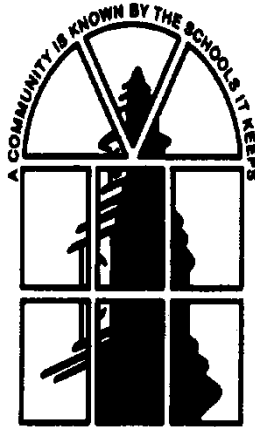


The Minority Achievement Committee

Students Leading Students to Greater Success in School

RESOURCE GUIDE



Shaker Heights High School
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Minority Achievement Committee Pledge

I am an African American
and I pledge to uphold the name and image
of the African-American man.

I will do so by striving for academic excellence,
conducting myself with dignity,
and respecting others as if they were my
brothers and sisters.

NARRATIVE

FOREWORD

One of the most troubling problems in American education is the persistent underachievement of African-American males. While many attain high academic honors, far too many others, though intellectually capable, do not succeed in school. The consequences can be devastating: dropouts, unfulfilled potential, and opportunities foreclosed.

Educators and youth development professionals all over the United States have proposed and tested ways to address this issue. Afro-centric curricula have been created, Rites of Passage programs replicated, all-male academies opened. Different approaches may work in different circumstances; each merits a fair test.

At Shaker Heights High School, we took our lead from students themselves. In 1990, our Faculty Achievement Committee asked high-achieving African-American males what factors contributed to their success in school. They, in turn, asked us for an opportunity to work directly with underachieving students. Thus, the Minority Achievement Committee (MAC) Scholars program was born.

This Resource Guide was prepared to help other schools create their own MAC Scholars program. It is not meant to be a “cookbook” that must be followed to the letter, but rather suggests approaches that, through some trial and error, have worked for us. It is set up to be responsive to anticipated questions about how a similar program could be structured in another school. We encourage schools to adapt our strategies to their own situations and target populations.

Our deep gratitude goes to The George Gund Foundation and The Cleveland Foundation for their financial support of the original MAC Resource Guide and the *Diamonds in the Rough* DVD. Their grants gave us the time to step back, assess, organize the knowledge gleaned through our work with the MAC Scholars program, and commit the mechanism of this program to film. We are also indebted to the Harry K. Fox and Emma R. Fox Charitable Foundation, the Key Foundation and the Shaker Schools Foundation, who continue to support this important work.

We are grateful as well to the Shaker Heights Board of Education, the administration, and our colleagues at Shaker Heights High School for their unwavering support of the MAC Scholars program.

Most of all, we thank the MAC Scholars themselves for the wisdom, ingenuity, and generosity of spirit that sustain the program. It is a joy to work with these young men, and it is to them that we dedicate this volume.

Mary Lynne McGovern
Academic Advisor
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THE MINORITY ACHIEVEMENT COMMITTEE

Students Leading Students to Greater Success in School

The Minority Achievement Committee, known informally as the MAC Scholars Program, was initiated, constructed, and implemented by high-achieving black male students at Shaker Heights High School. Their interest was captured in the spring of 1990, when they were invited to be student consultants to the Faculty Achievement Committee.

In this capacity, these young men were presented with striking statistics on the low academic achievement of many entering ninth grade black males. These juniors and seniors, who themselves were scholars and leaders, asked to intervene. They saw their efforts as a mission to retrieve their younger brothers from an academic route that would lead to lost opportunities and hopelessness. It was their resolve that led them to become the architects of the MAC Scholars Program.

The following is a descriptive narrative of the program the MAC Scholars designed with guidance from the Academic Advisor, who serves as the coordinator of achievement initiatives at Shaker Heights High School, a faculty member who serves as a co-advisor to the MAC Scholars program, and members of the Faculty Achievement Committee. It should be noted that the concept and structure are adaptable to other target groups within a school.

BACKGROUND

The Faculty Achievement Committee was formed by fifteen faculty members who came together out of a strong mutual concern over the persistent and profound underachievement of minority students, especially black males. This concern had been discussed by the faculty as a whole over many years but the faculty members who formed this committee agreed that more focused efforts had to be made to break the cycle of failure.

The early meetings were spent discussing and defining underachievement: understanding its roots; its progression over the years; its impact upon students as they reach high school; and its disproportionate incidence among black students, primarily males. The group shared classroom experiences related to the achievement of their minority students, methods they were trying, studies and other relevant literature they had researched, and experts they had consulted.

The Faculty Achievement Committee was the instrument through which the Minority Achievement Committee (MAC) Scholars program was conceived. By 1990, the decline of black male achievement became of paramount concern to the Faculty Achievement Committee and the members decided there was a vital need to concentrate their efforts on that group of students.

It was determined that the best way to learn the underlying causes and gain a greater understanding of the dynamics of underachievement was to interview students. The plan was to meet with three different groups of students, referred to as student consultants:

- A. Ninth and tenth grade black males who had less than a C average, referred to as **Potential Scholars**.

