# INCREASING THE ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, AND SUCCESS OF MEN OF COLOR IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

## A FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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**Improving Educational Outcomes for Men of Color Symposium**: The Improving Educational Outcomes for Men of Color Symposium, which included the release of this brief, was envisioned in response to the alarming trend of drops in enrollment and persistence among men of color in community colleges. The goal is to explore underlying causes and the strategies being used on campuses to address these causes and reverse these trends through this brief, campus dialogue, and student feedback. **https://www.acct.org/page/improving-educational-outcomes-men-color-symposium**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Longstanding concerns about the enrollment, retention, and success of men of color (e.g., Black, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian) in community colleges have been exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While community college student enrollments overall declined 13% during the pandemic, declines for Black and Native American men were notably higher at 26% and 24%, respectively. High rates of attrition and low rates of completion for men of color have also garnered the attention and concern of community college leaders and policymakers. Between 2017 and 2021, rates of attrition exceeded 50% for Black, Native American, and Pacific Islander men. During the same time frame, more than one-third of White and Asian American (not disaggregated) men completed community college. In comparison, less than 30% of Black, Latino/Hispanic, Pacific Islander, and Native American men completed. Men of color in community colleges also have grade point averages that are consistently lower than their peers.

Among the factors that have been identified by researchers and practitioners as negatively impacting the enrollment, retention, and success of men of color in community colleges are racially hostile campus climates, employment challenges and concerns, basic needs insecurities, and identity conflicts relating to gender and masculinity (to name some).

In response to the issues that complicate the enrollment, retention, and success of men of color, a set of policy and institutional recommendations are offered in this brief. The policy recommendations proposed herein center on increasing the number of high school students who apply to public postsecondary institutions, investing in dual enrollment programs that target boys of color, increasing access to disaggregated student enrollment and success data, and supporting statewide efforts to eliminate cost as a barrier to access. Institutional leaders include incorporating enrollment, retention, and completion goals into institutional strategic plans; building the capacity of all educators to serve men of color equitably; and establishing industry partnerships within career and technical education programs.

Community colleges have long served as the primary pathway into postsecondary education for historically underserved men of color (e.g., Black, Indigenous/Native American, Latino, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian).

# INTRODUCTION

Community colleges have long served as the primary pathway into postsecondary education for historically underserved men of color (e.g., Black, Indigenous/Native American, Latino, Pacific Islander, and Southeast Asian). These institutions have provided upward socio-economic mobility through career preparation and transfer opportunities (Wood, Palmer, & Harris III, 2015). Notwithstanding, many colleges and universities have struggled to facilitate positive outcomes for men of color, - a challenge that was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community college trustees are critical to addressing both historical and contemporary challenges to the success of men of color–largely because issues facing men of color are indicative of systemic challenges fostered by historical policies, laws, codes, and practices that result in outcome disparities for men of color.

As stated by W. Edwards Deming (n.d.) "every system is perfectly designed to achieve the results that it gets." As such, outcome disparities faced by men of color are a function of systems that can be reformed to ensure positive outcomes for college men of color. Trustees are charged with the responsible stewardship of community colleges through establishing policy, hiring CEOs who share their vision for student success, and setting expectations and standards for performance (Smith, 2018). Thus, trustees have significant influence in building and sustaining college cultures that ensure success for men of color and other disproportionately impacted students.

In this brief, we offer recommendations that can be advanced by trustees to improve outcomes for men of color. Herein we offer

two sections of recommendations: first, are recommendations for policymakers at the state, regional, and local levels. Second, our recommendations for institutional leaders, particularly trustees and chief executive officers. In tandem, these recommendations serve as a guide to create systems that can improve enrollment, retention, and success for men of color. Before presenting these recommendations, we examine enrollment and persistence patterns among men of color and provide context to the backgrounds and experiences of these men as documented in the published literature. It should be noted that access to national data has been impacted by COVID-19 with the government halting key data collection efforts. As such, in some cases, we were reliant upon pre-pandemic data as newer data are not readily available. After discussing patterns of enrollment and persistence for men of color, we provide an overview of the Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) model, a conceptual framework we developed based on an extensive review of literature focused on community college men of color. This framework has been widely used among scholars and practitioners to understand the complexity of issues (e.g., masculine identity, campus climate, non-cognitive factors) that influence success (broadly defined) for men of color in community colleges. In this brief, our focus is primarily on men of color who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in education, notably, Black/African American, Native American, and Latino. However, men of color are also inclusive of Southeast Asian (e.g., Hmong, Cambodian, Laotian, Vietnamese) and Pacific Islander men as they often have experiences and outcomes that mirror their Black, Latino, and Native American male peers (Harris III et al., 2017).
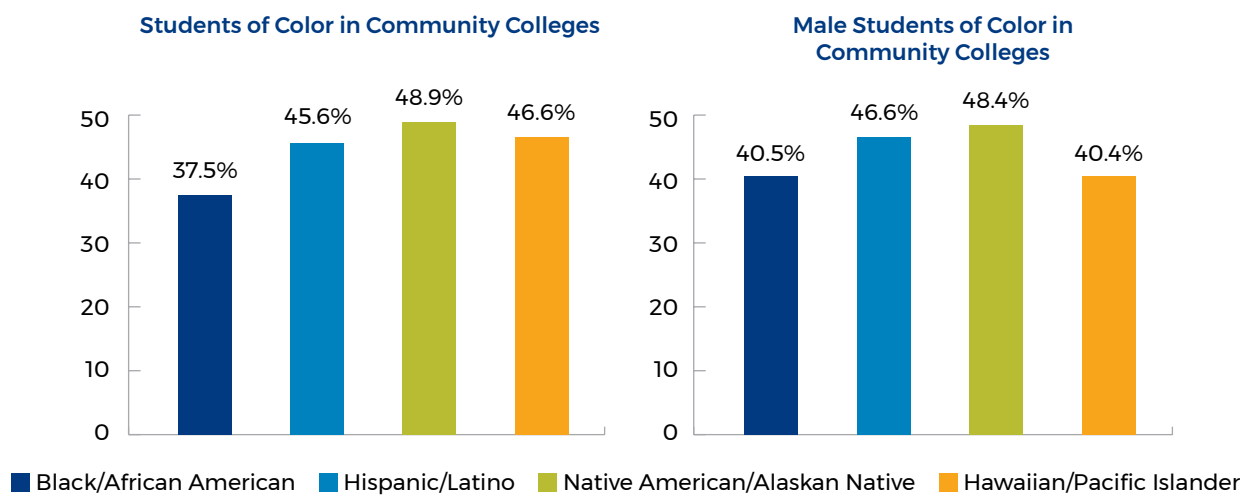
# A NEED TO FOCUS ON MEN OF COLOR

