Executive Summary

Introduction

Over the past ten years, much of the concern over the so-called "achievement gap" - the pervasive disparities in academic achievement - has centered on the performance of boys of color [1]. The reason for concern is not surprising: boys of color are conspicuously overrepresented on most indicators associated with risk and academic failure (Fergus, Noguera, and Martin, 2014). While many other groups of students are also more likely to underperform in school—English language learners (ELL), students with learning disabilities (SWD), students from low-income families— the vast array of negative outcomes associated with boys of color, which also intersect ELL, SWD, and low-income status, distinguishes them as among the most vulnerable populations. All of the most important quality-of-life indicators suggest that boys of color face a wide variety of hardships that, generally speaking, impede their abilities to succeed both socially and academically.

Gradually, as awareness of these patterns and the social costs associated with them has grown, educators, community groups, and policy makers have begun formulating a response. In recent years, several private foundations (e.g., the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundation, Schott Foundation, and California Endowment, to name just a few) and public officials at the local, state, and federal levels of government have called for urgent measures to address the negative trends associated with Black and Latino males and to reverse the patterns. In August 2011, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced that he and billionaire philanthropist George Soros were donating $200 million of their own fortunes and redirecting millions more in public funds to a variety of initiatives that they felt would address the "crisis" confronting Latino and African American males. Similar initiatives have been launched in other communities throughout the country. And in 2014, President Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative, which set out to establish federal, state and local commitments to address specific conditions surrounding boys and young men of color. In March 2016, New York State legislature made an unprecedented appropriation of $20 million towards a state-level MBK.

In an effort to support the development, implementation and impact of strategies and programs geared towards changing the trajectory of boys of color, the Northeast Comprehensive Center in partnership with Dr. Edward Fergus (New York University) were commissioned to develop a series of documents to inform school and community practitioners. This first document focuses on providing an overview of the outcome trends among boys of color in K-12 school environments, and a research review of the most prevalent strategies currently being implemented in schools and communities across the country. A second document will follow that focuses on the implementation steps necessary within each of the strategies; the intention of that

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[1] The term boys of color will be used throughout the document as shorthand to reference Black, Latino, Native American, and Asian male students. The age group of focus is from Pre-school through high school.

document will be to provide schools and communities a roadmap of how to consider fidelity during the implementation process.

The following provides a summary of the most salient information available in this document.

Summary of Academic Outcomes

The preponderance of outcome information shared in this document highlights a variety of issues and potential areas of intervention. The following summarizes the salient findings:

Academic Achievement
- Nationally, by the time Black students are in 12th grade, over 60% and 50% are below basic levels in Math and Reading, respectively.
- Nationally, by the time Black and Latino male students are in 10th grade, they are over-represented in the lowest GPA (below 2.5).

Graduation and Dropout Patterns
- In NYC, among the 2007 graduating cohort of Black and Latino males, 16% dropped out.
  - The 2007 cohort of Black and Latino males who dropped out left over a three-year period.
  - The 2007 cohort of Black and Latino males who dropped out were uniquely different from their graduating peers by several variables. They were typically overage and completed fewer than 5 credits in 9th grade. Moreover, more than half were at level 1 proficiency in 8th grade and had failed two or more core courses in 9th grade.
- In NYC, among the 2007 graduating cohort of Black and Latino males, 28% attained a Regents diploma.
  - Among the 2007 cohort of Black and Latino males who received a Regents diploma, nearly 50% were below proficiency in 4th grade ELA and Math.
  - Among the 2007 cohort of Black and Latino males who received a Regents diploma, over 60% and 80% of Level 1 performers moved up at least one performance level between 4th and 8th grade in Math and ELA, respectively.

Special Education Enrollment
- Nationally, Latino males have the lowest enrollment in special education in proportion to their overall enrollment.
- Nationally, Native American males have the highest overrepresentation in special education in proportion to their overall enrollment.
- Nationally, Black males appear proportional in their special education enrollment in proportion to their overall enrollment.
- In NYS, Black students are disproportionately represented in the emotional disturbance

and intellectual disability special education category.

Gifted and Talented Program enrollment
- Nationally, White and Asian males maintain the highest enrollment in gifted and talented programs.
- In NYS, Black and Latino students are under-enrolled in gifted and talented programs relative to their overall enrollment.

