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# **District of Columbia Public Schools**



## **Empowering Males of Color**

## **Introduction**

From 2007 to 2014, the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) experienced a significant amount of growth with respect to student proficiency on the District of Columbia Comprehensive Assessment System exam (DC CAS). Despite steady improvements in the overall proficiency rates by 13% in reading and 22.6% in math, we also acknowledge that not all of our students are making progress at the same rate. While we celebrate the previously mentioned progress, and its impact on the life trajectories of all of our students, concurrently we have concluded that males of color, specifically African American and Latino, in DCPS are experiencing the least amount of growth academically. As such, we aim to alter this narrative of far too many of our males of color while also embracing the success that so many have demonstrated over time.

Comprising close to 45% of the students in DCPS, a significant number of African American and Latino males persistently lag behind their peers on a variety of academic and social indicators associated with success. Using our most recent 2014 DC CAS data, we are keenly aware that only 32% of African American males are advanced or proficient in reading and 43% for Latino males, with similar results in mathematics. Likewise, recent data from our student satisfaction survey indicates that both groups of students are less satisfied with school than their peers, and have lower graduation rates than their peers. While the previously mentioned data is just part of the story, our commitment to moving these data points upward are not only our professional obligation but associated with our strategic plan—**A Capital Commitment**. This commitment articulates clear goals for DCPS in five key areas:

- Increase achievement rates
- Invest in our 40 lowest performing schools
- Increase the graduation rate
- Improve student satisfaction
- Increase enrollment

While these goals are ambitious and attainable, it is very clear that we will not be successful in achieving our goals by 2017 without a much more concentrated and targeted effort to support our males of color. After careful examination of our own performance and progress towards the Capital Commitment, Chancellor Kaya Henderson has ordered the launch of an initiative specifically focused on improving the outcomes of males of color in the District of Columbia Public Schools. Through the ***Empowering Males of Color*** initiative, DCPS and the city of Washington DC stand together ready to accelerate their growth and development through engagement, improvement, and innovation.

## **Empowering Males of Color Initiative**

The ***Empowering Males of Color*** initiative is an aligned effort by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) to identify and assess current challenges and successes of PK–12 African-American and Latino males. We will collaborate with the community, as well as school & district leaders to implement effective strategies to enhance the student experience, increase achievement, and prepare our males of color for college, careers, and life beyond DCPS.

Over the next three years, DCPS will dedicate \$20 million to this effort, which will help our males of color to:

- Improve early literacy rates
- Increase in seat attendance
- Increase enrollment in Advanced Placement courses
- Improve graduation rates
- Increase student satisfaction
- Increase college acceptance and persistence
- Prepare students for high-wage, high-growth careers

### **Our Approach and Theory of Change**

The District of Columbia Public Schools has made a commitment to continue to build and maintain a school district that works for ALL of its students. Since the launch of the Capital Commitment, our strategic efforts have been guided by a theory of action that includes three main leverage points: (1) high quality educators, (2) rigorous academic content with a focus on literacy, and (3) engaged and motivated students and families. Collectively, these three leverage



points have helped deliver improved results district-wide. However, when considering the data specific to a significant portion of our males of color, it is abundantly clear that we need to approach our work in a much more targeted and aggressive manner to gain the best possible results.

Additionally, we acknowledge that many of the males of color in DCPS are doing exceptionally well academically and their social-emotional development has positioned them to become immediate contributors to our democracy. To that

end, the *Empowering Males of Color* initiative isn't just an effort at speeding up the academic progress of those students struggling in the classroom but also provide additional supports and outlets for our males of color doing exceptionally well in the classroom.

The *Empowering Males of Color* initiative was developed through collaboration with a working group of teachers, principals, instructional superintendents, and central office staff to conduct an internal analysis of our academic programming, staffing, policies and other critical areas that ultimately have an impact on student performance. Additionally, the working group has consulted with several panels of concerned community members and some of nation's foremost scholars on the education of African American boys, the achievement gap, developmental psychology, and urban education. In some cases, we are already doing the right things. We simply need to ramp up our intensity. However, in order for us to have the desired impact we must not hesitate to employ innovative strategies, programmatic improvements, and impactful policies. In short, we must be bold and we must act swiftly.

