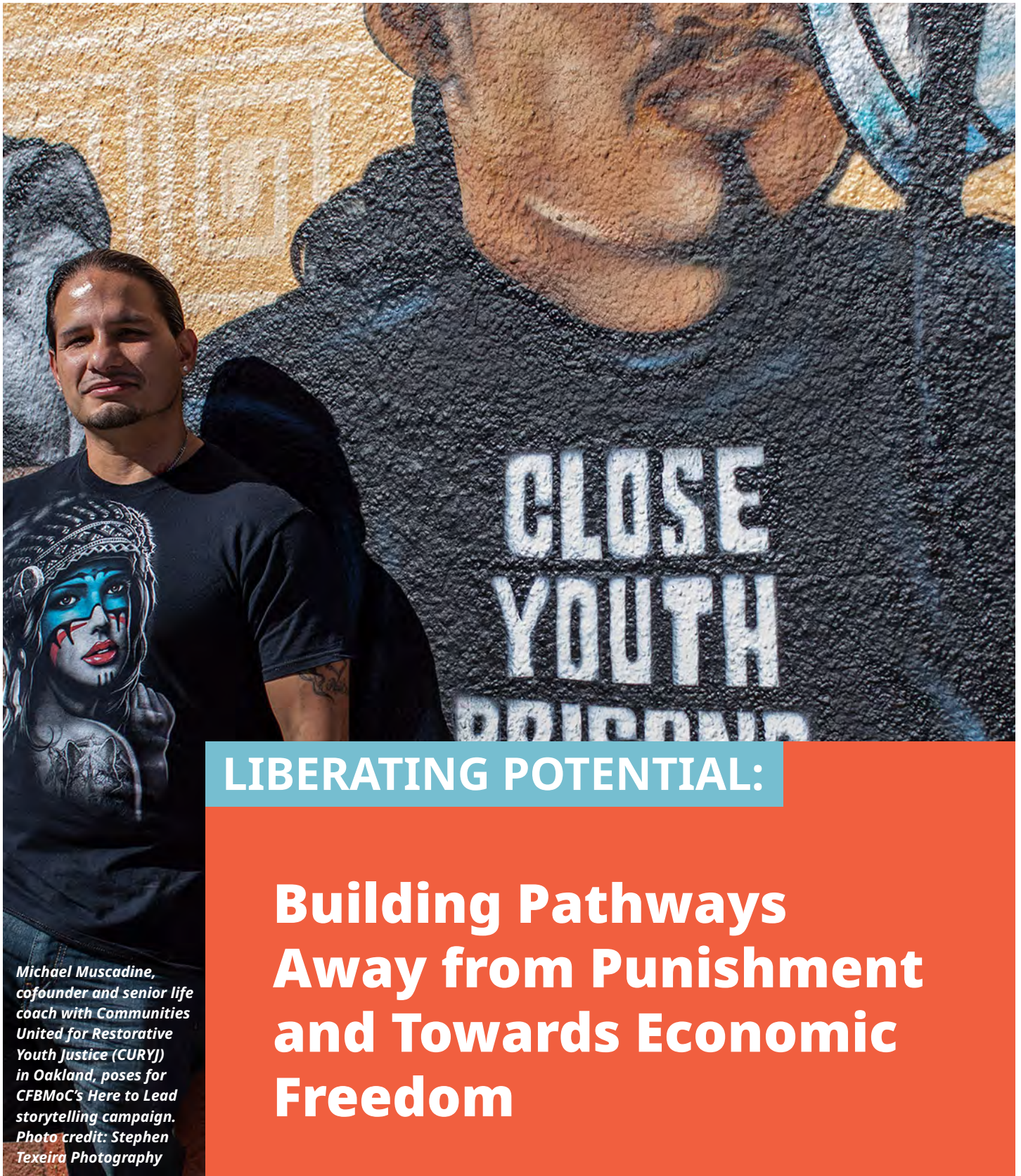




LIBERATING POTENTIAL:

Building Pathways Away from Punishment and Towards Economic Freedom

Michael Muscadine, cofounder and senior life coach with Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice (CURJ) in Oakland, poses for CFBMoC's Here to Lead storytelling campaign. Photo credit: Stephen Teixeira Photography



CALIFORNIA FUNDERS
for Boys & Men of Color



THE CENTER
at Sierra Health Foundation



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Derek Steele, Executive Director of the Social Justice Learning Institute in Los Angeles, and a featured leader in CFBMoC's Here to Lead campaign.
Photo credit: Mike Dennis



About the California Funders for Boys and Men of Color

To shape a just and thriving California, we must invest in boys and men of color, along with their families and communities. The California Funders for Boys and Men of Color (CFBMoC), co-founded by the Sierra Health Foundation and managed by The Center at Sierra Health Foundation, is a network of philanthropic organizations united by a shared vision: a California where boys and men of color can thrive. CFBMoC centers the leadership of philanthropic Presidents, CEOs, and Executive Directors from private, family, regional, and community foundations, while also welcoming cross-sector leaders who share a deep commitment to its mission.

CURRENT MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

- Akonadi Foundation
- California Community Foundation
- The California Wellness Foundation
- The California Endowment
- East Bay Community Foundation
- ECMC Foundation
- Heising-Simons Foundation
- Liberty Hill Foundation
- NextGen Policy
- Rosenberg Foundation
- Sacramento Region Community Foundation
- San Francisco Foundation
- Sierra Health Foundation
- Sobrato Philanthropies
- Stuart Foundation
- Weingart Foundation
- Y&H Soda Foundation
- Zellerbach Family Foundation

California Funders for Boys and Men of Color, co-founded by Sierra Health Foundation and managed by The Center at Sierra Health Foundation, commissioned this project to better align investments, sectors and stakeholders to improve opportunities for African American, Latino, Asian Pacific Islander, Native American and LGBTQI+ boys and men. The framework contains informative data and practical examples that CFBMoC is championing to create a California where boys and men of color can thrive and achieve economic freedom.



Introduction

The diverse state of California and our nation as a whole are seen by many as places where educational and economic opportunities are accessible to individuals of all backgrounds.

The longstanding notion of “the American dream” is based on this belief—that all people in the United States have the same set of options open to them that can lead to better lives for themselves and their families.

However, the truth is that complex forces and constructs act upon us all, sorting and labeling us, and opening or closing doors that grant or deny access to the dream of success. While, for many, our country’s name remains synonymous with freedom and choice, we cannot fail to recognize that individual freedoms and choices are often limited by the larger systemic and structural confines that have been in place for many decades, penalizing some while benefiting others. As central as the story of the American dream is to our collective national imagination, the reality is that some pathways lead to the kind of success we all imagine, while others lead in the opposite direction.

The framing report that follows outlines two major trajectories for boys and men of color, defining them as:

1. **The Punishment and Marginalization Pathway, and**
2. **The Education and Opportunity Pathway**



Michael Lynch, featured in CFBMoC’s *Here to Lead* storytelling campaign, is Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder of *Improve Your Tomorrow, Inc.*, based in Sacramento, California. Credit: *Here to Lead CA*



AS A SOCIETY, HOW CAN WE DIRECT AND KEEP BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR ON THE EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY PATHWAY? WE MUST BEGIN BY SUPPORTING HEALING AND INCLUSION RATHER THAN DOUBLING DOWN ON DIVISIONS AND PUNITIVE MARGINALIZATION.

Banners featuring three leaders nominated for CFBMoC's Here to Lead storytelling campaign. Credit: CFBMoC

For some, the pathways open up to a wealth of resources, connections, and fulfilled dreams (Education and Opportunity), while for others, the pathways reveal a scarcity of resources and support, resulting in alienation, isolation, and struggle (Punishment and Marginalization). While access to each of these pathways can open and close throughout one's life course, it is possible for purposeful policy shifts, strategic investment, and concerted action to improve not only the opportunities available at each transition point, but the quality and accessibility of the Education and Opportunity Pathway overall.

In addition to outlining these two Pathways, this report offers a life course framework perspective to illuminate how long-term prospects for success are shaped for males of color and which key transition points represent vital moments for intervention and support.

The Education and Opportunity Pathway is the conduit to economic success and mobility for males of color. Milestones met or missed during childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood determine whether a young person is on track to a good job and a family-supporting income or, by contrast, a life of economic marginalization. Positive milestones, such as high school or college graduation, correlate strongly with more favorable outcomes, while negative milestones, including high school dropout or incarceration, correlate to poor economic and health outcomes. Positive milestones span the entire growth of a child to a young adult, ranging from attending pre-kindergarten through post-college career counseling. But far too often, even if a young person is on the Education and Opportunity Pathway, external forces in society can push them off.

As a society, how can we direct and keep boys and men of color on the Education and Opportunity Pathway? We must begin by supporting healing and inclusion rather than doubling down on divisions and punitive marginalization. To accomplish this, we must confront longstanding systems and ways of thinking that have allowed injustice and barriers to proliferate. We must go so far as to dismantle Punishment pathways and build Recovery pathways in their place.

For those dedicated to the vision of a healthy, inclusive society and economy, there are a number of common sense ideas and practical tools at our disposal to help bring about positive change. For example, improving high school graduation rates improves life outcomes for males of color. Ensuring that more high schoolers graduate also greatly reduces the number of young people entering the juvenile justice system—a significant step towards dismantling the Punishment and Marginalization Pathway. A limited number of Diversion programs already in use in the United States are proving successful at reducing the numbers of repeat offenders while improving behavioral health outcomes. Giving increased support to young people reentering school after experiencing incarceration in the juvenile justice system is effective as well. For those in long-term confinement, offering clear onramps to postsecondary education serves as a vital component in



A group of funders gather during CFBMoC's membership meeting in October 2023 in Oakland. Photo credit: Brooke Anderson Photography.

their rehabilitation process, moving them from the Punishment pathway to the Education pathway. As the demand for skilled labor increases in our modern and ever-changing knowledge economy, the importance of college attainment remains a critical determinant of workplace success, and myriad college access and success approaches are linked to economic stability and mobility.