Behavioral Referrals and Suspensions
- Nationally, Black, Latino and White male and female students are experiencing high rates of receiving one or more in-school suspensions.
- In NYS, Black male students are disproportionately represented in all forms of suspension (in-school, out-of-school, and more than one).
- In NYS, Black male students are three times more likely to experience suspension.

These patterns suggest specific domains of educational practice and policy that require further examination and remedy. The most critical domains are: 1) practice and policy related to special education, gifted/talented programs, and discipline; and 2) the need for targeted intervention(s) to disrupt current academic trajectories.

In the first domain, patterns of disproportionate representation in special education, gifted/talented programs, and discipline practices require, at minimum, a closer examination of practices and policies that set the stage for these disproportionate outcomes. In the second domain, patterns of academic under-performance at various grade levels require strategies to provide targeted and research-based interventions to change the current trajectory. Both domains of strategies are necessary for school, local government, and community organizations to begin addressing: systemic issues (domain 1) and current trajectories (domain 2). Various research on school reform suggests that attention to one at the expense of the other minimizes the potential for institutionalizing improvements (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Payne, 2008; Tyack and Cuban, 1995).

Summary of Review of Research on Emerging Practices
Given the conclusions suggested in *Section 1: Overview of Academic Outcomes* and the prevalence of strategies emerging among schools, *Section 2: Review of Research on Emerging Practices* prioritizes specific strategies and programs. The intention of this section is to provide a broad overview of each strategy and program, including a summary of its operation and relevant research on its impact and/or outcomes. The eleven strategies and programs examined in the brief include:

Strategy 1: Mentoring
 Mentoring, defined as a long-term face-to-face relationship between an adult and student, has demonstrated positive outcomes for boys and young men of color. When mentoring programs

incorporate structured activities, social emotional development and support, and positive adult male role models of color, boys and young men of color experience positive outcomes. These positive outcomes include improved relationships with their parents, increased attendance and academic performance, and enrollment in college at higher rates.

Strategy 2: Recruitment of Racial/Ethnic Minority Teachers

Racial and ethnic minority teachers can serve as models of achievement and positively influence the academic achievement and self-perceptions of students of color. Furthermore, racial and ethnic minority teachers provide similar life experiences and cultural backgrounds that enhance and support student learning. Historically an overwhelmingly low percentage of racial and ethnic minority teachers have been found in districts and schools across the United States. To address the scarcity of racial and ethnic minority teachers in school, recruitment efforts have been developed through state education agencies (SEAs), early outreach/pre-collegiate programs, university programs, non-traditional and alternative pathways, and scholarship funds and fellowships.

Strategy 3: Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Instruction

Commonly referenced and adopted as Ladson-Billings' (1994) coined term "culturally relevant teaching" which is defined as an "approach that empowers students, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes", culturally relevant curriculum and teaching is an instructional approach and practice that increases academic, social, and cultural success of students of color through infusing class lessons with their culture, background, and experiences. When integrated into the classroom, culturally relevant curriculum and instruction positively impacts student achievement increasing levels of engagement, confidence, and interest in school. Furthermore, it impacts school discipline: decreasing school suspensions, expulsions, police and special education referrals. Districts and schools that have practiced culturally relevant curriculum and instruction in their classrooms sought to do so by addressing teachers' mindsets and beliefs through professional development and training, embracing student experiences and interests, and supporting ELL and bilingual students.

Strategy 4: Rites of Passage Programs

Rites-of-passage programs provide youth with experiences and information to strengthen social and spiritual development into adulthood while encouraging the adoption of attitudes, behaviors, and practices important to healthy youth development (Piert, 2007; Okwumabua et al., 2014). Rites-of-passage programs examined in the brief, commonly delivered through schools and community based organizations, included transitional phases, activities centered on ethnic identity development, and community involvement. Boys and young men of color who entered into the examined rites-of-passage program developed a strong sense of ethnic identity, improved self-esteem, better relationships, and commitment to their communities.

