



Empowered Youth Programs: Partnerships for Enhancing Postsecondary Outcomes of African American Adolescents

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the educational community has the opportunity to ensure that underserved populations, such as students of color and poor students, receive the necessary educational support to achieve academic success. Relevant data from the Education Trust (1999, 2003, 2006) suggest a growing achievement gap between the academic performance of students of color and that of their White counterparts. This gap has led many educational communities to implement various strategies to close the achievement gap for these underserved populations. Family involvement has long been heralded as a key component for academic success and has moved to the forefront as educational communities explore ways to involve families in the educational experiences of their children (Gonzalez, 2002; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). This article reviews how academic enrichment programs, as part of the educational community, promote and support parental engagement to encourage academic success for all students.

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Economic stress often results in job loss and financial turmoil especially for those families already suffering financially; however, that same economic stress could stimulate a shift in the job market. Because many white-collar jobs that were popular in the 1990s are currently being outsourced to Asia and India, the job market pendulum may be swinging back to research and development as well as labor-intensive jobs (Achieve, Inc., 2008a, 2008b; Engardio, Bernstein, & Kripalani, 2003). To take advantage of this shift both locally and globally, the next generation of workers must be prepared academically in order to compete in the global arena. This can only be accomplished by completing technical or postsecondary degree programs (Bailey, 2003; Boyd, 2007). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008) estimated that completing some form of postsecondary education (i.e., associate's and bachelor's degree programs and/or technical certification) could increase one's earning potential by as much as \$15,000 when compared to those who only complete high school and as much as \$30,000 when compared to individuals who drop out of school before earning their high school diploma.

Accepting the challenge of a changing job market, by focusing on and increasing one's postsecondary options, becomes problematic for students who are already lagging behind academically. To close the achievement gap that exists between students of color, especially African American students, and their White counterparts, researchers and practitioners have suggested that a few things need to occur: changing low teacher expectations to high expectations for all students; eliminating

substandard curricula; and challenging policies, procedures, and behaviors that make students of color and poor students feel alienated from the school community (Education Trust, 1999, 2003, 2006; Green, 2001; Lee & Bailey, 2005; Slavin & Madden, 2001; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). While these suggestions represent factors inherent to the school, other researchers (Epstein, 2001; Green; Jeynes, 2003b; Slavin & Madden, 2001) suggest going beyond reform within the classroom and changing how the educational community encourages parental involvement relative to academic success as it pertains to increasing the possibility of postsecondary options for children.

Paramount to encouraging parental involvement is the need to understand factors impacting parental involvement both positively and negatively, especially for African American parents (Archer-Banks, 2008; Jeynes, 2003a, 2003b, 2005; O'Bryan, Travis, Braddock, & Dawkins, 2006; Slavin & Madden, 2001; Trotman, 2001; Yan, 1999). Unfortunately, some educators are quick to cite lack of parental involvement as the main contributing factor for poor academic performance (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Field-Smith, 2005; Thompson, 2003). As a result, preconceived notions of parental support, especially as it pertains to African American parents, fuel an unwillingness to investigate and understand the communities being served, resulting in the inability to develop effective strategies to encourage positive parental involvement (Archer-Banks; Jeynes, 2003a, 2003b; Ross, Smith, & Casey, 1999; Slavin & Madden). Moreover, African American parents from these educational communities express similar feelings toward educators; oftentimes, these parents perceive the school environment as being resistant to their efforts of becoming involved in their child's education and believe that their input will neither be welcomed nor valued when offered (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Williams & Baber, 2007).

Thus, the school community and African American parents experience a continuous cycle of distrust and misguided beliefs toward each other. This distrust can diminish the educational success and the attainment of postsecondary degrees for African American students (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Lin & Yan, 2005). To help these two groups work together in an effort to maximize the impact of parental involvement in the educational trajectory of students, academic enrichment programs dedicated to helping African American students reach their academic potential could serve as a bridge and facilitate meaningful communication by acting as a liaison between the school and African American parents. One such program, Empowered Youth Programs (EYP), utilizes a developmental and comprehensive approach as it seeks to maximize the academic and social potential of African American students, establish meaningful communication between African American parents and the educational community, and provide special information sessions dedicated to helping African American parents understand their role in their children's postsecondary future (Bailey, 2003; Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2004, 2007; Bailey & Paisley, 2004).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

At one time, the school represented the center of the community through a combination of academic, athletic, and fine arts interactions. Currently, many public schools no longer feel connected to the surrounding community. While the faces of teachers, school counselors, and administrators have remained predominantly White, the faces of the students, parents, and the community for many public school systems have dramatically changed over the past few decades, resulting in feelings of disconnect between the school and the community it serves (Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Researchers predict that by the year 2020, more than 50% of public school students will be African American and Hispanic (Banks, 2007; Jones, 2007; Teel & Obidah, 2008).

