THE NATIONAL BLACK LATINO SUMMIT
Solidarity for America's Future

Creating Communities of Opportunity for African Americans and Latinos:

An Educational Policy Brief[1]

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This paper is a work-in-progress that will be finalized after the Summit and posted to the National Black Latino Summit Website

Education not only generates knowledge, skills, and other kinds of social capital, but also powerfully shapes outcomes in other key arenas as well, including employment, occupation and job satisfaction, income, wealth, health, and criminal justice (Children's Defense Fund 2005; *The Condition of Education 2006* 2006; Wolfe and Haveman 2001). In short, education shapes access to opportunity. Chief Justice Earl Warren's observation on behalf of a unanimous Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* rings even more true today: "in these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education" (Children's Defense Fund 2005, 88). More recently, the Court has acknowledged that segmented access to education is not just a threat to learners but also a threat to the legitimacy of our democracy (Grutter). Education does not just provide access to jobs and material resources; education properly conceived is a pathway to membership and belonging.

In the half century since *Brown*, some progress has been made. Gaps in educational attainment between African Americans and Latinos, on one hand, and White American children, on the other, have narrowed. However, with respect to standardized test scores, high school dropout rates, college graduation rates, and many other important measures, wide gaps remain. These gaps have implications for the future of our country. At a time when African Americans and Latinos already comprise two in five public school students in the United States, a proportion sure to grow steadily over time, the nation continues to ignore the educational needs of these children at its own considerable peril.[2]

Facts about Educational Disparity

Educational achievement is linked to a range of factors, many of them, like family background and neighborhood characteristics, generally considered outside the immediate purview of our schools and universities. But school resources—teachers, facilities, curricular materials, and much more—also matter a great deal, as does the funding required to secure them (Mickelson 2003). Black, Latino, and poor students suffer from a lack of these resources, in comparison to their White

[1] This brief draws substantially on other work published under the auspices of the Kirwan Institute and its staff. Please do not cite without permission.

[2] Public Elementary and Secondary School Student Enrollment, High School Completions, and Staff From the Common Core of Data: School Year 2005–06, Table 2. Public school student membership, by race/ethnicity and state or jurisdiction: School year 2005–06. Available online at : http://www.cpec.ca.gov/CompleteReports/ExternalDocuments/Public_School_Enroll_Completions_Staff_2005-06.pdf)

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and affluent counterparts. Bearing in mind the strong link between school poverty rates and the quantity and quality of school resources (Orfield and Lee 2005), consider that half of Black and Latino public school students, but only 5 percent of White students, attend schools where at least 75 percent of the student body is poor (Children's Defense Fund 2005, 94).

This paper focuses on a few of the indicators that impact educational outcomes. Funding and segregation are two indicators that will be focused on but it should be understood that there are many other factors that impact the learner's access to opportunity. The funding field tilts against poor and minority students at the interstate, inter-district, *and* intra-district levels. African Americans and Latinos together made up 40 percent or more of public school students in eight states in the 2003–4 school year. All but one of those states (Maryland) ranked below the national average in per pupil funding, and five (Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Arizona, and New Mexico) ranked in the bottom third of states (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2006, table 11). Within states, affluent districts with strong tax bases can lend more support to their neighborhood schools than can poorer districts, which tend to have more Black and Latino students. As a result, in 28 states "high-minority districts receive less state and local money for each child than low-minority districts. . . . Across the country, $908 less per student is spent on students in the districts educating the most students of color, as compared to the districts educating the fewest" (Education Trust 2006, 6).

We see racially inequitable funding even across schools in the same districts, largely the result of "intradistrict funding formulas that allocate positions, rather than dollars, to schools, and teacher sorting patterns that allow higher paid [and more qualified] teachers to systematically opt into lower-need schools" (Rubenstein et al. 2006, 11; see also Thomas B. Fordham Institute 2006, 15). These absolute comparisons actually understate the inequity of current funding patterns. Minority students typically enter schools with greater needs than White students: 35 percent of Black, 28 percent of Latino, and 29 percent of American Indian children lived in poor families in 2005, but only 10 percent of white children did (Fass and Cauthen 2006). Under these circumstances, the equal distribution of monies and resources across schools often segregated by race and class would not signify their equitable distribution, a point recognized and reflected in the educational equity movement. Most schools and districts serving large racial minority student populations would be pleased to achieve resource parity with their more well-to-do peers. In most cases, this would not create an equitable outcome for Black and Latino learners. The focus on adequacy and equity is a more robust way of thinking about the larger question of opportunity that acknowledges that groups are situated at different points in their levels of access and have different needs.

The narrative of inequitable public school funding builds substantially on the twin pillars of local funding control and segregated schooling. The historical trend is away from state and local funding. Between 1920 and 2004, the federal share of public school funding crept from less than 1 percent to 9 percent, and most federal monies have come with directives attached (Howell 2005, 4; *The Condition of Education 2007* 2007, table 37-1). It remains the case that states and localities continue to raise and control the disbursement of by far the lion's share of educational funding (nine in 10 dollars). The record of recent court decisions around funding equalization is instructive.

