

COMMUNITY-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP

Leading from the Inside Out

SHADOW STUDENT ATHLETE

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES, INC.

A.I.M Achieving Goals, Inspiring Change
Motivating Students, Teachers, and Communities



INTRODUCTION

AIM is an Initiative of Shadow Student Athlete Development Services, Inc (SSADS). AIM implements culturally responsive mentoring practices to impact the “new education crisis” in Pennsylvania. Discipline practices that are racially inequitable push African American males out of public school. The ways in which AIM implements mentoring as a coaching and modeling method begins with an effort to bridge the greater crisis, namely, the achievement and information opportunity gap.

AIM strategically places Character Coaches who are community-centric in high needs Pittsburgh Public Schools as conflict specialists to support students, families and school staff. These coaches work by modeling culturally specific mentoring practices, managing class transition periods and providing intensive support through individual or group sessions and assessing the cultural health of the community. These services are designed to build and develop the spectrum of social emotional skills for students, and to activate the empowerment of parents to be equitable partners with school staff in responding to the needs of their students and the needs of the school.

AIM assess the barriers and resources of the community (cultural wealth and health) through experiential knowledge, observation, dialogue and a social/cultural capital tool to discover how best to mobilize what resources are needed and which resources are available in the community that can be activated. This component of AIM enhances the cultural specificity of the initiative and creates a wholistic balanced approach to the work.

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WHAT WE ADDRESS

AT THIS PHASE OF THE INITIATIVE, AIM IS ADDRESSING THE FOLLOWING:

- DISPROPORTIONATE AND DISPARITY RATE OF EXCLUSIONARY SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PRACTICES

- ACADEMIC, TRANSITION, AND POST SECONDARY OUTCOMES

- CHALLENGES WITH THE SCHOOL CLIMATE

- THE CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS OF STUDENT, PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, ALL SIGNIFICANT NEEDS THAT IMPACT THE ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS THROUGH POST SECONDARY OUTCOMES ALONG WITH CURRENT AND FUTURE CULTURAL HEALTH OF THEIR COMMUNITY.



MENTORING

AIM is a mentoring movement that provides mentors who fortify students with social skill development in order to navigate spaces and who model community-centric leadership to teachers and administrators in urban schools. In addition to providing students with problem solving, critical thinking, and listening skills, peer mediation prepares students to be globally competitive citizens in a complex and conflict-ridden world. School based mediation programs provide a number of proven benefits to schools including but not limited to: reduced suspension, detentions, and expulsions rates.

AIM strives to improve communication between and among students, teachers, administrators, and parents. With that effort, a reduction of violence has taken place at the schools where AIM is implemented. The mediation process will provide students with a direct forum for resolving conflict that does not require the direct attention of administrators. The process helps resolve conflicts permanently by addressing their underlying causes, and serves as an alternative to traditional disciplinary actions.



WHY WE CARE

- Through the AIM Initiative, we are making significant discoveries operating in K-8 schools with grades 4th – 8th and work in 9th-12th. One major discovery is a need for Character Coaches to extend their support for students engaged or interested in after school athletics. Here's what we know about the impact of racial inequity of discipline practices and athletics on African American males and what we, through data driven design, seek to disrupt:
- Between 2007 and 2010, Black men were 2.8% of full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students, but 57.1% of football teams and 64.3% of basketball teams (Harper, Collins D.W., & Blackman, 2013, p. 1)¹
- During the 2009-2010 school year, African American students represented 17% of National discipline data (Losen & Gillespie, 2012)¹
- During the 2011-2012 school year in the State of Pennsylvania, African American students represented 13.6% of the school population, but 48.25% of the out-of-school discipline data. In that school year, 166,000 African American students were “pushed out” of school. Pittsburgh Public Schools is the 2nd largest school district in the state and ranks 5th in the states discipline data (American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, 2013)¹
- ¹Harper, S., Collins D.W., J., & Blackman, H. (2013). *Black male student-athletes and racial inequity in NCAA division 1 college sports*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race in Education.
- ²Losen, D., & Gillespie, J. (2012). *Opportunities suspended: The disparate impact of disciplinary exclusion from school*. The Center for Civil Rights Remedies at UCLA. Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project.
- ³ American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania. (2013). *Beyond zero tolerance: Discipline and Policing in Pennsylvania Public Schools*. American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania.

