

University Partnership

A Grant-Funded Program for Minority and Underserved Populations

Jerry Holt

Provision of services for minority and underserved populations is often problematic. Often, these students attend schools in districts in which funding is lacking for the delivery of services (Ballantine, Hammack, & Stuber, 2017; Brint, 2017). Classic texts such as Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1991) highlighted the disparate nature of the schools that serve these populations, and concomitantly the diminished opportunity for these students in terms of academic progress and workforce possibilities. This disparity of opportunity, often characterized

by ethnicity and socioeconomics, persists into the 21st century (Rothstein, 2004; Weir, 2016). Kozol also continues to describe the ongoing disparity in American education in the 21st century (e.g., Kozol, 2005).

This article briefly describes a grant-funded collaboration between a university and public school districts in Florida, aimed at providing greater opportunities for ethnic minority students. Florida A&M University (FAMU) is a historically Black university, the only public HBCU in Florida. In order to provide an outreach to high school students who might not otherwise consider attending a university, FAMU has instituted the Black Male College Explorers Program (Florida Department of Education, 2017), an on-campus, residential, 4-6 week summer program. The mission of the Black Male Explorers is stated as follows:

The Black Male College Explorers Program is an at-risk prevention/intervention program designed specifically to prevent black males from dropping out of high school; facilitate their admission to college; and significantly increase their chances of earning a college degree. (Florida A&M University College of Education, 2018, p. 2)

Although the anchor site for the Black Male Explorers is at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, there are three additional sites that operate under the purview of the FAMU program. These are housed at Edward Waters College (Jacksonville),



Jerry Holt,
Visiting Instructor,
Florida A&M University.
Telephone: (850) 412-5331.
E-mail: jerry.holt@famu.edu

Bethune-Cookman University (Daytona Beach), and Florida Memorial University (Miami). Each of these HBCUs has its own model for operation of its program. There is also the possibility that Black Male Explorers will expand to other campuses, particularly to predominantly White institutions, as well as technical schools and community colleges. This report specifically targets the operation of the program at Florida A&M University.

The focus of the Black Male College Explorers is to ensure that the student participants are prepared to enter college or university classes, or some form of advanced post-secondary education. The primary emphases of the academic segment of the residential program are language arts, reading, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, but with a focus on mathematics. These are the subject areas that comprise the expected readiness of students entering the colleges and universities, as well as the areas that will constitute much of the first-year college or university experience for the prospective post-secondary students. In addition, they are the subject areas that are addressed by the Florida State Assessment examinations, which students must pass in order to graduate from high school.

Black Male Explorers sets forth a number of eligibility requirements for participation, which speak to the population to be served as well as the program objectives. Applicants must be Black male students from low-income families. In addition, they must be in Grades 7 through 11 at the beginning of the summer session to which they are applying. The program specifies that applicants must be students with diminished grade point averages that do not represent the true potential of the students. In addition, it seeks students that have either a history of disciplinary considerations, or a propensity toward irregular behavior. Students must be willing to commit to the program through their high school graduations, and must be willing to

consider some form of postsecondary education subsequent to their high school graduation. Thus, Black Male Explorers is designed to provide interventional services that address the educational deficiencies, and potentialities, of a very specific population. Not only does it seek to optimize the success level of these students through their high school years, but also seeks to ensure that their preparation for college or vocational school, or some other appropriate training for a productive place in the job market.

As noted, the academic focus of Black Male Explorers is on those subjects that are tested on the Florida State Assessments, but with a definite emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects. The Florida State Assessment tested areas are completely aligned with the state standards for the applicable subject areas. However, the entire academic program includes instruction in English, reading, mathematics, art, personal development, African American studies, and technology. Students receive instruction at their appropriate grade levels in each of the subject areas (Grades 7–11). All instruction is provided by certified teachers in the respective subject areas. Classroom instruction occurs alongside personal development activities, which include weekly seminars, workshops, and motivational trips.

