



Issue Brief: Focus on Education

INVESTING IN BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR: THE PROMISE AND OPPORTUNITY

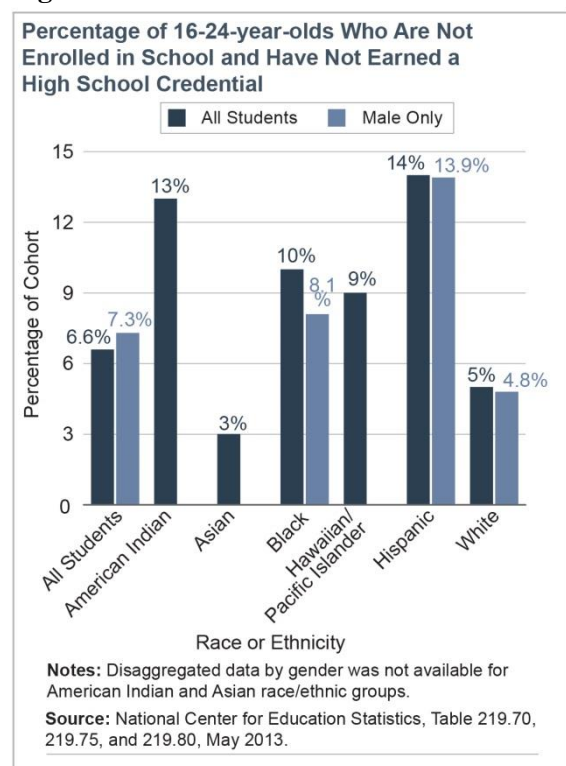


Educational success is the cornerstone to creating successful pathways for youth. Yet many schools struggle to meet the needs of low-income, minority, and English-learning students, allocating insufficient staff and resources to address issues such as guidance and counseling, attendance, or additional course help. In high-poverty and high-minority schools, the curriculum is not sufficiently challenging and the teachers are often among the least experienced in the workforce. Lacking the support to succeed, too many youth become disengaged from school and fail to complete their education. Disciplinary policies also derail learning by pulling students out of school and depriving them of crucial instruction. Those who manage to avoid these pitfalls and graduate high school too often find themselves unprepared to succeed in postsecondary education. These barriers are particularly acute for young men of color.

Drop Out Prevention and Recovery

The national on-time high school graduation rate has steadily increased over the past decade to 80 percent.ⁱ However, that figure can be misleading. Currently, barely half of Latino, African American, and Native American students who begin high school will graduate. And while Asian American students boast a high school graduation rate of 80 percent in Hmong, Laotian, and Cambodian communities, fewer than half of all individuals over age 25 have a high school diploma.ⁱⁱ

Figure 1.



According to the most recent data available on males ages 16 to 24, the dropout rates of males of color are much higher than the national average. Latinos and American Indians have the highest percentage of youth dropping out of high school (14 percent and 13 percent respectively), compared to just 5 percent of Whites. Latino and Black males have the highest dropout rates (See Figure 1).

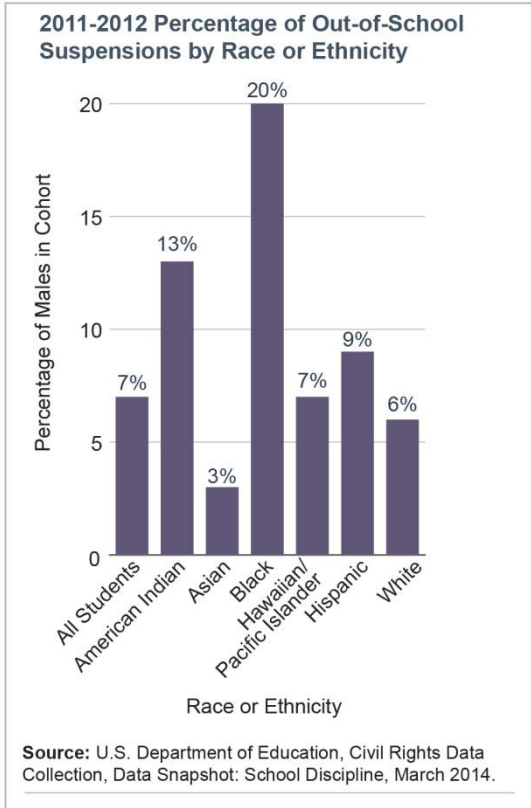
For young men of color, harsh school discipline policies often undermine their ability to remain in school. The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights reports that while African American boys make up 9 percent of the student population, they account for 24 percent of those suspended and 27 percent of those expelled from school. Similarly, Latino boys make up 10 percent of the student population but 14 percent of those suspended and 17 percent of those expelled.ⁱⁱⁱ

