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OPINION

Providing the Basics for All Children

The seed experiment

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

A perennial favorite science project from preschool on up is the "seed experiment." A child plants identical seeds in two pots. She places the first pot inside a dark cupboard and leaves it there, and she puts the second one in a sunny spot and waters it every day. She waits to see what will happen. It's very easy for even the youngest children to figure out that their seedlings need the basics—sunlight and water—if they are going to survive and thrive.

The same is true for children and "the basics" during children's earliest years can have long lasting effects.

Arloc Sherman, senior researcher at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and one of the contribu-



tors to the new Harvard Education Press book "Improving the Odds for America's Children," says sometimes we forget to say how important the day-to-day basic assistance of food, clothing and shelter is for children's futures.

He pointed to a 2012 study on the long term effects of what began as the food stamps program. Researchers went back to the earliest days of the program when it was rolled out county by county to identify children who had access to food stamps in early childhood and whose mothers had access during their pregnancies.

They tracked their progress from the 1960s and 1970s into adulthood, comparing them to similar children who didn't have access to food stamps. The results showed the power of nutrition: the children who had access to food stamps were less likely to have stunted growth, be obese, or have heart disease as adults—and the positive effects weren't just health-related. One of the largest differences was that chil-

dren in families with food stamps were 18 percent more likely to graduate from high school.

This echoes other studies on the positive effects of federal nutrition programs that found needy children who received food assistance before age five were in better health as adults and girls, more likely to complete more schooling, earn more money, and not rely on safety net programs as adults.

Putting food on children's plates helps build healthy minds and bodies today and helps set children up for better futures later. And the benefits don't end there. Better graduation rates mean better jobs with higher salaries with cascading benefits to the community, the national economy, and the next generation.

The case for providing the basics for all children in America is hard to refute. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2.2 million children were lifted out of poverty by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, in 2012.

Yet right now we are fast approaching a critical time for hungry children: summer vacation. School-based federal nutrition programs have proved to be a lifeline for needy children. In fiscal year 2012 more than 21 million children received free or reduced-price lunch through the National School Lunch Program and nearly 11 million children received free and reduced price breakfast.

Hunger doesn't end on the last day of school—yet only 11 percent of the number of children who relied on those lunches during the school year received meals through the Summer Food Service Program. Even though the program is 100 percent federally funded and can create desperately needed jobs for cafeteria workers and others during the summer months, many states and communities have created needless bureaucratic hurdles to establishing summer feeding sites resulting in not nearly enough sites to serve all eligible children. But it's not

too late to find out how you can help—or how children you know can participate.

The USDA, which administers the summer feeding program, says there are many ways individuals and organizations can get involved: "You can serve the meals, promote the program, provide transportation, volunteer at summer food sites, or even go out and find sponsors."

The USDA's "Summer Meals Toolkit" provides information on sponsors, sites, links to state agencies, and much more, or call 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-HAMBRE. If there are not enough summer feeding sites in your community, ask why not. Help make sure children in your community are getting the basics and that there are no hungry children in your community this summer.

Many plants blossom and thrive all summer long. Children should be able to do the same.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

A 'Sterling' Example of Our Confusion

Let our money do the talking

BY RON BUSBY SR.

Let me get my disclaimer out of the way first. The U.S. Black Chambers, Inc. is a business organization. Our sole purpose is to improve the lives of black people by actively working to change the market environment. We advocate for improvements in capital access, increased opportunity and the transfer of the skills necessary to successfully, and profitably compete in America's economy.

Despite this clarity of purpose, we are often called upon to weigh in on issues that typically are addressed by civil rights or social justice organizations. For certain, we are black in America, so we do have opinions about continued evidence of inequality, racism, bigotry, discrimination and hatred being directed against black people. But, as I said, we are a business organization, so our perspective is always going to be a business perspective.

Donald Sterling is a businessman who owns, among other interests, a National Basketball Association franchise. He said some insulting remarks that prove his dis-



dain for black people, presumably including the men whose athletic ability make his franchise valuable. And through his twisted thinking, he has hijacked all of black America's communications channels. Facebook, Twitter, radio, and newspaper are all on fire with commentary about Sterling and what must be done to make him pay.

Excuse me, but there's real life going on here! Black America, even after the furor over Sterling's telephonic rant has dissipated, will still suffer from gross inequality. The \$2.5 million fine levied by the NBA for his "transgression" is a pittance for someone whose fortune is reported to be over a billion dollars. His franchise, the Los Angeles Clippers, will still receive millions of dollars in television royalty payments, even if he is not allowed to attend games or go to his office.

And all the while, black businesses are still not able to qualify for a loan guaranteed by the full faith and credit of the United States government! Black businesses are still failing to net their federally mandated share of contracts awarded by that same government. As a result, black unemployment figures—as reported by the same federal government—are still spiraling skyward, with no apparent ceiling.

Talk about misplaced anger! This

is not to diminish the obvious - that Sterling's perspective is unacceptable, is deserving of any fine, penalty, compensatory payment and public shaming available under law. But Congress makes the laws that limit our ability to have equitable access in the marketplace and the courts interpret and uphold those laws, even in the face of glaring inequity. Doesn't that make you mad, too?

So, if we're going to be mad about something...okay, okay, Donald Sterling is as good a place as any to start. But his despicable record in denying housing opportunities to black families has had more direct impact on black folks than anything he may have said to his "side piece" in a recorded phone conversation. So, maybe Sterling is a pretty good place to start showing just how angry we are today.

In the meantime, if we truly want to demonstrate our displeasure, let's go cold turkey! Turn off the NBA playoffs. Don't buy another jersey. Don't watch NFL games this fall. Stop buying that profanity-laced, misogynistic crap that is being foisted upon us as cultural expression.

If it's our money that is financing the exploitation of black talent, we can do something about that. If the empires built on exploitation can no longer rely on our complicity (in ticket sales, athletic attire, and viewers/con-

sumers, etc.) they will quickly lose their value.

If we truly want to demonstrate our displeasure, let our money do our talking. Do something different - support black-owned businesses. Here at the USBC, we've grown fond of pointing out that if each of America's black-owned businesses earned enough money to hire just one new employee, we'd wipe out black unemployment overnight!

So, we have a real opportunity here to prove that we really have taught our dollars some sense. Racism, bigotry, discrimination and personal animus seem to be - after all

these years -- beyond our control. Unfortunately for us, those behaviors are also apparently beyond the control of federal laws designed to stamp them out.

Our money, however, is entirely within our control.

If you don't like racism, don't finance it. If you don't appreciate being discriminated against, don't finance it. If you don't like stupidity, don't finance it either! After all, money talks and you-know-what walks. You can take that to the bank! (A black-owned bank, please!)

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