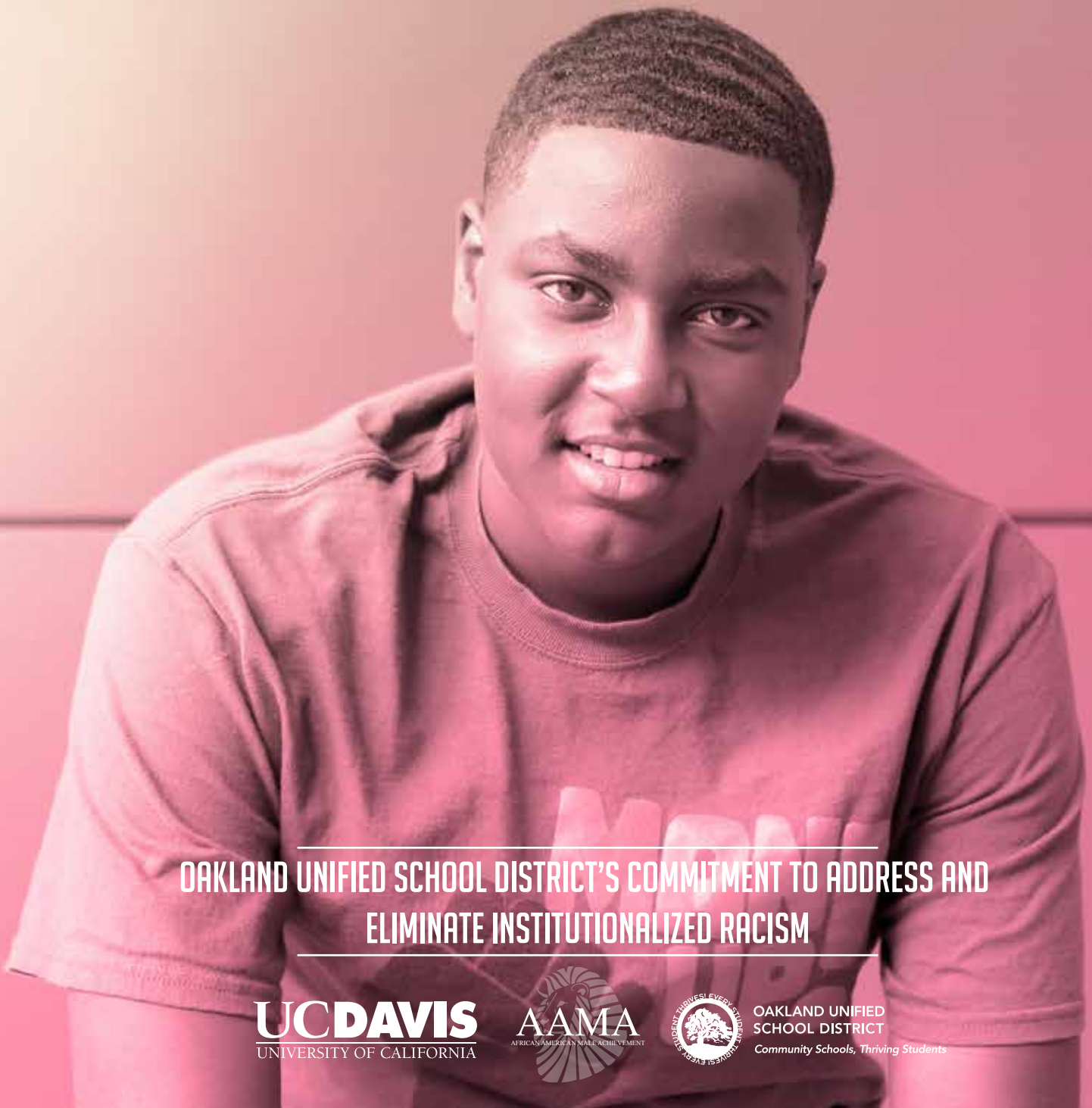


THE BLACK SONRISE



OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT'S COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS AND
ELIMINATE INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM

UC DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



OAKLAND UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT
Community Schools, Thriving Students



This report is in honor of the African ancestors in the motherland and throughout the diaspora who endured horrific atrocities, and yet gathered strength through struggle. These men and women gave birth to generations of resistance, inspiring a fight for justice embodied in the community of educators and activists in Oakland, CA who are successfully reaching and teaching African American youth. This report is also dedicated to former Superintendent Tony Smith, for honoring his sacred duty as an educator to respond to a pervasive problem with institutional support, audacious hope and courage. Finally, this work is for those young people who died too young because of preventable acts of violence, as well as those who are still enslaved behind prison walls in a paralysis of arrested development. The path towards a greater tomorrow begins today. The genocide of underachievement will no longer occur on our watch. May this generation of sons reach their full potential bright, brilliant, and Black.

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THE BLACK SONRISE: OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT'S COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS AND ELIMINATE INSTITUTIONALIZED RACISM

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ABOUT AAMA

The Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) was launched in 2010 and strives to stop the epidemic failure of African American male students in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) by creating the systems, structures, and spaces that guarantee success for all African American male students.

AAMA is an ambitious project designed to dramatically improve academic and ultimately life outcomes for African American male students in Oakland. AAMA is leading the school district by analyzing the patterns and processes that are producing systemic inequities. OUSD's theory of action, Targeted Universalism, ascertains that by transforming the system to support successful outcomes for OUSD's lowest performing subgroup, OUSD will create a district that improves academic and social-emotional outcomes for all of its students.

For more information, visit AAMA online at www.thrivingstudents.org/33.

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Message From the Author

The Black Sonrise is the first in a series of reports that document and examine the Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) within the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). This first stage of analysis examines the Manhood Development Program (MDP) from its inception to its current practices and future goals. MDP is unique because it offers an elective course during the school day, which is taught by African American males for African American males. At nearly every middle and high school in Oakland, the Manhood Development classroom instructors are offering young men opportunities for healthy identity development. The instructors are intentional about creating a safe space and curriculum that fosters positive self-esteem and critical thinking for school and life. As a result, students learn about the power of personal and collective agency in order to overcome barriers to achievement.

Building on my personal and professional interests, I was honored by the chance to study AAMA methods and therein actively support OUSD as one of the only school districts in the country systemically addressing and eliminating institutionalized racism. My own background as a former classroom teacher, community activist, and scholar informs my understanding of the promise and perils of urban cities and schools. I investigate this topic in various places—community centers, juvenile detention facilities, schools—and in each of these settings, I examine the ways learning can serve as a mechanism of disenfranchisement or as a catalyst for social change.

At Harvard University, I was mentored and trained by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot in a qualitative research methodology called Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; 1988; 1994; 1999; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Under her guidance, I learned how to use the entirety of my being to not simply listen to a story, but listen for a story. Because of the nature of Portraiture, however, it is important to note that *The Black Sonrise* may not read like a traditional evaluation report—this is intentional.

“BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF PORTRAITURE, HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE BLACK SONRISE MAY NOT READ LIKE A TRADITIONAL EVALUATION REPORT—THIS IS INTENTIONAL.”

Relying on a tree metaphor, many reports focus on the leaves, that is, the facts and figures that are the byproducts of certain kinds of work. Then there are studies that emphasize the branches, those correlations of how, why, and where the leaves connect. And there are plenty of examinations that simultaneously consider the historical context: the roots. My focus, however, was to dig (literally and figuratively) through years of information and layers of discoveries, constantly triangulating among multiple sources, to uncover the seed of the story—for it is the seed that holds the soul of the work—the essence. Building on this idea of a tree, neither policymakers nor practitioners can plant a tree with leaves, limbs, or even roots. To authentically grow this work in Oakland and beyond, seeds need to be planted, nourished, and cultivated.

As a qualitative researcher, I am fascinated by the seeds of courage and determination that spurred a school district to make an unprecedented commitment to the education of Black males. In my quest to analyze this initiative, I was given access to a wide array of people and information. My primary data sources included: interviews with key staff and administrators, student surveys, student work, participant observation, teaching logs, and classroom videos. My secondary data sources included: the MDP curriculum, pertinent newspaper articles, student achievement and discipline data, and previous annual reports and studies. In addition, I received important classroom observations and interview transcripts from Na'ilah Nasir, as well as informative teacher logs from Gerald Williams. I am also grateful to Nathan Alexander and Ijeoma Ononuju for their assistance analyzing the student survey data. Throughout this process, Precious J. Stroud served as a creative partner; we contemplated over a cup of tea that we were metaphorically making a quilt—sewing together pieces of patchwork to form layered nuances, rich textures, and colors that would convey a message. The vibrancy of this report is the result of the intersection of science and art; as I sought to sew with words, she was concerned with the visual aesthetics of the final product. Finally, various stakeholders within and beyond the walls of the school district provided feedback on preliminary versions. Their insights added precision to the analysis, for which I am extremely grateful.

In the subsequent pages, the story of the Manhood Development Program unfolds. On the one hand, the narrative should be accessible to a wide audience, from the young people in these classes to a school board member. On the other hand, it should read to those in the study as representing the crux of their work; MDP staff should see themselves here, but in a new, more refined light that is the result of careful and methodical inquiry. Altogether, and perhaps most importantly, this research is a general call to arms to every one of us.

Given the wails of the world, we are in need of arms that care, arms that care, reach out, and restore basic principles of our common humanity. So wherever you are, whoever you are, please join hands from the White House to the schoolhouse, from the block to the boardroom: the time is now.

Thank you for the privilege of documenting and analyzing the inroads to achievement for African American males. May this work make a small contribution to help transform minds, guide hearts, and inspire our feet to improve the systems that impact our lives.

In Solidarity,

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The Office of African American Male Achievement

On February 27, 2014, President Barack Obama made an unprecedented commitment to boys and young men of color when he announced a new initiative, My Brother's Keeper. Pulling together a range of stakeholders, My Brother's Keeper brings national attention, financial support, and institutional resources to the plight and promise of this particular demographic. As if foregrounding the call from President Obama, in 2010, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) joined forces with community organizers, religious leaders, neighborhood elders, teachers, parents, and students to launch the Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA).

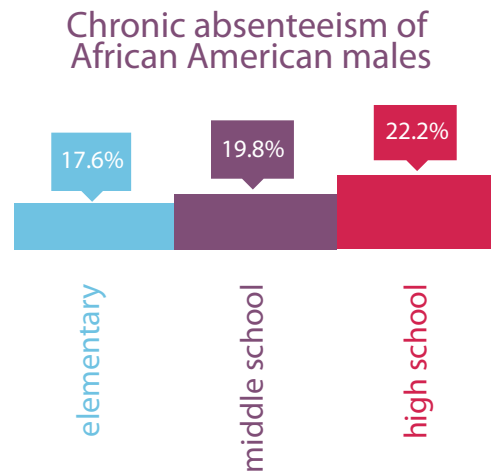
OUSD is the first district in the United States to create a department that specifically addresses the needs of African American male students.

They made the formal commitment that, "African American male students are extraordinary and deserve a school system that meets their unique and dynamic needs."

Superintendent Tony Smith—together with Oakland's Board of Education, the Urban Strategies Council, and the East Bay Community Foundation—examined longitudinal data and came to a jarring conclusion: past initiatives had done little to transform the experiences, access, or educational attainment of African American male students. Regardless of the reform or learning theory or even school site, en masse, the educational needs of Black children were not being met. Generation after generation, Black families were sending their children to school; but the ideals of an oasis of learning were met with the realities of institutionalized racism, low expectations, and marginalization. As a student in Oakland discloses, "Since fourth grade ... my teachers have called me dumb to my face."

In the K-12 system, the urban school crisis affects African American males unlike any other ethnic or gender group. Consistent with national trends, OUSD faces major challenges with successfully educating African Americans. Black males in particular comprise 17.3% of the student population, 30% (1,959) of whom are in high school.

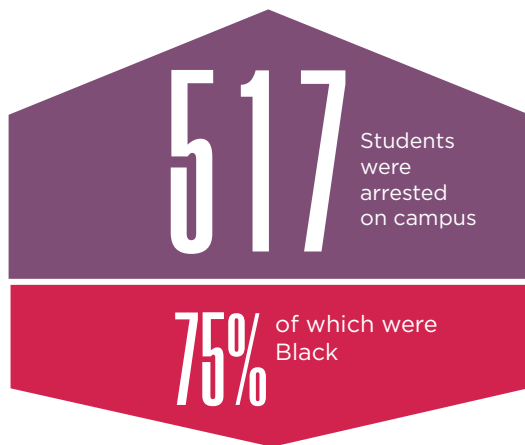
In 2010 the following statistics painted a horrific picture of schooling for this population.¹



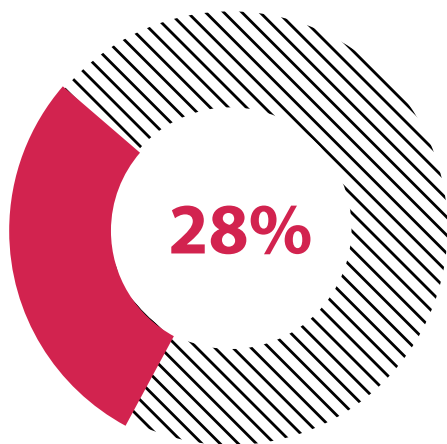
African American males in OUSD were chronically absent: missing 17.6% of the academic year in elementary school, 19.8% in middle school, and 22.2% in high school. In the district, African American males comprised 17% of the population, but account for 42% of the suspensions annually.

"REGARDLESS OF THE REFORM OR LEARNING THEORY OR EVEN SCHOOL SITE, EN MASSE, THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF BLACK CHILDREN WERE NOT BEING MET."

517 students were arrested on campus; 75% were Black.



Only 28% of African American males scored proficient on the California Standards Test (CST) for English.



English Proficient

Only 30% scored proficient on the CST for math.

Given this calamity of underachievement, Oakland made a bold and courageous effort to no longer leave Black children behind.

It is disappointing, but not surprising, that in the early stages of this endeavor, many people throughout the district were unable to even imagine what Black achievement could or should look like. This environment compelled Christopher P. Chatmon, the newly appointed executive director of the Office of African American Achievement, to work directly with school principals.



"Please close your eyes," Brother Chatmon announced to an auditorium full of school leaders four years ago. "Now visualize one, just one, successful African American male student that is currently on your campus." The room fell silent as Brother Chatmon waited for a sea of hands to emerge from the audience. But it did not happen. Only a relatively small portion, ("less than a third") of Oakland administrators raised their hands. Brother Chatmon was taken aback that his colleagues were unable to identify a student, yet he was not defeated or even frustrated. Rather, he met the challenge with a wide smile, optimistic and hopeful. "It was disheartening, to say the least," he remembers, "but it's the reality and it showed us how much work needed to be done." With fervor, Brother Chatmon began to envision solutions.

Today, the Office of African American Male Achievement is leveraging community partnerships, researching and implementing best instructional practices, and paving the way for reforms that will affect school systems for generations. Throughout this journey, Brother Chatmon and his colleagues remained courageous, creative, and committed to developing an intervention that would improve lives. During this time (2010–2014), OUSD has had three Superintendents and Brother Chatmon's office has been moved into various departments within the district. Notwithstanding these shifts, Brother Chatmon is clear: "What kept us alive and growing was our fluidity and dedication."

OUSD is raising the bar for the nation and represents a model for institutionalizing efficacy and disrupting barriers to achievement. The subsequent sections, examine in detail, the Manhood Development Program (MDP), a powerful case of "going beyond episodic attention to sustained effort, beyond lip service to real change, beyond punctuated action to sustained focus" (Bernholz, 2014).





MDP Instructor Earnest Jenkins with MDP student Asim

**“YOU DON’T MAKE PROGRESS
BY STANDING ON THE SIDELINES,
WHIMPERING AND COMPLAINING.
YOU MAKE PROGRESS
BY IMPLEMENTING IDEAS.”**

- SHIRLEY CHISHOLM



The Manhood Development Program

In 2010, the Office of African American Male Achievement initiated the Manhood Development Program (MDP), a unique academic mentoring model designed and implemented by African American males for African American males. Instructors for the program were carefully chosen based upon cultural competency, understanding of youth development, and past experiences teaching.

In partnership with the AAMA, the instructors designed an elective course that was offered five days a week to students during the school day. Students were identified to participate based upon a heterogeneous cohort model of 20-25 students, whereby one-third of the class was high-achieving, one-third average, and one-third under-achieving.

During its first year, MDP proved so effective that in 2011–2012, the program grew from three to six sites. Today, the program is operating in 17 schools throughout the district: Castlemont, Dewey, Fremont, McClymonds, MetWest, Oakland, Oakland Technical, and Ralph Bunch high schools; Alliance, Claremont, Edna Brewer, Frick, Madison, Montera, and West Oakland middle schools; plus Parker and Piedmont elementary schools.

Three baseline interrelated indices of effectiveness shaped the structure and pedagogy of the MDP. Specifically, the program sought to:

1. Decrease suspensions and increase attendance.
2. Decrease incarceration and increase graduation rates.
3. Decrease the opportunity/achievement gap and increase literacy.

The MDP made successful inroads to student success; namely, the majority of students had a decrease in suspensions and an increase in attendance as well as an increase in GPAs, school belonging, and self-efficacy. In conjunction with MDP's impact points, studies continue to confirm that by providing youth with the tools to make better choices, alongside evidence-based services and a network of care and support, any targeted

population can make quantifiable gains both academically and socially—yet the Manhood Development Program is distinct because of its focus on Black males.

Research Questions

This report, *The Black Sonrise*, documents the journey of the MDP from its inception, giving particular attention to lessons learned for sustainability and replication. In order to better understand empowerment and ascertain promising practices this study seeks to unearth answers to African American male achievement. It focuses on distinct input layers (culture, conditions, and capacities) that help categorize three overarching questions:

1. **Culture:** What are the rituals, routines, and practices that result in effective learning environments for African American males?
2. **Conditions:** What are the policies, structures, systems, and supports necessary to facilitate the healthy development and learning of African American males?
3. **Capacities:** What are the skills, knowledge and awareness that adults need in order to effectively reach and teach African American males?

To answer these questions, you are invited to experience the MDP through Portraiture, a unique qualitative methodology rooted in a style of vivid storytelling that allows the reader into the moment (further explanation of the methods are available in the Appendix). This kind of account permits a multifaceted reality to unfold that feels alive and authentic. The depth of writing is meant to show, rather than tell, the process of transformation and empowerment.



Program Manager Jerome Gourdine with MDP student Jolondo

MDP

IMPACT POINTS

SERVICES TO SUPPORT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ACHIEVEMENT:

- Recruitment and development of African American male instructors
- Culturally relevant curriculum
- Leadership and character development activities
- Transcript evaluation and college/career guidance
- Parent/family training and community building
- Cultural, college, and career field trips

2012

2011

Enrollment: **50** students at **3** school sites

Structure: **3** MDP sites were subcontracted to a community partner organization that used an external curriculum.

Enrollment: **112** students at **6** school sites



Structure: The AAMA gained further control of the MDP. This means that the AAMA interviewed and hired staff, created learning objectives, produced program assessments, and used a series of existing curricula to create a stable program. In this year, the program more than doubled in size.

30%

8%

30% of participants are reading at or above grade level and, over the course of two years, 8% of students increased from below grade level to grade level or above.³

1.7

2.12

GPA INCREASE

The average GPA for students in the program is 2.12 compared to non-treatment African American males average a GPA of 1.7.