As noted previously in this brief, community colleges serve as the primary pathway to postsecondary education for men of color. Across all postsecondary sectors (e.g., public four-year, private for-profit four-year), community colleges have the highest enrollment of students of color. For example, enrollment for students of color in community colleges (i.e., public two-year institutions) is as follows: 37.5% Black/African American, 45.6% Hispanic/Latinx, 48.9% Native American/Alaskan Native, and 46.6% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. When disaggregated by gender, representation for men of color is often slightly higher including 40.5% Black/African American, 46.6% Hispanic/Latinx, 48.4% Native American/Alaskan Native, and 40.4%, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

(U.S. Department of Education, 2016a), see Figure 1. These data are based on the pre-pandemic era. Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, community college enrollment dropped by more than 13%. This enrollment decline was the largest of all postsecondary sectors, including public four-year (-2.8%), private not-for-profit 4 year (-1.7%), and private for-profit (4.5%), see Figure 2. In community colleges, enrollment declines were not consistent across all racial groups. The highest enrollment declines were among men, particularly men of color. For domestic men, the most startling enrollment declines were for Native American and Black men, who experienced 26% and 24% enrollment declines between 2019 and 2021 (Geary, 2022).

## FIGURE 1: ENROLLMENT FOR STUDENTS OF OF COLOR IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

### Students of Color in Community Colleges



### Male Students of Color in Community Colleges



■ Black/African American  ■ Hispanic/Latino  ■ Native American/Alaskan Native  ■ Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
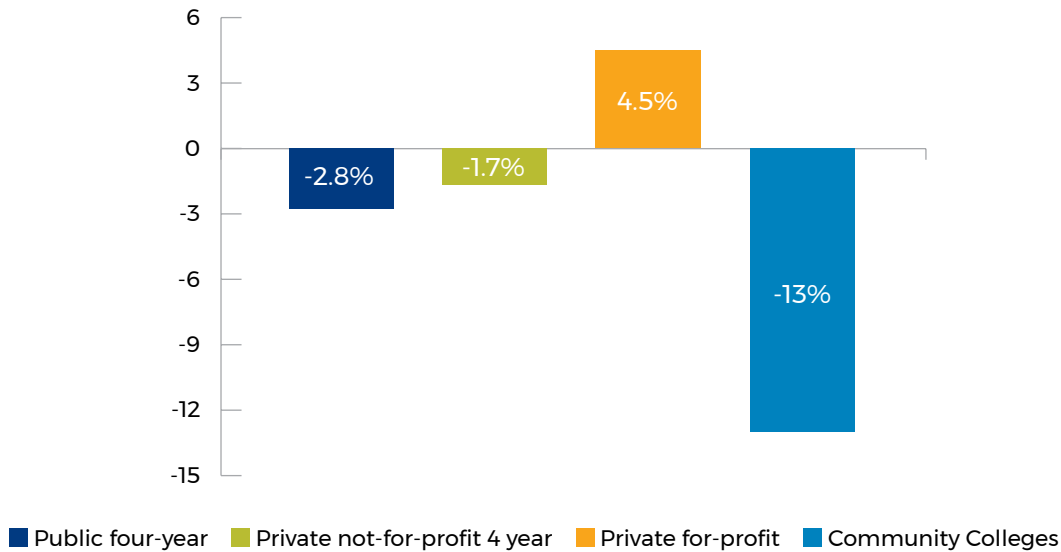
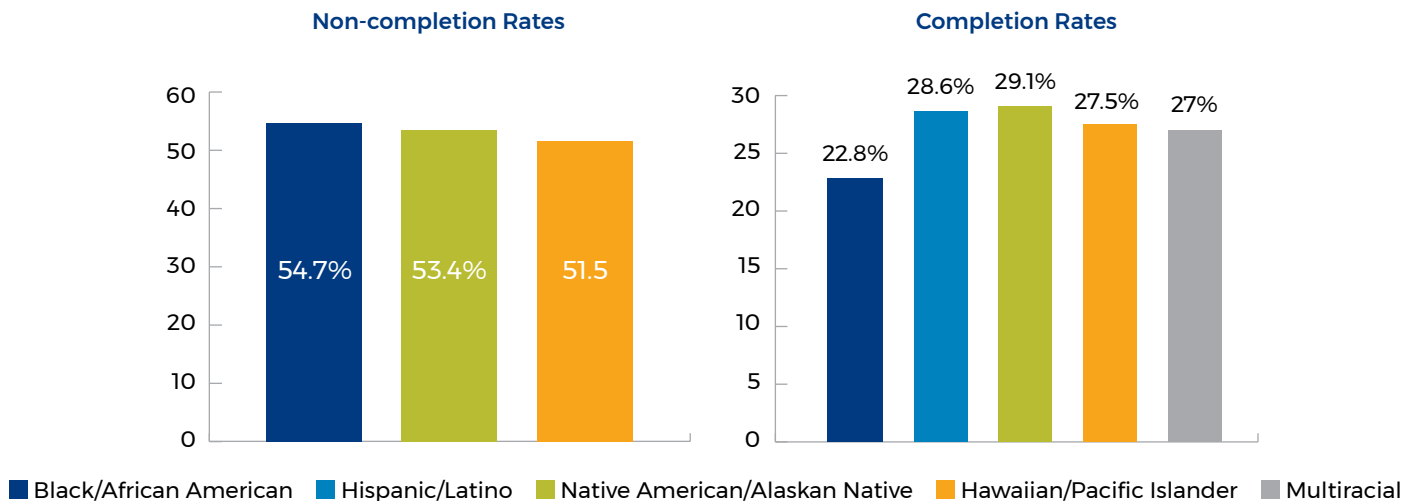Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2016a

