

LEAN INTO THE WIND:

EMERGING THEMES AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AAMA 2.0



Oakland Unified School District //
Office of African American Male Achievement //



OAKLAND UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT
Community Schools, Thriving Students



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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 continues to endure...

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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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) leadership with findings from the planning process currently underway for the District's Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA). 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 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. Other key stakeholders were identified by AAMA leadership and then grouped by categories: funders, program instructors, and OUSD faculty and staff. The interviews included participation from the central administration leadership including the former superintendent Tony Smith, as well as MDP instructors, funders, students, parents, and community partners. (See the appendix for the full list of stakeholders). Each interview was conducted confidentially. Persons quoted by name in this document provided their consent to be identified.

This document is comprised of the following sections: Emerging Themes and Recommendations from Key Stakeholders, Student Voices, Parent

Perspectives and an Appendix that includes a list of key stakeholders and a key informant conversation guide.

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.”*

Emerging Themes and Recommendations

Continuing to Foster a Supportive Organizational Culture

There is a widely-held belief by those we interviewed that a primary function of AAMA is to trumpet the fact that African American students are valuable assets to their families, our city, and the nation; that they are worthy of educating and worthy of requiring special nurturing, understanding, care, love, and respect. That message has been shared with other city leaders, but too often they have not been held accountable for their role in making progress in this arena.

AAMA has helped the OUSD culture shift, to a modest degree, how African American students are viewed by teachers and administrators. Many want AAMA to be a lot of diverse things for a lot of diverse reasons, but this central focus on viewing Black male students as valuable assets has contributed to changing the way some teachers and administrators view Black male students.

Not insignificantly, the work of the Office has changed the way students who have participated in MDP classes view themselves. Though far from being a District-wide phenomena, there are pockets of transformation which represent bright spots in what continues to be an environment that is by and large, hostile to Black male students, inattentive to their needs, and disparaging of their aspirations (for further information on this trend, see AAMA's report, *The Black Sonrise*).

Recommendations:

1. Translate the lessons learned by AAMA, from its programmatic work to policy conversations and adoptions by the Board, to signal focus and attention on the needs of African American students in the District, even as the needs of other underserved students are being addressed.
2. Ensure that the focus on AAMA is included in the updating of the current strategic plan, and help staff understand how the next phase of implementation will happen.
3. Craft a consistent public message from the current Superintendent, based on the “passing of the baton” from Tony Smith, which signals ownership of the next phase of the work. Make sure it is focused on even more robust internal work and the engagement of a broader set of public players to change the culture of not only the District, but other public and community entities which touch the lives of African American males. Rebrand the work to the extent necessary to make it more effective.
4. Synchronize district goals with AAMA goals and explicitly connect OUSD goals with AAMA as a means of reaching said goals. For example, the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) seeks to target African American students to decrease the achievement gap and increase student engagement. AAMA should be seen as an integral part of OUSD's plan to reach these goals and execute the LCAP. This should also be reflected in external and internal communications.
5. Additionally, AAMA funders have expressed the importance of the new Superintendent and the school board explicitly naming the growth and sustainability of AAMA as a priority. One funder shared, “Being able to reaffirm that AAMA is still a priority is really important from a funder's perspective. If the Superintendent says this is not a big priority, AAMA will lose funders.” Because AAMA's sustainability and overall effectiveness is tied to its ability to increase its capacity and continue to attract funders, it is in the best interest of African American male students in OUSD for AAMA to be elevated as a priority by district leadership.

Capacity, Positionality, and Authority of AAMA in the OUSD Structure

There has been considerable debate in circles close to AAMA about where the Office should reside in the OUSD organizational structure to ensure maximum efficiency, authority, and impact. Most who were in a position to analyze the pros and cons of the issue believe that AAMA has performed well as a promoter of strong Social Emotional Learning interventions for African American students. Many believe that over the last two years, the strengthening and uniformity of the curricular offerings in terms of the recruitment of credentialed MDP instructors and the work of making the offerings A-G compliant have been important, meaningful developments. Moving AAMA to the teaching, curriculum, and instructional “side of the house” has generally been greeted with support.

When I first heard about AAMA I thought it was powerful that AAMA reported directly to the superintendent because it elevated the importance of the work and explicitly named race and racism in this institution as the key thing to solve.

-An OUSD administrator

What emerged from our interviews most strongly was the need to have AAMA continue to be widely and robustly supported by the current Superintendent in external as well as internal communications with stakeholders, supporters, detractors, funders, and others. “Keep shining the light” on the needs of Black boys to make the case for what needs to happen for all children of color in OUSD. It is the “test case” for making **targeted universalism actionable**.

Several people we talked with raised important concerns about sustainability. Many asked, “How do we make AAMA ‘transition-proof’ with an ongoing, evolving mission and role across

changes in leadership, financial resources, and new district priorities?” Most suggested that the AAMA work, like emerging work for other students of color, become a part of the District’s “DNA” in that it must be consistently connected back to the fundamental mission of the District, not a supplemental, add-on effort.