To help us achieve these goals in California, we are fortunate to benefit from the work of leading philanthropic organizations dedicated to realizing the vision of an inclusive society where all can thrive. In their strategic support to enable better outcomes for boys and men of color, they are fostering regional, statewide, and even national commitments to eliminate the Punishment and Marginalization Pathway that channels and isolates males of color. Their efforts are helping to turn the tide away from juvenile incarceration and towards a population of young men ready for success in college and beyond.

The latter half of this report details some of the efforts of these organizations, known collectively as the California Funders for Boys and Men of Color. With continued leadership and investment from these organizations and their grantees—as well as commitments from new partners and peer funders—we can profoundly improve the likelihood that young boys and men of color will find the Education and Opportunity pathway open to them.

Finally, the report offers suggestions for next steps and areas of focus. In building new opportunity pathways and better onramps to existing ones, we serve the interests of the entire state, creating educational opportunity, improving health and economic well-being for males of color and their families, and increasing inclusion for this generation and many to come.



Two Central Pathways Define the Faultline of Opportunity for Boys and Men of Color in California

Understanding where young people will end up in their 30s and 40s requires studying the life course milestones they experienced from their earliest years, through middle childhood and adolescence on into young adulthood. The life course milestones that shape a person's long-term prospects in life can be thought about as either "positive" or "negative". Together, these milestones form "trajectories" or pathways that can lead a person toward a predictable destination without intervention. Positive milestones, like high school or college graduation, are linked with more favorable long-term outcomes, while negative milestones, like dropping out of high school or incarceration, presage a future of poor economic and health outcomes.

The following sections in this paper chart key milestones that fall into two primary pathways that shape most of the life prospects for males of color in California:

- 1. The Punishment and Marginalization Pathway:** characterized by school disengagement or dropout, involvement with the juvenile or adult criminal legal system, and a lifetime of unstable employment and low earnings.
- 2. The Education and Opportunity Pathway:** characterized by good grades in middle and high school, enrollment and graduation from a high-mobility college, and stable full-time employment in a high-growth industry.

The key life course milestones for each of these pathways are described below. They were derived from a synthesis of literature on predictors of long-term life outcomes. Along with the key milestones for each pathway, the following sections will also provide a pipeline visualization for select milestones using California data to show the likelihood that youth from different racial groups will experience the positive or negative milestones that make up each pathway.

Methodological Note: All milestones listed below for each pathway are derived from findings in prospective longitudinal studies. Most studies are nationally representative while some are local longitudinal studies or randomized controlled trial evaluations.

THE PUNISHMENT AND MARGINALIZATION PATHWAY

Over the past half-century, the rate of prison incarceration in the United States has exploded, swelling by 430% between the early 1970s and the 2010s.¹ As a state, California helped lead the way in mass incarceration with mandatory minimum, truth-in-sentencing, and, three strikes laws.² Fortunately, California's incarceration rates have been declining in recent years, triggered by the U.S. Supreme Court *Brown vs. Plata* decision and subsequent reforms, known collectively as "criminal justice realignment," that were enacted during the administrations of Governor Jerry Brown and Gavin Newsom.³ As of July 2024, California's prison population has declined by 43% from its peak in 2006.⁴ California has also made great strides in reducing its incarceration of juveniles, recently shuttering the state's Department of Juvenile Justice and its youth prisons.⁵ Nevertheless, Californians continue to grapple with the legacy of prior draconian policy decisions.

The scale and impact of California's system of punishment has contributed to solidifying an intergenerational pathway of punishment and marginalization.⁶ The so-called "school-to-prison pipeline" is an apt metaphor for summarizing the main systemic infrastructure for this enduring reality. The stark connection between school disengagement and the risk of incarceration is most clearly seen in the life outcomes of African American males. Raphael (2007) found in an analysis of California's prison data that Black males who dropped out of high school had a 90% chance of going to prison in their lifetime compared to just 12% of Black males who obtained a high school diploma or higher.⁷

THE SCALE AND IMPACT OF CALIFORNIA'S SYSTEM OF PUNISHMENT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO SOLIDIFYING AN INTERGENERATIONAL PATHWAY OF PUNISHMENT AND MARGINALIZATION. THE SO-CALLED 'SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE' IS AN APT METAPHOR FOR SUMMARIZING THE MAIN SYSTEMIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THIS ENDURING REALITY.

Life Course Milestones of the Punishment and Marginalization Pathway

A review of longitudinal research evidence points to key life course milestones that pave the way for adult imprisonment and a lifetime of marginal employment and low earnings. A total of **15 negative milestones** were found to be either strong predictors or causal stepping stones on the Punishment and Marginalization Pathway (see Figure 1). Young males of color who follow this pathway may not necessarily experience all of these outcomes, but they often experience several. Those they do experience build upon each other and reinforce trajectories toward marginalization. Perhaps the most influential milestone in channeling young males of color onto the path to incarceration is failing to graduate from high school.⁸

1 National Research Council. (2014). *The growth of incarceration in the United States: Exploring causes and consequences*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

2 Campbell, M. C. (2018). Varieties of mass incarceration: What we learn from state histories. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 1(1), 219-234.

3 *Brown v. Plata* (2011). Criminal Justice Realignment Act of 2011

4 See "Public Policy Institute of California. (n.d.). How California reduced its prison population. PPIC. <https://www.ppic.org/blog/how-california-reduced-its-prison-population/> and California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. (2024, August 1). Monthly report of population: As of midnight July 31, 2024. Division of Correctional Policy Research and Internal Oversight, Office of Research.

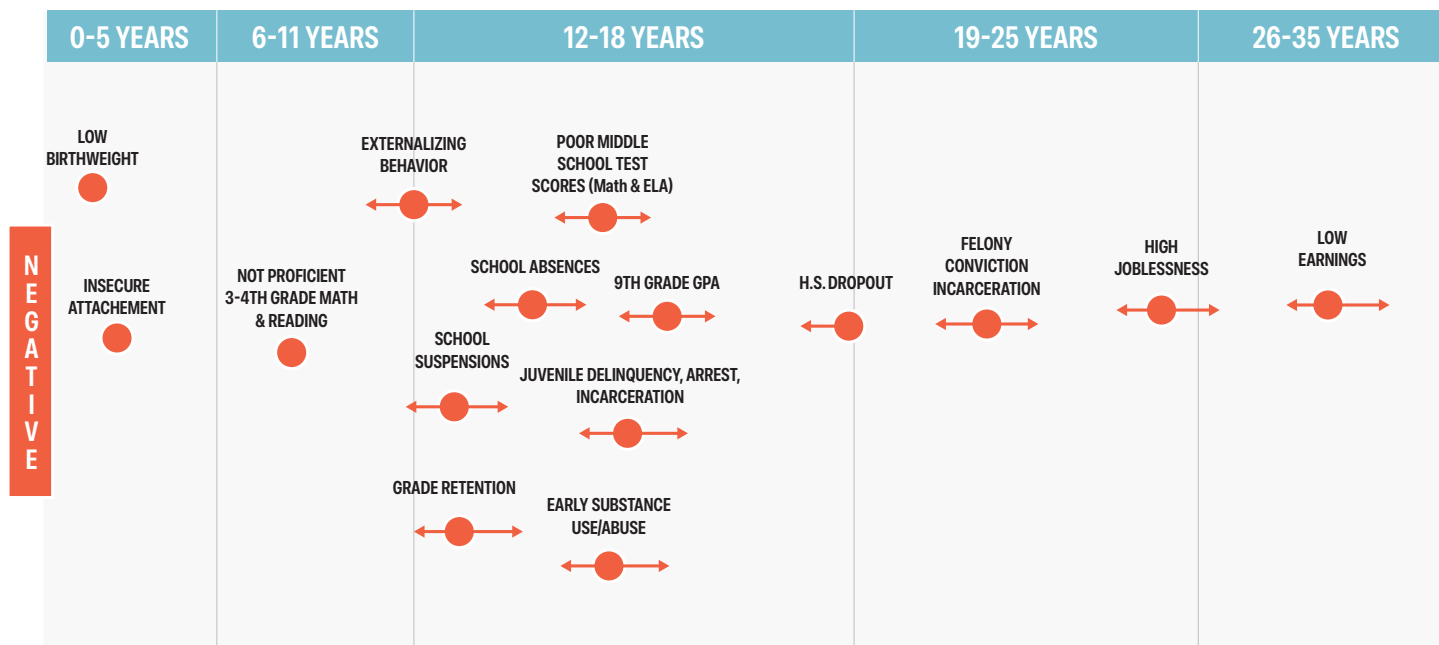
5 Office of Youth and Community Restoration. (2024). Building higher education pathways for youth in secure treatment facilities in California: A call to action. California Department of Health and Human Services.

6 Hagan, J., & Foster, H. (2012). Intergenerational educational effects of mass imprisonment in America. *Sociology of Education*, 85(3), 259-286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040711431587>. Poehlmann-Tynan, J., & Turney, K. (2021). A developmental perspective on children with incarcerated parents. *Child Development Perspectives*, 15(1), 3-11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12375>. Wakefield, S., & Wildeman, C. (2013). *Children of the prison boom: Mass incarceration and the future of American inequality*. Oxford University Press.

7 Raphael, S. (2007). Early incarceration spells and the transition to adulthood. In S. Danziger & C. E. Rouse (Eds.), *The price of independence: The economics of early adulthood* (pp. 278-306). Russell Sage Foundation.

