

Putting boys of color on path to success

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Oscar Barbarin, left, and Michael Cunningham, professors of psychology, spearhead the “Boys of Color Collaborative” with scholars at other universities to determine early influences on boys of color. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

In 2014, President Barack Obama launched My Brother's Keeper, an initiative aimed at addressing persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color. It's an issue close to the hearts of Tulane University [psychology](#) professors [Oscar Barbarin](#) and [Michael Cunningham](#), whose [Boys of Color Collaborative](#) is using data to determine what families and schools can do to put boys of color on a path to success.

The collaborative, which includes scholars from Duke University, Emory University, the University of California—Los Angeles, University of Virginia, George Washington University and several other institutions, gathers and analyzes data on the development of boys of color to determine early influences.

“In the earliest years, boys of color look no different than any other group,” Barbarin said. “How is it that when they get to adolescence you see such stark differences?”

For example, the U.S. Department of Education found that black students, especially boys, were 3.5 times more likely to be expelled or suspended than white students. They also are over-represented in the criminal justice system and in special education, Barbarin said.

The collaborative is working to develop joint research and to provide mentoring for younger scholars and undergraduates involved in the issue.

“They’re not all doing poorly,” Barbarin said. “Sixty percent are doing fine ? not great but getting along. The problem is that 20 percent are not doing well at all, and that’s millions of kids.”

In the spring, Barbarin and Charles Figley, a professor in the Tulane [School of Social Work](#), plan to organize a youth summit to discuss the challenges of New Orleans youth.

“The goal of the summit is to challenge existing conceptions of youth as failing to achieve and as purveyors of violence, to reimagine them as assets to their families and community and as future leaders,” Barbarin said.

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