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Strategy 5: College Readiness Programs
The examined college readiness programs in the brief demonstrate that when a student is provided with academic and social supports, develop an awareness for college, and are prepared academically to take college level courses their chances of enrollment and success in college increases. While boys and young men of color are graduating at higher rates than previously documented, as a group they are underrepresented in college. The college readiness programs highlighted in this section provide boys and young men of color opportunities to develop an awareness for college and career pathways, acquire required knowledge and skills for success in college courses, and access to social supports to develop practices that will increase academic motivation and self-confidence.

Strategy 6: Character Education Programs/Social Emotional Learning
Character education and social emotional learning prepare and equip boys and young men of color with the ability to navigate and manage their lives. Character education is defined as "formal education" developed with the intention to teach students virtues such as respect, responsibility, self-control, that enable them to act or demonstrate morality (Park, 2004). While social emotional learning is defined as a process for learning life skills, including how to manage one's emotions, behaviors, relationships and to work effectively with others (CASEL, 2015). Together, they enhance boys and young men of color's ability to thrive as they meet the demands of school and life. Common practices found in character education programs and social emotional learning include a change in policies and organizational structures, use of teaching practices to foster social emotional development in the classroom, change in school culture and climate, and parent and community involvement.

Strategy 7: School Policy Change
School policies have been documented as barriers to success for boys and young men of color; creating disparities and inequities in academic achievement. However, schools and districts have changed policies around discipline, special education and advanced placement (AP) enrollment impacting the life trajectory and success of boys and young men of color. Through school policy change districts and schools have adopted processes, approaches, and practices to revise, remove, and re-design policies that have historically marginalized this population. Changes to school policies have shifted assessment practices reducing special education referrals, increasing AP enrollment and success, and reducing expulsions and suspension of boys and young men of color.

Strategy 8: Early Warning Systems
Early Warning Systems (EWS) identify students who are "at-risk" for academic failure, disengagement, and dropping out based on three predictors: attendance, behavior, and course performance. The three predictors, commonly referred to as the "ABCs" of early warning interventions, alert schools on providing "at-risk" students with targeted interventions and

supports that will place them on the track to graduation. The brief examines EWS with specific targeted interventions and supports for students in elementary, middle, and high school. Effective EWS promptly identify "at risk" students, immediately provide short and long term targeted interventions and supports, monitor interventions for their effectiveness/ineffectiveness, modify ineffective interventions and supports, and report outcomes to continue supporting "at-risk" students on their path to graduation.

Strategy 9: Family and Community Engagement

Family and community engagement, commonly referred to as an intervention that promotes student success and achievement, is defined in two parts. Family engagement refers to a partnership between families, schools, and communities to enhance and support student learning and achievement. While community engagement refers to the support and services that community based organizations provide to support student learning and increase family engagement. Together, family and community engagement creates support systems, in and out of school, to help students achieve academic success. Research demonstrates that when districts and schools build relationships with families and communities, students attend school more, improve their academic performance, and change their attitude and mindset about school.

Although positive student outcomes are associated with family and community engagement, schools have historically lacked effective and genuine partnerships with racial and ethnic parents and families. Therefore, creating barriers to family engagement and negatively impacting their level of engagement. Despite the barriers, scholars and schools/districts have developed various frameworks, partnerships, and strategies to increase parent engagement among parents of color to improve the learning outcomes, academic achievement, and social and emotional development.

Strategy 10: Community Schools

Community schools, recognized as the "hub" of a community, provides programs and services through community based partnerships that address the holistic development of youth. The academic, social, and health based programs and services provided are tailored to not only meet the needs of youth but their families and members of the community. Community schools have demonstrated their commitment to enhancing outcomes for boys of color by placing emphasis and priority on the needs of students of color and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, their effort to address communal disparities and alleviate inequities has produced stronger and healthier students, families, schools, and communities. Therefore, resulting in students who are healthier emotionally, physically, and socially.

Strategy 11: Single Sex Gender/Sex Schools

Although single-sex (SS) schools have been in existence since the 19th century, the research on SS schooling effectiveness in comparison with co-education (CE) schooling is mixed. The research on SS education has primarily focused on how it differs from CE and whether SS

education results in statistically significant achievement gains compared with achievement in CE education, as well as attention to causal relationships between the SS strategy and a focused outcome area. Due to the large number of studies on single-sex schools and the variation in their conceptual focus few reports exist or have been commissioned to conduct a review of SS and CE comparison studies; Fred Mael's reports (Mael, 1998; and Mael, et. al., 2005) represent the most extensive review of these studies. Overall, many of the studies outlined by Mael (2005) identified a mix of findings; however, more studies cited positive achievement gains in SS schools than they did CE schools.