8 Western, B., & Pettit, B. (2010). Incarceration and social inequality. *Daedalus*, 139(3), 8-19. https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00019

Figure 1. Key Life Course Milestones of the Punishment and Marginalization Pathway

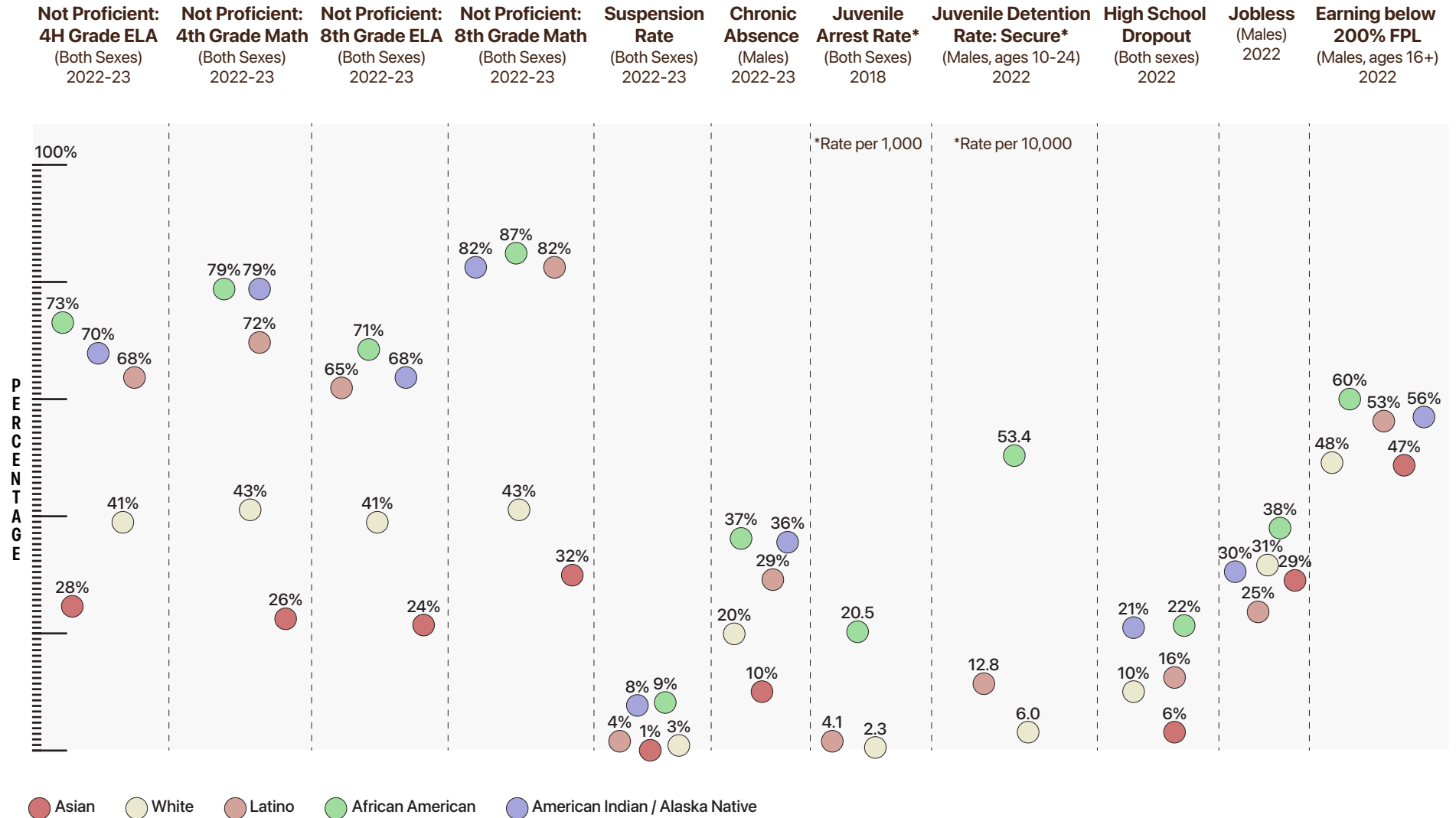


For youth of color in California, there are stark disparities in the risk of experiencing select milestones on the pathway to punishment and marginalization (see Figure 2). Youth of color, especially Black and American Indian males, have a high likelihood of failing to reach math and reading proficiency benchmarks while experiencing relatively high rates of suspensions, chronic absence, involvement with the juvenile legal system, and high school dropout. All of these outcomes culminate in high rates of joblessness and low earnings.



Community gathered at the Youth Power Summit in 2018, which brought hundreds of youth advocates from across the state. Credit: CFBMoC

Figure 2. The Likelihood of Experiencing Select Punishment Pathway Milestones for Youth of Color in California





Devon Grey, President of [End Poverty in California](#), was a featured leader CFBMoC's Here to Lead storytelling campaign. Photo credit: inBloom Films

For each of the 15 life course milestones that make up the Punishment and Marginalization Pathway (as seen in Figure 1), evidence from longitudinal studies is summarized below. The milestones reveal that the pathway begins quite early and is very much tied to the outcomes young people experience during their primary and secondary education, including their early experience with school-based punishment systems in the form of suspensions and expulsions. The pathway culminates with their involvement in the juvenile legal system and, ultimately, their receipt of a felony conviction or a term of imprisonment.

1. **Low Birthweight:** Low birthweight substantially increases the risk that children will later drop out of high school--by 32% for low birthweight children compared to normal birthweight children.⁹
2. **Insecure attachment** has been shown to predict heightened risk of involvement in criminality and incarceration.¹⁰ Insecure attachment is a term used in psychology to describe a type of emotional bond between a child and their caregiver that is marked by anxiety, fear, or uncertainty. It typically develops when a child's early experiences with their caregiver are inconsistent, neglectful, or emotionally unavailable. These experiences can lead to difficulties in forming healthy, stable relationships later in life.¹¹
3. **Below proficiency math and reading test scores in the 3rd and 4th grades:** Math and reading skills in middle childhood have been linked to greater risk of high school dropout. For example, in a national study, persistent math achievement problems between ages 6 and 10 have been associated with a 13-percentage point drop in the probability of high school graduation.¹²
4. **Externalizing behavior:** Childhood externalizing behaviors such as arguing, getting angry, or fighting, have been shown to predict lower high school graduation rates in national studies. A one standard deviation increase in these behaviors between ages 10 and 14 is

9 Johnson, R. C., & Schoeni, R. F. (2011). The influence of early-life events on human capital, health status, and labor market outcomes over the life course. *The BE Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.2521>

10 Ogilvie, C. A., Newman, E., Todd, L., & Peck, D. (2014). Attachment & violent offending: A meta-analysis. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 19(4), 322-339.

11 Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Erlbaum.

12 Duncan, G. J., & Magnuson, K. (2011). Online appendix to Chapter 3: The nature and impact of early achievement skills, attention skills, and behavior problems. In G. J. Duncan & R. J. Murnane (Eds.), *Whither opportunity?: Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances* (pp. 278-306). Russell Sage Foundation.

associated with a 5 to 10 percentage point decrease in high school graduation.¹³ Notably, persistent antisocial behavior between ages 6 and 10 corresponded to a 16-percentage point drop in high school graduation, with the effect more pronounced for boys. Other research finds that externalizing behavior has a stronger correlation with educational attainment when measured at ages 11 and 12 than at ages 5 and 6.¹⁴

5. **School suspensions:** School suspensions have been shown to increase the likelihood of high school dropout.¹⁵ Large studies using national data show that even when controlling for various family factors, school suspensions are associated with a 12-percentage point drop in high school graduation rates.¹⁶ Moreover, national studies have found that experiencing suspensions during grades 7 through 12 marked a turning point in student's educational trajectories that increased their odds of incarceration in young adulthood by a staggering 288%.¹⁷
6. **Grade retention:** Growing evidence indicates that grade retention (the practice in schools of holding a child back to repeat a grade) is a cause of reduced high school graduation, especially when students are retained in middle school or later. Causal evidence from a study in Chicago found that retention in grade 8 led to a 14% reduction in high school graduation.¹⁸ A similar study in New York City found that grade retention in elementary school had no negative effects on high school graduation, but retention in grades 7 and 8 were associated with a 30% increase in dropout rates.¹⁹
7. **School absences:** A high rate of school absenteeism is another reliable predictor of high school graduation. Research has found that missing 14 or more school days in grades 4 through 6 was associated with an 18-percentage point decline in on-time graduation.²⁰
8. **Low reading and math scores in middle school:** Persistently low math and reading test scores in middle school are associated with significant reductions in high school graduation. Research conducted with nationally representative data has shown that continuous low math test scores from grades 8-10 reduce high school graduation by 7 percentage points. Similarly, consistently low reading scores during these grades lower high school graduation by 2 percentage points.²¹
9. **Early substance use disorder:** The onset of a substance use disorder before the age of 16 increases the odds of incarceration in adulthood. One longitudinal study with urban youth found that the onset of a substance use disorder before the age of 16 was associated with a 400% increase in the risk of adult incarceration (35% vs. 9%).²²
10. **Juvenile delinquency:** Delinquency, particularly before age 16, has been shown in causal studies to reduce high school graduation. Causal research with a nationally representative

13 Duncan, G. J., & Magnuson, K. (2011).

14 Magnuson, K., Ruhm, C. J., & Waldfogel, J. (2016). Early childhood interventions: What we know and what we need to know. *The Future of Children*, 26(1), 79-98. <https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2016.0007>

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16 Rumberger, R., & Losen, D. (2016). The high cost of harsh discipline and its disparate impact. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies. <https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/resources/projects/center-for-civil-rights-remedies/school-to-prison-folder/federal-reports/the-high-cost-of-harsh-discipline-and-its-disparate-impact>

17 Hemez, P., Brent, J. J., & Mowen, T. J. (2020). Exploring the school-to-prison pipeline: How school suspensions influence incarceration during young adulthood. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 18(3), 235-255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204019879843>

18 Jacob, B. A., & Lefgren, L. (2009). The effect of grade retention on high school completion. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 1(3), 33-58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25760170>

19 Mariano, L. T., Martorell, P., & Berglund, T. (2018). The effects of grade retention on high school outcomes: Evidence from New York City schools. (RAND Corporation Working Paper WR-1259-DEIES). https://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/WR1259.html

20 Smerillo, N. E., Reynolds, A. J., Temple, J. A., & Ou, S. R. (2018). Chronic absence, eighth-grade achievement, and high school attainment in the Chicago Longitudinal Study. *Journal of School Psychology*, 67, 163-178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2017.11.001>

21 Farkas, G. (2011). Chapter 4: Middle and high school skills, behaviors, attitudes, and curriculum enrollment, and their consequences. In G. J. Duncan & R. J. Murnane (Eds.), *Whither opportunity?: Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances* (pp. 127-149). Russell Sage Foundation.