In addition to enrollment declines, there are also persistent gaps in student outcomes. For instance, for the 2017 cohort of two-year college students, the highest attrition rates were for Black, Native American, and Pacific Islander men. In fact, between 2017 and 2021, 54.7% of Black men left college without earning a certificate or degree. This attrition rate is closely followed by Native American/Alaskan Native men at 53.4% and Pacific Islander men at 51.5%, respectively. Moreover, within this time frame, fewer men of color completed their degree programs. Completion rates for Black, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Multiracial men were 22.8%, 28.6%, 29.1%, 27.5%, and 27%, respectively. (U.S. Department of Education, 2021), see Figure 3.

"Stopping out" offers a partial explanation for these disparities in completion rates. Stopping out refers to students who take a break in enrollment for a period of time before returning to their studies. High stop-out rates are evident for students of color, a pattern which is also reflected among men of color. For instance, for men of color enrolled in the 6-year cohort ending in 2017, more than half stopped out of college during this timeframe. Specifically, stop-out rates were 54.6% for Black/African American men and 45.0% for Hispanic/Latino men. These rates were significantly higher than the stop-out rate for White men, which was 38.1%. That said, it should be noted that stop-out rates for women of color are slightly higher than those of men of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), see Figure 4.

## FIGURE 2: ENROLLMENT DECLINE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES



■ Public four-year   ■ Private not-for-profit 4 year   ■ Private for-profit   ■ Community Colleges

## FIGURE 3: TWO-YEAR COHORT (2017-2020)

**Non-completion Rates**

**Completion Rates**



■ Black/African American   ■ Hispanic/Latino   ■ Native American/Alaskan Native   ■ Hawaiian/Pacific Islander   ■ Multiracial
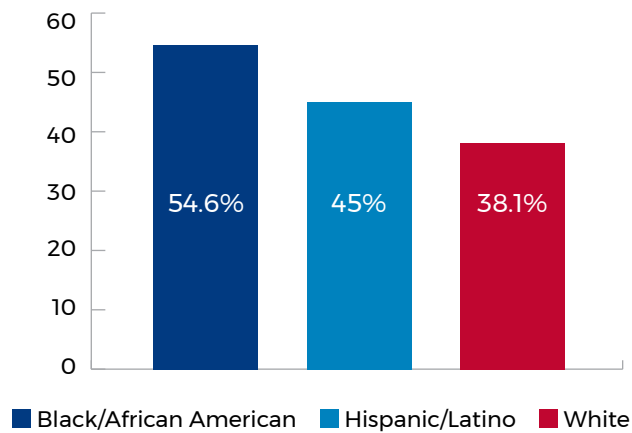
Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2021

In addition to completion, another marker of a college's effectiveness in supporting student success is achievement. In comparison to their counterparts, men of color often have grade point averages (GPAs) that lag behind their peers. For example, 26.2% of students in community colleges have a GPA of 3.5 or higher. In comparison, this rate is lower for Native American/ Alaskan Native, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino men at 19.9%, 17.6%, and 18.7%, respectively. In contrast, 29.3% of White men have a GPA of 3.5 or higher (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b), see Figure 5. Conversely, success can also be examined by identifying those lower than desired GPAs. Unfortunately, men of color are overrepresented among community college students with GPAs of 2.5 or lower. For instance, 30.2% of community college students have a GPA of 2.5 or lower. However, the rates for 39.8% of Native American/Alaskan Native, 42.9% of Black/African American, and 39.8% of Hispanic/Latino men have 2.5 or lower GPAs. The rate for Black men (42.9%) is the highest in this category for any racial and gender group (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b), see Figure 6.

