

CREATING SUPPORTIVE BONDS OF BROTHERHOOD: A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

Many educators around the country are deeply committed to serving their Black and Latino male students and helping provide the support they need to pursue postsecondary education. But relatively few resources offer practical guidance about how to approach this work.

Creating Supportive Bonds of Brotherhood: A Guide for Educators is one of several guides produced by the Research Alliance for New York City Schools as part of our [evaluation of the City's Expanded Success Initiative \(ESI\)](#).

ESI created opportunities for participating high schools to try new strategies (or expand existing programs) aimed at increasing college and career readiness for Black and Latino males.

[The guides](#) cover approaches that principals and teachers across ESI high schools have identified as important to helping young men of color

reach—and be well prepared for—college. (Other topics include Culturally Relevant Education, Early Exposure to and Preparation for College, and Improving Academic Readiness for College).

Drawing on interviews and observations in five ESI high schools, each guide begins by briefly describing one of these approaches to boosting college readiness and why schools are using it. The guides then explain *how* individual schools have implemented that strategy, including concrete examples, tips, and tools. Each guide also provides a list of discussion questions and resources for educators.

Together, these materials are designed to inform educators in NYC and beyond as they work to develop innovative programs and services for Black and Latino male high school students.

What Is Brotherhood?

“Brotherhood”ⁱ can be understood as a bond shared by men of various backgrounds and generations—centered on common experiences, traditions, and/or identities.ⁱⁱ Schools can foster brotherhood by creating all-male spaces designed to develop and strengthen personal relationships, often by building on some aspect of students’ shared experiences (such as cultural backgrounds, gender-related issues, challenges in and out of school, and hopes for the future).

Why Develop Brotherhood Programs?

There is extensive research suggesting that positive relationships in schools can contribute to academic success. For example, studies have found that positive relationships between peers are linked to improved student behavior, lower risk of dropping out, and increased college-going.ⁱⁱⁱ Likewise, the quality of student-teacher relationships is associated with students’ engagement in learning, their academic expectations, and college enrollment.^{iv} Mentoring programs, in particular, show promise for improving a range of student outcomes.^v

Nurturing relationships may be particularly important for male students. There is evidence that, generally, girls have closer relationships with their teachers and more academically oriented relationships with their peers than boys do.^{vi} Furthermore, research on schools that achieve positive outcomes for Black and Latino males suggests that strong relationships between teachers and students are a crucial element of their success.^{vii}

The schools highlighted in this guide offer male-only programs designed to promote a sense of brotherhood and camaraderie. Educators and students at the schools report that these programs do indeed strengthen relationships, help students feel valued, and foster a sense of belonging to a larger community of adults and peers.

This guide was authored by Tony Laing and Adriana Villavicencio.

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BROTHERHOOD CEREMONIES

EAST BRONX ACADEMY

East Bronx Academy (EBA) holds an annual in-school “ring and sweater ceremony,” designed to foster a sense of brotherhood among 9th and 10th grade male students. The ceremony is similar to those seen in some college fraternities, with male students gathered to receive a ring or sweater (in this case, identifying them as a member of the school community, rather than a fraternity) and to recite a pledge for the future, as described below. The ceremony aims to recreate positive experiences many of the school’s teachers had as fraternity or sorority members, such as the opportunity to share cultural traditions and develop lasting friendships. Components of the ceremony include:

Wide outreach.

All EBA first- and second-year male students—around 120 in total—are invited to participate in the ring and sweater ceremony, which takes place during the evening in the school building. Students first learn about the event at an in-school information session, where staff describes the school’s full set of male-only programs/initiatives. The event is also promoted through fliers and emails (see example on page 3), and students are encouraged to invite their family members. The actual number of students who participate varies from year to year.

“I could say these guys [are my brothers], because I never really had a brother, and I guess **I learned brotherhood from these people** who share close bonds with each other.”

– East Bronx Academy Student




Pledges for the future.

During the ceremony, 9th graders make a public pledge to another person—usually a family member, but sometimes themselves, a peer, or a teacher—to achieve some personal goal. These goals are typically academic in nature. For example, students have pledged to no longer be late to school, to get better grades, and to enroll in college. After making their pledge, participating 9th grade students receive a ring (purchased by the school) and recite the following words: “I, (name) , pledge to work hard, pass all my classes, and graduate high school, and I will continue to further my education in college.” According to school staff, the public nature of the pledges not only helps form bonds between the students, as they share a meaningful experience, but also contributes to a sense of peer support and accountability for students’ goals.

Physical symbols.

During the ceremony, sophomores give freshmen rings, while freshmen, in turn, provide sophomores with sweaters imprinted with their last name or a nickname. The rings and sweaters serve as an ongoing reminder of the ceremony and the goals students publicly articulated.

