Mattahunt Boys Academy Profile Report

INTRODUCTION

There is a crisis that exists in America. Young black boys are losing in the game of education. They are performing at a significantly lower level than their white counterparts in reading, writing and arithmetic. Over time, this gap has only gotten worse. The Mattahunt Boys Academy (MBA) seeks to bridge this treacherous achievement gap. MBA is a same sex academic program designed to create the young intellectuals of the future. It works to achieve this goal by bringing successful community leaders and college students together with young scholars.

OBJECTIVES

The administrators and educators at MBA completed hours of research on the effects of gender specific programming on young boy’s academic success, and their goal is to use this research to improve the MCAS scores, literacy rates and math scores of their students. MBA is eager to prove that experiential activities can become positive character building experiences. These activities will have a direct correlation with student’s academic performance and growth. Moreover, MBA hopes to provide students with the tools required to navigate and resolve any issues that may appear in their lives. This agency profile will attempt to show that mentorship can positively influence a student’s academic performance. The purpose
of this report is to find out how effectively the mentors at MBA accomplish their mission.

METHODS

For research purposes, I conducted personal observations at the Academy. I also contributed to discussions and participated in as many activities as possible. In addition, I met with MBA director Chris Sumner, MBA principal Mrs. Ababio-Fernandez, and a majority of the MBA students. I wanted to meet with the director to see how he feels about the impact of the program on the student’s lives and to develop a deeper understand of the vision behind the program. My meeting with Mrs. Fernandez was to determine if the MBA program seems to have a positive effect on the students in the class. I met with students to get their opinion of MBA and find out how it has affected their lives inside and outside the classroom.

RESULTS

In this program, all mentors and scholars are required to meet at Mattahunt Community Center on 100 Hebron Street in the Mattapan section of Boston bi-weekly on Saturday mornings. Once everyone arrives, breakfast is made and served. After breakfast, students and mentors are required to recite the following poem:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

This poem, titled “Invictus,” was written by William Ernest Henley and describes a dying man who felt unconquered, empowered and encouraged even though he was on his deathbed. This poem is a vivid depiction of the attitude MBA students should have toward their lives and education. Each morning after reciting this poem, the students are required to recite the MBA creed. The MBA creed is a pledge to academic excellence and fidelity towards one another.

Students and mentors alike gather around to have what is called sacred time, when students and mentors connect with one each other on a deep, emotional level. It is the time when mentors and students create bonds that express love for each other, and it helps foster an environment focused on the importance of academia. After sacred time, the students break up into smaller groups led by the mentors. In these small groups, students focus on goal setting, reading, writing, and arithmetic. There is a maximum of three students per mentor. It is during this time of the day that students can really focus on academic improvement.

Students work diligently from 8:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. Afterwards, the mentors open up the gym for play. Gym time is based on merit; the goal is to show students that hard work pays off.
Although I am one of the lead peer mentors at MBA and, as such, already have a good understanding of the program, it was imperative for me to reach out to the principal, Mrs. Ababio-Fernandez, to learn her perspective on the Academy’s mission. She summed up the school’s “call to action” this way:

The environment for education in our country is changing rapidly and we must face that reality as the new “normal.” Despite national data showing some evidence of students’ progress, our young black males continue to trail behind their white counterparts significantly in reading and math achievement. More and more studies confirm this tragic reality and the call to act has become a moral and social imperative. Success in redirecting this educational trajectory for our black males demands collective attention and commitment from the ‘village.’ The Mattahunt School will launch a gender specific program, Mattahunt Boys Academy (MBA), as a first response to creating experiences and conditions to redirect the educational trajectory of our black male scholars. We seek to enlist the talents and energies of strong, committed community leaders with diverse backgrounds to achieve this ambitious goal! (Fernandez, 2012, personal communication)

Through mentorship and hard work, the test scores and academic confidence of MBA students has risen significantly. Each week, a different student comes in with a testimonial about how the goals he set in MBA has helped him achieve good grades and conduct reports. Evidence proving the MBA method works with 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade boys helps refute negative statistics such as the following:

Over one-half (54%) of black 4th graders scored below the basic achievement level in reading on the NAEP in 2007, and 32% scored at a basic level of achievement. (“Basic” denotes partial mastery of knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at a given grade.) Only 14% scored at or above a proficient level; of these, just 2% scored at an advanced level. (Britannica, 2010)

Many studies have proven that African-American children’s literacy rates are declining due to socioeconomic status. The Britannica blog explains that, “according to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2006), 61% of African American
children lived in low-income families” (Britannica, 2010). Perhaps there aren’t enough resources to provide these children with the necessary tools that they need to succeed in an academic environment. In its school district, MBA provides the only resources its students need to succeed: an academic venue that provides a safe haven for determined young scholars and dedicated elders who are willing to be part of the village that it takes to raise a child.

In 2011, 4th and 5th grade students at the Matthunt Elementary School scored in the 40th percentile for English Language Arts. MBA’s goal is to triple that score for 2012.

**DISCUSSIONS**

Malcolm X once stated, “The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.” He was a keen advocate for education of any kind. He believed that an education is the passport to the future. The Mattahunt Boys Academy abides by the same philosophy. MBA mentors share the tools they have used to survive life and get to where they are today. Through their mentorship, they also instill in students virtues of reciprocity, honor, dedication, diligence, and love. It is these things that will make these young men stellar students and valuable assets to the world. In addition, the MBA program has helped, and will continue to help, students raise their MCAS scores and exceed expected math and literacy rates.
RECOMMENDATIONS

My hope is that as the MBA continues to grow, so will the academic readiness and curiosity of its students. MBA excels in training young boys to be young men. They exceed in reawakening student’s intellectual promiscuity. They will continue to identify definitive ways to improve student test scores and to work towards their ultimate goal of securing a better future for our children.