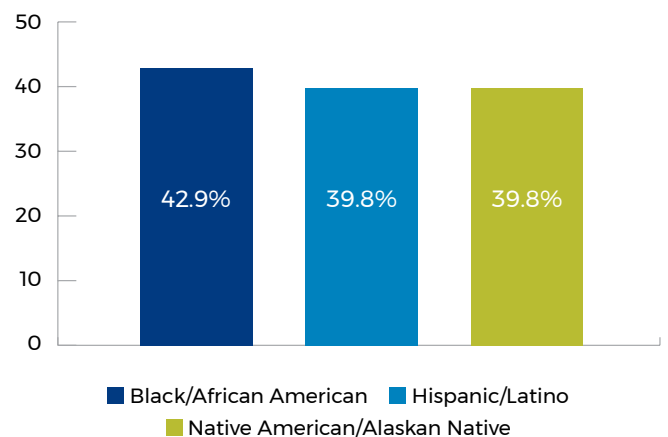## FIGURE 4: SIX-YEAR COHORT STOP-OUT RATES



Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2017

## FIGURE 5: GPA OF 3.5 OR HIGHER
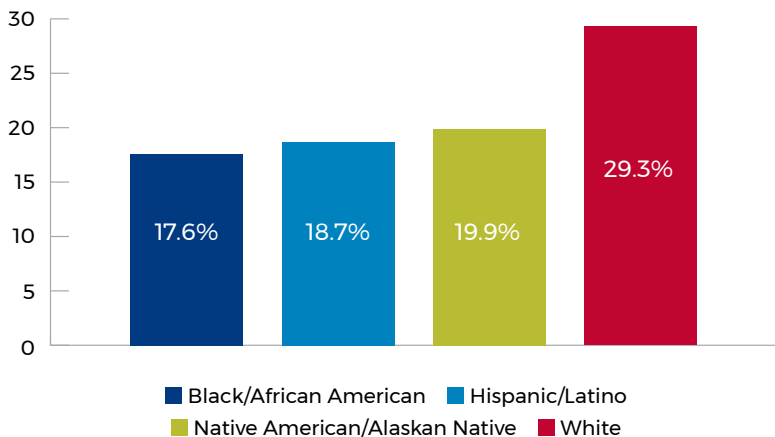


Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2016b

## FIGURE 6: GPA OF 2.5 OR LOWER



Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2016b

Finally, with regard to factors impacting the enrollment, retention, and success of men of color in community colleges, overexposure to basic needs concerns, such as food and housing insecurity, also have a salient impact.

## Factors Influencing Student Enrollment, Retention and Success

Researchers (e.g., Harper, 2009; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011) have shown that men of color often enter classrooms and college environments where they are exposed to racism and racial microaggressions. In particular, Wood and Harris III (2015) have noted that men of color routinely experience interactions with educators where they are assumed to be academically inferior in comparison to their peers, to be troublemakers who are prone to criminalized behavior, and to come from families and communities that do not value education. These messages are communicated to them during the matriculation process, in class, out of class, and in other contexts that require them to interact directly with faculty, academic advisors, counselors, and student services professionals (Wood & Harris III, 2017). These experiences are compounded by hostile campus climates for men of color. Too often, these environments do not effectively support men of color in feeling a sense of belonging in college, believing that their presence matters, or that their engagement is either invited or desired by educators (Wood & Harris III, 2020). While many institutions have undergone studies focused on racial climates, few institutions have succeeded in changing climates and experiences for the majority of their men of color.

Some men of color persist in spite of hostile campus climates due to motivational desires to create a better life for themselves and their families. In doing so, they recognize that they will need to prove wrong those who do not believe in their abilities to be successful (Wood, Hilton & Hicks, 2014). The last decade of research on men of color has been more attentive to the role that masculine identity has on student success. Three patterns of masculinity that are salient within community college contexts are 1) men of color's perceptions of school or academia as a feminine domain that is not conducive to men's thriving and belonging,

2) breadwinner orientation, which is men's tendencies to make academic and career decisions based on the expectation that they must fulfill the role of breadwinner in their families, and 3) an apprehension to help-seeking, which is an unwillingness to seek or accept help to avoid being viewed as weak or dependent. Harris III and Wood (2016) demonstrated that because men are often socialized to see being a provider as an expectation in their homes and families, they must see some alignment between this expectation and the pursuit of a college degree. In addition, men are often socialized to see help-seeking behaviors as a sign of weakness, hence some men will avoid asking for support and using campus support services despite needing to do so. Thus, it is important for community colleges to proactively provide services to students, particularly those who are less likely to initially seek out help.

