



THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

Week of Aug. 15-19, 2011

CA Legislators to Study the Status of Boys and Men of Color

By UCLA IDEA

California legislators have embarked on a yearlong examination of school attainment, health, incarceration and other issues that affect the well-being and life outcomes of the state's boys and young men of color. Research has established patterns of social and economic success associated with factors such as race, wealth, gender, immigration status and more. These patterns, along with the conditions and policies that underlie them, will be studied by the newly formed Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color.

The committee held its first of five hearings on Wednesday. It heard first-hand accounts of individual experiences as well as expert testimony describing the challenges and vulnerabilities that boys and men of color face—particularly in the areas of education, justice, employment and health.

Unequal opportunities affect the prosperity and quality of life of all Californians, not just the most disadvantaged groups. The committee intends to look beneath the broad demographic labels of wealth and race to inform policies designed to improve opportunities for boys and men of color—the group that is currently at greatest risk.

California's success as a decent and economically viable place to live depends on the extent to which young men of color succeed in school and work. Too many of these young men currently lack resources to keep healthy; they may lack access to quality schools or appropriate training for jobs. Young men of color are less likely than other Californians to graduate high school or college and more likely to spend time in jail.

John Rogers, director of IDEA, presented data on educational opportunities and outcomes. Rogers described for the committee research findings on schools with highest proportions of Latino, African American and American Indian students. These students are more likely to experience crowded classrooms, less qualified teachers and an overall lack of resources. Furthermore, when disaggregated by gender, young men of color lagged even further behind.

Almost twice as many African American girls than boys are enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. Twenty percent Latino male students compared to 30 percent female students take the SAT exam in their senior year. In both African American and Latino populations, the girls were seventy percent more likely to graduate having completed required A-G coursework for eligibility in UC and Cal State.

These substantial gender differences suggest that explanations for the achievement gap are complex and that policymakers need to consider many factors *along with* race. The committee's hearings will allow legislators to account for *all* community factors that impact educational attainment and success while bringing urgent attention to the disproportionately low outcomes for boys of color.

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Bradly Palmer, a 16-year-old youth leader, told the legislators at the hearing that policy deliberations need to include youth voice. "I'm giving you the opportunity to listen and you're giving me the opportunity to speak. We're an asset to each other and to make decisions about youth we need to be an asset to each other."

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