American Indian and African American male students receive out-of-school suspensions at a much higher rate than all students, as well as their male counterparts. American Indian males are two times more likely than White males to receive an out-of-school suspension. The gap is even bigger for African American males, who are *three* times more likely than their White counterparts to receive an out-of-school suspension (See Figure 2).



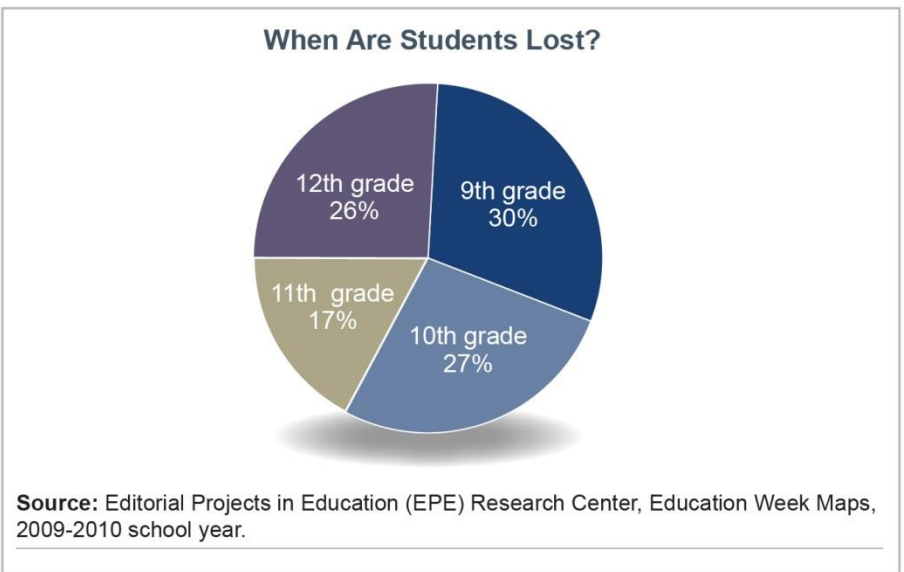
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Figure 2.



Identifying the key points where students are lost is critical to understanding school dropout and developing solutions. Nationally, almost all students are lost during the first two years of their high school experience. Nearly one-third of all school dropouts occur during 9th grade and another 27 percent occur during 10th grade (Figure 3).

Figure 3.



Sankofa Passages is an initiative of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color, in collaboration with the Alternative Education Region of the School District of Philadelphia. The program is designed to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of young men of color who are experiencing academic problems because of suspension, expulsion, poor attendance, or social adjustment in a regular school setting. In conjunction with academic teachers and support personnel, mentors at each program site work with a cohort of middle- and high school-age young men to develop their academic, social, and technical skills, as well as promote their personal, psychological, and physical development. Young men are engaged in transformative activities that help them grow and change, including peer learning and support, cultural and historical activities, and personal reflection. They are also exposed to postsecondary and work opportunities through community service, service learning, internships, and college workshops and visits.

For more information, please visit <http://www.coseboc.org/sankofa-passages>.



