



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



Mr. Anthony Simmons
Schott Foundation for Public Education
675 Massachusetts Ave., 8th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02139

October 26, 2012

Dear Mr. Simmons,

The Connecticut Achievement Gap Task Force and Black & Puerto Rican Caucus would like to explore engaging the Schott Foundation to develop an action plan to address the achievement/opportunity gap in Connecticut that so dramatically impacts Black, Latino and low-income males in our state.

The Problem

We have read the Schott Foundation's *Lost Opportunity: A 50 State Report on the Opportunity to Learn in America* issued in 2009, which includes your metric for determining students' opportunity to learn and your state-by-state comparison of both academic proficiency and access to high-performing schools. We took note of the Schott finding that if we are to provide every student a true opportunity to learn, we must first ensure that all students, even the most disadvantaged, have access to the high-quality resources necessary for success.

We also took note of the four core minimum resources identified by the Schott Foundation for a child – regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status – to have a fair and substantive opportunity to learn:

1. High-quality early childhood education;
2. Highly qualified teachers and instructors in grades K-12;
3. College and/or Workforce preparatory curricula that will prepare all youth for college, work and community; and
4. Equitable instructional resources.

The report findings that (1) Connecticut's Black, Latino and Native American students, combined, have less than a third of the opportunity to attend the state's best-supported, best-performing schools than the state's White, non-Latino students, and

that (2) a low-income student also has less than a third of the opportunity to learn of an average White, non-Latino student, are undoubtedly a call to action.

The Schott Foundation's 2012 report, *The Urgency of Now: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, highlighted not only the achievement/opportunity gap in Connecticut, but also highlighted substantial discipline inequities exist when comparing Black and Latino students (not disaggregated by gender) and their white cohorts. While 20.4% and 13.5% of Black and Latino students, respectively, were likely to face out-of-school suspension, only 2.4% of their white, non-Latino cohorts faced out-of-school suspension.

In 2011, the Connecticut General Assembly established the Achievement Gap Task Force to address the academic achievement gaps in Connecticut. The Task Force was charged with developing a Master Plan to eliminate the academic achievement gaps by January 1, 2020.

Specifically, the charge is to identify in the Master Plan the achievement gaps that exist among and between racial groups, ethnic groups, socioeconomic groups, genders, and English language learners and students whose primary language is English. Finally, the Task Force was to recommend annual benchmarks for implementation of the master plan and closing the achievement gaps.

The Task Force members voted to include the particular issues facing Black and Latino male students in their recommendations to the Legislature.

Purpose of Engagement

The Connecticut Achievement Gap Task Force, in collaboration with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and the Commission on Children, proposes to explore engaging the Schott Foundation to provide **a data-driven, in-depth report and recommendations on the achievement/opportunity gap in the State of Connecticut, particularly as it impacts Black and Latino males and the economically disadvantaged.**

The report would:

1. Present the socio-economic impact on the State of Connecticut in losing this population of males;
2. Engage a resource and outcomes accountability metric to provide an in-depth demographic analysis, disaggregated by race, gender, and socio-economic status, of the impacts of opportunity disparities, recognizing the links of need between Black and Latino and poor children.

The analysis of disparate opportunity should focus on the following impacts on Connecticut's Black and Latino males and the poor:

- a. Early childhood education, health, and safety;
 - b. Dropout rates;
 - c. Juvenile justice and the racial disparities vis-à-vis out-of-school suspensions;
 - d. Third-grade reading cliffs;
 - e. "Fourth Grade Failure Syndrome" and the effect of diminished educator expectations on children of color and the poor; and
 - f. Disproportionate school referral of Black and Latino males to law enforcement for behavioral issues and the school-to-prison pipeline;
3. Provide student-centered policy and resource recommendations, based on the data, regarding improving access to the four core minimum resources for Black and Latino males to have substantive opportunity to learn; and
 4. Provide recommendations for legislation in the 2013 Session and beyond to help achieve the goal of equitable access to opportunity for Black and Latino males in Connecticut.

Use of Report

The Achievement Gap Task Force would use this report to a) communicate the depth of the achievement/opportunity gap relating to Black and Latino males and the poor to the legislature and the public, and b) to identify immediate and long-term legislative treatments to help the state reverse this trendline.

Civic and Public Education Process

We noted in the Schott Foundation's 2006 report, *A Positive Future for Black Boys*, the Schott Foundation highlighted the importance of (1) engaging new and broadening existing community efforts to work for positive change on behalf of Black boys, and (2) building a public will for change.

According to Schott, "more people must get involved in multiple efforts. This certainly includes individuals and families, and also includes local institutions such as faith-based institutions, small businesses and larger corporations, local colleges and universities, and both private and public foundations."

With that in mind, the data research for the report will be coupled with a civic strategy of public information, community input and narrative, which will include:

- Public forums on this issue in the cities or communities with substantial populations of Black and Hispanic and economically disadvantaged males;
- Public information on findings and challenges in the data and in the community narrative;
- Engagement of youth in defining the problem and working together on the solution; and
- Engagement of families in policy recommendations.

Built-in Evaluation Using Results-Based Accountability

The research findings in the report, coupled with community input, will allow the State of Connecticut to focus on the desired policy and systems change recommendations. All recommendations implemented will be followed for impact using established results-based accountability procedures and principles.

These outcomes may be incorporated into the Achievement Gap Task Force recommendations, and tracked through the Children's RBA Report Card and/or Results First. Reports on both process and content outcomes will be given to the Appropriations Committee, Achievement Gap Task Force and CT General Assembly Education Committee.

Engagement Response

Because of the Schott Foundation's leadership and expertise in this arena, the Connecticut Achievement Gap Task Force, in collaboration with the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and the Commission on Children, has a very strong interest in engaging the Schott Foundation to create and provide this data-driven, in-depth report and recommendations on the achievement/opportunity gap in the State of Connecticut.

We look forward to hearing back from you as to (1) whether the Schott Foundation would be interested in this work, and (2) the budget proposed by the Schott Foundation for this work. Please contact me should you have any questions or require any further information.

Sincerely,



Elaine Zimmerman
Executive Director