As a result, many students of color feel alienated from the educational system that should represent a key to their future. Unfortunately for public school systems, these feelings of alienation translate into increased truancy rates, discipline referrals, high failure rates, and, ultimately, dropout rates (Education Trust, 1999, 2003, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lewis & Kim, 2008; Marks & Tonso, 2006; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). For African American students who remain in the educational system, data from the Education Trust (1999, 2003, 2006) reveal an achievement gap between the academic performance of students of color and that of their White counterparts in the areas of reading and math; without the foundational skills of reading and math, success in advanced level courses for African American students becomes difficult. Given this information, it becomes apparent that the academic and social potential for African American students has yet to be tapped, especially because recent data indicate that 33% have the academic foundation necessary to enter into and complete a postsecondary degree program (Guess, 2007).

Parental Involvement

To reverse the educational trajectory for African American students, schools need ways to become the center of the community by helping parents maximize their involvement in their children's education. Research related to parent involvement leads to an increase in academic achievement, cognitive development, and improved student behavior resulting in higher grades, better critical thinking skills, and less discipline problems (Lamy, 2003; Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple, & Peay, 1999; Samaras & Wilson, 1999). Research also indicates that parental involvement can affect the academic engagement of students; when parents become involved in their child's education, their child responds with a higher level of academic engagement, leading to more effort and focus in core academic areas as well as higher grade-point averages (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Parent involvement can include attending parent-teacher conferences and school activities, being involved in students' extracurricular activities, helping with homework, selecting classes, monitoring academic progress, and valuing the importance of education (Epstein, 2001; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). To maximize their impact on children's academic potential, parents need to understand which parental involvement behaviors will lead to their academic success, thereby enhancing postsecondary options for their children.

African American Parental Involvement

Several studies indicate that parental involvement seems more closely related to academic achievement for African American students than for White students; furthermore, parents of successful African American students tended to demonstrate higher levels of social interaction both with their children and with the school (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Yan, 1999). Other studies have attempted to explain why some African American parents seem hesitant to become involved in their child's education. Much of this research focused on low-income African American families. Many low-income parents might not be involved because they feel intimidated by the schools, cannot get past their own negative experiences in

schools, may not understand the importance of being involved in their child's education, or find it hard to fit parent involvement into an already overwhelming schedule (Howard & Reynolds; Sheely-Moore & Bratton, 2010). Lack of African American parental involvement could contribute to the myths that surround African American families, their perceptions of education, and the degree to which they are involved at their children's school. Ford (1996) postulated that for some in the school community, these myths include the following: Black families are homogenous [meaning that all African American parents are the same regardless of their social economic status];

Black parents have little interest in their children's education; Black parents who do not become involved in the schools are not interested in their children's educational wellbeing. (p. 162)

To counter these misconceptions and provide a more theoretical basis for study, the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework has allowed several researchers to examine the why and how of parental engagement rather than parental involvement. Within this framework, parental engagement becomes a function of space and capital via activity networks (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Barton et al. described space as the areas of academic and non-academic interactions in which academic refers to all aspects of the curriculum and capital represents the "human, social, and material resources one has access to and can activate for their own desired purposes" (p. 5). Within this model, cultural differences become a viable factor in explaining why African American parents may not seem as involved in their children's education. Their "engagement" with the school community may be limited due to their own educational experiences and the degree to which they feel comfortable and welcomed in the school. Moreover, parental engagement involves a dynamic, interactive relationship rather than the parent as a passive recipient of information; too often, the latter describes the extent of the school's interaction with African American students and their parents as it pertains to academics (Barton et al.; Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hogue, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lightfoot, 2004). Thus, African American parents may be hindered from providing the appropriate academic support for their child on two different fronts-understanding which parental behaviors lend themselves to providing true academic support as well as how to be an effective advocate for their child in an educational setting that does not seem welcoming-both of which become critical if they wish their child to complete some form of postsecondary education.

ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY

To help African American parents counter these roadblocks, academic enrichment programs developed specifically for this population could maximize the advantages of parental involvement while acting as a bridge between the school and African American parents. However, with the accountability via standardized testing associated with No Child Left Behind (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), many schools have added after-school interventions or partnered with community-based programs to increase test scores for struggling students, most of whom are either low-income students or students of color, or

both (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, 2005). Research on these academic enrichment programs suggests that academic gains will not be seen in "drive-by" programs that only interact with the students for a limited time period; instead, programs that build relationships with the students and their families over time will eventually see academic gains (Martin, Martin, Gibson, & Wilkins, 2007; McDonald & Sayger, 1998; Noguera, 2003; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). In addition, enrichment programs whose primary goal is to improve standardized test scores may miss opportunities for long-term impact such as preparing African American students for admission to and graduation from postsecondary institutions.

Commonalities among successful programs include understanding the child's academic and social strengths and weaknesses; being a consistent, positive presence in the child's life; valuing the parent's role in the child's educational attainment; and empowering both the parent and the student as they learn to navigate an educational system that can seem intimidating (Bailey, 2003; Martin et al., 2007; Moore, 2006; Sheely-Moore & Bratton, 2010). Furthermore, successful programs have earned the trust and respect of the educational community and can create an active partnership between the educational community and African American parents. As a result of successful programs, the educational experiences of African American students are enhanced and the likelihood of postsecondary enrollment is increased (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Hock, Pulvers, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2001; Jones & Palmer, 2004; Sheely-Moore & Bratton; Somers et al., 2009; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004).

Acting as a bridge between African American parents and the educational community, EYP represents an enrichment program (academic and social) that uses a developmental and comprehensive approach that works with African American students and their parents. What follows is an overview of EYP's main components, presentation of data that show how the program promotes postsecondary readiness, and practical suggestions for maximizing parental involvement as it relates to the academic success and academic future of students.

EMPOWERED YOUTH PROGRAMS

As its mission, EYP develops and nurtures academic and social excellence in children and adolescents, with an emphasis on African American adolescent males, through its main components including Saturday Academy, academic advisement, and the exam lock-in (Bailey, 2003; Bailey & Paisley, 2004). Developed in 1989 as the Project Gentlemen on the Move (GOTM), it was designed to serve high school African American males who were experiencing difficulty in school and/or at home. However, over the past 10 years the program has evolved into what is now known as Empowered Youth Programs. Currently, EYP includes GOTM for male students and Young Women Scholars for female students, both for preschool through 12th grade and both aimed at students who have demonstrated either a need or a desire to improve their academic and social performance. There also is Parents of Empowered Youth, for parents and guardians of EYP participants.

EYP uses a developmentally and comprehensive approach to working with children and adolescents. Developmentally focused, EYP staff evaluate participants' current level of academic and social performance and, in collaboration with parents, teachers, school counselors, and the students, assess where they should be academically and socially based on their age, home and school situations, academic and social performance, and personal goals. The EYP staff then develop an action plan that provides students with opportunities to develop the necessary skills to reach their academic and social potential. EYP takes a holistic approach to working with program participants. It is a comprehensive program that works with participants on multiple levels, including school, family, and community, and addresses issues at each level that could impact participants' academic and social performance. In an effort to build academic capacity and enhance postsecondary readiness for its participants, EYP incorporates this developmental and comprehensive approach throughout all of its components, the Saturday Academy, academic advisement, and the exam lock-in.

EYP Core Components

Saturday Academy. The Saturday Academy is one of the main components of EYP. Running concurrently with the academic year, the Saturday Academy takes place on the campus of the state flagship university every Saturday during the academic year with a few Saturdays off for staff training and holidays. The goal of the Saturday Academy is to assist participants with mastering the core competencies of academic courses, especially those that serve as prerequisites for advanced-level academic courses. All participants (preschool through 12th grade) are expected to attend at least 85-90% of the academy sessions.