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Interventions to Prevent High School Dropout and Support Student Recovery and Reengagement

Establish Early Warning Indicator Systems

Since ninth grade is when students are most likely drop out of school, educators should be attentive to warning signals during this time and have appropriate interventions in place to keep students on track to complete school. The National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research recommends using readily available school data, including indicators of attendance and course failures in middle school and the first year of high school, to identify ninth grade students at risk of dropping out.^{iv}

Institute school-wide reforms that support philosophy of preventing school dropout

School-wide reforms in high-poverty and high-minority schools are essential to dropout prevention. Effective interventions include: developing specialized high school preparatory classes to help with the transition to high school for all students; developing “ninth-grade success academies”—schools within schools that create a smaller environment to nurture first-year students; adopting discipline policies that focus on keeping youth in school; and instituting flexible options for students to attend school either during daytime or in the evening to address social and schedule factors that inhibit school success.

Provide academic supports to remediate and accelerate learning

Strong academic supports are needed for students who are struggling, those who are over-age and under-credited, and those who may have dropped out. Approaches include: providing catch-up courses in mathematics and reading using a block schedule format for students who need to earn additional credits and other recuperative strategies such as online credit recovery; intensive tutoring services for students who are behind; and competency-based learning options to enable each student to learn and accrue credits at his own pace and to accelerate education for older students.

Create multiple pathways that blend education, training, and postsecondary education support

A multiple pathways approach supports the academic achievement of students of all levels, including those who are advanced and those who have dropped out and are seeking to reenroll in school. States and local education agencies must be encouraged, in collaboration with community-based organizations, to create a menu of well-supported educational pathways and options that meet student needs and prepare them for postsecondary opportunities and success in the workplace. Examples include but are not limited to: high-quality alternative programs or charter schools; accelerated learning models; twilight academies; specialized supports for parenting students; concurrent enrollment in high school and community college; school/work models in partnership with workforce investment boards; GED Plus/Diploma Plus models; and career and technical education. Multiple pathways approaches should be accompanied by targeted dropout recovery and reengagement strategies, such as reengagement centers that seek to identify, locate, and reenroll young people that have left school prematurely.

Implement student supports that build character, leadership skills, and cultural identity

Effective youth programming includes building leadership skills, seeding civic engagement, and ensuring young people are involved in finding solutions for their own generation. These opportunities should include in-school and out-of-school programming that fosters a positive cultural identity, as well as helps young people engage in their communities by learning about issues that affect their lives, organizing themselves to have a voice, and participating in leadership structures such as youth councils.



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Ensure wraparound supports are available to youth living in high-poverty communities

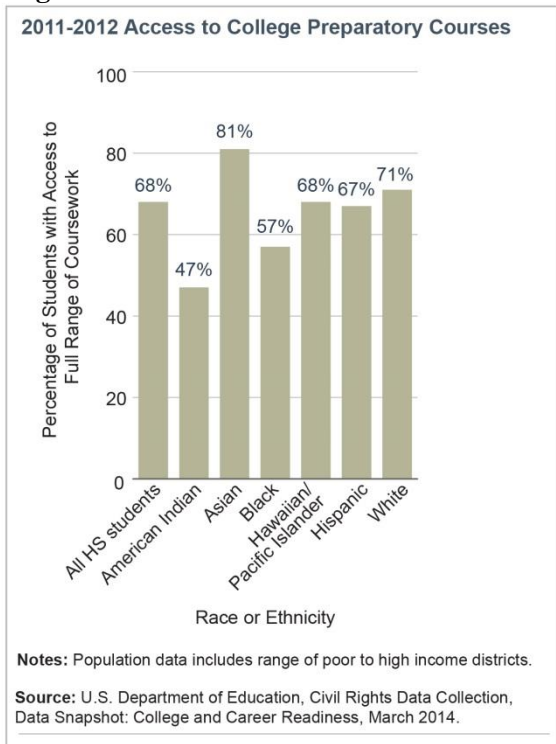
Strong partnerships with community organizations, schools, and social service agencies are essential to provide students with wraparound and social service supports, as well as build relationships that bridge home and school life and increase communication among a student’s family, school, and community agencies.

Build community collaborations and cross-system supports

All community stakeholders and people who touch the lives of youth must work together, aligning systems for seamless support that ensures youth successfully complete their education and transition to the job market. This is particularly important for out-of-school youth; there is no single public system currently responsible for their well-being. This collaborative approach, which includes both public and private investment, is necessary to ensure vulnerable youth do not fall through the cracks. It eases transitions between the education, health and human services, child welfare, juvenile justice, and workforce systems and helps students and families access services—preparing youth to succeed in school and in work.