2013

2014

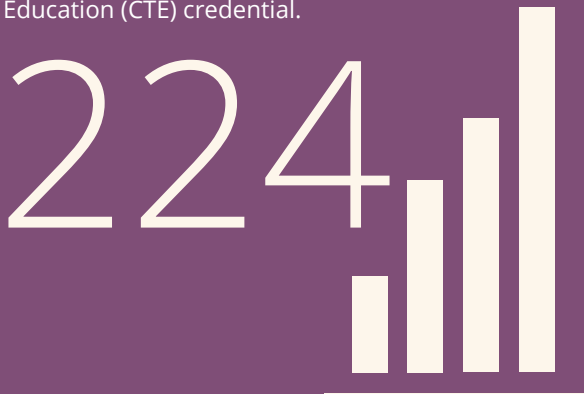
Enrollment: **224** students
at **11** school sites



Enrollment: **450** students
at **17** school sites



Structure: The MDP continues to experience steady growth. The MDP facilitators become certified instructors with a Career Technical Education (CTE) credential.



124% increase in MDP student enrollment. Oakland youth want to be in the class, and there is currently a waiting list for participation.²

124%

DISTRICT WIDE IMPROVEMENTS:

- Every school is required to include specific goals and outcomes for African American males in their site plan.
- OUSD School Quality Review standards include specific African American male standards.
- AAMA Executive Director sits on the OUSD Cabinet—providing both access and a voice for African American males at the highest level of district administrative leadership.
- AAMA staff members participate in cross-functional committees to help formulate policies and structures in support of African American male students.

African American Student Success

Traditional schooling practices and material conditions in the neighborhood convinced a young African-American male from West Oakland that he would not be successful in school or in life. He could not even envision making it to his 21st birthday, let alone graduating from college. An MDP student opens up and confides to his teacher that he had come to believe he was a “bad kid” who needed to be “fixed.”

As African American males internalize messages and images that they are incapable of greatness, in due time, far too many of them start to believe the lie. A student surveyed wrote that when he looks in the mirror he sees, “another kid from Oakland, a black male, dead before 30.” Echoing this negativity, a student proclaims that he is, “ugly, black, and stupid.”

Imagine gazing into the mirror, and all that you see in your reflection is failure. Now, take a closer look; when you stare into the mirror, do you see your ancestors looking back at you? What is your legacy? Who determines who you are and where you are going in school and in life? What is your responsibility to yourself, your family, your community, and this world? How do you love your brother if you never loved yourself? These questions, and others, are asked of the classroom full of African American males in middle and high schools throughout Oakland.

It is the first day of the Manhood Development class at Oakland Technical High School. The 20 or so students, all Black male ninth graders, arrive in the class to find Brother Harshaw, their instructor, standing in front of the class holding a tennis ball. He is in his early 20s with a broad smile and gregarious manner. The desks are arranged in a circle, and the instructor greets each student warmly as he arrives—some shy, some boisterous, some with looks of curiosity. Once the students are settled, the instructor frames the meaning and purpose of the class. He talks about how they have been chosen because of their leadership potential. He shares some of his own experiences and

personal history as a young Black man growing up in Oakland. As he speaks, he tosses the tennis ball from hand to hand, occasionally bouncing it on the classroom floor. The young men watch excitedly. Clearly something different is happening here. What is the ball for? Eventually, he begins to throw the ball to students between statements—he wants them to know this is a classroom where they can move their bodies, where they can interact, where they are presumed smart and competent. “This is a class where we will laugh, learn, and laugh again,” shares Brother Harshaw.

This short classroom vignette shows—rather than tells—the process of developing a classroom culture that is alive from the very first day of instruction. As Brother Harshaw helps depict, learning in these spaces is connected to the full range of human emotion and, as such, it is okay to have fun. Students do not have to leave their humanity outside the door of the classroom. This place is home and an extension of the family. In fact, on a recent survey, 64% of students report that their MDP class is like a family to them.

To create a culture of brotherhood, at the beginning of the class, students need to sign a contract, agreeing to the “standards in AAMA, overall at school, and in life.”

Our Standards for “The Brotherhood”

- 1. Respect for Ourselves and Each Other**
- 2. Keep it 100 (Tell the Truth)**
- 3. Lift Ups, No Put Downs**
- 4. Look Out For Each Other**
- 5. Play Hard, but Also Work Hard**
- 6. Represent Your Best Self at All Times**
- 7. Be On Time**

8. **Be Responsible for Your Actions**
9. **Build the Brotherhood**
10. **Trust Yourself and Others in the Brotherhood**

As the guidelines demonstrate, MDP instructors are particularly concerned with creating a space where students are involved in co-creating classroom structure and rules. The community norms in MDP classes are predicated on a notion of brotherhood that plays out in how students address their teachers (e.g., Brother Malik, Brother James) and interact with one another. The idea of brotherhood is central and translates into being accountable for one another—"I am my brother's keeper."

"THE IDEA OF BROTHERHOOD IS CENTRAL AND TRANSLATES INTO BEING ACCOUNTABLE FOR ONE ANOTHER"

When walking into a Manhood Development class, it is typical to witness students smiling, working together, and getting along. The camaraderie nourishes the education. In other words, the brotherhood establishes a space for the seeds of knowledge to grow. An MDP student affirms: "Our Manhood Development class helps us be more respectful to each other and to stay together as a brotherhood. I learned about my heritage and about myself as an African American student."

The foundation of brotherhood helped create a new type of schooling experience for Black males in OUSD. As a result of caring African American male instructors, a culturally relevant curriculum, and a pedagogy rooted in experiential learning and critical dialogue, participating students began to see themselves and one another differently. The course content and pedagogy reflected the Office of African American Male Achievement's

unequivocal love for Black sons. All aspects of the program were predicated on helping these students not just survive in a racist world, but also thrive with the tools to transform themselves and their communities.

The work is powerful, political, and historical. Within the African American community there is a long-standing legacy to use education as a tool for empowerment. Building on this tradition of learning as a form of liberation (Freire, 1970; Nasir, 2012; Payne & Strickland, 2008; Perry, 2003; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Watson, 2012; Woodson, 1933; Yosso, 2005), the AAMA sought to disrupt subjugation by moving the most marginalized students into the center of school reform.

The uniqueness of this endeavor meant key AAMA stakeholders, partners, and participants were compelled to make the road by walking it. In the process, they created the archetype of the "My Brother's Keeper" initiative within a large urban school district before anyone understood how important it would be on a national scale. To fully grasp the nuances of the Manhood Development Program, and the tenacity it took to create it, you are invited to get inside the mind and heart of its founder, Christopher P. Chatmon.

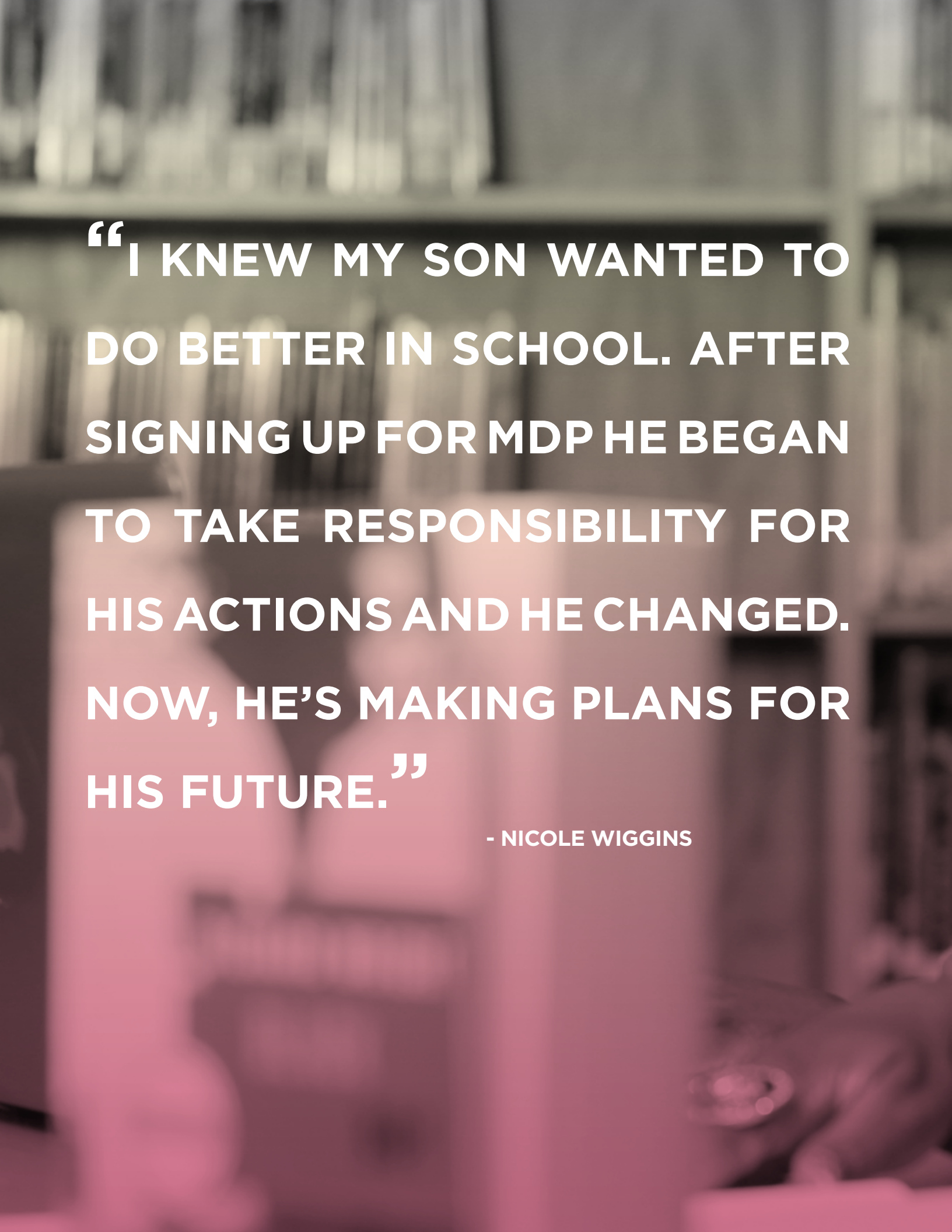
"Systems-change" is a common catchphrase among school reformers. There are certain leaders who view institutional transformation as a structural issue and believe that reorganization, alone, will somehow shift practice. Christopher P. Chatmon, the Executive Director for the AAMA and the visionary behind the MDP, is not that type of leader. For him, systems-change is based on human connection, relationship, and helping move people to move systems. In this vein, far too many school administrators are preoccupied with the mechanics of schooling and running

a district, when in reality, leaders like Brother Chatmon demonstrate how mountains are actually moved: with personal conviction and collective agency. As it was recently noted by Lucy Bernholz (2014), “our success as a society is relational” (p. 5). Embodying these words, Brother Chatmon pulled people together to shift the culture of an entire school system. His vision and commitment to reconfiguring the ways African American males in this country experience education is the focus of the first portrait.



Man up! Conference drum making workshop. Kamren with his drum and self affirming words, empower, faith, unity.





**“I KNEW MY SON WANTED TO
DO BETTER IN SCHOOL. AFTER
SIGNING UP FOR MDP HE BEGAN
TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR
HIS ACTIONS AND HE CHANGED.
NOW, HE’S MAKING PLANS FOR
HIS FUTURE.”**

- NICOLE WIGGINS



Ms. Nicole Wiggins with her son Asim

Christopher P. Chatmon: Transforming Leadership

On September 21, 2010, Superintendent Tony Smith, a white man in his mid-forties, announces the appointment of a cabinet position that will focus on African American male achievement. In his introductory remarks, Superintendent Smith explains that the board recognizes the urgent need “to frame a position inside our organization to take primary responsibility to interrupt the institutional oppression and racism here in the city of Oakland. This is radical stuff. Enough is enough.” He explains that the school system is jointly responsible for the violence in Oakland. “We see the violence. Over 700 people were shot in Oakland. More than 25 were shot since last Friday.” He shares that all of us “planted seeds of disruptive disengagement and the lack of belonging” in these kids. As a response and a call to action, in a calm tone he urges (almost empathetically begs) the entire school system to mobilize:

The time is now. We are the people who are going to change these outcomes. OUSD is going to be the place where we have someone who is able to name it, get out in front of this, and work on it.

That someone that Superintendent Smith is describing to fulfill his lofty vision is Christopher P. Chatmon. Smith and the board rise to their feet, applauding, as Brother Chatmon makes his way to the podium for the first time.

Tonight, Brother Chatmon is wearing a blue collared shirt with a tan-and-grey striped tie. He stands front and center and without hesitation, addresses the school board and community members: “It is a pleasure and a privilege to be in front of all of you this evening.” His face is stern and his expression and overall demeanor is unflinching. “I want to thank the leadership of Oakland Unified School District for having the audacity to put forward a framework to deal with the crisis of African American boys in this city. Many urban areas throughout the nation are struggling with these same issues but,” he leans forward and projects his voice, “now, we have a pathway to unequivocally align resources, people, and programs in a way that is unapologetic” in an “intentional effort to uplift, engage, and empower Black males.” As if taking his first inhalation since

he began speaking, Brother Chatmon smiles and shares:

I am a father of three boys—my sons are in Oakland public schools. I am a teacher by training and calling; I’ve been a principal at an alternative high school that worked with students that were [formerly] incarcerated and chronically truant. I had the opportunity to lead a youth development agency here [in the city] for 12 years.

His background provides Brother Chatmon with the types of insights and expertise that Oakland needs, but he declares, “My background doesn’t make me any better or any smarter than anybody in this room.” He emphasizes that his first task will be to listen: “I look forward to talking to the youth, talking to my peers, and talking to my elders.” He ends abruptly, “Thank you for the opportunity. Those are my words. Give thanks.”

A couple weeks later, on October 1, 2010, Brother Chatmon steps in as Oakland’s leader, the person who has been charged with addressing structural racism and transforming the institution of schooling on behalf of African American males. This type of undertaking is unparalleled in our nation’s history. As Brother Chatmon admits, this initiative could have “lived within the central office

and just been an exclusively adult 50,000-foot conversation” where “nothing is really hitting the ground.” This would have been a disservice to the work so “I wanted something that could engage our young brothers immediately.”

Eager to learn more, I schedule our first one-on-one interview. Even before I am able to sit down and turn on the recording device, Brother Chatmon starts narrating the purpose of the Manhood Development Program; how it came to be, the bumps along the way, and his overall vision moving forward. His passion is contagious and it seems there isn’t even going to be time to ask a question, as he continues to speak, in rapid succession, about the importance of this work.

Within seconds of sitting down, Brother Chatmon shares the history of the MDP. “The Manhood Development Program started back in 2010–2011.” This pilot “tilled the soil of classes of Black men with Black boys in just three schools.” These classes were so successful —“The cohort model of working with Black boys is working”—that “we were able to double that the next year.” Two years later, “We’re at eight high schools, six middle schools, one elementary school” every “Monday through Friday during the school day for an elective credit.” This sounds promising, but I know that the MDP did not just happen overnight; I prod Chatmon to slow down and walk me through the process. I am just beginning to picture—through his intense drive, personal commitment, and professional passion—how the MDP really came to be.

On an early, foggy morning in 2010, Superintendent Tony Smith and Christopher P. Chatmon met for a cup of coffee. “When I met with Tony over coffee at Lakeshore Café and he approached me about taking on this position, I let him know that this is my life’s work that I will

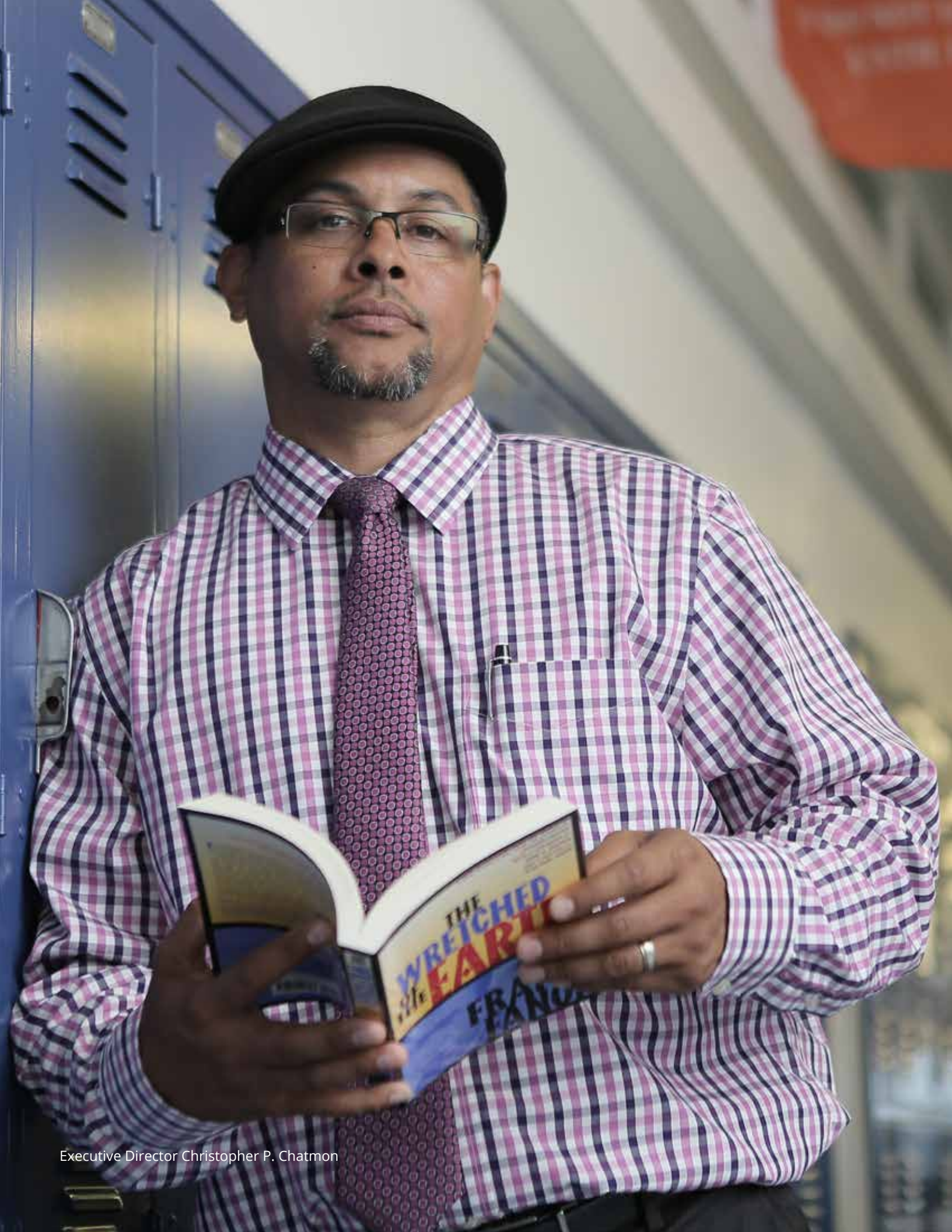
do it with or without you.” At that time, Brother Chatmon was a principal of a small alternative high school in San Francisco and he was also working on starting a charter school for Black boys in Oakland. In this role, he was touring the country looking at gender-specific schools that focus on identity development. Additionally, he was coordinating Man Up! conferences (convening mentoring opportunities between Black men and Black boys). Given this terrain, “I shared with Tony my interpretation” of what a department focused on African American male achievement would actually look like. He vividly recalls telling Superintendent Smith that “It’s not just about changing structures. It’s not just about changing policies. It’s not just about changing practices.”

So what is it then?

“IT IS REALLY ABOUT INOCULATING BLACK BOYS, BECAUSE BLACK BOYS NEED SOMETHING NOW.”

