Middle School Matters:
Improving the Life Course of Black Boys

A Statistical Profile
A Statistical Profile of the Educational and Life Status of Middle School Black Boys

The middle school years represent a prominent transition for children. For our most vulnerable population, the 1.5 million Black boys between the ages of 9–13, this period can be tumultuous. When a Black boy born in 2001 has a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime, the path a student chooses in middle school counts.

This brief statistical profile presents a snapshot of the treacherous waters many Black boys navigate during their formative middle school years. The data for this age group are limited. As a group, they are not represented in many studies of children, yet they don’t fully reflect the data reported for teens. The data present a portrait of a group adrift — economically and academically — and many Black boys are making life decisions that eventually restrict their prospects for a successful future. Some are treading water, while others are sinking — the data show that few will reach shore without intervention.

Our 2012 symposium, convened by ETS and the Children’s Defense Fund, offers an opportunity for community members, policymakers, educators, youth workers and advocates to share successful practices, provide information about resources and recommend actions leading to academic success for Black boys. The middle school years really do matter.

Across the country, innovative educational organizations are designing and implementing programs aimed at improving the life course of Black boys in middle school.

This symposium will highlight some of these promising approaches and dynamic leadership strategies intended to offset the effects of the multiple disadvantages that many Black boys face in the classroom.

46 percent of Black elementary school students and 21 percent of Black secondary school students attend high-poverty schools, compared to 7 percent of White elementary school students and 2 percent of White secondary school students.

Poverty
36 percent of Black boys ages 9–13 live in poverty; the poverty rate for White boys this age is 12 percent.
17 percent of Black boys ages 9–13 live in extreme poverty, compared to 5 percent of their White peers. Extreme poverty is defined as below 50 percent of the poverty line or about $31 a day for a family of four.

Single-Parent Families
A majority — 57 percent — of Black boys ages 9–13 live with a single mother and an additional 6 percent live with a single father, while 17 percent of White boys this age live with a single mother and 5 percent live with a single father.

Disadvantaged Neighborhoods
More than 75 percent of Black children born between 1985 and 2000 grew up in “high disadvantage” neighborhoods, characterized by high levels of unemployment, welfare, poverty, single-parent families, segregation and density of children under age 18. Five percent of White children in that cohort grew up in such neighborhoods.

The homicide rate for Black boys ages 10–14 is more than seven times higher than that of their White peers.

Sexual Activity
31 percent of Black male ninth-graders report having had sex for the first time before age 13, four times the rate for White boys.
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Drug and Alcohol Use
20 percent of Black male ninth-graders report smoking marijuana before age 13, compared to 8 percent of their White peers.
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

36 percent of Black boys ages 9–13 live in a two-parent family, compared to 76 percent of White boys this age.

29 percent of Black male ninth-graders report drinking alcohol before the age of 13, compared to 26 percent of their White peers.
— Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
Nutrition
23 percent of eighth-grade Black boys report that they did not drink milk within the last week, compared to 7 percent of their White peers.

24 percent of eighth-grade Black boys report eating fast food at least once per day in the last week, compared to 5 percent of their White peers.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Student Questionnaire.”

Grade Retention
Black students were 16 percent of all sixth- through eighth-graders included in the Department of Education’s Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), but were 42 percent of students in those grades who were held back a year.


Friendships
69 percent of eighth-grade Black boys and 46 percent of White boys report that getting good grades is very important. Similarly, 66 percent of eighth-grade Black boys and 45 percent of White boys report that good grades are very important to their close friends.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Student Questionnaire.”

47 percent of eighth-grade Black boys and 55 percent of White boys report that attending class regularly is very important to their close friends.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Student Questionnaire.”

15 percent of eighth-grade Black boys report that their classmates do not care about their feelings, compared to 7 percent of White boys.

— Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Student Questionnaire.”

Aspirations
91 percent of parents of eighth-grade Black boys and 94 percent of parents of eighth-grade White boys are satisfied with their son’s education.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Parents Questionnaire.”

79 percent of eighth-grade Black boys and 82 percent of their White peers anticipate that they will graduate from a four-year college or earn an advanced graduate degree.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Student Questionnaire.”

67 percent of parents of eighth-grade Black boys and 71 percent of parents of eighth-grade White boys expect their sons to attain at least a four-year college degree.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Parents Questionnaire.”

35 percent of eighth-grade Black boys agree that “Every time I try to get ahead, something or somebody stops me,” compared to 27 percent of White boys.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Student Questionnaire.”

11 percent of parents of eighth-grade Black boys and 6 percent of parents of eighth-grade White boys expect their sons to attain a Ph.D., M.D. or other advanced degree.

— Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Parents Questionnaire.”

Time With Friends
29 percent of eighth-grade Black boys and 18 percent of their White peers report being out with friends (not at someone’s home) every day or almost every day. Additionally, 33 percent of eighth-grade Black boys and 20 percent of their White peers are at a friend’s house every day or almost every day.

Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Student Questionnaire.”
### Time on Homework
47 percent of Black students in Kindergarten through eighth grade report doing homework five or more days per week, compared to 35 percent of White students. Black students also were more likely than White students to report that their parents helped them with their homework five or more days per week — 26 percent versus 14 percent.


### Multitasking During Homework
35 percent of Black children ages 8–18 report using entertainment media most of the time they are doing their homework, compared to 28 percent of White children.


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### Reading
Black children ages 8–14 report reading books for pleasure an average of 18 minutes per day in contrast to 31 minutes for White children.


### Watching Television
53 percent of Black eighth-graders report watching four or more hours of television a day, compared to 18 percent of their White peers.

Source: Child Trends Data Bank. Analysis of Monitoring the Future Data from 2008.

### Television Availability
86 percent of Black children ages 8–18 have a television in their bedroom and 68 percent have cable TV, versus 64 percent and 41 percent for White children.


### Computer and Internet Access
89 percent of Black children ages 8–18 have access to a computer, 78 percent have Internet access and 55 percent have high-speed Internet access, versus 94 percent, 88 percent and 61 percent for White children.


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The reading achievement gap is persistent and distinct among our nation’s boys.

25 percent of the nation’s 578,000 fourth-grade Black boys reside in Texas, Florida or Georgia.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2011 Reading Assessment.

- **Employment**
  
  In March 2012, the unemployment rate for Black men over age 25 was more than twice that of White men (13.8 versus 6.8 percent).


- **Wealth**
  
  In 2009, 40 percent of Black households had zero or negative net worth, compared to 20 percent of White households. The median net worth for Black households was $2,200, while the median net worth for White households was over 44 times greater at $97,900.


- **Economic Mobility**
  
  Black men who grow up middle class are almost twice as likely to fall out of the middle class as adults, compared to White men (38 percent versus 21 percent). This disparity does not exist between Black and White women, with both of these groups experiencing similar levels of downward mobility.


- **Home Ownership**
  
  54 percent of parents of eighth-grade Black boys and 86 percent of parents of eighth-grade White boys own their homes.

  Source: Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. 2007. “Spring 2007 Grade 8 Parents Questionnaire.”

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