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Dear Reader,

On behalf of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color, I welcome you to the first edition of our newsletter. Being at the forefront of the movement to educate boys and young men of color, we have named it *The Vanguard*.

The mission of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color is re-imagine and transform the schooling experience for boys and young men of color. In order to meet our mission we will commit our energies to the process of communicating and connecting with practitioners, researchers, and policymakers who believe that high quality education for male students of color must be achieved.

The Vanguard will profile schools and leaders who are working to make male students of color socially, emotionally, and academically proficient. These are places and people who believe that their students have the capability of becoming leaders and innovators for the twenty-first century.

The Vanguard will also feature a wide range of tips, tools, and strategies that will support those who want to be the “difference makers” in the lives of boys and young men of color.

The Vanguard will also solicit articles, opinion pieces, and research from readers and others interested in



Ron Walker

advancing the mission of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color.

Additionally, *The Vanguard* will provide the avenue for building the learning community of leaders across a wide range of professional backgrounds. The common thread will be the consensus that their work is to insure that male students of color have a fair, equitable and exemplary opportunities to learn and to succeed.

The Vanguard will be a membership benefit that will be published four times over the school year.

As Executive Director of the Coalition, I believe that *The Vanguard* will become a beacon for the movement to save our sons. It will serve as one of several touchstones that will be shaped by those who recognize that the nation cannot afford to lose another male student of color to a sub-standard education. *The Vanguard* intends to lead the way. Please join us on this important journey.

Sincerely,

Ron Walker
Executive Director
Coalition of Schools Educating Boys
of Color

Feature Article

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “rite of passage” as a ritual associated with a crisis or a change of status for an individual. The term appears in the mission statement of New York’s Urban Assembly Academy of History & Citizenship for Young Men (UAAHC) for good reason.

“Our school’s philosophy is ‘retrieve the past in order to create the future.’ The rite of passage concept comes from history, and in many indigenous societies of color it is how boys become adults,” says UAAHC co-founder and principal, Jonathan Foy. He further explains the transition to manhood is so difficult for many young men of color in part because they have been disconnected from their cultural legacy. UAAHC through its history-focused curriculum seeks to reconnect its students (called scholars) to the past, imparting strong academic and character traits along the way.

The Bronx-based high school (grades 9-12) first opened its door in 2004 and currently enrolls 300 scholars. In addition to Foy, UAAHC was co-founded by Kamau Ptah, the Program Director and Richard Kahan, president of the Urban Assembly. The idea of UAAHC first came about when Ptah and Foy worked as history teachers at the Study Center for Law and Peace (SCL&P), a mini-school located in Harlem. It was at SCL&P that UAAHC’s future founders experienced the small school model, urban education, and successful work with adolescent males.

UAAHC’s curriculum is centered on the study of history, law, civics, and the arts. Scholars develop the skills of college bound historians and are



expected to be independent thinkers, investigators, problem solvers, activists, and masters of acquiring and synthesizing multiple strands of information. The school is in accordance with the New York State Regents requirements, and also includes such courses as African American History, Latino History, Facing History and Ourselves, Law and Dispute Resolution, Photography, Drama and Spoken Word.

Scholars are further prepared for college by trips to a variety of campuses around the country. As a graduate of the class of 2008 recently wrote: “From freshmen year until senior year, the whole UAAHC staff always talked about college and how prominent of a role it played in my and each of my brothers’ futures. The staff spoke of college like it was a part of every scholar’s destiny. It definitely kept me in high hopes. When graduation day arrived, I knew I was ready for the challenge of college.”

The school hosts a Saturday Academy where scholars engage in academic, recreational, and cultural activities. The first part of the day is spent on workshops in which scholars think critically about local and national issues through the prisms of math and English. The remainder of the day

is spent in extracurricular activities including athletics, the UAAHC Warrior Step Team (2009 City Champions), New York Cares community service, and field trips.

“We are a small school and take advantage of our size, we know our young men and engage them in a number of ways,” says Foy. Other means of transformative engagement include annual international excursions. Among the locations scholars have visited or will visit are Costa Rica (where scholars studied education and agriculture), Japan (where the impact of hip hop culture in Asia will be examined), and Ghana.

In order to create a healthy school culture, UAAHC is based upon the Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles) that derives from the cultural celebration of Kwanzaa. The seven principles are geared toward cultivating character and building community for all members of the school family.