Preparation for College and Careers

Figure 4.



A student’s college and career readiness largely depends on their passing key academic courses required by college admissions, particularly math and science classes. A quarter of high schools with the highest percentage of Black and Latino students do not offer Algebra II; a third of these schools do not offer chemistry. During the 2011-2012 school year, only 47 percent of Native American and 57 percent of Black high school students attended schools offering the full sequence of math and science courses considered necessary for college readiness—compared to 71 percent of White and 81 percent of Asian American students (Figure 4). This range of courses includes Algebra I, Algebra II, geometry, calculus, biology, chemistry, and physics.

According to the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, Southeast Asian American students experience educational inequalities that are often masked due to their local categorization as “Asian.” As with other ethnic groups, there are many challenges that impede Southeast Asian youth’s college and workforce readiness and contribute to low educational attainment rates, including: lack of Southeast Asian American educators and staff; inadequate numbers of bilingual school counselors to connect students and families to school resources; and limited parental engagement in their children’s education (often because of cultural barriers and a lack knowledge on navigating school systems). Further, Southeast Asian American communities often grapple with limited English proficiency. And many low-income neighborhood schools lack access to high-quality resources and services, including bilingual education.



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Sociedad Latina’s Pathways to Success Model is an array of comprehensive programs, strategically aligned to engage youth throughout their development from ages 10 to 21. The model provides youth with multiple pathways leading to successful futures. Pathways programs are designed to build skills in four areas: Education, Workforce Development, Civic Engagement, and Arts & Culture. Youth are engaged in integrated programming that matches their skills and interest. High school-age youth are employed through one of four workforce development programs, receiving a stipend and gaining critical hard and soft work readiness skills. In the last three years: 2,800 youth engaged in their pathways programs- 100 percent of high school seniors were accepted to college or secured full time employment and 95 percent of youth had a positive connection to their cultural heritage.

For more information, please visit <http://www.sociedadlatina.org/pathways-to-success/>.

Strategies to Ensure Young Men of Color Are College and Career Ready

Create accountability for graduation rates

Include four- and six-year cohort graduation rates in accountability requirements to allow local education agencies time to help struggling students and those who dropped out of high school to fulfill requirements for high school completion.

Create measures of college and career readiness for high schools

Include measures of college and career readiness (such as performance on Advanced Placement coursework and exams, SAT or ACT scores, and enrollment in postsecondary education) in high school accountability. Set goals at the school, district, and state levels for improving college and career readiness for all students. Collect data annually to monitor progress and disaggregate by race and gender to ensure all subgroups are making progress.

Close the gaps in course offerings, enrollment, and completion

Conduct an annual school-level analysis in all middle and high schools to identify where gaps exist in college preparatory course offerings, enrollment, and completion. Disaggregate and cross-tabulate data by race, gender, socioeconomic, and disability status to get the fullest picture of the situation for all students. Use data to develop an action plan and set school- and district-level benchmarks for closing gaps for students of color and improving college readiness for all students. Introduce innovative solutions to provide college preparatory courses in schools where student enrollment may not be sufficient to justify a full-time teacher, including technology-based learning or offering the class through a community college. Evaluate progress annually and adjust the action plan as necessary.

Ensure all high schools have culturally and linguistically proficient school counselors and lower the counselor-to-student ratios for schools with many high-needs students

Prioritize placing the appropriate number of counselors in each building. Analyze student data to determine which schools have the largest numbers of students with significant needs. Districts can use student indicators (such as free and reduced lunch, low course completion rates, overage students, or low attendance rates) and feeder community or neighborhood data (such as high school graduation and college matriculation rates, poverty, violence, or crime) to identify where needs are greatest. Ensure these schools have lower counselor-to-student ratios and staff who are proficient in the languages spoken by the student population.