Recommendations:

1. Create an OUSD Office of Equity (as distinguished from an Office of Multi-Cultural Education), which focuses on creating a better understanding of the role of structuralized racism in the OUSD and the nation writ-large and how to create equity-informed interventions for all students. The Office of Equity would be the home for AAMA and AAMA would serve as a leader to help facilitate other efforts defined by race, gender, and/or other relevant student differences; it would create a venue for learning about what works; and it would develop system-wide measures for impact in addition to population disparity measures for success. For example, impact should be measured by indicia that include the numbers of teachers certified in culturally-proficient classroom practice; the implementation of non-punitive restorative justice practices at scale; the enhanced student-based funding formulas which shift resources in equitable (as opposed to equal) ways; the numbers of African American boys who successfully find slots in Advanced Placement courses and are provided supports to be successful; as well as a range of other measures which could be developed.
2. Stakeholders expressed the need for increased accountability to ensure that the goals of AAMA and the principles of MDP are being embedded as norms of school culture at each school site. In the past, this role has largely fallen on the shoulders of Christopher P. Chatmon and his

team. One of the roles of the Office of Equity would be to ensure that school administrators, the Chief of Schools, and the Superintendent are held accountable for proactively addressing the experience and performance of Black boys. Specifically, Principals would need to regularly evaluate and communicate how their Black boys are performing and what professional development their teachers are receiving to be able to more effectively engage them. (The District's School Quality Review (SQR) process is currently working on this aspect of the effort.) Principals would also be asked to point to indicators that demonstrate that AAMA and MDP principles are being embedded as norms of school culture.

3. Build and support the existing staffing capacity of the Office of AAMA to increase its responsiveness to supporting, training, and evaluating MDP instructors; resource development; parent engagement liaisons; and communications strategy implementation. Currently, the Office appears to most outsiders to be understaffed. The Executive Director, Christopher P. Chatmon, is an energetic leader who needs more staff resources to do the job he has been asked to do. He has been a great ambassador for the Office. His position should be viewed and communicated as a "special project" of the Office of the Superintendent, even as it resides in the Chief Academic Officer's division. That would signal the level of importance that the current superintendent places on the work of AAMA. And it would also help Chatmon gain traction with Principals, something many stakeholders think is critical to AAMA's integration into schools and classroom instruction.

Professional Development and Supports

There is a shared and often repeated concern about how teachers who are not part of the MDP program build their skills to better serve African American students. "Are the skills of MDP instructors transferable and, if so, how?" is the

question that was raised by several interviewees. What can principals do to engage and encourage better teaching practice when it comes to African American male students?

Lack of racial diversity, and the assumed cultural proficiency that comes with it, is a challenge for school site staff working with African American students. While the Social Emotional Learning related aspects of MDP performance is strong, there has been a concern about the content-specific teaching skills of the MDP instructors.

Recommendations:

1. Provide continuous implicit bias training for both school site employees and central office staff as part of a required professional development offering. The importance of race-informed trainings cannot be overstated, as the racial slights/micro-aggressions that Black students face in school are one of the primary barriers to a positive school climate. District leadership should prioritize this training as a critical element of providing effective instruction to all students of color, but specifically to African American students. The communication strategy around implicit bias training should also receive serious consideration because its implementation must be framed as a necessary investment in teachers as a part of a greater, district-wide commitment to quality instruction.
2. Focus on site-based professional development, led by principals, who can engage the lessons we are learning from AAMA with regard to increased attendance, increased engagement, and reduced behavior challenges on school sites.
3. Enhance current professional development opportunities for MDP teachers to strengthen their teaching practice around core skills of literacy and numeracy.

MDP's System of Supports for Students— Impact and Scale

The most often identified dynamic here is the need to balance attention paid to interventions aimed at addressing the disrespect of and systematic trauma experienced by Black male students (grounded in identity development, culturally-based healing and social emotional learning) with college readiness and the related academic skills required to get them there. *“Is AAMA and the work we’re trying to do more around culture, relationship, supports, and creating the conditions for learning or should it be more embedded in the practices of teaching and learning?”* There is an obvious recognition of the fact that addressing both sets of needs in students is non-negotiable. How to strike the balance and do it for more students is the recognized challenge. *“While serving approximately 650 students is commendable, what can we do for the vast majority (the remaining 5,800 Black male students) given our current resources?”*

MDP instructors often serve as “mentor-advocates” for students, a role which has gradually become recognized as part of the formal job description. It is effective in many cases to mitigate the bias, fear, and negative perceptions that other school staff have of African American boys. It is also the source of resentment by those same school site staff that feel MDP instructors “overstep” their authority with regard to what occurs in classrooms other than their own.

MDP has done a great job of making corrections along the way in terms of creating a sense of collective fate, racial identity, and peer-based supports for the boys who participate in the program. The shift in approach from, “Send us your hardest-to-serve boys,” to creating a mix of students who are performing at low, moderate, and high levels was a significant one that has proven effective.

One of the common questions emerging from key stakeholders was: *How can the AAMA and*

MDP target students earlier in their development?

Those who have witnessed the positive impact that the MDP can have on both the self esteem and academic engagement of young men in their adolescent years want to see the work begin much earlier. MDP students agree, saying, “The earlier the better.” They expressed that sentiment because today’s youth are exposed to so much negativity in popular culture, their communities, and from their peers so early in their development that the positive influence of the MDP is needed even earlier in order to counter the negative images and messages they internalize.