The academy begins with three academic rotations including reading comprehension, vocabulary, and math. In addition, a self-discovery rotation features leadership training coupled with both oral and written communication skills. By intentionally focusing on fundamental academic areas during the Saturday Academy rotations, EYP can help students increase their academic capacity and efficacy, as a solid foundation in reading, vocabulary, and math is critical to their academic success (Education Trust, 2003, 2006). The structure of the rotations varies depending on participants' age and grade level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school), but the content areas remain the same. While elementary and middle school students stay together in one classroom, the high school students rotate in grade-level specific cohorts. The size of the cohorts varies yearly based on the number of students in each grade level. District and state educational data are used to determine the focus of the rotations, which has remained consistent for the past few years. For high school students, the last 90 minutes of the Saturday Academy is dedicated to individual academic tutoring; this represents an important part of the Saturday Academy given that the next component, academic advisement, encourages students to increase academic rigor by taking College Prep and Advanced Placement classes.

Academic advisement. In addition to the academic rotations and tutoring, high school students are assigned an academic advisor as part of the academic advisement program. Advisors are either master's-level school counselors in training or teachers from the local school district. This component of the

program ensures that participants are on track for enrollment in a postsecondary institution regardless of their grade level. Academic advisors are responsible for collecting data such as ACT/PSAT/SAT scores on a yearly basis, school progress reports quarterly, and EYP academic monitoring forms (AMFs). AMFs give teachers the opportunity to provide feedback on the academic and social/behavior performance of program participants. The forms are completed by teachers in the middle of each reporting period so that academic advisors can monitor academic progress more effectively. Feedback from the AMFs also helps academic advisors ensure that students are attending after-school tutoring as well as completing special projects and assignments assigned by their teachers that may require more independent work. Data collected become a part of each participant's academic advisement plan.

Using academic advisement plans as a guide, EYP's academic advisors plan, assess, and monitor academic and social progress, and outline a college path specific to each grade level (see Appendix A for EYP grade-level specific advisement plans). The college path is especially important to program participants who will be first-generation college attendees and may not be aware of the steps that increase chances of postsecondary acceptance and completion. For example, ninth graders should be preparing for the PSAT, 10th graders should take the PSAT as a practice, and then 11th graders should take it with the hopes of qualifying for certain scholarships. Academic advisors meet once a month with their advisement group and then with each advisee on a weekly basis. The advisement plan becomes a checklist for advisees to monitor and chart their academic and social progress with the help of their academic advisor. At the end of the year, EYP parents are invited to student-led conferences in which program participants review their advisement plan with their parents and EYP academic advisor.

Exam lock-in. At the end of each semester, high school participants are required to participate in an exam lock-in (ELI) the weekend prior to final semester exams. This intensive overnight experience begins on Friday afternoon and ends mid-Sunday afternoon at one of the local partnering high schools. The ELI incorporates a multifaceted approach to intensive exam preparation using highly structured individual, small group, and peer tutoring sessions with a combination of approximately 16 sixty-minute study sessions and 8-10 thirty-minute quiz periods over the course of the weekend. While the ELI allows for individual study time, the majority of the study and quiz sessions are held in small groups (three to five per group) and directed by teachers, graduate students, and/or community volunteers who have been trained in and practice culturally relevant strategies (Harvey & Rauch, 1997; Ladson- Billings, 1994; Verharen, 2000). The EYP director and associate director train staff and volunteers at the beginning of each year in culturally relevant strategies as they pertain to classroom management and group work; training ensures continuity from year to year for program participants even though staff and volunteers may change. EYP staff have used the ELI successfully to increase scores on state standardized tests and final exams, but also by establishing the routine of a "study group" environment and to develop and enforce effective study habits that will help students beyond high school.

EYP's Postsecondary Outcomes

The three EYP components (Saturday Academy, academic advisement, and exam lock-ins) work together to increase the likelihood of graduation from high school and postsecondary enrollment. To date, 98% of EYP program participants have graduated from high school and have been accepted to, currently attend, or have graduated from postsecondary institutions. This is in contrast to the 55% local high school graduation rate for African Americans students and the 64% high school graduation rate for the state. According to data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2005), only 19% of African American students from the local school district attend a postsecondary institution. To make postsecondary enrollment a reality for African American students, they must have a competitive grade point average (GPA), have completed some advance college preparation (ACP) and/or advanced placement courses (depending on the schools they are planning to apply to), and have passed all state-mandated graduation tests.