“We want our scholars to feel as though they are part of a family and take personal and academic risks that they would not normally attempt in a conventional educational experience,” says Ptah. “Our young men are challenged to explore their vision and life purpose and how they will contribute to our legacy. We want our scholars to look at where they are along the boy-man trajectory, and help them realize that they can become history-makers and contribute to our collective story.”

One way in which community is built is through the annual celebration of Warrior Week. Held at the beginning of each academic year, the lessons and readings cover a range of themes

“Our school’s philosophy is retrieve the past in order to create the future.”

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centered on the UAAHC mission including manhood, the importance of culture and history, civic engagement, and the Nguzo Saba.

“We make Warrior Week unique each year, adding different components like hosting powerful presentations by renowned guests and upperclassmen that live our mission,” says Ptah.

“Additionally, dynamic workshops are designed to guide scholars to a greater awareness of the cultural and historical legacy of African and Latino people and how UAAHC and the scholars are the expression of the vision of their ancestors who yearned for a brighter day.”

The spirit of Warrior Week continues throughout the year, through guest speakers (including the likes of Ernest Green, Phylicia Rashad, Sister Souljah and rapper KRS-1) “who walk off the pages of history” and engage with scholars; an annual Men’s Conference that involves parents and touches on a range of topics including sexuality, overcoming obstacles, victory over the streets, gang prevention, relationship with the police and substance abuse, and a mandatory Advisory class.

In Advisory, a group of 15-20 scholars and a teacher engage in discussion, readings and activities centered on issues relevant to their elevation and evolution. Scholars are challenged to examine their core values and are presented with trials and ordeals that help them affirm their developing identity as young men.

“The activities and initiations facilitated in Advisory forces our young men to think on their feet and address areas in their lives that they need to strengthen and demonstrate support in the areas that they have excelled. Advisory helps to foster our rite of passage experiences and the young men are celebrated for making



Kamau Ptah, Cornel West, and Jonathan Foy

discoveries and breakthroughs about their distinct and authentic identities,” says Foy.

The model adopted by UAAHC has so far proven successful. “We graduated our first class two years ago. In New York City, 45 percent of students of color graduate, with an even lower rate in the Bronx,” says Foy. “Our graduation rate is much better than the system, but we are not yet where we want to be—we graduated 65 percent with 96 percent going off to college. We are confident that in years to come not only will our graduation rates increase, but our young men will represent the answers to the challenges that our communities encounter. They will be men of vision and purpose with the capacity to transform our world.”

Learn more about UAAHC:
<http://www.uaahc.org/>

Gathering of Leaders

Re-imagining Schooling for Boys and Young Men of Color
Howard University,
School of Education
Washington D.C.
April 22-24, 2010

This three-day conference will convene school leaders and others committed to the education of boys and young men of color.

Participants will share promising practices, engage in informative interactive workshops, and continue the process of building the movement to re-imagine and advance the schooling of male students of color.

Register now for this event on the COSEBOC website:
www.coseboc.org/conference.htm

America, Our Black Boys Are Dying!



Commentary by Ron Walker

As an educator who has devoted four decades of service to advancing the educational prospects of all students, I am deeply concerned about the plight of a particular group of students. Those students are male and black.

America's urban black community is being torn asunder. The tragic circumstances brought on by the recent murder of a young black male who was also an honor student has made Chicago the latest flash point for urban youth violence. Unfortunately, Chicago is just the tip of the modern holocaust that continues to deny too many black young men life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

In a recent speech, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan challenged all of America's school districts to pick up the pace and to remain relentless in their efforts to educate all students. I totally agree with the secretary and with our president who opened this school year with a strong motivational message to our students. To quote Duncan, "everyone everywhere shares a common belief that education is America's economic salvation." He went on to share the statistics that have become all too familiar. Too many students dropping out of school, too many of our students continue to trail their international counterparts in math and science, too few earning a college degree and our continual decline in the rate of college completion. We are now in 10th place; a generation ago we were in 1st place.

The pleas from political and business leaders are loud and their worry regarding how America measures up to nations like China, India and Singapore is real. And while I agree



Derrion Albert

with the charge to reclaim our place in the global pecking order, I question if all of the stakeholders truly understand the toll that is being taken in America's urban deserts each and every day.

Many will likely fail to connect the tragic event in Chicago with our nation's goal to lead the world in economic and education superiority. Each time we lose another young male of color to the ravages of violence and the consequences of sub par education our ability to close what Arne Duncan termed the "global achievement gap" gets slimmer and slimmer. Can we afford to lose another student of promise, like Derrion Albert? I think not.