- B. Tenth graders whose averages had been C and below, but were showing significant improvement, referred to as **Emerging Scholars**.
- C. Eleventh and twelfth graders whose averages were above C and who were enrolled in Honors and Advanced Placement classes, referred to as **Scholars**.

As meeting dates were established, faculty members of the Achievement Committee selected and invited students from their classes to serve as student consultants. This method of selection helped to create a more comfortable environment for the students. They would come to the meeting knowing that at least one of their teachers would be there to welcome them. It also allowed teachers to remind students of meeting dates and ensure their attendance.

In addition, each student received a formal invitation from the Committee requesting his service as a student consultant and asking him to think about the following topics chosen by the Committee for discussion:

- A. Personal goals and expectations
- B. Peer pressure and social life
- C. Parental involvement
- D. Curriculum
- E. Study habits
- F. Teacher encouragement and expectations
- G. Extracurricular involvement
- H. Responsibility at home or job
- I. Free time
- J. Role model or confidante in school

These invitations were hand delivered to the student consultants by the teacher who had selected them. The teacher then spent time explaining the purpose and format of the meeting and answering questions.

The Committee began the interviews with the Scholars group in May 1990. It was felt that the responses of students who had experienced success in school would facilitate the subsequent interviews with the other two groups.

STUDENT CONSULTANTS

The first meeting with the Scholars was held after school. There were eight Scholars and fifteen faculty members in attendance. A member of the Committee served as facilitator.

The facilitator opened the meeting with introductions, a brief statement of the Committee's mission, an explanation of the purpose of the meeting, and the plan for future meetings. The facilitator stated that the Committee's desire was for students to be open and honest with the faculty without fear of negative judgment, breach of confidentiality or future reprisals. The facilitator did ask the students that in alluding to experiences with members of the faculty, they do so without using names.

Finally, and most importantly, the facilitator shared with the Scholars statistics on the achievement of black males entering the ninth grade. They expressed alarm and dismay, mainly to each other, stating that they were vaguely aware that black males were not doing well in school but they had no idea how serious the problem was. They based their assumption of low achievement on what they saw in their classes and what they knew about their friends. They said the Honor Roll, which recognizes students with a 3.5 grade point average or above, generally had few, if any, black students listed. The revelation of the statistics was the opening to the discussion that followed.

The Scholars, armed with the facts on black male achievement, were indeed straightforward in their response. They were uninhibited in their statements and their observations, which they offered with conviction and fairness. They took a share of the responsibility upon themselves, laid responsibility on the underachieving students, on their parents and, to some degree, on teachers. They offered insights into the thinking of young black males as they enter the high school—their anxiety and fear about what their peers think of them, what their teachers expect of them, what their parents do or do not demand of them. Will they measure up, do they want to measure up, what will happen if they do or do not measure up? In essence, they talked about the negative views these young students have of themselves as learners, their ability to achieve, and what others think of them. At no time did the Scholars make excuses for them nor did they at any time “blame” the teachers or the school.

Much of the ensuing discussion was carried on openly amongst themselves, each trying to uncover what they believed was the root of the failure to achieve. They felt they knew because some admitted having the same insecurities and facing the same dilemmas as they entered the high school. The impending questions for the faculty members were: what caused these students to become achievers; what causes the others to continue to underachieve; what are the factors that make the difference.

The first meeting lasted more than two hours. No one left at any time during the meeting. As the hour grew late, attempts were made to bring the meeting to a close and this was accomplished only when it was suggested that a second meeting would be held the following week. The topics chosen for discussion were incorporated into the exchange, and all were addressed at some point.

The students and the teachers formed a bond at the first meeting. This was evident through the dialogue in the meeting and the lingering conversation of students and teachers after the meeting. An understanding, based on a genuine mutual concern for the critical issue of black male achievement and an honest exchange of thoughts, had been reached.

The second meeting with the Scholars was held the following week. The Scholars again carried on much of the discussion among themselves, answering each other's questions, adding to and clarifying each other's observations. It was as though the teachers had been invited to listen in on a meeting of the students. They were, however, always responsive when the teachers joined in the discussion or asked questions or when the facilitator intervened to refocus the discussion.

A new level of understanding and insight had been reached by both students and teachers the preceding week. This led to a self-examination by the Scholars as to why they were able to rise above the negative pressure and self-doubts and make the choice to be achievers in school.

The topic that received their greatest attention was the vital importance of their parents' involvement in their education. They all agreed that the single most critical factor in their school success was the refusal of their parent(s) to accept poor grades. They also agreed that the presence of a single parent or both parents in the home was of secondary importance in their school achievement. Approximately half of the Scholars were from single parent homes and that parent, in all cases, was the mother or the grandmother. They gave examples of how a brief or slight downturn in their grades was handled by parents. It was clear that credit for their school success went, in great measure, to involved supportive parents.

