

# America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



October 2, 2012

## Features

### Welcome to Our *America's Tomorrow* Newsletter!

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *America's Tomorrow*. This new PolicyLink e-newsletter will lift up bold, innovative, and effective policies, practices, strategies, campaigns, and ideas that create greater equity and move the nation toward prosperity for all.

America is changing. Today, the majority of babies born in this country are Latino, African American, Native American, Asian, or other people of color. Within the next three decades, the majority of our population will be people of color. This shift has already occurred in four states and 49 metropolitan regions across the country.

At the same time, the nation is recognizing that inequality—which is reaching into white communities as well as communities of color—is weighing down our national psyche. We must find a way to pull out and move forward. A focus on equity, rather than being a divisive issue, has the potential to unite the nation around an uncommon vision—one that is win, win, win: good for the people, good for the economy, and good for the nation.

This reality is putting equity in a whole new light. Leaders from business, education, government, labor, faith groups, youth organizations, and more are recognizing that equity—just and fair inclusion—has become an economic imperative in addition to a moral one. And this insight is inspiring a wave of enterprising strategies to create a new type of economic growth model that is driven by equity.

That's what our newsletter is all about. On a regular basis, we

## In Brief

### Immigrant Integration Key to Strong Regional Economies

Regions that take concrete steps to integrate immigrant residents into economic and social life are more likely to prosper, according to two reports released this month.

The [California Immigrant Integration Scorecard](#), produced by longtime PolicyLink collaborator Professor Manuel Pastor and his team at the University of Southern California's [Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration](#), measured immigrant integration across 10 California regions. The researchers examined 28 indicators of economic participation and mobility, civic participation, and the extent to which regions were welcoming to immigrants. The team found that the regions doing the best job integrating new immigrants, such as Santa Clara county (home to Silicon Valley), also had the most robust economic growth, while less welcoming regions, such as Fresno, also suffered from economic stagnation.

will bring you the latest developments in the movement to create opportunity for all. We'll highlight fresh thinking and cutting-edge solutions. We'll profile visionaries and equity champions. We'll track progress toward building public will to sustain prosperity and democracy.

The newsletter will often focus on a theme. Today's highlights the growing momentum around efforts to create opportunity ladders for young people, especially young men of color. Forthcoming issues will focus on job creation, regional organizing, and more.

Please send me your thoughts about our inaugural issue and your suggestions for future newsletters at [agb@policylink.org](mailto:agb@policylink.org). To learn more about the case for equity as the superior growth model, please read the report [America's Tomorrow](#), which we produced with our partners at the USC [Program for Environmental and Regional Equity](#).

Sincerely,



Angela Glover Blackwell  
Founder and CEO, PolicyLink

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## Changing the Economic Futures of Young Men of Color



Joining a groundbreaking advocacy effort, California Governor Jerry Brown has signed 10 bills that will improve the odds for young men of color. The legislature took up dozens of bills this season to secure the state's economic future by

ensuring that all California's youth have a fair chance to succeed.

The new laws will reduce barriers and create greater

A [report](#) by Audrey Singer of the Brookings Institution describes how increasing the education and skills of immigrants without college degrees can be a critical regional economic development strategy. Immigrants are a major driver of demographic change, yet many immigrants—especially the 72 percent without postsecondary degrees—lack the targeted training, English language, and other skills they need to move up in the job market. Innovative regions with large immigrant populations have taken up this challenge by developing training programs that address specific needs like English language development while providing the skills, credentials, and placements that lead to careers. [Washington State's Integrated Basic Education Skills Training](#) program (I-BEST), for example, partners with 34 community colleges to quickly advance low-skilled adults into careers such as auto technician, office technician, and certified nursing assistant through integrated skills training and basic education and language training.

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### Austerity, Inequality Harm Global Economy

Austerity measures in Europe and the United States are likely to further destabilize the global economy, decrease growth prospects, and exacerbate the trend of rising inequality, warns a

opportunities for success at school and in the workforce. Four of the bills reform overly harsh school discipline practices so more youth can graduate. The others strengthen career pathways for high school and community college students, create a youth leadership program, make a prisoner re-entry support program permanent, and streamline standardized testing in schools.