There are two routes by which students may be selected for the program, in terms of funding. The primary funding source is through the Department of Education grant, as noted above. For grant-funded students, all expenses are covered, as described below. However, students may also be individually funded, usually through community donations. In order to fund the attendance of these additional students, Black Male Explorers solicits donations from community sources, in a process of strategic partnering with community organizations and private donors. A goal of the program is to reach as many

students as possible. For the summer of 2017, there were 33 students in the summer program at FAMU (Florida Department of Education, 2017).

For sponsored students, the program includes transportation to and from the Tallahassee campus, campus lodging, food, books, and classroom materials. A number of weekend activities are also included for the students. In addition, sponsored students receive a weekly stipend of \$25. Students may also be funded by parents or community organizations, outside of the grant-funded sources. The amount for non-grant funded students is approximately \$2,700 per student for the summer program.

An additional benefit of the Black Male Explorers is offered to a certain number of students in the form of complete coverage of a semester of university classes, if they meet certain criteria. Thus, for students who have been in the program for at least three years, have graduated from high school, and are admitted to the university, all expenses are covered for one semester, including tuition, lodging, books, and a meal plan. Thus, students who have demonstrated academic success through the Black Male Explorers program are afforded the opportunity of one complete semester of university attendance, without expense to the students.

Students are solicited from all public school districts in Florida. Thus, all students in Florida public school districts who meet selection criteria are eligible to apply for the summer program at FAMU. Program personnel provide information through the school districts, which is then disseminated to students and parents. Students apply for selection, and those whose applications most closely match the selection criteria are chosen for participation. Although the program is targeted at Florida students, there have been applicants from other states. These students are also welcome to apply, with the caveat that

they must meet the financial obligation for participation (see above).

Based on retention and graduation rates for the target group, those students who have participated in the Black Male Explorers program have demonstrated noticeably higher rates of high school completion than the general state rates for this group. In terms of 2017 data, the state graduation rate for this target group is 55%. For those students who participated in Black Male Explorers, the graduation rate was 95% (Florida Department of Education, 2017). In terms of postsecondary placement (i.e., enrolling in college or post-secondary vocational school, joining the military, or entering the workforce), program participants demonstrate greater than 80% placement rate. Thus, in terms of these comparative data, the Black Male Explorers program is highly successful for this target group of students.

Black Male Explorers is funded on a year-to-year basis through the Florida Legislature, and administered through the Florida Department of Education. Because of the success of Black Male Explorers within its target population, the program has been able to secure funding for 27 years. However, even with its record of success, Black Male Explorers must apply for grant funding each year. Demonstration of effectiveness of the program has, to his point, resulted in continued funding through the Legislature, and the funding seems assured for the foreseeable future, as long as Black Male Explorers can continue to demonstrate effectiveness among this target population.

Black Male Explorers has achieved significant success among its participants, although the number of participants is relatively small. Nevertheless, for those participants, their expectations for individual success, as defined by high school graduation and postsecondary productivity, have been substantially improved. The probability of graduating from high school, as well as the probability of participation in post-

secondary education, is greatly increased, compared to the general target population. As long as the legislature continues to fund the program, the Black Male College Explorers Program will continue to provide a positive and prospect-rich experience for its participants.

Note: This article was developed from a panel presentation titled *Encourage Innovative Research Through Collaborative Grants*, Florida Distance Learning Association/Florida Mathematics Teacher Educators Conference, Altamonte Springs, January 18, 2018. Errol Wilson, director, Black Male College Explorers Program, was instrumental in the preparation of this report. The integral nature of his assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

REFERENCES

- Ballantine, J. H., Hammack, F. M., & Stuber, J. (2017). *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Brint, S. (2017). *Schools and society* (3rd ed.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Florida A&M University College of Education. (2018). *Black Male College Explorers 2018 Handbook*. Tallahassee, FL: FAMU College of Education. Retrieved from www.famu.edu/BlackMalesCollege/2018%20BMCEP%20Handbook%20%202-8-18.pdf
- Florida Department of Education. (2017). 2016–2017 BMCEP summative evaluation report. *Quarterly Deliverable Reports 2016–17*, 42(2), 65–80.
- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the Black-White achievement gap*. New York, NY: Teachers College.
- Weir, K. (2016). Inequality at school: What's behind the racial disparity in our education system. *Monitor on Psychology*, 47(10), 42–47.