The Scholars then led the teachers into a discussion of ways to intervene in the progressive decline of the younger black males. They again referred to the traditional Honor Roll, posted every nine weeks, featuring the highest achieving students with few, if any, black students listed. They suggested having three academic rolls: Honor Roll for 3.5 and above; Merit Roll for 3.0 to 3.49; Recognition Roll for 2.5 to 2.99. The Achievement Committee members reacted to their idea with enthusiasm and a promise to follow it through to implementation.

The Scholars' recommendation was put into place the following year and continues to date with striking results. Students crowd the area while the three academic rolls are being posted. Black students, who are now well represented, openly express pride when they see their names, challenge each other to move up to the next higher roll or, if their name is not listed, vow they will make it next time. The Scholars' idea was the catalyst for making black achievers visible at Shaker Heights High School.

Further exploration of intervention strategies led to the suggestion by one of the Scholars that we "let them help." They talked about the idea of older achieving black males becoming directly involved with the younger underachieving black males.

The discussion immediately centered on how this might be accomplished. It was agreed that we would continue exploring their idea early in the 1990-91 school year. It was clear, however, that the students and the teachers felt they had come upon an intriguing idea. In fact, the seed had been planted that ultimately grew into the Minority Achievement Committee.

Over the remaining weeks of the semester the Faculty Achievement Committee met first with Emerging Scholars and then with Potential Scholars. There was a distinct difference in attitude, willingness to communicate candidly, and level of insight between the Scholars and Emerging Scholars as compared to the Potential Scholars. The Scholars and Emerging Scholars were similar in that all had made the decision to be achievers. It was clear they were committed to and comfortable with that decision.

Emerging Scholars are those students who, during their ninth grade year, show significant improvement in their grades, such that they become eligible for a MAC award at the end of the year. They may then choose to continue their involvement in the MAC program in tenth grade and, in some cases, may go on to become MAC Scholars in eleventh or twelfth grade.

The Emerging Scholars talked about feeling "low" when their grades were poor, afraid of not getting into college and, in general, worried about their future. They echoed much of what the

Scholars had said about their own feelings upon entering the high school but emphasized that it had to be their decision to achieve. They also admitted that once they began to do their work on a consistent basis, their grades improved significantly. This momentum is what kept them moving ahead.

The Potential Scholars, mostly ninth graders, had less insight and were reluctant to enter into the discussion. When encouraged, mainly by the teachers who invited them, some conceded that they did not feel good about their grades, that they knew they were capable of better work, and that parents were disappointed in their low achievement. One student admitted, and others agreed, that he was struggling with the choice between being a good student and having a good social life, and being popular. He said he felt like he was on a fence. The meeting confirmed what the Scholars had observed in earlier meetings.

The final Faculty Achievement Committee meeting of the year was spent talking together about what we had heard in the preceding weeks from the student consultants. The teachers felt that the three groups of students had brought valuable and compelling insights and information.

In the early fall of 1990, the Scholars met as a group with the Academic Advisor. Some of the original number had graduated but those remaining wanted to plan a program based on their suggestion the previous spring. They were single-minded in their intent to confront what they considered the dismal state of black male achievement. They were convinced that they could make a difference by acting as mentors or role models and they were determined to find a way to do this.

MAC SCHOLARS

The Scholars wanted to be seen as a credible organization, fully recognized by the school. First, they had to choose a name and, after much deliberation, they voted to call themselves the Minority Achievement Committee, known informally as MAC. They referred to themselves as MAC Scholars and agreed that the ninth graders would continue to be known as Potential Scholars.

These things accomplished, the MAC Scholars began meeting regularly to explore what role they could play in breaking the pattern of school failure and guiding the Potential Scholars into the realm of school success. They looked again at the characteristics and mind-set of entering ninth grade black males: the insecurities, the facade, the underlying sense of confusion.

The MAC Scholars expressed concern about how they would convey to the ninth graders the understanding they so clearly had without appearing to have all the answers. They were determined to be straightforward with the ninth graders. They discussed many approaches and strategies over the weeks and rejected any that seemed to set them apart from the younger students.

PRECEPTS

The MAC Scholars, in designing a program that would give them the best chance of having a positive effect on the Potential Scholars, considered the following elements to be of the highest importance:

- A. Respect. The Scholars would convey to the younger students that they hold them in high esteem and that, in return, they expected behavior that demonstrated respect for the Scholars and for each other.
- B. Pride. The Scholars would show pride in their own school success and would not apologize for or minimize their accomplishments. They would work to instill this sense of pride in personal achievement in the Potential Scholars.
- C. Honesty. The Scholars would relate their individual school experiences so the younger students would know that they too had struggled to varying degrees but had not given up. They would urge the Potential Scholars to be honest with themselves and others about their poor academic performance. The Scholars made no excuses for themselves and would accept no excuses from the younger students.
- D. Sensitivity. The Scholars would be cognizant of the low esteem in which most of the Potential Scholars hold themselves as a cause and effect of their low achievement. They would avoid criticism, reprimands or other negative techniques. They would also work on their own listening skills, which they determined to be a primary tool in their intervention.
- E. Confidence. The Scholars would consistently affirm their genuine belief in the ability of the Potential Scholars to be achievers. Their challenge was to get the Potential Scholars to believe in their own ability, to begin seeing themselves as learners. They would do this by leading them to acknowledge their pattern of inaction and avoidance, then attempt to guide them to more productive behavior—accepting responsibility and utilizing self-discipline.

