



The National Urban League

## 8 Point Plan

# Educate, Employ & Empower

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National  
Urban League

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The National Urban League, through its 97 local affiliates, which serve 300 communities, provides direct services to more than 2.6 million served a year.

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# PREAMBLE

In 2011, the National Urban League launched the 12-Point Jobs Plan to Put America Back to Work. In 2012, we are issuing a public call for immediate national action around the education and job-training steps necessary to achieve these goals. As a result of our long history of job training and education programs, the National Urban League understands the importance of equipping workers with a sound education. With the introduction of our 2012 Employment and Education Plan, we seek to raise this most urgent conversation to the top of our national news headlines. The time to act is now!

Any serious discussion about the creation of jobs and economic opportunity must account for the basic shortcomings of our current national approach to education, from early education to adulthood, and beyond. These two concepts are closely rooted in their ultimate purpose, if not one and the same. Education, at its core, is economic readiness. Job training, by its very definition, is education in its most practical sense. The two cannot and must not be viewed separately. A broken national system of education will continue to yield a broken economy, built upon broken communities and broken lives.

This list of practical and actionable ideas is a recommended approach to solving America's crisis in education - one designed to spark serious discussion, while also serving as a policy playbook ready for action today. We view the following collection of ideas as the first step towards positive change, and a long-term education solution for America.

Although our traditional role has often been seen by many as a 'bridge' between the services available and the daily needs of the underserved of our cities, we fully accept the growing challenge asked of a historic Civil Rights Organization such as ours, to take the lead in forcing our country to confront those basic sources of economic hardship that we can and must change within our lifetime.

# 1

## Fair and Equitable School Funding for All

Nearly 60 years after the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, our nation's schools are inequitably funded and available funds are distributed unevenly[i]. If America is to achieve the vision of a globally competitive nation, no longer may we accept that the quality of a student's education is based primarily upon his or her zip code. We must have a laser like focus on high academic outcomes for all students.

Federal and state funding must adequately fund high-quality *traditional and charter schools* by redesigning funding formulas to allow for effective intervention strategies and innovation in the classroom.

- Funding must be equitable so that educational outcomes do not depend on geography, race, national origin, language or school location.
- States must compare and publicly report the amount of funding spent on all staff and instructional services to monitor and actively ensure the equity of investments within states and school districts as well as between schools.
- A new national fund must be dedicated to low-performing middle and high schools to ensure that resources are made available according to the varying needs of students with a particular emphasis on school districts with concentrated student poverty.
- Federal, State and Local Education policy must encourage, and incentivize longer school days, and a longer school year to allow for more time on task, as well as full inclusion of quality, extra activities such as sports, music, leadership development and the like.

## 2

### **Robust Early Childhood Education for Each Child**

The availability of early learning opportunities for children is a significant predictor of the level of achievement students will achieve throughout their academic career. Early interventions for the youngest learners help to promote and ensure the economic health of our nation's future leaders.

- All states and districts must set a goal to provide universal access to high-quality preschool programs that prepare students for kindergarten[ii].
- States should align their early learning systems with other education systems, so as to create a seamless education continuum from preschool to postsecondary education.
- Childcare programs for ages 0 – 5 must fully integrate early learning principles and invest in strategies to support parents as their child's first teacher[iii].



# 3

## Strengthen High Schools and Re-engage Students to Prevent Dropouts

Too often the experiences of high school students do not prepare them adequately for postsecondary education and to enter the workforce. We must raise the high school graduation and college-completion rates of students of color to the level of white students by 2020 to add \$310 billion to the U.S. economy[iv].

- High schools must provide academic supports for all students to overcome barriers to learning and teaching, integrate innovation and research-based methods to re-engage students especially for those students at risk for dropping out of school.
- States must promote culturally relevant content knowledge and teaching that will prepare students to be more effective in a global economy.
- High schools must include financial literacy education to prepare students to manage student and personal loans.
- High schools must seek to engage community-based organizations such as Urban League affiliates in new and innovative ways, including in the development of high school improvement, wrap-around services and turnaround strategies.



# 4

## Robust STEM Focused Curriculum and Programs

In order to fully prepare students for the fastest growing job sectors in America, all classrooms must adopt a robust STEM curriculum aligned with college and career-ready standards[v]. Students must be exposed to hands on learning outside of the classroom connecting students to STEM related careers.

- All classrooms must adopt a robust STEM curriculum aligned with college and career-ready standards and workplace expectations.
- Schools, businesses and community-based organizations must work together to provide co-ops and lab experiences in the middle grades and STEM internships in high schools.
- Project Ready STEM program, a post-secondary success program for urban middle and high school students designed to provide them with support to succeed in STEM- related class work, should be replicated and brought to scale through public and private partnerships.



