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Georgia Center for Educational Renewal
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GOOD LUCK

If you decide to implement this program, please let the Georgia Center know. If you are interested in this program, but feel you need additional advice or support, please contact Dr. Charles Reavis at the Georgia Center for Educational Renewal at careavis@georgiasouthern.edu or call 912-681-5719

Background Note: We have all had them. Mine were Mr. Smith, Mrs. Cannon, Mr. Maltby, and Mrs. Penny. These were teachers who simply were not going to let you fail. They encouraged you, but at the same time, pressed you, hard. Mrs. Cannon was legendary for pulling students out of lunch to work on their algebra – there was simply no way you were not going to learn algebra. The only question was how hard you were going to make it on yourself! Mr. Maltby had the patience of Job as he taught Advanced Algebra. Mrs. Penny had the most organized approach to the teaching of grammar I had ever experienced (I still remember P1, P2, etc). Mr. Smith joked, cajoled, threatened, and pushed, pushed, pushed. A recent study released by Harvard University's Civil Rights Project and the Urban Institute found that Georgia only graduated 47.4 % of the blacks who were enrolled in the 9th grade four years earlier, placing Georgia near the bottom in that study. The Georgia Center for Educational Renewal hopes to aid schools in improving on that record.

Research: The Georgia Center for Educational Renewal has undertaken a study of all of the research on teaching black male students. So far we have reviewed over 75 research articles/studies. We have been selective – choosing only those from strong universities or highly respected researchers with sound research designs. The research studies have utilized a variety of methods – ethnographic, statistical, and experimental, among others. We have selected only those with specific implications for "doable" school interventions. We have not assumed special personnel, extra funding, or extraordinary effort. We know any interventions must fit within ongoing school operations, and many other high priorities that schools face. This review of the literature is ongoing so this is an interim report of our work, thus far.

Findings: The teacher emerges as the central most important factor in black male achievement. More so than curriculum. More so than ethnicity of the teacher. More so than peers. More so than mentors external to the school. More so than technology. Teacher factors that have been found to be critical are (1) the subtle ways teachers communicate their attitudes to black male students (fear, aggression, low expectations, rejection of their clothing styles, etc.), (2) aiding black male students in being more organized in their school work (helping them keep calendars of when work is due, having a set time to do school work, teaching study habits in the context of their subject, etc.), (3) supporting attitudes that high achievement is not "acting White," but rather acting smart, (4) aiding them in setting personal goals, not once, but on a continuing basis, daily, tied in with their class work, (5) individual attention.

Implications:

1. One research study had very good results in using cases (examples) of how teachers unknowingly communicate negative attitudes toward black males. Teachers then worked on eliminating these verbal and non-verbal behaviors.
2. Organization aids were developed by one teacher to support students in meeting expectations. Study aids were presented at the time they were needed to complete a particular assignment.
3. Teachers across the school continued to emphasize high achievement as a culture-neutral goal.
4. Teachers aided students in setting concrete goals (possessions, local examples of "who I would like to be like," jobs, etc.) as aspects of class room assignments.
5. Teachers "adopted" one student to make a special effort to relate to and support.

"...(black) children begin school very much achievement-oriented and engaged with the process of schooling. These findings provide evidence that the school experience plays a significant role in the development of attitudes toward school." Research study – University of N.C. at Chapel Hill

supplement

Howard, T.A. (March, 2001). Powerful pedagogy for African American Students. *Urban Education*, 36(2), 179-202.

Identifies three strategies used by highly effective teachers of African American students:

1. Holistic Instructional Strategies – Within the context of the lesson, teaching students academic, moral, and social competencies (values such as honesty, responsibility, respectfulness, cooperativeness, sympathy for others, perseverance, responsibility, respect for authority). “Results and Responsibilities Right Here, Right Now; Not Excuses.”
2. Culturally Consistent Communicative Competencies – Recognizing that African American students tend to be more verbal and “seem very close to the edge of disrespect or lack of it.” (For example, helping students channel their natural verbal tendencies toward leadership opportunities, rather than in disruptive directions). All of the teachers were strict disciplinarians. They also connected out-of-school events to course content. They personalized content – for example, in teaching Greek mythology, assigning students the roles of the mythological characters and having their room in conflict with another room in their school.
3. Skill Building Strategies – “Most teachers will say ‘All children can learn’, but you also have to show the student how he can do it.” These teachers differentiated “being smart” from “having skills.” They stressed that academic learning skills could be developed and with that development could come success.

The key in all three of these strategies was building these into the ongoing activities of the regular classroom, not having a “study skills lesson” in isolation.