As important as the legislation itself is the process that has made it happen. The bills came out of the bipartisan California Assembly [Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color](#), chaired by Assemblymember Sandré Swanson. Over 18 months, the committee held packed hearings around the state, convened issue-based work groups, and launched an ambitious [policy and action agenda](#) it will pursue over the next six years.

The Select Committee worked in partnership with the [Alliance for Boys and Men of Color](#), a determined coalition of youth, community, public sector, and philanthropic leaders that crossed divides of race, age, ethnicity, and geography to address the urgent needs of a population in crisis.

The boys and men of color effort is inspired by the growing recognition that young people of color are California's future. More than 70 percent of Californians under 25 identify as people of color. The Select Committee and the Alliance believe that if the state is to succeed economically and socially, these youth of color must grow up healthy. They must succeed in school and work. They must have the knowledge and skills to contribute to their families, their communities, the workforce, and the well-being of society.

The challenge is not California's alone. According to a Measure of America [report](#) released earlier this month, one in seven young people age 16 to 24 is disconnected from work or school—a total of 5.8 million. Young black and Latino men have the highest rates of disconnection, at 26 percent and 17 percent, respectively, compared with 12 percent of whites.

### ***Listening to California's youth***

More than 2,000 people attended hearings in Oakland, Fresno, Los Angeles, the Coachella Valley, and Sacramento. At each hearing, young men from low-income communities, underresourced schools, and struggling families described systematic barriers along the road to adulthood, and

new [report](#) from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Reviewing the research on inequality and economic growth, the report finds that although economists traditionally believed that some inequality is good for growth, there is now a "growing academic consensus" that inequality has a negative impact on economic growth.

Recommendations include: income policies that link wage growth to productivity gains and inflation, legal minimum wages, collective bargaining, progressive taxation, strong safety nets, public employment schemes, and public spending to provide essential goods and services.

The report calls for new growth strategies that ensure all can share in economic progress, explaining how inclusion will provide the consumer demand and investment needed to fuel economic growth.

These aren't newfangled strategies, but are tried-and-true policies that work. As the report says, "Relearning some old lessons about fairness and participation is the only way to eventually overcome the crisis and pursue a path of sustainable economic development."

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### **Conference Highlights Equity in Action**

What works for cities? The eighth

articulated their hopes and visions for better lives for themselves and their siblings, friends, and peers. Older men who grew up in similar situations, and women who live in the same neighborhoods as young men of color, also spoke in support of positive action from policymakers.

Corleone Ham, a high school senior in Long Beach and a son of Cambodian refugees, told of growing up in a neighborhood plagued by gangs and violence, walking around hungry, and attending a school that tracks students of color, boys especially, into low-achieving classes. "The lack of a safe and meaningful learning environment makes us feel like we don't matter and we really want to matter, to know that there is help and genuine support for us," he said.

South Central Los Angeles teen Joshua Ham, who is African American, [testified](#) about how conditions in his community conspired against success at school, asking "How can children be expected to achieve at a high academic level, when you are experiencing conditions that are more like a prison and less like a school?"

At the Coachella Valley hearing, Jerry Tello, director of National Latino Father & Family Institute, described the intergenerational challenge: "You carry your mama's pain, you carry your daddy's pain, you carry your grandpa's pain. And the struggle as we talk about boys and men of color [is] if men are wounded, how can boys be healed? If elders are still recovering, how can we expect young boys to fight it out?"

Other speakers described interventions that helped them overcome the barriers. Erik Monreal spoke about how the Latino Commission helped him get on the right track after he became addicted to alcohol as a young teen. "My GPA is now 3.5, and my family relationships have improved," he said.

