



Program

Developing Relationships to Enhance African-American Mentee Success(D.R.E.A.M.S.)

The Issue

Each year millions of students in the United States leave school without graduating.

Background

It is widely accepted that life without high school and college completion is more difficult and challenging for those who do not finish. Some of the consequences seem to be higher rates for involvement in crime, premature sex, use of drugs and alcohol, gang activities and other destructive activities.

In a recent working paper (Greene & Winters, 2005) released by the Manhattan Institute (MI), Georgia ranked near the bottom among states on high school graduation rates. This study provides important information on the progress that our public educational system has made in producing graduates and college-ready students over the last decade. The authors highlight alarming trends in high school completion rates between 1991 and 2002. While the nation's graduation rate remained relatively flat, Georgia's rate declined 12 percentage points. Because the requirements to graduate from high school are set lower than the requirements to apply to four-year college, many high school graduates are ineligible to enroll. Even when the data are disaggregated by racial and ethnic subgroups, Georgia still performed near the bottom. The MI report went on to state that Georgia ranked 49th out of 50 states on overall high school graduation rates in 2002 with 56 percent completing compared to the U.S. average of 71 percent. The MI report findings reiterate an emerging theme in Georgia, which is the need to ensure that the state's high schools are relevant and structured to support an increased completion rate.

America's children are its greatest resource. In the Atlanta-metropolitan area, where classic urban school issues exist, these problems are compounded. Students in high-poverty urban schools perform worse than students in high-poverty schools outside urban areas (Craig & Curran, 1998). Poverty, low student achievement, and high proportions of minority students are among the characteristics of schools considered *at-risk*. Orfield et al (2000) reported that growing numbers of schools, isolated by race and class, face severe educational problems. High minority enrollments, they found, also tend to correlate with poverty, itself a predictor of lower educational achievement and other educational inequalities. Educational and psychological research repeatedly has shown that students from disadvantaged U.S. minority groups tend to receive poorer academic outcomes than do White or Asian American students. Included among these poorer outcomes are lower grades in school (Demo & Parker, 1987) and higher dropout rates (American Council on Education, 1990; Steele, 1992).

Few would debate the importance of earning a high school diploma. Researchers agree that graduating from high school leads to much better life outcomes. In most states, urban students perform far below their non-urban peers and in most states (Craig & Curran, 1998).

The graduation rates for regular diplomas are disproportionately low, particularly for African-American and Latino/Latina students, as is evidenced by the alarming data shown in table below:

Table:2004 Graduation Rates for 3 Metro Atlanta School Systems by Ethnicity

Graduation %	Atlanta Public Schools (N=3660)	FultonCountySchools (N=4467)	Clayton County Schools (N=2857)
African-American	54%	57%	63%
Latino/Latina	39%	49%	51%
White	66%	87%	64%

One of the most troubling problems in urban education is that African American children, particularly males, have been categorically underserved by public schools. In particular, disproportionately large numbers of African American boys in our city schools are expelled, suspended, relegated to special education programs, and left with fewer personal resources than their European American peers. Nationwide one out of every four African American males drops out of high school (US Department of Education, 1990). This rate is higher than any other ethnic/gender group, and African American males drop out of school at a younger age than other groups (Swartz, 2001). In Georgia, the high school completion rate for African American males (defined as the percent of 1997 grade 9 enrollment in graduating class of 2001) was 58%; the overall high school completion rate was 71% (Georgia Public Education Report Card, 2000-01).

The Need

In the last three years, educators, community advocacy groups and concerned businesses in the community have become aware that the solution will not to be gained from an isolated effort by any one entity, but rather multiple levels of intervention are necessary to affect change (Atlanta Journal Constitution, 2002). There is evidence that suggests that children aspire to achieve and that their performance improves when they believe that opportunity is available to them.

A Solution

The Alonzo A. Crim Center for Urban Educational Excellence in the College of Education at Georgia State University's African-American male initiative program (DREAMS) proposes to help a cohort of Atlanta-area African-American male and female high school students, with the support of their families and community organizations, complete their high school education, attend, matriculate and graduate from college. Further, it is expected that given the community roots of the consortium members, the training and assistance activities resulting from this project will be maintained and extended to other schools and school districts. Scholars cite the effectiveness of school-university partnerships in working with at-risk students and schools (Ascher& Schwartz, 1989; Holmes Group, 1995). Ascher&Schwart (1989) reported that a primary reason for school system-college collaboration is improving the college preparation of students at-risk. The main goal of the DREAMS project is to create a university-school system collaborative to increase the life chances of African-American males and females deemed at-risk.

Activities/Methodology

The DREAMS project is designed to serve three schools in two urban school systems. Project staff along with civic organizations will help establish a school-based mentorship that will teach parents and students about processes and opportunities for successful enrollment into institutions of higher learning. The Georgia State University student organization Tighter Grip in collaboration with Georgia State University faculty, civic organizations (Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 100 Black Men of Atlanta) and parents of students in Atlanta Public Schools and Fulton County Schools will form a tiered-mentoring consortium. This consortium will support and sustain the DREAMS project and develop strategies to continue project activities beyond this funding cycle.

The schools involved in the project represent Title I schools in two urban school systems. Two of the schools are high-priority in the professional development schools project. These schools are Therrell High School and Tri Cities High School. The third school, Early College of the Schools at Carver is a school that is also affiliated with Georgia State University. Their demographics appear below.