If they followed the guidelines set forth by the Scholars, the Potential Scholars would begin to see an improvement in their grades and would no longer be able to doubt or deny their ability to be achievers. The Scholars were firm that no excuses for failure would be tolerated.

After establishing these precepts, the Scholars turned to developing a basic plan for their program with the Potential Scholars. The framework of the MAC program evolved from their decisions on the following elements:

STRUCTURE

A. Fundamentals

1. Target Group. Entering ninth graders with a GPA of 1.9 or below (on a 4.0 scale) were deemed to be underachievers because they were performing at a below-average level. Therefore, all black males in this category would be considered Potential Scholars and would be invited to attend the meetings with the MAC Scholars.
2. Student Notification. The Academic Advisor would notify each student in the target group through a written invitation delivered by the student's classroom teacher.
3. Meeting Schedule. The MAC Scholars would meet with the Potential Scholars every other week, for one period, using a different class period each time to minimize absences

in any given class. They would hold MAC Scholar planning meetings during the intervening weeks.

4. Faculty Notification. The Academic Advisor would inform the faculty of the MAC Scholars program at a regular faculty meeting. A list of MAC Scholars and Potential Scholars would be provided so that teachers would know which of their students were involved in the program.
5. Faculty Support. The Academic Advisor would explain the concept behind the MAC program, its origin, its purpose, and the role of the MAC Scholars. Faculty support would be enlisted in excusing students for meetings and reporting progress, or lack thereof, of Potential Scholars. Faculty would also be asked to monitor the continued progress of the MAC Scholars. Guidelines for each of these would be provided as the program developed. It is here that the Faculty Achievement Committee becomes most critical. Currently there are 25 members of this Committee, representing all five core subject areas. Since the MAC Scholars program was conceived in this Committee, the members become the advocates of the program in their departments, which creates widespread support among the faculty.

B. Procedure

1. MAC Scholars. The following preliminary procedural model for meetings was laid out by MAC Scholars:
 - a. MAC Scholars and the Academic Advisor would meet for one class period during the week prior to meeting with Potential Scholars. Co-leaders would be designated by the group and an agenda drawn up. The co-leader position would be rotated so that every Scholar had the opportunity of being a leader several times during the year.
 - b. It was determined that the co-leaders would introduce the topic to the Potential Scholars and other Scholars would join in as the discussion got underway. The Scholars made it clear that they expected each member of their group to participate but that no one would dominate the discussion.
 - c. The Scholars would state ground rules at the beginning of each meeting. These would include demonstrating respect for each other, not interrupting, and not condescending to or belittling each other. They would include additional rules as the need arose.
 - d. The Scholars agreed that it was essential to provide time and opportunity for the younger students to interact with them throughout the meeting. They would ensure this by asking questions of the students or requesting that someone volunteer to comment on the topic under discussion.
 - e. The Academic Advisor raised the issue of appropriate dress for the MAC Scholars and suggested that shirts and ties would enhance the seriousness of their purpose

when meeting with the younger students. The Scholars agreed that this would help to establish them as role models and adopted the dress code.

2. Potential Scholars. The Scholars would communicate their expectations of Potential Scholars at the first meeting. They would include the following:
 - a. Attendance at all MAC meetings unless class attendance takes priority over meeting attendance as required by their teacher on a particular day.
 - b. Completion of make-up work for the class missed as a result of the MAC meeting.
 - c. Respectful behavior toward MAC Scholars and fellow Potential Scholars as stated in the ground rules.
 - d. Demonstration of seriousness of purpose as evidenced by active participation in meetings and honest sharing of academic progress.
 - e. Improvement in academic performance as demonstrated by such factors as regular attendance, increased class participation, putting forth greater effort and seeking extra help, as reported by teachers.

C. Substance

1. Choosing Topics. The Scholars engaged in lengthy debate on the topics they believed were essential to any effort to break the cycle of failure. They reached consensus on the following general guidelines in selecting topics:
 - a. The meetings should not be lectures or “preaching,” therefore topics should be immediate and relevant to the ninth graders.
 - b. The Scholars should choose topics they are knowledgeable about and can personally relate to.
 - c. Topics selected should lend themselves to interaction between Scholars and Potential Scholars.
 - d. Topics should contain helpful, useful information such that the Potential Scholars will leave the meetings with action steps they can take immediately: practical suggestions on what Potential Scholars can do on their own behalf to improve; problem solving techniques related to self-discipline/academic behavioral issues.
 - e. Topics should inherently address negative attitudes related to school and the learning process, such that greater understanding will lead the way to a more positive attitude and a greater appreciation of the value of education.
 - f. Topics should inspire Potential Scholars to accept the challenge of higher achievement.