Save the Date	ESI Annual Induction Ceremony
	
	February 5, 2014 5:30 pm – 7:30pm
	Invitations to Follow

CREATING BROTHERHOOD THROUGH CONVERSATION

ACORN COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

ACORN Community High School sponsors an annual day-long symposium for all of its male students. The program was originally designed as a series of individual seminars throughout the semester, but staff decided a full-day event would be less disruptive to scheduling and provide a more powerful experience for students. The symposium facilitates conversations about topics the staff deem particularly salient for male students and provides an opportunity for students to connect with Black and Latino male alumni, teachers, and other adults in the community.

The symposium features outside speakers (recruited through word of mouth, referrals from school staff, or college fraternities), a film screening, and six panel discussions. A male staff member attends each of the panels, which are all led by alumni, male community leaders, and/or teachers. Students rotate through three of the six panels based on their interests. The 2015 symposium included panels on the following topics (descriptions excerpted from a flier ACORN used to promote the event):

Know your rights.

As Black and Brown young men growing up in Brooklyn, New York, knowing your rights is crucial. With "Stop and Frisk" so prevalent in our city, it is important that we equip our young brothers with knowledge that will prevent them from becoming victims of the judicial system and the prison-industrial complex. This panel discussion will inform students of their rights under the law; it will also deal with racial profiling.

Life after high school.

Not all students want to go to college; many would like to join the workforce as soon as possible. This panel discussion will provide information about several options that students may be considering for careers upon graduation from high school. In addition, alumni will share experiences they have had after graduating, with the goal of giving students insight into potential academic or career paths.

Looking the part.

Looking the part is vital in professional and personal life. This workshop and panel discussion will take a two-pronged approach: First and foremost, it will address the "dos" and "don'ts" of hygiene and dressing in business attire. Second, it will provide information about developing a career in the grooming and clothing industry.

Money is power.

This workshop will focus on the importance of learning the language of money and becoming financially literate. One skill that is essential to the success of our students and community, and that at times is overlooked, is being financially responsible and savvy. This part of the symposium will address financial literacy/planning and entrepreneurship.

The importance of brotherhood.

Without unity, families, communities, and society will not survive the test of time. Most students understand the importance of social unity; unfortunately they may find unity in the wrong places. Gangs and other individuals who don't have students' best interests at heart are tempting ways to obtain the unity students crave. This panel will highlight organizations that provide better options and opportunities for students to become a part of something positive and find the unity that will benefit both others and themselves.

The importance of education.

"Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." — Malcolm X. Education has always been looked upon as a vital part of our progress throughout history. However, when most people think about education, they think narrowly about grades, exams, and books. This panel will examine education using a broader lens and try to redefine education for our students, so they will have the desire to become life-long learners.

Workshops at the symposium were designed to capture students' interest by addressing topics that spoke to their social, educational, and cultural experiences. The workshops all featured Black and Latino male speakers, highlighting models of success and possible sources of ongoing support for students. Some alumni shared their contact information with students and encouraged them to stay in touch. According to students, the day provided knowledge and insight into topics relevant to their everyday lives and future goals, as well as an opportunity to discuss these topics openly with one another. Many expressed that this shared experience fostered a sense of brotherhood and comradery that extended well beyond the one-day event.

"I feel like it was a really important event... I feel like anybody that spoke that day had a bit of honesty in them and just pretty much told the truth. You have to do this. You got this... You can't just sit down and enjoy the ride. **You actually have to put in work. I feel like that was a very important aspect of that day.**"

– ACORN Student

CREATING BROTHERHOOD THROUGH PEER MENTORSHIP

HIGH SCHOOL FOR LAW AND PUBLIC SERVICE

The High School for Law and Public Service (HSLPS) offers a voluntary peer mentoring program that pairs 20 male 9th and 10th graders with 20 male 11th and 12th grade mentors.^{viii} The goal of the program is to use the power of peer relationships, and more specifically brotherhood, to help students achieve academic success and strive for college. Mentors and mentees meet during a weekly class during the school day. Food is provided in all sessions as an incentive to attend and a way to build community.

Pairs are matched for a full school year. In the classes, mentees work with their mentors to set and regularly check in on specific goals, and teachers provide both mentors and mentees with information and support related to college and careers. Beyond the classes, mentors are expected to communicate regularly with their mentees about their academic goals, extracurricular activities, public service engagement, and enrichment opportunities. The school also brings the pairs on a number of trips.

HSLPS's peer mentorship program emphasizes:

Empowering mentors.