Kids these days are being born into a corrupt society. There’s not a lot of people putting positivity into their minds so they feel like they’re not going to grow up to be anything. -An MDP student

The MDP currently serves eight high schools and seven middle schools, but only two elementary schools. There is a wealth of research on the correlation between a student’s reading level at the third grade and the likelihood of both future academic success and incarceration. In OUSD and nationwide, the achievement gap is readily apparent for African American boys as early as Kindergarten to third grade. It is unrealistic to expect MDP classes to significantly raise the literacy levels of MDP students if they are not reaching the students until their teenage years. The exposure to culturally-relevant curriculum and reading material, the focus on character building and social and emotional development, and the relationship with the MDP instructor are all things that current MDP students cherish, but they are just as important and valuable in early education. If the OUSD is serious about narrowing its achievement gap, disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline, and expanding opportunities for African American boys district-wide, the AAMA’s capacity must be expanded so that the MDP can be offered in early education.

Recommendations

1. Each MDP site needs at least three different skill sets and personnel represented: (a) An MDP instructor who serves as teacher-mentor-advocate; (b) a “well-being specialist” to deal with trauma and healing of the students; and (c) a parent liaison to work directly with the MDP students’ parents.
2. Create and implement “individualized wellness and achievement plans” for MDP students, which can be updated at key transition moments in their scholastic careers. These plans would be co-created by students, parents, teachers, health care providers, social workers, and others who have connections to these students.
3. Create a more robust and consistent way to connect MDP students to internships, career exposure, and part-time jobs that are aligned with their long-term personal goals.
4. Develop a database of local African American male professionals from a diverse range of careers and industries who may be interested in mentoring MDP students, providing opportunities for them to have exposure to their respective fields, or speaking to MDP classes about their career paths. For example, an MDP internship program and summer job placement initiative could set students on their paths to community service, college, and meaningful employment.
5. Tap into networks of African American coders, programmers, health-care, and tech industry workers to expose MDP students to rapidly growing industries in which African American men are vastly underrepresented. Partner with Linked Learning or encourage their recruitment of African American professionals, especially for Career Pathways that do not currently draw much interest from African American students.
6. Call on organizations like Kaiser Permanente and The Brotherhood of the Elders Network who have an abundance of African American male professionals to answer the call

for mentorship and share their time and knowledge with MDP students.

7. Seek the funding, sponsorships, or partnerships necessary to organize and lead a college tour and/or historically Black college tour for MDP students. Students and principals have specifically mentioned this as an initiative that would garner a lot of interest. Several MDP students mentioned that it wasn’t until their exposure to MDP that they felt college was attainable or realistic for them. For some students, AAMA staff and MDP instructors may be the only adults in their lives who have the ability or capacity to guide them through a college tour. Consider offering the tour as a reward for the highest achieving or most improved MDP high school students until the program can be expanded to include all students.

Identifying and Using Data Effectively

The determination of baseline data, the use of it to define meaningful impact, and the publicizing of the work are all critical needs of the AAMA effort. From funders to community allies, several interviewees expressed support for the work of the Office while expressing the need for stronger, more robust data sets, to be used over time, to help sustain the political will for this race-gender specific work.

Recommendations:

1. Create an Equity Data Dashboard by working with the District’s data unit and external intermediaries like Urban Strategies Council and PolicyLink to develop current baseline data on equity practice (see below for more detail) and population measures which can be useful for tracking progress in real time. Create up to eight key outcomes and address them with relentless focus.
2. Incorporate the data dashboard into public communications in meaningful ways to engage the public discourse on equity issues and approaches to race/equity informed work.

3. Produce more quantitative data, as most of AAMA's data production is perceived to be qualitative in nature.
4. Regularly conduct comprehensive evaluations of MDP student attendance, academic progress, and involvement in disciplinary action. Conduct pre/post evaluations of non-MDP teachers' perception of the MDP and its impact on students and school climate. School administrators should complete similar evaluations as non-MDP teachers.
5. Conduct more thorough family/parent evaluations of the impact that the MDP has on their children both at school and at home. Provide families with data on the progress of their children in MDP classes.
6. Continue to conduct and effectively communicate data that compares AAMA student progress to non-AAMA students as well as to district- and state-wide averages.
7. Widely publicize favorable data that demonstrates AAMA's positive impact on MDP students, their families, and the school climate while communicating challenges and refining the program for greater impact.
8. Critical stakeholders expressed that there should be statistical evidence that targeted universalism is working. How OUSD measures the positive impact that AAMA is having on non-AAMA students and school climate deserves careful thought. Sooner than later, that impact will need to be measured and that data will need to be shared in order to increase AAMA's sustainability and system-wide buy-in.