While everyone involved in the effort—the Select Committee, the Alliance, the people who came to hearings—was driven by a moral imperative to create opportunity for a chronically marginalized population, there is also a powerful bread-and-butter argument for equity. Improving the life chances of young men of color "is not merely a matter of fairness and equality," according to the committee's report, "It is essential to the economic strength and competitiveness of the state."

### ***Equity pays off***

annual [2012 Inner City Economic Summit](#) held by ICIC, The Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, in Boston September 19-20 highlighted solutions that foster jobs, equity, and investment.

Emphasizing that regional economic development efforts need to include targeted strategies that bring jobs and economic opportunities to inner cities (as described in ICIC's recent [report](#)), the conference spotlighted best practices from cities across the country.

Throughout the day, participants learned about models to help inner-city businesses scale and grow through partnerships with anchor institutions, prepare workers for jobs in growth industries, develop urban food clusters, and more. Cleveland's University Circle Community Wealth Building Initiative, Boston's \$25 million SkillWorks workforce training and placement effort, and New York City's Green Carts initiative were among 28 case studies shared at the conference and will soon be posted online at [www.whatworksforcities.org](http://www.whatworksforcities.org).

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### **Stalled Economic Mobility, Redux**

A new [analysis](#) from the Urban Institute underscores the nation's continuing challenge of economic mobility, particularly for communities of color. Analyzing four decades of data on the life

The equity agenda—just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate and prosper—has become a national imperative. In [\*The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth\*](#), researchers from the City University of New York and Columbia University found that the cost of doing nothing to open up opportunities for youth who are disconnected from work or school is steep. These youth are likely to end up unemployed or in the prison system, which leads to fewer dollars being spent in the economy, slower economic growth, reduced tax revenues, and higher government spending on the prison system and on social supports. They calculate that each disconnected young person costs society about \$37,500 per year, for a total cost of more than \$6 trillion.

Changing the odds for disconnected youth can bring significant returns. The California Endowment estimates that raising high school graduation rates for Latino and African American males in California by just 10 percentage points, to 66 percent, would generate \$8.1 billion in income, tax revenue, and social savings over their lifetimes. A 100 percent graduation rate would generate \$37.2 billion.

The committee found overwhelming consensus among youth, community, and leaders in law enforcement, courts, prisons, juvenile detention, and other systems, that maintaining punitive, opportunity-limiting systems is prohibitively costly—in human terms as well as financial ones.

### ***Focus on school discipline***

The Select Committee put its weight behind 19 priority bills, nearly half of which focused on reforming harsh school discipline policies. The Alliance for Boys and Men of Color also targeted its advocacy around the school discipline bills and gathered 15,000 signatures in support.

School discipline is a critical arena for action because severe "zero tolerance" policies have resulted in excessive suspensions and expulsions, often for minor infractions. California now suspends more students than it graduates. In the 2009-2010 school year, California schools expelled more than 21,000 students and imposed 757,000 suspensions.

The damage reverberates for years. Students who have been suspended or expelled are five times more likely to drop out of school and 11 times more likely to turn to crime. Studies show that such punitive discipline does nothing to make

trajectories of children born poor, researchers find that one in six children born to poor parents remain poor for at least half their childhood, with no improvement to this rate over time.

They also found that poverty is more persistent for children of color. Black children who are born poor are twice as likely to remain poor as their white counterparts: Two-thirds of poor black children remain poor, compared to one-third of white children. (Data on mobility is not yet available for Latino children.)

Stalled mobility for children of color is a major threat to the nation's future economic prospects, given that more than half of all newborns are of color and by the end of this decade the majority of all youth will be of color. The findings of this study should compel action to improve economic opportunities for children growing up in low-income communities of color.

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schools safer or foster learning, and that alternative strategies cost less and produce better outcomes.

