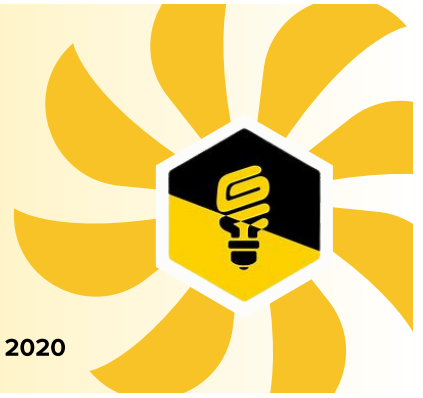


Programming to Develop and Support the Graduation of Black Male Youth in the Bay Area



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Introduction

Throughout the course of American History young men of African descent have historically had considerable difficulty in the process of their education. Due to many factors including, but not limited to, family structure, financial difficulties, criminal activity, and use of substances, high school graduation rates of black males are significantly lower than that of other races. The issues present that affect high school graduation rates of young black men are just as present in the San Francisco Bay Area as anywhere else and if anything, are increased ten-fold due to the given financial aspects of the area.

This white paper intends to delve into the issues present that affect black male youths in the process of graduation. In particular, this paper will focus on the issues that affect these young men in the San Francisco Bay Area. This paper will also outline possible ways in which the high school graduation rates of black male youths in the Bay Area can be increased. We'll also focus on the non-profit, "The Hidden Genius Project" and how the non-profit provides opportunities for black male youths and is an example of how graduation rates can be increased.

This paper will also focus on the more general scope of how high school graduation rates of black male youths can be increased by looking at self-determination, family support, positive instructor influence, and financial or positive academic influence.

Opportunity Gaps

As the introduction states, there are a range of opportunity gaps that exist between Black male youths and their white counterparts, most of which are due to institutional racism that systemically disadvantages Black communities from having access to certain resources. It is important to discuss the opportunity gaps because, despite the abilities that a student may have, some opportunities are more easily accessible for people of different races. The research article *Moving the Needle: Exploring Key Levers to Boost College Readiness Among Black and Latino Males in New York City*, a study from 2013, goes into more detail about the importance of acknowledging these opportunity gaps when understanding the barriers to graduation rates, and subsequently college for young Black men.

The article goes into detail about the different kinds of opportunity gaps that exist which include disparities in wealth and income, unequal access to health care, uneven teacher quality, and gaps in available curricula. In addition to how the effects of socioeconomic status on home life influence the academic lives of Black male students, so too can cultural norms of maleness affect the way they perform in school. Research has found that male students are more likely than female students to be held back a grade level. Starting later than the rest of their peers of the same age can have “negative effects on a student’s perception of their own academic abilities and competence” (24). What’s worse, there is a significant gap between the way boys are socialized to behave and the expectations that a teacher sets in a classroom. Studies show that “boys across all racial groups received lower grades than their test scores predicted,” showing a correlation between the way boys typically behave in classrooms and their ability to do classwork.

One may argue that the way young boys are socialized has nothing to do with the teachers and everything to do with the child’s parents or guardians. Though there is validity in this point, it is also important to note that for young men of color living in poverty - “more than one in three Black and Latino children are currently living in poverty as compared to one in ten White children” - their home life does not allow for enough room to address these issues. “Nationally, children of color are disproportionately represented among those living in poverty” which is compounded by the fact that “schools serving the largest percentages of Black and Latino male students tend to be under-resourced in terms of facilities, supplemental materials, and high-quality teachers” (26). This combination of socioeconomic factors proves that it is absolutely crucial to address student’s needs outside of the classroom in order to improve their academic outcomes. Often, the lack of resources that are available in a student’s home life correlates to a lack of resources in their academic lives as well.

Background and Research

Overall, there is a trend of lower graduation rates for black male youth. This problem stems back to a very young age. According to Kapor Center’s article, “Leveling The Playing Field in Tech,” Oakland Unified School District’s suspension rate for black male youth is extremely high, starting as early as elementary school, putting over half black males in danger of not graduating from high school. Black male youths are suspended at a rate of 6 times more than white males in the school district, therefore the education playing field is unequal.

A study was conducted by co-directors of San Diego State University’s Community College Equity Assessment Lab and the director of UCLA’s Black Male Institute. The findings focused on suspensions of black male youth in the state, specifically the higher rates among those in the foster care system. The article states “African-Americans made up just over 5 percent of California’s public school enrollment, but account for nearly 18 percent of suspensions” (Romney). Furthermore, the suspension rate among black males is 3.6 times higher than the rate of all students. They found a correlation between those who have

been suspended and those in foster care. Black male youth in foster care have a suspension rate of 27 percent and statewide, in grades 7th-8th, the suspension rate is 41 percent. In addition, the national graduation rate for black males comes to around 59 percent, versus 65 percent for Latinos and 80 percent for White males (Superville). This lower graduation rate for black male youth is likely due to unequal opportunity as well.

It is a common belief that there needs to be more funding in order to keep black male youths in school in order to boost graduation rates due to unequal opportunities among black communities. Although this is a possible solution, it can't fully fix the problem. There needs to be much more than funding. Funding wouldn't fix the high suspension rates and correlation to the foster care system. There needs to be more opportunities given to black male youths overall in order to boost graduation rates.

Solution: Benefits of Social Capital

Though there are many organizations that provide incredible funding and grants to schools that can potentially affect a student's overall education experience, this funding does not always provide the opportunities to gain social capital within the student's community. Social capital is the concept based on how a person can access resources. Black male youth in the Bay Area are commonly known not to have high social capital due to racism, low finances, family dynamics, and crime. So then how can a student gain social capital?

Organizations that provide opportunities for students to connect to others in their communities and provide them with adult mentors can be a catalyst for this change. In [Routes to Resilience](#) by LeConte Jeanine Dill, she analyzes and records her experiences working with *The East Oakland Youth Development Center*, an organization that "develops the social and leadership capacities of youth and young adults so that they prepare for employment, high education, and leadership opportunities." The author talks with both youth and employees of this organization to understand its impact. They say "meaningful participation- the involvement of youth in relevant, engaging, and interest opportunities- is found to support healthy adolescent development," and "the staff at EOYDC serve as teachers, mentors, supervisors, and counselors for the youth participants...soon youth come to know the staff on a deeper, more personal level,"(38 Dill). Though in school, youth may be able to learn the curriculum and extra funding can enhance that learning, it is the extra step of having the student engage in a purposeful manner with the support of an adult mentor that lends them social capital.

Black male youth in the Bay area can advance and gain more success if they are provided with the access to resources that are specified to them. By giving them the programming that interests and engages them while also providing mentors, these men can move into high education and eventually help their own communities.

Conclusion

- Black male youth high school graduation rates affected by many issues
- Low-income areas and schools cannot give all resources in order to help students
- Some programming provided grants to states to help schools
- Students need more than financial support in schooling- need nurturing environment and rounded experience in high school

The Hidden Genius Project provides students with a STEM education that goes above and beyond. Their mission is to foster the whole student. They allow the student to learn skills that will help their community in the future through meaningful support and connections. Their adult mentors give them the tools they need to thrive in their communities and graduate to higher education successfully. They overcome the challenges that face them with intellect and passion they already have inside them, brought forth by the opportunities given to them.

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