Design and Execute a Coherent Communications Strategy

AAMA still requires high visibility, nurturing, and care from the Superintendent and Board in order to sustain its work over time. Several stakeholders suggested that more regular and systematic reporting of the impacts on and the narratives of the boys who the program serves. It is especially important that this be shared with the broader public, elected officials, and funders. (There is still

a need for elected officials in city venues to accept accountability for the neighborhood context for educating Black boys. The ecosystem of long-term neglect; the deterioration of systems; and the lack of community-wide supports, protections, and opportunities add to the challenges facing this segment of the City's population.)

Some stakeholders advised AAMA to consider fewer big events and more concerted communications, because the coordination of big events can be a drain on the Office's labor and resources. Several suggested that school sites be encouraged to take on a bigger role in the coordination of events and programs that target Black students and families because it will make it easier to garner parent participation. *"The vast majority of parents experience school in a very localized way. So I actually think we miss a lot of parents because everything AAMA does is central."* -An OUSD staff person

The MDP, seemingly because of its inclusion of social, emotional, and cultural pedagogy, has dealt with the perception or label that it is not strongly rooted in academics. The term "fluffy" has been used to describe the curriculum or third party critiques of the curriculum more than once.

Why is it that the African American male work is seen by many people as fluffier as opposed to foundational to learning? Why is it that AAMA is seen as 'cultural' but the work of the new English Learner Office is considered 'academic?' -An OUSD staff person

A better understanding of the current MDP curriculum would help answer these questions.

The new OUSD structure has AAMA reporting to the Chief Academic Officer, which will lead to the MDP being more strongly rooted in academics. However, AAMA is in need of an effective communication strategy that explains the curriculum and validates its academic rigor.

Parent engagement as a communications strategy was raised by several stakeholders as part of an effective campaign to gain and sustain more public support. Virtually all stakeholders agreed that engaging parents at the high school level is challenging if the parents have not previously been involved in their child's school or have not consistently interacted with their child's teachers. The focus on parental engagement must begin earlier in the child's schooling to see the ideal level of parental involvement at the high school level.

It's a lot easier to engage parents of elementary and middle school students. Once your kids are in high school, there is that real push-pull. They need guidance but they're pushing you away. 'We don't want you coming to school, Mom. You're going to embarrass me.' -An OUSD administrator

To the extent that it has the capacity, AAMA should coordinate a systematic approach to engaging Black families beginning in elementary school.

Recommendations:

1. AAMA in partnership with the District's communications office and/or external communications strategy consultants, should develop and implement a strategy that guides messaging, events, public relations, and other modes of sharing information.
2. Develop and implement a data dashboard that is a consistent portal for information to be shared on a regular basis. This would be particularly useful to funders as some have said that they would like to receive more regular communication and reporting of the progress of the MDP with supporting data. Some funders have also expressed that they would appreciate having a conversation with AAMA leadership about the best methods of communicating relevant information.

Strengthen and Expand Parent Engagement

This arena of the Office's work remains a critical and an underdeveloped aspect of the work of

AAMA. District staff is currently working with limited resources to create a more meaningful engagement approach with parents. Several stakeholders supported the idea of a more concerted, well-financed effort to educate and organize Black parents to help them understand their role in partnering with teachers and others to support their children. This is in addition to becoming active agents in terms of the advocacy that their children need. This aspect of AAMA's work is severely underfunded and understaffed, making the following recommendations difficult to implement without a significant increase in the office's personnel capacity.

Recommendations:

1. Seek additional funding specific to this need for on-going parent education and engagement to help parents become stronger supporters of their own child's education, knowing what they should expect from the classroom teacher and principal, and gradually moving toward becoming an advocate for "other people's children."
2. Work with the Black Organizing Project, the Brotherhood of Elders Network, and others to create a stronger approach in this regard.
3. Bolster the District's in-house staff and create a more robust engagement strategy that includes (but goes beyond) summits, conferences, and events to more targeted parent-engagement work.
4. Consider alternative methods of engaging parents who are not able to be physically present at school or at school events. Oakland Technical High School found its tele-seminars to be effective for parental engagement because many parents who weren't able to attend programs on campus had the opportunity to dial in and participate by phone.
5. Conduct more thorough family/parent evaluations of the impact that MDP has on their children, both at school and at home.
6. Provide families with data on the progress of their child(ren) and engage them in discussions

