

# OPINION

## Only With Our Help Can Our Kids Succeed

### Let's put our children's needs before politics

BY BRIAN L. PAULING

It's the time of year parents receive a progress report of their child's academic performance after a fall term of being fully engaged in their classes.

Some will be fine, meeting or exceeding expectations for their grade level. Unfortunately, a significant number will already have fallen behind. Their academic success will be in jeopardy unless someone intervenes. To parents, teachers, administrators and community members, I say that someone is us!

It's up to us to work as a cohesive and collaborative support system for our children. That will mean holding ourselves and each other accountable to ensure that each student has been taught and has learned the required coursework for their grade level and is ready to advance to the next grade, without remediation, by the end of the school year.



We are expecting a lot from our children, but what, in turn, should our children expect from us?

As parents, students should expect us to be actively involved in their education. We must ensure the learning-readiness basics are mastered at home: sufficient sleep, on-time school arrival, safe after-school care, and quality homework assistance, provided either by us or someone we find to help, such as a student in a higher

grade, a college student, or a nonprofit organization, like 100 Black Men of America, Inc., whose local chapters offer mentoring and tutorial programs.

Then we must move to an even higher level of engagement. For instance, we should communicate regularly with our child's teachers. Join the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at our child's school. Attend school board meetings. Advocate for the needs of our children, their school, teachers and district. Educate ourselves about the best available education options in our communities, from traditional public schools to nonprofit charter schools.

If students do their part and we as parents do ours, then our children also should expect their teachers and administrators to provide instruction, experiential learning opportunities and school environments that breed and boost success.

Our children should expect their teachers to demonstrate that

capable and well-trained professionals who teach in compelling and creative ways.

Our students should also expect the support of people in their communities—even those without school-aged children—because these students are destined to impact the community through their positive contributions or negative

Stand with school boards and policy-makers to advocate publicly for high-performing schools and better teacher evaluations and student assessments. All are vital ways community members can support our students' overall success and make a difference in their lives.

We at 100 Black Men of America know that our children are more than capable of being academically successful. Let's provide access to educational opportunities that equip students to be competitive. Let's set high expectations for student achievement, remove obstacles to progress and provide proper interventions and support systems. We will demonstrate our unwavering belief in our students by working side by side with other concerned parents, teachers, administrators and community members throughout the school year.

Let's put our children's needs before politics and make our nation's schools the best they can be, so all of our students can become the best they can be.

*Brian L. Pauling is the national president and chief executive officer of 100 Black Men of America, Inc.*

*When some children fail to make the grade, they should expect that their teachers and school staff won't let them flounder, but use proven intervention strategies to get them back on track.*

they believe that all children can learn at high levels. When some children fail to make the grade, they should expect that their teachers and school staff won't let them flounder, but use proven intervention strategies to get them back on track. Our children should expect their teachers to be

degradations. Visit a local school and ask how you can volunteer. Partner with a local school and offer your services or the expertise and resources of your company or organization. Serve on a local school council. Get involved as a tutor, mentor, guest speaker or member of a booster club.

## Changing the Conversation on Childhood Development

### Experiences shape our biology

BY DR. RENÉE BOYNTON-JARRETT

Americans are fond of saying that our children are our nation's most valuable re-



source. But if our actions are the measure, do we really mean it?

Mounting research evidence from neuroscience, public health, economics and social science supports a simple conclusion: investing in early childhood, through affordable early childcare and enrichment opportunities, pays dividends for the individual and for society.

Yet we know that not all children have an opportunity to experience high-quality early childcare—and it's because we have chosen not to support universal access.

Scientific research supports the long-term value of creating the conditions children need for a strong start. We also know how to scale and support effective social and educational programs and make them accessible.

Why, then, aren't we committed to ensuring these opportunities?

Political discussions about early childhood generally center on parents' choices and responsibilities. We expect parents to make good decisions for their young children. But wouldn't a tighter safety net of opportunities and support make good decisions easier, and make parents less likely to stumble in their efforts?

We need a new conversation, one that places what is optimal for children at the center.

That's what The Raising of America, a new documentary series, is trying to do. I'm proud to

be a part of the film, which probes how conditions faced by young children and their families form the foundation for future success—and brings to light the consequences of our failure to provide adequate support for parents raising young children.

In recent years, medical professionals have learned that health is profoundly influenced by factors outside the healthcare system. Study after study has shown that social determinants influence the ways our biological systems operate.

We also know that children who live in environments with a lot of concentrated disadvantage and in high-stress home environments are most likely to have adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs. A higher prevalence of ACEs can affect their emotional regulation, which in turn can impair optimal learning.

Yet with all of this knowledge, we still haven't bridged the gap between data and practice.

It strikes me that as a society we have accepted that the challenges parents face are all "just

part of raising a child." That the stress of trying to balance time and cost against what's best for our kids is now the norm. That it's not imperative to offer all children the opportunity to experience the high-quality early care they need to succeed.

The truth is that families cannot do it alone. It's my hope that the larger conversation we're launching—through ongoing research and with The Raising of America—will prompt a closer look at how we can develop an opportunity agenda for our nation's children, and steer a course that puts children front and center.

I hope this is the moment when society says, "This is not our goal. It doesn't have to be this way. We can change the experience of childhood. Let's get started."

*Dr. Renée Boynton-Jarrett is a Boston Medical Center pediatrician and researcher. She is founding director of Vital Village, a network of residents and agencies committed to maximizing child, family and community wellbeing.*



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