22 Slade, E. P., Stuart, E. A., Salkever, D. S., Karakus, M., Green, K. M., & Jalongo, N. (2008). Impacts of age of onset of substance use disorders on risk of adult incarceration among disadvantaged urban youth: A propensity score matching approach. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 95(1-2), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2007.11.019>



Tyler Okeke, Power California youth leader, a featured speaker at the 2018 Youth Power Summit in Sacramento, California. Credit: CFBMoC

sample of youth found that delinquency by age 16 reduces the probability of high school graduation by somewhere between 2 and 9 percentage points.²³ Furthermore, they found that these effects are driven by those who become delinquent before age 14, have a high intensity of offending activity at age 16, and commit income-generating offenses. Another nationally representative causal study showed that juvenile delinquency increases the probability of dropping out of high school by 4.6 percentage points, an effect that was limited to boys.²⁴

11. Juvenile arrest: Youth who are arrested for crimes as juveniles are at elevated risk of dropping out of high school, especially for income-generating offenses. In one study of a nationally representative sample of adolescent males, researchers found that delinquency before age 16 raised the likelihood of school dropout by 20%, and an ensuing arrest at age 17 further raised the probability by an additional 37%.²⁵ Delving further, the study identified income-generating activities as a significant factor in the link between delinquency and school dropout, with earlier involvement in such activities showing a stronger correlation with school dropout.²⁶ Another causal longitudinal study of youth in Chicago found that juvenile arrest increases the probability of dropping out of high school by 22 percentage points (increasing dropout risk from 51% to 73%).²⁷

12. Juvenile incarceration: Adolescents who are placed in juvenile confinement are at significantly increased risk of dropping out of high school. A nationally representative study found that incarcerating juveniles decreased their probability of graduating high school by 25 percentage points. Interestingly, the study also found that the length of incarceration did not appear to influence the likelihood of graduation. This suggests that the lasting stigma of incarceration may be a primary contributor to the overall impact of incarceration on the

23 Ward, S., & Williams, J. (2015). Does juvenile delinquency reduce educational attainment? *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 12(4), 716-756. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jels.12090>

24 Kim, J. (2021). Gender differences in the educational penalty of delinquent behavior: Evidence from an analysis of siblings. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 37, 179-216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-020-09466-w>

25 Ward, S., & Williams, J. (2015). Does juvenile delinquency reduce educational attainment? *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies*, 12(4), 716-756. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jels.12090>

26 Ward, S., Williams, J., & van Ours, J. C. (2020). Delinquency, arrest and early school leaving. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/obes.12393>

27 Kirk, D. S., & Sampson, R. J. (2013). Juvenile arrest and collateral educational damage in the transition to adulthood. *Sociology of Education*, 86(1), 36-62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040712448862>

risk of dropout.²⁸ A rigorous causal study applied to over 35,000 juvenile incarceration records and adult outcomes in Illinois over a ten-year period found that juvenile incarceration resulted in a 13 percentage point decrease in high school graduation rates (from 43% to 30%) for affected youth.²⁹

13. 9th grade course failures: Course failures in the 9th grade have been shown to be a robust predictor of dropout. Multiple studies have found during the transition into high school that both a low cumulative 9th grade G.P.A and having two or more course failures are strong predictors of eventual high school dropout.³⁰

14. High school dropout: The risk of going to prison in one's lifetime is starkly defined by how much education one obtains. For example, a national study has found that roughly 70% of Black males who fail to graduate high school face the prospect of incarceration during their lifetime, in comparison to just 21% of Black males who finish high school or earn a GED.³¹ In California, the rate of incarceration for Black males who drop out of high school is 90% compared to just 12% for those with a high school degree or higher.³² These rates are significantly higher than those of previous generations, particularly for high school dropouts. Among Black males born between 1945 and 1949, only 14.7% of high school dropouts experienced imprisonment in their lifetime, compared to 11% for those with high school diplomas or GEDs. This means that Black male high school dropouts born in the 1970s saw an approximately 450% increase in their risk of lifetime imprisonment compared to those born in the 1940s. Although rising from much smaller baselines, imprisonment rates for White and Latino male high school dropouts have also exploded. They increased by 740% (3.8% vs. 28%) and 480% (4.1% vs. 19.6%), respectively.³³

15. Criminal convictions or incarceration: Going to prison or receiving a felony conviction can lead to a host of societal exclusions in areas like employment, civic participation, and housing. Studies using nationally representative data demonstrate large earnings penalties for those who experience incarceration. One causal study found that those who experienced incarceration or were convicted of a felony or misdemeanor offense sustained large penalties in annual earnings in the subsequent 30-year period.³⁴ Individuals who were incarcerated saw a 52% reduction in annual earnings, while those with felony convictions but no incarceration experienced a 22% reduction, and those with misdemeanor convictions a 16% reduction. Moreover, Blacks and Latinos suffered the greatest lifetime earnings losses, totaling \$358,900 and \$511,500 respectively, compared to \$267,000 for their White counterparts.



Photo credit: Brooke Anderson @movementphotographer

28 Hjalmarsson, R. (2008). Criminal justice involvement and high school completion. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 63(2), 613-630. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jue.2007.04.003>

29 Aizer, A., & Doyle, J. J. (2015). Juvenile incarceration, human capital, and future crime: Evidence from randomly assigned judges. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(2), 759-803. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv003>

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32 Raphael, S. (2007). Early incarceration spells and the transition to adulthood. In S. Danziger & C. E. Rouse (Eds.), *The price of independence: The economics of early adulthood* (pp. 278-306). Russell Sage Foundation.

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34 Craigie, T., Grawert, A., Kimble, C., & Stiglitz, J. E. (2020). Conviction, imprisonment and lost earnings: How involvement with the criminal justice system deepens inequality. Brennan Center for Justice. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/conviction-imprisonment-and-lost-earnings-how-involvement-criminal>

THE EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY PATHWAY

Since the 1980s, attaining a postsecondary degree has become critical for achieving upward mobility in the United States. As the economy has shifted from manufacturing to knowledge-based industries, the demand for skilled labor has risen sharply, making higher education a key determinant of economic success.³⁵ The growing wage gap between college graduates and those without a degree highlights the importance of obtaining a college education, not just for securing higher-paying jobs but also for gaining access to broader career opportunities and financial stability. College graduates are estimated to have 60%-73% higher earnings over a lifetime compared to those with only a high school diploma.³⁶

As a result of the college wage premium, the societal emphasis on higher education has intensified, with a college degree now often viewed as a necessary credential for improving one's socio-economic standing and achieving the American Dream.³⁷ However, not all postsecondary degrees are created equal with some delivering returns that barely exceed a high school diploma. To support intergenerational opportunity for males of color, postsecondary degrees should provide wages sufficient to support a middle-class family, which some have pegged, at a minimum, somewhere between 250% to 300% of the federal poverty level. In 2024, 300% of the federal poverty level for an individual would total an income of \$45,180 per year. For a family of 3, it would total \$77,460 per year. Reaching these important income thresholds in a state like California, with its very high cost of living, involves not only successfully leaving high school ready for college, but attending colleges that deliver a solid return on investment (ROI) and obtaining one or more post-secondary degrees with significant labor market value.

The likelihood of reaching important milestones on the Education and Opportunity Pathway also depends crucially on avoiding many or most of the negative milestones associated with the Punishment and Marginalization pathway.

Life Course Milestones of the Education and Opportunity Pathway

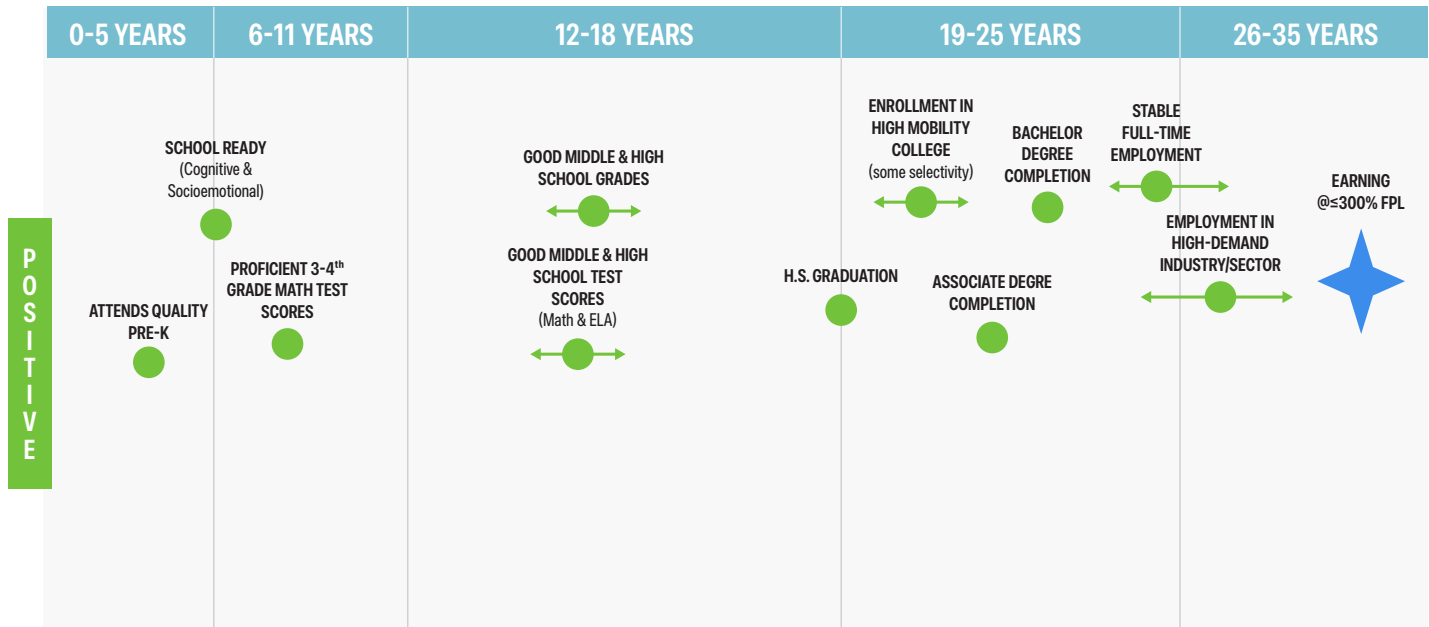
An extensive review of the longitudinal research evidence highlights at least ten milestones that shape the likelihood that males of color will reach the middle class (see Figure 3).

