Welcome
Today is devoted to the issues facing the 3.5 million Black boys under the age of 9 years. Too often, we hear that the problem is too big to solve. However, if we focus our efforts on the education and development of those boys, it is possible to write a different story. Working together, we can explore the challenges facing this vulnerable population, and the opportunities to position young Black boys for educational success.

Speakers:
- Michael T. Nettles, ETS
- Marian Wright Edelman, Children’s Defense Fund

Opening Speaker/Session
The Condition of Young Black Boys in the United States
An abundance of research published in academic journals and the popular press suggests that young Black boys fall behind even before they enter school. Family income, racial/ethnic minority status and maternal educational attainment are among the multiple socio-demographic characteristics associated with young children’s developmental outcomes. In turn, their development affects their readiness for success in school. Of the 40 percent of Black children born in poverty, more than two-thirds are poor for at least half of their childhoods. These children face inadequate healthcare, financial instability, community violence and other forms of stress associated with poverty. Family, community, schools and school systems also play significant roles in the educational outcomes and life trajectories of young Black boys.

This opening session will explore the circumstances that young Black males living in poverty must navigate on the road to educational success. It will provide others with a holistic understanding of the urgent needs and challenges facing young Black boys and lay a foundation for the symposium’s subsequent discussions.

Session Chair:
- Cathy Grace, Children’s Defense Fund

Speakers:
- Oscar Barbarin III, Tulane University
- Iheoma Iruka, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

Discussion 1:
Critical Early Years: Connections of Poverty, Early Brain Development and Academic Achievement
There is a small window of opportunity in the very early years of life to affect brain development that does not present itself again. Scientists suggest that there is a connection between the earliest relationships that infants have with caregivers and the development of their brains as the foundation for lifelong learning.
Constant ongoing experiences, whether positive or negative, lay the social and emotional foundation for babies. In turn, emotional well-being and social competence provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities, and together they are the bricks and mortar that comprise the formation of human development.\(^1\)

Young children who are emotionally secure and socially competent have the foundation to support emerging cognitive skills. Those who are preoccupied with anxiety, stress or fear lack a sufficient foundation on which their cognitive skills can be built. The chaotic context that many young Black males living in poverty must navigate as they develop, grow and learn undermines the critical development that is needed to support cognitive skills, development and ultimately academic achievement.

This panel presentation will offer an overview of current research associated with brain development and neuroscience. Panelists will explore the implications of this research on young Black male academic achievement, and describe initiatives that are using the research in guiding effective programming.

**Session Chair:**
- Rashanda Perryman, Children’s Defense Fund

**Speakers:**
- Aisha Ray, Erikson Institute
- Anjohnette Gibbs, Delta Early Learning Program

**Lunch Discussion:**

*The Time is Now: A Strong Start for Young Black Boys is A Strong Future for the Nation*

Wade Henderson will give a speech about the importance of ensuring access to high-quality public education for every child in the United States. The speech will highlight the need for significant investment in Black boys ages 0–9 as a moral imperative, one that is critical to the future success of our country.

**Session Chair:**
- Catherine M. Millett, ETS

**Speaker:**
- Wade Henderson, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

**Discussion 2:**

*Approaches to Learning from PreK–3rd Grade and the Effect on Closing Gaps*

The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the Nation’s Report Card™, reveals that only 12 percent of fourth-grade Black males performed at or above proficient levels in reading, compared with 38 percent of White males nationwide. Math results were similar.\(^1\) One promising approach to addressing this disparity is the development of a high-quality, seamless PreK through 3rd grade continuum, in which children move smoothly from one grade to another through a connected, aligned set of experiences.

This panel session will highlight two leading school districts’ implementation of the PreK through 3rd grade approach to learning, and will provide a conceptual map of this promising approach to addressing achievement gaps. Presenters will discuss program components as well as how this approach is responsive to the unique challenges facing young Black boys. They will also discuss current societal and public school system challenges for young Black boys and their families. Longitudinal data will be presented from both school districts that define the approach’s contribution to student achievement at various critical junctures.
**Session Chair:**
- Michela English, Fight for Children

**Session Moderator:**
- Jeanne Middleton-Hairston, Children’s Defense Fund

**Speakers:**
- Kristie Kauerz, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- Linda Sullivan-Dudzic, Bremerton School District
- Jerry Weast, Montgomery County Schools

**Closing Discussion:**

*Strengthening the Agenda: Ensuring a Strong Start*

Chinese Taoist philosopher Lao Tsu stated, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” In 2011, ETS President Kurt Landgraf committed ETS to extend itself beyond assessment development and policy research that identifies achievement gaps and to work with community organizations to close the achievement gaps. ETS’s partnership with the Children’s Defense Fund is a step toward improving the plight of Black boys under the age of nine as they begin their journey from early childhood through adolescence and beyond.

Marian Wright Edelman will close the day’s discussions with her insights into how we can move this agenda to provide young Black boys with a strong start for educational success at home, in our communities, and through the democratic process.

**Speakers:**
- Michael Nettles, ETS
- Marian Wright Edelman, Children’s Defense Fund

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