“While we are trying to change the system and improve adult behaviors,” explains Brother Chatmon, “we need to come in on day one” with something real and tangible for these students. His voice gets deeper, even fatherly: “It is really about inoculating Black boys, because Black boys need something now.” The word now lingers between us. Again, I hear the urgency in Brother Chatmon’s voice. “What I really want,” he confided in the Superintendent four years ago, “is to have classes during the school day for young brothers where Black men are working there.” The Superintendent agreed.

Superintendent Smith told Brother Chatmon, “I can assure you that there is no blueprint.” Using a football metaphor (“Because he was an offensive lineman at UC Berkeley”) Smith says, “I’m the offensive line and I’m going to blow out this hole and give you a gap and I’m going to hand you



Executive Director Christopher P. Chatmon

the ball and brother you hit that gap and you run far and you run fast.” Recalling the conversation, Brother Chatmon shakes his head, “There was no binder. There wasn’t even a playbook.”

“When I was introduced at that School Board meeting, it was a department of one.” Reminiscent of the Superintendent’s sports metaphor, Brother Chatmon was primed to take the lead and run.

“In my first year,” explains Chatmon, “OUSD launched 14 Task Forces to help initiate the Strategic Planning process for the district. All of the task force committees were led by adults and exclusively engaged adults.” From his previous experience working with youth, he knew he had to “lift up the voices of our young kings.”

“STUDENTS FELT THAT THEY WERE BEING TREATED LIKE VILLAINS AND SUSPECTS—EVEN WHEN THEY HAD DONE NOTHING WRONG. SCHOOL WAS NOT AN OASIS OF LEARNING AND SAFETY FOR THESE KIDS, BUT A SPACE THAT REFLECTED AND REPRODUCED SOCIETY’S RACIST AILMENTS.”

One of Chatmon’s first major initiatives was to design and implement a listening campaign for African American middle school and high school students. Brother Chatmon organized his colleagues and community members to “go around on school grounds with Flip cameras and just interview students.” He needed to “get a sense of how they were experiencing school and how they perceived their teachers and adults felt about them.” Brother Chatmon shakes his head

and looks down: “What came out of our listening campaign was humbling.”

Brother Chatmon learned firsthand that students felt that they were being treated like villains and suspects—even when they had done nothing wrong. School was not an oasis of learning and safety for these kids, but a space that reflected and reproduced society’s racist ailments. “We learned,” recalls Brother Chatmon, “that few adults even asked the kids, how are you or what do you want to be?” There was a general consensus that “our young brothers were not having a good experience.” Moreover, these Black youth had little to no “access to positive African American men on school campuses.”

As the leader of the AAMA on the one hand and as a father of three sons in OUSD on the other, Brother Chatmon listened intently to students’ jarring experiences. Their voices became the beacon of his platform: engage, encourage, and empower. Chatmon smiles and sits up in his office chair. With conviction he says, “In light of how our sons were experiencing school, we came up with the 3 E’s.” He delineates his response to the crisis of underachievement. “Engage Black boys as oppose to ignore them. Encourage Black boys as oppose to discourage them—don’t hate, appreciate,” and finally; “Empower Black boys as a way to equip them with the skills they need to master their content and community.” While Brother Chatmon recognizes that “it wasn’t solely the work of one person,” it was his responsibility to lean on the system and hold the system accountable to African American male students and their families. In essence, his role was to leverage OUSD on behalf of a marginalized community. Again, Brother Chatmon went from vision to action. “All that to say,” he exclaims, “we didn’t just want to tell people how to do this work, we needed to show them—inside their schools.” So “what we launched, out the gate, was Manhood Development classes.”

**“ENGAGE BLACK BOYS AS OPPOSE TO IGNORE THEM.
ENCOURAGE BLACK BOYS AS OPPOSE TO DISCOURAGE
THEM....EMPOWER BLACK BOYS AS A WAY TO EQUIP
THEM WITH THE SKILLS THEY NEED TO MASTER THEIR
CONTENT AND COMMUNITY.”**

- BROTHER CHATMON





Instructors Emilo Ortega, Remi Bereola, and Kevin Jennings with Brother Chatmon

The Manhood Development class was predicated on evidence-based community-defined best practices and insights. Chatmon was thoughtful in his approach. He strategically gleaned tactics from a wide range of programs, from Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) “because of their cohort model during the school day” to transformational drum circles and storytelling, because they had proven to offer students various forms of healing. He also examined gender-specific programs for boys in general, of all different races. This information was then coupled with advice from the elders. For instance, Brother Chatmon had long conversations with Dr. Wade Nobles⁴ and learned about his initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as his seminal work at McClymonds High School in Oakland. Altogether, Brother Chatmon created a model for OUSD that was unprecedented: classes for African American males taught by African American males during the school day.

After just four months of serving as the Executive Director for AAMA, Brother Chatmon had finessed funding (“identified seed funding from Waste Management, Kaiser, and the Mitchell Kapor Foundation”) to hire staff to pilot the program. In January of 2011, three high schools had agreed to participate: Oakland High, Oakland Technical, and Skyline. During this first phase, there was a teacher of record and the MDP curriculum was based upon the work of Leadership Excellence.⁵ Brother Chatmon exhales and leans back in his chair: “There were things that we learned, both good and bad, in that first year.”

On the positive side, it was clear that “the cohort strategy did indeed work.” Also, the rituals and routines that were established created a unique brotherhood amongst the students. As an area for growth, however, Brother Chatmon knew he had to revise the model to make it more diverse. Specifically, in the first semester, they asked the school to send the “15 to 30 most challenging brothers.” The danger of this, shares one of the

MDP instructors, was to “not let the class be a dumping group for Black boys.” By creating a class that housed only the truant, misbehaving African American males they had the potential to further substantiate a stereotype of malice amongst this targeted demographic.

Chatmon and his colleagues decided on a new heterogeneous cohort model whereby one-third of the class was high-achieving, one-third was average, and one-third under-achieving based upon a variety of matrices that dealt with academic success and social emotional well-being. Brother Chatmon shares that it was the mix that created a powerful peer-based support system:

Through testimony from the boys we learned that some of them were more academically inclined, but they were struggling socially; [they] actually benefited from knowing brothers that they might otherwise not connect to because this was a safe place—a brotherhood. It held equally true that brothers that were having a hard time in school started to learn how to organize their work and gain other academic skills. The kids in the middle benefitted from both.

Essentially, these African American youth had a lot to teach each other about navigating through school and life.

The process of putting these students together to foster self-efficacy and collective accountability was part of an inoculation (“I got that term from Wade Nobles”) against society’s ills. The fact remains that African American males are bombarded with implicit and explicit messages that Blackness has a negative connotation. Racism is part of the ecosystem of development and shapes the way students identify.

A case in point. When MDP students were asked, “What three words would you use to describe being a young Black male in America?” the responses were overwhelmingly destructive. Out

of 202 surveys, the most common answer was hard. Recognizing the harsh reality—or as one student wrote, “I don’t know how to describe this feeling”—what classes, cultural tools, and/or family traditions help these young men navigate through a system that is designed to leave them behind?

To find the answer, it is important to understand the on-the-ground architects of the MDP. Brother Chatmon needed to find African American men who could help enrich and embody the program and take it from a small pilot and build it into a robust initiative that would be able to transform the lives of Black teens while simultaneously transforming the culture of schools.

“I met with the Superintendent and I told him I need staff,” recalls Brother Chatmon. Fortunately, the timing was right because there was some restructuring that provided an opportunity to accelerate growth. Brother Chatmon was clear that he “needed somebody that understood how to navigate the central office and schools. There was the perfect storm,” so to speak, “because they were consolidating a school and Brother Martin was the right person.” Martin Abdel-Qawi would be an administrator on special assignment (“still being paid by the district”) but would help grow a new generation of MDP courses inside schools. “During those first two years,” recalls Brother Chatmon, “Martin was instrumental to the day-to-day operations of the Manhood Development Program.” Building on Chatmon’s vision, Abdel-Qawi helped construct one of the most innovative school initiatives of the 21st century.



Parker Elementary Manhood Development students

**“I’M NOT SAYING I’M GONNA
RULE THE WORLD, OR I’M
GONNA CHANGE IT, BUT I
GUARANTEE THAT I WILL
SPARK THE BRAIN THAT
WILL **CHANGE THE
WORLD.**”**

- TUPAC SHAKUR



Matin Abdel-Qawi: Building Success

I asked a student if he cared about school, he turned around and looked at me saying, “I don’t care about school. When did school ever care about me?”

The above quote about a student’s disengagement lingers in my mind as I think about Brother Chatmon’s mantra: engage, encourage, empower. How do these powerful words find traction in a school system that has, for generations, misguided so many youth of color? In search of a solution, I am told to go meet Matin Abdel-Qawi.

From the district website I learn that Brother Abdel-Qawi began working at Oakland High School after serving as Program Director of MDP. Starting in OUSD as a math and science teacher at Claremont Middle School, he completed the Berkeley Educational Leadership Institute in 2002, and became an Assistant Principal, and then Principal, of the East Oakland School for the Arts on the Castlemont campus. He is the father of three teenagers, two sons and a daughter.

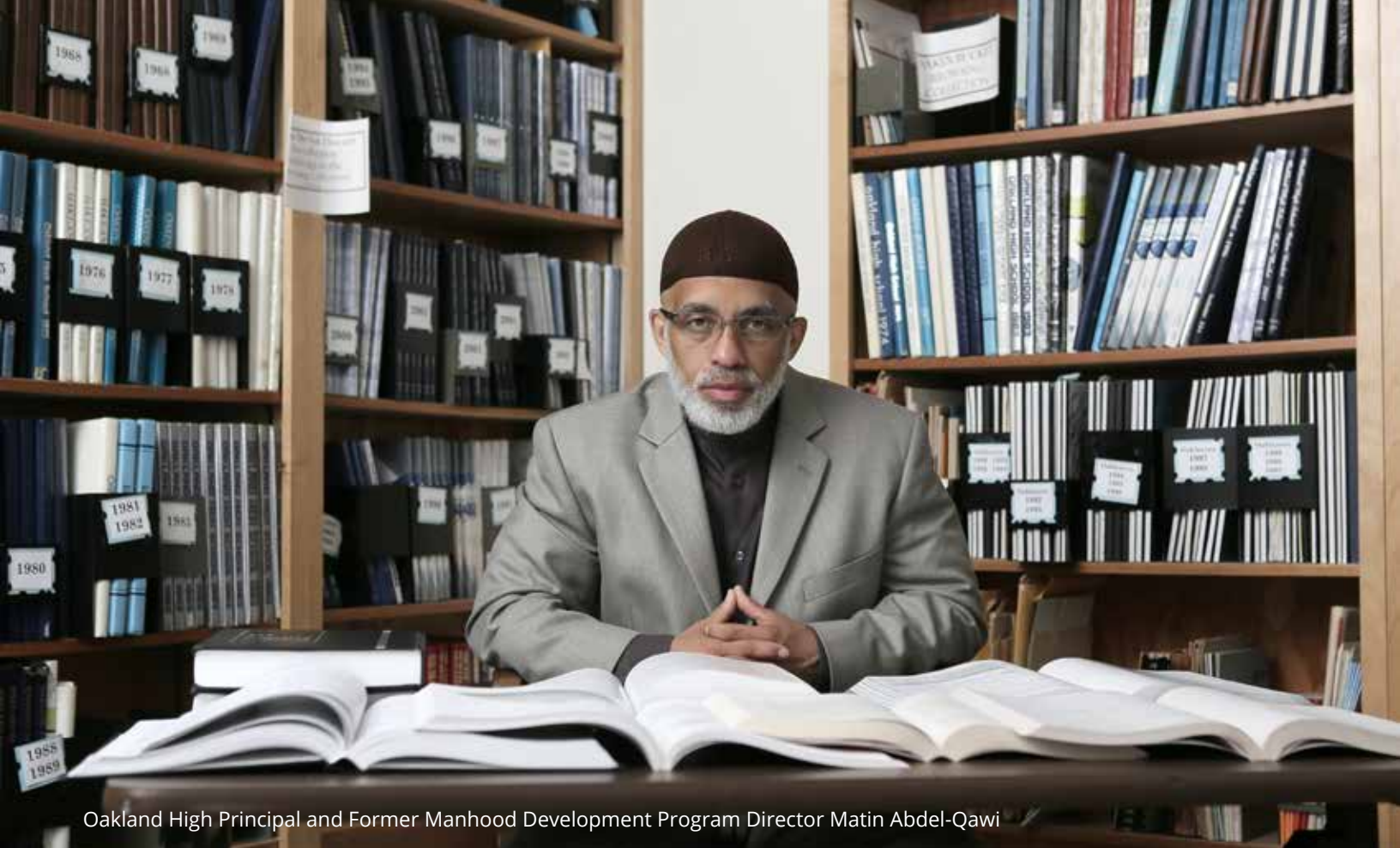
I arrive at Oakland High School to interview Brother Abdel-Qawi on a warm sunny day. As I drive into the parking lot, a security guard smiles and welcomes me onto the campus. My first impression of the grounds is shaped by the sheer number of students scattered outside, working intently in groups on projects. As I head into the building, the hallways are extremely clean, even the floor seems to shine. These impressions run through my mind as I climb a flight of stairs and make my way to the principal’s office.

Before we can begin the interview, Brother Abdel-Qawi needs to check-in with a student. I overhear an older African American male (in his late 20s or so) tell a younger student, “Mr. Abdel [pronounced Abdul] is Pops. That’s Pops and he’ll look out for you.”

Brother Abdel-Qawi’s office, like most principal’s offices, is filled with the life of his school. His desk contains various sticky-notes of tasks to be completed and there are piles of papers strewn throughout. Amidst the usual clutter of running a site, this space feels distinct. He has a large bookshelf that also contains his prayer rug. Two large framed posters hang above his desk. The first is the photo of Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists during the medal ceremony of the 1968 Summer Olympics. The second is a painting of Ché Guevara with the caption, “Against brute force and injustice the people will have the last word, that of victory.”

***“AGAINST BRUTE FORCE AND
INJUSTICE THE PEOPLE WILL
HAVE THE LAST WORD,
THAT OF VICTORY.”***

To begin our conversation, I inquire about the comment the young man just made that Brother Abdel-Qawi is “Pops.” Brother Abdel-Qawi shrugs and says, “That’s nothing.” He keeps it simple: “I was his teacher,” he reflects back, “that particular older young man was my student fifteen years ago in middle school (sixth grade) and I knew him through high school, college, and now he works in Oakland for the probation department as a case manager.” In this moment, I am given a glimpse into a community network of fatherhood, brotherhood, and mentoring that involves a Principal, a local caseworker, and a struggling young African-American male student. The paths of these three individuals serendipitously connect on a Friday afternoon at Oakland High School.

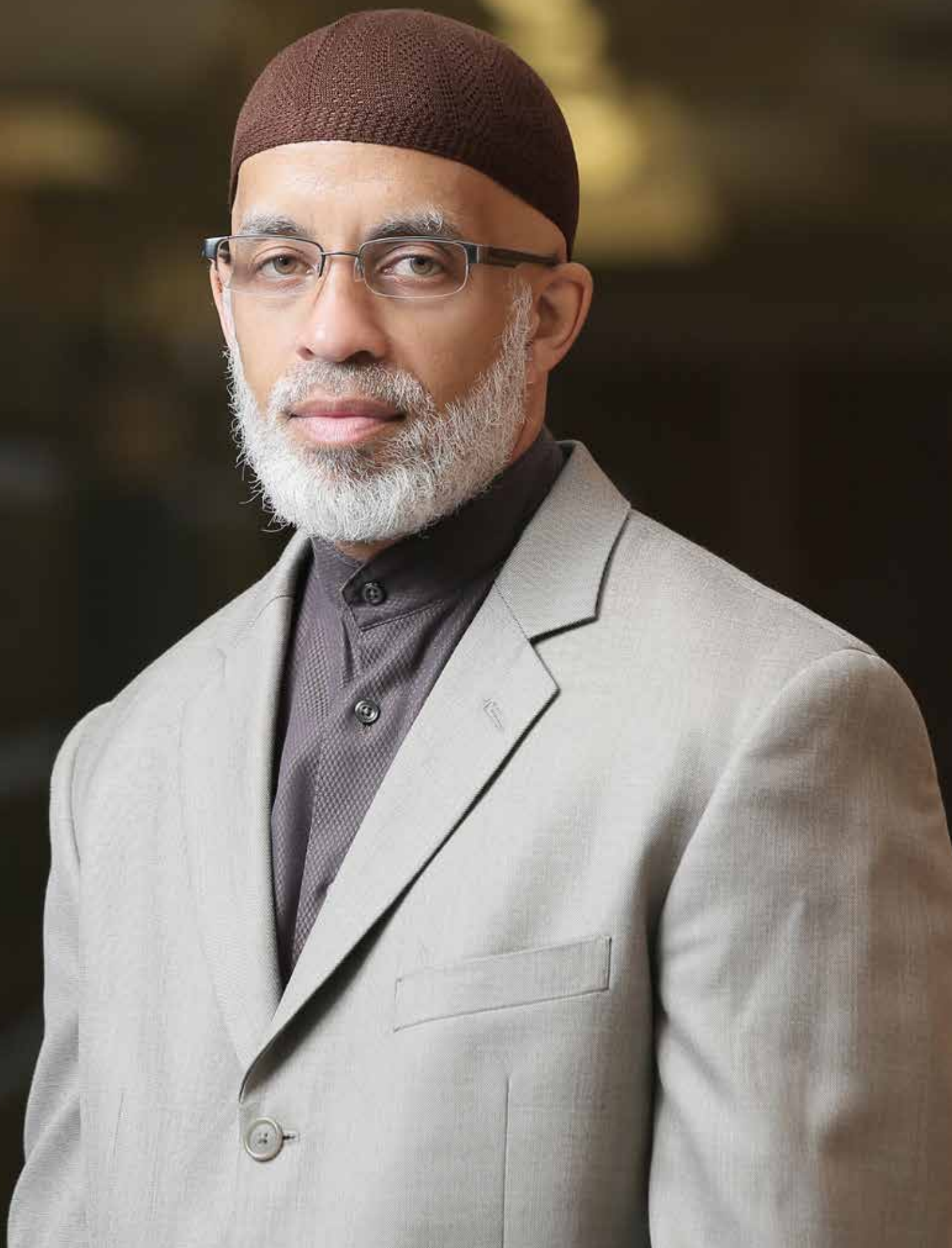


Oakland High Principal and Former Manhood Development Program Director Matin Abdel-Qawi

Yet, the path that led to this moment was forged between a teacher and his student over a decade ago. A profound interaction that has given Brother Abdel-Qawi the title of “Pops,” signifying a deeper role than that of a typical classroom teacher or principal, one that reaches beyond the walls of the schoolhouse into the heart, mind, and lives of those he seeks to educate. This relates directly to his role as an architect of the MDP.

Brother Abdel-Qawi went to school in New Jersey in the 1980s. His graduating class was over 500 students and over 90% Black. His father owned a local barbershop in town and the clientele was 100% African-American. Altogether, he grew up in a Black community where his neighbors and the “folks down the street” were mostly African American. While the nexus of his neighborhood was Black, this was in contrast to the teachers at his school who were almost exclusively white

women. During his public school experience, he remembers having three African-American male teachers: “I had science, history, and PE teachers [who] were African American males.” He does not speak about his white female teachers as ineffective or damaging, per se, but focuses on the interventions that exposed him to a world outside of Jersey. In his junior/senior year, “two brothers” ran a program that “took us to tour Morehouse and Spelman during Spring Break.” During this experience, he was able to see an education system run by Black people for Black people. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)⁶ represent a long-standing educational tradition; a legacy rooted in the struggle to use learning as a tool for personal and collective liberation. Although all-Black schools are not a new idea, creating an identity and gender-specific program within a diverse large urban school district is groundbreaking.