The great work that our educators are doing here at DCPS must be supplemented with strategies that can help accelerate achievement and further tailor instruction and programs to the needs of

our students. Furthermore, this effort must extend beyond the classroom and better leverage our families, partners, and the local and national community in the work of preparing our young men of color for college, career, and life. **We are working to make sure *Empowering Males of Color* efforts are aligned, resourced, well executed and thoughtfully scaled to maximize our resources.** Our aim is to not just impact academic results in the present, but also reset the culture of our entire school district such that the core elements of this initiative will continue for years to come.

This initiative utilizes both radical and practical approaches to improving our district. This document outlines our overall strategy using our theory of change, which focuses on three areas: **ENGAGE, IMPROVE, and INNOVATE.**

- **Engage** our students, families, and the community in solutions that ensure the long-term success of our males of color.
- **Improve** and expand the implementation of several research-based strategies already underway within the district – utilizing the critical lens of equity.
- **Innovate** and challenge our approach to problems and policies that have consistently impacted the academic achievement and development of our males of color.



Within our theory of change all efforts associated with this initiative will fall into one of five categories: Academic Programming, Social & Emotional Support, Policy Changes/Updates, Professional Development, and Family/Community Engagement. Our success in this initiative will depend on sound management and extensive collaboration between the community, our schools, the central office, and key community partners—local and national.

### **Key strategies of the *Empowering Males of Color* initiative**

In DCPS, our males of color are scholars and future leaders in the DC community and beyond. In order to support their growth and development as critical scholars and intellectuals, we are implementing focused efforts situated in specific grade bands as well as large-scale efforts connected to the broader DCPS context.

#### **Innovation, engagement, and improvement in the early years (Pre K-5<sup>th</sup> grade)**

As noted by researchers and practitioners, the academic and social-emotional experiences of children in the early years are critical to their long-term success. In an effort to support males of color in early childhood and elementary school, the *Empowering Males of Color* initiative will focus on early literacy development, community & parental engagement, and social-emotional development. Several of the critical pieces of this portion of the initiative are explicated below.



- *500 for 500: Mentoring through Literacy*  
Recent data on DC CAS and DIBLES suggest that a significant number of males of color struggle to reach grade level reading proficiency prior to the start of 4<sup>th</sup> grade. As reading on grade level by 4<sup>th</sup> grade is a significant indicator of future success in school and life, we aim to interrupt this trend through the usage of research-based interventions whereby community members serve as mentors through literacy. In an effort to provide additional supports to the students and their teachers, we are collaborating with non-profit organizations that connect community members with schools to provide supplemental reading instruction for students. By providing support from trained, dedicated mentors, using research-based approaches to literacy instruction, we can ensure that our males of color are prepared for future success by reading on grade level by the end of third grade. To date, the current DCPS data suggest that this model has had a significant impact in 11 schools. Our task—scale up and go faster to reach more students in DCPS.
- *Summer literacy program*  
Recent data from the Office of Teaching and Learning indicates that males of color in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade suffer the most extreme learning losses of all students in DCPS during the summer months. This presents a significant challenge when one considers that reading on grade level by 4<sup>th</sup> grade is a solid predictor of future success in school. In fact, research has concluded that many of the challenges students face with reading in high school can be directly attributed to summer learning loss in elementary school. Accordingly, we are offering a summer reading program that not only supports students through intensive instruction but also provides weekly workshops for parents focusing on reading strategies they can use at home with their children, and incentives for gains in students' reading level during the course of the program.
- *Make Early Learning Effective Learning*  
In collaboration with the Office of Head Start and the National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness housed at Bank Street College of Education, the ***Empowering Males of Color*** initiative has a three school pilot program designed to support the school readiness and success for young African American and Latino Boys through professional development training. Our professional development model is situated within an imbedded practice model whereby the training includes opportunities to practice the new ideas and skills in the classroom along side other teachers and receive immediate feedback.

