

MAX MINUTES

Social capital and workforce readiness

How connection becomes opportunity, and how we build it on purpose

Ché Watkins Executive Director, Braven Atlanta

50 out of 50

Atlanta ranks last among the 50 largest U.S. metro areas for upward economic mobility.

And we did not hold steady

Atlanta

49th

2014



50th

today

We slid.

Charlotte

50th

2014



38th

today

They moved twelve.

Our ranking is not a verdict on
Atlanta's talent.

It is a verdict on Atlanta's
coordination.

Charlotte's numbers moved because business, philanthropic, nonprofit, and government leaders galvanized around one shared vision. That is not magic. That is coordination.

Social capital does not happen by accident.

It happens by design.

And what we design, we can measure.

Social capital is not a business card

It is not a LinkedIn request. It is a deep relationship that goes beyond a contact, and it is reciprocal. Both people have to have what they need in order to be successful.

“The students I work with can get a business card. What they cannot get is the fifteen-minute phone call that tells them which of two offers to take. That call is the capital.”

Some young people inherit
this network at the dinner table.

Others have to be introduced to it
on purpose.

Skills are necessary. They are not sufficient.

We have spent decades building skills pipelines and then wondering why the outcomes did not move.

Skills

get you qualified.

Networks

get you hired, get you promoted, and get you a second chance when the first job does not work out.

What the research actually found

21 billion

friendships analyzed by
Chetty's team

3 kinds

of social capital tested:
connectedness, cohesion,
civic engagement

1 winner

economic connectedness,
among the strongest
predictors ever identified

When Chetty came to Atlanta, his message was not “train harder.” It was: connect people to opportunity.

Atlanta's own connectedness number

42nd

percentile nationally for
economic connectedness

38%

of a low-income Atlantan's
friends are high-income

40%

is the national average,
for comparison

Fewer than four in ten of a low-income Atlantan's friendships reach across the income line.

Economic connectedness figures provided by Felicia; confirm exact source before citing on screen

Hold those two numbers together

50 of 50

for mobility

the symptom

42nd percentile

for connectedness

the cause

We are below the national middle on the single variable that best predicts whether a low-income child rises. Those two numbers are not a coincidence.

Why this is hopeful rather than damning

We cannot quickly change what neighborhood a child was born into.

We can absolutely change who they meet at nineteen.

You cannot choose a pathway you have never seen a real person walk.

Where this runs in Atlanta

Spelman College

- Our first HBCU partner nationally
- The first institution anywhere to require the Braven Accelerator for all sophomores
- A one-semester, for-credit course, with support continuing through graduation and beyond

“Spelman graduates some of the most accomplished women in this country. Our job is to make sure they get the same professional on-ramp that their peers with connected parents never had to think about.”

How Braven does it: Building it on purpose

- 1 Teach** We explicitly teach Fellows how to build a network. It is curriculum, not encouragement.
- 2 Practice** They rehearse those skills in low-stakes ways before the stakes are real.
- 3 Expose** Structured exposure to employer partners as coaches, mentors, and mock interviewers.
- 4 Cultivate** We help them tend the relationships they will need long after the course ends.

Yes, we can move. Here is the price.

1

Intentional

Cross-class connection has to be designed, staffed, and budgeted.

2

Ongoing

A single career fair is not a relationship. Social capital compounds, so it needs time to compound in.

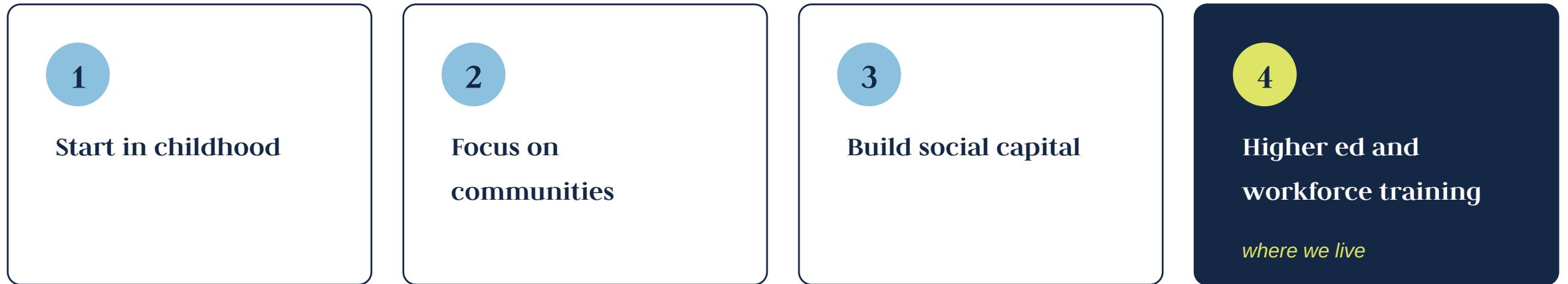
3

Measurable

Track who got introduced to whom, what came of it, and who is still connected two years later.

Nobody owns this alone

The research names four levers for improving mobility. We work the fourth. It only pays off if the others hold.



A student can be well served at every prior stage and still stall at career launch if no one owns the network piece. What we have been missing is not capacity. It is the connective tissue between us.

Two asks

The systemic one

You will be in a room this month with someone who holds real power over budgets, hiring, or policy. Say the words “social capital” out loud in that room. The more of us who ask, the harder it becomes not to change something.

The ninety-second one

Go to [Braven.org](https://braven.org) and volunteer to mentor one student. One. That is how this compounds, one relationship at a time, on purpose.

Atlanta is 50th out of 50.

Charlotte moved twelve places
because people decided to.

I would like to be back here in five years talking about our twelve.

Thank you. Questions welcome in the chat.

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