Preliminary findings indicate that the Saturday Academy effectively provides academic support to participants by increasing their overall GPA. After 6 months of consistent participation in EYP, 88% of participants' GPAs increased. As participants continued in the program, results indicated that their GPAs leveled off or in some instances slightly decreased as participants increased the number of advanced college prep (ACP) or advanced placement (AP) courses they enrolled in due to their academic advisement plan to increase academic rigor. The local school district supports three academic levels in its high schools including college prep (CP), advanced college prep (ACP), and advanced placement (AP). Table 1 summarizes the trends in the percentage of EYP students enrolling in CP, ACP, or AP courses in 2002-2007. Enrollments in these academically rigorous courses translate into better academic preparation for postsecondary success and serve as an excellent marker of EYP's impact.

To help EYP participants succeed on state-mandated graduation tests (Georgia High School Graduation Test [GHSGT]) given in March of their junior year, EYP juniors participate in special intensive review sessions held during January and February Saturday Academies. These special sessions have demonstrated success by increasing the number of juniors who pass all five sections of GHSGT. For English and science, a passing score is 200 while for math and social studies a passing score is 500. Scores of 235 in English and science earn students the rating of "Advanced Proficiency" while scores of 535 for math and 525 for social studies earn students a "Pass Plus" rating. For EYP juniors in 2008, 93% passed all five subject areas; 54% of these students' scores placed them in the Advanced Proficiency or Pass Plus category in two or more areas. In 2009, 100% of EYP juniors passed all five areas with 34% of these students again scoring high enough to qualify into Advanced Proficiency or Pass Plus for two or more categories. According to the state report card for the Clarke County School District, only 44% of African American students passed all sections of the GHSGT, with 78% of the entire student population passing all sections. Table 2 provides a summary of the GHSGT scores for EYP participants.

Helping Parents Increase Postsecondary Readiness

Empowered Youth Programs staff understand and promote the importance of parental engagement as it pertains to increasing the postsecondary readiness of African American students. For EYP, this begins with helping parents establish authentic communication with their child's school. Authentic communication means that parents engage in meaningful discussions with teachers and school counselors regarding their child's educational progress. This should include teachers and school counselors asking parents for their input about their child and then listening to the input they provide. In collaboration with parents, this information should be used to develop a plan of action that will help the children reach their academic potential.

Facilitating school-parent communication. EYP staff develop authentic communication between African American parents and the schools by (a) sharing with them information collected from the EYP academic monitoring forms, (b) attending parent- teacher conferences, and (c) facilitating panel discussions involving school counselors and administrators at several Parents of Empowered Youth (PEY) monthly parent meetings. EYP advisors use the consistent and specific feedback from the AMFs to help parents develop an understanding of which student behaviors are linked to academic success and how to encourage those behaviors. Academic advisors meet with parents at monthly parent meetings to discuss AMFs, with students in attendance, as they view student input as integral to taking ownership of their own learning. Before ending the meeting, contractual parent-child agreements concerning their academic goals are developed. Moreover, if the child's academic progress suddenly changes, then parents are notified by the academic advisor immediately and steps can be taken to correct the situation instead of waiting weeks later for a progress report from the school. If parents are unable to attend a monthly meeting, academic advisors contact them either by phone or e-mail.

To alleviate feelings of mistrust between the educational community and African American parents, EYP staff (usually the director or associate director) attend parent-teacher conferences upon request. Providing an advocate who is familiar with the school environment, including its politics, helps PEY members feel more confident and less intimidated during these conferences as well as aids in the development of authentic communication between school personnel and parents and minimizes the chances of heated debates. This strategy also has led to the development of mutual respect among parents, teachers, school counselors, administrators, and EYP staff. These authentic interactions usually result in positive outcomes. On occasion, when the outcomes are not as positive, the director and/or associate director meets with the parent to discuss next steps. Next steps may include separate meetings with school administrators or meeting with the superintendent or members of the school board.

Providing parent education and advisement. EYP staff also assist African American parents in understanding how to become an academic advocate for their child. First and foremost, the staff constantly reinforce the importance of academic rigor rather than grades as the ultimate goal at each of the monthly parent meetings. They share local, state, and national academic achievement data for African American students during the monthly meetings. This is done so that parents are able to visualize exactly what the achievement and opportunity gaps look like and the potential implications this

could have for their children's future earning potential. The achievement gap is always discussed in conjunction with the importance of academic rigor.