Men of color are also adversely impacted by unemployment and underemployment. While in college, their work experiences and opportunities are complicated by the types of job opportunities that are available to them. Men of color in community college tend to be concentrated in jobs that share these three characteristics: 1) physically demanding and exhausting; 2) occur in the evening, late night, or overnight hours; and 3) temporary, seasonal, or transitional (Wood, Harrison, & Jones, 2016).
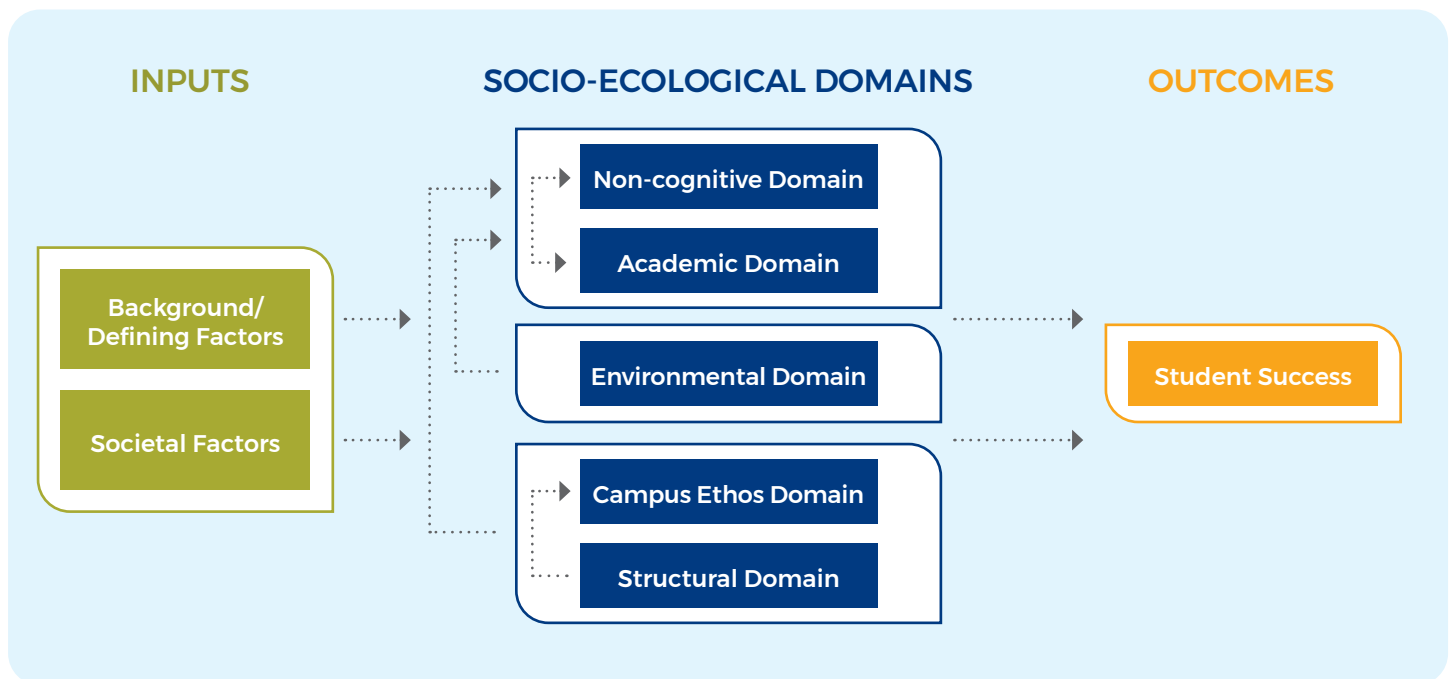
Finally, with regard to factors impacting the enrollment, retention, and success of men of color in community colleges, overexposure to basic needs concerns, such as food and housing insecurity, also have a salient impact. It is also common for these students to experience insecurities relating to access to transportation to and from campus and access to the technology that is required to complete courses. In tandem, basic needs and climate concerns can further intensify feelings of alienation and isolation for men of color.

## The Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) Model: A Framework for Understanding the Experiences of Men of Color in Communities

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) model was developed by Harris III and Wood (2016) to account for the myriad of factors that influence men of color's experiences and success in community colleges. The model has been proven effective in guiding community college leaders in transforming institutions to be more conducive to the success of men of color, and community college faculty in designing curricula and courses that account for men of color's learning needs and strengths. The SEO model was developed based on the published literature and research on the intersection of race/ethnicity and masculinities in education, adult learning, and student success in community colleges. Bensimon's (2007) concept of equity-mindedness, which foregrounds institutions' and educators' responsibilities in the student success paradigm, also informed the development of the SEO model. The model was also field-tested with data that were collected from men of color in community colleges using the Community College Survey of Men.

| INPUTS | SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL DOMAINS | OUTCOMES |
|---|---|---|

**INPUTS**

- Background/Defining Factors
- Societal Factors

**SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL DOMAINS**

- Non-cognitive Domain
- Academic Domain
- Environmental Domain
- Campus Ethos Domain
- Structural Domain

**OUTCOMES**

- Student Success

The Socio-Ecological Outcomes (SEO) model was developed by Harris III and Wood (2016) to account for the myriad of factors that influence men of color's experiences and success in community colleges.

According to the SEO Model, educators who are concerned about the representation and success of men of color in community colleges should be aware of the factors below and their impact on men of color's educational trajectories:

- *Background defining factors* (e.g., age, primary language, citizenship status, ability) and societal factors (e.g., racist stereotypes, economic conditions, systemic inequities) that shape students' identities as learners.

- *Non-cognitive factors* that account for the intersection of students' identities as learners and their confidence in their ability to be successful, intrinsic academic interests, and perceptions of the worthiness of postsecondary education. The intersection of race/ethnicity and gender is situated in the non-cognitive domain.

- *Academic factors* account for students' direct interactions with instructional faculty, their commitment to a course of study, and their use of academic services.

- *Environmental factors*, which are situated outside of the physical boundaries of the institution but impact the time and resources men of color are able to invest in their pursuit of postsecondary goals at any given time, for example, employment, family commitments, transportation, access to broadband, and access to food and housing to name some.

- *Campus ethos factors*, which are typically under the complete control of educators at the institution and include men of color's sense of belonging; perceptions of the campus racial and gender climate as safe, welcoming and inclusive; receiving validation and support from campus educators on a regular basis; and having relationships with educators that are grounded in trust, mutual respect, and authentic care.

