personal, social and financial needs. Research on college match primarily focuses on low-income, first-generation to attend and minority students; within this, findings generally apply to highly qualified students and elite, four-year universities. For these students, the operating theory behind undermatch is based on research that demonstrates that students are more likely to complete college when the college is the most academically selective post-secondary institution that admits them (Bowen, Chingos & McPherson), and sometimes when a college also has a higher graduation rate. However, for lower-achieving students, the most critical component in college completion is not a college’s selectivity level but instead the graduation rate of the admitting institution, separate from match. In other words, a student is more likely to complete college if s/he attends a school with a higher completion rate (Roderick, M., et al., forthcoming).

The extent of college undermatch is pervasive, particularly among low-income minority youth (Smith, Pender & Howell, 2013; Bowen, et al., 2009). A mixed methods study of students in Chicago Public Schools found that close to two thirds of the 2005 graduating class was undermatched (Roderick et al., 2008). A 1999 study of all high school seniors in North Carolina found that 40 percent of highly qualified students did not enroll in a selective college (Bowen, et al., 2009). And, in the first national study on the topic, 41 percent of students undermatched, most often among students from low-income families, living in rural locations with parents who do not have a college degree (Smith, et al., 2013).

Promising Practices

Roderick, et al. (2011) situate the challenge of undermatch within the organizational context of the high school, calling for “urban high schools [to] develop organizational norms and structures that guide students effectively through the college application process.” More specifically, Roderick argues that high schools must provide students and their families with in-depth post-secondary education planning opportunities, including “expectations, information, resources, and supports” needed for successful college choice.

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) took an approach aligned with Roderick’s recommendations, piloting a College Match advising program in three Chicago public high schools; they recently expanded the program to New York City (Byndloss & Reid, 2013). Central actors (other than students) were recent college graduates, trained as “College Match advisers” to work with students from second semester of their junior year in high school through graduation. Advisors employed five primary strategies: (1) information-sharing and awareness

building; (2) individualized advising; (3) application support; (4) parental engagement; and (5) decision making and planning ahead. MDRC's analysts believed that the College Match program is scalable because its strategies can be easily transferred to counselors and other personnel in high schools and to their counterparts in community-based organizations.

A qualitative study focusing exclusively on African American male students appeared to support Roderick and MDRC's approach but took it a step further; findings revealed that students had negative experiences with high school guidance counselors who advised them not to apply to selective private colleges because they would not be accepted. Instead, counselors gave wildly varying direction: some encouraged students to apply to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and comprehensive state universities, while others told their African American male students not to apply to HBCUs because they would lead to limited opportunities (Harper, 2012) (see Institutional Promising Practices, below). A number of students interviewed for the study who attended elite private colleges noted that they would not have ended up where they were if they had heeded their guidance counselors' advice.

In *The Missing 'One-Offs': The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving, Low-Income Students*, Hoxby and Avery (2012) suggested geographic determinants to the undermatch phenomenon, demonstrating that a majority of high-achieving, low-income students in the U.S. do not apply to selective colleges because of three primary reasons: (1) they originate from school districts that are small and/or remote (and therefore, do not contain public high schools that are well-known to college admissions officers); (2) they are not in classes (peer networks) with other high-achieving students; (3) their teachers do not have histories—and therefore the attendant knowledge—that would come from having attended a selective college. Consequently, Hoxby and Avery argued that institutions from which high-achieving, low-income students come are not geographically well-situated and do not help students get the information they need to navigate the highly complicated application processes of selective colleges. They also argued that there is a misperception among such students and their families that attendance at a selective four-year college is more cost-prohibitive than non-selective institutions of post-secondary education, a claim that Hoxby and Avery refute.

In a follow up randomized controlled trial, Hoxby and Turner (2013) examined the efficacy of interventions that offer students primarily web-based, partially customized information on college application and costs, and include paperless waivers of application fees and materials to educate parents about some of the misconceptions they may have about college quality and cost. Materials were sent directly to the students and families rather than to a teacher or counselor. Findings indicated a causal link between students' use of these interventions and their subsequent acceptance and matriculation at selective colleges. Further, freshman grades for these students were on par with those of counterparts in a control group that attended less selective institutions that had fewer resources, lower graduation rates, and students with lower academic qualifications.

2: Imperfect Financial Aid Information and Support

Challenge

Lack of financial aid has long been documented as a barrier to post-secondary persistence and completion. Further, many African American young men drop out of college because they are not able to pay for tuition and related costs; others do not graduate within six years because they are busy working off-campus jobs to finance their education. While accrual of debt may not directly interfere with college completion, it can burden students for years afterwards (Harper, 2012). Research has also demonstrated that minimal numbers of minority students and their families have adequate knowledge of the financial aid system (Kirst & Venezia, as cited in Roderick, 2011).

Promising Practices

Responses to this challenge include the concerted efforts of financial aid officers who can help students to find financial aid beyond typical forms such as Pell grants and work study. Colleges and universities can encourage African American male students to apply for resident assistant programs that cover room and board. They can also reach out to African American young men and their families, along with the high schools and community- and faith-based organizations where they live, to make these intermediaries more aware of the multiple opportunities available to students (Harper, 2012).

Although not specific to boys and young men of color, research has demonstrated positive outcomes in college access from specific efforts to increase awareness of and participation in financial aid, along with making the application process simpler and more accessible. In a comparative study of randomized controlled trials, one approach involved direct support from H&R Block employees to low-to-moderate-income families in filling out the FAFSA form (Federal Application for Financial Aid), providing information on the approximate level of financial aid support they would receive and on local college options. A second approach involved providing customized information on financial aid eligibility but no help filling out the FAFSA form. Findings indicated that students and families who received both help filling out the FAFSA form and information about financial aid eligibility were significantly more likely to complete and submit the FAFSA form, enroll in college in the fall, and receive more financial assistance (Bettinger, et al., 2009).