Parents also are provided with information related to local and state graduation requirements, postsecondary admissions requirements, financial aid, scholarships, including the types of scholarships that are available, how to apply for them, what they can be used for, and other pertinent information that EYP parents find useful. Most parent meetings are facilitated by the director; however, each semester EYP staff develop and present workshops for parents. Topics range from "How to say no to your children" to "How not to give into peer pressure" to "How to keep your kids safe on the Internet." During these meetings, parents have opportunities for informal discussions to share strategies (related to the topic of the meeting) that work for them. One of the most popular workshops was led by a parent; the title of her workshop was "Who's using all the toothpaste and toilet paper? What moms can do to stop it!"

At the start of each academic year, the associate director provides "academic advisement" for parents. During the parent advisement session, parents participate in a backward walk from college acceptance to necessary "academic steps" for each grade level—from the student's senior year in high school all the way back to elementary school. It is important that African American parents be aware of the intentional practices that students should engage in at each grade level that could potentially lead to college enrollment. Discussion topics include the advantages of completing advanced courses, early enrollment in a foreign language, after-school tutoring opportunities, participation in school service organizations, the importance of community service, and the benefits of being active student leaders.

Another primary goal of EYP staff includes helping parents learn about constructs such as academic motivation and specific parental behaviors that enhance or hinder their child's academic performance. Again, the monthly EYP parent meetings provide a forum for parents to learn about the different types of motivation and to share successful and unsuccessful strategies that they have used in attempts to enhance their child's motivation to learn. Research relative to motivating students to learn is presented so that parents who have no research knowledge or experience can readily understand the information. By affording parents access to current information and then providing them the opportunity to either affirm current parental behaviors or see the need for change, EYP equips them with tools to help their children reach their academic potential.

While we have offered several examples of a school-family-community partnership that has and continues to enhance outcomes for African American students, below are recommendations specifically for school counselors related to engaging African American parents in the educational experiences of their children both in their school and in partnership with appropriate community-based organizations such as academic enrichment programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

School counselors are well positioned to help African American parents become more engaged in the educational process of their children. To do so, school counselors should first consider how they could create a welcoming environment that says *gWe value your input and gI want to do whatfs best for your child.h* If they can accomplish this, African American parents may feel less intimidated by the school environment and the counseling process itself. Before meeting with parents, school counselors should give serious thought to the question *gHow can I create a climate that says you and your child are important?h* Creating a welcoming environment would lessen the possibility of parents feeling defensive when they meet to discuss their childfs academic progress. Further, school counselors should assist parents in understanding the importance of being actively engaged in their childfs educational experience. To this end, school counselors should devise meaningful ways of engaging African American parents as a part of the school community with the understanding that some parents of African American and poor students may find it difficult to fit school involvement into their already overwhelmed schedules; the typical parent-teacher organizations may not work for these parents.

To create a welcoming environment, school counselors should consistently reflect on their beliefs about parents from different cultures to minimize the impact of misconceptions. They should understand and believe that African American parents care as much about their children as parents from other cultural groups care about theirs and that no two African American parents are alike; they have different ideas about what works for their children. Also, school counselors should be sensitive to the possibility that some African American parents may have had negative school experiences when they were students, and that these experiences may impact how or if they will interact with the school. To help counter previous negative experiences, school counselors should help facilitate authentic relationships between African American parents and their childrenfs teachers.

School counselors are also in a position to help African American parents partner with partnership programs such as academic enrichment programs. Following are recommendations specific to this goal:

- * Consider running focus groups for students of color to discover their academic and personal interests as well as academic and personal accomplishments.
- * Use the data collected from the focus groups to develop a database containing academic and social information for students of color to ensure appropriate referrals to external programs.
- * Research local and state programs and, when possible, contact local chapters of African American Greek organizations and churches.
- * Visit existing community-based programs to gain personal knowledge of ghow they do what they doh and ask for data related to educational outcomes for their participants.
- * Develop a website or link from your schoolfs website that showcases academic enrichment programs available in your area.

* If no programs exist, consider contacting the local chapters of African American Greek organizations and churches to see if they would partner with the school to start a program.