## Innovation in high school design—Urban Preparatory Academies (<http://www.urbanprep.org>)



Far too many males of color in DCPS have graduation rates significantly lower than their peers. As the Chancellor has pushed towards a school system that provides a world-class education but also prepares students for college, career, and life after DCPS, the *Empowering Males of Color* initiative will innovate through an entirely new model of schooling for males of color—a **single gender school for boys**. Through a collaboration with **Urban Preparatory Academies** in Chicago, our goal is to provide a targeted, proven, high-impact support that will ensure students attending this school will not only graduate from high school but also college. To do this, DCPS will launch the first Urban Preparatory Academy outside of Chicago. Our goal—preparing and accelerating our students on a path to graduation and success in college and a career.

### District Wide Efforts

The *Empowering Males of Color* initiative cuts across all grade levels in DCPS. In an effort to embrace the broader scope of the work that extends beyond specific classrooms and grade bands, we will offer new and innovative **professional development offerings to teachers**, improve **our recruitment of African American and Latino male teachers**, and offer innovative ways to ensure that **access to AP courses and SAT test prep is equitable throughout DCPS**. While these efforts are ongoing and are essential elements of the *Empowering Males of Color* initiative, we are also looking to engender a spirit of innovation in our schools while also celebrating the successes of our males of color. The strategy for innovation in schools will be animated through **Proving What's Possible Grants**, and celebrations of student success will through our **Celebrating Academic Champions** program.

- **Proving What's Possible Grants**

In order for DCPS to truly invest in the advancement of males of color, DCPS is encouraging collaboration with schools to provide funding for multi-year grants and mini grants. These grant funds will be used to develop initiatives that not only improve the academic outcomes and social-emotional development of our African American and Latino male students, but also encourage engagement with families and the community. Through a collaborative process we will support schools in the development of both large & small scale initiatives that are tailored to school level data. Grant proposals will focus on one of three areas:

1. Family & Community Engagement
2. Academic Enhancement/Enrichment
3. Social & Emotional Support

In order for this grant program to be successful, a spirit of collaboration throughout DCPS will be paramount. As such, proposals will be creative and innovative.

- **Celebrating Academic Champions**

The future of young people and the economy as a whole depends on increasing the number of students who leave DCPS college or career ready. Modeled after the traditional college football signing day, DCPS' **Celebrating Academic Champions** program is designed to acknowledge and honor the accomplishments of our graduating seniors. This event will bring our scholars, their parents and community members together to celebrate their paths after high school, making a public commitment to attend college, pursue a career, a certificate program or other post-secondary training upon graduating from DCPS. The overall purpose of this event is to honor our students who are continuing their education beyond high school

The effects of **Celebrating Academic Champions** will last longer than the event itself. This type of event can shift the focus of an entire student body from high school graduation to postsecondary commencement. It shows younger students that they can be great academically. It shows them that academic excellence is just as worthy of cheers, shouts, and photo ops as athletic prowess.

- **Honor Roll Luncheon**

Aligned with the *Empowering Males of Color* initiative, DCPS would like to acknowledge the successes of our males of color by holding a quarterly honor roll luncheon to recognize their academic achievements. We have students who are stepping up to the plate and truly performing academically. As such, it is imperative that we not only focus on the challenges of our males of color, but more importantly, we **MUST** highlight their accomplishments. This event allows DCPS to shine a brighter light on these students in a larger forum. The target population for this event is males of color in grades 9-12. Our approach to this effort will involve:

- Schools will be grouped into cohorts (determined by the number of students on the honor roll)
- Four honor roll luncheons will be held each year and each cohort should participate in two honor roll luncheons per year

### **Management and Innovation Approach**

In order to ensure that the Empowering Males of Color initiative experiences successful implementation, these strategies (and their related performance metrics) are fully integrated into our existing accountability structures. Accordingly, we will be using an **equity scorecard** to track our progress and help determine areas of growth and spaces for improvement. Additionally, our progress will be aligned with the performance management framework linked to the Capital Commitment goals. The regular School Stat presentations that track our performance against each of our five Capital Commitment goals will routinely include a report on males of color in DCPS.

As we look toward the future, DCPS has placed serious attention on thoughtfully scaling the initiative with the right balance of improving existing programs, supplementing our work with external partnerships and philanthropic support, and outright transformation. This will allow for appropriate cross-departmental planning, resource allocation, and strategic staffing. To be clear,

we are taking steps toward improving the lives of our males of color and, ultimately, the future of the District of Columbia – *and there is no better motivation than that.*







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PUBLIC SCHOOLS