Four years ago, Superintendent Tony Smith approached Brother Abdel-Qawi about Oakland's new initiative. Brother Abdel-Qawi was excited about the vision. Superintendent Smith was "very specific and for good cause. If you look at all of the data, no one is performing worse than African American males. Every data point justifies the need to focus on African American males." He continues, for a "white male leader to have an agenda that focused on Black children, specifically, was interesting, to say the least" and was really quite "brave and brilliant."

In July of 2011, Brother Abdel-Qawi was placed on special assignment (vis-à-vis the district office) to help build a robust program in OUSD for African American male students. Under the direction and leadership of Christopher P. Chatmon, Executive Director of the AAMA, Abdel-Qawi's first directive was to oversee and manage the MDP, which at the time, was still in its infancy. The goal was to have the program fully operational at all high school sites. This, Brother Abdel-Qawi chuckles, was nearly impossible given that school would be starting in just one month. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the task, however, Brother Abdel-Qawi found places like Oakland and McClymonds high schools that "had the right people in place and were primed and ready to go." There were also critical partners like Destination College and the East Bay College Fund that had staff and expertise that they wanted to lend to the cause. Based upon Chatmon's vision, Abdel-Qawi's contacts inside the schools, and a vast array of community partners, the MDP began to take root in OUSD.

Since Brother Abdel-Qawi had served as a teacher and principal in the district for over two decades, he had well-established partnerships with teachers, school personnel, and principals. "I did not come in with a really fancy book or a lot of curriculum in place," he recalls, but people knew me and there was "a lot of trust" and "we did it on the strength of relationships." I wonder about

pushback; did any of the site administrators feel like a program such as this might alienate other students? Brother Abdel-Qawi is adamant that "there was no resistance from anyone." While there were "a lot of questions" because we were still building it, everyone was eager for a solution. "No one was happy with the data on African American male students. It was an easy sell."

Throughout the fall of 2010, Brother Abdel-Qawi was focused on, "developing relationships with administration to get the school sites ready, made sure we were on the master schedule, and found students." Overall, the schools were ready to embrace a class on manhood development for African American teens; equally critical was finding the right instructors.

I ask Brother Abdel-Qawi what kind of attributes he looked for in the MDP teachers. He leans back in his chair, smiles, and responds with a calm serenity: "Patience." I am surprised that he mentions this first and he must sense my reaction because he shares, "It might sound silly, but we needed to find brothers that had a tremendous amount of patience, an unbelievable wealth of patience," and that is not something that can just "come across in an interview. So we sat at cafes for long periods of time," he explains, "and had long conversations about why do you want to teach, how would you approach this type of situation. In addition to patience," Brother Abdel-Qawi continues, "we looked for brothers" who majored in African American Studies in college, worked with African American male organizations before, demonstrated some kind of connectedness to the community (through art, hip-hop/spoken word, faith-based work, etcetera), and who were, "personally and professionally connected to African American people in general and African American boys specifically." Essentially, they sought instructors who would not see their position as merely a job, but a calling. Using their networks throughout the Bay Area, the AAMA began to develop a strong team of nontraditional

teachers who had a genuine “love for the work.”

As it turned out, “Some had college degrees. Some didn’t. One instructor was a college professor and found time in his schedule to do this four days a week.” Although the skill sets were all different, admits Abdel-Qawi, “the foundational pieces were there in all of them.” A set of common values, an unrelenting commitment to Black people, and personal qualities, like patience, far out-weighed any particular credential.

Christopher P. Chatmon and Matin Abdel-Qawi needed a band of brothers willing and able to enter the public education system to save a generation. The subsequent sections will introduce some of these teachers, but prior to delving into their classes, it is important to understand the structure and purpose of the course itself.



As previously mentioned, each manhood development course is comprised of a diverse group of teenagers: “one-third of the brothers struggled a lot academically, one-third on the bubble, and one-third who demonstrated academic success,” remarks Brother Abdel-Qawi. The goal was that this cross-section of students “would support each other in different ways” that impacted the learning environment and eventually, “the classroom and school culture.” The configuration of the class is significant:

Students who are straight A students sitting next to a kid who comes to school 2–3 times a week and try to get them to have a serious conversation about what it means to be a brother in this society and valuing both of their perspectives can be very challenging.

Nevertheless, for one class period each day, approximately 25 African American male teenagers grappled with their own identity and belonging in school and in this world.

Brother Abdel-Qawi desperately wanted this experience to “lift them up. I wanted to help create an environment that they looked forward to coming to, that would build them back up.” Too many of these students experience poor treatment in their communities and even in their schools. “They go from class to class and get beaten down and disrespected” and they start to believe that they are menaces to society and that they are destined for failure, even an early death. As I listen to Brother Abdel-Qawi, I am reminded of the student surveys; hundreds of students wrote down the way the world negatively perceives them. Just for these same students, urges Abdel-Qawi, to “feel good about who they are and what their potential is” and that they are capable of advocating for themselves and using their voice to get what they need out of school is monumental. “I want them to know they are an asset to their families, community, and homeland” and gain a real understanding of the “African American experience” in terms of the “challenges and the blessings.”

Given these goals, what were the outcomes? In particular, what kind of student was the program most successful at empowering? Brother Abdel-Qawi is clear that the classroom climate of brotherhood and support really helped everyone. Still, success is not necessarily a clear result, but a lifelong process. “We might have had success in the moment, but you find the kid two years later, he dropped out and is in juvenile hall.” This does not seem to erode Brother Abdel-Qawi’s hope; rather he speaks with confidence that the “lessons we taught him will benefit him in some way.” There were students from two-parent households who everyone assumed would shine right through school that would demonstrate self-destructive behaviors and other young people from group homes who embraced the MDP, stayed the course, and they “are juniors now and they are on track, good GPAs, respected amongst peers, and staff.” After all his years in education and the intense work associated with the MDP, Brother

Abdel-Qawi admits, that when it comes to a child's destiny, there is no definitive "rhyme or reason" to who a person will become. As educators, then, it is our role to nurture their brilliance while they are in our care and further each student's ability to think critically, act wisely, and advocate for themselves and their communities.

"SOMEONE HAS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SHOWING US THE BEAUTY OF WHO WE ARE BY DEMONSTRATING A COUNTER-NARRATIVE TO THE STEREOTYPICAL IMAGES THAT SURROUND US."

I am interested in what these ideals look like, on the ground, inside a high-poverty school in Oakland. I backtrack a bit to ask, "Given that there is no rhyme or reason, what would you say are some best practices for reaching and teaching young African American males?" I continue to prod, "Does it even matter what we do?" Brother Abdel-Qawi appreciates the question ("that's a good question") and provides four key definitive points:

- 1. Create a safe space for African American young men on-campus** "Our schools in general don't do that. I think that a lot of our brothers feel alienated, isolated, picked on, and just to have a class, at least one-hour a day, to just breathe, exhale, and be who they want to be without judgment."
- 2. Recruit and retain African American male mentors and educators** "Having a brother in front of the classroom who is articulate, intelligent, and caring is a shift from what a lot of them see on a daily basis. This helps disrupt the stereotype. It also creates an intergenerational brotherhood and network of

support to help these students succeed."

- 3. Utilize a culturally relevant curriculum** "We must have an opportunity to learn about who we really are and the legacies that we come from. Schools have a responsibility to be intentional about fostering that. Black children in this country actually believe that who they are started with slavery and that history is not even taught in a functional way. It does not connect you to Africa or to ancient civilizations. So all you feel connected to is East Oakland, drug dealing, negative hip-hop, misogyny, and that's all you experience about your people. Someone has to take responsibility for showing us the beauty of who we are by demonstrating a counter-narrative to the stereotypical images that surround us."
- 4. Provide opportunities to experience life outside of school** "Exposing them to life outside of their neighborhood and school with college tours, going to the beach, and so on. With all these other aspects in place, the field trips and experiential learning opportunities make African American manhood development a really special adventure."

These four ingredients continue to be ever-present in the MDP at various middle and high schools throughout OUSD. The class serves as an oasis for the students, but it also underscores the deficiencies and, at times, discrimination, apparent in their other courses. As an example, three MDP students came to their MDP instructor to express concern with their poor grades in another class. The students were adamant that even though they were turning their work in, the teacher was marking it missing. They were no longer willing to accept a "D" or an "F" grade. The MDP instructor mediated a conversation between the students and the teacher and subsequently created academic contracts that had to be signed daily to hold both parties equally accountable for the learning. According to the MDP instructor log, this small-scale intervention proved quite successful

and gave the students the leverage they needed to earn higher grades in that particular class.

In the best case scenario, confirms Brother Abdel-Qawi, MDP instructors are on campus full-time and can serve as powerful mentors within the MDP classes as well as act as an advocate, case-manager, and change-agent for the whole school. At one site, the instructor noticed that On-Campus Suspensions (OCS) were comprised, daily, of a classroom full of African American males. Prior to having the MDP on campus, a student would be sent to OCS for an entire day, but with the African American male advocate at the school site, he was able to point to the problem, name it, and then devise a solution. Now teachers can only send students to OCS for one class period and during that time a reflection needs to be completed that helps identify the root causes of the behavior. This shift changed the structure and culture of the entire school and, “drastically reduced the number of students in OCS,” explains Abdel-Qawi.

Looking forward, Brother Abdel-Qawi has resumed his role as Principal and now works at Oakland High School where he has a part-time MDP instructor; in addition, he continues to offer support and guidance to the Office of African American Male Achievement.

The MDP offers a tangible remedy to the endemic failure of our sons. Yet underneath the positive accolades and applause, how does this pedagogy of liberation really feel? What’s happening inside these classes? Moreover, in order to develop replication models, it is vital to uncover how and why these particular courses are having such a profound impact. We now turn our gaze to inside the classroom.





Parker Elementary Manhood Development students



**“THOSE OF US WHO ARE
REVOLUTIONARY ARE
NOT CONCERNED WITH
ISSUES; WE’RE CONCERNED
WITH THE SYSTEM. THE
DIFFERENCE MUST BE
PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD.”**

- KWAME TURE (STOKELY CARMICHAEL)

The Brotherhood: Cultivating Resistance

In another serendipitous moment, Executive Director Chatmon needed help streamlining the curriculum, and Baayan Bakari came onboard to carry the torch. Bakari was “intrigued that MDP was in the schools” and he was excited by the possibilities. It was a natural fit. In 1997, with a prestigious fellowship grant from the Echoing Green Foundation, Brother Bakari created his first African American male curriculum. Throughout his career, he revised it based upon experiences he had teaching inside the schools, working at The Mentoring Center⁷, and coordinating several community-based programs, including Oakland Freedom Schools. Over a decade later, he was compelled to join the Office of African American Male Achievement. I ask him why.

After the murder of Trayvon Martin and the George Zimmerman verdict, Brother Bakari felt called to lend his expertise to the MDP. “The value of our Black boys was evidently zero by greater society.” He was moved to action and even changed professions.

I stepped out of the tech space as my sole focus after Trayvon Martin because I was so angry that this society was just dismissing our Black boys. The Trayvon Martin verdict is to me, personally, the darkest stain on modern American society. If I think about it too long, I get angry all over again.

Brother Bakari made the following commitment:

If I can get the curriculum that I have been working on into our boys, at least I can help raise up the value of how we see ourselves and how others see us so that Trayvon never happens again.

To save our sons—like Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and countless others—the MDP curriculum links present

injustices to a historical context.

Specifically, the curriculum is built upon the premise that stereotypical notions of Black masculinity have shaped the way young Black men self-identify (Nasir, 2012). Consequently, a paramount goal is to cultivate healthy identities amongst Black male students as a means of improving Black male achievement. This is in part because the instructors believe that schools are often hostile to young Black men and that Black men have also been systemically encouraged or socialized to take on self-defeating characteristics; particularly in the realm of academics (Nasir, 2012; Nasir et. al., 2013). In response to this problem, Brother Bakari provides a personal, apropos example of how to disrupt and counteract the narrative of underachievement.

Brother Bakari discusses a moment in his life that changed him. Growing up in the toughness of Richmond, California, he thought there were two types of African American men: those who were strong and those who were intelligent. When he was in middle school, he picked up the Autobiography of Malcolm X. Malcolm’s image widened Brother Bakari’s horizons.

The image of the glasses, the suit and tie, standing very, very strong and yet, nobody was going to run up on him—to use the colloquialism to say—that he was fully capable of defending himself. Malcolm gave me a vision of manhood I could grasp onto. He dispelled the fear of being seen as a nerd.

Brother Bakari proudly considers himself a philosopher and thinker. As a widespread reader and historian, he is quick to compare Malcolm to Paul Robeson and the Moors of Spain. He references these people and groups to emphasize

that Blackness is multidimensional: “I can be a warrior and at the same time a poet. I can be and do a range of things.” The curriculum naturally reflects Brother Bakari’s paradigm and experiences; he intentionally tries to complicate what it means to be a Black male growing up in Oakland.

“I CAN BE A WARRIOR AND AT THE SAME TIME A POET. I CAN BE AND DO A RANGE OF THINGS.”

As an example, a freshman dissects an article in the Oakland Tribune. The student writes in his journal:

I found the article to be overall quite positive. For the most part it was well deserved praise, and very informative. The little bad mouth comments sprinkled in hear and their to many may just seem like fair and balanced journalism. That is understandable, but in reality it's an example of institutionalized racism. It's such a small thing but you don't have to go out in sheets and burn crosses to be a racist. I don't blame the man though his mentality has been fostering for generations.

While this student has some spelling and grammatical errors, the student’s critique of personal and systemic racism demonstrates his ability to critically dissect text.

The Manhood Development curriculum, called Khepera, is designed to get students to exercise their minds in new ways, as the student demonstrates in his analysis of a newspaper article. For Brother Bakari, he describes this as “creative intelligence.” This work rests at the intersection of acquiring knowledge of self and a depth of knowledge, key attributes within the new Common Core State Standards.

In the freshman course, Mastering Our Identity, lessons draw on contemporary youth culture to support students as they explore their identity options, learn how to manage their emotions, learn how to channel their personal will, and develop a positive sense of purpose for themselves, their families, and their communities. To accomplish these goals, curricular units focus on the impact of choices, thinking for oneself, as well as emotional characteristics of manhood. Each unit has a theme: Ma’at, an analysis of ancient African civilizations; Maafa, the African American Holocaust; and Sankofa, the struggle for liberation and dignity. The class culminates with student-led community-based projects wherein the young people are given the opportunity and responsibility to imagine and design an intervention that will empower African Americans. Students are graded based upon participation (40%), assessments (40%), and attendance (20%).

Within Brother Bakari’s curriculum, there are a number of rituals, including a word of the day. Consider the following:

Words of the Day in a ninth grade MDP class:

Soigne: carefully or elegantly done

Ujima: collective work and responsibility

Apotheosis: a model of excellence or perfection

Words of the Day in a tenth grade MDP class:

Avidity: enthusiasm or dedication; eagerness

Acme: the highest point of something

Pyrrhic victory: a victory achieved at great cost

Students are responsible for defining the word in their journal, and using it in a sentence.

To raise the bar of expectations, the curriculum is carefully designed to expand what student’s believe they are capable of becoming. This is intentional. The MDP program believes that a crucial component of African American male identity formation involves explicit discussions



MDP student Romelo with Instructor Remi Bereola



about Black history often absent from their regular school curriculum. Students also elect class representatives to hold various positions, among them “scribe” and “cultural keeper.”

Although Brother Bakari has created curricular units and various scripted activities, he considers the MDP curriculum a living document based upon the ever-changing dynamics inside classrooms. While the content is not prescribed, there are specific pedagogical components that shape the rituals, routines, and practices that result in effective learning environments for African American males. Specifically, instructors rely on a Freirian teaching style that emphasizes open-ended questions, group dialogue, critical thinking, and consciousness building. Lessons are multi-modal and often utilize various media forms as culturally relevant texts to intellectually excite the students. As a result of these strategies, students gain an increase in their understanding of what it means to be an African-American in today's society: culturally, socially, emotionally, and academically.

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After interviewing various MDP instructors and reviewing years of classroom logs, it became clear the ways these Black men are revivifying the learning process by creating a culture for Black youth to be brothers, students, and yes, to be children. As a representative sample, the quotes below provide a window into MDP classrooms—through the eyes of the educators:

- 1. Engaging students is classroom management:** An MDP teacher spent his weekend looking up the discipline and transcript data for each of his students. He was shocked to discover the “pervasive and excessive discipline” problems with 90% of his students. He shares, “When I saw their records I had a hard time believing these were the same guys in my class because we haven’t had those same issues.”
- 2. Learning who students are outside of school can impact learning inside of school:** An MDP teacher’s presence in the neighborhood and at community events provided important insights into his students. An example, “I saw Asim turf dancing on a Friday night. At this event I was amazed at the precision of his moves and I now challenge him to set aside the same amount of time studying as he practices for his dance events.”
- 3. Affirming excellence and positive behaviors creates a culture for success:** An MDP teacher finds success in the little things that others might overlook. He compliments his students when he notices improvements, no matter how small. “Harry now carries a backpack,” mentions the MDP teacher, “which is something not common to what he is known for.” This educator describes his student Harry with pride: after participating in the MDP, “He takes initiative in making sure his grades are improving, he’s not as confrontational as he used to be, and he has truly shown his promise and proven his potential to be a positive contribution to his community and his own self-worth.”
- 4. Doing whatever it takes to support our students:** As if it’s all in a day’s work, an MDP instructor explains in his weekly log, “I have talked with at least seven teachers on campus to ensure time for late work to be turned in, for students to retake/make-up quizzes or tests. I have collected work from teachers to hand deliver to certain students for completion. I have even hand delivered work to students in their neighborhood.”

5. Creating safe spaces for honesty, healing and growth: For African American children in Oakland, they now have a place on campus to discuss what is happening in their lives. An MDP educator reiterates this point: “During our routine check in process, this young man wanted to share what he was going through. His grandmother is addicted to crack and his mother was getting very sick and needed to have surgery.” The MDP instructor continues, “Now you must understand, this is one of the so-called ‘class clowns.’ This brother is rarely serious about anything. For him to open up and feel comfortable sharing something like that made me [realize] we are slowly but surely helping these brothers feel safe.”

The testimonies from these nontraditional teachers demonstrate a pattern of behavior rooted in a love for students that drives the MDP instructors into the neighborhood to see their students on their own terms and on their own turf. In this milieu, community knowledge is a resource and an asset to instruction, like the way the instructor learns about Asim’s discipline when it comes to dancing and uses that to push him in school. As a result of authentically meeting students where they are at and from, MDP instructors are able to necessitate difficult conversations inside the classroom. Consequently, for some of these teenagers, they go from trying to survive school to thriving in school.

Thus far, *The Black Sonrise* report has shed light on the leaders, architects, and thinkers that tilled the soil for The Manhood Development Program. Yet the greatest validity of the work is in the students themselves. From the students’ perspective, what kind of classroom dynamic and pedagogy was able to help them discover their potential? And how did their instructors influence the trajectory and mindset of so many of them that had heretofore given up on themselves and school? In follow-up

conversations and on classroom assignments, students provide tremendous insight into the program’s impact.