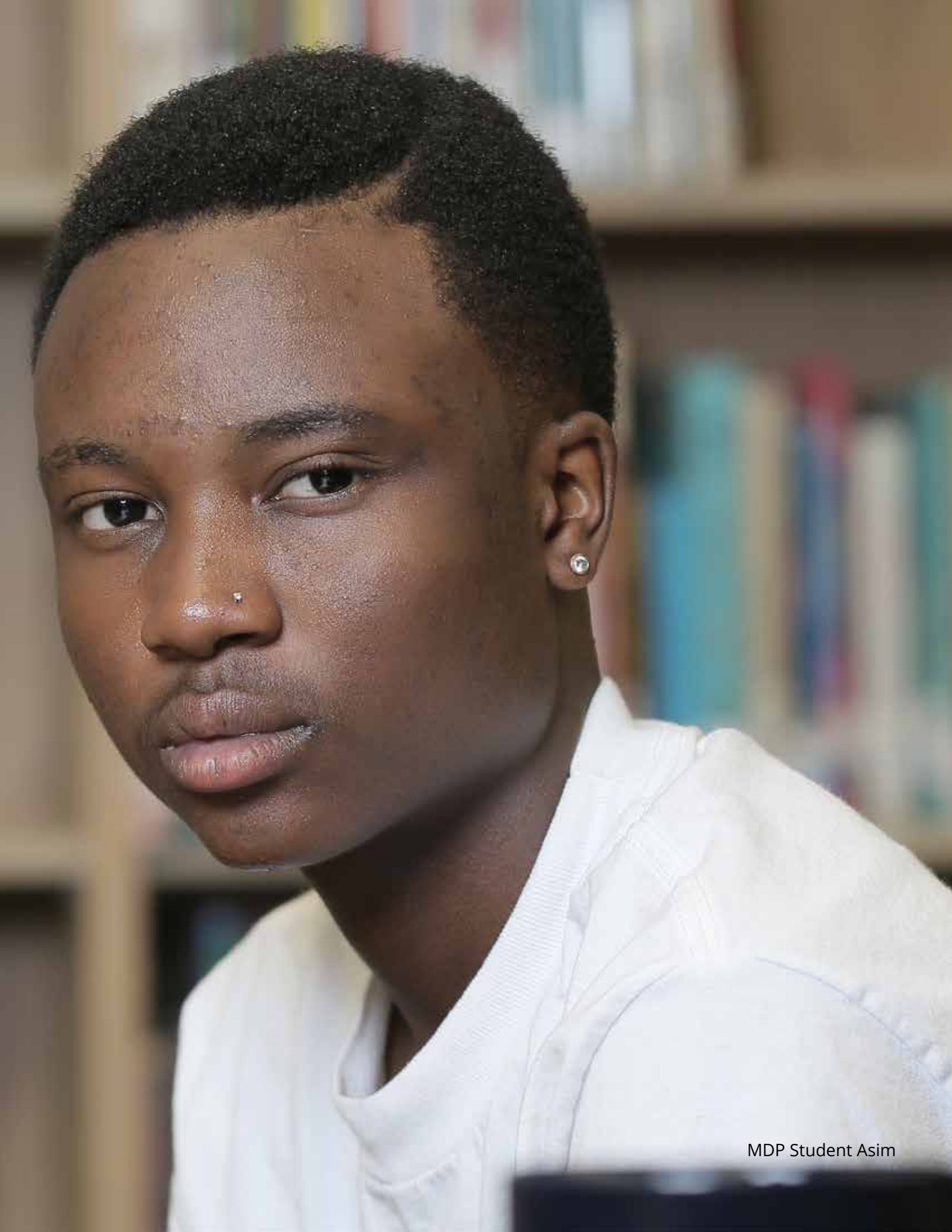
about how they can support their children's improvement where needed.

7. Keep track of the frequency of interaction with each MDP parent and compare that to the progress and performance of their child.
8. Involve parents in creating individual academic plans for students.
9. Develop a parent curriculum that provides parents with MDP lessons and reading material as well as guidance and resources for navigating the OUSD. "We have to teach parents that they can be advocates without being adversarial."
10. Continue to provide parents with opportunities to feel proud of their children. The AAMA has done a good job of this through recognizing and awarding student achievement.
11. If the African American Honor Roll is the most well-attended event by Black parents, consider ways to maximize the potential of that event as an opportunity for parent engagement and dissemination of important information.
12. Consider ways that Registration and Back to School Night can be better utilized to engage parents in meaningful discussion about their role in supporting their children through MDP. These events seem to attract the highest number of parents.
13. Conduct parent evaluations to get a better understanding of how parents want to be and are able to be engaged. Use these evaluations to inform the approach to parental engagement moving forward.
14. Continue to seek funding that allows AAMA to incentivize parent participation at school and encourages parents to take leadership roles in the recruitment of other parents. The incentive-based approach has proven to be an effective and "realistic" way to get parents to be present and involved.
15. Develop a family and community engagement team within AAMA who act as a liaison between families and schools. The family and community engagement team is responsible for communicating feedback from

families to AAMA staff, who in turn regularly communicates that feedback to teachers and principals. The AAMA staff keeps the family and community engagement team abreast of what is happening in MDP classrooms and in schools so they can relay that information back to families.

**“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



MDP Student Asim

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.

After food and an introductory icebreaker, we began the focus group by asking the students questions about their experience in the MDP class. Across the board, students expressed that the program was "life changing." The group identified the following benefits of participating in the MDP class.

"I learned to think before I speak."

Through this program, I realized, I'm fine with being who I am."

"MDP class showed me that people really do care."

"It made me a better student."

Additionally students report that the MDP class raised their consciousness of racism and improved their race esteem and positive self-identity. As one student put it, the class *"...helped me realize the challenges that African Americans face in this society."*

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.

Even though I knew about slavery. Learning more details about it like how we were really treated and how people not the same color as us got treated way better than we did. And learning some of the assassinations of African American leaders. It was hard because some of it we don't even learn in our history classes. -An MDP student

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.



Parental Perspectives

AAMA leadership understands the importance of parent involvement as it relates to student achievement and is fully committed to engaging parents in the MDP. The following section provides insight into parent perspectives of the AAMA programs.

