

June 17, 2013

Dear Mr. Ron Walker:

I would like to thank you and your COSEBOC team for the opportunity to become a part of a very exciting movement. Through this experience, I have grown both as an individual and an educator. COSEBOC has skillfully taken me through the process of educating boys of color by methodically referring me to books written specially addressing their learning styles, discipline issues, and educational needs.

Though I am a woman of color, the wife of a man of color, the mother of a man of color, and have been the teacher of hundreds of boys of color, I have learned that I did not know enough about the mind, wiring, and learning styles of males of color. Instinctively I have traveled through my career systematically teaching through my own learning experiences. As a woman of color, I understood the biases that I had experienced and strived to not inflict those same practices on the children entrusted to my educational care. While doing an admirable job, I was not equipped by the educational institutions to be successful in creating an equitable educational setting for all students.

As my journey propelled me towards growth, I had to first admit some cold hard facts. First, boys of color were falling far behind their counterparts in almost every major area as it relates to education. Second, when we fail boys of color in the classroom we set them up for failure in life. Third, in order to improve the success of these young men, we must improve the way we provide instruction. COSEBOC helped me to focus my vision on the solution and not the perceived problems, the boys.

Through the Mississippi Leadership Association led by COSEBOC, I have had an opportunity to receive hands-on training geared specifically towards meeting the needs of the lowest twenty-five percent of society's students. Understanding that group is comprised mainly of African-American and Latino boys, COSEBOC had to first break my mind of the stereotypes often held even among our own culture. In order to do so, COSEBOC utilized the facilitation of wonderful professionals like Mr. Sean Vann, Dr. Farmbry, Dr. Howard Stevens and others. Consequently, my eyes have been opened to the great opportunities that lay ahead and sadden by the great failures that we as educators have already inflicted on so many young males of color.

Through learning styles quizzes, hands-on activities, small group sharing, and whole group learning, I as a participant have grown. It is my hope to bring back to my school and district what was been shared with me so that we can turn the low performers into high achievers. I acknowledge that changing mindsets is not easy; however, I know that it is possible through the books, quizzes, and human resources made available through this movement. As Mr. Walker says, "A movement takes more than a moment."

In addition to the wealth of information, I have also been exposed to the theories in action. While attending the 7th Annual COSEBOC Gathering, I was given the opportunity to see boys from economically low backgrounds show off their skills both on the stage and in the classroom. Through this experience, I was reminded that it is not the amount of your pocketbook but the amount of your determination that dictates your success. Through changing the culture of the educational environment, boys of color were given an opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

As a result, I am implementing those practices into a new school program called Young Men of Valor. This school-within-a-school will be comprised of low achieving boys who will be placed in all boys classes and receive instruction based solely on the learning styles of boys. They will have opportunities to become exposed to more cultural activities, critical thinking learning, and mentoring. All of this is a result of my time as a member of COSEBOC.

If there is anyone who wants to become a part of the educational solution in regards to young men of color, I would encourage the active participation in COSEBOC. We cannot prepare students to be successful in the twenty-first century without acknowledging their changes both in the way they think and the way they act. We must first become learners so that we may help others to think!

Thank you COSEBOC FAMILY for helping me to become a better Dream keeper.

Sincerely,


Iscinova Durio-Gray