At the onset, students acknowledge feeling treated with respect. Reminiscent of the first day of class with Brother Harshaw, the MDP youth were encouraged to be fully human and open up in real, authentic ways. These teenagers were pushed to be introspective with probes such as, “what is [your] life’s purpose?” And young people had answers, like “to help others unlock their true potential and rise over the influence of violence.” As a result of the critical dialogue, a deep sense of community developed. Nearly every person interviewed talked about the “camaraderie,” “rapport,” and “brotherhood,” clearly demonstrating how much the students genuinely bonded with one another and their instructors.

In the spirit of collective accountability, MDP participants were taught to hold each other to a higher standard. A young man explains, “The main thing I got from this class is responsibility, a sense of urgency, and how to help other people.” The instructor, “Always tells us to bless somebody because we are kings and leaders, and that means that people in the school look up to us so we should always be on our best behavior.” Furthermore, students appreciated the culturally relevant rituals (like drum circles) and the rigorous reading materials. “This class is the realest class that I’ve ever taken,” a student shares, “it’s not sugar coated or afraid of letting us know the truth about our past, present, and future.” This direct student feedback is the byproduct of the work of Bayaan Bakari and others who made a commitment to step up and intervene in these students’ education. The dedication of these Black male educators should not be underestimated, they planted something inside these students that continues to grow and prosper.

The story of MDP is rather beautiful, but the work itself is hard, even painful.

Students in MDP classes were asked to list three words to describe being a young Black male in America. They came up with a litany of words, which paint a dire picture of being menaced by society.

Describe being a young Black male in America:

Scared, hiding, survival
Underestimated, underappreciated, alone
Dangerous, humbling, targeted
Hard, need to be a hard worker, very stereotyped
Feared, not respected
Underestimated, statistic, ignorant
Horrible, bad, sad
Hard, poverty, poor
Hard, unfair, scary
Hard, stereotypical
Hard, discrimination, dangerous
Discriminated, unfair, treated differently
Mistreated, life, hard
Lonely, broke, oppression

Juxtaposing these negative experiences, students demonstrate resilience as they affirm their own identities, self-worth, and willpower through the MDP coursework. To counter oppressive experiences, a student proclaims: “I am a scholar. I am a 3.5 honor roll student. I am responsible. I am loving. I am not a destroyer. I am blessed. I am brave.” Another young man asserts, “I am a great thinker. I am an 8th grader with high potential. I am a person who will be remembered. I am a valued brother, son, and peer. I am a person who will succeed at any cost.”

Consider the self-efficacy, determination, and powerful use of metaphors in the following piece of student work by a young African American male in middle school.

MDP Student Identity: How Do I See Myself?

I am a Diamond in the Rough.
I am a Miracle in Disguise.
I am the Essence of Time.
I am Unstoppable.
I am the Victorious One.
I am the Blood that Pumps your Main Artery.
I am that Breath of Fresh Air.
I am the Bullet in the Chamber.
I am the Chosen One.
I am the American Dream.

Across various data sources, it is clear that, in the words of a student, MDP “made it cool to be Black and smart.” Even more important than being Black and smart, the instructors want the students to be multidimensional: goofy and gangsta, soft and hard, loving and a leader; whatever it is that authentically represents their full selves and the characteristics and idiosyncrasies that often come hand-in-hand with growing up.

The current program manager of the MDP, Jerome Gourdine, asks a provocative (yet rhetorical) question: “How powerful is it for our young men and boys to go to a place where they feel safe to explore what is on their minds and how to be successful?” The outcome of this freedom—to think and authentically be—is transformational. We are actually teaching them, he continues, to transition “from a boy into a man.” There is someone on nearly every campus in Oakland, he continues, who “really cares about African American male achievement and that, in-and-of-itself, is just really special.”

To garner an even broader perspective and ascertain how students experience the program, we surveyed over 200 MDP middle and high school participants (11 to 18 years old). The following surfaced:



MDP student Demetrius

- **92% of students reported that their MDP teacher wants them to succeed.**
- **85% of students reported that their MDP teacher cares about them.**
- **85% of students reported that their MDP teacher encourages them to get good grades in school.**
- **82% of students reported that MDP activities make them feel proud to be a young Black male.**
- **80% of students reported that they trust their MDP teacher.**
- **79% of students reported that MDP makes them want to be successful in school.**
- **79% of students reported that their MDP teacher includes examples of their racial, ethnic, and cultural background in the lessons/activities.**
- **77% of students reported that they are respected in their MDP class.**

On multiple indicators, the vast majority of students perceive that the MDP class adds value to their lives.

For these African American male youth, however, they constantly vacillate between feeling mistreated on the one hand and unstoppable on the other. This is an important developmental bridge that MDP classes tap into—academic achievement becomes part of the narrative of resistance, resilience, and revolution.

The foundation of brotherhood alongside the ethos of engage, encourage, and empower, helped create a new type of schooling experience for Black males in OUSD. As a result of caring African American male instructors, a culturally relevant curriculum, and a pedagogy rooted in experiential learning and critical dialogue, participating students began to see themselves and one another differently. The course content and pedagogy reflected the Office of African American Male Achievement's unequivocal love for Black sons. All aspects of the program were predicated on helping these students not

just survive in a racist world, but also thrive with the tools to transform themselves and their communities. This is not an easy task; it is literally and figuratively a lifelong fight.



The ecosystem that informs student development outside of school, weighs heavily on their lives. Nearly every student described an urban environment fraught with violence.

MDP students report a steady increase in seeing and experiencing violence from sixth to ninth grade. Half of the MDP students report that they have seen someone shot by the ninth grade. This is consistent with national trends. In 2007, 5,764 young people across this country were murdered—an average of 16 each day (CDC, 2010a). For “every person who gets shot and dies,” reports physician John Rich (2009), “another four get shot and survive” (p. x). In 2009, homicide was the second leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 24. In this age group, homicide remains the number one cause of death among African Americans, the number two cause among Xicano/Latinos, and the number three cause among Native Americans. The homicide rate is 19 times higher for young Black men than for young white men (CDC, 2010b).

Death does not occur in isolation. When any of us lose someone we care about, we experience great sadness and feel tremendous loss. We mourn. And to the extent that our grief becomes perpetual—because so many people in our lives are dying—it can affect our overall social, emotional, and academic wellbeing. Many students are living amidst the sounds of these gunshots, experiencing the pain of constant bereavement, and suffering from present (not post) traumatic stress disorder (Cooley et al., 2009; Tucker, 2007). Although there is a growing body of research on trauma in the lives of inner-city youth, there is less data on the healing measures that promote

academic achievement. This is yet another reason to advocate for programs like the Manhood Development Program that place student's lifelong health and well-being at the center of instruction.



It is clear that the MDP students enjoy the class, but it is also an important escape from the day-to-day micro-aggressions⁸ that can occur inside school. When comparing MDP students' perceptions about school and MDP, the following surfaced:

- **43% of students report that their teachers respect them versus 77% for the MDP participants.**
- **44% of students report that their other teachers want them to get good grades versus 85% for MDP.**
- **54% of students report that "The majority of their teachers care about me" versus 85% for MDP.**
- **59% of students report that school makes them feel proud to be African American compared to 82% for MDP.**
- **63% of students report that the majority of their teachers want them to get good grades versus 85% for MDP.**
- **65% of students report that their other teachers expect them to succeed versus 92% for MDP.**

Given the results of the MDP, if the students are capable of learning and excelling, then what is really going on in schools? Reminiscent of Brother Chatmon's initial analysis that African American male students in OUSD felt villainized, my findings also substantiate that school is not an oasis of learning and safety for over half of these students. The aforementioned descriptive statistics foreshadow a deeper problem. Schools are a place that perpetuate society's racist ailments. The students' negative experiences in school are not meant to vilify teachers and school staff, but to

serve as a wake up call.

In the era of a national dropout crisis, pervasive prison problems, and increased racial/ethnic segregation in schools, it still seems hard for many educators to name the problem. Direct conversations about race and racism are often avoided. Teachers and administrators still use code words like at-risk, emotionally disturbed, slow, unmotivated, and even urban to lump together children of color and avoid direct conversations about race and racism. Any effort to place the blame for academic failure exclusively on the student's family dynamics, cultural background, and biological makeup is inaccurate, especially if it assumes the school and staff to be impartial and simply meritorious. This is just not the truth.

"THE STUDENTS' NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL ARE NOT MEANT TO VILIFY TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF, BUT TO SERVE AS A WAKE UP CALL."

Building on the research of Dance (2002), African American students are not controlled by external forces, but rather are constrained, sometimes severely, by structural and material conditions. In other words, demographics does not determine destiny. A person's birthplace is not the basis of their brilliance. Therefore, students need teachers who are able to help them navigate and name systems of injustice, instead of teachers who turn a blind eye and act as if students develop in isolation of their histories, communities, and experiences.

The Manhood Development Program reveals that African American students are capable of greatness—if given a real opportunity to shine in their own light and on their own terms. MDP

provides the “proof in the pudding,” explains Brother Chatmon. “We are demonstrating that African American males are not the problem, they are teachable and reachable.” However, they are often misunderstood. This point is not missed on the students themselves or their families; they know they are receiving a bad rap.

Recently a mother shared a personal testimony:

I'm convinced that schools expect Black children to underachieve. They don't push them as hard as they do the other kids. I'm convinced. The way I look at it is, I sent three very brilliant young kids to school, and somewhere along the way, they got messed up. They got discouraged. (Nasir, p. 8, forthcoming)

This mother's firsthand statement reveals that many schools are saturated with low expectations for Black males, an irrelevant curriculum, and zero-sum discipline policies that can actually push these young people out of school, often into the streets “Students who frequently get into trouble may have so many negative experiences in school that they conclude school is not for them and that the rewards associated with education are beyond their reach” (Noguera, 2008, p. 134).

MDP classes demonstrate that schools can become sanctuaries that help break the cycle of underachievement— instead of reinforce it. For this to occur, en masse, the purpose of schools would need to shift from being individually-oriented, competitive, and capitalistic to oasis' that support all students to live out their brilliance. Rooted in the African adage, “I am because we are,” the MDP classes exemplify, in the words of an MDP instructor, that “for the Brothers, every exercise, accomplishment, consequence, and discussion was viewed through a lens of being a part of a collective.” The collective accountability— uplifting each other and holding one another to a higher standard—is not just the ethos of the classroom, it is the culture of the AAMA. Even the professional development for the MDP

instructors reflects a communal worldview rooted in relationship; each person is valued as an expert. For children and adults alike, it feels powerful to be a part of this movement. Education in the Manhood Development Program is not a noun, but a verb. It is an action: Upliftment.

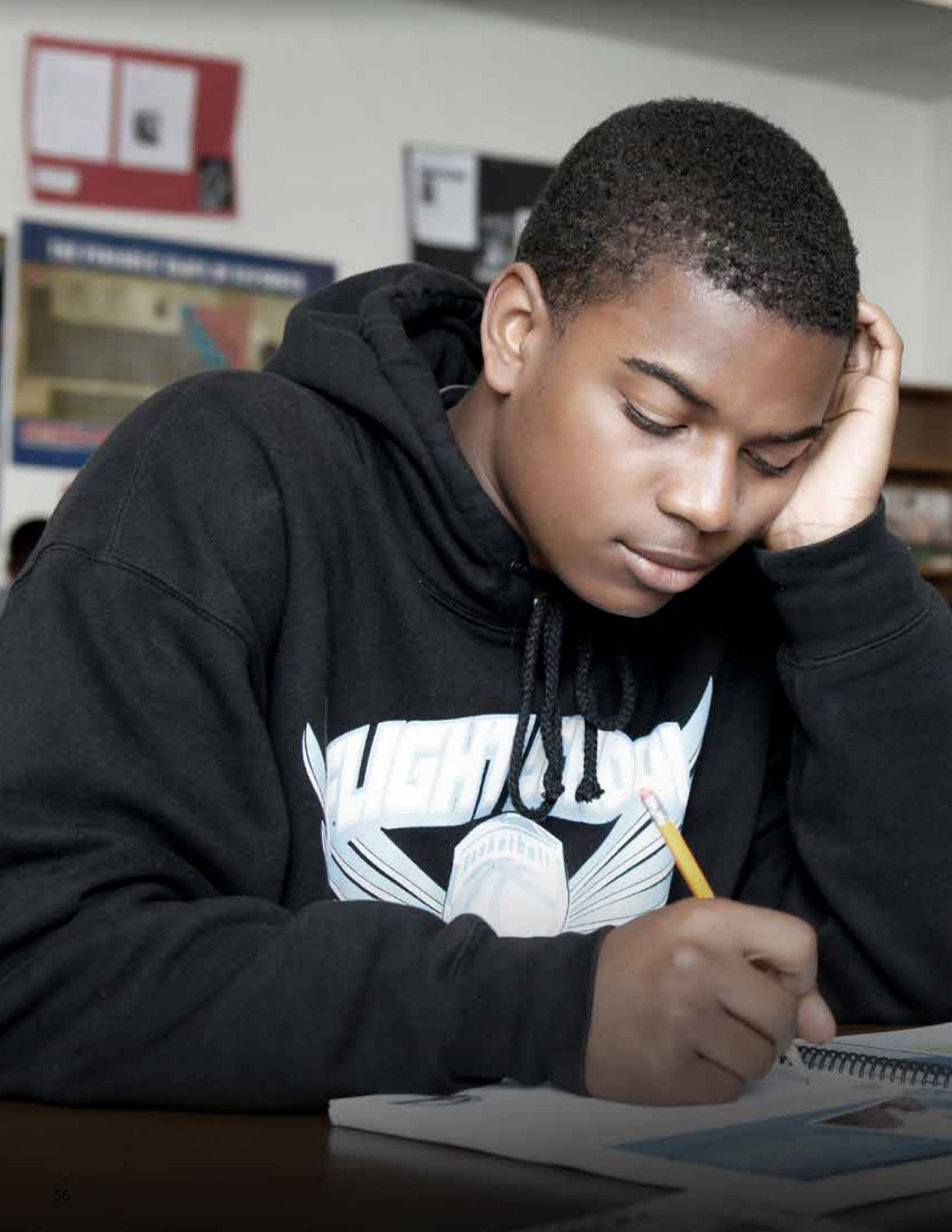
Given this momentum, how can Brothers like Chatmon, Abdel-Qawi, Bakari, Gourdine, and all of the others who are lending their hand to this movement in Oakland, be called upon to further the work on behalf of Black males? How do the MDP findings relate to the endemic crisis of African American children and youth across the nation? Simply put: what seeds do we need to sow in order to grow?

These questions lead me to Brother Jahi.

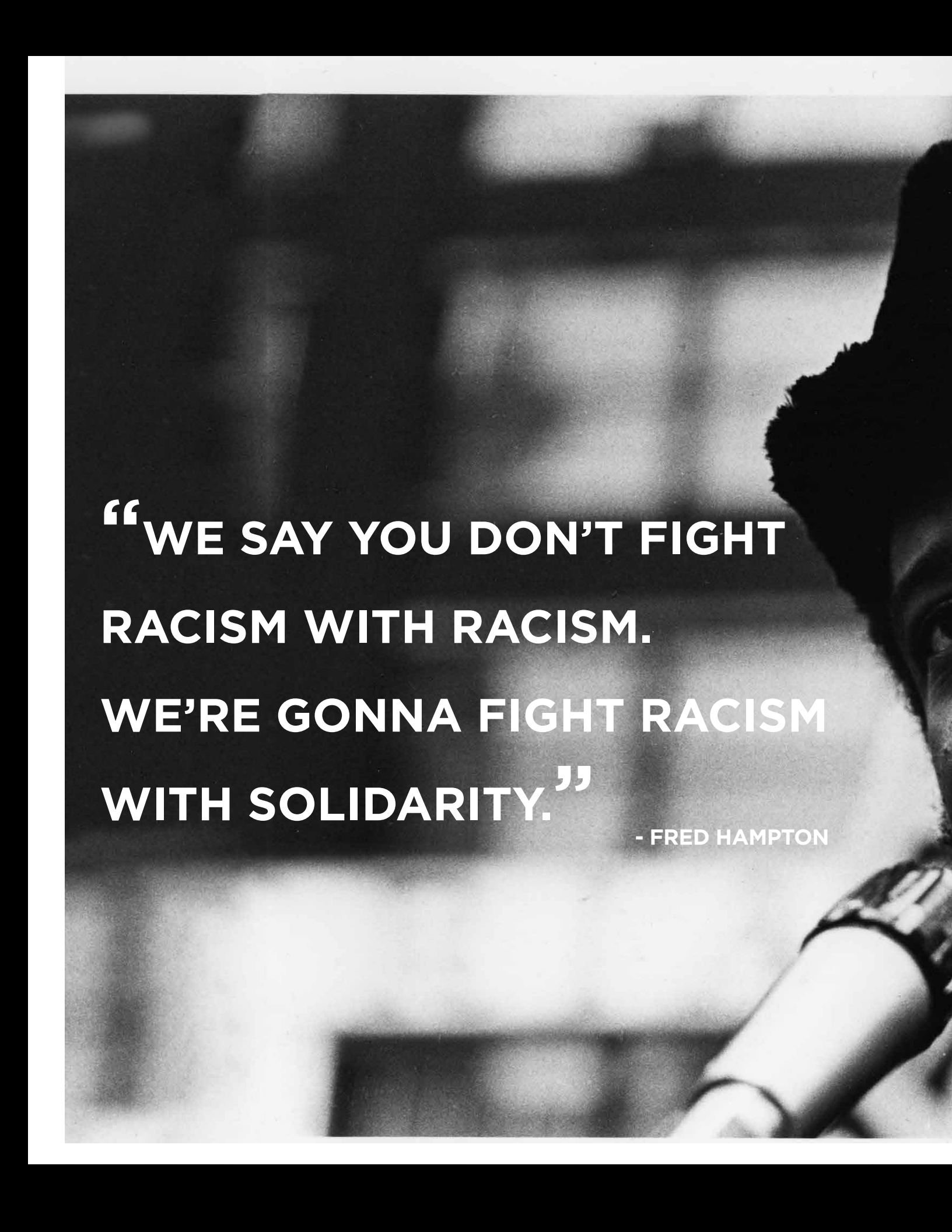
Connecting with Brother Jahi is challenging, as he is currently the director of a youth-serving organization in Menlo Park, and during the summer, runs programs for 150 high school students in East Palo Alto. When I pull up to the Boys and Girls Club for our interview, Jahi is waiting in the front and finds us a quiet space to talk (“I just gave my office up to someone else so they could get their work done.”) We end up sitting on brown metal chairs in the middle of the large common area (it could probably hold 300 or so people) that is open and bright with 20-foot windows along the wall that beautifully lets the sun shine through. There are various activity stations and games, like foosball and air hockey, throughout the space; yet it feels a bit empty because there are no students. However, within the first couple of minutes of our conversation, young people start wandering in and hanging out. Their loud joy does not bother or distract Brother Jahi from the task at hand: discussing the impact of the Manhood Development Program. MDP not only improved the students' lives, but changed him as well.



MDP students JJ., Solomon, and Amari







**“WE SAY YOU DON’T FIGHT
RACISM WITH RACISM.
WE’RE GONNA FIGHT RACISM
WITH SOLIDARITY.”**

- FRED HAMPTON



Brother Jahi: The Time is Now

When Brother Chatmon decided to go to a KRS-One concert, he was not expecting to meet someone that would become an MDP instructor, but then he saw Brother Jahi on stage and listened intently to his uplifting message. He was moved. After the show, Chatmon was introduced to Brother Jahi by a mutual friend, Kamel, and there was an immediate connection. They talked about how to use creative expression and critical thinking as a liberatory tool. Brother Jahi explains “timing.” Brother Chatmon and Brother Jahi were “on the same page without realizing it.” Soon thereafter, Brother Jahi was recruited to work at Edna Brewer Middle School.