AAMA began its Manhood Development classes by working with high school students in grades 9–12. Over time, the program has expanded to now include middle school and elementary school. For much of the program’s history, the focus has been on high school students. High school age students are moving through life at a particularly interesting moment in their development. On one hand, high school students are expected to be more responsible and independent than a young child. On the other hand, they’re not allowed to be totally independent and responsible. For example, our society sees teens as responsible enough to drive a car at 65 miles per hour, but we don’t see them as responsible enough to vote in elections.

This seemingly hypocritical treatment of teenagers is often reinforced in the home environment and can lead to conflict between parents and their teenage children. At times this conflict plays out with the teen becoming “distant” and less communicative with parents. The routine question parents ask their children, “How was school today?” and their child’s textbook answer, “Fine,” illustrates this point. All this to say that for many parents, whether their child is in an MDP class or not, relationship-building can be challenging during a child’s teenage years.

One of the less than obvious ways MDP class supports student success is by providing spaces and opportunities for parents and their children to repair, strengthen, or change the dynamics in their relationship. Speaking to the question of, “How did out of class experiences impact your child?” One parent had this to say,

Before this class, I had a big issue with my child going on school trips. But being that this was a trip with Jahi (an MDP class instructor) I let him go and it’s helped me become more open. The experience helped me and him because I was able to be more comfortable and give him more freedom and he was able to experience new things at school and at home.

Other parents cite the MDP class in general with helping improve household/family dynamics. When asked how the class has affected family dynamics, one parent said, “...he’s been getting better at chores and responsibilities. He’s been stepping up trying to help out around the house... I don’t have to tell him to do chores anymore.”

When asked what has been the source of this change or the most effective aspect of the program, parents echoed what students said during the focus group: the relationship that students build with their MDP class instructor is life-changing and transformative. Many students in the OUSD have never had a Black teacher, much less a Black male teacher. The importance of MDP instructors being Black men was highlighted by parents as well as students. “Jahi was the first male teacher he had. And he was the first Black teacher my son had. He was really juiced when he got Baba Jahi because he had a teacher who looked like him.”

To be clear, the identity of the MDP class instructor is important to students and their parents. However, the way MDP class instructors support students at school, outside school, and at home is the key factor to the program’s success. MDP instructors build deep bonds with their students

because they advocate for the child in each area of his school life.

One of the most influential areas where MDP instructors intervene and advocate on behalf of students is in those moments where a student has a conflict with another teacher. Without the presence of an adult ally, the power dynamics in a conflict between a student and a teacher will almost always favor the teacher whether that teacher is right or wrong. With the presence of an MDP instructor as an advocate the conflict is more likely to be mediated with balance and restorative justice.

Take the following story for example.

David participates in the MDP class and is a ninth grade student at McClymonds High School. He is intelligent, articulate, and outgoing. He plays football and is regularly one of the highest achieving students in his grade. David is also very social and talkative in class, which leads to conflict between him and some of his teachers. For a couple of weeks, David complained to his MDP instructor that his History teacher didn't like him and that he thought he was being treated unfairly as a result.

One day David came to class visibly upset. During check-ins (a routine practice where students share how their day has been) he commented that he hated his history teacher and that she wasn't fair. After class ended, David's MDP instructor talked with him and offered to visit the teacher with David to mediate the conflict after school.

Once school ended David and his MDP instructor visited his History class teacher. The MDP instructor laid out the situation and asked the teacher to share her perspective. The teacher disagreed that she wasn't fair to David. She

expressed that she thought David was a good student but talked too much in class and could be disrespectful at times. David acknowledged he talked too much and agreed to work on being less disruptive in class. He pointed out a time where he felt he was treated unfairly and wasn't allowed to turn in an assignment before he got dismissed from class, which meant that the assignment was turned in late and he didn't get credit for it. David's MDP instructor asked the History teacher if she would make an exception this time and allow David to receive full credit for his assignment. The teacher agreed and David thanked her. The conflict, at least for the time being, had been resolved.

Stories like this are ubiquitous in the MDP and illustrate the power and authenticity that lies at the core of the relationship that program instructors build with their students. However, it should be noted, although parents and students say that this strategy of having MDP instructors advocate for students is one of the most effective parts of the program, MDP instructors report that this sometimes causes tension between them and other teachers.

The relationship between MDP class instructors and their students begins in the classroom on the first day of school. It is reinforced and solidified through out-of-class experiences and it carries over into family and community dynamics.

Through the MDP classes, AAMA is having a deep and long lasting impact in the lives of African American boys, young men, their families, and the larger community. MDP students and parents speak openly and honestly about the importance of having a positive relationship with an African American male teacher. The relationship is cultivated inside and outside of the classroom when MDP lead instructors show up as advocates

for the social, emotional, and academic well being of students. This happens in dynamic ways that are functions of the style of each individual instructor. One instructor may go as far as helping a parent locate an absent child at 2am. Another instructor may simply offer bus fare to a student with no judgment or show of favoritism. Regardless of the approach, it is clear that the intentional acts of advocacy and support create the ideal environment for African American male achievement.