Through these experiences, we have discovered a high need for the AIM initiative to expand into systemic supports in addition to the student, family, school and community support.

It is our claim that teachers and administrators are not always reflective of the various cultural and social spaces navigated by students and their families. This lived reality of navigating often challenging spaces impacts how students are in relationship with the process of education.

Culturally responsive engagement processes supports the authentic connection of teachers, families, students, and curriculum, especially in the current culture of standardized educational practices. However, this type of engagement requires many levels of reflection on the part of teachers, administrators, and community-centric leaders. In addition, it requires the recognition of the realities that accompany the facts and issues that come with serving in marginalized urban communities.



Community-centric facilitators in schools

The literature highly recommends that not only must teachers and teacher educators reconsider how, why, and what they teach, but also critically examine who is in the classroom and why. It is our experience after piloting the AIM Initiative for two quarters in two “high needs” PreK-8 schools, that missing from this conversation are community-centric leaders who are able to translate, facilitate and navigate this critical examination, adding a unique perspective to the conversation- that the addition of community-centric leadership is a key element to support the journey that Pittsburgh Public Schools seeks to embark on in their new strategic plan in order to truly insure that ALL students are receiving a quality, equal, appropriate, empowering, and critical education. Through culturally responsive professional development that is balanced with the unique perspective of community-centric leadership, teachers, teacher educators, and school administration will begin the long and difficult journey to making a transformation in education possible.

Character Coaches

We utilized Character Coaches, which have a pulse on the culture in the community. This pulse enables them to be highly successful. Character Coaches serving as conflict specialists in schools are placed to support school staff by modeling culturally specific mentoring practices, managing class transition periods, and providing intensive support through individual or group sessions to students that build and develop social emotional skills. They also activate the empowerment of parents to be equitable partners with school staff. The AIM initiative is in operation as a supportive response to discipline practices in urban school settings.

Character Coaches take on many roles, but all roles stem from a position of servant-leader. As servant leaders through the AIM initiative, Character Coaches lead by serving students, in schools and in their community. AIM assess the barriers and resources of the community in which the student is in school and lives through observation, dialogue and a social capital tool to discover how best to mobilize what resources are needed and which resources are available in the community that can be activated. The Character Coaches are seen, known, and available in the community of the students a process of relationship building that is significant and sustainable.

Impact

Below are data collected from the mediation process from August 26, 2013 through June 30,2014:

Character Coaches conducted 343 mediations involving 777 students. 339 out of 343 mediations have been resolved (mediations are resolved when two or more parties come to a resolution or agreement to move beyond the initial problem). That is a 98.83% success rate. We only had 4 fight that occurred after the 343 mediations.

Only 84 of the 777 students experienced more than one mediation in the same month for the same problem (10.81%) and 15 students out of the 777 (1.93%) had multiple mediations in the same months for different reasons. We served a total of 1,972 students during the 2013-2014 school year

Students are utilizing the mediation service in replacement of fighting

In the 2013-2015 school year, AIM has successfully impacted the school climate by building healthy, collaborative relationships with the administration and teachers. An example of this impact is AIM Administrative staff invitation by school administrations to actively participate in staff meetings that are in connection with the student achievement and discipline. It is our claim that the AIM perspective on discipline has greatly influenced the ways in which the administration is examining discipline practices. Before the referral process or before action on a referral is taken, Character Coaches are called to address disciplinary matters.

SHADOW student athletes from Pittsburgh Brashear High School, have engaged in Youth Leadership Development by participating as classroom assistants, mentoring and tutoring students at both sites where A.I.M. is piloted. These student athletes who are seniors, have been involved with SHADOW since their freshman year of high school.

Further, as SHADOW student athletes who participated in the Youth Leadership Development at the K-8 sites are eligible as Promise Ready and have been accepted into college.

Also, AIM leveraged a partnership with the University of Pittsburgh “Build On” initiative to tutor students in 5th grade at Langley twice per week. These students were struggling significantly with social skills development that impacted their learning and “identified” as “problematic”. By building healthy relationships with these students’ parents, Character Coaches provided field trips opportunities on the weekends that included fitness training at UPMC Sports Complex. By participating in out of school exercises, the students were able to manage their behavior.