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Provide postsecondary transitional supports

Partner with postsecondary institutions and community-based organizations to create mechanisms that support young men of color as they transition into postsecondary education. Provide information that will aid students and their families in navigating campus, identifying academic and personal support services, and developing strong skills and habits that will lead to postsecondary success. Use technology to maintain regular connections with students and create opportunities for peer sharing and encouragement. Gather annual data on continued enrollment of young men of color.

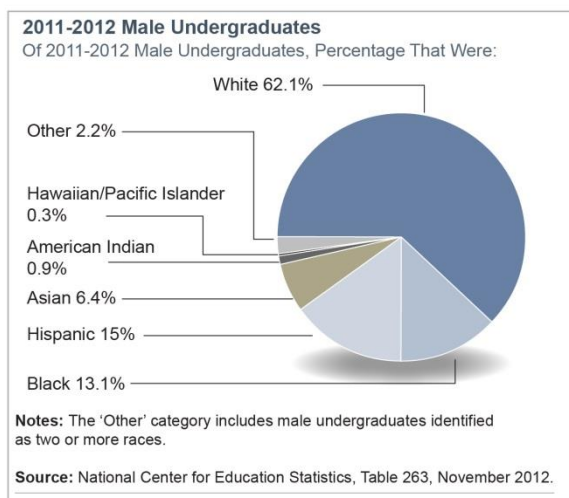
The Native American Community Academy (NACA) was founded for Native American students in Albuquerque to integrate personal wellness and cultural identity with academic success. NACA’s Hiyupo Project actively engages Native American young men in the school environment and prepares students for successful transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Guided by the belief that Native American students thrive in academic environments that include and value their languages, histories, heritages, and cultures, school leadership and staff have high expectations for students—including a requirement to earn college credits before high school graduation. The Hiyupo Project includes a number of strategies, such as: hiring effective Native American male teachers (NACA’s teaching staff is approximately 50 percent male compared to the national average of 14 percent); long-term mentoring; explicitly teaching fraternal and paternal roles in Native American communities; and instituting cultural interventions for mental, physical, emotional, and social health.

For more information, please visit <http://www.nacaschool.org>.

Postsecondary Access and Affordability

According to the most recent data available, women are outpacing men in college-going rates. In fall 2012, there were 10 million female undergraduate students, accounting for 56 percent of total students enrolled. There were just 7.7 million male undergraduate students. Hispanic men comprised 15 percent of male undergraduate students in the 2011-2012 school year—slightly less than the representation of Hispanics in the overall population (17 percent) (Figure 5). Though roughly 56 percent of all male students who began college in 2005 finished within 6 years, only 35 percent of black male students and 39 percent of Native American male students graduated within that timeframe (Figure 6).

Figure 5.

