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INTRODUCTION
The Black male is the most vilified sub-group in American history. From being separated and sold to being told to “shut up and dribble”, there is a traumatic history of exterminating Black male voices from American society. This position and treatment both directly and indirectly impact Black boys and men at every level of the educational system.

Nationally:
- Black student dropout rates are nearly 8%
- Black students have the lowest mean ACT scores
- Black students are over 200% as likely to be suspended as their white counterparts

Locally:
- Black students are seven times more likely than white students to be suspended from school 10 or more days in Jackson County.
- Black students, on average, score 25% on ELA compared to peer average of 44%.
- In Math, Black students averaged 18% compared to their peers’ average of 37%.

Overall, the health and wellbeing of Black students is being jeopardized with the lack of success they experience in schools. Ensuring that Black Male Educators are present and active in classrooms and schools allows Black men to have their voices heard and ensures that equity and healing occur.

Racial equity can only take place with an equitable representation of Black Male Educators. The impact Black Male Educators have on Black students by representation and revolutionary education is rooted deeply in racial equity and education justice. By serving the most underserved population in education we will pursue racial equity and justice through education. BLOC’s vision is to place a Black Male Educator in the academic path of every student to ensure their life trajectory is truly reflective of their talents and not their provided opportunities.

Imagine a day where every police officer, every doctor, every parent has had at least one Black Male Educator in their academic career. Police officers, doctors, bankers, lawyers, and teachers will no longer be able to equate young, Black boys with thugs and predators. Instead, they will see them as children who are seeking opportunities.

Cornell Ellis
Co-Founder & CEO
Brothers Liberating Our Communities (BLOC) is a professional network of Black Male Educational leaders working to uplift our communities through racial equity-centered education work. Since 2016 we have been focused on the Kansas City metropolitan area, dedicated to recruiting, retaining, and advancing Black men through careers in education, thereby transforming the landscape of traditional educational leadership.

Since its inception, BLOC has committed to providing affinity-based networks of development and support to meet the unique needs of the Black Male Educator, which are so often overlooked by typical educational development programming and whose omission leads directly to the lack of Black male representation in education careers. Through its mission of providing sustainment to the whole Black Male Educator, BLOC seeks to build a network of empowered leaders who will go on to revolutionize the current educational landscape, uplift and sustain current educators, and transform the student experience in pursuit of equitable outcomes for all students. We do so by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connecting</th>
<th>Black men with each other through a supportive community,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>Effectiveness in the classroom through relevant and applicable professional training, and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging</td>
<td>The larger community to create more allies in the pursuit of increasing the representation of Black men with careers in education within our city</td>
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In order to increase the number of Black Male Educators in careers within education, we must retain the current Black men, recruit the next generation, and make sure all schools are ready to be justice centered. Over the next five years, we hope to engage with over 500 Black Male Educators from around the Kansas City region.
PROGRAMMING REPORTS
**Judas and the Black Messiah, Deep Dive (JBM-DD)**

**DESCRIPTION:**
The February 2021 JBM-DD event was a virtual, one-night event that provided a space for participants to view, discuss, and process the film *Judas and the Black Messiah*. In particular, BLOC hosted a guided conversation on how to navigate and transform systems and environments of oppression depicted by the film (e.g., health care, law enforcement, education) and guided critical reflection on the role educators play within their own professional systems.

**PARTICIPANTS:**
Attendees to the February 2021 JBM-DD event indicated age range from late 20s to mid-40s, and varied in gender (50% men, 50% women) and racial/ethnic identity statuses (25% White, 25% Hispanic/Latinx, 50% Black/African American). Teaching experience ranged from 7 to more than 10 years in the field and each participant indicated specialty in K-12 education.

**EXPECTATIONS:**
Each participant indicated being *Very Interested* in the JBM-DD event prior to attendance.

Despite high expectations, participants reported that the event was *Much Better than Expected*.