2. Planning the Agenda. The Scholars decided that the agenda for the opening meeting should include the following:
 - a. Explanation of MAC program and why it was developed.
 - b. Introduction of MAC Scholars, including brief personal academic history. Scholars would “tell their stories” so that Potential Scholars would see that some had experienced difficulty in school in the past. Those who had consistently earned high grades in school would tell of moments of self-doubt related to their ability and their motivation to continue to make sacrifices to achieve their goal. The Scholars saw this as a way to minimize the gap, created by the difference in achievement, between themselves and the Potential Scholars.
 - c. MAC meeting expectations of Potential Scholars, ground rules and goals.
 - d. Confronting fears, lack of self-confidence, peer pressure, and other impediments related to achieving.
 - e. Feedback from Potential Scholars on their personal academic history and school experience.

This became the standard opening meeting agenda for the years that followed, with some minor adjustments reflecting the values expressed and held important by newly selected Scholars.

Follow-up meetings would include these general topics, with revisions as the Scholars deemed appropriate:

- a. Why school is an important connection to the future
- b. Confronting negative attitudes about school
- c. Setting goals
- d. Developing good study habits
- e. Where and how to get help in school
- f. How to approach teachers
- g. Learning to be a self-advocate
- h. Developing self-discipline
- i. Making good choices
- j. Having friends who want to do well in school
- k. Encouraging friends to do well in school
- l. Confronting behavior/discipline issues
- m. Roadblocks to school achievement
- n. Reality and problems of being a black male in America

TRAINING AND PRACTICE

The Academic Advisor, with support and consultation from members of the Faculty Achievement Committee, met with the MAC Scholars weekly in preparation for their meetings with the Potential Scholars. A series of approaches and techniques used in teaching were introduced, explained and

demonstrated. The purpose was to communicate to the Scholars the importance of adhering to their five precepts—respect, pride, honesty, sensitivity, and confidence—in working with the ninth graders.

A particular emphasis was placed on carefully listening to the Potential Scholars as they respond to questions, offer opinions or comment on the topic under discussion. Scholars recognized how much they would be able to learn about the younger students and what they are thinking through careful attention to what they are saying. They were given opportunities to discuss, as well as to role-play, how they would handle varying situations that could arise. Within a short time they were prepared to launch their program.

In going through this very detailed and thoughtful process of structuring the MAC program, the Scholars demonstrated well-developed and heretofore untapped ability as leaders, planners, negotiators, communicators, listeners, and group members. They were diligent in their efforts, strong in their opinions, and clearly intent on designing an effective program. They moved toward closure by the end of the first semester (1990-91) knowing that the program would need to be amended as they went along.

The first MAC Scholars meeting with Potential Scholars was held at the opening of the second semester in 1991.

FIRST MAC MEETING – February 1991

Approximately 50 Potential Scholars attended the first meeting. It was clear that they felt some apprehension as they entered the auditorium, but they settled down quickly when the Scholar co-leaders called the meeting to order.

The Academic Advisor welcomed the ninth graders, circulated an attendance sheet and made a few brief remarks before turning the meeting over to the Scholars and leaving the room. The advisor remained outside the room during the entire meeting, but was able to observe the events inside.

The Scholar co-leaders who had volunteered to open the first meeting captured the attention of the younger students at once and their fellow Scholars joined in as the meeting progressed. The Potential Scholars remained attentive throughout. At first, they were somewhat hesitant to participate when asked but the Scholars skillfully coaxed them into responding and they soon became more at ease.

The most notable observation was the ability of the Scholars, high school students with no prior experience in leadership roles, to hold the attention and elicit the participation of ninth graders with a history of low achievement and, in some cases, serious school behavior issues. Some of the Scholars were more comfortable speaking before the group than others but all were natural, had remarkable presence, and were clearly proud of themselves as achievers and leaders.

The succeeding meetings grew increasingly more productive. Attendance was high, behavior was exemplary, and the Potential Scholars became more deeply engaged in the discussions. The

program gained visibility in the school. Ninth grade males who had not received an invitation sought out the Academic Advisor and asked to be included, which they were.

ADDITIONS AND REVISIONS

By late spring and early fall 1991, the Scholars began making decisions that would affect the coming school year.