35 Autor, D. H. (2014). Skills, education, and the rise of earnings inequality among the 'Other 99 Percent.' *Science*, 344(6186), 843-851.

36 Carnevale, A. P., Rose, S. J., & Cheah, B. (2011). The college payoff: Education, occupations, lifetime earnings. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/the-college-payoff/>

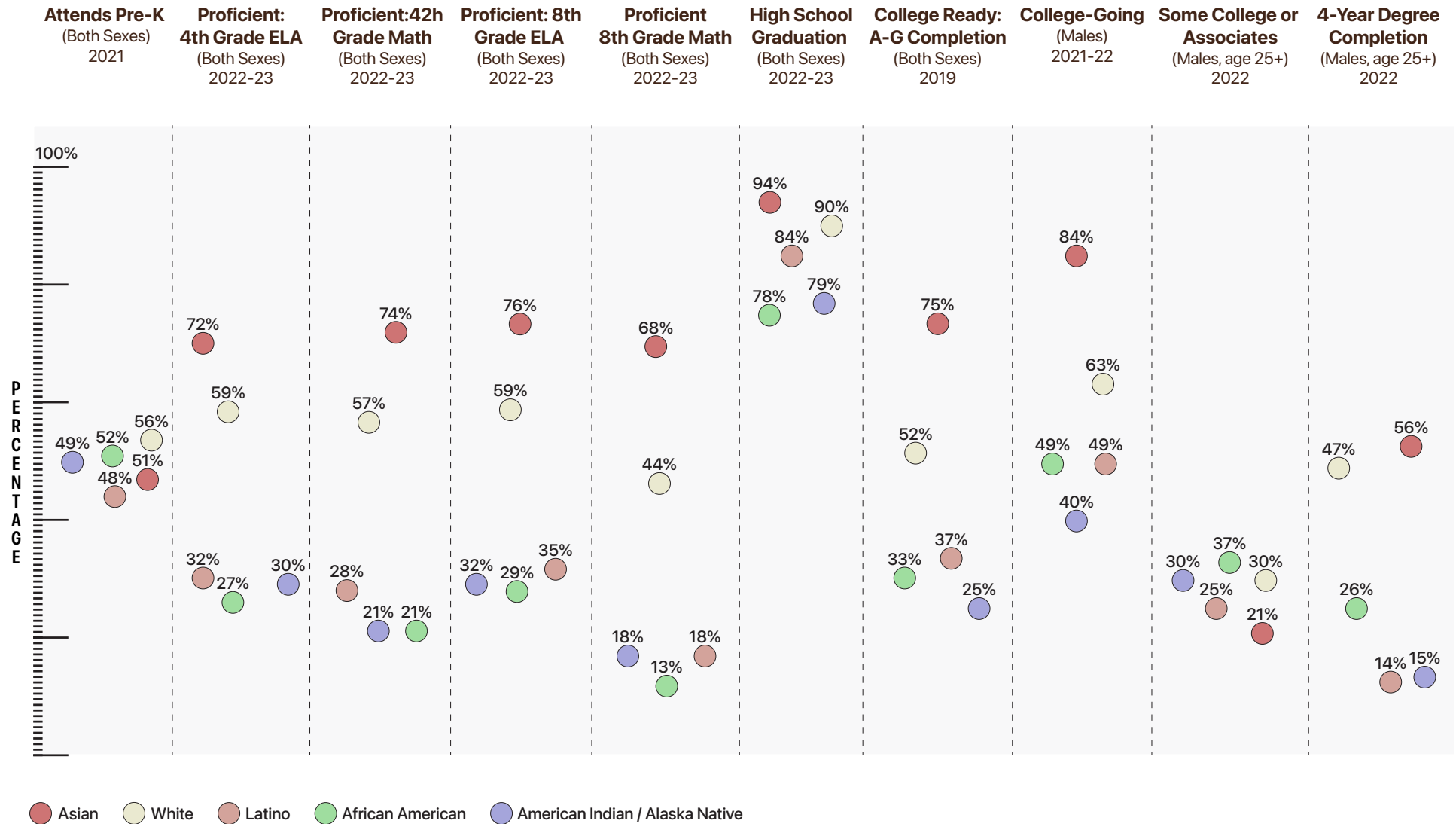
37 Haskins, R. (2007). Education and economic mobility. The Economic Mobility Project, Pew Charitable Trusts. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/02_economic_mobility_sawhill_ch8.pdf

Figure 3. Key Life Course Milestones of the Education and Opportunity Pathway



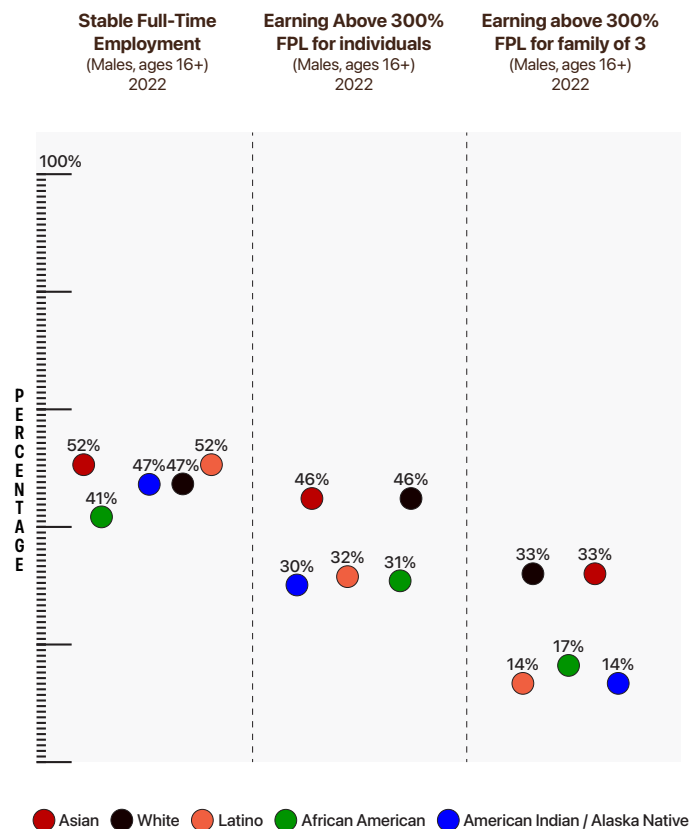
Youth of color in California trail significantly behind white youth in their likelihood of achieving educational milestones on the path to the middle class (see Figure 4). Along with large racial gaps in elementary and middle school English and math proficiency, youth of color experience large gaps in college readiness, college enrollment, college completion, and the likelihood of earning a middle-class income.

Figure 4. The Likelihood of Experiencing Select Opportunity Pathway Milestones for Youth of Color in California



Ten “positive” milestones increase the likelihood of a young person enrolling in college, completing a college degree, and/or earning higher earnings in young adulthood. They include enrolling in quality preschool, being ready for school in kindergarten, attaining good grades and test scores in math and literacy through the elementary and middle school years, completing a postsecondary credential with significant labor market value, and attaining stable full-time employment in a high-demand industry.

- 1. Pre-K attendance:** Several long-term studies have pointed to the beneficial effects of preschool programs on educational attainment, including the Carolina Abecedarian program, the High-Scope Perry Preschool Project, Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers, and Head Start.³⁸ More recent studies of pre-K programs in Boston, Tulsa, and Georgia show similar findings. Participating in Boston’s universal preschool programs has been shown to cause an increase in 4-year college enrollment by 5.9 percentage points, with more significant effects for boys. Moreover, although both boys and girls showed an increase in college enrollment, only boys saw improvements in rates of juvenile incarceration, high school graduation, SAT-taking, and college graduation.³⁹ Evidence from Tulsa, Oklahoma shows that enrolling in the city’s preschool programs caused college enrollment rates to increase by 12 percentage points, with the effects limited to Black and Latino students.⁴⁰ Lastly, Georgia’s statewide universal pre-K program has been shown to boost college completion rates by 13.7%.⁴¹
- 2. Kindergarten socioemotional/cognitive readiness:** School readiness, characterized by acceptable math and reading test proficiency, as well as positive teacher assessments of attention, externalizing behaviors, and internalizing behaviors, predicts the years of education a young person will complete.⁴²
- 3. Middle childhood math test scores:** Math and reading test scores in middle childhood have been linked to college enrollment. A national study has found that persistently low math test scores between ages 6 and 10 were associated with a 34-percentage point drop in college attendance.⁴³
- 4. Middle and high school math & ELA test scores:** Persistent difficulties in math and reading during middle school are significant predictors of college completion. A study using nationally representative data found that continuous low math test scores from grades 8-10 are associated with an 8-percentage point reduction in postsecondary degree



38 Cascio, E. (2021). Early childhood education in the United States: What, when, where, who, how, and why (NBER Working Paper No. 28722). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w28722>

39 Gray-Lobe, G., Pathak, P. A., & Walters, C. R. (2021). The long-term effects of universal preschool in Boston (NBER Working Paper No. 28756).