Research on the relationship between financial aid and college persistence is more limited. However, a 2004 study by Eric Bettinger examined the effect of Pell grants, the largest need-based federal financial aid grants in the United States, on college persistence (Harper, 2012). Findings clearly indicated that Pell grants reduced rates of student drop out, suggesting that they may also positively affect educational attainment in college.

More recently, creative approaches that provide financial aid scholarships on the basis of academic performance have received attention. MDRC, for example, recently published results of a randomized controlled trial in seven states including California, of Performance-Based Scholarships, a financial aid intervention for low-income students given almost entirely to

community college attendees (Patel, et al., 2013). While findings did not indicate an increase in persistence among student recipients of the scholarships, recipients were more likely than control group students to meet the scholarships' academic requirements and also increased the number of credits they earned.

As noted previously, college knowledge is an essential element in improving college-going and completion rates among boys and young men of color—as well as low-income and first-generation college-going students. Directing students to colleges that are strong matches for their academic qualifications and that have high completion rates and supporting students to access financial aid of all types are two prime examples of promising practices in college knowledge. Still needed is longitudinal research on outcomes for those students who take advantage of college match programs to track actual persistence and completion and not just application and enrollment. On the practice side, broadening the target population to include students in college match activities who may not be the “highest achieving” attending the most “elite universities” will also test its efficacy; MDRC's pilots apparently included “B” students. For both college match and innovative financial aid programs, qualitative research could be highly valuable to best understand the experiences of students, families and school administrators in their implementation process.

Both college match and financial aid are situated squarely in the college knowledge dimension of college going. Both can contribute to increased college access and success but more is needed to comprehensively address persistence and completion. Particularly for boys and young men of color, match and financial aid programs cannot be administered in isolation—from each other or from complementary practices that emphasize race and ethnicity, or social and emotional skills and mindsets.

3: Racial and Stereotype Threat Linked to High School and Post-Secondary Dropout

Challenge

Much of the literature that examines the low level of college going and success among boys and young men of color points to issues of racism and stereotype threat that is linked to their withdrawal from educational settings. Claude Steele and others have examined evidence that stereotype threat, or the threat to an individual that others' judgments or their own actions will negatively stereotype them in the [educational] domain, has a significant negative effect on standardized test scores and leads to educational disengagement (Steele, C., 1997). Research on the post-secondary experiences of Latino males is sparse, especially when compared to that focused on African American men. Consequently, this section will include more information from the literature on African American males. And yet, as Harper (2006) argued, “...while troublesome outcomes among and challenges faced by Black males in K-12 schools have been explored and consistently documented, it has only been in recent years that emphasis has been placed on Black male college students.”

Promising Practices

Initiatives and programs to increase college-going among boys and young men of color exist at both the high school and college levels. A recent report examined New York City's Expanded

School Initiative (ESI), a program designed to increase college and career readiness among the city's Black and Latino high school males (Harper, S.R., 2012). Researchers identified several successful practices, including academic rigor and meaningful relationships with caring teachers and adults who work to foster college-going educational environments. Adults used a strengths-based youth development approach in their interactions with students, provided social and emotional support, and communicated clear behavioral expectations and high standards for college and career readiness.

Culturally Relevant Supports and Interventions. To address issues of enrollment, retention and completion of African American males on college campuses, researchers and practitioners have long emphasized the need for culturally relevant supports and interventions (as cited in Harris et al., 2011). Allan (1992) made the case that “any attempt to address the problems faced by African American college students without considering the broader context of issues confronting Blacks as a discriminated minority in America is doomed to fail, for the experiences of Black students in higher education are in part products of larger systemic problems.”

A number of researchers link specific culturally relevant supports with positive outcomes among African American males in college. Identity development is a frequent theme, as described by bell hooks: “In order for African Americans to reclaim their authentic selves, they must learn how to reconcile the conflicts that have emerged from misconceptions internalized about their identity” (p. 59 - hooks, 2004; Rothenberg, 1995 as cited in Johnson and Cuyjet, 2009). Dupre and Gasman (2009) posit that culturally relevant supports that aimed to enhance positive identity development and coping skills among African American males would improve effort and academic and college completion outcomes. That is, when supports are relevant to their culture and identity, African American males are more likely to accept their student role and its positive contribution to their life. Johnson and Cuyjet (2009) also underscored the importance of identity development, suggesting that colleges may look to racial and ethnic identity studies to assist Black males on college campuses in adjusting to an environment where they are vastly underrepresented not only in their culture but also their socioeconomic status. Johnson and Cuyjet connected the sustainability of identity development to African American males engaging in a process of developing community in college. To this end, they identified three related areas: (1) “belongingness” on campus; (2) becoming a “full-fledged member of the campus community and contributing to it;” and (3) creating “community with other Black males.”