Edna Brewer is located on 13th Avenue in Oakland, California. Brother Jahi “lived up the block” and “wanted to do something in his neighborhood.” The MDP served as his doorway into the school system and he was eager to lend his expertise to the cause: academic achievement for Black youth. Jahi was excited to have a presence with the students “on a daily basis.” His ambitions were clear: “Be of service. Inspire kids. Make an impact.”

Before engaging the students, Brother Jahi got to know their families. “Before I did anything,” he says, “I had a family gathering with food and music and laughter.” At this inaugural event, Brother Jahi literally served the parents. It shifted the power dynamics because Brother Jahi told them, “Don’t get up, I’m here to serve you,” and proceeded to fix each person a plate. As a result, the parents opened up in profound ways. “My real leverage” is families. Brother Jahi explains that the “Mama, Aunt, Grandmama all knew that I cared.” A parent shares that Brother Jahi was effective because he constantly reminded her son “how great he is.” A father echoes these sentiments; his “efforts with my son have been helpful not just in his classes, but in life.”

Brother Jahi boasts that through the MDP community at Edna Brew Middle School, he watched families become advocates for their children. “I can remember Brian who they considered special needs, he was being treated unfairly and the parents had a meeting with the

school.” Although Brother Jahi had been asked to attend these types of meetings before, this one stands out in his mind. As he watched the parents, he realized that they were modeling his behavior. In previous meetings, they sat back as school personnel dictated to them about interventions for their son. Now, the parents had a notebook full of questions and they wrote down the entire conversation. At one point, they even asked the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, “Weren’t we supposed to receive a phone call prior to this decision?” He relates this experience to larger issues of family engagement and school improvement. When everyone is on the defensive, learning slows down. In parent-teacher conferences, for instance, families get “run through like they fast food” and a lot of teachers “already assessed [that] your kid is bad” so there is no real conversation. But through community and relationship, he stresses, “We can get a lot further” on behalf of kids.

Brother Jahi’s reputation precedes him, and the MDP team hold him in high regard. But why? Because, he acknowledges, “I tried to make an impact. I am serious about my work. I wasn’t playing.” His colleagues recognized that Jahi was at an extremely difficult site where site administrators were highly skeptical. Nevertheless, Brother Jahi was relentless because, “We got to win.” While parents were critically important to his overall feat, it was equally important to have teachers on his side.

From the onset, Brother Jahi explains, he would “take an assessment” and just ask the students directly: “What teachers are you cool with?” and “Who are the teachers that you are having problems with?” Once he had his list, Brother Jahi would meet with his colleagues. For those teachers that students identified as particularly effective, Brother Jahi would approach them with the following script, “Johnny identified that you are a cool teacher; why would he say that?” As the teacher would open up, he would, “make a friend and ally” because, “both of us want this child to succeed.” Conversely, for those teachers the students designated as difficult, he would, “be very strategic in saying how can I support you and help you with this child?” From this conversation, Brother Jahi could gauge where the teacher was at, not just with a particular student, but also with their profession. Brother Jahi is direct: “Any time a teacher would talk to me about a student, I would say, tell me something good about that child. Tell me three things he did well.” He surmises, “I was instrumental in creating a paradigm shift.”

***“ANY TIME A TEACHER WOULD
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GOOD ABOUT THAT CHILD. TELL
ME THREE THINGS HE DID WELL.”***

Brother Jahi understands that children develop in an ecosystem. Therefore, just having a great MDP class was not enough. He needed to foster connections to students’ families and work with the staff to shift the dynamics of the entire school. Having his colleagues discuss positive attributes of African American males was a small, but important step, in this direction.

To create a classroom culture that empowers students, Brother Jahi allowed the middle schoolers to choose a class theme as well as set the rules. First and foremost, “The rules were set up by all of us. I am done trying to set up rules and giving them to kids.” He shakes his head as he describes horrific approaches to classroom discipline. “When they have to be held accountable to it,” he surmises, “It’s not like uh, somebody imposed that on me.” Brother Jahi retorts, “Oh, I didn’t say you couldn’t be late three times. You know, that was your rule.” In effect, his style fostered collective accountability—“the students disciplined one another because it was *their* rules, not mine.”

Now, once classroom order is established, children just need a space to “grow and blossom.” Similar to Abdel-Qawi, who also discussed the importance of safe spaces, Brother Jahi intentionally wanted his students “to be themselves, be a child in a safe environment” that nourishes them to “grow” with “somebody who truly cares about them.” Furthering this metaphor of a garden, for Brother Jahi, he intentionally creates lessons that explicitly relate to the context, environment, and roots of students’ identities—for African American youth this has particular significance.

The curriculum in the MDP classes is culturally relevant, and Brother Jahi has a gift for making content, no matter how rigorous, accessible to the students. When teaching Malcolm X, for instance, he started by having the students dissect his life from age 0 to 15 “so they could find out Malcolm was a foster child. That Malcolm’s father was a Garveyite; he studied Marcus Garvey. That Malcolm wanted to be a lawyer and his teacher told him to be a carpenter.” If he had just pulled out the Autobiography of Malcolm X and ordered his students to read, they probably would not have been as engaged with the text. His scaffolding approach to literature and other lessons demonstrated an awareness for developing their

analytical skill set. Essentially, it expanded his students' depth of knowledge and deepened their knowledge of self. Brother Jahi chuckles a bit under his breath. His students thought they knew about Malcolm because of the popular phrase, by any means necessary. When in actuality, "I want you to know what Malcolm was like when he was 12." As a middle school teacher, Brother Jahi met the students where they were at and introduced them, anew, to leaders like Malcolm X.

Brother Jahi and I have a common passion for teaching. The conversation flows naturally as we discuss best practices. I am taken aback, however, when he describes his pedagogy. It is a beautiful combination: simple and profound.

Teaching, according to Brother Jahi, is straightforward. Building on decades of his work with young people "around the world," he has developed a three-step process that continues to prove effective. Brother Jahi's pedagogy: **I Do. We Do. You Do.** These three phrases are plain enough, but listening to his description of the process is powerful. I ask him to clarify what his tactics look like inside the classroom ("Break that down brother, please"). He elucidates:

I Do: *"In the first five to ten minutes, it's what you as an instructor have to do to take control of your classroom; you have to know exactly what you are teaching for the day. You set the tone and the energy: if you come in slouching, then don't be mad when your kids are slouching. Inversely, if you come in organized, prepared, and energized, then it will be infectious."*

Once "I Do" is established, then "We Do is what we will do together."

We Do: *For instance, "Today we will learn about Malcolm X. We will watch the video together and we will critique what we watched and we will have a conversation about what we saw. That's the We part." He advises, "As you facilitate*

the conversation, you are giving away your leadership, every time you can. Somebody raises their hand, 'Ah, you lead.' Someone is an outlier and is not paying attention and not focused, 'Ay, can you tell your brother to pay attention.'"

Learning is a collective process, but students also need to take personal responsibility for what they comprehend. This leads to "You Do."

You Do: *In this stage, students have to "Demonstrate critical reflection and competency with the task at hand." In a lesson about Malcolm X, each person needs to explain, "How does Malcolm's experience relate to you?" At this point, "I back completely up."*

"ESSENTIALLY, IT EXPANDED HIS STUDENTS' DEPTH OF KNOWLEDGE AND DEEPENED THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF SELF."

The arc of the lesson comes to a close ("There's the exit") when the students are told to jot down a fact and figure on a note card. It could be something as simple as what are two things that you learned today like, "Malcolm X was born on May 19th and he joined the Nation of Islam." These note cards provide the instructor a quick glimpse into each student's grasp of the content and serve as an important bridge to tomorrow's lesson.

Jahi is methodical in his approach to teaching. And his students excelled in the environment he created for and with them. I am curious, "What are some of the greatest lessons that the MDP youth have taught you?" He answers with one word: "Patience."

Beaming like a proud teacher, he expounds,

I'm looking at the MSNBC article that came out today. I look at Willie Scott. I had Willie first in seventh grade at Edna Brewer. He didn't know

nothin' about MDP and Willie used to be crackin' jokes in the back of class and taking extra snacks. Now I am looking at him. He is the one that went to D.C. to represent, he's the one [who] they're talking about in the article.

Willie used to tell Brother Jahi to "lighten up, you're too tough on us," but now, Brother Jahi gleams, "he taught me patience." He puts his hand on his heart: "Out of that patience," grew a young man who is "leading right now. He is one of the main kids in that article today. Wow! I had a hand in that!" As I listen to Brother Jahi speak about his student who blossomed, I am reminded of Brother Abdel-Qawi's insistence that the MDP instructors have patience.

Clearly, Brother Jahi had some outstanding success at his site, but given my experience working in urban schools, I feel compelled to ask: "Do you think there was any perception, especially among the white teaching force, that you are only successful because you are a Black man working with Black boys? Do you think there was any scapegoating there?" Before I can even finish the question, Brother Jahi responds with conviction: "There's always that." Some people rationalize Jahi's success as a race issue. He laughs and responds, "You are a teacher. You decided to be a teacher." He goes on to explain that when a person becomes an educator, they should not be so narrow-minded as to think they will only be effective with kids that look like them, talk like them, or are from the same economic or ethnic background. That is not realistic and it is not the core of good teaching. "I am not going to let you off the hook because what I am doing, you could actually do. Now, there might be some unique skills set, like I'm an artist, but" he reiterates, "you decided to be a teacher. Here are some universal principles that you can use so that I can stop being your scapegoat." Brother Jahi takes a breath and I jump right in: "So give me your universal principles for teaching. What are they?" He



Program Manager Brother Jahi



Brother Jahi leading Man Up! Conference
drum making workshop

responds immediately, in rapid succession. "Number one: All children are inherently great. Number two: They are always one opportunity away from succeeding even more. And three: There is no such thing as failure. Failure is an illusion; there are only various degrees of success."

Brother Jahi speaks with clarity and precision. He seems personally invested in these principles and as the interview continues, I realize that this is not just about how he teaches, but reflects how he lives. "I hold myself to an incredibly high standard," he shares. Even so-called failures "are part of my success plan" because "it is only when you reflect and have introspection that you become better." He urges anyone who wants to help improve schools and society to be brave enough to look at themselves—the precipice of progress.

While the focus of MDP is the students, in the conversation with Brother Jahi, I learn that the program also provided a new type of brotherhood, camaraderie, and network for the educators. As much as Brother Chatmon, Brother Abdel-Qawi, and others sought to create services that would impact African American students, they, too, became integral agents in this collaborative process. Manhood development is not just for the youth. Being a part of a community that cares, shares, and whose members hold one another accountable is powerful for the adults as well.

"The Manhood Development Program," explains Brother Jahi, "Does not just enhance the leadership abilities of students, but also provides leadership opportunities for African American men." Brother Jahi was able to grow as a teacher and instructor. He also gained important skills in leading professional development, designing curriculum, and directing and overseeing activities. He discusses the vital mentoring he received from Brother Chatmon ("Just being around him, period—was great") and the guidance from

Brother Abdel-Qawi was inspirational.

Brother Jahi leans back in his chair and looks up, as if recalling a distant memory. There is a moment of silence between us. He does not appear to be bothered or even notice the loud game of air hockey right next to us; students are screaming and the puck seems exceptionally loud moving from one side of the table to the other. Still, this backdrop fades away as Jahi leans in, with a twinkle in his eye, and shares with me a typical morning. Brother Abdel-Qawi "would call me," grins Brother Jahi, and he would only say, "I love you, brother. Have a good day," and then hang up. In turn, Brother Jahi felt compelled to tell his students, "I love you, brother." In staff development trainings, Jahi and the other instructors would be advised: "You know what, we got to love these brothers. We got to love these brothers!"

Love in the classroom setting does not imply some type of romantic, sappy, sentimental feeling. No. Love in this milieu can be tough, even rigid. It is something to be experienced, even shared, as a reciprocal, fluid, and relational act—much like respect.

Building on Jahi's comment, love is a central theme across all of the MDP sites. A student at Dewey Academy writes, "This class has influenced me to love and cherish the people around me while staying true to who I am." Building on this same notion, a Vice Principal, Earl Crawford, offers a sentimental testimony regarding the need for MDP at his school.

Our young soldiers, scholars, kings have gone from turning up to reaching up. This is indicative of the precepts of our forefathers; galvanizing, fortifying and expanding from within to overcome being without. I am grateful to have Brother Foster as a catalyst for this work on our campus and appreciate how he facilitates and models Black love for our young brothers to emulate.





For this administrator, it is not just love, but the Black love that is impacting kids.

Loving students might sound simple enough, but it's the way the MDP instructors' love that is key. Case in point: a particular student with "emotional explosions" who had recently "witnessed a murder" and had "some PTSD," had a break-down in class and "broke our foul language rule." "His classmates," shared the instructor, "were holding him to the class expectations," but the student continued on a volatile tirade. "I let him know that if he could not follow along with our agreed upon rules, he'd be taking some unwanted steps towards being pulled out of our program." The student expressed discontent with the MDP and said blatantly that, "He didn't care" and that, "he wanted to be out of the class." "The next day when he came to my class," explains the instructor, "I gave him his new class schedule." About a week later the teacher got a visit from the student's mom and IEP teacher.

After hearing their arguments, I let them know that he could return, but it was going to be under two conditions: One, he must do the push-ups that he owes the class for his foul language violation. Two, he must formally apologize to the class for not holding his end of the agreement.

The student eagerly rejoined the class. Upon further debrief, when the MDP instructor sat down with the student to better understand why he wanted to be back in the class so badly, he admitted that he "missed the brotherhood and mentorship." "Today," explains his MDP teacher with pride, "this young man is one of the model students of the class." When examining student-created poster boards I discover the one that belongs to this particular student. He writes enthusiastically: "What I like about the class is it's 100!"

I think about this young person—who went from having emotional explosions to being a leader

amongst his peers—and wonder, what accounts for the transformation? Brother Jahi provides insight. He is critical of shortsighted conceptions of learning. He explains that some educators are so preoccupied with making sure students get their homework done, that they completely ignore a child's development. I concur: "We are not teaching Math or Science or English, those are just the subjects. We are first and foremost teaching human beings." Jahi nods and states poignantly that in his first year as an MDP instructor, "I learned to keep my humanity in the room. Like be a human. Sometimes you want to safeguard that and create this image. Nah. My students saw me some days tired. Some days, super energized. Some days challenged." In order for his students to keep it real with him, he had to be honest and authentic as well.

"...IT IS NOT JUST LOVE, BUT THE BLACK LOVE THAT IS IMPACTING KIDS."

From his own vulnerability Jahi was able to show—not just tell—the kids to open up. To foster trust and community, he would sometimes put a "do not disturb" sign on the door. The students would love it because, "It's going to be just us." Those conversations and lessons, recalls Brother Jahi, "That's when it got really real." In these moments, when it's just the MDP participants:

I would say to them, you know you been waiting for somebody to tell you to be smarter. You know you smarter than this. And you've been waiting for somebody to tell you it's okay for you to just unlock it—now's the time!

When the door was closed, hearts and minds became even more open; the students and Brother Jahi became closer as a family, as brothers. A student shares, this class is different than other classes, "because it is a type of brotherhood."

The bond of brotherhood is a recurring theme—I hear it in conversations with parents, at staff meetings, in the MDP classroom—and yet I am still trying to uncover its significance to academic achievement.

“School is about education,” Brother Jahi contends, so, “let’s educate the whole child. It is not just about reading and writing, there has to be a class on who you are.” Self-discovery is as “vital” as any subject. He continues, “you are a being in this world and you need to understand yourself.” The Manhood Development classes are a special, sacred space because “you can kind of put yourself on the experiment table [and] get a chance to learn from yourself. And then out of that, you’re able to function and understand more about yourself, your sensibilities.” This is not just about an existential knowledge of self; a youngster might be wondering, “Why am I growing, why are my feet getting bigger, why is my voice cracking? Like those are things that you can talk about” in this class. Brother Jahi gets excited, “that’s why I love middle school!”

I wonder how Brother Jahi defines manhood in middle school. He quips, “If you ask a hundred different men, you might get a hundred different answers.” He adamantly wants his students to “define manhood for themselves.” He is cognizant of his positionality and does not try to impress his ideas about manhood or anything else for that matter, on the students. “The one thing they learned about me,” he states, “is that I never try to pull here’s your motto of manhood. It’s me. Do what I do. Act how I act.” No. Brother Jahi wants each kid to be able to “grow up and find their own uniqueness.”

I continue to prod, “If manhood is deeply personal, then how do you define a successful African American male youth?” “Hmmm,” he nods, “that’s a good question. Umm ...” he repeats, “that’s a good question.” For the second time in the interview, a moment of silence enters the conversation. I lean

in a bit closer, waiting for Brother Jahi to speak. When he begins to talk, there is solemnity to his expression. He speaks with a calming authority.

Success has a lot to do with them determining where they want to go. Success is when they can identify where they want to go and then take the steps they need to take and are proactive on a daily basis, in their own unique way, despite their challenges or family issues, they are making some step towards their goal—that’s a pathway and success happening at the same time.

He says practically, “If you had five missing assignments and now you are just missing three, you are on a success track. I think it’s the lens,” because “we’re lifelong learners.”

The idea of setting personal goals is pivotal to manhood and achievement. As an illustration of this concept, one of his student’s responds to the daily quote: You must eat an elephant one bite at a time. Jodiah writes in his journal,

I like this quote because it expresses the fact that even if you have a huge dream to become a college professor, you must first do your work, get good grades, graduate, go to college and then get your degrees—slowly but surely you’ll get to your goal. One example for me is when I was in the 6th grade I wanted to get a 3.0 so I did my work studied and when I got my grades I had a 3.7. I take from this that you can’t just jump to your destination you must get there step by step.

Clearly, the students in the Manhood Development classes reveled in the camaraderie and life skills; for many of them, like Jodiah, it gave them the drive to strive to do better in school.

Personal ambition, alone, is not enough to overcome adversities. Brother Jahi would tell his “young kings” to “be first to raise their hand” in all of their classes. Unfortunately, it was not always well received. His students would complain, “but

my math teacher still didn't call on me today." Brother Jahi did not want his students to feel defeated. He told them,

Well, you can raise your hand here and we can talk about it. Tomorrow I want you to raise your hand, but the only difference is that I will be in your math class with you tomorrow so that I can see first-hand what is going on.

This is significant because it demonstrates that MDP was not just a class, but also an opportunity for campus-wide advocacy. Brother Jahi explains,

That's the leverage I have as an instructor because I can really be with the kids who need me the most during the day. I'm already in the school. I don't need to stop at the principal's office or get a pass. I can go directly into the class.

When Brother Jahi showed up, the dynamics between students and teachers started to change: he became a pivotal partner to the learning process.

When Jahi was growing up, he needed a Manhood Development Program. He reminisces, "I failed the eighth grade. Luckily they had summer school for free. I was the kid beating on the table, writing rhymes in Cleveland, Ohio." He shakes his head. Looking back, "I realize how much culture I was not exposed to or around" but, "Public Enemy and Poor Righteous Teachers was happening." Inadvertently, hip-hop "became my cultural education." In eleventh grade, Brother Jahi's mom "got a good job and moved to the suburbs where it was all white kids" and he was called the "n-word." Experiences such as this inspired Brother Jahi "to go above and beyond to culturally empower our brothers because you need that armor to be able to function."

I inquire, "What is that armor that you are trying to give them?"