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*How interested were you in this topic prior to the event?*

- **Participants were “Very Interested” in the event (5/5)**

*To what degree did this event meet your expectations?*

- **Participants indicated the event was “Much Better than Expected” (5/5)**
EXPERIENCE:

Not only did participants rate JBM-DD as Excellent quality, but each participant also rated the event as either Very Helpful or Extremely Helpful to their professional development.

The JBM-DD event was valuable and impactful enough (100% indicated Excellent Value) to generate interest for participants to return for future BLOC programming, where 100% of participants reported it Extremely Likely to attend future BLOC events.
PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK:

100% of participants indicated the length of the event was

*About Right*

More interactive was the most consistent feedback to improve future programming.

Participants particularly valued the space as an opportunity to learn nuances of bigger discussions without the pressure to have answers.

“Freedom v liberation keeps resonating in different conversations I'm having.”

“I enjoyed the space it provided to listen & learn without pressure.”
**Book Study**

**DESCRIPTION:**
The Book Study, hosted by BLOC, gathered weekly for a period of 8-weeks to engage Black Male Educators via two published works by Black men. The first, *Letters to the Sons of Society* by Shaka Senghor offered participants a story of redemption, where the men discussed the notion of self-worth, being worthy of fatherhood, and the power to love and be loved. The second book was *Ratchetdemic: Rethinking Academic Success* by Chris Emdin, wherein participants discussed pedagogical strategies to help educators bring unapologetically their authentic selves to the classroom.

**PARTICIPANTS:**
Participants for the March 2021 Book Study group self-identified as Black/African American men (100%). The vast majority indicated age between 25 and 35 years (80%), with and minority reporting 18 to 24 years (10%) or 35 to 44 years (10%).

**EXPECTATIONS:**
Participant interest level for the Book Study was reportedly high (80%, *Very Interested*). Overall, the Book Study group exceeded 100% of participants’ expectations.
EXPERIENCE:

All participants rated the Book Study event as either *Very Good* (40%) or *Excellent* (60%).

Participant perceived the event as highly valuable. Indeed, 90% ranked the Book Study as 5/5 (*Excellent*).

The majority of participants found the Book Study to be *Very* (20%) or *Extremely* (70%) *Helpful* to their professional development.

Participants left the Book Study highly motivated to attend future BLOC events.

100% reported either *Very Likely* or *Extremely Likely* to attend a future BLOC event.
PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK:

How did you feel about the length of this event?

15%
Too Short

85%
About Right

Becoming anti-racist is an action and journey. Everyone that chooses this path is working on internal work. I am affirmed with interactions each and learning the we are human.

The book study group has allowed me to do internal reflection that I hadn't done before. It has refined what I know about race and has improved how I speak about race in the classroom and in conversation with peers.
I am greatly appreciative of this study group because I'm not sure if I would have gotten this in a different space.

Reading quality books authored by black men brought a value to my life personally and professionally that I was not aware of.
Having an opportunity to discuss those books with other black men that share my experiences, but are also diverse in their thinking, was valuable as well.

Just enjoyed the content and the experiences shared. Having this community to lean on and simply talk to every week was fun & enjoyable.

Gathering with other black males to discuss necessary topics is essential.
Even with being a black male in education, I still have so much to learn and listen to.

Share your top takeaway from this event.
DESCRIPTION:
The April 2021 LiberatED conference was a two-day event designed as a space for Black Male Educators to build community, experience empowerment, and promote endurance towards achieving equity in education. The event was comprised of small group professional development breakout sessions, career fair, a Black Male Educational leadership panel, and a keynote address. The conference was delivered virtually, and diverse educators were invited.

PARTICIPANTS:
Participants to the conference ranged in racial/ethnic (71% Black/African American, 26% White), and gender (55% men, 44% women) identity. The vast majority of participants were professionals in K-12 education (84%). By age, participants reported between 25-34 years (39%), 35-44 years (21%), 45-54 years (21%), and over 55 years (11%).