Following the slow response to the peoples' cries for help after Hurricane Katrina, Harvard Law School professor Lani Guinier said that "poor black people are our nation's canary in the mine." The question remains, do we hear their cries? Do we hear the cries of our black and brown boys who are crying for attention? If the need to close the global gap is so urgent and if we still lag behind in the numbers of college graduates needed to fend off the economic challenge posed by other nations, can we afford not to listen? Can we afford to waste any portion of our nation's resources? Are we willing to continue to pay the annual \$35K cost of incarceration versus \$12k of educating this valuable resource?

Some will emphatically say that black people must mobilize and solve the problems taking place in their neighborhoods themselves. They will also say that the parents are to blame. And they will say that the black middle class and blacks of means have turned a blind eye to the crisis in the village. All of these arguments have merit and I too would say that the black community must come together like never before.

However, the issue is larger than any one group. The reality is that these are America's children and youth. These children belong to all of us! If we fail to see this fundamental premise then we will surely fail in our relentless efforts to regain our global stature as the leader of the free world. We will never know if Derrion Albert would have become the next Nobel Prize winning physicist or humanitarian and we will never know if the countless thousands of murdered boys and young men of color would have contributed to our efforts to close the global achievement gap.

Yet we do know that with each loss of life the opportunity to maximize our potential will go unmet.

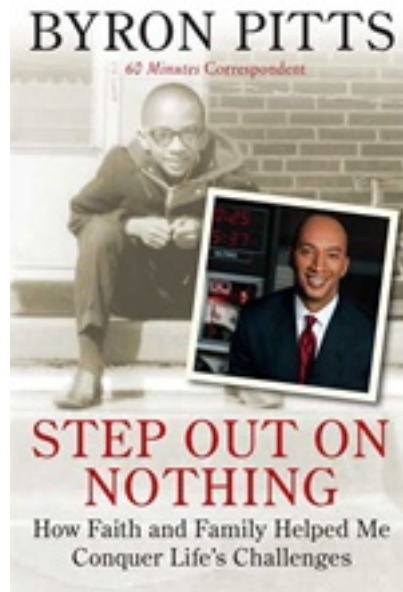
The business, political, and education communities must bear the same burden that the affected community must bear. The rally to liberate inner city communities of color from fear, terror, unacceptable education, the prison pipeline, predatory lending, poor nutrition and health, substandard housing, and a dearth of job prospects rests on the nation's resolve to stop the loss of our children and youth. If we fail to accept this challenge, then we will surely fail to reclaim our eminence as the world's most prestigious nation simply because we have failed to take care of our own. Yes America, Our Black Boys Are Dying! What will YOU do?

Standards and Promising Practices

The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color in partnership with the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education has developed the *Standards and Promising Practices for Schools Educating Boys of Color Tool* to assist school districts and educational leaders that seek to develop and enhance schools and programs serving boys of color. This document is organized under 7 essential core areas for developing and sustaining effective schools and/or school programs for boys of color. Each core area contains a list of standards of practice or “quality indicators”, and promising practices for ensuring quality outcomes.

More information about the *Standards* will be announced on our website and in future issues of *The Vanguard*.

Recommended Reading



In *Step Out on Nothing: How Faith and Family Helped Me Conquer Life's Challenges* (St. Martin's Press, \$24.95), CBS News correspondent Byron Pitts describes the numerous childhood obstacles he overcame to become a success. Pitts was raised by a single mother, had a severe stutter that left him socially isolated, and was illiterate to the age of 12. In describing his book, Pitt says “I talk about the journey I had to go on as a boy who felt so uncomfortable in his own skin...it is for anyone who has been told no you can't, you're not good enough, you're not ready.”

Learn more:
<http://us.macmillan.com/BookCustomPage.aspx?isbn=9780312577667>

Join COSEBOC

Please visit our website to learn how you, your school, or district can join the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color. Among the benefits of membership are:

- Discount on annual conference registration fee
- A subscription to *The Vanguard* newsletter
- Use of a school self-assessment tool and access to fee-based external review
- Quarterly webinars on topics related to the education and development of young men of color
- Access through social networking technology to a virtual community of leaders

www.coseboc.org/membership.htm

■ THE VANGUARD ■

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The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) promotes the re-imagining of the schooling experience for boys and young men of color. We are a networked learning community of educators, researchers, policy-makers and caring adults. We support school leaders with high quality professional development so they can realize this vision of making success an attainable goal for every male student of color.

Our work is made possible by the generous support of:

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Urban Prep Academies

SchoolWorks