Strong relationships or social support networks—with peers, faculty and staff—can be a primary mechanism in facilitating both academic identity and community development for African American males in college (Dupre and Gasman, 2009, Johnson and Cuyjet, 2009). Interpersonal relationships are also directly linked to persistence, the development of educational aspirations, completion of a bachelor's degree, and subsequent enrollment in graduate school among college students overall (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) and among African American males (Harper, 2013). Student involvement in campus extracurricular activities has also been credited with educational persistence and attainment among all college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Specific activities among African American male college students include engagement in campus clubs, activities and groups focused on African American males and their assumption of leadership roles (Harper; Dupre and Gasman). Dawson-Threat (1997, as cited in Kuh, G. D., et al., 2006). found that African American men

benefitted from “more occasions to make connections between the reality of their lives and learning experiences in the classroom. Students need safe spaces to express their personal views, struggle with understanding human differences, and explore their identities.” However, recent research on student engagement among young men in community college showed that an achievement gap persists even in the presence of student engagement. Specifically, Black male students at the highest levels of engagement had lower academic performance than less engaged white male students. Latino male students fell in the middle. This clearly suggests that engagement alone—in the absence of other social and academic supports—is not enough to level the academic playing field (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2013).

Mentoring. Mentoring African American boys and young men in public schools and post-secondary institutions has been shown to be a successful means of supporting students struggling academically (Jackson and Matthews, 1999; Terrell, Hassell, & Duggar, 1992; Pope, 2002 as cited in Sutton, 2006). However, although most mentoring for adolescents focuses on self-esteem and confidence-building, the approach has been almost entirely “instructional” rather than “developmental.” Sutton (2006) argued in favor of developmental mentoring, which emphasizes the mentee’s active involvement in his own development over direct guidance from a mentor. For example, the mentee is given choice and encouraged to make decisions about the relationship; the mentor supports and encourages the development of relationships outside of the mentor-mentee relationship. This approach has specifically manifested as one in which a faculty mentor doesn’t provide “answers” to a mentee’s challenges (personal, educational, professional) but instead celebrates successes and uses challenges to encourage the mentee to explore possible solutions he hadn’t before considered (Selke & Wong, 1993, as cited in Sutton, 2006). Developmental mentoring is not to be done at the exclusion of more “instructional” forms of mentoring, but rather a supplement; males of color can benefit both from direct advice and encouragement to critically assess and explore their options. Staples (1982, as cited in Sutton, 2006) explained that (developmental) mentoring is of use to African American males because “the combination of previous social, cultural and economic forces has historically kept these individuals from mastering vital developmental tasks such as establishing positive self-esteem, control of emotions, positive interpersonal relationships with women, appreciation for academic success, and basic interaction skills during their childhood and adolescent years.”

Family Engagement. The literature also identifies parent and family engagement as a critical factor in the enrollment and success of African American males in post-secondary education. In the largest national qualitative study yet of Black undergraduate males enrolled in a wide variety of four-year post-secondary educational institutions, Shaun Harper (2012) found that parents played a huge role in establishing clear expectations for attending college, despite the fact that only half of parents in the study had received a bachelor’s degree. Parents and family members who had attended particular colleges were also helpful in the choice process.

The challenges and promising practices related to college going among Latino males are similar in a number of ways to those of their African American peers, but obvious and more subtle differences exist. The presence of language barriers, immigration histories, parental illiteracy and the experience of being an English Language Learner in elementary and high school clearly set some Latino boys and young men apart and in many cases, have a profound effect on their education.

Family influence and involvement is a prominent theme in the lives of Latino boys and young men, including their relationship with higher education. Many scholars point to “familismo,” or family connectedness, which results in “Strong feelings of loyalty, responsibility, and solidarity within the Latino family unit” (Marin & Marin, 1991; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995 as cited in Saenz, V.B., and L. Ponjuan, 2009 “The Vanishing Latino Male in Higher Education” *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(1), 54-89). In particular, many Latino males report bearing a responsibility to contribute financially to the family which may in turn push them towards work rather than post-secondary education. Pursuing a college degree may be perceived as an opportunity cost when compared to the potential to begin working and earning income immediately after high school. Negative contributing factors include family messages about high school graduation as an end goal, working to contribute to family finances, and reticence about college loans because of a “cultural stigma around debt and borrowing” (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Cunningham and Santiago, 2008, as cited in Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). On the other hand, the strength of “familismo” and the connections within in it can also be tapped as a mechanism for encouraging Latino males to go to college (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Furthermore, peer networks can influence the college choice for Latino boys and men. A study by Perez & McDonough (2011) found that students followed older friends who were already attending a particular college or decided to attend an institution alongside another friend.

Social and Emotional Learning Skills and Mindsets. In 2011, Saenz and Ponjuan conducted a small qualitative study of Latino males in college at the University of Texas at Austin and University of Florida which found that Latino males do not seek out help because of traditional notions of masculinity, and that this may interfere with their ability to take advantage of supports available to them in college and to engage in activities that could encourage persistence. This finding supports other research focused on boys and young men of color in the community college setting (Gardenhire Crooks, 2010 as cited in Harris and Bensimon, 2010). Saenz and Ponjuan’s conclusions pointed to many of the same supports that have been identified as promising for African American males’ persistence in and completion of college: campus cultural groups such as clubs, affinity groups, groups for Latino males and Latino student centers or leadership councils; mandatory orientation for new students and families; mentoring for support and connections to resources that might eventually lead to a culture of student connectedness, validation, and engagement; and living-learning communities for Latino males.

In the community college setting specifically and throughout the literature about college access and completion for boys and young men of color, high expectations from significant adults play a prominent role. Defined as press and encouragement to excel, along with an unflinching belief in a student’s ability to succeed in college, high expectations that come from parents, teachers, mentors, and others—and behaviors consistent with those high expectations—help with motivation and persistence (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014).