The new laws take a commonsense approach to school discipline. Here, in brief, is what each will do:

- Change zero tolerance law to give school administrators discretion to use alternatives to expulsion in certain situations ([AB 2537](#))
- Authorize school administrators to use alternatives to suspension or expulsion when appropriate ([AB 1729](#))
- Prohibit schools from denying readmission to students solely because they are returning from the juvenile justice system ([SB 1088](#))
- Change truancy provisions to identify reasons that constitute a valid excuse for missing school, among other things ([AB 2616](#))

One bill, which would notify a foster care child's attorney and child welfare agency if she or he was at risk of being expelled ([AB 1909](#)), still remains on the governor's desk.

The governor vetoed two bills. One would have removed "willful defiance"—a highly subjective category—as a reason for lengthy suspension or expulsion ([AB 2242](#)). The other would have required schools with high suspension rates (25 percent or more) to create action plans to reduce the rates ([SB 1235](#)).

### ***The movement continues***

While the final tally from the year's extensive activities remains to be counted, the policy wins, outpouring of public support, and creation of new legislative champions in the fight for equity all mark tremendous steps forward. Much more is needed, but a movement is being built across the state to carry it forward. As Assemblymember Victor Manuel Perez, a member of the Select Committee explains: "Like any movement, it takes time, and it takes patience, and it takes a lot of work."

What Corleone Ham told the committee is true: "All boys and young men of color need to be given a chance."

Want to learn more? This 6-minute [video](#) tells the story.

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## **Opportunity Nation Campaign**

## Takes Off

Opportunity Nation, a new bipartisan campaign to expand opportunity by connecting young people to school and work, is gaining traction. Speaking at its spirited summit on September 19, Angela Glover Blackwell flagged the need to make sure "the opportunity ladder goes all the way to the ground and does not hover as a distant dream, and that it be strong enough to hold the millions who need to climb the rungs."

The [action](#) agenda unveiled at the conference seeks to do just that with a focus on ensuring high school, postsecondary education, and career success for all of the nation's youth. The campaign platform calls for community and employer action, local innovation, and policy reform to reconnect disengaged youth, strengthen career pathways and technical education programs, promote asset development, and expand job and training opportunities.

About 1,200 people, including an impressive array of young people and local and national leaders, attended the Washington, DC summit. The day spotlighted game-changing local, state, private, and philanthropic initiatives to give all young people a shot at achieving the American dream.

Since Opportunity Nation launched last year, more than 250 prominent nonprofits, companies, educational institutions, and community- and faith-based organizations have signed on.

"If all the partners in @oppnation join together, there is no telling what the future holds," one participant tweeted.

### ***Tracking opportunity***

Opportunity Nation's organizers conducted extensive research during the first year of the campaign. They developed a data-driven [Opportunity Index](#) that gives every state and county a grade from A to F based on its performance across more than a dozen opportunity indicators. They also held hundreds of listening sessions with people from all backgrounds, walks of life, and political and ideological stripes.

The research led to the campaign's focus on young people ages 16 to 24. Analyzing the primary drivers of the opportunity index scores, the researchers found that the percentage of young people who are out of school and unemployed was the single most important factor in determining a state's

opportunity ranking.

### ***Inspiring local action***

Opportunity Nation seeks to increase opportunity scores in all 50 states by 10 percent over the next 10 years, and is moving forward to marshal public and policy support for its agenda.

Already, the campaign is fostering local action. The Opportunity Index has spurred a kind of "race to the top," as cities and states vie to improve—and outdo their neighbors. Minnesota is ranked No. 3 nationally (behind Vermont and North Dakota), for example, yet leaders in Saint Paul have created a spinoff, [Opportunity Saint Paul](#), to reduce its local poverty rate of 24 percent. Iowa, No. 7, has vowed to do better and beat Minnesota and Nebraska, the two higher-ranking Midwestern states.

The summit energy will ripple across the nation during the official [Week of Action](#), October 8-15.

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*America's Tomorrow* highlights campaigns, leaders, policies, reports, and local models that are advancing equity as an economic imperative. It is produced by Chris Schildt, Sarah Treuhaft, Fran Smith, and Ana Louie. To learn more, visit the [America's Tomorrow webpage](#).

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