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## Rethinking Recruitment:

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Information on How School  
Districts Can Leverage  
Community-Based  
Partnerships to Support Black  
Boys in Elementary Education

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## Introduction

Black boys face disproportionate challenges in elementary education. They are more likely to be placed in special education programs, attain lower levels of achievement, and experience higher rates of suspension and expulsion (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Nance, 2016; Schott, 2015; USDOE, 2019). To reduce these disparities, researchers cite the need for more culturally-responsive classroom environments (Husband, 2012; Noguera, 2012; Toldson, Brown, & Sutton, 2009). Central to culturally-responsive classrooms are teachers who are willing to care for Black boys, draw upon their cultural assets, plan lessons with high levels of vigorous activity, display warmth and control, and demand high expectations of performance (Rashid, 2009).

**Teachers of any color and gender can create a culturally-responsive classroom environment, but representation matters.** Black boys thrive under the care of adult Black males who are committed to excellence in teaching and learning. Black male teachers are more than role models; they dispel myths of racial inferiority and produce greater performance gains for Black students compared to their White counterparts (USDOE, 2016; Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Irvine & Fenwick, 2011). For low-income Black boys, having just one Black teacher in elementary school reduces the risk of later dropping out of the school by a whopping 39 percent (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016). School districts seeking to improve educational outcomes for Black boys must become intentional in their hiring practices to recruit more Black male teachers. Community-based partnerships offer solutions for rethinking teacher recruitment in elementary education.

## Background

What's wrong with the existing teacher pipeline? Data obtained from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) suggests that traditional teacher preparation programs do not effectively recruit Black males into elementary education. Over 80 percent of public school teachers are White females; less than 2 percent are Black males (USDOE, 2017). Only 7 percent of Bachelor's degrees in education were conferred to Black undergraduates in 2016, indicating a declining trend in the number of future Black male teachers in the traditional pipeline (USDOE, 2016).

Traditional Teacher Pipeline in Undergraduate Education*	2000	2012	2016
Percentage of White education majors	77	73	76
Percentage of Black education majors	11	12	7
Percentage of Latino education majors	8	11	10
Percentage of education majors representing Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, and More than one race.	4	4	7

\* SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, Washington, D.C. 2016. This report is available on the Department's website at <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversityworkforce.pdf>.



Popular alternative certification and recruitment agencies such as Teach for America have not fared better. Only 19 percent of Teach for America recruits are Black (Teacher for America, 2019), and the agency has a paradoxical effect of actually *decreasing* the number of Black teachers in major school districts where they operate (White, 2016). Teach for America alums Mario Jovan Shaw and Jason Terrell founded their own community-based non-profit, Profound Gentleman, to address this lack of Black male representation (Profound Gentleman, 2019). Their organization offers support, professional development, and networking opportunities in effort to recruit and retain Black male teachers. **Like Shaw and Terrell, school leaders must look beyond existing teacher pipelines to leverage community-based partnerships that successfully engage Black males in elementary education.** Here are three exemplary models for rethinking recruitment at the district level:

## Urban Ed Academy – San Francisco, CA

Urban Ed Academy is a community-based nonprofit that provides STEM-based educational services to third-fifth grade students of color in San Francisco, CA (Urban Ed Academy, 2020). Founded in 2010, the organization supports Black and brown boys through an afterschool program, Saturday school, and teacher recruitment agency. Its pedagogical framework draws upon culturally-responsive teaching to engage students in academic coursework, recreation, and social development facilitated by local male mentors of color. In doing so, Urban Ed Academy supports boys holistically, with an aim towards building productive citizens through cultural representation, mentoring, and academic enrichment. Additionally, Urban Ed Academy recruits males of color from around the country to train and work in local San Francisco public elementary schools. Recruits are prepared to teach through a lens of culturally-responsive teaching and best practice in STEM education. Through intentional recruitment and training, their teachers are best equipped to meet the needs Black and brown boys in elementary education.

### What can school districts do

District leaders can model an Urban Ed Academy approach by leveraging community-based partnerships with local non-profits already engaged in supporting children of color, or Black boys specifically. These local non-profits can provide supplementary instruction or recreational and social development activities. They can identify mentors for Black boys or organize a Saturday school for boys enrolled in the critical third, fourth, and fifth grade. District leaders should also consider Urban Ed Academy as an option when contracting with teacher recruitment agencies, especially in urban districts with large numbers of Black and brown boys enrolled in public schools.