40 Gormley Jr, W. T., Amadon, S., Magnuson, K., Claessens, A., & Hummel-Price, D. (2023). Universal Pre-K and college enrollment: Is there a link? AERA Open, 9, 23328584221147893.

41 Berne, J. S. (2022). The long-run impacts of universal pre-K: Evidence from the first statewide program. [Type of work, e.g., Working Paper, Unpublished Manuscript, etc.]. Institution/ Publisher.

42 Rabiner, D. L., Godwin, J., & Dodge, K. A. (2016). Predicting academic achievement and attainment: The contribution of early academic skills, attention difficulties, and social competence. School Psychology Review, 45(2), 250–267. <https://doi.org/10.17105/spr45-2.250-267>

43 Duncan and Magnuson (2011)



Michael Tubbs, Founder of End Poverty in California and Mayors for a Guaranteed Income (MGI) and Special Advisor for Economic Mobility and Opportunity for Governor Gavin Newsom, speaking on a panel about investing in boys and men of color at the CFBMoC All-Member Summit in 2023. Credit: Brooke Anderson

attainment. Similarly, consistently low reading scores during these grades is associated with a 6-percentage point reduction.⁴⁴

5. **Middle and high school grades:** Academic performance, as indicated by grades received, has been shown to be a potent predictor of graduating from college. Several studies have demonstrated that grades in middle and high school are powerful predictors of college completion, even stronger than admission tests like the SAT or ACT.⁴⁵ Moreover, a study of all first time freshmen who enrolled in the California State University system, found that high school G.P.A. was a strong predictor of college graduation over and above standardized assessments.⁴⁶

6. **Enrollment in high mobility colleges with some selectivity:** The level of selectivity of colleges that young adults attend is a significant determinant of their long-term earnings prospects, and this impact is above and beyond the attainment of a college degree alone.

⁴⁷ In a large national study by Chetty et al. (2020), consisting of 10.8 million individuals

44 Farkas, G. (2011). Chapter 4: Middle and high school skills, behaviors, attitudes, and curriculum enrollment, and their consequences. In G. J. Duncan & R. J. Murnane (Eds.), *Whither opportunity?: Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances*. Russell Sage Foundation.

45 See Geiser, S., & Santelices, M. V. (2007). Validity of high-school grades in predicting student success beyond the freshman year: High-school record vs. standardized tests as indicators of four-year college outcomes; Galla, B. M., Shulman, E. P., Plummer, B. D., Gardner, M., Hutt, S. J., Goyer, J. P., ... & Duckworth, A. L. (2019). Why high school grades are better predictors of on-time college graduation than are admissions test scores: The roles of self-regulation and cognitive ability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(6), 2077-2115; William G. Bowen, Matthew M. Chingos, and Michael S. McPherson, *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities* (Princeton University Press, 2009), Appendix Table 6.7; Allensworth EM, Clark K. (2020) High School GPAs and ACT Scores as Predictors of College Completion: Examining Assumptions About Consistency Across High Schools. *Educational Researcher*. 2020;49(3):198-211; DiPrete, T.A. and Buchmann, C. (2014) The Secret Behind College Completion, Girls, Boys, and The Power of Eighth Grade Grades. *Third Way Report*. <https://www.thirdway.org/report/the-secret-behind-college-completion-girls-boys-and-the-power-of-eighth-grade-grades#:~:text=To%20see%20into%20the%20future,to%20look%20at%20eighth%20grade,&text=DiPrete%20and%20Buchmann%20explain%20that,into%20high%20school%20and%20college>.

46 Jackson, J., & Kurlaender, M. (2014). College readiness and college completion at broad access four-year institutions. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(8), 947-971

47 Witteveen, D., & Attewell, P. (2020). Reconsidering the 'meritocratic power of a college degree'. *Research in social stratification and mobility*, 66, 100479; Thompson, J. (2019). Mobility in the middle: Bachelor's degree selectivity and the intergenerational association in status in the United States. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 60, 16-28; Zhou, X. (2019). Equalization or selection? Reassessing the "meritocratic power" of a college degree in intergenerational income mobility. *American Sociological Review*, 84(3), 459-485.

born between 1980 and 1982, the selectivity of colleges attended accounted for 62% of the subsequent earnings gap between low-income and more affluent students.⁴⁸ However, higher selectivity alone is not what makes colleges boost long-term earnings. There are several mobility-boosting colleges that help their low-income students advance to the middle class, but they are not highly selective.⁴⁹ It is not well understood why these colleges enhance mobility prospects in the way they do. California colleges that have been shown to be mobility boosters include Cal State Los Angeles, Cal State Dominguez Hills, Cal State Northridge, U.C. Riverside, Cal State Bakersfield, Cal State Fresno, and U.C. Irvine. All of these colleges were in the top 10 percent of a sample of 2,137 colleges rated for boosting the income mobility prospects for lower-income students.⁵⁰

7. **Associate's degree completion:** While a bachelor's degree delivers the largest improvements in lifetime earnings on average compared to just a high school diploma, certain associate's degrees can also yield large gains. Associate's degrees or vocational certificates in the fields of electronics, health, computing/IT, engineering, and business/office management can lead to larger earnings gains than some bachelor's degrees.⁵¹ Given that in California, three-quarters of Black and Latino first-time freshmen (around 72-78%) enroll in community colleges, completion of associate's degrees is a milestone with potentially far-reaching ramifications for economic opportunity.⁵²
8. **Bachelor's degree completion:** Graduating with a bachelor's degree has become a virtual prerequisite for upward mobility in the United States for youth of color and the differences in lifetime earnings for those with a college degree compared to those with just a high school diploma is stark. Those with bachelor's degrees earn 31 percent more than those with an associate's degree during their lifetimes and 84 percent more than those with just a high school diploma.⁵³
9. **Stable full-time employment:** Having lengthy unemployment periods or employment instability are significant predictors of reduced long-term income.⁵⁴ Studies of nationally representative data have shown that low and unstable employment histories during prime working years (ages 22-50) are associated with a reduction in long-term income of 39%-53%.⁵⁵
10. **Employment in a high-demand industry:** Working in an industry or sector with high labor demand and wage growth is more likely to lead to joining the middle class than working in industries or sectors where labor demand and wages are stagnant or shrinking.⁵⁶ Solutions for Liberating Potential for California's Boys and Men of Color

48 Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Saez, E., Turner, N., & Yagan, D. (2020). Income segregation and intergenerational mobility across colleges in the United States. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjaa005>

49 Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Saez, E., Turner, N., & Yagan, D. (2017). Mobility report cards: The role of colleges in intergenerational mobility (No. w23618). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w23618>

50 Ibid.

51 Kim, C., & Tamborini, C. R. (2019). Are they still worth it? The long-run earnings benefits of an associate degree, vocational diploma or certificate, and some college. *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 5(3), 64-85. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2019.5.3.04>

52 Campaign for College Opportunity. (2019). State of higher education for Black Californians. Campaign for College Opportunity. Retrieved August 4, 2024, from <https://collegecampaign.org/publication/the-state-of-higher-education-for-black-californians>; Campaign for College Opportunity (2021), State of Higher Education for Latinx Californians, Campaign for College Opportunity. Retrieved on August 4th, 2024 from <https://collegecampaign.org/publication/the-state-of-higher-education-for-black-californians>

53 Carnevale, A. P., Rose, S. J., & Cheah, B. (2011). The college payoff: Education, occupations, lifetime earnings. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

54 Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Jones, M., & Porter, S. (2020). Race and economic opportunity in the United States: An intergenerational perspective. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 135(2), 711-783. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjaa007>

55 Weisshaar, K., & Cabello-Hutt, T. (2020). Labor force participation over the life course: The long-term effects of employment trajectories on wages and the gendered payoff to employment. *Demography*, 57(1), 33-60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-019-00831-1>

56 Ross, S. L., & Ukil, P. (2021, May). Initial industry and long-term earnings growth. In *AEA Papers and Proceedings* (Vol. 111, pp. 476-480). American Economic Association.



Photo credit: anatoIycherkas



Solutions for Liberating Potential for California's Boys and Men of Color

Drawing from research evidence on effective interventions for improving the lives of boys and men of color, this section offers recommendations to re-direct boys and men of color from pathways of punishment toward pathways of opportunity. It also highlights work being done by the partner foundations of the California Funders for Boys and Men of Color (CFBMOC) to positively change the lives of males of color across the state. The recommendations are organized into three broad groupings: 1) Dismantle punishment pathways and build recovery ones; 2) Create more effective postsecondary pathways; 3) Connect boys and men of color to middle-class jobs.

DISMANTLE PUNISHMENT PATHWAYS AND BUILD RECOVERY ONES

Decrease exclusionary discipline, divert youth from involvement in the juvenile legal system and help formerly incarcerated youth successfully reintegrate into school.