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Citing the work of Sean Corcoran and colleagues on "The Changing Distribution of Education Finance: 1972–1997," Pamela Barnhouse Walters concludes that, although "the Supreme Courts in almost twenty states have issued decisions ordering school finance reform, in no state has the degree of resource equalization ordered by the Courts been realized, and levels of resource inequality between affluent and poor districts remain high" (Walters 2007, 24). By the end of 2005, when plaintiffs had filed cases in 45 of 50 states and won about half the judgments, the verdict remained roughly the same. In many of those "wins," legislatures and state officials have resisted implementing remedies or have reallocated funds in ways that reflect "the balance of political power, usually heavily weighted in favor of suburban school districts" (Hunter 2005). In the end, a federal government that spends less than one in 10 education dollars is no match for politically savvy schools and districts, mostly affluent and White, able to use their superior political access and clout to secure favorable judgments from key decision makers.

Of course, the different abilities of rich and poor districts to channel resources to "their" schools would have less racial significance if not for the persistence of segregated housing patterns. Segregation by race and ethnicity translates into segregation from many other aspects of opportunity. School and residential segregation are deeply linked, both because parents with housing options typically weigh school quality heavily in making their decisions and because most children attend neighborhood schools. (About 10 percent of K–12 students attended private schools in 2000.[4]) The racial and socioeconomic makeup of neighborhoods thus becomes the main determinant of the racial and poverty status of the schools within them. Many Black and Latino children go to severely under-resourced schools that deliver poor educational outcomes in large part because they are compelled to live in poor neighborhoods whose residents have limited wealth, income, and social capital to support the schools. "In the absence of effective school desegregation policies, location is destiny, and segregated housing for families, reinforced by differential use of private schools, produces education that is starkly polarized" (Orfield and McArdle 2006, 4–5).

Would a United States in which public schools with the neediest students enjoyed per-pupil funding, facilities, and teacher-student ratios that corresponded to student need—and was *at least* equal to those found in schools educating the most privileged—guarantee educational equity? No. We would still have to assure that the students and families served by those schools enjoyed comparable levels of access to those institutions, that they brought comparable resources to the engagement, that they met with equitable treatment within them, and so on. But the equitable distribution of resources, broadly understood, would be a powerful start. How might this be accomplished? First of all, this is a process or goal. How do we more closely link students with opportunity more broadly defined? One of the important factors is neighborhoods and housing. Space is closely associated with a range of opportunity. The relationship between housing and education is very strong and important. Are there existing mechanisms to more deliberately link housing and education? In looking at this question, it is also important to be mindful of the particular needs and situation of Black and Latino learners.

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Policy Solutions

Linking Federal Housing and Education Policy: Using the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program to Connect Low-Income Children to High-Quality Schools

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) has surpassed all other HUD housing programs to become the largest provider of low-income housing in the United States. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) recognizes and affirms the importance of high quality education as a priority of the federal government. Unfortunately, regardless of their intended policy outcomes, the implementations of LIHTC and NCLB have come into conflict. The decentralization of federal housing through the LIHTC program has in fact concentrated minority families in neighborhoods with 'failing schools.' As critiques of NCLB note, the 'choice' option for students in failing schools has not necessarily increased opportunities across socioeconomic classes. In fact, poor minority students do not have access to the same 'choices' as their more affluent counterparts. To eradicate the concentration of low-income families in 'failing schools' and low opportunity neighborhoods, LHITC and NCLB must be evaluated and restructured in tandem.

One mechanism for merging the integrative objectives of housing and education policies would be to incorporate quality-of-school criteria within the Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) of the LIHTC program. This has been advanced as a way to encourage racial integration as high-minority schools are correlated with low performance. Education and housing policy necessarily support each other as there are few thriving neighborhoods without quality schools and unstable housing environments have a detrimental impact on residents' ability to succeed at school. The LIHTC program must be used to connect affordable housing opportunities for low-income families to high-performing schools, for the benefit of the student, community, and our nation. LIHTC and the site selection should be sensitive to any special concerns or needs of learners with an eye toward effectively connecting them to opportunity. For example, are there language or family needs within communities that should be considered? The current way that LIHTC is administered is largely either unconcerned about or even hostile to these issues. The current restructuring of the housing market might provide a way to think about how to improve access to opportunity in different communities. For example, Fannie Mae is now part of the federal government which is subject to the Fair Housing Act. This may be an additional tool to leverage housing policy.

Federated Regionalism, Tax-base Sharing, and Increasing Funding to Poor Schools

There is a growing need for minority communities facing failing school systems, residential concentration of poverty, depopulation, and business and job losses to develop an integrated regional approach as well as retaining local control in their neighborhoods (powell 2000). Federated regionalism promises to deal with this need by creating a tax-base sharing strategy. For example, the Twin Cities implemented regional tax-base sharing in seven counties. Each community contributes 40 percent of the growth of its commercial-industrial tax revenues to a regional fund. This money is then redistributed so that those municipalities with lower commercial tax capacities receive more funds (powell 2000). "Although the region is made up of 186 cities, villages and townships; 48 school districts; and 60 other taxing authorities, the regional government views the region as one

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large, interconnected community." (New Rules Project, ND) Under the tax-based sharing plan, the tax-base disparities among Twin Cities communities went from 50:1 to almost 12:1 and there has been significant increase in school funding to poor schools (New Rules Project, ND; Orfield 1998).