- A. Selecting New MAC Scholars. In order to replace the graduating seniors, the Scholars decided to hold a group interview to select new Scholars who they felt could carry on the program. After considerable debate, they agreed that in order to qualify for an interview a candidate must be:
1. A black male who had a GPA of 2.5 or above and would be a junior or senior the following year. In subsequent years, the MAC Scholars voted to raise the minimum GPA for Scholars to 2.6 and then to 2.7 and now to 3.0. Their reasoning was that this is a position that many achieving black males aspire to and that the higher academic requirement would make them strive harder to meet the new standard.
 2. Recommended by a current MAC Scholar or a faculty member.
 3. A person of integrity and good reputation among the students.
 4. A person who understands and is highly committed to the mission of the MAC Scholars program. This would be determined through pre-screening by the Academic Advisor at a preliminary individual interview and confirmed by Scholars during the interview process, which they themselves developed.

This has continued to be the method used to select new MAC Scholars. The recommended students, whose grade point averages meet the requirement, are notified and are asked to meet with the Academic Advisor for a preliminary interview.

Following the interview, the Academic Advisor turns over to the Scholars the list of candidates who qualify for a group interview. The Scholars devise a format and list of questions they will use in the interview session.

Immediately following the group interview, which is held at the end of the school day and usually lasts up to two hours, the Scholars meet and a lively, heated discussion ensues as they lobby for their individual choices. They will select as many new Scholars as they deem qualified to be leaders in training. In the first few years of the program, the total number of MAC Scholars in any given year ranged from ten to sixteen.

At the end of this process the Scholars submit their final list of new Scholars to the Academic Advisor. The list is the product of negotiation, compromise and artful persuasion among a group of students who are determined to select only those candidates who will carry on their concept of the program—to challenge and inspire the younger black males to be achievers in school.

Each year the overall make-up of the Scholars group changes, sometimes dramatically, sometimes only slightly. Each student brings his unique blend of qualities: leadership, values, creativity, interests, personality, opinions, and vision. Some years the outstanding feature of the group is exceptionally high academic standing, with many members engaged heavily in intellectual pursuits. Other years the overall academic standing may not be as high but involvement in athletics and other school and community activities is predominant. Some years the group, as a whole, is more outgoing and self-confident, other years more serious and introspective in nature.

Because there is diversity among the Scholars themselves, every Potential Scholar can find someone in the group with whom he can identify. Friendships between individual Scholars and Potential Scholars may develop as the year goes on. These relationships often become “big brother” in nature with the ninth grader voluntarily seeking out his Scholar friend to report improved grades or confide in him regarding a problem.

Each year some former Potential Scholars who grew into Emerging Scholars are, themselves, selected as MAC Scholars as juniors or seniors. This is the ideal progression of students involved in the program.

Following the final selection process, the Academic Advisor notifies the chosen candidates and a year-end Scholars retreat is held to welcome the new group and discuss their role as MAC Scholars. Those candidates not chosen as MAC Scholars become MAC Mentors. They are called upon to:

1. Tutor Potential Scholars.
2. Meet individually to counsel a ninth grader who is having severe behavior problems in the classroom.
3. Join Scholars, upon teacher request, in working with classes on motivation and achievement.

The idea is to utilize the talents of all high achieving black males to overcome the underachievement of younger black males. In the process, the high achievers are given the opportunity to further strengthen their academic abilities and grow into leaders.

- B. Target Group. The Scholars decided they must increase the scope of their target group. In the fall of 1991, they invited the first group of ninth graders to continue to attend meetings as tenth graders. They had seen progress in many of these students and did not want to exclude them after only one semester.

This policy has continued since the beginning. The majority of the Potential Scholars are still entering ninth graders but approximately one-third of the total number are tenth graders. The number of students invited to the opening meeting is approximately 75-80 with 50-60 attending.

After a student has missed three consecutive meetings his name is removed from the list. He can be reinstated as a member only if he requests it of the Academic Advisor and explains his absences.

- C. Individualizing the Program. The Scholars developed a plan that would allow for more personal and individual interaction with the Potential Scholars. Just after the distribution of report cards and progress reports, the ninth graders are divided into four groups with each group assigned two to four Scholars. The purpose of these sessions is for the Scholars to discuss with each Potential Scholar how he achieved the grades he is proud of and what he needs to do to improve the grades he is not proud of.

In these small group sessions the Scholars are particularly mindful of two of their precepts, respect and sensitivity. They are aware of the potential negative effect on their students' self-esteem when their grades are revealed to the Scholars in front of their peers. However, the Scholars believe that the topics they focus on in the large meetings become meaningful only when they are applied in the smaller group setting, on an individual basis.

This plan has been effective largely because the Scholars take on the role of a coach. The sessions are lively and good-humored. Improved grades are praised and the opportunity is provided to reinforce the Scholars' confidence in the younger student's ability. However, explanations of poor grades are required and no excuses are accepted. Potential Scholars generally admit they deserved the grade they got and set about making an action plan to improve it. They know the Scholars will see their next grade report.