EXPECTATIONS:
Participant interest level for LiberatED was generally high (60%, Very Interested) prior to attendance.

The LiberatED conference was able to meet or exceed 97% of participants’ expectations.
Participants overwhelmingly found the LiberatED conference to be *Very Good* or *Excellent* value (97%), with most participants (57%) responding with a 5/5 rating.

Similarly, over 97% of participants rated the LiberatED conference as *Good*, *Very Good*, or *Excellent* quality.

Participants at the LiberatED conference indicated high likelihood of returning to future BLOC events because of their experiences.
SESSIONS:

Overall, participants rated each session for the LiberatED conference as highly impactful on their professional development.

Note: Range from 0 to 5.0

LiberatED Professional Value Impact Scores

- Breakout 1: 4.13
- Breakout 2: 4.06
- Leadership Panel: 4.22
- Fishbowl Keynote: 4.13

Dr. Chris Emdin
Engagement Score
4.41/5.00

Sharif El Mekki
Engagement Score
4.17/5.00

Curtis Valentine
Engagement Score
4.17/5.00
PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK:

How did you feel about the length of this event?

- 15% Too Short
- 85% About Right

How can future events be improved?

- More relevant topic: 11%
- More interactive: 24%
- Resolve technical problems: 16%
- Event environment feedback: 11%
- More knowledgeable speakers: 3%
Social-Emotional (S-E)

DESCRIPTION:
The S-E event was held in February of 2021 as a recurring development that provides safe space for Black Male Educators to dialogue on the topic of self-worth. The workshop was led by a Black male psychologist whose aim was to help participants welcome vulnerability and emotions during their conversation. The psychologist also offered self-monitoring strategies that would impact one’s self-worth and improve one’s S-E wellbeing.

PARTICIPANTS:
Participants to the S-E Event were 100% Black Male Educators, ranging in age from early adulthood (18-24; 28%) to middle adulthood (35-44; 43%) and in experience.

EXPECTATIONS:
Participants indicated high interest in the S-E Event prior to attendance.

The S-E Event either met or exceeded the expectations of 100% of participants.
EXPERIENCE:

Participants found the event to be *Very Good* or *Excellent* quality, with most participants (71%) responding with a 5/5 rating.

Most participants rated the content of the S-E Event as either *Very* (57%) or *Extremely* (29%) helpful for their professional development.

Participants clearly reported that the S-E Event was a valuable networking opportunity.

100% rated the event as either *Very* or *Extremely Valuable* networking opportunities.

Overall, 100% of participants indicated a *Very* or *Extremely* high likelihood of returning to future BLOC events.
What was your top takeaway from this event?

"I am enough"

"If you don't use it, you will lose it"

"I learned that managing stress in order to be effective in life is a community affair."

"Finding other black males to lean on and learn from"

"Thankful to be around like minded brothers to learn about the resources, business, and organizations we have to share"

"great topic, much needed discussion and support"
How did you feel about the length of this event?

100 %, About right

How can future events be improved?

14% Better Food

57% More Interaction
EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL EVENT

Participants were able to “connect” and “exchange contact information” with others Black Male Educators who want to succeed in education.

Participants heard “realistic scenarios, conversations” around about topics “difficult to digest, verbalize” equipping Black Male Educators with strategies on how to navigate such difficult scenarios.

IMPACT OF BLOC ON YOUR EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATION

Connecting on a monthly basis, BLOC has:

- “Encouraged and motivated” educators to continue the good fight for students”
- “Better assert my authentic voice without feeling wrong in doing so”
- “Finding out I’m not alone”

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Although you are beat down busted and disgusted every single day [in the classroom] you know you got a safe spot in BLOC. You got a spot where you can open up and share what's challenging you, what's burdening you. And you don't have to bear that low alone.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Being a Black man, in a field dominated by White woman… you have to navigate the realities that comes with that. You want to prove to yourself and for yourself, for your community, for your family, you want to prove… I think the way BLOC addresses that is by giving you a place to be and voice this pressure.
Participant Experiences

PERSPECTIVE AS A BLACK MALE TEACHER

• Helped me “flourish” as an educator.
• Helped me understand “who I am” and “how to be myself in the classroom.”
• Taught me technical skills to teach better.
• Taught me “how to empower young people to let their true selves out.”
• Helped me connect with other Black educators and form authentic relationships.
• Supported me to connect with my larger community through service.