Linking P-12 Education to Postsecondary Education for Black and Latino Students

The design of our American education system has to been in which one in which we have multiple silos instead of one continuous education pipeline. This is best illustrated in the present disconnect between preschool, K-12 education, and colleges and universities. This fragmentation is contributing to losing students, particularly students of color, at each educational level. In order to prepare for these changing trends, and get more low-income children and students of color into higher education, the fractured school system that students navigate must be aligned, and targeted programs must be developed to capture those students that frequently slip between the cracks. Collaboration between K-12 and higher education is a necessity so that ultimately our students are part of a seamless P-16 education system. For example, the Early College Program founded by Barbara Byrd-Bennett in the Cleveland Municipal School District allows students to take courses at Cleveland State University to earn college credits while in high school, and still graduate within three years.

Through the establishment of seamless relationships between K-12 and postsecondary education, schools not only benefit, but universities and students do as well. Schools can benefit by partnering with universities to ensure that teacher training is of a high quality and relevant to the issues schools are facing; to attract and incentivize high-quality teachers to work in low-income, urban schools; to learn about promising teaching techniques or initiatives that could be implemented in the schools; and to have a partner in researching the success of any initiatives implemented. Universities benefit by ensuring their teachers are fully prepared; by bridging that gap between academic and practitioner, through ensuring their research and work are relevant, and address real needs in education; by having environments in which to conduct research; and ultimately by having a more diverse student body. Finally, students benefit as admissions requirements, curriculum, and standards are aligned to universities; by having opportunities to earn college credits in high school; by having the opportunity to attend a more diverse college or university; and through collaborative efforts to close the achievement gap.

Conclusion:
Challenges and Prospects for a Black-Latino Alliance

Assembling the partnerships needed to push the policies suggested above will not be easy. In terms of potential partnerships among African Americans and Latinos, the challenges are many and span matters of motive (reasons to pursue alliances, "real" or perceived), means (degree to which communities have the resources required to do effective alliance work), and opportunity (degree to which immediate circumstances support actual alliance work). Specific challenges include the groups' real political, economic, social conflicts of interest; widespread ignorance of the historical and contemporary conditions affecting the social outcomes of both groups; media insistence on a Black/Latino conflict and

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competition storyline; scarcity of relevant resources (time, money, patience, expertise); a lack of proven, publicized institutional models of cooperation between these groups; insufficient organizational capacity to do work; the absence of intra-group consensus about goals and strategies on both sides; a mixed (at best) history of power-sharing under conditions where one or the other group dominates; the presence of a strong anti-immigration "wedge" movement; and economic duress and structural racism.

What is often not addressed is the structural relationship between Latinos and Blacks. Some researchers have suggested what often shows up as a cultural tension is more aptly understood as a "group location situatedness," an issue that is related to their level of access to opportunity. This difference is often missed because of an over focus on a single indicator. For example, Black and Latino middle-class workers are likely be in different sectors of the economy. Blacks are much more likely to be in public sector jobs and therefore have different interests related to protected government-related jobs. Similarly, Blacks and Latinos have a different history and focus around school desegregation. Finally, issues of ESL are often approached very differently between these groups. It is not enough just to assume that there is a similarity of interest because of similar circumstances in one or even two areas. Interest will shift as groups navigate within the larger structures of opportunity.

That said, we also see substantial reason for hope. The groups share a range of important concerns that include educational reform but extend as well to economic justice (jobs, wages, training, safety); racial profiling, police harassment, and hate crimes; health care; and the subprime/ foreclosure crisis.

Increasingly, there are efforts growing around the country led by broad coalitions of African Americans and Latinos concerned about educational equity. In New York, the Coalition for Educational Justice (CEJ), led by African Americans and Latinos, has won important campaigns on fiscal equity and curriculum transformation. ACORN, Cypress Hills Advocates for Education, Queens Congregations United for Action, and the Community Involvement Program of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform have been among the key players. In Los Angeles, a city-wide coalition of African American and Latino youth and parents organized by Inner City Struggle and the Community Coalition recently won an important campaign to ensure every high school student in the Los Angeles Unified School District has access to the curriculum that is required for admission to four-year colleges and universities. In addition, national groups such as the Applied Research Center, the Center for Community Change, PolicyLink, The Center for New Community, and the Kirwan Institute are urging a broad structural rather than a narrow cultural analysis of group challenges as well as greater recognition that our fates are linked. Such an approach requires both an assessment of differences and similarities that are grounded in perceptions and "reality" and are reflected in culture and institutions. Addressing structural barriers will also require a shift in institutional arrangements and a focus on group tensions and interests to improve opportunity and outcomes for Blacks and Latinos.

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[4] U.S. Bureau of the Census: see http://factfinder.census.gov/jsp/saff/SAFFInfo.jsp?_pageId=tp5_education.

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