An added benefit of the group meetings and sharing of grade reports is the revelation within the peer group that some Potential Scholars have met the Scholars' challenge to take the necessary steps to become better students. This often provides incentive to those who have not yet decided to take on the challenge but who are witness to the benefits and rewards of those who did.

An effort is made to publicly acknowledge and celebrate achievement in the large meetings. The Academic Advisor provides the MAC Scholars with a list of students whose grades improved significantly and those whose names appear on the Honor Roll. The Scholars read their names at the meetings and the students are asked to stand to the applause of the Scholars and their peers. There is a sense of pride on the part of the younger students and a congratulatory spirit on the part of their peers who are applauding them.

- D. Awards Ceremony. The Scholars determined that an awards ceremony would bring closure to their program at the end of the school year. It would also serve as a farewell to the graduating MAC Scholars and a welcome to the new members.

A MAC Scholar acts as Master of Ceremonies and all other Scholars have a role in the program. It is their opportunity to publicly congratulate and praise the younger students to whom they have devoted their time, offered their wisdom and understanding, and imparted a sense of pride in personal achievement.

The MAC Awards Ceremony has raised the visibility of the MAC Scholars program among students, district staff and administration, and the community as a whole.

- E. The Handshake and the Pledge. The MAC Scholars noticed that many Potential Scholars, even though making headway in their studies, had weak handshakes and did not make eye contact. The Scholars feared that this would make a poor initial impression on teachers, college admissions officers, and prospective employers, and resolved to correct it. Each meeting now includes a handshake ritual: each Potential Scholar goes down the line, greeting each Scholar with a firm handshake and direct eye contact. As with the dress code, the handshake is viewed as a sign of maturity, respect, and seriousness of purpose.

The MAC Scholars for the 1995-96 school year decided to write a Pledge, which would be recited at the opening of each meeting with the Potential Scholars. One of the Scholars volunteered to write the Pledge. He submitted his writing to the Scholars and they voted to adopt it as their Pledge, a statement of their mission.

The students stand and recite the Pledge with respect and conviction at the beginning of each meeting. The following year, the Scholars required that it be memorized.

- F. Evaluation. The MAC Scholars were cognizant from the outset that reversing the pattern of failure in school would not necessarily show up in dramatically improved grades after one or two years of exposure to their program. Although there are numerous cases of significant improvement over the years, including those Potential Scholars who moved on to become MAC Scholars, there remain students who have not accepted the challenge offered by the Scholars.

This has not discouraged the Scholars. They knew their task was monumental and they knew the odds were great that they may not be able to overcome the powerful forces that lie outside of their control. They reluctantly acknowledge that they will not influence all who go through their program. However, they are steadfast in their belief that even those who they are unable to inspire have, in some way, benefited from the experience and from knowing firsthand that the Scholars believed in them and cared about what happened to them.

The MAC program lends itself well to anecdotal and subjective evaluation. Evidence abounds that the program is successful in seizing the attention of underachieving ninth grade black males and changing many of their attitudes related to school and how they view themselves as learners. The following will attest to the compelling impact of the program on many Potential Scholars:

1. Written evaluations by the Potential Scholars reveal their sense of belonging to a group they feel aligned with and whose purpose is to help them become true learners and successful students. They express admiration for the Scholars and many acknowledge that they would like to “be like them.”

2. In most cases, Potential Scholars who are removed from membership for non-attendance at meetings, excessive absence from school, or for other reasons, request reinstatement.
3. Attendance at meetings is high and participation is spirited. When, for scheduling or other reasons, the length of time between meetings is greater than usual, Potential Scholars will ask the Academic Advisor or a MAC Scholar when the next meeting will be held.
4. Potential Scholars who are serious in their efforts to improve their grades will:
 - a. Report improvements in grades or special efforts they are making toward that end to the Academic Advisor or a MAC Scholar.
 - b. Attend student/teacher conferences after school.
 - c. Seek out a MAC Scholar for advice on issues that arise, either personal or related to school.
 - d. Request a tutor in specific subject areas.
 - e. Request that his teacher report improvements directly to a MAC Scholar or the Academic Advisor.
 - f. Sometimes report that they intend to become MAC Scholars when they are juniors and ask what they need to do to make that happen.
 - g. Reprimand each other at meetings for inappropriate or inattentive behavior.
 - h. Consistently show respect to the MAC Scholars and the Academic Advisor. They are responsive to reports from teachers when their behavior in the classroom is inappropriate or their effort inadequate.

FACULTY SUPPORT

Teachers have supported the MAC program from its inception. They have demonstrated their support in the following ways:

- A. Delivering MAC-related messages to students in their classes and allowing students to attend meetings during class time.
- B. Reporting academic or behavioral status of Potential Scholars to the Academic Advisor.
- C. Working with Potential Scholars utilizing MAC-engendered strategies.
- D. Recommending students to be interviewed for MAC Scholars.
- E. Talking positively about the MAC program, MAC Scholars and Potential Scholars among their peers; making complimentary references to the program and its students in faculty meetings and to parents.