Youth who have experienced juvenile incarceration are at heightened risk of dropping out of school permanently or experiencing adult incarceration. Given the significant influence of juvenile arrest and incarceration on placing youth of color on a pathway to economic marginalization, California should build on its progress of decarcerating juveniles by diverting them from deeper involvement in the juvenile legal system. Evidence shows that diversion is an effective approach for reducing delinquent behavior. For example, a systematic review of 19 rigorous evaluations found that police-initiated diversion of youth reduces their risk of future delinquent behavior.⁵⁷ Another study examined the effect of a program in Philadelphia that barred youth from being arrested for school-based issues and misdemeanor offenses. In their quasi-experimental analysis, the researchers found that diversion reduced the likelihood that youth would experience suspension or expulsion

⁵⁷ Wilson, D. B., Brennan, I., & Olaghere, A. (2018). Police-initiated diversion for youth to prevent future delinquent behavior: A systematic review. *Campbell systematic reviews*, 14(1), 1-88; Harmon-Darrow, C., Afkinich, J., Franke, N. D., & Betz, G. (2023). Police diversion at arrest: A systematic review of the literature. *Criminal justice and behavior*, 50(3), 307-329.

in the year after an offense occurred.⁵⁸ These types of reforms together can help dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline and reduce the risk that males of color will follow a punishment pathway into and through young adulthood.

National data shows that just 15 percent of formerly incarcerated 9th graders graduated from high school in the four years after their release.⁵⁹ Evidence shows that these outcomes can be the causal result of juvenile incarceration itself.⁶⁰ When schools fail to effectively reintegrate youth who have experienced incarceration, they only help cement the pathway for these youth to adult incarceration.

Walton et al (2021), evaluated a relationship-centered intervention designed to reduce recidivism among children reentering school from juvenile detention and promote a stronger connection between them and school. It aims to shift mindsets, minimize bias, and improve outcomes by orienting educators and students towards positive relationships. The intervention reduced juvenile reincarceration in the semester following school reentry from 69% to 29%.⁶¹ The findings in this study are also buttressed by other research on how teacher-student connection reduces recidivism. A study of 1,354 adolescents followed for a year after they were adjudicated delinquent found that those who had a stronger attachment to school while in confinement—indicated by a bond with a teacher, their attitude toward school, and the time they spent on homework—were less likely to engage in delinquency and more likely to re-enroll in school or work for a year after release.⁶²

**WHEN SCHOOLS
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CFBMOC Funder Spotlight

The California Endowment has prioritized these types of strategies in its efforts to dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline, heal school communities, and build healthy learning environments. The Endowment has invested in an “ecosystem” of organizations and coalitions like Dignity in Schools Campaign-California, the Black Organizing Project, CADRE, and the Dolores Huerta Foundation. These investments have led to shifts in state policy and local practice aimed at reducing the number of males of color experiencing exclusionary discipline and improving school climate so that all students thrive.

Two foundations in Los Angeles County—**The California Community Foundation and The Liberty Hill Foundation**—have relaunched a public-private partnership with the Los Angeles County Probation Department to implement Ready to Rise (R2R), a \$50 million multi-year initiative involving 96 grantee organizations and almost 60,000 youth. Ready to Rise (R2R) is an effort designed to expand opportunities and resources for youth development and enrichment services, focusing on diversion and prevention rather than ineffective punitive measures. The goal of Ready to Rise is to build a system that replaces traditional punishment and incarceration with emerging best practices centered on healing, learning, and

58 Goldstein, N. E., NeMoyer, A., Le, T., Guo, S., Cole, L. M., Pollard, A., ... & Zhang, F. (2021). Keeping kids in school through prearrest diversion: School disciplinary outcomes of the Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program. *Law and Human Behavior*, 45(6), 497-508. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000437>

59 Kubek, J. B., Tindall-Biggins, C., Reed, K., Carr, L. E., & Fenning, P. A. (2020). A systematic literature review of school reentry practices among youth impacted by juvenile justice. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 110, 104773. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104773>

60 Aizer, A., & Doyle, J. J. (2015). Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital, and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges *. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(2), 759-803. doi:10.1093/qje/qjv003; Hjalmarsen, R. (2008). Criminal justice involvement and high school completion. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 63(2), 613-630

61 Walton, G. M., Okonofua, J. A., Remington Cunningham, K., Hurst, D., Pinedo, A., Weitz, E., ... & Eberhardt, J. L. (2021). Lifting the bar: A relationship-orienting intervention reduces recidivism among children reentering school from juvenile detention. *Psychological Science*, 32(11), 1747-1767. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976211044240>

62 Jäggi, L., & Kliwer, W. (2020). Reentry of incarcerated juveniles: Correctional education as a turning point across juvenile and adult facilities. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(11), 1348-1370; Jäggi, L., Kliwer, W., & Serpell, Z. (2020). Schooling while incarcerated as a turning point for serious juvenile and young adult offenders. *Journal of Adolescence*, 78, 9-23.

opportunity.⁶³ R2R is also funded as a key capacity-building strategy of the California Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act (JJCPA) funding stream.

Recognizing that School Resource Officers (SROs) are increasingly called upon to handle disciplinary issues, a practice that results in youth of color being drawn into the juvenile legal system for what would otherwise be school disciplinary infractions, The **Zellerbach Family Foundation** supported Black Organizing Project's advocacy to remove law enforcement officers from schools and redirect resources toward support services, restorative justice facilitators, family liaisons, culture keepers and other interventions that contribute to safer school environments for students, teachers, and staff alike.⁶⁴

Create postsecondary pathways for youth in long-term juvenile confinement.

Youth who experience long-term confinement in California typically reach adulthood and graduate from high school while confined.⁶⁵ Without significant intervention, these paths can lead to continued involvement in the criminal legal system and a lifetime of tenuous connection to the labor market. Research shows that connecting these youth to higher education can be a turning point in this trajectory. A systematic review of over 37 years of correctional education research (1980-2017) found that when limited to studies with the highest quality research designs, incarcerated people who participated in correctional education were 28% less likely to recidivate compared to those incarcerated individuals who did not participate in correctional education. This reality has led one researcher to argue that recidivism serves less as a marker of inherent criminal risk and more as a proxy measure for access to opportunity.⁶⁶



Photo credit: Cal State Fullerton

63 All youth-serving R2R grantees integrate a positive youth development framework into their programming including five key areas: identity development, cognitive development, socioemotional development, mental health, and physical health. In addition to programming, grantees receive customized capacity building support, which includes monthly professional coaching, cohort-based training, and peer learning opportunities.

64 Counts, J., Randall, K. N., Ryan, J. B., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). School resource officers in public schools: A national review. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 41(4), 405–430. <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2018.0028n>

65 Office of Youth and Community Restoration. (2023). Building higher education pathways for youth in secure treatment: A call to action. California Department of Health and Human Services.

66 Bozick, R., Steele, J., Davis, L., & Turner, S. (2018). Does providing inmates with education improve postrelease outcomes? A meta-analysis of correctional education programs in the United States. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 14, 389–428; Denney, M. G., & Tynes, R. (2021). The effects of college in prison and policy implications. *Justice Quarterly*, 38(7), 1542–1566.

CFBMOC Funder Spotlight

The value of postsecondary pathways for serving as a turning point on a punishment pathway is reflected in the work of **The California Wellness Foundation**, which has sought to support postsecondary pathways for youth involved in the juvenile legal system. The organization has done this via support for such groups as:

1. Project Rebound – a program designed to support the higher education and successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into the California State University system
2. Underground Scholars – a program supporting formerly incarcerated individuals to attend the University of California
3. Project Change – the first community college-supported program in California to provide wrap-around student support services, direct access to postsecondary education for incarcerated youth, and in-person college instruction inside juvenile youth facilities⁶⁷

Increase high school graduation for boys and men of color.

High school graduation is a key fork in the road leading to economic opportunity on one side or economic marginalization on the other, particularly for Black males in California.⁶⁸ Programs and policies that target disadvantaged Black, Latino, and Native American males to promote high school graduation are sorely needed. Two rigorously evaluated interventions detailed below have shown success in boosting high school graduation rates for boys and girls of color.

Becoming a Man (BAM) has shown remarkable success in boosting high school graduation rates for Black and Latino boys. Tailored to high school-age young men, especially from disadvantaged neighborhoods, BAM helps to aid them in making a smooth transition to adulthood by offering cognitive behavioral therapy, group sessions led by trained facilitators, and a commitment to fostering vital social-emotional skills and values. Using a rites-of-passage framework to support transition stages to adulthood, BAM offers a 30-lesson curriculum scaffolded with a safe space, engaging activities, strong caring adult relationships, group mental health support modeled on cognitive behavioral therapy principles, and a set of core values. BAM was shown in a large randomized controlled trial evaluation to



Photo credit: Obama Foundation

⁶⁷ Office of Youth and Community Restoration. (2023). Building higher education pathways for youth in secure treatment: A call to action. California Department of Health and Human Services.

⁶⁸ Raphael, S. (2007). Early incarceration spells and the transition to adulthood. In S. Danziger & C. E. Rouse (Eds.), *The price of independence: The economics of early adulthood* (pp. 278–306). Russell Sage Foundation.

increase high school graduation rates by 19% while reducing total arrests by 35%, violent-crime arrests by 50%, and other arrests by 43%.⁶⁹

The Self-Affirmation intervention has been shown in a large randomized controlled trial to improve on-time high school graduation rates for Black and Latino youth by 10 percentage points, cutting the Black-White and Latino-White gaps by 50%. The intervention was delivered multiple times to middle school students and was comprised of a brief writing exercise designed to address and mitigate threats stemming from negative stereotypes. The interventions employ exercises that encourage students to contemplate and articulate values that are important to them and briefly write about them.⁷⁰

CFBMOC Funder Spotlight

Seeking to improve school outcomes and reduce risk for juvenile legal involvement, **The California Community Foundation** launched the BLOOM initiative in 2012 to redirect young males of color away from pathways to punishment towards opportunity. The initiative subsequently became a formal alliance known as the BLOOM Alliance, which was comprised of Becoming a Man, Social Justice Learning Institute, and Brotherhood Crusade. Partners in the BLOOM Alliance deliver rites of passage programs targeting young males of color in middle and high school. They serve thousands of students at dozens of school sites across Los Angeles County with a budget of around \$7 million. According to their program impact report, 92.7% of BLOOM participants tracked through senior year earned their high school diploma or GED.⁷¹

Implement felony diversion.