PERSPECTIVES AS A BLACK MALE EDUCATIONAL LEADER

“BLOC is a resource that is helpful for connections and the mental health of Black Male Educators.”

“BLOC offers Black Male Educators opportunities to network with others like them and share similar experiences, helping them navigate the challenging field of education because they can learn from each other.”

BLOC’S ROLE IN BUILDING COMMUNITY

“One of the things that BLOC does is breaks the isolation. And I think when you are able to be in a community with folks who have had similar experiences, who have similar dreams, who have navigated spaces that you've ever been in before, that's some wisdom. You get to connect with wisdom… So we engage actively in the process of enhancing our community. How do we enhance our community? Well, the longer we keep Black men in classrooms, that's going to enhance the community. The way we support our students and our teachers, that's going to enhance our community.
Conclusions

The data and stories of those receiving support from BLOC align with the research literature and are a testament to BLOC’s successes over the 2021 programing year.

BLOC supports Black male educator in their professional flourishment by:

1) Building access to connect with other Black educators.
2) Presenting educators with opportunities to refine and expand upon their educational and professional skills.
3) Offering the space to learn about oneself and be one’s authentic self.
4) Designing spaces to give back and connect with the community-at-large.

In general, across events offered in 2021 BLOC generated high interest and high expectations with a diversity of educational professional, but particularly among Black Male Educators. With a high degree of consistency, BLOC events were able to meet or exceed these expectations. In addition, the vast majority of participants rated these events as of high quality and high value for their professional development.

One consistent piece of feedback from participants was the desire for more interaction, time with the presenters/organizers, and professional networking time. This feedback appears to speak to the pressing need for many minoritized professionals in education, and Black males in education more specifically, for community, belonging, and meaningful connections with other like-minded and like-experiencing individuals.

It is an urgent need for our society to recruit and retain Black Male Educators, and the evidence suggests that BLOC’s three-pillar approach is a highly effective strategy to fulfill that need. BLOC’s three-pillars are: (1) connecting Black Male Educators; (2) developing the skills of educators; and (3) engaging with the larger community to foment allyship in the support of Black Male Educators. BLOC offers this three-pillar approach in response to education’s antiquated institutions that have detracted from Black men and boys holding an equitable standing as students, educators, and administrators (Grooms et al., 2021; Milner, 2016).

BLOC’s objectives focus on educators’ and students’ cultural identities to promote equitable education and success of students and teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Most importantly, BLOC helps educators deeply understand the importance of social context, where “the ethos of a school, district, and community influence validation and affirmation of students [and educators]” (Milner, 2016, p. 429).
The Research Literature

According to the existing scholarship in education, the overall purpose and objectives of BLOC are well-founded and worthwhile pursuits.

Status of Black Male Educators

There are many reasons why there is a shortage of Black men in education. One prominent rationale is “the vilification of Black men who have a passion for teaching and working with children” (Tafari & Williams, 2022, p. 2). As a group, Black educators “face racial discrimination and stereotyping that leave them feeling alienated and restricted from participating in the school community, impacting their ability to be effective and ultimately their desire to remain in the profession” (Griffin & Tackie, 2016).

Black Male Educators, when they enter the classroom, they must withstand the vilification, the “negative assumptions from other teachers… and maintaining their identity as a Black man” (Tafari & Williams, 2022, p. 8; Callendar, 2020). Even after enduring these challenges, work environment hostility follows, leading to isolation in the school (Brown & Thomas, 2020). By building a community around the men, BLOC works diligently to support Black Male Educators to counter the toxicity they may encounter in their school environment.

