Extended Abstract: Black male students in New York City and their educational trajectories

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Black male students in New York City exhibit a wide variety of hardships and disadvantages that pointedly indicate their educational needs are not being met. This is true with respect to educational attainment and most indicators of academic performance. Nationally, there is a growing income gap of $174 in median weekly income between those who have a high school diploma and those who do not (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002; U.S. Department of Labor, 2006). According to a 2006 study of the New York City labor market, the Black male unemployment rate is over 50 percent.

According to multiple indicators, the proportion of minority and low-income high school students in New York City meeting proficiency targets and ready to attend postsecondary institutions is low, but for Black males, the numbers are even lower. In 2006, the graduation rate for Black males in New York City was only 26 percent (Schott Foundation, 2006). Nationally, while from 1973 to 1977 there was a steady increase in Black male enrollment in college, since 1977 there has been a sharp and continuous decline (National Research Council, 1989; Carnoy, 1994).

Current research, including studies conducted by the Chicago Consortium and Parthenon Group on graduation and dropout trajectories, offers certain information about the pipeline to school dropout. These studies provide useful information that can be incorporated into policy and program design for at-risk students in general. These reports show:

- o Indicators from elementary and middle school are strong predictors of later dropout including: low attendance, teacher reports of poor behavior, failure in math or English courses (Belfanz and Herzog, 2005), and retention (Alexander et al., 1997; Parthenon Group, 2005).

- o Grades, attendance, and failure in one or more courses in 9th grade strongly predict the likelihood or unlikelihood of high school completion (Allensworth & Eastin, 2007). These three factors combined create a strong indicator of whether or not students are "on-track" towards graduation.

- o Dropouts in New York City are overwhelmingly over-age and under-credited by the end of their freshmen year in high school. Students who participate in "Multiple Pathway" programs appear to have some promise for a successful future. In 2005, 56 percent of over-age, under-credited students in small-sized transfer schools graduated from high school, compared to 19 percent in comprehensive schools (Parthenon, 2005).

With regard to Black males specifically, research offers only general lessons, which are typically focused on their over-representation in categories that predict poor performance and likelihood of dropping out, such as:

o Rates of suspension, expulsion from school, and arrests in school settings (Meier, Stewart, and England, 1989; Skiba et al., 2002);

o Special education classifications of mildly mentally retarded, emotional disturbance, and/or learning disabled (Orfield, 2004; NCCRESt, 2004);

o Enrollment in poorly resourced, poor performing schools (Rothstein, 2004) that are highly segregated by race and class (Orfield, & Lee 2006).

However, research is generally designed to test these factors on broadly defined categories of students, such as race or gender, that do not take into account the variation that exist within these broad groupings. Hence, research has often produced simplistic dichotomous "either/or" findings. We know a lot about the young men with the worst outcomes while the opposite, or "doing well" outcomes are often defined as the "absence" of these characteristics. As a result, we know little about the complex pathways of educational experiences that may exist for Black male students in the public school system which would be required to make more targeted decisions on where to intervene or select appropriate interventions for Black male students in New York City. Furthermore, while supplemental education programs both within schools and within neighborhoods have proliferated, we still have relatively little understanding of which programs serving Black male children and youth in the city are successful in improving their educational outcomes, and if so, how they are doing it. Taken together, such research can lead to poorly informed policymaking and strategy implementation, in spite of the presence of promising and innovative programs that may exist in the city.

We will be using a longitudinal dataset originally obtained from the New York City Department of Education, New York State Education Department, and US Department of Education Common Core Data. This was linked to the student level data obtained from the NYCDOE's Department of Assessment and Accountability (DAA). The dataset consists of 11,403 Black male boys who were expected to graduate from the NYC public schools in 2006/2007. Student and school level data spans 1998 to 2007.

Our method uses a statistical technical called hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to determine how much of the pattern of change in a measure of academic achievement is due to the various factors associated with this measure. For example, some Black Male students start out with high scores on reading tests in the 4th grade, but as they get older, their reading scores grow rapidly. Other students start out with high scores on reading tests in the 4th grade, but as they get older, their reading scores grow more slowly. Still other students start out with low scores on reading tests in the 4th grade, but as they get older, their reading scores catch up to the reading scores of students, who were more advanced at the outset. HLM will enable us to examine the variation in patterns of change of academic achievement and determine how much of the variation is associated with family characteristics (such as whether or not the student lives in a single or two-parent family, or whether or not the student is eligible for the Free/Reduced Lunch Program, a proxy for family income), school characteristics (such as the student teacher ratio) , teacher characteristics (such as the proportion of teachers who teach in subjects for which they were especially trained) , etc. The key outcome measures we will examine are math and English exams in the elementary school years and credit course completion in the high school years.

Thus, the rationale behind our study is to focus exclusively on Black male students, the demographic group with the lowest graduation rates in New York City, and to identify where and how best to allocate educational resources to improve their educational outcomes. This will facilitate targeted decisions about when to intervene and the kinds of interventions most needed.

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