A sense of self. A sense of validation. You do not have to adjust, let the world adjust. Stand in your manhood. Stand in your Blackness. Shoulders back. Back straight. Some of them things my grandfather used to say. Be comfortable in who you are. Don't try to front like you better than anybody, but be authentically who you really are.

I take a closer look at Brother Jahi. I jot down in my notebook: humble confidence. He seems to embody the very attributes he wants his students to emulate. I realize that even his name has significance. Jahi is a Kiswahili word that means "Dignity." In 1992, after studying with Rastafarians in the Clarendon Hills in Jamaica, he legally changed his name "to reflect the person I strive to be." He continues to describe his first name, Torman. "Tor" is a Yoruba word that means King, and he added "man" because, "although I am a king, I am also a man, meaning balance. I never use my first name in public. I use only my last name. Why, because it's my right and my own personal freedom to do so."

"WE COULD MAKE OAKLAND AN EXAMPLE OF CHANGING THE WORLD."

In closing, I ask Brother Jahi if he has any advice for Executive Director Chatmon, the leader of the AAMA. Echoing the MDP philosophy, Jahi wants "Brother Chris" to:

Lean on your brothers and keep pushing forward. Be aware of your team. Your team represents you and if you have weak links on your team, call them out, because there is no time for weak links. Be courageously honest about that.

He urges Chatmon to identify the strongest aspects of AAMA (people, programs, and policies) and build upon the strengths in order to move the work into the future. "The reality of it is this is not just cultural work; this is not just manhood



MDP student Jolondo

development instructors and young brothers.” It is bigger and bolder. He tells me, “We could make Oakland an example of changing the world.” Suddenly I get a rush of goose bumps up my spine and down my arms. Jahi is adamant:

“We can actually change the lens about how we look at Black men. There was a group of strong brothers who came together to save our sons.” It is not a miracle that a movement was created inside a school district to drop suspension rates and increase engagement in school: “This should be the norm across the nation. Doesn’t this country realize that there’s a million Jahi’s?” What is stopping all of us from lending a hand to “actually make that happen” for more brothers, young and old? Brother Jahi leans to the side and speaks with his voice as well as his hands: “It’s crucial right now. It is not a time to stop. It’s a time to grow.”





**“A PEOPLE WITHOUT THE
KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR
PAST HISTORY, ORIGIN, AND
CULTURE IS LIKE A TREE
WITHOUT ROOTS.”**

- MARCUS GARVEY





MDP student Dahyan

Rising Sons: Dare to Dream

If the young are not initiated into the village, they will burn it down just to feel its warmth.

~African Proverb

A number of lessons are prevalent and relevant for an array of stakeholders willing and able to lend their expertise to the plight and promise of African American male achievement. Oakland dared to name institutionalized racism—and not the children—as the problem. This is monumental.

In the four years since its inception, the Manhood Development Program has grown exponentially and helped raise hundreds of boys into men. In fact, the first cohort is getting ready for college. I can hear Brother Jahi telling them, “Stand in your Blackness. Shoulders back. Back straight” as they march towards their dreams.

Although the future is bright, there is still so much to be done and even more to learn. For district administrators, Brother Chatmon can serve as an example of how to leverage people to improve institutional practices. He demonstrates that jobs with a 50,000-foot view will not have a substantial impact unless they are connected to the ground and rooted in practice. Amidst countless district upheavals, Chatmon’s unapologetic love for the work and relentless service to African American families propelled the program forward.

Classroom teachers can find solace in the lessons from Brothers Abdel-Qawi and Jahi; they offered hands-on advice for reaching and teaching this generation. Above all, both of these educators advocated for a pedagogy of patience. And the curriculum specialist, Brother Bayaan, explained the importance of cultivating creative intelligence so that MDP students can help solve societies greatest ills.

Perhaps the greatest takeaway, however, is the sheer beauty of collective willpower. Altogether, a community of educators, elders, young people, superintendents, scholars, policy makers, and parents joined hands to interrupt patterns of underachievement. And they did it! MDP turned a vision into a reality, a theory into action—school districts across the country now have a model for African American student success.

Looking forward, the Office of African American Male Achievement is continuing to expand the Manhood Development Program into other schools, and is even connecting the curriculum to college entrance requirements so that for juniors and seniors, it is integral to their pathway into higher education. In addition, all teachers interested in effectively reaching and teaching African American children and youth are being welcomed to participate in the AAMA professional learning series and workshop modules. On a national level, Chatmon and others are advising groups that are interested in building similar programs.

It is important to underscore that this is not only about Black people, per se, but society as a whole. Consider that African American males are more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to drop out of high school. Every time a student disassociates from school, society experiences larger casualties. Researchers have found that over their lifetimes, dropouts depend more on public assistance, have lower earnings, poorer health, and higher rates of unemployment, mortality, criminal behavior, and incarceration compared to their peers who complete high school (Breslau, 2010; Orfield, 2004). Thus, finishing high school can mean the difference between life and death, between a dorm room and a prison cell.

Education is a gateway to survival—so it is through school that we can, and must, make the greatest impact.

Given today's environment, the classroom can—and must—take on new meaning.

If young people, all young people, are reachable and teachable, then what explains the endemic failure of students—disproportionately low-income students of color? If every child is capable of greatness, what happens along the way to dim the light of brilliance?

Educational attainment is critical to the lifelong health and success of students, but there is little consensus about the type of education young people need. Small-scale beacons of hope commonly surface, but they're like bandages on a virulent disease; year after year, we remain sick as a society to the ailments of injustice. The Manhood Development Program provides a beacon for what our schools could become. A counselor at Castlemont High School poignantly states,

This class provides a very much-needed safe, comfortable, almost sacred space for young African American men. This class rebuilds self-esteem, relieves the feeling [of] personal responsibility for symptoms of an unjust and racist social system that most severely affects African American males. The class allows for close connections with positive role models who teach, lead by example, and encourage the members of the class to dare to dream about their futures.

An MDP instructor discusses the impact of learning for liberation:

If we can continue to deliver a positive uplifting message to the youth that they can understand and implement into their daily routine, we will be building a front line of young Black soldiers [who] will rebuild their communities with the betterment of their people and the generations to follow.

These young men “represent the future of us as a people, and once they realize their power it will drive them in mind, heart, and action.”

“EDUCATION IS A GATEWAY TO SURVIVAL—SO IT IS THROUGH SCHOOL THAT WE CAN, AND MUST, MAKE THE GREATEST IMPACT.”

Something must be done to improve our schools and save, not just our sons, but all of us from the treachery of inequity. The greatest crime in this country is poverty. It forces human beings into desperation whereby we are willing to do almost anything like rob, steal, kill, sell ourselves and others, just to acquire what we need to survive. Poverty traps, while racism tricks. White supremacy is a disease of the soul and of the system. It creates delusions of power that we are taught to internalize, perpetuate, and defend. This sickness is intergenerational and connected to the ideology and material realities that fortify and rationalize inequality on a daily basis in our institutions and in our interactions with one another. The problems are so deeply rooted and endemic that it's difficult to embody a cure.

I write these words in the wake of Michael Brown's murder by a police officer in Missouri and the militarization and excessive police brutality in low-income communities of color. Amidst a world of tear gas from Gaza to Ferguson, the Office of African American Male Achievement in Oakland exemplifies resistance by fostering hope and consciousness, demonstrating a collective will to improve the world. There is a word in South Africa—ubuntu—that reflects the idea that humanity is bound together in ways that are invisible to the eye, yet gripping to the soul; a oneness that inspires compassion and ignites innovation.

In our final interview, Chatmon remains tenacious, his optimism still infectious. He states, “Our young Black boys will excel. It is not a question of if but when.” Through “strategic partnerships” that “link up the right people” entire systems and cultures transform. I ask him, “What is it that you want for every young Black male in Oakland Unified School District?” He responds, “Wow.” Then he tilts his head and looks right into me: “That whatever they dream, whatever they envision for themselves, that they know and hold that it can be true.” This empowerment is courageous and contagious. It does not just occur in the classroom or with the students; it is embodied in the daily routine of each person connected to this work. While the seeds were planted through the AAMA, this is not about a particular office or position; it is a movement—a legacy to uplift the son—one day at a time.

Knowing these aspirations and the seeds of social change that are being cultivated in Oakland, how will you use your job, talents, and ambitions to leverage a new day? What is our collective legacy? The future—for good and bad—is found in the eyes of our children. Just take a look. In the MDP classes, we have the opportunity to see bright futures that will not succumb to the wails of this world. We see the rays of tomorrow reflected in the light of these student’s eyes: it is time to shine.

The last will and testament of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune seems especially fitting. Her voice echoes through the work and pierces to the heart of the MDP story:

I leave you **LOVE**.

I leave you **HOPE**.

I leave you the **CHALLENGE**
of developing confidence
in one another.

I leave you **RESPECT**
for the use of power.

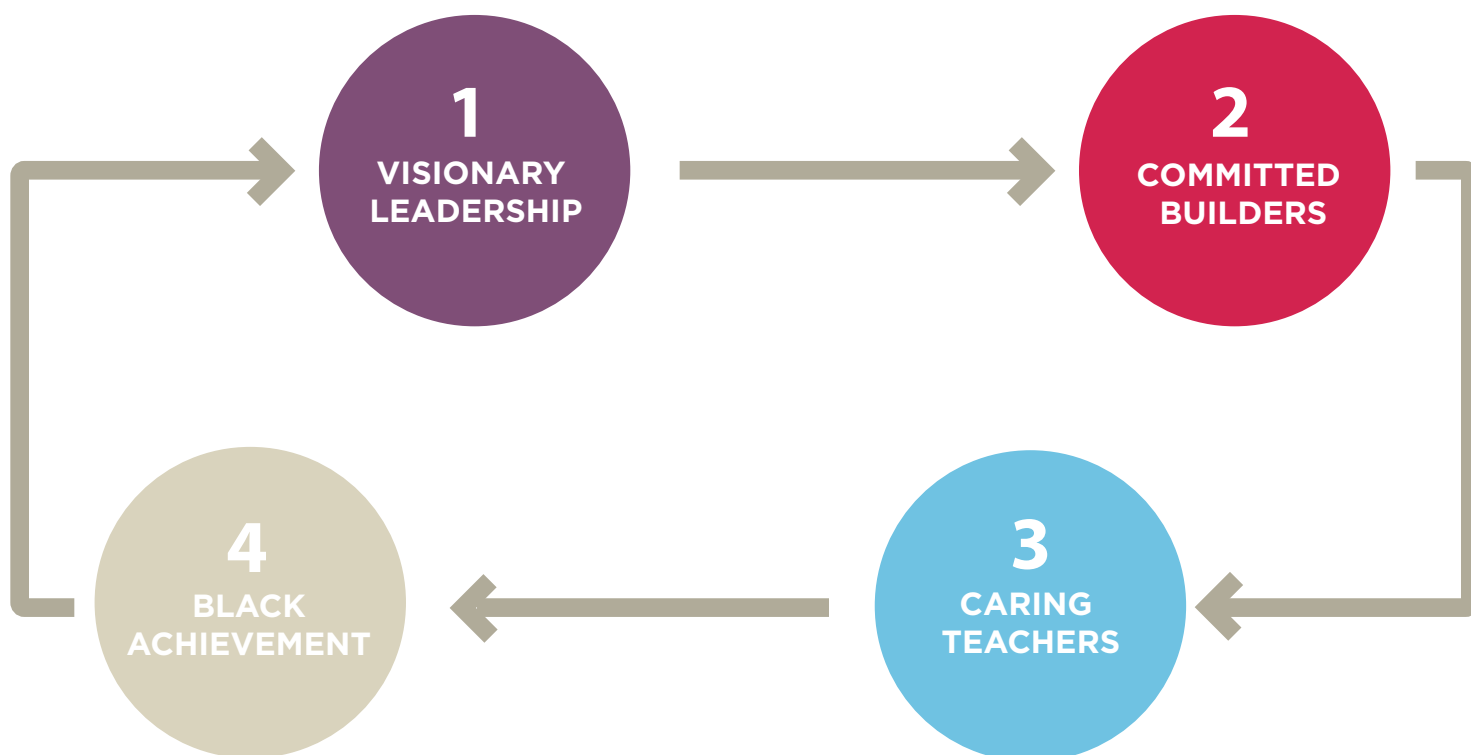
I leave you **FAITH**.

I leave you racial **DIGNITY**.

MODEL FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT SUCCESS

1. VISIONARY LEADERSHIP: Jobs with a 50,000-foot view must connect to the ground and be rooted in practice. Tenacious leaders are able to foster unity both vertically and horizontally to improve and move systems.

2. COMMITTED BUILDERS: Educators, elders, young people, superintendents, scholars, policy makers, and parents must work together to interrupt patterns of underachievement.



3. COMMUNITY OF CARING TEACHERS: Educators must care deeply about student's social-emotional and academic well-being within and beyond the walls of school. The nature of this work demands patience, partnership, commitment, and an unwavering belief in the brilliance of all children.

4. BLACK ACHIEVEMENT: Learning environments must foster positive self-esteem by invoking the power of the past and the legacies of resistance that pave the way for each generation. Schooling then becomes a liberatory tool that uplifts and empowers the next generation to use what they know to improve the world.

Special Thanks

The Office of African American Male Achievement acknowledges that we stand on the shoulders of individuals, organizations, and movements that come before us. We honor Mr. Oscar Wright, whose commitment to students in Oakland has been an inspiration.

For this report, we thank Dr. Vajra Watson, the report contributors, and most importantly the students, families, and community that we serve.

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Finally, I thank my family whose love and support permits me to give my time and energy in service to the students of Oakland and the community that we share.

Engage. Encourage. Empower.

In the spirit,

Christopher P. Chatmon

Executive Director, AAMA

Matin Abdel-Qawi

Zarina Ahmad

Olafemi Akintunde

Russalyn Ali

Mark Alexander

Kira Lynne Allen

Brenden Anderson

Christian Andrews

Sheilagh Andujar

Larry Austin

Lina Avidan

Awele

Baayan Bakari

Philip Barnett

Judge Barreola

Brian Bassette

Angus Bates

James Bell

Remi Bereola

Dereca Blackmon

Fred Blackwell

William Blackwell

Dan Boggan

Davonne Boggan

Sarah Breed

Alex Briscoe

Desley Brooks

Joe Brooks

Rodney Brooks

Cedric Brown

Shelia Brown

Rhonda Bryant

Judge Rhonda Burgess

Hezekiah Burton

Louie Butler

Terry T Butler

Ambessa Cantave

Grace Carroll

Keith Carson

Mashama Carter-Thompson

Victor Cary

William Chabarin

Perry Chen

Lauran Cherry

Madeline Clarke

Brother Clint	Javonni Henderson	David Muhammed
Aeeshah & Kokomon Clotney	Coy Hill	Jamal Muhammed
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Candice Davis	Tyrone Howard	Pedro Noguera
Hodari Davis	Mary Hurley	Nana Kofi Nti
Ikeria Davis	Jabari	Michael Orange
Justin Davis	Bishop Bob Jackson	Emilio Ortega
Lairolyn Davis	Regina Jackson	Macheo Payne
Obasi Davis	Brother Jahi	Arnold Perkins
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Anne Gregory	Ise Lyfe	Tiago Robinson
Vernon Hal	Brigitte Marshall	Walter Robinson
Lamar Hancock	LaResha Martin	James Rockefeller III
Morgan C. Hanson	Yo Ann Martinez	Brian Rogers
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Ron Smith	Stacey Wyatt	Chabot College, Strong Black Brothers
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Hattie Tate	East Bay Community Foundation	Leadership Excellence
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Loren Taylor	Community Benefit Programs	Program (MAP)
Lucinda Taylor	Mitchell Kapor Foundation	Oakland Community Organizations
Lisa Thomas	Next Fund, in Memory of Sheila Gadsden	Oakland Housing Authority
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Ivory Toldson	Open Society Foundations: Campaign for	Partners in School Innovation
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Tina Tranzor	San Francisco Foundation	Question Bridge
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Judge Trina S. Thompson	Stuart Foundation	Striving Black Brothers Coalition
Vinh Trinh	The California Endowment	The Black Star Project, USA
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Eddie Vargas	100 Black Men of the Bay Area, Inc.	Yes We Code
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Appendix A: Excerpt, *Lean Into the Wind: Emerging Themes and Strategic Recommendations for AAMA 2.0*

By Gregory Hodge

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Dedication

To Dr. Marcus Foster, the first African American superintendent in OUSD, a pioneering educator who led our District from 1970-1973. He was an inspiration whose life was cut short by an assassin's bullet. His legacy endures...

Introduction

The creation and ongoing work of the OUSD Office of African American Male Achievement has been both historic and foreshadowing of the future of the District's commitment to educating all of its students. The District's leadership and supporters have signaled that we collectively value, encourage, and love our Black boys at a time when the headlines in national and local media would indicate otherwise. OUSD is uniquely positioned to bring life to the concept of "Targeted Universalism"—the premise that advances the idea that in order to achieve equity by providing opportunities to those least advantaged in our society, we must focus our attention and sufficient resources on a specific set of people while ultimately informing how we create the conditions for success for others. AAMA has begun to create the pathways for doing just that.

The purpose of this document is to provide the Oakland Unified School District leadership with findings from the planning process currently underway for the District's Office of African American Male Achievement. The themes outlined here are intended to document the approach, impact, successes, and challenges over the past four years (2010–2014). More importantly, the recommendations are intended to provide the basis for executing the next iteration of AAMA's work on behalf of the District's students. In order to be effective, these recommendations must be operationalized in the context of the OUSD Strategic Plan, which will be revised under the direction of Superintendent Antwan Wilson over the coming months. The "headlines" of strategic approaches detailed here are as follows:

- **Continue to foster a District-wide Culture which Nurtures African American Male Achievement:** Build and foster an ecosystem at all tiers of the system—from the district office to the classroom—that engages and empowers Black male success in school.
- **Create an OUSD Office of Race and Equity and Build an Equity Data Dashboard:** Attend to the capacity, positionality, and authority of AAMA in the OUSD structure. Ensure that attention continues to be focused on the needs and interventions aimed at supporting African American boys. Develop current baseline data on equity practices, inputs, and leverage points to measure key outcomes and address them with a relentless focus.
- **Create Robust Professional Development and Supports:** Continue to build on the

experience and expertise of AAMA to leverage best practices for all teachers and staff.

- **Expand and Deepen the Manhood Development Program:** Create comprehensive K-12 pathways of support by expanding the Manhood Development Program's (MDP) cohort model for African American youth to every school in the district.
- **Engage Parents as Critical Allies:** Strengthen, expand, and mobilize AAMA families to participate in the strategic direction, ongoing development, and advocacy of programs that work for their children. Strengthen the work with parents aimed at helping them become more effective partners in achieving positive educational outcomes for own children.
- **Develop a Robust Communications Strategy:** Design and execute a more coherent communications strategy that can be utilized within and beyond OUSD to establish partnerships, build the local and national funding base, and elevate innovations in the areas of educational equity. Create effective marketing tools for raising awareness about the needs of and responses to the challenges facing African American students in the District, for both internal and external audiences.

These strategic approaches are based on insights gained from 34 interviews and 2 focus groups with students and parents involved in the MDP, which were conducted between July and October, 2014.

Valuing Our Black Boys

Throughout the inquiry process, our team had dynamic discussions that produced valuable insights and suggestions. Each question generated noteworthy discussions. However, across interviews, the question, "What kind of experience do you want African American males to have in school?" produced particularly interesting responses that we believe highlight why AAMA is such a necessary initiative to address the current education crisis facing African American male students in OUSD.