# 5

## Qualified, Effective and Diverse Teachers

Low-income, low-performing students and students of color are far more likely than other students to have inexperienced, uncertified, poorly educated, and under-performing teachers[vi]. In order to develop and support strong educators and school leaders, we must redefine the important role of teachers in contributing to our nation's current and future economic development by addressing the quality of the teaching profession as well as the effectiveness of existing and future teachers.

- States and school districts must elevate the teaching profession by providing competitive salaries based upon high quality performance.
- Teachers must be provided mentorship and the necessary supports to succeed and have a defined career ladder that encourages innovation and improvement for those that have been in the classroom for many years.
- Redefine the recruitment and training of teachers in teacher preparation programs while encouraging higher education programs to seek racial and gender diversity in recruitment efforts and prepare teachers to meet a wide range of student needs.
- Qualified, effective teachers must be equally distributed and parents must be provided with transparent information about the preparation and certification of their child's teacher.



# 6

## Strategic Workforce Development: Targeting Americans Most in Need

The long overdue reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) has led to the reduction of investment in our nation's workforce, especially those programs that train unskilled and low-skilled adults and youth who have little attachment to the labor force, and older workers whose jobs will have been lost to the recent recession[vii]. With long-term unemployment rates hovering above 40 percent since 2009, recent history shows that widespread GDP growth alone will not restore these jobseekers to gainful employment. Strategic and effective workforce development therefore requires:

- Public/private investments and partnerships in our workforce development system targeted to low income communities.
- Direct federal funding to national community-based intermediary organizations that have demonstrated expertise and effectiveness in workforce development.
- Intensive services in basic education, pre-employment and skills training for high growth and emerging industry jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Equal access to pre-apprenticeship programs that facilitate better access to unions and higher paying jobs.
- Mandatory inclusion of Urban League affiliates, and other community based organizations on all local Workforce Investment Boards or any other local governing mechanism that may be established by WIA.
- A reauthorized WIA must include conflict of interest provisions to prevent Workforce Investment Boards from functioning as direct service providers in competition with local community based providers.

# 7

## **New Job Training Models Coupled with Job Placement**

Job training programs must provide two services: 1) a full suite of skills that match the needs of employers, and 2) the assistance of successfully trained jobseekers with job placement. To achieve this, job placement must be an integral part of any job training program and a national on-the-job training structure that is driven by employer needs and open to diverse organizations must be created. This requires:

- Partnerships of business, vocational education providers and community intermediaries addressing all the individual characteristics contributing to successful employment.
- Reforming the old apprenticeship model to fit today's needs. Tax incentives for apprenticeships and community intermediaries to assist hard-to-reach workers must be included.
- Wrap-around services addressing other causes of employment must be considered. An example is the crisis of those referred to as the 'long-term unemployed'. In their case, the lack of skills is often not the only impediment to getting a job.

# 8

## **Improving and Integrating Current Data Systems**

An effective youth-to-adulthood education, job training and job placement structure requires the collection of data that is necessary for efficient resource allocation.

- It is essential that this data be established based upon desired outcomes so that PreK-12 education, workforce development and higher education systems data are connected for a complete understanding of the impact of education on the outcomes (long and short-term) of students, workers and families.

i As reported in the National Urban League 2012 Equality Index, average per student funding in high poverty schools is \$5,937 compared to \$7,244 in low poverty schools.

ii The 2012 National Urban League 2012 Equality Index reports that 44.1% of black children ages 3-5 have at least 3 of the requisite skills for school readiness compared to 26% of Latinos and 46.8% of white children in the same age group.

iii According to the National Urban League 2012 Equality Index, 78% of black children are read to at home 3 or more times a week, versus 68% of Latinos and 91% of white children.

iv As reported in the National Urban League 2012 Equality Index, 11.6% of all African Americans, 20.8% of all Latinos and 9.1% of all whites are high school dropouts. College graduation rates for 4-year institutions are 37.7% for African Americans, 46.2% for Latinos and 59.3% for whites. According to the Alliance for Education report Education and the Economy: The Economic Benefits of Helping High School Dropouts Earn High School Diplomas and College Degrees, increasing the graduation rate would add \$310 billion to the U.S. economy.

v The 2012 National Urban League 2012 Equality Index reports that the average scale score in science for black 8th graders is 124, compared to 129 for Latinos and 160 for whites. For 12th graders the average science scores are 120 for blacks, 128 for Latinos and 156 for whites.

vi According to the National Urban League 2012 Equality Index, 21.9% of high school teachers in high poverty schools do not have an undergraduate degree in the subject they teach compared to only 10.9% in low poverty high schools.

vii As reported in the National Urban League 2012 Equality Index, only 19.8% of African Americans, age 25 and older, have a bachelor's degree compared to 13.9% of Latinos and 33.2% of whites. However, nearly one-third of all new jobs created between 2008 – 2018 will require at least a bachelor's degree.



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