## **Summer Learning Academy – Albany, GA**

The Summer Learning Academy is a summer enrichment program administered by Albany State University, a historically Black college/university (HBCU) in Albany, GA. Founded by Dr. Erica DeCuir and the department of Teacher Education, the Summer Learning Academy engages multiple stakeholders (local HBCU, school system, and parents) to increase math and science readiness for Black students enrolled in local public elementary schools. The program draws upon culturally responsive teaching to achieve its three objectives: 1) increase math and science readiness, 2) introduce and inspire careers in STEM education, and 3) train future teachers in culturally-responsive strategies for teaching science and math concepts to Black children. The Summer Learning Academy offers Black college students an authentic classroom experience in culturally responsive elementary education that promotes the teaching profession among Black male undergraduates.

### **What can school districts do**

To emulate this model, school districts can develop summer learning academies in partnership with local HBCUs or minority-serving institutions (MSIs) to achieve the same objectives of the Summer Learning Academy. This model establishes a culturally responsive classroom environment for providing STEM-based instruction, promotes the teaching profession among Black male college students, reduces loss of learning during the summer months, and increases academic preparedness for the upcoming school year. The Summer Learning Academy is an exemplary model for district leaders because it strategically targets Black male recruitment, culturally-responsive teacher training, and math and science readiness in one summer program.



## The Heinz Endowments – Pittsburg, PA

The Heinz Endowments, through its focus on equity and social justice, funds community-based programs that provide educational, economic, social, and leadership opportunities for Black boys in Pittsburgh, PA (Heinz, 2020). Funded projects include *Crossing Fences*, a multimedia project that generates recorded conversations between Black boys and older Black males, and *Game Changers*, a program that engages young filmmakers to produce “micro-documentaries” about positive Black men in local communities. These projects demonstrate how the use of grant monies can be leveraged to provide mentorship to Black boys through community-based programs in multimedia production and filmmaking.

### What can school districts do

In accordance with the Heinz Foundation’s focus on equity and social justice, school systems can direct grant-funded projects to include activities that provide community-based, cultural representation to support Black boys. These activities could be part of a multi-layered approach to reduce disciplinary infractions, drop-out rates, or disengagement in school. School leaders can leverage the support and expertise of local groups already invested in Black boys such as local fraternity chapters, youth groups, and mentoring programs. Grant funds can also be directed to recruit Black male teachers among these community-based groups, provide training, and guide them through an alternative certification process.

## Recommendations

By rethinking teacher training and recruitment, district leaders can increase the number of Black male teachers in the following ways:

- Partner with teacher recruitment agencies that successfully engage Black males, such as Urban Ed Academy
- Be deliberate in request for Black male teachers among traditional program providers
- Engage local HBCUs or MSIs in summer learning academies to increase Black boys' readiness to learn and recruit Black male college students willing to teach
- Appoint representatives to local community action boards
- Promote alternative certification pathways among community groups and members
- Extend grant monies to community-based groups and/or local HBCUs to provide extracurricular activities that support Black boys and engage Black males
- Advocate to reduce barriers in teacher certification routes that negatively impact teachers of color

## Conclusions

Culturally-responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; 2013) has strong research applications in P-12 schools that positively impact Black boy's learning outcomes (Bui & Fagan, 2013; McIntyre & Hulan, 2013; Sleeter & Cornbreth, 2011). This paper explores how culturally-responsive teaching models can be employed in out-of-school experiences that operate external to, but in partnership with, local public school systems. Urban Ed Academy, the Summer Learning Academy, and the Heinz Endowments encourage culturally-responsive teaching, mentoring, and leadership from Black males to Black boys. They service Black boys as a fragile population within fragile communities, who possess talents and skills that must be nurtured in effort to increase their educational attainment. They intentionally recruit and engage Black males as teachers, mentors, and external instructors to provide culturally-responsive teaching that supports academic and social success.

School districts seeking to improve learning outcomes for Black boys should adopt a community-based approach to engage Black males in elementary education. Existing teacher pipelines do not sufficiently recruit or produce Black male teachers in proportion to the number of Black boys in elementary schools across the country. More effort is needed to recruit among local community groups, strategically target Black males in alternative certification programs, and reduce barriers for all teachers of color in traditional certification programs. Reducing disparities for Black boys in elementary education leads to greater academic success for Black boys in schools and schools districts where they are predominantly enrolled.



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This research study was supported by a research grant from  
Albany State University Center for Educational Opportunity