

# Black Organizing Project (BOP) – Oakland (Alameda County), CA

# SNAPSHOT

## Overview

The Black Organizing Project (BOP) is a Black, member-led, grassroots organization. We are working for the racial, social, and economic justice of Oakland and Bay Area's Black Community. We are doing this through relationship and community building, leadership development, political education and policy change.

## Mission

*Our Vision is to “Build a strong bottom-up organization of Black people that will: Craft alternative models and institutions that will advance our vision of racial and economic justice; Rebuild the spirit and foundation of our community; Exercise political and economic power; Act to win real systematic change; Transform the lives of Black people; Embody the spirit that has sustained the Black community.” —BOP website*



## Constituency

- African Americans
- Intergenerational (ages 4-65+)

## Local Conditions & Critical Issues Impacting 0-5 Childhood Health in Oakland

### Gentrification

Including rising real estate prices, resulting in forced displacement & school disruption

### Limited Access to Affordable, Quality Early Childhood Education

### Lack of Safe Places for Young Children to Play

### Police and Community Violence

Including fear and worry of exposure to both types of violence, as well as associated childhood and adult trauma

### Poor Quality Education and Punitive Discipline Policies

Which lead to “push out” for youth of color

### Limited Transportation

Leading to chronic school absenteeism for children/youth and stress on parents

### Poor Economic Conditions

23% of Oakland children live in poverty<sup>1</sup>

## Key Indicators of Childhood Health in Oakland & Alameda County

# 11.2%

Blacks have the highest percentage of **low birth weight** in the county compared to all other racial/ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup>



Black children in the county are 2 times more likely to be hospitalized due to **asthma** than other races.<sup>2</sup>

# 20.1%

of Black youth are overweight, and 33.8% are obese.<sup>1,3</sup>



only 15% of children ages 5-17 were physically active at least 60 minutes per day.<sup>4</sup>

# 43.7

per 100,000 is the homicide rate for Black residents.<sup>2</sup> Children exposed to multiple traumatic events are at greater risk for anxiety, aggression, and mental illness.<sup>5</sup>

## Current Wellness & Safety Efforts

### Ongoing School Reform Campaign (B.O.S.S. Bettering Our School System)

Part of local, regional, statewide, and national coalitions focused on transforming school climate and learning by reforming school discipline policies, adopting restorative practices, and removing school police.

### Youth Leadership Development “School-Site” Organizers (SSO) Internship Program

A semester long internship program that develops youth leaders around grassroots organizing. Interns are responsible for surveying their selected school campuses, hosting political educational workshops, and monitoring the implementation of our policies on selected school sites. Our interns are also responsible for recruiting parents and students and working closely with our organizing committee on creating ways to combat school pushout.

### Community Building

Outreaching and engaging the community by creating spaces that incorporate arts and culture, political education, food, and healing etc. to foster a strong sense of community and engagement in change efforts.

*“When families are part of changing the policies, it changes everyone. If mom feels like she knows how to advocate for these issues, and children are part of that and they see that, they don’t feel like they are just helpless and powerless in the system.”*

### Integrated Voter Engagement

Voter Education and Surveying in East Oakland - Integrating civic engagement into our base building outreach in East Oakland has allowed us to expand and politicize our base. By informing folks about our policy wins and B.O.S.S. campaign we create space for Black communities to hold the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) Board accountable around transparency with the budget and pushing for the removal of law enforcement out of schools.

## BOP Accomplishments in Wellness & Safety

- **Fair and Just School Policing**

The “B.O.S.S. Campaign” created a way for Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) students, teachers and parents to have a clear process and policy for making complaints specific to school police and security officers. Further, they limited and defined the role of the Oakland Police Department within OUSD by establishing guidelines that previously did not exist.

- **Restorative Justice (including elimination of punitive punishment)**

Eliminated the use of “willful defiance and disruption” as grounds for suspension/expulsion in OUSD (from kindergarten to high school), which disproportionately targeted black children,<sup>6</sup> including commitment by OUSD to invest monies into restorative practices and prevention. Focuses on creating supportive school climates for all youth through investments in non-punitive discipline measures.

*“Kindergarteners are getting suspended [and] expelled...Black preschoolers especially, so their introduction in their little world of school, already starts at a very early age, when they are treated or seen as sort of the bad kid. Kindergarteners have had interactions with police officers in schools. It changes their whole viewpoint of what an education system is and very early on. These kids end up hating school and thinking that they are bad students. We hope that the work we are doing has an impact on a large element of the community, not only for those that are in school, but also those entering school.”*

–Jackie Byers, Director



## Community Defined “Best Practices” to Improve Childhood Health

### Integrated Model for Developing Holistic and Multi-Generational Leaders:

1. Creating pathways for community members of all ages (including very young children) to develop as leaders.

*“Even when we have meetings, instead of having kids to the side, we want to figure out, how can we see them as part of the community and develop their leadership, even as little ones.”—Jackie Byers, Director*

2. Developing collective leadership, not just for community change, but to strengthen community connections.

*“They’re not growing as leaders because, ‘look at this charismatic overachiever’, but they’re growing as leaders because they’re part of the community and they serve the community...puts the central focus on community, so that it’s not just about policy...[Policy is] a material impact of our work, and it’s important, but the how we get there is also building strong community ties...”*

3. Providing cultural spaces for community healing and connection.

*“...that’s what healing is, where we show love to one another, where we develop our vision, and even when policy may or may not happen the way we expect it to happen, we still win because we build a strong base of leaders that is accountable and kind to community...and we understand too that it’s spiritual...we’re whole-beings. People are very wounded and there’s a lot of pain...we can’t just change policies, we have to also have a place to sort of revise ourselves as well...love and spirit and culture are central ways that we organize.”*

### Allies/Partnerships Working on Children’s Health

- Coleman Advocates – San Francisco, CA <http://colemanadvocates.org/>
- GSA Network – Los Angeles, CA <http://gsanetwork.org/>
- Communities United for Restorative Youth Justice – Oakland, CA <http://www.curyj.org/>
- American Civil Liberties Union – Various, HQ in NYC <https://www.aclu.org/>
- CADRE – Los Angeles, CA <http://www.cadre-la.org/>
- Labor Community Strategy Center – Los Angeles, CA <http://www.thestrategycenter.org/>
- Public Counsel- Berkeley, CA <http://www.publiccounsel.org/>



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2. Bautista, E., Bell, S., Beyers, M., Brown, J., Cho, S., Guide, R., . . . Alameda County Public Health Department. (2014). Retrieved from [http://www.acphd.org/media/353060/acphd\\_cha.pdf](http://www.acphd.org/media/353060/acphd_cha.pdf)
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