Though three teachers oversee the peer mentoring program, the mentors actually plan the “lessons” from week to week. They meet a few days before the mentorship class, come up with a topic (e.g., selecting a college, writing a personal essay, etc.), and develop a presentation (usually a slideshow) and short activity related to the topic. Each week during class, three or four mentors present the material to the mentees. Finally, mentors solidify their commitment to the program by signing a mentor “contract.” See a sample contract on page 7.

Enrichment opportunities.

Many students agreed that one of the best parts of the peer mentorship program was the opportunity to venture outside of the classroom together, including an overnight college trip, a visit to Chelsea Piers, and a baseball game. Staff reported that mentor-mentee relationships grew stronger as a result of these shared experiences.

Celebrating academic success.

The mentorship class is largely focused on academic goals, including the pathway to college. Both mentees and mentors set specific goals early each marking period (e.g., average an 80 in all core classes, apply to 7 colleges). Then, pairs and staff track progress toward these goals and publicly acknowledge all students who meet or exceed them. Students report that these celebrations, which occur several times throughout the year, help them feel motivated by their own or others' successes.

“The students feel like the streets—that was the word most of them used—the streets were a big challenge, like what they see outside, drug dealing and gang activity... Not having **positive role models** that they could readily talk to or be influenced by. [The peer mentoring program provides those] role models.”
– *HSLPS Teacher*

Continuity.

As they become 11th and 12th graders, past mentees are encouraged to serve as mentors. One of the advantages of this approach is that students who were mentees are in a better position to understand the importance of the mentor's role for a younger student. HSLPS staff have also invited alumni of the school and the program to speak to current students about their experiences in college and to lead tours of their college campuses. Meeting alumni is a powerful way to help younger students envision themselves succeeding in high school and beyond.

The peer mentoring program has a variety of potential benefits for both mentees and mentors. For example, 9th grade mentees have access to several "point people" (i.e., their own mentors and others in the class) to help them navigate a new school. They also have a forum to seek support around personal or academic issues and setbacks. The mentors develop leadership skills and receive credit for volunteering, which they can highlight on college applications.

Furthermore, the class provides both mentors and mentees with ample exposure to the many steps involved in preparing to go college, including information about SAT and ACT exams, GPA requirements, personal essays, Regents exams, etc. They also learn about different types of colleges and universities and how to apply to different institutions. But, perhaps most importantly, the program creates a safe space for male students to spend time with others who share many common challenges and a set of common goals. HSLPS students and teachers report that program creates a powerful sense of brotherhood, which encourages peer support and accountability.





HSLPS Peer Mentor Program

The mission of a Peer Mentor is to:

- ✓ Make freshmen feel comfortable coming to them with questions or concerns. HSLPS has friendly, fun, and supportive people.
- ✓ Touch base regularly and make sure freshmen are doing well with their grades, attendance, behavior, and overall acclimating to high school life.
- ✓ Motivate them to work hard and keep their grades up - no freshmen should begin their high school years with a failing grade. Failure is not an option for our freshmen! Most four-year colleges look for students with 80+ averages.
- ✓ Let them know about all the different sports, clubs, public service and activities available and encourage them to join something. Being connected to school with an extracurricular activity highlights the social side of high school life and a lot of other great experiences that high school offers.
- ✓ Encourage them to make wise choices and good decisions.

What you get:

- Public Service Hours
- Items for College Application
- Building Confidence, Self-Esteem and Satisfaction from knowing you are helping someone
- Lunch!

Mentoring-- which comes from the Greek word

meaning "enduring"—is defined as a trusted and sustained relationship between two or more people. With this definition in mind, the peer mentor program will group one mentee with one mentor with a goal of creating an enduring and successful relationship.

Describe a person in your life (preferably not a relative) who has guided you or been an "enduring" support for you.

What three qualities does this person possess that make him or her an enduring influence for you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Your commitment:

As an HSLPS peer mentor, you are about to begin one of life's potentially most rewarding and fulfilling experiences. Your commitment indicates that you believe in others. You recognize the magnitude of the responsibility that you accepted in choosing to work with freshmen and agree to interact/contact appropriately with your mentees according to the highest ethical standards. Most of all, be yourself and enjoy this enriching opportunity. Lastly, always show up! X _____



Questions for Educators

1. How would you define “brotherhood” in the context of the male students you serve? Which issues have you encountered in your school that might lead to the creation of a brotherhood program?
2. The schools in this guide use three very different strategies to encourage brotherhood among their male students. Does your school have any programs that facilitate these types of experiences? If not, what are some programs or practices you might consider developing?
3. What are some potential challenges of providing single-gender programming? For example, are there any issues around gender identities that might make it difficult to convene single-gender groups of students in your school community?
4. What are some potential benefits of providing opportunities for Black and Latino males to bond with each other, with teachers, and with school leaders? What areas of your school environment or culture might be changed with the addition of brotherhood—or sisterhood—programs? How might they improve the interactions between students or between students and staff?

