

BLACK CHURCH EDUCATION ADVOCACY PROJECT

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There is a persistent crisis in education. This crisis exists not only in Palm Beach County but throughout the country. In this information age, the background knowledge and critical thinking skills necessary to compete and thrive are much greater than what the typical high school graduate has mastered. Black children, as a whole, are even less prepared than their peers. The Coalition for Black Student Achievement's (CBSA) single purpose is to ensure that Black children in Palm Beach County reach the high levels of academic achievement necessary to make them successful in this increasingly hostile and competitive world.

The Black Church has long been the focal point of efforts to improve the status of Black people in America. It is, in fact, the most valuable resource in our community. The Black Church has the ability, the energy and the resources to turn this situation around. Once the Black Church engages and insists on education reforms to educate our children, the tide will change.

CBSA is enthusiastic about the prospect of partnering with Black Churches to save our children. Indeed, this effort will save our people. Education provides choices as well as employment opportunities. An educated and prosperous congregation will have the ability to better focus on spiritual issues and commit to them. We pray that you, as leaders of our people, will rise to the challenge that faces us all.

This proposal has several layers-each building on the prior one. Each Black Church can dedicate itself to the education reform movement-individually or collectively, minimally, moderately or extensively.

STEP 1-PREACHING EDUCATION

At the very least, we all must become familiar with the rapidly changing education arena. School districts and states throughout this nation are functioning in a high stakes/accountability era. Though there are moves to eliminate the high stakes nature of the standardized tests, it matters not. We must work together to assure success for our students, not matter how success is measured.

It is our belief that all parents want their children to be successful. Yet, most of us (parents, community) don't know how to help our children succeed. It is important that our faith-leaders take the lead in telling us what to do. Words from the pulpit have a stronger and longer impact than any other words!

- ◆ Just one weekly suggestion from the pulpit and education related announcements in the Church bulletin will go a very long way.
- ◆ Host the "Wake Up, Step Up!" training for your congregation so that the Church understands achievement goals.
- ◆ Setting the goal of maximum success, not just passing, must be verbalized from the pulpit.
- ◆ Simple suggestions such as "Turn off the TV and read with your child daily" will increase reading skills and strengthen the parent-child bond.
- ◆ A book of the month club with book club discussions with church leadership.
- ◆ Distribute grade level vocabulary words regularly and discuss them
- ◆ Clearly state the expectation that every child will be in school, in every class, every day. Children must be in class to learn their lessons.
- ◆ Sunday school must once again be where children learn to read. Sunday school teachers can and should learn how to teach reading. What better place is there to learn phonics, Dolch sight words and vocabulary.
- ◆ Every Black Church should house an "Education Station"-filled with information regarding education including test preparation materials, the kindergarten readiness checklist, scholarship information and grade level benchmarks.
- ◆ Honor every student in your congregation. Announce the end of each marking period, recognizing the efforts of the parents and the students and set the expectation of bigger and better things. Let them know that the entire church knows that they can do better (no matter how well they are doing) and that they are loved. Ask them to make a commitment to do their very best.
- ◆ Honor attendance

Phase 2 EDUCATE ABOUT EDUCATION

Two or more members of the congregation shall make a commitment to learn more about the changing educational environment and pass that information onto other members.

These Education Liaisons will serve as a Church based wealth of knowledge. CBSA will assist this effort by providing information about educational opportunities and/or hosting workshops at the Church.

Education Liaisons will acquire knowledge about

- ◆ Motivating Your Child to Learn
- ◆ What classes your child should take
- ◆ Edline
- ◆ State Standards and Homework Sampling Project
- ◆ Florida Standards Assessment
- ◆ How to Have an Effective Parent-Teacher Conference
- ◆ Test Taking Skills

PHASE 3-PRESCHOOL EDUCATION STRENGTHENING

Research shows that the first several years are critical years-when small efforts will provide huge rewards later years by allowing the child to hit the ground running in kindergarten. Many Black preschool children are in daycare. Some are in formal programs. Some are cared for in homes. Wherever our children are cared for in these early years, learning must be reinforced.

The Black Church is in an ideal position to help.

We propose that the Black Church be the centerpoint for providing materials and skills training to parents, other family members as well as private caretakers. Ideally, one or two of the congregation would volunteer to act as a parent-child advocate for all families with preschool children-making home visits, provide information, encouragement and acting as a support system. CBSA in turn could be part of the advocate's support system and provide any training necessary.

PHASE 4-ADOPT A SCHOOL

Each Church will identify a school in need of the Church's numerous blessings and make the commitment to improving the school from within.

- ◆ Identify 2 church members to go through training and actively participate in the school's SAC(school advisory council.) These could be the Church's Education Liaisons.
- ◆ Monitor disciplinary actions including suspensions and expulsions
- ◆ Work with the school's Principal to decrease the number of disciplinary actions and increase student achievement
- ◆ Minister to the family needs of troubled children.
- ◆ Monitor student achievement data
- ◆ Evaluate the level of rigor in classwork using the tools learned in the Homework Sampling Project
- ◆ Advocate on behalf of the students at School Board meetings, City Council meetings, etc.

PHASE 5-EDUCATION REFORM COMMITMENT

- ◆ Full membership and participation in CBSA
- ◆ Encourage access to computer lab at church – teach typing, on line test prep, Edline check and discussion
- ◆ Start/continue/ expand the summer education efforts....summer freedom school
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