

## Building Bridges to College and Career Success for Young Males of Color

Mark McDaniel

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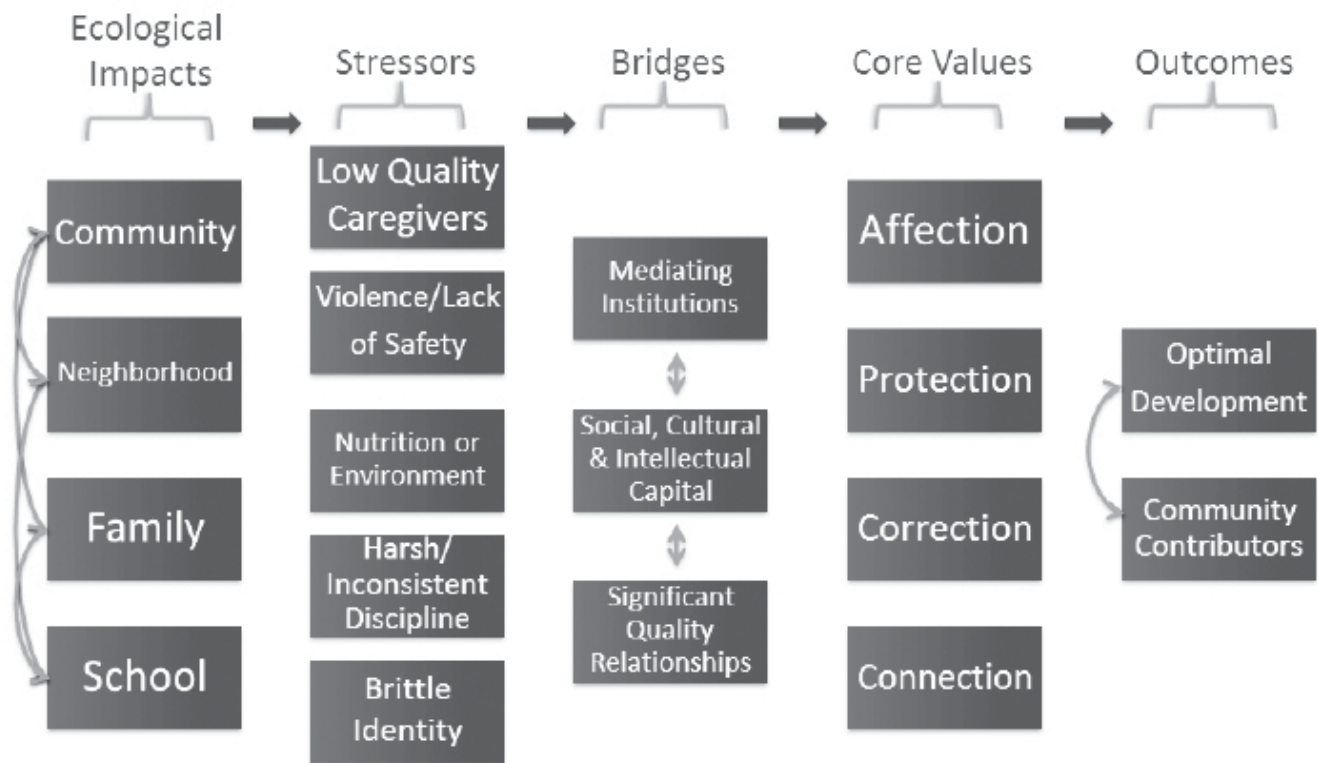
Vibrant, livable communities rely on healthy, well-educated and engaged residents to sustain them. This is not a controversial statement at face value, although some might argue about the means by which to achieve this outcome (e.g. importing a trained labor force versus educating and cultivating indigenous talent). Most policy makers believe a balanced approach is necessary to address ongoing human capital needs, with robust partnerships between public institutions and the private sector leading the way. The reasons for this are fairly clear. Without a set of committed and highly functioning educational institutions in local communities, labor markets begin to falter and the most vulnerable neighborhoods succumb to the economic and social manifestations of persistent

poverty, hopelessness and violence.