On this question, many interviewees responded in similar ways. Overall, the key stakeholders explained that they wanted African American male students to feel valued and to have a school experience that was inviting, supportive, allowed them to be their authentic selves at all times, and that prepared them for productive lives once their formal schooling ended. The following quotes illustrate this theme.

"I want every African American boy to feel a deep sense of belonging at school." -Curtiss Sarikey, Associate Superintendent, OUSD

"To have an environment where black boys are being treated as first class citizens, feel safe, are not profiled or stereotyped, enjoy learning, are well educated and where they feel comfortable and protected." -Jackie Minor, General Counsel, OUSD

"I want them to be able to be authentic at all times... In a place that is nurturing and supportive." -Brother Jahi, Program Manager, Manhood Development Program, AAMA, OUSD

"The environment needs to be one in which it is inviting from the security guard at the front door to teaching staff and school administrators, the people should be inviting. Students should expect goodness that is nurturing and loving. Schools should have loving and supportive discipline that's not punitive." -Jason Seals, Professor, African American Studies Department, Merritt College

"It'd be great if their experience were that people expected them to succeed, to be leaders, and vital parts of the community... Being able to be real about how society is and real about who they are." -Diane Dodge, Executive Director, East Bay College Fund (Manhood Development Program Partner)

"I want them to feel supported in every way—socially, emotionally, academically. I want them to

feel encouraged and pushed by their instructors... I want them to feel proud of who they are and that they and their parents are treated with respect and dignity.” -Raquel Jimenez, Community Engagement Coordinator, Student & Family Community Engagement, OUSD

The question “What kind of experience do you want African American males to have in school?” is of great interest not only because of the responses it generated but, particularly, in comparison to the response students gave to the question, “...describe your AAMA experience...” When comparing what key stakeholders want African American males to experience in school and what students report experiencing in AAMA’s MDP class, it is clear that AAMA is creating an ideal environment for African American male student success and achievement. As one Oakland Technical High School student put it, AAMA is “Life-changing and eye opening.”

Student Voices

The MDP is central to the work AAMA engages in to improve outcomes for African American males in the District. The key to the success of each Manhood Development class is the relationship between the MDP instructor, the MDP student, and the student’s family. To help us better understand the MDP student perspective, we conducted a student focus group at Oakland Technical High School. The participating students were all currently enrolled at Oakland Technical High School and had been in the MDP class for at least one year. The following section is a summary of the feedback that the young men provided during our conversations.

It is clear from the students’ perspective that MDP classes are impactful and meaningful. To uncover why this class was so well received, we asked, “What’s different about the MDP class compared to your other classes?” In an emphatic and unanimous way, students reported that the MDP class instructor is the key difference when compared to their other classes. On one level, the

fact that the instructor is an African American male is appreciated by each student. In the words of one student, the difference is, *We have a Black teacher. Not only is he Black, he’s a Black man. He could share with us how his life was and what he faced as a Black man and how things can be better for us.*

While the instructor’s race and gender are important aspects that influence how African American male students experience school in general and the MDP specifically, the deeper impact lies in the way the instructor treats the students and the classroom culture they co-create. From the student perspective, it is clear that MDP class instructor Lamar Hancock cares about them inside and outside of his classroom. For many students, he is like a father, and that makes all the difference. Students reported “... *that we had a father at school... we had someone [who] would look out for us and do the best he could do to keep us out of trouble.*” Or as another student put it, “*Mr. Hancock, he’s like a father. Especially because some of us don’t have fathers. Like me. My dad’s occasionally in my life. So to have somebody that cares like that, it feels good.*”

Changing school culture is imperative to improving outcomes for all students, especially those who are struggling to find their path to academic excellence. The communal culture created by the MDP class instructor and his students also creates space for the students to be their authentic selves. In this process, students feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts, feelings, and insights. This inclusive culture helped students participate more deeply in class. The difference this makes is summed up by the words of these two students,

Everybody’s voice was heard. Nobody was left out. Nobody felt left out. It was just one big family.

I wasn’t afraid to explain how I felt because I know that what I go through as an African American male, everybody else in this classroom probably goes through as well. Because they’re also African

American males, we can relate on multiple levels, which doesn't happen in my other classes. In other classes that had different races, I didn't feel comfortable speaking about my experiences as an African American because I didn't think other non-Black students could understand.

While each MDP class instructor shapes their classroom culture and community in unique ways, some common strategies include group agreements and extracurricular activities. Group agreements are created collectively in each class so that students help shape the classroom experience. Common agreements in the MDP classroom are “no put downs,” “no using the N-word,” and “each one teach one.” These agreements are typically displayed publically and enforced collectively. For example, if one student uses the N-word, the whole class takes notice and demands that the appropriate consequence be given. Depending on the group policy, that could mean 10 push-ups/jumping jacks or a writing assignment. The group agreements coupled with collective enforcement help foster a sense of safety and community in the classroom that helps students feel free to be their authentic selves.

The strong classroom culture and sense of community creates the foundation for positive extracurricular activities, which students and instructors report as their most memorable moments. For example, when students were asked to share a story that highlights their best experience in the MDP class, each student told a story about an out-of-class experience. Whether it was “Going to see (the film) *Fruitvale Station*,” or “When we came together as a family to go to the *Warriors* game to represent AAMA,” the out-of-class experiences are made possible because of what first takes place in class between the instructor and students.

The positive and memorable out-of-class experiences also have the potential to impact the family dynamics of MDP students and can foster

restorative relationships between parents and students. One MDP instructor recalls an end of the year trip to the Exploratorium as a memorable experience that rekindled love between a mother and her son, who had become distant. This instructor explained that during the trip, the mother of one of his students pulled him to the side to express her gratitude for being offered the opportunity to go on the trip as a chaperone because, “This trip allowed me to see my son as a kid again. Lately, he’s been going through some things because me and his dad are separating and in that process my son has become distant and adversarial towards me. Today we were able to love each other like we used to. We needed this trip. Thank you.”

The entire strategic plan, *Leaning Into the Wind: Emerging Themes and Strategic Recommendations for AAMA 2.0* is available on the AAMA website at www.thrivingstudents.org/33.

Appendix B: Methodology and Methods

At Harvard University, I was mentored and trained by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot in a qualitative research methodology called Portraiture. Accommodating a wide range of investigative techniques, Portraiture anticipates that participants and researcher engage in a co-construction of the narrative. Because the researcher does not preconceive ideas, it is possible to uncover a clearer appreciation for each participant's unique reality, as well as the contradictions that often come hand-in-hand with those realities. In this interactive process, the researcher is not an abstract entity removed from the findings, but instead an active participant throughout the data collection stage. The researcher's voice is integral to the multi-dimensional story that emerges—and integral in a way that amplifies the experience and perspective of each participant without obscuring or filtering their voice. This humanistic approach does not restrict data to a predetermined set of measurable factors, but instead allows the human experience to unfold, as it will. Thus Portraiture forces the researcher to be inquisitive and self-reflective as a way to bring the story to light (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, pp. 148–9).

Therefore I am part of the analysis, not removed from it. From my perch of human-as-instrument, my goal as Portraitist is to discover the universal within the particular and to communicate that in recognizable terms (Glesne, 1999; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997; Maxwell, 1996). When doing Portraiture, then, I must take a stance that is simultaneously inside and outside the moment. That is, while documenting conversations and taking in the subtle nuances of meaning and implication—and details like the color of the walls—I am also thinking about who I am. This encourages a free association of the five senses plus the heart and soul in fluid qualitative description and does not seek to isolate conditions

to make them duplicable. As such, it is a practice of emancipation, unfolding in the form of human archeology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 139). Along this journey, I am the active listener (“ear hustler”) to the very heartbeat and pulse of this work.

As a portraitist, I use the entirety of my being to not simply listen to a story, but listen for a story. For instance, to develop the aesthetic whole of each portrait, I remain cognizant of central elements, including: voice, context, emergent themes, and the complex relationship that develops out of the intensity of the research process (Behar, 1996; Davis, 1996; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). This powerful in-the-moment account permits a multifaceted reality to unfold. Lessons are transferable not because any controlled environment can be duplicated, but because from the portraitist's perch of human-as-instrument, it is possible to discover the universal within the particular (Glesne, 1999; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997; Maxwell, 1996).

The methods of Portraiture entail observational work, thematic in-depth interviews, and document analysis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), all of which I employed meticulously to create a viable and accurate account. Portraiture grants a descriptive narrative to communicate essential findings. However, this does not imply subjectivism. Drawing mainly from grounded theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Tuckman, 1999) to construct the findings, I systematically analyzed the data collected through field notes, questionnaires, surveys, and interviews. This combination of various types of data combined with particular analytic strategies allowed me to conduct this research.

I encoded all data using both open and theoretical codes as a way to trace themes and create further

analytic questions in the process (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Strauss, 1987). Analytic memos, which include crafted profiles and narrative summaries (Glesne, 1999), were utilized throughout my data collection phase to categorize salient attributes as they emerged.

Maxwell (1996) defines validity as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p.87). To enhance validity, I compared multiple data sources for consistency and contradictions. By triangulating information sources, I was able to notice and tease out aberrations.

My own personal preferences, consciously or unconsciously, can enter into data selections and perhaps affect the general outcome. One strength of *Portraiture*, however, is the author’s essential inclusion into the final description, so that prejudices might be revealed in a way that does not diminish the empathetic understanding communicated to the reader or affect the results. Still, I acknowledge that working towards the aesthetic goal of *Portraiture* does not negate the need to address potential problems. Therefore I will employ several strategies to address researcher bias and reactivity.

First, to ensure descriptive validity, I tape-recorded and transcribed all interviews verbatim, including words like “um...” and “you know.” I processed field notes within one day of observation and conducted initial open-coding (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Maxwell, 1996).

Second, I wrote reflexive memos and kept a journal. These ethnographic tools allow researchers to be aware of their emotions and observe themselves as they become part of the setting and culture under study (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). These memos are essential for referencing how I interact with others. Furthermore, I approached the interview data aware that it is

a process of co-construction where teller and listener create meaning collaboratively (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Riessman, 2003). In this way, I kept strict notes of personal impressions and thoughts as I gathered information.

Third, to ensure interpretive validity, I systematically emphasized evidence in my analytic memos and narrative summaries by citing participants’ own words and documenting transcript page numbers to connect my interpretations back to the data. I examined discrepant data against my working observations to assess whether or not I should modify my developing sketch and consider alternative explanations (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Fourth, I conducted member checks (Maxwell, 1996) by having participants review their interview transcripts and clarify or expand on any issue raised. I also shared some of my initial analysis with participants and asked for impressions. These strategies are important tools for developing validity and for guarding against researcher bias (Tuckman, 1999).

Fifth, I triangulated across several data sources (e.g., participant observation, questionnaires, interviews, surveys, and supplemental documentation) to reduce the risk of chance associations and biases due to my data collection methods.

Sixth, I solicited feedback regularly from colleagues: skilled researchers not intimately connected to the data. I shared transcripts, memos, and matrices with these colleagues to identify discrepant data and to strengthen my coding strategies and analytic tools. Such alternative interpretations are necessary to forge proper conclusions (Glesne, 1999; Luttrell, 2000).

Appendix C: Sample Lesson

In Brother Quinton's lesson plan, he uses Brother Jahi's three steps (I Do, We Do, You Do) to devise his activity.

The theme for the month is self-mastery and the today's activity is "Where are you headed?" On the board it clearly states that the standards are Comprehension and Collaboration (CCSS.ELA-Literacy 9-10.1) and Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL 9-10.4).

Word of the day: Reflect

Quote of the day: "I'm starting with the man in the mirror, I'm asking him to change his ways, and no message could be any clearer, if you want to make the world a better place, take a look at yourself and then make that change." –Michael Jackson

ENGAGE Direct Instruction: "I DO"

My personal testimony of a time I made a poor decision.

Explain how I felt after examining the 3 steps of reflection which are to Think Again, Remember Feelings, and Learn Something New.

ENCOURAGE Guided Practice: "WE DO"

Ask if anybody would like to share a situation of their own in which they didn't use good judgment. Talk through the situation together using the 3-steps of the reflection process.

EMPOWER Independent Practice: "YOU DO"

Students will be placed into groups of 3 to share stories, and to state something that they'd like to change about themselves or in their lives based upon the reflection process.

Use active listening skills to respond to what you hear and give feedback.

Repeat the process until each group member has shared.

Exit Slip Question of the Day: How can I use my reflection today to help me with tomorrow?

Homework-write: When was the last time you helped someone? What did you do?

Appendix D: Manhood Development Program Reading List

Go Tell It To the Mountain

James Baldwin
New York: Dial Press, 1963.

Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America

Lerone Bennett Jr.
Chicago: Johnson Pub., 1969.

Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization

Anthony T. Browder
Washing, DC: Institute of Karmic Guidance, 1992.

Manchild In The Promised Land

Claude Brown
New York; Macmillan, 1965.

Can't Stop, Won't Stop

Jeff Chang
New York: St. Martin Press, 2005.

African People In World History

John Henrik Clarke
Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1993.

The Pact

Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt
New York: Rive Head Books, 2002.

Black History for Beginners

Denise Dennis
London; New York: Writers and Readers; Distributed in U.S. by W.W. Norton, 1984.

The African Origin of Civilization

Cheik Anta Diop
New York: L. Hill, 1974.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass
London: G. Kershaw and Son, 1852.

Invisible Man

Ralph Ellison
New York: Random House, 1952.

The Wretched of the Earth

Frantz Fanon
New York: Grove Press, 1963.

Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey

Amy Jacque Garvey
New York: Atheneum, 1969.

The Spook Who Sat By the Door

Sam Greenlee
Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990.

Roots

Alex Haley
New York: Dell, 1977.

Introduction to African Civilizations

John G. Jackson
New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1970.

The World's Great Men of Color

J.A. Rogers
New York: Macmillan, 1972.

The Golden Age of The Moor

Ivan Van Sertima
New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992.

They Came Before Columbus

Ivan Van Sertima
New York: Random House, 1976.

The Peculiar Institution

Kenneth Stampp
New York: Knopf, 1956.

The Mis-education of the Negro

Carter G. Woodson
New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1990.

Black Boy

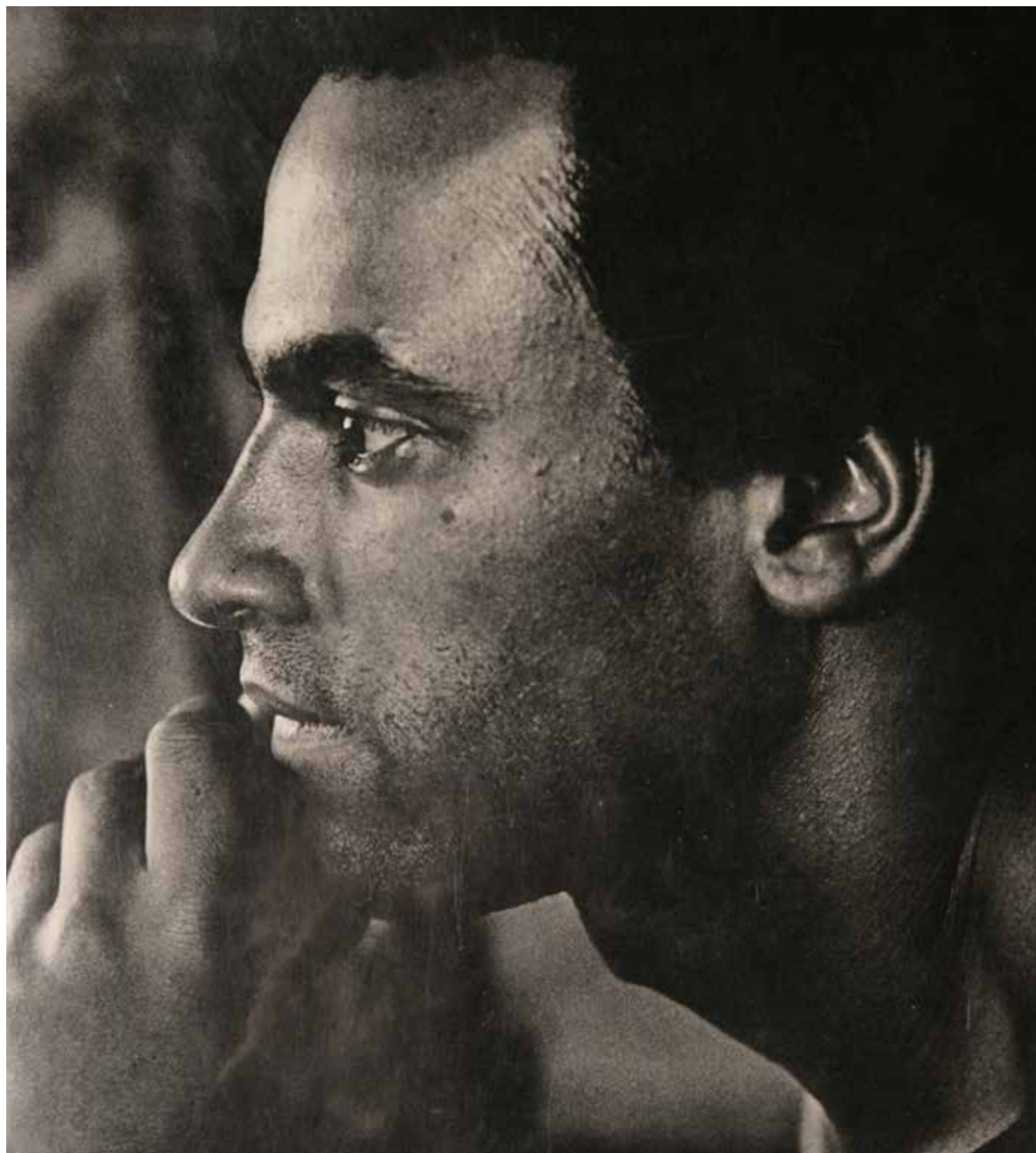
Richard Wright
New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

Malcolm X
New York: One World/Ballantine Books, 1992.

**“THE REVOLUTION HAS
ALWAYS BEEN IN THE HANDS
OF THE YOUNG.
THE YOUNG ALWAYS INHERIT
THE REVOLUTION.”**

- HUEY P. NEWTON



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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Data from 2009-2010. This data alongside the historical precedence of failure, spurred Oakland to take action.
- ² Findings on student academic and social-emotional outcomes taken from the AAMA Community Update: 2014 as well as analyses by Gerald Williams, Oakland Unified School District.
- ³ Data from the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) test.
- ⁴ Dr. Wade W. Nobles is professor emeritus in the Department of Africana Studies at San Francisco State University and is the founder and Executive Director of the Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family, Life, and Culture, Inc. in Oakland. He is a prominent theoretical scientist in the fields of African Psychology, cross-cultural and ethno-human functioning. He is one of the leading researchers on social systems and psycho-cultural development and is the author of over sixty-five articles, chapters, research reports, and books.
- ⁵ Leadership Excellence is a non-profit community-based program in Oakland, CA that focuses on leadership development for Black youth and social justice youth development (Ginwright, 2004; 2009; Watson, 2012).
- ⁶ Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are institutions of higher education in the United States that were established before 1964 with the intention of serving the African American community.
- ⁷ The Mentoring Center trains and supervises mentoring programs in the Bay Area. They also provide direct services to incarcerated youth, <http://www.mentor.org/>.
- ⁸ In the literature, micro-aggressions are those commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, racial slights about People of Color (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Equin, 2007).

**“THE SYSTEM UNDER
WHICH WE NOW EXIST
HAS TO BE RADICALLY
CHANGED. THIS MEANS
THAT WE ARE GOING TO
HAVE TO LEARN TO THINK
IN RADICAL TERMS.”**

- ELLA BAKER





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