The past decade has been characterized by growing scholarly and public recognition of the significance of social and emotional skills and mindsets associated with educational success (Farrington et al., 2012), including college readiness and achievement. Two studies by Walton and Cohen (2007, 2011) found a link between social belonging on college campuses and improved academic outcomes among students of color using a series of relatively simple

interventions. The first study (Walton & Cohen, 2007) was a randomized controlled trial of first-year African American and white college students. The study offered students of color a different lens through which to understand their academic difficulties, encouraging them to link their feelings of not belonging in school to the difficulties all students face (regardless of ethnicity) rather than social identity. Through a series of presented surveys and laboratory sessions, students in the experimental group received a consistent message that upperclassmen from all racial and ethnic backgrounds had worried about their own (social) acceptance during the first year of college. Students participating in the study were then asked to reflect on this information through daily questionnaires and self-reports on personal adversity. Findings revealed that Black students in the treatment group studied more and had higher GPAs than those in the control group and Black students campus-wide, and communicated more with their professors. There was no effect on white students in the treatment group.

The second study was a similar randomized controlled trial, this time with a three-year observation period involving two cohorts of Black and European American college students in the second semester of their first year. Researchers delivered a narrative to those in treatment group that depicted feelings of social lack of belonging in school as transient and normal. They discouraged students from interpreting lack of social belonging as unique and unchangeable in them (a fixed mindset) “but rather as common and transient aspects of the college adjustment process.” Researchers conveyed this message to students by presenting them with ostensible findings from a report of a survey of older students. Students in the treatment group then wrote an essay about their own similar experiences, converted it into a speech and then videotaped it to be used with students making the transition to college. Findings after a three-year post-intervention period raised African American students’ GPAs relative to several control groups and “halved the minority achievement gap.”

4: Experiences of Boys and Young Men of Color as Low-Income, First-Generation to Attend Students

Challenge

A large body of literature on college access and completion examines boys and young men of color—“minority students”—within the context of other underrepresented students who are low-income and/or first-generation to attend, and women. Most practices and programs highlighted in this section are well established and known to college access and completion stakeholders; here we provide the research base for many of them. The practices and programs are differentiated from one another based on where they are delivered—in the high school or college setting.

Promising Practices

High School Practices. Savitz-Romer and Bouffard (2012) pointed to the relative lack of emphasis on social and emotional skills and mindsets in all college access programs for these populations as another possible contributor to their low rates of college going and completion.

Consistent with the previously-cited literature focused on boys and young men of color in post-secondary education, these practitioner-researchers argue that although programs must

continue to include a strong focus on college knowledge, they also must be deeply rooted in *adolescent development theory* if students are to persist and complete. More specifically, they argued for an additional focus on (1) identity development and exploration and practitioners' fostering a "college-going identity;" (2) intrinsic motivators (mastery-focused on learning) that derive from personal interests and goals along with existing extrinsic motivators (performance-focused on getting ahead of others) such as a desire for economic success beyond that of their parents; (3) self-regulation; and (4) genuine parent involvement that engages parents as partners in the process, providing education and guiding them to have high expectations and provide encouragement and support to their children throughout the process. As such, the authors implied that current programs may successfully get students *into* college (extrinsically motivated by financial supports, e.g.) but have a difficult time sustaining their persistence without attention to intrinsic motivators ("Why am I here?").

Frequently cited effective practices in the high school setting are mentoring and intrusive advising. Generally, student relationships with caring, competent adults and supportive peer networks help to facilitate the positive youth development opportunities necessary for successful transitions through middle and high school into college. When adults provide a safe, personalized school environment, students can interact with positive adult role models, schools can identify academic and social problems in earlier grades, and schools and families can strengthen their relationships. Cooperative and positive peer relationships also contribute to a sense of a supportive school climate; young adult mentors from similar communities and backgrounds as students can provide strong examples of college success (Hooker, S., et al. 2009).

Mentoring and intrusive advising are two practices that have been shown to lead to increased academic motivation and persistence among high school students. A study of mentoring program relationships, experiences and benefits for higher-risk youth revealed that in addition to improving mental health, participants in mentoring programs demonstrated gains in social acceptance and academic performance (Herrera, C., 2013). Mentoring promotes positive social attitudes and relationships among students. In addition, mentored youth have better school attendance, an increased likelihood of going on to higher education, and better attitudes toward school (Jekielek, S., 2002).

Intrusive advising, which involves intentional contact and relationship-building with students, differs from the more traditional advising models because advisors are not only helpful and encouraging figures for students, but they proactively initiate contact with students. Students who perceive that someone cares about them and that they belong to the school community are more likely to be academically successful than those who do not feel any sense of care on the part of the institution (Heisserer, D.L. & Parette, P. 2002).

High School Programs. Research indicates that high school programs that are most successful in increasing college enrollment and retention emphasize elements of strong mentoring relationships, relevant youth-centered practices, academic rigor and support, and effective instruction. Programs like Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and TRIO employ different combinations of these programmatic elements in order to provide assistance to students who are typically underrepresented in the college system.

AVID is a college readiness system for elementary through higher education designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. AVID is designed to serve students in the “academic middle,” motivating them both academically and attitudinally and seeking to raise academic expectations and foster a college-going culture at school. More than 70% of 2013 AVID students were Latino and African American, many of whom will be first-generation college-goers. Furthermore, 74% of AVID students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch (AVID General Data Collection, 2012-2013). AVID has demonstrated consistent success in college enrollment: three out of four AVID students who applied to four-year colleges or universities were accepted, and are twice as likely as their non-AVID peers to complete university entrance requirements (AVID Senior Data Collection 2012-2013; Greene, J.P. and Forster, G. 2003).