Thus the impact studies of single-gender/sex school environments points to the following positive results: 1) Girls in single-gender/sex environments compared to girls in Co-educational settings perform slightly better in all academic subjects; and 2) Under-performing boys in single-gender/sex environments compared to boys in co-educational settings perform slightly better in the subjects of under-performance.

Summary of Program and Strategy Research Review

States, districts, schools, and organizations have established initiatives, programs, and interventions to address outcomes for boys of color. Each addresses some facet of their lives in the hope of improving outcomes under historically unfavorable circumstances. The programs and strategies included in this current document are the following: mentoring; rites of passage; early warning systems; special education, suspension and AP/gifted enrolled policy changes; single gender/sex schools; college readiness programs; community schools; family and community engagement; culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy; racial/ethnic teacher diversity; and character education/social emotional learning programs. The programs and strategies selected for this brief exemplify current interventions established or adopted to enhance outcomes for boys of color. While the interventions address challenges and outcomes identified by research for boys of color, they may be regarded as promising at this juncture, given the limited availability of impact studies.

Each program and strategy contains multiple components and examples, however based on the available information, in particular the descriptive studies, in our review we identified the following common components, consistently demonstrated:

Race, Gender and Academic Identity

All of the interventions identified an associative relationship between racial, ethnic and gender identity, academic achievement, and the cognitive, physical, and social development of boys of color. Whether persons of color were reflected in a classroom teacher(s), mentor(s), or lesson(s), across all interventions the efforts appear to have enhanced the self-perception, identity, behavior, attitude, and academic performance of boys of color.

Cultural Competency and Relevance

Among the interventions, cultural competence and relevance are seen as essential in enhancing outcomes for boys of color, especially in the classroom with respect to academic performance, identity formation, academic identity and attitude, and behavior. Cultural relevance, whether through structured activities, curriculum, or supports, helped boys of color to change their self-perceptions about academic success, attending college, and other adulthood outcomes (e.g., economic mobility). Research also highlights correlations between reductions in special education referrals and extreme discipline practices and increased use of culturally competent curriculum and strategies.

Social and Emotional Support

Across all interventions, social and emotional development was defined as a need for boys of color. Because boys of color experience variations of discrimination, community violence, limited academic opportunities, trauma, poverty, family distress, and social stigma, the interventions identified social and emotional development as a mitigating strategy. By finding themselves in safe and protective environments, interacting with positive role models, engaging in culturally centered activities, and enrichment opportunities, boys of color registered improvements in self-image, behavior, attitude, and academic performance. The social and emotional components assisted boys of color in learning how to manage and address experiences of racial and gender based discrimination, recognize their feelings, cope with frustration and disappointment, manage conflicts positively, and develop healthy relationships with peers and adults.

Policy Changes

Substantive research suggests that the manner in which school-based policies are created can serve as systemic barriers for boys of color, even at times, stimulating the school-to-prison pipeline. Specifically, such policies that reduce opportunities for equitable and responsive interventions that directly affect students' achievement and social emotional development. Many positive school-based interventions were developed through policy changes. Leaders influenced their districts, schools, staff, and communities to adopt policy changes—that is, practices, strategies, and interventions—that would improve outcomes for boys of color. As documented in the brief, such policy changes used culturally relevant instruction and curriculum, enforced alternatives to suspensions, and increased opportunities to enhance college readiness for boys of color.

Data Collection

Across multiple interventions, few descriptive and/or impact reports on outcomes for boys of color were available, however the desire for developing an empirical basis was identified. Additionally, while this report focuses on boys of color, specific groups (e.g., Native Americans and Asian subgroups) were not represented due to missing or nonexistent data. To expand

services to the wider population of boys of color, systematic data collection is essential and necessary to incorporate within program development and implementation. Furthermore, data collection needs to include all groups identified as "of color". These data will provide information about not only trends and patterns across this population, but will inform measures and supports that should be put in place to establish or continually enhance interventions.