The latter, in fact, often defines the predicament of many low-income urban and rural communities of color. In these places, the transition from early childhood to adulthood is often described as the “cradle to prison” pipeline rather than a “cradle to college” pipeline. There are a number of factors that contribute to this unfortunate trend of sizable numbers of young males of color who drop out of school, are disproportionately involved with the criminal justice system, and are increasingly disconnected from regional labor markets. In too many parts of the country, males of color are less likely to benefit from high quality pre-school programs, are more likely to attend under resourced schools, are more likely to be assigned to non-college bound academic tracks and are overrepresented in suspension and expulsion data (“University of North Carolina Commission Final Report,” 2007). These factors are often compounded by community level burdens of poverty, exposure to violence and higher levels of disruption in positive role models all contribute to disparate drop out, college attendance and employment rates. (Johnson & McDaniel, 2011)

Acknowledging these realities, the Urban Investment Strategies Center at the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise launched Bridges to Success (B2S), an initiative that works to improve the overall life chances of young males who are at-risk of academic failure due to significant social and economic challenges. B2S interventions are anchored in a conceptual model of successful pathways to optimal development. The model rests on the research-based premise that owing to concentration effects of exposure to multiple and overlapping risk factors in the family, school, neighborhood/community contexts, boys of color are exposed to an array of stressors – sometimes early on in the life course – which make it difficult to succeed academically and in other walks of life. B2S asserts that mediating institutions, such as schools or other community-based partners, can serve as hubs or safe havens for developing a range of life enhancing interventions and can help forge the formation of dense networks of social, cultural and intellectual resources that can serve as bridges to the coping mechanisms needed for optimal development (Johnson & McDaniel, 2011).

Guiding and assisting B2S efforts to design effective interventions for young males is a scholars panel of experts in child and youth development, K-12 education reform, and evaluation research comprised of individuals from University of North Carolina System Institutions and beyond. The scholars panel is charged with assisting B2S in keeping abreast of evidenced-based best practices for improving education outcomes for young males and designing culturally competent male-centric professional development training for K-12 administrators, teachers and staff. The professional development focus is based on the central premise that closing the male achievement gap requires a radical restructuring of the content of both higher education programs for aspiring teachers and in



**Figure 1.** Successful Pathways to Optimal Development for Males of Color Grades K-8.

service professional development for existing teachers (Johnson & McDaniel, 2011).

Over the next five years, B2S will launch several demonstration initiatives aimed at improving education and life outcomes for young males of color. B2S will work in partnership with the Global Scholars Academy (GSA), a pre-k through grade 8 charter school based Durham, North Carolina. GSA serves as the “mediating institution” and beta test site for 3 pilot initiatives.

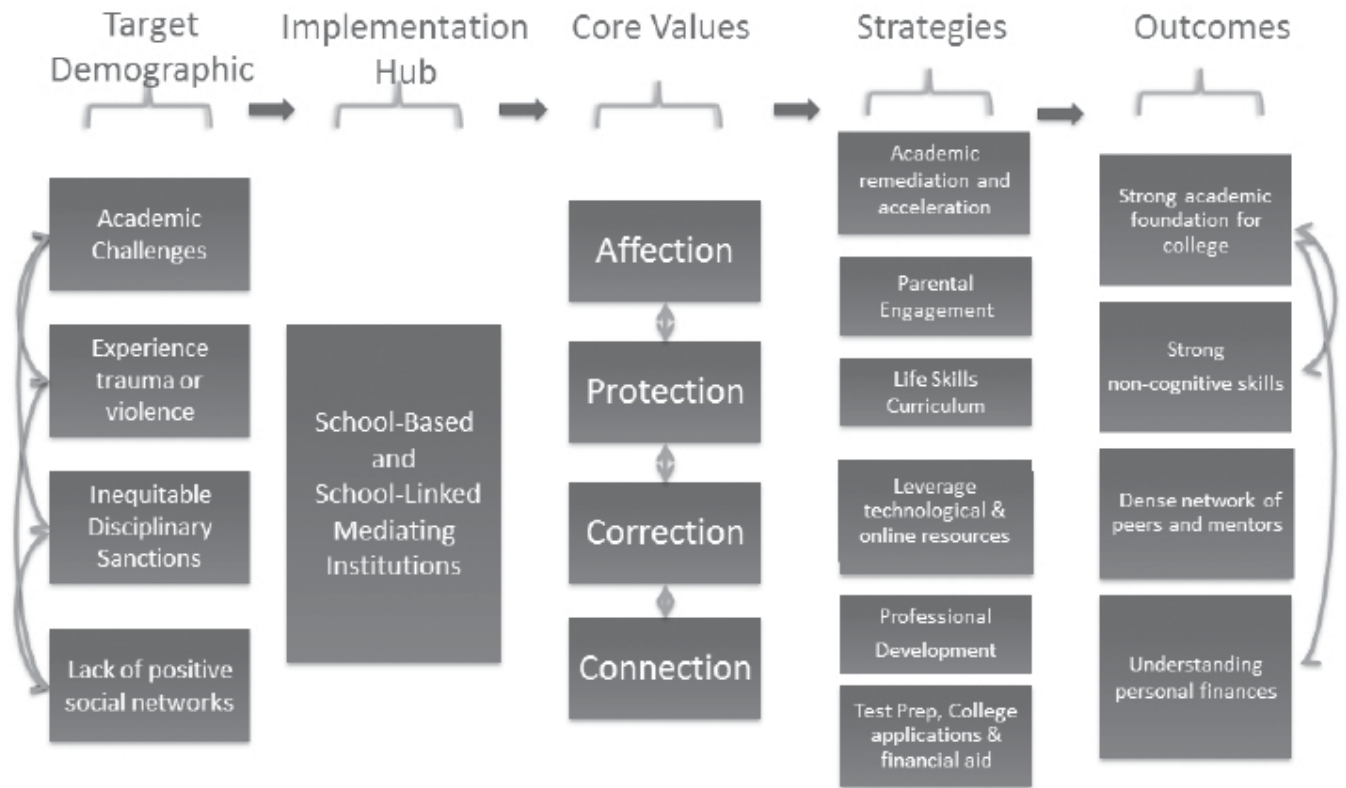
The first pilot is an *Early Care Intervention* that will target a cadre of male infants born in Durham next year. The males identified will enroll in Primary Colors, GSA’s early care center, and receive developmentally appropriate medical screening and care from a pediatric clinic also collocated at GSA. Upon successful completion of pre-school, they will matriculate to GSA’s K-8 program for their primary and middle school education.