Professional Development Opportunities

The following organizations provide trainings or resources related to creating brotherhood in schools.

Black Male Development Symposium
<http://blackmaledvelopment.com/>

Brotherhood Sister Sol <http://brotherhood-sistersol.org/>

Coalition for Schools Education Boys of Color (COSEBOC) <http://coseboc.org>

Chionesu Bakari Program for Young Men
<http://youngblackmanonline.org/>

Gay Men of African Descent
<http://www.gmad.org>

Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools
<http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/>

One Hundred Black Men, Inc.
<http://ohbm.org/site/>

Student African American Brotherhood
<http://www.saabnational.org/>

The City University of New York Black Male Initiative <http://www1.cuny.edu/sites/bmi>

Undoing Racism: The People’s Institute for Survival Beyond <http://www.pisab.org/>

Young Men’s Initiative NYC
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/yimi/html/home/home.shtml>

Related Sources

Schools interested in providing their staff with books related to developing brotherhood may refer to this abbreviated list:

- Butler-Dirge, S.R. (2009). *Rites of Passage: A Program for High School African American Males*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Franklin, A. J. (2004). *From Brotherhood to Manhood: How Black Men Rescue their Relationships and Dreams from the Invisibility Syndrome*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Harper, S. R., Wood, J.L. (Eds.) (2015). *Advancing Black Male Student Success from Preschool through PhD*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mincy, R.B. (1994). *Nurturing Young Black Males: Challenges to Agencies, Programs and Social Policy*. Lanham, MD: National Book Network.
- Noguera, P. (2009). *The Trouble with Black Boys: ...And Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Tatum, A. (2009). *Reading for Their Life: (Re)Building the Textual Lineages of African American Male Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Publishing.

Notes

ⁱ Franklin, A. J. (2004). *From Brotherhood to Manhood: How Black Men Rescue their Relationships and Dreams from the Invisibility Syndrome*. John Wiley & Sons: IAP: Charlotte, NC.

ⁱⁱ This guide focuses on what case schools have done for groups of male students as part of ESI, but some of the strategies we describe have been used with female and non-gender-conforming students in these and other schools.

ⁱⁱⁱ Haynie, D.L. & Osgood, D.W. (2005). Reconsidering Peers and Delinquency: How Do Peers Matter? *Social Forces*, 84(2), 1109-1130; Riegle-Crumb, C. (2010). More Girls Go to College: Exploring the Social and Academic Factors Behind the Female Postsecondary Advantage Among Hispanic and White Students. *Research in Higher Education*, 51(6), 573-593; Wells, R.S., Seifert, T.A., Padgett, R.D., Park, S., & Umbach, P.D. (2011). Why Do More Women Than Men Want to Earn a Four-Year Degree? Exploring the Effects of Gender, Social Origin, and Social Capital on Educational Expectations. *Journal of Higher Education*, 82(1), 1-32.

^{iv} Wells, et al, 2011; Riegle-Crumb 2010.

^v DuBois, D., Portillo, N., Rhodes, J., Silverthorn, N., & Valentine, J. (2011). How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of the evidence. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 12(2), 57-91; Eby, L., Allen, T., Evans, S., Ng, T., & DuBois, D. (2008). Does mentoring matter? A multidisciplinary meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72(2), 254-267; Jekielek, S., Moore, K., Hair, E. & Scarupa, H. (2002). *Mentoring: A promising strategy for youth development*. Retrieved from Child Trends Website: <http://www.childtrends.org/?publications=mentoring-a-promising-strategy-for-youth-development>.

^{vi} DiPrete, T. A., & Buchmann, C. (2013). *The rise of women: The growing gender gap in education and what it means for American schools*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Giordano, P.C. (2003). Relationships in Adolescence. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 257-281; Hughes, J. N., Cavell, T.A. & Wilson, V. (2001). Further Support for the Developmental Significance of the Quality of the Teacher-Student Relationship. *Journal of School Psychology*, 39(4), 289-301; Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Wells et al., 2011.

^{vii} Fergus, E., Noguera, P. & Martin, M. (2014). *Schooling for Resilience: Improving the Life Trajectory of Black and Latino Boys*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

^{viii} Both mentors and mentees must opt into the program, but specific students who staff identify as struggling academically, socially or emotionally are often encouraged to participate as mentees.

To learn more about our evaluation of the Expanded Success Initiative, please visit our website:
http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/research_alliance/research/projects/esi_evaluation

The Research Alliance for New York City Schools conducts rigorous studies on topics that matter to the City's public schools. We strive to advance equity and excellence in education by providing nonpartisan evidence about policies and practices that promote students' development and academic success.

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