Appendix A: List of Key Stakeholders

Jahi, Program Manager, Manhood Development Program, AAMA, OUSD

Lina Avidan, Program Executive, Zellerbach Family Foundation

Cedric Brown, Managing Partner, Kapor Center for Social Impact

David Chambliss, Quality Community Schools Development, OUSD

Christopher P. Chatmon, Executive Director, AAMA, OUSD

Teresa Clincy, Attendance Discipline Support Services, OUSD

Diane Dodge, Executive Director, East Bay College Fund

Shawn Dove, Campaign Manager, Campaign for Black Male Achievement, Open Society Foundations

Paul Flores, Program Manager, Latino Men and Boys, The Unity Council

Michele Grant-Groves, Formerly 0-8 Early Education Coordinator, OUSD

Vernon Hal, Senior Business Officer, OUSD

Jumoke Hinton-Hodge, Director, District 3, Governing Board, OUSD

Tony Iton, Senior Vice President for Healthy Communities, The California Endowment

Raquel Jimenez, Community Engagement Coordinator, OUSD

Charlene Johnson, Classified Staff, Edna Brewer Middle School, OUSD

David Kakishiba, President, Governing Board, OUSD

Jody London, Director, District 1, Governing Board, OUSD

David Montes de Oca, Deputy Chief, Continuous School Improvement, OUSD

Sam McNeal, Former MDP Instructor, AAMA, OUSD

Jackie Minor, General Counsel, OUSD

Derek Mitchell, Chief Executive Officer, Partners in School Innovation

Martin Abdul-Qawi, Former MDP Program Director, Current Principal, Oakland High School, OUSD

Yvette Radford, Vice President for External and Community Affairs in Northern California, Kaiser Permanente

Tiago Robinson, Former MDP Instructor, AAMA, OUSD

Staci Ross-Morrison, Principal, Oakland Technical High School, OUSD

Curtis Sarikey, Deputy Chief, Community Schools and Student Services, OUSD

Jason Seals, Former MDP Instructor, Professor, African American Studies Department, Merritt College

Kim Shipp, Parent Coordinator, AAMA, OUSD

Tony Smith, Former Superintendent, OUSD
Kevin Taylor, High School Network Superintendent, OUSD

David Tucker, Director of Community and Public Relations, Waste Management, Alameda County

Tina Tranzor, Principal, Montera Middle School, OUSD

Lisa Villareal, Program Officer, Education, The San Francisco Foundation

Timothy White, Deputy Chief, Facilities, OUSD

Gerald Williams, Research Associate, Disproportionality, Research, Assessment and Data, OUSD

Junious Williams, Chief Executive Officer, Urban Strategies Council

Jean Wing, Executive Director, Research, Assessment and Data, OUSD

Gary Yee, Former President, Governing Board, and Former Interim Superintendent, OUSD

Appendix B:

Key Informant Conversation Guide

Students

1. What is your name and what grade(s) were you in when you were an AAMA student?
2. When and how did you first hear about AAMA? What's your earliest memory of AAMA?
3. What AAMA programs have you participated in (MDP, Read 2 Lead, Voluntary School Study Team, Special Events)? How long have you participated in those programs?
4. How would you describe your AAMA participation experience overall?
5. Can you share a story about your best experience with AAMA?
6. Can you share a story about your most challenging experience with AAMA?
7. If you could change something about AAMA, what would it be?
8. Has AAMA made a difference in your life? If so, how?
9. Have you seen AAMA make a difference in the lives of your classmates or friends? If so, how?
10. If you think you have other friends/peers that would benefit from being in AAMA but were not enrolled in it, what about the program do you think they would benefit most from most? What do you think they might not like about AAMA?

Parents, Community Partners, School Faculty, and Staff

Strengths of AAMA's work:

1. When and how did you first hear about AAMA?
2. In your opinion, what have been the most effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
3. What impact do you believe AAMA programs have had in the District for students? For teachers? For administrators?
4. What do you think is most important about these programs? Why? Please be specific.

Areas for Improvement for AAMA's work:

1. In your opinion, what have been the least effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
2. What would make those programs more effective?
3. What things have inhibited or supported the success of the programs?

Advice for AAMA:

1. What new programs or services do you think AAMA should offer?
2. What advice would you give to District leadership including the new Superintendent with regard to how AAMA should operate going forward?
3. What kind of experience do you want African American males to have in school and why?
4. How, if at all, does AAMA help support this vision?

Parents

1. Is your relationship/communication with AAMA teachers/staff different than your relationship/communication with other teachers? If so, how?
2. Do you feel like AAMA teachers are more accessible or approachable than other teachers?
3. Do you think the AAMA does a good job of engaging parents? If so, how? If not, is this something you want to see improved? If so, how?
4. Anything else we should know?

MDP Instructors

Background and History with AAMA:

1. What is your name and how long have you been an MDP instructor?
2. When and how did you first hear about AAMA? What's your earliest memory of AAMA?
3. What site(s) have you been an MDP instructor at?
4. How do you think MDP is/was viewed by the school faculty and staff?
5. What was it like being an MDP instructor?
6. Can you share a story about your best and/or most challenging experience as an MDP instructor?
7. What kind of experience do you want African American males to have in school and why?
8. How, if at all, does AAMA help support this vision?