CONCLUSION

African American students have made significant gains in postsecondary enrollment and completion since the early 1990s. Completing an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree allows African Americans to enter either the research, business, medical, or educational fields to maximize their earning potential (Cook & Codova, 2007; Edmonds & McDonough, 2006). Even more important is what they bring to these fields with their unique perspectives and life experiences. If celebrated, this diversity becomes a strength when new insights are developed into new ideas that can help communities overcome current challenges. To increase the likelihood of new perspectives from different voices, the percentage of African American students who are prepared to complete a postsecondary education must be increased.

Currently, only 41% of African Americans graduating from high school continue their education (Cook & Codova, 2007; Edmonds & McDonough, 2006); within the other 59%, there exist individuals whose energy and creativity could produce solutions to current problems. Thus, it becomes the responsibility of the educational community to develop and nurture the academic and social potential of all students, especially African Americans. To accomplish this, schools need to engage African American parents in the educational experiences of their children. This involves partnering with academic enrichment programs, such as Empowered Youth Programs, so that African American students feel supported by their parents, the school, and the community at large as they strive to reach their academic and social potential.

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Appendix A:

Empowered Youth Programs Grade-Level Specific Advisement Plans

Academic Advisement Plan for 9th Graders:

* Review CRCT scores to assess academic strengths and weaknesses.

- * Set academic and behavior goals for each semester.
- * Attend academic tutoring at their home school with the goal of passing all eight classes.
- * Review academic monitoring forms and provide feedback to participants.
- * Begin PSAT preparation.
- * Complete a career assessment.
- * Begin the college search related to career assessment results.
- * Complete a 6-year plan that includes a 4-year academic schedule for high school and the first 2 years for college.
- * Ensure that students move up from CP to ACP or AP classes when appropriate for the 10th-grade schedule.

Academic Advisement Plan for 10th Graders:

- * Review the ninth-grade transcript to assess academic strengths and weaknesses.
- * Set academic and behavior goals for each semester.
- * Encourage participation in school or community organizations dedicated to service.
- * Attend academic tutoring at their home school with the goal of passing all eight classes.
- * Review academic monitoring forms and provide feedback to participants.
- * Continue PSAT preparation; ensure that students complete the PSAT in the fall as sophomores.
- * Review PSAT scores; assess for academic strengths and weaknesses.
- * Continue the college search related to career assessment results.
- * Review the 6-year plan that includes the 4-year academic schedule for high school and the first 2 years for college.
- * Ensure that students move up from CP to ACP or AP classes when appropriate for the 11th-grade schedule.
- * Search and apply for any academic-related summer opportunities.

Academic Advisement Plan for 11th Graders:

- * Review the 10th-grade transcript to assess academic strengths and weaknesses.

- * Set academic and behavior goals for each semester.
- * Encourage participation in school or community organizations dedicated to service.
- * Attend academic tutoring at their home school with the goal of passing all eight classes.
- * Review academic monitoring forms and provide feedback to participants.
- * Continue PSAT/SAT preparation; ensure that students complete the PSAT in the fall as juniors.
- * Review PSAT scores; assess for academic strengths and weaknesses.
- * Complete a second career assessment to see if there have been any changes.
- * Continue the college search related to career assessment results.
- * Review the 6-year plan that includes the 4-year academic schedule for high school and the first 2 years for college.
- * Ensure that students move up from CP to ACP or AP classes when appropriate for the 12th-grade schedule.
- * Search and apply for any academic-related summer opportunities.

Academic Advisement Plan for 12th Graders:

- * Review the 11th-grade transcript to assess academic strengths and weaknesses.
- * Set academic and behavior goals for each semester.
- * Encourage participation in school or community organizations dedicated to service.
- * Attend academic tutoring at their home school with the goal of passing all eight classes.
- * Review academic monitoring forms and provide feedback to participants.
- * Continue SAT preparation.
- * Outline a schedule for taking the SAT in late summer, early fall, and late fall, if necessary.
- * Review SAT scores; assess for academic strengths and weaknesses.
- * Narrow the college search to their top three related to career assessment results, GPA, and SAT scores.
- * Apply to their top three choices for college.

- * Review the 6-year plan that includes the 4-year academic schedule for high school and the first 2 years for college.
- * Search and apply for scholarships.
- * Review survival tips for their freshman year in college.

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