According to the model, it is the dynamic interactions that take place between and within these factors that ultimately shape student success (broadly defined) for men of color in community college. Thus, efforts (e.g., programs, policies, and practices) to improve their representation and success in community college must account for these factors.
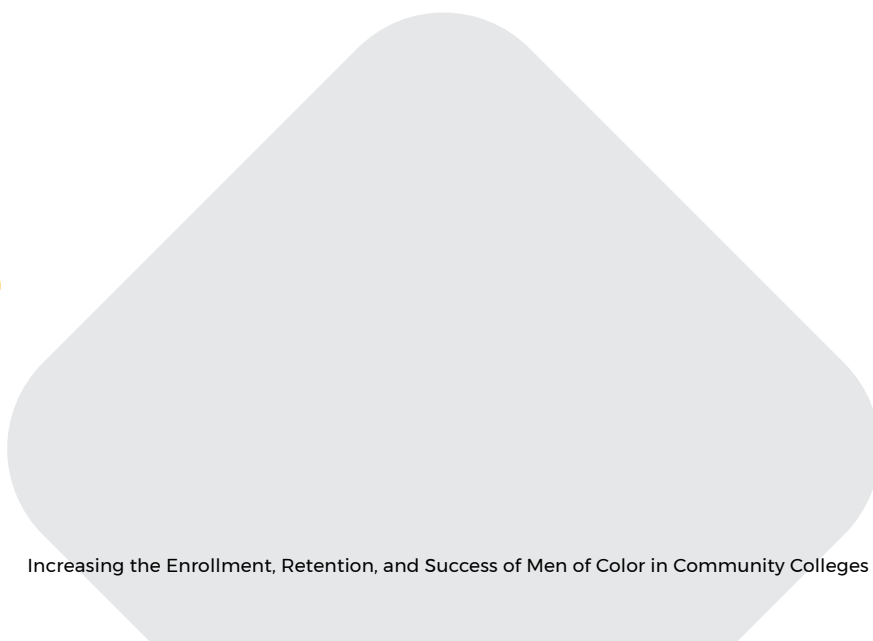
# INSTITUTIONAL SPOTLIGHTS

In this section of the brief we share four community colleges and one postsecondary system that have enacted promising interventions to increase enrollment, retention, and success of men of color. In doing so, we highlight the mission, core services, and student success data (when available) that speaks to the program's impact.

**Bunker Hill College:** The HOPE initiative at Bunker Hill College is an asset-based initiative that aims to leverage men of color's cultural wealth and other assets they bring with them to educational contexts. A core assumption of the initiative is that transforming inequitable systems and structures will enable men of color to thrive. Among the services and supports that are afforded to HOPE students are: learning resources, dialogue sessions, study groups, and dedicated staff. The initiative also has intentionally designed professional learning experiences for faculty, staff, and administrators who are responsible for ensuring the success of men of color at the college.

**Miami Dade College:** The Miami Dade College Rising Black Scholars program was launched in 2021 to address significant gaps in the retention and graduation of Black students. To date, more than 300 scholars have participated in the program. Scholars are afforded resources and supports that are critical to student success including technology, book stipends, access to a holistic support team that provides academic and financial advising, mental health counseling, and transportation support (to name some). Scholars were retained at a rate of 98% from the Fall 2021 to the Spring 2022 term, and 84% from the Spring 2022 to the Summer 2022 term. These retention rates were significantly higher than the 57% rate for non-participants.

**Community College of Baltimore County:** The Male Student Success Initiative (MSSI) serves men of color at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) through a range of programs and services that are intentionally designed to improve academic success outcomes. Over the last year, the program has grown from 120 to 255 student participants. MSSI's core programming includes: offering sections of gateway English and Math courses that are designed to meet the learning needs of men of color, a mentoring program that pairs men of color students with professional MSSI Success Mentors who share their identities, tours to four-year institutions, and activities that facilitate career development for men of color (e.g., internships, job shadowing, readiness workshops). During summer 2022, MSSI students interned at BGE, Whiting-Turner Construction, Stanley Black & Decker, Ports America Chesapeake, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield and MedStar. More work-ready training and corporate partnerships are being developed as the program grows.

**The City University of New York:** The CUNY Black Male Initiative (BMI) is a system-wide initiative that targets African, Black, Caribbean, and Hispanic/Latino men at 25 campuses across the city's five boroughs. The BMI emerged from a task force that was convened by former CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein in 2004 to develop a set of recommendations to improve academic success for Black males. Ten of the system's institutions serve students who are pursuing 2-year degrees and continuing education. The BMI programming model is guided by six pillars that align with the initiative's goals of increasing the enrollment, matriculation, retention, grade point averages, and graduation rates of men of color: 1) Diversity recruitment, 2) culturally competent peer-to-peer mentoring, 3) academic enhancements, 4) institutional commitment, 5) advisory committees, and 6) socioemotional programming.

**Community College of Philadelphia:** The Center for Male Engagement (CME) was established at the Community College of Philadelphia to address disparities in achievement and retention that disproportionately impacted Black male students. CME employs a cohort model that serves Black men by way of one-on-one coaching, academic tutoring, career development, and cultural enrichment programs. A core value of CME is to utilize strength-based approaches to serve students that counter deficit narratives about Black men. CME has served more than 1,500 students. Retention and graduation rates for CME participants are consistently higher than those for Black male peers who do not participate in the program.

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INCREASING THE ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION OF MEN OF COLOR IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Leaders and policymakers who are concerned about the status of boys and men of color in their states, regions, and areas should consider enacting policies that are aligned with these six recommendations:

1. *Require All High School Seniors to Complete and Submit an Application to a Public Postsecondary Institution in the State* – The process for applying to postsecondary education can be confusing and cumbersome for students, especially those who may be the first in their families to pursue a college education. This challenge, combined with the recognition that men of color are among the students who struggle most with asking for help, suggests a need for targeted support for applying to college during students' senior year of high school. States should require all public high school seniors to submit an application for admission to at least one of the state's public community colleges or universities. State leaders should also require high schools to support students in applying for federal and state-based financial aid as a part of the process for applying to college. Providing high school districts with the support needed to increase the capacity for college advising at every high school will be essential to ensure this recommendation has a meaningful and measurable impact on improving access to postsecondary education, especially for Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander men who tend to be among the students who are least likely to matriculate to college immediately upon completing high school.