Characteristics of Participating Schools

<i>NAME OF SCHOOL</i>	SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (SES) (free lunch program)	PERCENTAGE MINORITY	GRADUATION RATE	SCHOOL SIZE**
THERRELL HIGH SCHOOL	70%	99	32.1% (324 Students)	1,014
TRI-CITIES HIGH	40%	84	60.4% (427 Students)	2,022
EARLY COLLEGE AT CARVER	76%	98	28.2% (213 Students)	463

Tighter Grip, the African-American male student organization that will lead this effort, has a three-fold mission: to provide African American males with a *tighter grip* on academic studies, interpersonal relationships, career focus and self-identity via group discussions, teambuilding, and lectures. Secondly, intentionally establish brother and business connections across campus organizations, the student body and the Atlanta community. Thirdly, complete a mentoring certification program to effectively engage, encourage and challenge middle and high school students.

Evaluation Design

Three overarching goals have been identified for this one-year project. These goals are linked to the three major transition periods during the adolescent and young adult school years. The first goal is to increase the academic performance level on standardized tests of African American males and females. The second goal is to increase the number of African American males and females who remain in programs focused on graduation. The third goal is to empower the parents and African American male students through awareness of financial aid, scholarships, tutoring, mentoring and academic advisement available to them through the high school and university system. The fourth is to provide tutoring and mentoring for all project students to support their academic needs and exceed the current graduation rates in their schools.

1. Transition point one - 9th to 10th grade

Grade level CRCT scores for the previous school year will be used as the benchmark for those students entering Atlanta Public School's Early College. Students participating in the project will be given an identification number so that their progress can be linked individually to specific programs throughout the school year. CRCT scores for the current school year will be used to assess the participant's academic gain through participation in the tutoring, mentoring and standardized test preparation course. Additional data gathered will include hours of tutoring and mentoring participated in, number of African American males and females entering the Early College, number of African American males and females completing the first year of Early College, and number of African American males and females re-enrolling in Early College for the 2006-07 school year. An awareness questionnaire will be administered prior to the start of the program and at the end of the

program to document level of awareness of both students and parents of financial aid, scholarships, tutoring, mentoring and academic advisement available to them.

2. Transition point two - 11th to 12th grade

Grade level CRCT scores for the previous school year will be used as the benchmark for eleventh grade African American male students participating at Therrell and Tri-Cities high school. Students participating in the project will be given a virtual identification number so that their progress can be linked individually to specific programs throughout the school year. Eleventh grade High School Graduation Test will be used to assess the participant's academic gain through participation in the tutoring, mentoring and standardized test preparation course. Data will also be gathered to include hours of tutoring and mentoring participated in, number of African American males and females completing eleventh grade and enrolling in twelfth grade. Also, the name and number of colleges being considered by the student will be identified and collected.

PSAT scores will also be used as a benchmark for those students who took this test in the tenth grade. SAT scores obtained during the eleventh grade year will be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in educational programs. The areas will be assessed by the standardized test preparation course presenter along with the participants; and the course will be tailored to meet the educational needs of the specific audience. Students will also be encouraged and advised to enroll in classes during their twelfth grade year that will improve weaker scores and expand knowledge in areas of strength. Finally, an awareness questionnaire will be administered prior to the start of the program and at the end of the program to document levels of awareness of both students and parents of financial aid, scholarship, tutoring, mentoring and academic advisement available to them.

3. Transition point three - Freshman to Sophomore year

African American freshmen males and females will be identified at Atlanta Metropolitan College and Georgia State University. Students participating in the project will be given identification numbers so that their progress can be linked individually to specific programs throughout the school year. Tutors, mentors and an African American learning community will be made available to those participating in the program. Data will be gathered to include grade point average at the end of the first semester, grade point average at the end of the second semester, completion of GSU 1010 or its equivalent, number of academic hours enrolled, scholarships received, matriculation into the sophomore year and extent of participation in the greater college community. An awareness questionnaire will be administered prior to the start of the program and at the end of the program to document self-identified level of high school preparation for college, financial aid, scholarship, tutoring, mentoring and academic advisement available to them.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to provide support, information, and training to parents of students and students in identified low performing schools to help empower them to promote and support school achievement. We plan to dialog with the parents of the children in Title I urban schools and invite them to participate in the school community to be a part of the system that designs and evaluates their child's education. To achieve this, Tighter Grip will lead a consortium to undertake a mentoring initiative aimed at fostering communication between parents, students, mentors, civic organizations, schools and universities. The group will then work to educate and empower parents to promote their children's academic success. The project will remain flexible to meet the current and future needs of its participants.

Objectives

To provide a tiered mentoring program that provides comprehensive training, information, and support to parents and students in secondary schools and individuals who work with the parents and families, college organizations, organizations that support family-school partnership (such as parent-teacher associations and Parents as Teacher organizations), and other organizations that carry out parent education and family involvement programs to insure the academic success of African-American males and females and their eventual matriculation through institutions of higher learning. Goals of the project include:

1. Enroll at-risk African American male high school juniors in DREAMS project
2. Graduate participating students from high-school and prepare them to attend college
3. Coordinate with parents, students and civic organizations cognitive, affective and emotional needs
4. Provide tutoring and mentoring for all project students to support their academic needs and exceed the current graduation rates in their schools.

The DREAMS project will work with individual students to meet their individual needs, but it will also track impact on schools and school systems, families, communities and students, so as to institutionalize success and opportunity. The DREAMS project will build success one child at a time.