Upward Bound, one of the first and largest of the TRIO programs, provides high school students from underrepresented groups with college-preparatory academic and nonacademic enrichment classes, tutoring and academic support, as well as guidance through the college search and application process. The program is focused on building up students’ college-going identities and academic preparedness through exposure to college environments and rigorous coursework. A longitudinal study of Upward Bound found that the program significantly increased the number of high school credits earned by students at greater levels of academic risk. Participants in Upward Bound were also more likely to earn a post-secondary certificate or license from a vocational school; students participating in Upward Bound for a longer period of time were also more likely to enroll in a four-year institution and earn a bachelor’s degree (Seftor, N. S., et al. 2009).

Summer Bridge seeks to address the period between high school and college, in which students who have been accepted to college or even have committed to enroll in college fail to matriculate in the fall, a phenomenon termed “summer melt.” An experimental study found that for low-income students at Big Picture high schools, active college counseling during the summer after high school graduation led to substantially higher rates of college enrollment. Additionally, assisted students were more likely to engage in higher quality enrollment—students that received summer college counseling had higher rates of full-time enrollment and attendance at 4-year universities (Castleman, B. L., et al., 2012). Bridge programs assist first-generation college students to transition from secondary to post-secondary schooling by introducing them to college campuses, taking a course for college credit, and providing peer advisors, faculty, and staff as a support system before the official school year begins. Such bridge programs have been shown to assist minority students in navigating their way to and through post-secondary education (Fenske, R.H., et al., 1997).

College Practices. Research on practices at the post-secondary level indicates that successful strategies typically include high quality first-year programming, student engagement and involvement, and mentoring and advising services. Several practices focus on engaging students during the first-year transition, while others work to foster academic and social involvement throughout the span of college years (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2013). Research demonstrates that institutions with high graduation rates had more programs that eased new students’ entry and adjustment to college, including learning communities, study groups, block registering of students, tutoring, and other programs (The Pell

Institute, 2004, Fall). Engaging students early helps them to envision clear pathways to college success and enables students to connect with their educational experience in a meaningful way (Kuh, G. D., et al., 2010).

As students transition to college, practices such as structured, high quality academic advising and mentoring assist students in navigating the college landscape and increase rates of college completion. While many forms of advising exist at the post-secondary level, it has been found that students are most likely to persist and graduate college when advisors focus on addressing the needs of the undecided students, students who change majors, and first-generation students. Furthermore, academic advising is most successful when it is responsive to the developmental needs of individual students; while advising can help students with educational planning, advisors can encourage students to participate in campus events and interact with peer groups. Similarly, mentoring strategies have shown to increase rates of college persistence and completion. In an evaluation of student mentoring, students from public, private, and proprietary universities who were randomly assigned to a coach were more likely to persist during the treatment period, and were more likely to be attending the university one year after the coaching had ended. Coaching also proved a more cost-effective method of achieving retention and completion gains when compared to previously studied interventions such as increased financial aid (Bettinger, E. & Baker, R., 2011).

The creation of campus communities serves as another means of engaging and involving students, whether through learning communities, residence halls, or student success initiatives. Models of student engagement that promote team building, cooperative learning, and personal relationships with college faculty and staff have been shown to contribute to post-secondary success (Hooker, S., et al., 2009). When colleges work to highlight certain learning activities, students are more likely to engage in them. For example, when faculty members emphasize educational practices such as writing, active and collaborative learning, or using diverse perspectives to understand issues, students are more likely to engage in these activities (Kuh, G. D., et al., 2004).

College Programs. On college campuses, high quality academic and social support programs can assist students in the transition to college and foster a positive environment for college success. Research shows that specific programs that have successfully increased college persistence among low-income, first-generation, and minority students integrate elements such as first-year orientation, transition courses and first-year seminars, learning communities, advising, tutoring, supplemental instruction, peer tutoring, study skills workshops, mentoring and student support groups, student-faculty research, and senior capstone projects.

Umoja Community is a California-based program specifically designed for African American college students, rooted in African culture and identity as a means to promote self efficacy and ultimately academic success among participating students. The program emphasizes persistence and retention in school with a focus on individual, specified goals. Umoja takes a “whole student” approach of affecting body, mind, and spirit and “deliberately engages students as full participants in the construction of knowledge and critical thought.” Umoja’s “community model” incorporates learning communities, cohorts, and other support services include mentoring and peer mentoring, tutoring, and service learning. Umoja community programs

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come about at the institutional level—through partnerships with numerous local community college campuses across the state which integrate the program’s approach with the institution’s mission, strategic goals and any efforts toward equity. Umoja requires partnering colleges to set aside a designated space for its students in addition to incorporating its program components. Umoja offers three scholarships per year, which often take the form of “transfer scholarships” as students move from the community college setting to a four-year institution. Apart from the student level, Umoja offers professional development on issues of equity and diversity, particularly among African American students, to staff and administrators of participating colleges.

Programs such as UPHigh (Uniting Potential with Experience for Higher Learning) focus on building personal mentoring relationships to provide academic advising and social support. Based in Oakland, UPHigh is a four-year mentorship program that helps low-income, first-generation students transition into and thrive at institutions of higher learning. UPHigh forms deep mentoring relationships to provide students with knowledge, experience, and guidance that will ultimately help them remain enrolled and complete college.