Strengths of AAMA's work:

1. In your opinion, what have been the most effective aspects of the MDP program? Why?
2. What impact do you believe MDP have had in the District for students? For teachers? For administrators?
3. What do you think is most important about these programs? Why? Please be specific.
4. What does it take to be a successful MDP instructor?

Areas for Improvement for AAMA's work:

1. In your opinion, what have been the least effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
2. What would make those programs more effective?

Advice for AAMA:

1. Reflect on your experience as an MDP Instructor. If you had to design a series of professional development workshops for new instructors what 3 topics would you focus on? Why?
2. What advice would you give to AAMA Leadership and District leadership including the new superintendent with regard to how AAMA should operate going forward?
3. Anything else we should know?

OUSD Board and Administration

Interviewee Background and History with AAMA:

1. What is your name and role with OUSD?
2. How does your position impact AAMA?
3. When and how did you first hear about AAMA? What's your earliest memory of AAMA
4. From your perspective how does AAMA operate? What are some of the programs goals, as you understand them to be?
5. What kind of experience do you want African American males to have in school and why?
6. How, if at all, does AAMA help support this vision?
7. How does the OUSD system eco-system hold the work of AAMA? How does your division work with AAMA?
8. (On positionality and effectiveness of AAMA) In your opinion, what is the most strategic department for AAMAs work to be centered in? Why?

Strengths of AAMA's work:

1. In your opinion, what have been the most effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
2. What impact do you believe AAMA programs have had in the District for students? For teachers? For administrators?
3. What do you think is most important about these programs? Why? Please be specific.

Areas for Improvement for AAMA's work:

1. In your opinion, what have been the least effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
2. What would make those programs more effective?

Advice for AAMA:

1. What new programs or services do you think AAMA should offer?
2. What advice would you give to District leadership including the new superintendent with regard to how AAMA should operate going forward?
3. Anything else we should know?

Funders

Interviewee Background and History with AAMA:

1. What is your name and role with (insert organization name)?
2. How long has your work here included AAMA?
3. Why does your organization support AAMA?
4. How does your position impact AAMA?
5. When and how did you first hear about AAMA? What's your earliest memory of AAMA?
6. From your perspective, how does AAMA operate? What are some of the programs goals, as you understand them to be?
7. What kind of experience do you want African American males to have in school and why?
8. How, if at all, does AAMA help support this vision?

Strengths of AAMA's work:

1. In your opinion, what have been the most effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
2. What impact do you believe AAMA programs have had in the District for students? For teachers? For administrators?
3. What do you think is most important about these programs? Why? Please be specific.
4. (On positionality and effectiveness of AAMA) In your opinion, what is the most strategic department for AAMAs work to be centered in? Why?

Areas for Improvement for AAMA's work:

1. In your opinion, what have been the least effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
2. What would make those programs more effective?

Advice for AAMA:

1. What new programs or services do you think AAMA should offer?
2. What advice would you give to District leadership including the new superintendent with regard to how AAMA should operate going forward?
3. Anything else we should know?

AAMA Leadership

Interviewee Background and History with AAMA:

1. What is your name and role with AAMA?
2. When and how did you first hear about AAMA? What's your earliest memory of AAMA?
3. How would you describe your experience working with AAMA overall?
4. Can you share a story about your best and/or most challenging experience with AAMA?
5. What kind of experience do you want African American males to have in school and why?
6. In your opinion, what should be the top 3 priorities for AAMA as an organization?

7. (On positionality and effectiveness of AAMA) In your opinion, what is the most strategic department for AAMAs work to be centered in? Why?

Strengths of AAMA's work:

1. In your opinion, what have been the most effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
2. What impact do you believe AAMA programs have had in the District for students? For teachers? For administrators
3. What do you think is most important about these programs? Why? Please be specific.

Areas for Improvement for AAMA's work:

In your opinion, what have been the least effective aspects of AAMA's work? Why?
What would make those programs more effective?

Advice for AAMA

1. What new programs or services do you think AAMA should offer?
2. What advice would you give to District leadership including the new superintendent with regard to how AAMA should operate going forward?
3. Anything else we should know?

Parental Engagement-Specific Questions

1. What does parental engagement mean?
2. What are the goals of parent engagement?
3. What does successful parental engagement look like (as far as numbers and quality)?
4. What are you hearing from parents about AAMA/MDP? What do you hear is beneficial or that they want more of?
5. Are there any aspects of the program that parents have identified as areas of improvement?
6. What are the biggest challenges to parental engagement?
7. Are there records kept (data) on parental communications? Is there any analysis of frequency of parental communications' compared to progress/performance of the child?
8. What are the strongest and weakest aspects of current parental engagement efforts?
9. What kind of additional support do you think would help boost parental engagement efforts?
10. What can the community do to help? What can funders do to help?
11. Is there a centralized place (calendar?) where parents can get info about AAMA or events?
12. Any parent evaluations done regularly?

The 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.



AAMA

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ACHIEVEMENT



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