A felony conviction is the culmination of the punishment pathway and one that severely curtails the economic prospects for males of color for the remainder of their lives. Finding ways to prevent the stigmatizing effects of a felony scarlet letter requires policy and program innovation. Evidence points to the enormous benefits of avoiding a first-time felony conviction. Mueller-Smith and Schepel (2021) conducted a quasi-experimental study of a felony diversion program in Harris County, Texas. They found that defendants who avoided incarceration through court diversion saw a 45% reduction in the probability of future convictions and 50% higher quarterly employment rates over 10 years. Moreover, these effects were particularly pronounced for young Black men with misdemeanor criminal records, underscoring the importance of avoiding a felony conviction in improving long-term employment prospects. In examining mechanisms that may explain the effects, the authors determined that the effects are driven largely by the defendant's ability to avoid receiving a felony conviction and their consequent ability to find work in industries not accessible to those with felony records.⁷²

69 Heller, S. B., Shah, A. K., Guryan, J., Ludwig, J., Mullainathan, S., & Pollack, H. A. (2017). Thinking, fast and slow? Some field experiments to reduce crime and dropout in Chicago. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 132(1), 1-54; Lansing, J., & Rapoport, E. (2016). Bolstering belonging in BAM and beyond: Youth Guidance's Becoming a Man (BAM) Program components, experiential processes, and mechanisms. A report to Youth Guidance. Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

70 intervention on African American and Latino students' high school success. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 113(3), 605-620. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000505>

71 California Community Foundation. (2019). Building a lifetime of options and opportunities for men: Transforming the lives of young Black men in South Los Angeles. Retrieved August 1, 2024, from https://www.calfund.org/wp-content/uploads/Bloom-Report-Layout_Output-small.pdf

72 Mueller-Smith, M., & Schnepel, K. T. (2021). Diversion in the criminal justice system. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 88(2), 883-936. <https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdaa058>

CREATE MORE EFFECTIVE POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS

Create comprehensive postsecondary completion programs for community college students.

Too few males of color who enroll in community colleges in California ever earn an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year university. Interventions are necessary to improve their success, and evidence points to the effectiveness of comprehensive programs like the **Accelerated Study in Associates Program**. Evaluated in both New York City and Ohio, ASAP is tailored to helping low-income students complete an associate's degree in three years or less. Requiring full-time college attendance, ASAP offers extensive support. Unique in its approach, ASAP holistically addresses various challenges to student success over a three-year span. Its primary objective is to elevate graduation rates by delivering comprehensive support services to community college students in specific majors.⁷³ In a randomized controlled trial evaluation in New York City, ASAP increased associate's degree completion rates for community college students by 47%.⁷⁴ In a separate randomized controlled trial evaluation in Ohio, ASAP increased associate's degree completion rates by 76% for Black students and by 103% for Latino students.

THE FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE ENROLLMENT IS OFTEN THE MOST PRECARIOUS FOR STUDENT PERSISTENCE AND WHEN THEY ARE MOST LIKELY TO DROP OUT. THUS, INTERVENTIONS THAT CAN HELP STUDENTS SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THE FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE AND RETURN FOR THE SECOND ARE LIKELY TO BE CRITICAL TO COLLEGE COMPLETION.

Provide student coaching to support persistence and completion.

Supporting postsecondary completion at four-year universities for males of color often requires strong supportive relationships that can help these young men navigate the various challenges occurring both in school and in real life that can knock an educational career off-track. The student coaching program, **InsideTrack**, has been shown in a randomized controlled trial evaluation to improve persistence and completion. In the program, each student is assigned a coach who works with them for two semesters to overcome impediments to college persistence. Evaluation results showed that coached students were 3.4 percentage points more likely to still be enrolled 2 years after receiving coaching, with larger effects for males (4.7 percentage points) compared to females (2.2 percentage points).⁷⁵

The first year of college enrollment is often the most precarious for student persistence and when they are most likely to drop out. Thus, interventions that can help students successfully navigate the first year of college and return for the second are likely to be critical to college completion. One intervention, the **Social-Belonging Intervention**, was evaluated by Walton et al (2023) at 22 U.S. 4-year colleges with incoming freshman and transfer students. The intervention uses stories from older students and active reflection exercises to articulate common worries about belonging in the transition to college. In those schools with ample opportunities to belong, the brief online

73 Weiss, M. J., Ratledge, A., Sommo, C., & Gupta, H. (2019). Supporting community college students from start to degree completion: Long-term evidence from a randomized trial of CUNY's ASAP. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 11(3), 253–297. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20170142>

74 Ibid

75 Bettinger, E., & Baker, R. (2011). The effects of student coaching in college: An evaluation of a randomized experiment in student mentoring (NBER Working Paper No. 16881). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w16881>

intervention increased first-year full-time enrollment persistence by 2 percentage points for Black and Latino students.⁷⁶

CFBMOC Funder Spotlight

Given the importance of completing a college degree to reaching the middle class for males of color, **ECMC Foundation** has prioritized investing in efforts that help these students persist and graduate from postsecondary institutions. Through individual grants as well as its “Takeoff” signature program, the foundation is working with 2- and 4-year colleges to create effective programs and deploy system-wide reforms to support young men of color.

CONNECT BOYS AND MEN OF COLOR TO MIDDLE-CLASS JOBS

Promote enrollment in high-mobility colleges in California.

Not all colleges are created equally in their ability to promote upward mobility for males of color from low-income backgrounds. Data created by Chetty et al (2017) has helped to identify those California colleges with the greatest likelihood of being mobility boosters. For example, Cal State Los Angeles, Cal State Dominguez Hills, Cal State Northridge, U.C. Riverside, Cal State Bakersfield, Cal State Pomona, Cal State Fresno, University of La Verne, U.C. Irvine, and Cal State Bernardino were all found to be in the top 20 percent California colleges for boosting the income mobility prospects for lower-income students.⁷⁷ Identifying what makes these colleges more successful for



Organizing Director Jessica speaking at BOP press conference 2020. Photo credit: BOP

⁷⁶ Walton, G. M., Murphy, M. C., Logel, C., Yeager, D. S., Goyer, J. P., Brady, S. T., ... & Krol, N. (2023). Where and with whom does a brief social-belonging intervention promote progress in college? *Science*, 380(6644), 499–505. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abn0263>

⁷⁷ Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Saez, E., Turner, N., & Yagan, D. (2017). Mobility report cards: The role of colleges in intergenerational mobility (No. w23618). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w23618>

low-income students of color as well as promoting attendance at these institutions can help more males of color pursue viable pathways to the middle class.

Expand employment in high-growth industries.

Working in industries that have high growth and strong demand for labor is an important wave to ride to the middle class. An array of sector-targeted workforce development programs has helped low-income workers gain access to high-paying jobs in growing industries.⁷⁸ Two programs in particular bear mention: **Per Scholas** and **Year Up**.

Per Scholas is a nonprofit information technology (IT) training and employment services provider that has provided sector-targeted workforce development programs since 1998. Its programs are focused on helping low-income adults gain entry-level IT jobs. Their comprehensive program, spanning 4 to 5 months, provides participants with approximately 450 hours of classroom instruction, job placement assistance, and post-employment services. At 5 years post-intervention, Per Scholas increased earnings by \$3,458 per year (14%).

Year Up is a national sectoral training program targeting young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. This program seeks to help low-income, low-skilled adults acquire and complete training, which subsequently leads to placements in high-paying occupations. Year Up offers participants six months of full-time training in both the IT and financial service sectors, followed by six-month internships at leading firms. The program includes extensive support, such as weekly stipends, while also placing a significant emphasis on honing both professional and technical skills. At 18-21 months from the start of the program, Year Up increased average quarterly earnings by 52% for Black participants and 53% for Latino ones.⁷⁹

CFBMOC Funder Spotlight

To increase employment in occupations likely to yield higher lifetime earnings, **The California Wellness Foundation** is prioritizing access to pre-apprenticeship programs for males of color to help them gain access to quality jobs. They are also focused on strengthening the ecosystem of Black Worker Centers to help confront issues of racial discrimination within public systems through their investment in the UCLA Labor Center: Center for the Advancement of Racial Equity at Work.

78 Katz, L. F., Roth, J., Hendra, R., & Schaberg, K. (2022). Why do sectoral employment programs work? Lessons from WorkAdvance. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 40(S1), S249–S291. <https://doi.org/10.1086/715509>

79 Constance, N. (2018). Bridging the opportunity divide for low-income youth: Implementation and early impacts of the Year Up program pathways for advancing careers and education (PACE).



Photo credit: Alliance for Boys and Men of Color



Conclusion

It is far too easy and far too common for boys and men of color to experience certain critical milestones that direct them onto the Punishment and Marginalization Pathway. While none of these milestones is more detrimentally influential than failing to graduate from high school, all of them are significant, and the majority of them arise during the middle and high school years, when youth become more aware of and vulnerable to societal pressures and stress.

This report offers a detailed examination of the milestones on the Punishment and Marginalization Pathway to allow for a deeper understanding of what to avoid as we increase our awareness of the need to help guide these young people to more positive futures. Importantly, the beneficial milestones on the Education and Opportunity Pathway are also outlined above so that we can perceive what to avoid and when and where to direct young males of color toward pathways of healing and inclusion that lead to better long-term outcomes.

In California and across the country, several leading organizations and programs offer models for how to build and employ initiatives to better support, educate, and employ a new generation of youth towards a lifetime of achievement and success. The success of these efforts is a strong signal that change is happening, but it is not enough—we need more partners and new initiatives to enable the dismantling of punishment pathways and the creation of recovery pathways. We must create more effective educational and economic trajectories to help connect boys and young men of color to jobs that can sustain them and their families. When we do this, we build a healthy and inclusive society where everyone can thrive.