PUENTE is comprised of academic and mentoring programs for community college students; the model combines personal mentoring and community leadership with academic counseling and rigorous writing instruction with great success. In 2009–10, the community-college-to-four-year-college transfer rate of PUENTE participants was 56% compared to 44% for all California Community College students and 34% of educationally disadvantaged students. The number of PUENTE student transfers to four-year colleges continues to increase annually, with a 44% increase in transfers between 2001 and 2009.

The longstanding Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) has improved educational access and opportunity for more than 250,000 low-income, first-generation students throughout California, the majority of whom are first-generation college students. EOP offers a series of services, including admission counseling, academic advising, peer mentoring, and courses offered in conjunction with academic departments, student success workshops, tutoring, Graduation Writing Test preparation, and supplemental financial assistance.

Most, recently, MDRC has reported on promising findings from the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) intervention at the City University of New York. This program focuses on helping students avoid non-credit bearing developmental (remedial) courses to which many students are assigned because they are deemed unprepared for college-level work. Prior studies show that few students complete their developmental requirements, and only 15 percent earn a credential within six years. Instead, through a set of scaffolded supports, ASAP helps low-income, predominantly minority students complete community college faster. The program includes a requirement to attend full time as well as special seminars and classes, advising and career services, tuition waivers to cover gaps in financial aid. Interim results from the MDRC study indicate that the program has increased participant retention each semester by 8 to 10 percentage points, the number of credits earned by 25 percent, and the proportion of students graduating in two-and-a-half years by as much as 15 percentage points. Over one-third of the study sample is male; and early indications are that these effects are likely to grow substantially by the end of three-year study (Wimer and Bloom, 2014).

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Overall, research shows that typically it is not one college access practice or program that produces positive results for low-income, first-generation minority students. Often, a combination of practices and programs, intentionally designed to meet the specific needs of students they aim to reach, are most successful in improving college enrollment, persistence, and completion.

5: Lack of Equity-Focused Institutional Practices in K-12 and Post-Secondary Education

Challenge

As recently as the mid-1970's fewer than half of high school graduates went to college directly from high school. Since then, the percentage of high school students going into four-year colleges has risen by about 25 percent and the percentage going directly into community college from high school has risen by 50 percent (Conley, 2014). As David Conley noted in his recent study of the Common Core State Standards curriculum, these changes largely reflect a growing public response to changes in the global economy where individual success will be a function not just of what one has learned, but what one is capable of learning throughout the course of a productive lifetime. Conley noted that the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, by more than 40 states, including California, is the culmination of a two-decades-long institutional move to universal "college and career readiness" as a standard for K-12 education. Nevertheless, and as we have noted in earlier parts of this review, there is a wide acknowledgement that academic preparedness is only one component of college readiness. The greatest institutional challenge to equitable access to college readiness opportunities for boys and young men of color will focus on whether elementary and secondary schools build the social and emotional skills and mindsets that mediate academic persistence and tenacity in a way that leads to academic success for youth. As well, the new standards will need to be buttressed by state and district-level accountability systems that promote equitable access to learning opportunities for boys and young men of color.

Promising Practices

K-12 Institutions. Two developments with local instantiations in California seek to advance equitable access to learning opportunities within the new focus on college readiness in public schools. The first is that public school systems across the country are increasingly working to incorporate social and emotional learning into the mainstream of public education, especially in low-performing schools and neighborhoods. A collaboration of schools, with the support of the federal government and the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) are working to extend instructional practice beyond academic content learning and to promote academic success through school-wide attention to students' self-awareness, social awareness, relationship, and responsible decision-making skills, and through improved student attitudes and beliefs about self, others and school (CASEL, 2014). Two school districts in California—Sacramento and Oakland Unified—have adopted a social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum districtwide. In Oakland, for example, the SEL work has been incorporated explicitly into districtwide efforts to promote academic success among Black, Latino, and Southeast Asian boys in schools. These efforts are in the early stages of development but bear watching as they focus directly on the relationship between SEL learning and boys and young men of color.

The other major issue that will bear on the success of boys and young men of color with respect to new college and career ready standards is whether school accountability systems will reflect a focus on equitable access to learning opportunities. Here the efforts of the seven California school districts that are organized under the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) are instructive. Leaders of the consortium have recognized that in order to ensure greater access to the college and career standards for vulnerable subpopulations, including boys and young men of color, all district schools will need an accountability system that makes success more visible. To this end, CORE district leaders have developed a school accountability system where racial disparity in performance along a wide array of indicators will account for as much as 50 percent of performance points. The system will explicitly look at racial and linguistic disparity in academic performance as well as in graduation rates, suspensions, chronic absence, middle school persistence, placement into special education, and other social, emotional, and school climate factors. The system will be tested for the first time during the 2014-15 school year and is intended to improve accountability for boys of color and other youth vulnerable to poor academic performance and success.

Post-Secondary Institutions. In *The Equity Scorecard: A Process for Building Institutional Capacity to Educate Young Men of Color*, Harris, Bensimon and Bishop (2010) argued that a key gap in the existing literature on boys and young men of color in higher education is that “students rather than institutions are consistently prioritized as the units of analyses...[and that] strategies to build institutional capacity—beyond programmatic interventions...are therefore largely absent.” The authors go on to describe the equity scorecard; intended for institutions of higher education, it uses an evidence-based, collaborative approach that enables administrators to assess how their institution is meeting the needs of boys and young men of color in areas of access, academic progress, academic attainment, and excellence. The scorecard’s goal is to break down barriers and challenges with equity connected to male students of color by “developing practitioners’ contextualized awareness of inequities in educational outcomes, rather than on support programs for students, because it places practitioners in the role of researchers who collect, analyze, and interpret student-outcome data.” The process that the scorecard enables aims to move practitioners’ attention away from student deficits to what they, and their own institutions or departments, might be doing to exacerbate the problem or might not be doing at all. Ultimately, the message underlying the scorecard and its process is that leaders need to treat educational equity as an accountability issue for which they are responsible.