Engaging and Retaining Black Male Educators

Two research-based strategies, that BLOC already offers ameliorate the crisis of a lack of Black Male Educators:

1. **RETAI**N: Research calls for Black Male Educators to “be partners in [the] struggle to transform our world, one classroom at
a time” (Lynn, 2006, pp. 2519-2520). With the objective to retain Black Male Educators, organizations like BLOC creates a “nurturing” space for Black Male Teachers to come together with peers and mentors who are culturally like them, and receive support, mentorship, and pedagogical guidance (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Scott & Alexander, 2019).

2. **ENGAGE**: Scholars recommend to value the cultural capital Black Men bring to the classroom (Tafari & Williams, 2022, p. 10). When Black Male Teachers’ identity is affirmed and taught to navigate a potentially racist workplace, they are equipped to have self-confidence in themselves and have the tools to manage contentious collegial relationships (Bristol & Goings, 2019; Brown, 2014). Using conferences, book clubs, and monthly workshops, BLOC is offering Black Male Educators the tools to be successful in the classroom and their school environment.

## The Role of Black Male Educators in Students’ Success

Black Male Educators enter the profession with a fervor to be “a counternarrative” by incorporating culture and common interests when working with students (Tafari & Wilson, 2022, p. 10). They enter the classroom with a readiness serve as another father or mentor, and to support students’ personal and academic growth (Tafari, 2013). Research shows that Black Male Teachers are highly impactful for students – particularly Black and Brown students – towards a variety of highly important educational outcomes such as reductions to the probability of dropping out of high school and increases to students’ aspirations for a 4-year college degree (Gershenson et al., 2018).
Recommendations

1) Integrate higher levels of social interaction across program events.

Considering both the research literature and, more importantly, direct participant feedback, future BLOC programming would likely benefit from increasing emphasis on building community networks, personal conversation, and professional networking opportunities within events. The literature unequivocally demonstrates the crucial role of network and community building and professional networks in the perseverance of people of color in the education workforce. Overly didactic events may de-emphasize the simple – though powerful – social connection needs of Black Male Educators. While some variation of “more interaction” was the most consistent feedback from participants across programs, it will likely be helpful to further delineate the specific needs that participants communicate with this patterned response.

2) Expand evaluation efforts to a participant-centered approach.

Relatedly, programming evaluation for BLOC events may be strengthened by supplementing participant-centered survey questionnaires and interview protocols. Shifting this focus depends on an organization’s commitment to reflecting upon the question: *who is the beneficiary that responds to this question?* Generally, though not necessarily, questions about general satisfaction reflect an organization’s interest in refining their own work. Alternatively, questions about what makes an event satisfying, involving participants to share freely without prompt, and reflect a stance of humility, curiosity, and genuineness that often bolster collective efficacy. It may be helpful to implement a Design-Based approach (see Anderson & Shattuck, 2012) to future programming.

3) Move beyond descriptions of data to inferences and causal evaluations.

While recommendation #2 above relates to a general philosophy that guides organizational evaluation decisions, *how* evaluations are conducted can strengthen the answers an organization gets to the questions they have. Not all methods of collecting data are equal.

First, consider using data collection methods that can allow causal claims such as pre-post evaluations or longitudinal data collection. These approaches can demonstrate the size of the impact that BLOC events have on participants.

Second, consider integrating measures of psychological traits that relate to the BLOC’s overarching purpose. If the ultimate outcome of BLOC events is to extend the career of Black Male Educators in education, then perhaps it would be helpful to measure constructs such as a) intentions to persist, b) career outcome expectations, or c) career self-efficacy. Additionally, it may be of interest to measure indirect constructs related to persistence such as a) critical consciousness, b) sense of belonging, or c) perceived discrimination (reversed). Nevertheless, survey efforts will be stronger if future evaluations contain measures that have been demonstrated as both valid and reliable.
References


