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Celebrating Students of Promise

by Petrea Hicks

"...We acknowledge that, at every level, there has been a fundamental failure on behalf of our African American male students and a persistent bias against them."

—From the report on the Task Force on the Education of African American Males (Maryland), March 2007

On February 1, 2020, early childhood educators attended a Maryland State Department of Education approved training titled "Addressing and Eliminating the Opportunity Gap Among African American Males in the state of Maryland" at Johns Hopkins University. Petrea Hicks recently presented a similar topic during NAEYC's 2017 and 2018 annual conferences. She is the creator and facilitator of this training workshop; its intention is to continue the conversation with grassroots initiatives, in order to support ongoing change.

Workshop content included:

- Maryland's Senate Bill 651/House Bill 425 ban and pre-school suspension and expulsion recommendations.

- The Cooperative Children's Book Center 2018 publishing statistics about characters from diverse backgrounds.
- Changing the narrative from "Children at Risk" to "Children of Promise," and considering referring African American males to talented/gifted programs.
- The evidence that when children read books with characters and themes/experiences that represent them, they fare better than those who don't. (These children exhibit higher comprehension, but not recall, with African American characters and Euro-American themes/experiences; and, higher comprehension and recall with African American characters and themes/experiences.

Participants were introduced to and asked to share how some Maryland community grassroots initiatives serve to develop the next generation of leaders committed to reducing the opportunity gap (See Figure 1).



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Petrea Hicks, M.Ed., is the owner of XYZ the end result LLC, an early childhood education professional development training company. Hicks creates and conducts training workshops for local, state and national early education agencies and is an approved trainer with Maryland State Department of Education and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Division of Early Learning in Washington, D.C. She also works as a quality assurance specialist with Maryland's Quality Improvement System, Maryland EXCELS, for which she conducts trainings and offer technical assistance, monitoring and coaching to enhance the quality of childcare programs.

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Website



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Photo courtesy of Petrea Hicks

Left to right: Joyce Ferber, preschool teacher; Pamela Bryant-Funderburk, Ms. P's family child care program; Keya Johnson, preschool teacher; Del'Bria Castelow, child development supervisory program technician; and Lisa Dingle, coordinator, Baltimore County Public Schools' Early Childhood Office.

At the workshop's conclusion, participants were asked, "What was the big message you will share and what you found most valuable?" Responses included:

"...linking this information back to fundamental teaching practices, such as recognizing the different learning styles and how boys are kinesthetic learners... need(ing) to move and learn."

"The importance of adult decisions that impact children. Advocate for children and give them a voice."

"All of it was needed to drive future instruction, trainings and conversation within the Head Start program I help oversee."

"Educating parents on the vitality of perspective as it relates to African American males – promise over risk!"

Collectively, the data shows that amid the harsh challenges facing Black students, the Black community has not given up on education.

Petrea Hicks' training company, XYZ the end result LLC, has plans to collaborate with Johns Hopkins University School of Education's Literacy Project FY 20/21.



Photo courtesy of Petrea Hicks

Del'Bria Castelow, winner of books featuring African American male characters.



Photo courtesy of Petrea Hicks

Petrea Hicks - XYZ the end result LLC

FIGURE 1 Maryland Community Grassroots Initiatives

Black Fathers of Baltimore

<https://www.facebook.com/blackfathersfoundation/>

"It will help serve the positive self-image to develop the next generation of leaders committed to reducing the opportunity gap."

—Keya Johnson

Bowie State University, The Black Male Teachers College

Contact: Dr. Julius Davis (jldavis@bowiestate.edu)

"The Black Male Teachers College is a unique initiative to increase the impact of teachers on our black males when their teachers look like them."

—Naeomi Samuel

Building Our Network of Diversity (BOND)

<https://bondeducators.org/>

"Male educators bring different skill sets to the ECE field, but they also break down barriers of gender and race."

—Rachel Baucher

The Young Barbers Club

<https://theyoungbarbersclub.org/>

"Provide young people with the training and knowledge of a trade... even if college wasn't in their plan."

—Kendra Stewart