Use of the equity scorecard requires routine collection, analysis, and group review of data, another issue of great importance to improving the outcomes of boys and young men of color at the institutional level. The use of integrated longitudinal data across institutions increases the depth and breadth of information and therefore chances for success when resulting action is taken. Integrated longitudinal data also acts as an objective neutralizer within and between institutions that have common goals of improving post-secondary outcomes for underserved students. Moreover, creating a culture and value around data integration and review that involves students, faculty, administrators, and high-level department heads can lead to a systematic and sustainable means of addressing inequities in secondary and post-secondary institutions. For example, using data as a centerpiece, a three-year collaborative effort between

the San Francisco Unified School District, City College of San Francisco, and the Mayor's Office in San Francisco led to an early warning system in San Francisco Unified; a priority enrollment program at City College for first-time students from San Francisco Unified and a resulting increase in full-time enrollment and short term persistence among those students. Additionally, a groundbreaking pilot alternative placement program was put forth to address issues of remediation using multiple measures of assessment to help determine appropriate placement of students in college courses (Gurantz, Scolari and Carew, 2013).

The Irvine Foundation, between 2000 and 2006, invested \$29 million in the Campus Diversity Initiative (CDI) to support the persistence and completion of underrepresented students at 28 independent colleges and universities across California. While CDI wasn't focused only on boys and young men of color, many of the findings and lessons learned may be instructive for institutional efforts on behalf of that population specifically. The Foundation also funded an evaluation of CDI, in part by requiring participating institutions to collect data on a common set of indicators. The initiative employed four primary strategies: (1) Programs for individual students, e.g. admissions outreach, financial aid, gateway courses, summer programs; (2) Improvements to campus climate and connections for minority students, such as campus programs and events, communications on diversity from leadership, living-learning communities and assessments of campus climate; (3) Efforts to include more faculty from diverse backgrounds, offer faculty professional development, support for curriculum changes; and (4) Focusing on diversity as an institutional goal, such as accountability toward diversity goals with senior administrative and academic leadership.

Findings from the evaluation related to access indicated a consistent increase in racial and ethnic diversity over a four-year period for most participating schools; specifically, 29% growth of African American and Latino/a students at each of the 27 schools (Smith, D., et al., 2012). Findings related to student persistence showed that overall, participating schools had higher six-year graduation rates compared to other universities and colleges in California, and this held true for participating schools with low completion rates for underrepresented minority students when compared to California State University and UC schools.

Lessons learned from CDI are largely consistent with those in the literature about institutional change: the importance of a strategic plan and leadership commitment to universal student success as an institutional goal, and data use and accountability practices aligned with equity goals (West, Shulock, and Moore, 2012). Beyond this, initiative lessons also focused on the importance of tracking the success and retention of faculty of color and tracking hiring levels using data. A related and highly significant lesson involved enabling faculty to pursue topics of diversity in their specific disciplines. Both of these practices allow the institution to work with faculty and staff to ensure cultural competency and address implicit bias and a need for a content focused on diversity through scholarship—a different means of addressing equity.

In 2002, the University System of Georgia (USG) launched its African American Male Initiative (AAMI) based, in part, on a startling gender gap among African American students enrolling in and completing degrees in its universities. Beginning with a mixed-methods research study on the extent of and reasons for the low enrollment and completion of African American males, the initiative was "laser-focused on Black males' college completion." Initiative leaders used findings

from the study over ten years to develop programs and establish policies across University of Georgia campuses that were focused on engaging and retaining Black male students. The USG developed 36 programs on 26 of its 35 campuses that rely heavily on living-learning communities with a broad range of foci: leadership development; writing about the African American athletic experience; orientation, planning, and general support to first-generation to attend students; Summer Bridge; and the African American male experience. Results after nine years demonstrate significant increases across the board—in enrollment, retention, and graduation—of African American males in the University System of Georgia. African-American male enrollment increased by 80.73%; the six-year graduation rate increased by 11.4% for a cohort entering in 2005 and completing in 2011; and the number of bachelor's degrees earned annually increased by 58.11% between 2003 and 2011 (University System of Georgia's African American Male Initiative website, accessed at http://www.usg.edu/aami/AAMI_Booklet_UPDATED.pdf, 6/19/14).

A review by the Education Trust of the public four-year colleges and universities that have increased graduation rates the most for minority students (Engle & Theokas, 2010), demonstrated that data was integral to an effort at Georgia State University. From 2002 to 2007, the minority graduation rate at Georgia State rose by 18.4 percentage points, from 32.3% to 50.7%, and by 2010, the minority rate was higher than that for non-minority students. Using data, university leaders uncovered high rates of failure in introductory courses, low credits earned in the first year, and high drop outs between sophomore and junior years (potentially connected to the requirement for declaration of a major). In response, administrators added first-year learning communities which had a large effect on retention and used data to help address issues such as waiting lists and to establish priority enrollment.