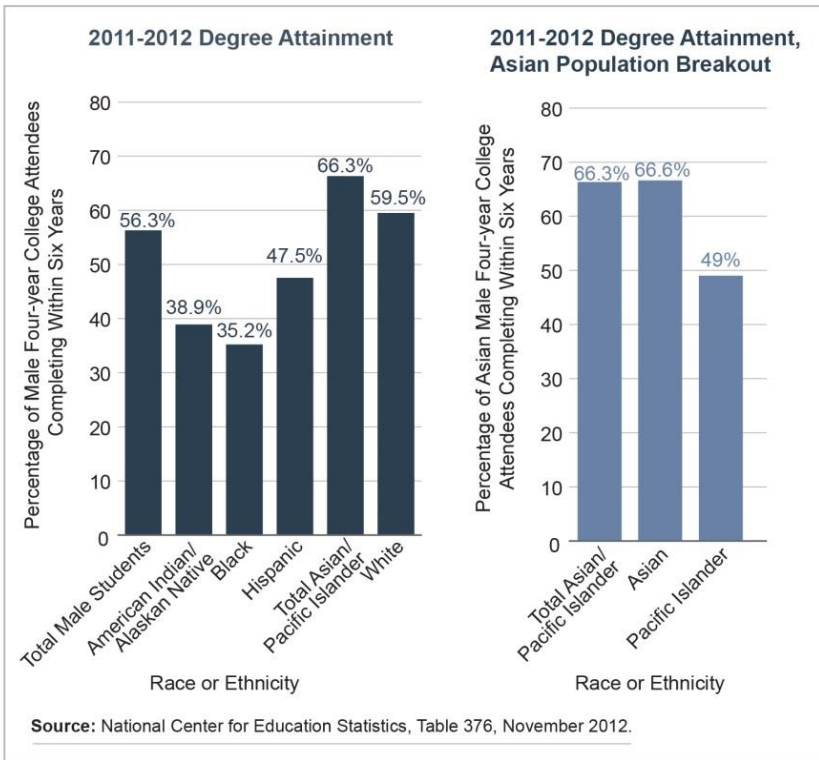


Findings from higher education literature suggest that a wide range of factors impede college access, participation, and achievement for young men of color. Young men of color cite “feeling like an outsider” and having intense pressure to succeed from family members and peers as key challenges they must navigate and overcome in order to achieve success.^v African Americans often cite lack of teacher and counselor encouragement to enroll in college as another roadblock. And across African American, Native American, and Latino student groups, issues of overpopulation in special education and low academic achievement negatively impact postsecondary participation. While there is limited higher education research on Asian American student experiences, emerging literature suggests that perceptions of campus climate affect mental health and depression and that Asian American males are more likely than women to be depressed and less likely to seek help.^{vi}



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Figure 6.



Lack of adequate student supports can also threaten student success and completion. In addition to financial barriers to postsecondary education, poor and low-income youth face many other challenges, such as logistical issues, poor academic preparation, and lack of information on how to navigate college processes.^{vii}

University System of Georgia’s African-American Male Initiative (AAMI) – After data revealed that college-going rates for African American males were far below those of White males and African American females, the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG) launched the AAMI in 2002. A statewide model for enhancing the matriculation and graduation of African American males, the AAMI has 36 programs on 26 of the USG’s 35 campuses, engaging and supporting young black men in college life. Since its inception, the USG has seen an 80 percent increase in African American male enrollment. Significant improvements have also been made in college graduation rates and the number of bachelor’s degrees conferred annually to black males at USG institutions.

For more information, please visit <http://www.usg.edu/aami/>.



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Innovations to Increase Postsecondary Access, Affordability, and Attainment

Create culturally appropriate campus programs that provide wraparound supports

Promote a sense of belonging on college campuses through culturally appropriate services and supports that focus on culture, gender, connections with family, and peer and adult mentoring—all of which emphasize positive recognition, leadership development, and on-campus employment.^{viii} Colleges and universities can play a role in improving college access, building capacity to understand culture and family, and creating a supportive environment in which youth of color, particularly young men, can thrive. Colleges and universities should also institute programming that supports the academic achievement of males of color using a cohort, peer learning model to engage them in activities that build study habits and offer assistance to those who are struggling.

Ensure higher education policies are designed to help students overcome financial and non-financial barriers to student success

Establish financial aid programs that couple grant aid with interventions designed to break down barriers for students of color in high-poverty districts and communities (e.g. innovations in course delivery, curriculum or instruction, learning communities, extra academic support and advising, emergency transportation, or child care assistance). Early research suggests that these comprehensive strategies are more effective than grant aid alone.^{ix} Federal higher education policy should also restore eligibility for federal student aid for students who do not have a high school diploma or equivalency but are able to demonstrate their “ability to benefit” from postsecondary education. These policies will advance postsecondary access and completion for all students, particularly low-income students of color.

Note: The terms “African American” and “Black” and “Native American” and “American Indian” are used interchangeably throughout this document. The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This brief includes the most recent available data. In some instances, data was not available for all race or ethnic groups.



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Endnotes

- ⁱ *Dropout Crisis Facts*, American Promise Alliance, <http://www.americaspromise.org//dropout-crisis-facts>.
- ⁱⁱ *Fact, Not Fiction: Setting the Record Straight*, National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, The College Board, 2008, <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/profdownload/08-0608-AAPI.pdf>.
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- ^{viii} John Michael Lee Jr. and Tafaya Ransom, *The Educational Experience of Young Men of Color*.
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