2. *Invest in Dual Enrollment Programs that Target Boys of Color* – Federal and Statewide policies and initiatives that are focused on increasing the enrollment and success of men of color in postsecondary education must do more to address the cracks in the pipeline that turn boys and men away from education. One strategy to do so is to invest in dual enrollment programs that

target boys of color in high school. Dual enrollment programs provide access to college courses to students while they are concurrently enrolled in high school. There are several benefits to dual enrollment for all students, notably: decreasing high school dropout rates, increasing college-going rates, facilitating transitions to college, and exposing students to academically rigorous curricula. These programs have long been popular amongst high-achieving students and families that seek to get a head start in postsecondary education. Thus, students who have been historically underserved in education; including Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander males, have been underrepresented in dual enrollment programs. Given the benefits of dual enrollment, state policymakers should consider heavily investing in these programs and ensuring that boys of color are equitably represented in them. Moreover, some states may find it worthwhile to establish dual enrollment programs in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs that garner the interests of young men, meet workforce needs in the state, and lead to careers that pay livable wages. In doing so, it is important to not track boys of color into CTE programs. Collecting the data that are necessary to ensure the equitable representation of males of color across all dual enrollment programs will be necessary. Finally, high-quality dual enrollment programs are those that do a good job of engaging parents and facilitating disciplinary partnerships between high school and college instructors to align the high school and college curricula.

3. *Establish An Intersegmental Statewide Initiative to Improve Educational Outcomes for Boys and Men of Color with Measurable Goals for Enrollment, Retention, and Completion* – State leaders should establish a statewide initiative with measurable goals and outcomes for high school completion, matriculation to postsecondary education, and completion of college degrees and certificates for males of color. For example, the overall 4-year

graduation rate for California high school students in 2020-2021 was 83.6% (California Department of Education, 2022). However, the graduation rates for African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Latino, and Pacific Islander boys in the cohort were 67.3%, 68.3%, 76%, and 78.7%, respectively. A policy that requires the graduation rates for disproportionately impacted subgroups to be within certain percentage points (e.g., "no less than 3%") of the overall graduation rate could garner the urgency that is necessary for districts to improve them. A similar approach should be considered for college preparation and matriculation. For example, 52% of all students in the aforementioned cohort of 2020-2021 California high school graduates met the requirements to enroll in one of the State's public universities. Yet, only 35% of African American males, 27.4% of American Indian/Alaska Native males, 37.8% of Latino males, and 39% of Pacific Islander males met these requirements, which means that these students were not admissible to one of the State's 32 public universities. State policies that address racial/ethnic and gender disparities in high school to college matriculation are needed. While increasing the number of men of color enrolling in postsecondary education will help to improve the status of men of color, ensuring that men of color actually earn postsecondary degrees and certificates is also necessary.

4. *Invest in Robust Data Systems with Disaggregated Data* – Having easily available access to real-time postsecondary student data that are disaggregated by subgroups (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, foster youth status, and socioeconomic status) is essential for educators to target resources and support to students who are impacted by equity gaps and outcome disparities. Yet, these data are often unavailable, difficult to access, or not updated in a timely manner in most states. At the federal level, data are also difficult to come by in many cases given the nature of collection structure and student-unit record prohibitions preventing longitudinal success tracking. Efforts to improve postsecondary access and success for men of color cannot be as timely and targeted as they need to be in the absence of these data. Thus, statewide investments in robust data systems that track students from their enrollment in kindergarten through postsecondary education are essential to measure the extent to which men of color are being served

equitably in the state and to improve accountability for their success. Further, the federal government should examine how it is examining these successes, which is particularly important when evaluating the success of stop-out students who return, using federal financial supports. These same data can be used to create and publish scorecards that inform the public on how well high school districts and postsecondary institutions in the state are achieving equitable outcomes for boys and men of color.

5. *Hold Institutional Leaders Accountable for Increasing the Enrollment, Retention, and Success of Men of Color* – Institutional leaders prioritize goals for which they are evaluated and held accountable. Far too often, the success of boys and men of color is treated as negotiable and not given the attention and resources that other institutional goals are afforded. Therefore, if increasing the postsecondary enrollment, retention, and success of men of color is indeed a state priority, then college, university, and system leaders must be evaluated based on how their institutions meet this goal. Every postsecondary leader in the state should have clearly articulated goals and metrics for improving outcomes for men of color upon which their performance is evaluated each year in a manner that is similar to how they are evaluated for meeting fundraising goals. In addition, candidates who are interviewing for leadership positions in public postsecondary institutions should be expected to present a plan for how they will close equity gaps for men of color if they are selected for the position.

6. *Support Statewide Efforts that Reduce or Eliminate Cost as a Barrier to Access* – Promise grants and other statewide efforts that reduce or eliminate cost as a barrier to enrolling in community college are essential to increase the enrollment of men of color. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapidly increasing cost of living in the United States have had a deleterious impact on enrollment in postsecondary education. Men of color, notably Black, Latino, and Native American men, have experienced the most significant enrollment decreases when compared to enrollments prior to Spring 2020. In addition, socially constructed messages about masculinity that suggest to men that the only value they bring to a household is that which fulfills breadwinner expectations have always created anxiety and gender role conflict for men who

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are expected to take care of their families. Given these trends and challenges, it is important to keep the cost of attending community college as low as possible.

The recommendations that follow are proposed to institutions and institutional leaders who are concerned about or charged with improving the enrollment, retention, and success of men of color.

1. *Incorporate Enrollment, Retention, and Completion Goals into the Institution's Strategic Plan* – An institution's strategic plan is perhaps the most public and transparent documented account of its goals and priorities. Thus, community colleges that are serious about men of color's enrollment, retention, and completion will have these goals clearly articulated in their strategic plans. In doing so, the strategic plan should discuss how the success of men of color is aligned with the institution's mission and vision, state the current status of each male of color group on each goal, present annual benchmarks of expected progress on each goal, and discuss institutional resources that will be invested towards achieving each goal.