Also authored by the Education Trust, a case study of California State University (CSU)—Northridge highlighted additional important institutional practices—including data use—that ultimately helped the school nearly double their graduation rates over 10 years; in five years, they increased the graduation rate for Latino students by eight percentage points (Brusi, 2014). The school sustained leadership with clear vision and goals focused on completion; realigned resources toward the completion goal; and used data to examine movement on retention and graduation rates. They also formed strong advisory coalitions and teams, particularly between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs that brainstormed how to address a lack of preparation among students while balancing maintenance of high academic standards and careful attention to how students learn. Data was also described as the “main tool” the coalitions “used to ask and answer what was working and what wasn't.” Additionally, after applying new or improved practices (e.g., clearing pathways to degree, early warning systems, learning communities, and restructuring advising), CSU-Northridge employed an iterative process of experimenting, examining the data, and, based on results, changing and improving.

Additional research examining institutional practices at the post-secondary level shows that high academic standards; strong institutional coalitions or committees; effective use of data; and a commitment to engaging, high quality introductory instruction contribute to higher rates of college retention and completion among low-income, first-generation minority students. One study examined remedial course redesign at 30 research universities, comprehensive universities, private colleges, and community colleges nationwide. The redesign was intended to

make introductory courses more focused on the learner, emphasizing computer-based resources, mastery learning, and on demand help. After the redesign, 25 schools showed significant increases in student learning. Students showed improved attitudes toward subject matter and were more satisfied with mode of instruction (Twig, C. A., & Lumina Foundation for Education, 2005).

Colleges may use strategies at the setting or classroom level such as attendance policies to sustain student performance throughout college. The Center for Community College Engagement, which sought to identify high-impact educational practices in community colleges, reveals that when teachers clearly explain their attendance policies, specifying the number of classes that can be missed without penalty, there is a positive relationship with benchmarks such as student effort, academic challenge and support for learners. Additionally, students whose teachers are engaged in early warning systems have higher rates of engagement across five benchmarks: (1) active and collaborative learning, (2) student effort, (3) academic challenge, (4) student-faculty interaction, and (5) support for learners (CCCSE, 2013. *A Matter of Degrees: High-Impact Practices for Community College Student Engagement*).

Previously-referenced literature addressing the specific needs of boys and young men of color also speaks to the need for institutional reform to improve outcomes. Recommendations to both secondary and post-secondary institutions include: aggressive recruitment of faculty of color, in-depth exploration and training of high school counselors on issues of race and ethnicity, and professional development for college counselors and teachers of high school students to increase objectivity so that they may provide their students with guidance based on qualifications and personal needs and interests as opposed to potentially discriminatory or biased beliefs (Harper, 2012). Squarely on the post-secondary side, Strayhorn (2008) supported the aforementioned need for collaborations between administrators from Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to develop and help deliver interventions because of the “historical divide” between the two offices. Strayhorn also echoes the need for diversity workshops, faculty diversity training, and self-reflexive activities (e.g., journals, dialogue) as well as aggressive faculty hiring policies. Also on the program (intervention) side for boys and young men of color, strong evidence exists supporting a multi-pronged approach through collaborations among programs that share similar goals even if the service focus is different (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008 and 2012).

CONCLUSION

This literature review underscores the urgent need for a combination of individual and institutional approaches to improve college access and completion among boys and young men of color. Work must be situated in both the high school (or earlier) and post-secondary contexts. An individual approach necessitates culturally relevant and responsive, research-supported interventions to address academics, college knowledge and social and emotional skills and mindsets among students and their families. An institutional approach involves a longstanding commitment among leaders, administrators, teachers and faculty, community stakeholders and students themselves within and across relevant entities to work in a highly collaborative environment.

Many of the most promising individual practices that promote college access and completion among boys and young men of color apply to both high school and college students: supportive adults and peers, high expectations, and family engagement, among others. Those more directly applicable to high school include development of college knowledge about the college application process and financial aid as well as support toward a strong college match. Those more directly specific to college include development of a college-going identity, participation in learning communities, and enabling a sense of belonging.

Institutional reforms to improve college access and completion among boys and young men of color in both secondary and post-secondary institutions must also go beyond academic supports to include social and emotional skills and mindsets and school climate. Efforts in the K-12 system must support the Common Core State Standards and those at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels should include a data-driven process with an unwavering vision toward completion and a strong system of accountability. The Inter-segmental collaborative approach described above is a way to involve both “sides” in the process, potentially improving outcomes for all students, raising all boats.

Challenges abound in efforts toward positive change in college access and completion for boys and young men of color. With direct interventions for all students, institutions often must choose between intensity and scale (Rutschow, et al. 2011). Specific to the boys and young men of color population, a report by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014) finds that “Many campuses have tried to serve men of color more effectively by introducing highly personal, engaging—but very small—boutique programs. While these programs may have positive effects on participating students, they typically serve far too few students, and they are neither readily nor often brought to scale.” Scaling direct service programs is a ubiquitous but surmountable problem and the solutions often lie in promising practices themselves. Many programs have successfully scaled by demonstrating their evidence base while small, which generates funding. Beyond high-impact practices, program design can play a significant role in scaling, through approaches that reach groups of students, capitalizing on the importance of relationships and personal connections without compromising quality. Enlisting peers or recent college graduates with similar cultural backgrounds to work in programs can also be an asset when scaling. Acknowledging and incorporating context as a critical factor in scaling can determine its success or failure; allowing some flexibility in design depending on context goes a long way toward meeting the needs of local implementers and students.

Institutional reform efforts face challenges due to their very nature: they require shifting often longstanding institutional practices, policies and ways of working, many of which have been part of the very fabric of the institution and carried out by people who have worked in the institution for years. In order to actively employ and sustain the promising institutional practices toward equity described in this literature review, leaders must demonstrate firm commitment, a clear vision aligned with the equity goal, and a robust system of accountability.

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