The second pilot, the *K-8 Successful Pathways Initiative* (see Figure 1), addresses academic performance challenges of male students often experienced in grades one through three that put them at greater risk of dropping out later in the life course. To address this critical challenge, GSA’s operating model incorporates an extended day, year-round format. This allows GSA to add special curricular enhancements to the Common Core Curriculum to improve overall literacy rates for young males. In addition, the extended day format allows for other enrichments to the curriculum including: nutrition

education, entrepreneurship, character development, global awareness and economic literacy.

Lastly, the B2S *College Preparatory Academy* (Figure 2) targets high school age males who are defined as college bound but not necessarily college ready. The Academic Enrichment and College Readiness component draws on a combination of academic content coaches and self-paced online education to accelerate remediation and advance learning. The college readiness portion of programming also includes SAT preparation, college research and applications and financial aid. The last component, the *Life Skills Evolution Program* (LSEP), addresses the often overlooked underdevelopment of “soft skills” (i.e. traits that pertain to personality, attitude and behavior) intangible skills required to succeed in a knowledge based economy. To complement the academic enrichment component, B2S created LSEP as a 4-year soft skills training program designed to help participants gain a higher level of maturity, a deeper sense of personal responsibility and higher educational and career aspirations.

Through these various initiatives, B2S asserts that the best college completion program begins as a high quality early childhood education program – followed by culturally competent, affirming and protective teachers and role models, engaging enrichment programs, diverse and dense social networks and strong core values throughout the academic and social of life of young males of color. By building a new research and evidence base, B2S will



**Figure 2.** College Preparatory Academies.

become a clearinghouse resource for tested strategies and innovative approaches for educating males throughout the life course.

If information can guide innovation, B2S' policy agenda hopes to influence the human capital development debate to include evidenced-based strategies that shift the educational and life trajectory for young males of color. Given the growing racial diversity of the country and a greater proportion of kids of color attending the nation's schools, maintaining workforce competitiveness in an ever changing global economy makes the focus on improving education outcomes for young males of color a societal and economic imperative.

Try learn more about the Bridges to Success initiative: [www.bridges2success.org](http://www.bridges2success.org)

### Resources

Johnson, J.H. & McDaniel, M. (August 2011). The Minority Male Bridge to Success Project. Retrieved from [https://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/kenan-institute/about/organization/urban-investment/~media/Files/kenaninstitute/UNC\\_KenanInstitute\\_MinorityBridge.ashx](https://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/kenan-institute/about/organization/urban-investment/~media/Files/kenaninstitute/UNC_KenanInstitute_MinorityBridge.ashx)

University of North Carolina Tomorrow Commission Final Report (2007). Retrieved from [http://www.northcarolina.edu/nctomorrow/UNCT\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.northcarolina.edu/nctomorrow/UNCT_Final_Report.pdf)

*Mark McDaniel is a Senior Research Associate with the UNC Center for Community Capital.*