2. *Build the Capacity of All Educators to Serve Men of Color Equitably and Responsibly (professional learning)* – Faculty, staff, and administrators who are well-positioned to support the enrollment, retention, and success of men of color must build their capacities to serve them equitably and responsibly. Therefore, it is important for institutions to ensure that every educator understands the lived experiences of boys and men of color in education; and can employ teaching, learning, leadership, and support strategies that have been proven effective in serving men of color. Towards this end, institutions can ensure every educator has access to high-quality professional learning experiences that are designed and delivered by facilitators with expertise on men of color. Some campuses may have educators working at the institution with this expertise. Professional learning can be made available to campus educators in a range of ways including in-person or online workshops, credit-bearing professional learning courses, asynchronous online experiences, or attending conferences (to name some). Regardless of how professional learning is made available, educators should have some responsibility to share what they have learned with their

colleagues at the institution and should be required to report how they will incorporate the lessons learned into their work with men of color. Finally, it may be useful to ask educators to develop annual professional learning plans that include at least one goal on building their capacities to serve men of color and activities they will undertake throughout the year to achieve this goal.

3. *Coordinate Efforts Around Basic Needs* – Black and Latino men are overrepresented among community college students who experience food, housing, and other basic needs insecurities (Wood & Harris III, 2018). Basic needs insecurity adversely impacts student success, specifically enrollment, persistence, retention, and completion. Community colleges have made significant progress over the past five years in supporting students who experience food and housing insecurities by enacting efforts like food pantries, clothing closets, and emergency grants. Some have gone so far as to use social media and apps to notify students when free food is available on campus. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning that took place in 2020 have illuminated how mental health and access to technology also are core basic needs that directly affect students' engagement and success in community college. As is the case with food and housing insecurities, men of color are disproportionately impacted by mental health concerns and a lack of access to technology. Institutions must engage in intentional and targeted messaging and interventions to ensure that men of color are equitably represented amongst the students who access basic needs resources. Again, this is necessary given men of color's tendencies to not enact proactive help-seeking behaviors.

4. *Establish Industry Partnerships with Career and Technical Education Programs* – Most students, particularly those who do not enroll directly after high school, attend community college with the hope and expectation of accessing employment that can improve their quality of life and the lives of their families. To do so, it is important that students not only gain the academic knowledge that is necessary to compete for high-quality jobs but also the practical, hands-on experience they need to demonstrate competency. Community colleges must establish partnerships between their Career and Technical Education programs and industry partners who provide access to jobs that pay a livable

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wage. Internships that get students the work experience they need to be competitive candidates in the industry can go a long way toward meeting this important goal. Established partnerships between the colleges and industry partners that involve program faculty and are designed for students in the program are desirable because they relieve students of the burden of having to establish them. Another practice that can make it easier for students to do an internship is for them to be paid for their labor. While this may not be feasible in all industries and programs, paying students can help to relieve cost as a burden for students who do not have the financial means to do an unpaid internship.

5. *Establish a Presidential Task Force to Examine the Experiences and Outcomes of Men of Color and Propose Recommendations for Increasing Enrollment, Retention, and Completion* – Although men of color who are enrolled in community colleges are often impacted by the same challenges, contextual factors that are situated within institutions impacts the salience of these challenges and how they are experienced by men of color. Institutions that are in the early phases of enacting a comprehensive effort to improve the experiences and success of men of color may benefit from establishing a presidential task force to do this work on behalf of the college. The task force should be composed of a diverse group of campus stakeholders who represent instruction, student services, men of color, and perhaps the local community. The task force must have a clear charge from the president and clear expectations of the timeline, reporting, and deliverables. Finally, it is important to keep the college's governing board (if applicable) informed of the work of the task force–especially if the group will propose recommendations that require an investment of institutional resources.

6. *Lift the Voices of Men of Color* – Institutional efforts to increase the enrollment, retention, and success of men of color must be informed by direct insights that are shared by men of color. Far

too often, educational leaders enact student success programs, policies, and interventions that have not been adequately vetted by the students they are supposed to serve. In addition, some institutions fall short in lifting the voices of men of color by only reaching out to a homogeneous subset of men of color (e.g., student leaders, those who attend full-time, students who enroll directly out of high school) rather than engaging a diverse group of men who better reflect the larger male of color student population. Institutions must periodically lift the voices of men of color by way of interviews, listening sessions, focus groups, or other qualitative inquiry strategies that enable men of color to share how they are experiencing the institution. In doing so, it is important to compensate students for their time and willingness to share their stories–particularly because they are doing so to improve institutional effectiveness. Finally, regardless of the form and structure they take, these conversations must be facilitated by someone who fully understands the experiences of men of color in education and is skilled at facilitating dialogue with students.

7. *Align Faculty Hiring, Tenure, and Promotion Policies with Institutional Efforts to Close Student Equity Gaps* – Like institutional leaders, faculty members should also be expected to contribute to institutional efforts to improve outcomes for men of color. In doing so, institutions can incorporate equity goals into faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion processes. Toward this end, faculty who are applying for positions should be expected to speak transparently about how they can meet the learning needs of disproportionately impacted students at the institution. Faculty who are being considered for tenure and promotion should also share how their teaching has had a direct impact on the success of disproportionately impacted students in their courses. Finally, colleges can incorporate questions that ask students to comment on how their instructors have infused equity into their courses and the impact it had on their learning in the end-of-class evaluations.

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