CONCLUSION

Judging the value of a program such as MAC Scholars becomes less a matter of determining measurable outcomes or statistical evidence as seen through grade point averages, and much more a matter of observable changes in:

- A. Attitude toward school, learning, and how one measures himself in that context.
- B. Individual investment in the process that will lead to higher achievement.
- C. Belief that such an investment will lead to the fulfillment of long-range expectations one has for oneself.

It is safe to say, after years of observation that the Potential Scholars come to this program with a deficiency in all three of these areas. They do not, however, come with a deficit in ability to achieve, hence the name Potential Scholars. The task of the Scholars is to guide these young capable ninth graders through the critical passages that will lead the way to becoming successful students. In other words, the Scholars must first introduce and define the fundamental tools of learning, pass on their understanding of how to use them, and inspire the younger students to put them into practice. In a sense, the Potential Scholars are in training to become learners and achievers.

The evaluation, then, becomes one of judging their growth in the training process. Are there observable changes in attitude and behavior, individual investment in the learning process, and are they applying the tools they have been taught to use?

The MAC program is continually evolving, refining techniques that work, experimenting with new ones, and expanding the dimensions of the project. Each year, the program takes on a slightly different character as the new Scholars bring to it their special talents.

What remains constant are the wisdom and integrity of a group of high-achieving black male student leaders who have assumed some measure of responsibility for reversing the disturbing downward trend of their younger counterparts. The Scholars are steadfast in their belief that they can make an important difference and that their mission is to restore hope in the younger students that they will, indeed, have futures that hold promise.

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ADDENDUM

SCOPE

Since the program began as the brainchild of a group of talented African American male high achievers in 1990, there have been a number of changes and new developments which have enhanced the MAC Scholars program and enlarged its scope.

In 2001, the program was introduced into Shaker's upper elementary and middle schools, encompassing grades four through eight. The young men attend meetings twice a month, wearing shirts and ties to school on meeting days. As early as fifth and sixth grades, leaders are selected and, with the guidance of the advisors, these ten- and eleven-year-olds stand in front of a group of their peers and conduct the meetings. Once again, it is remarkable to see the seeds of leadership already embedded in these very young students. It is also remarkable to see the respect and attention they get from their peers.

As with the high school program, the topics are consistently related to school achievement: increasing self-confidence; advocating for themselves; changing attitudes toward learning and achieving; instilling pride in being smart and earning high grades. MAC Scholars from the high school are invited to speak to both upper elementary and middle school scholars, further encouraging them to do well so they will be prepared for high school.

CHANGES AND ADDITIONS

The target group has been changed to include ninth graders with a 1.7 grade point average or above. It was found that students below 1.7 were not yet ready to engage in the program. Their conduct and the academic outcome of their involvement did not justify their missing class to attend the meetings. As students in the below 1.7 category become aware of the MAC meetings, they come to the Academic Advisor to request inclusion. They know they will be welcome to attend the meetings as soon as they have achieved a 1.7 grade point average. The very few students who might have difficulty meeting this goal would not be excluded from meetings.

Over the past several years, the target group has grown to include tenth graders who participated in the MAC Scholar meetings as Potential Scholars in ninth grade. They requested that they be allowed to continue to be included in meetings as tenth graders. Many of them have shown significant improvement and several have won awards. Though it expanded the numbers considerably, the Scholars were in favor of including the tenth graders.

Another cohort of students has been added to the MAC meeting invite list. In addition to the Potential Scholars, a group of ninth and tenth graders who are high achievers (grade point average of 2.7 and above) are invited and encouraged to attend the meetings. They are called Junior Scholars and will observe the work of the MAC Scholars. They are prospective MAC Scholar candidates who will decide whether they would like to be interviewed at the appropriate time to become a MAC Scholar. The Junior Scholars are valuable members of the group because they serve as models of achievement for their peers and they bring positive energy to the meetings,

reinforcing the message of the Scholars. They are undaunted as they stand and make important contributions about school achievement in the meetings. There is a critical mass of high achievers in this group and together they support each other and the MAC Scholars. As a group they make a powerful statement.

AGENDA TOPICS

Over the past few years the Scholars became interested in weaving into their meetings, their interest in and concerns about national issues, especially those that directly affect the lives of African Americans. Examples would be:

- A. National elections.
- B. Affirmative action
- C. Issues related to being Black in America.

These discussions proved to more effectively engage the approximately 60 ninth and tenth graders, especially those who are often more passive members of the group. The Scholars thought that by somehow tying achievement together with issues that are current and relevant, the Potential Scholars might begin to make a connection between success in school and becoming active, involved, thinking citizens. They decided that presenting these topics might be another way to help the Potential Scholars realize their potential by engaging in problem solving and reaching an understanding of the process of arriving at an informed and thoughtful opinion on important matters.

Introducing topics that affect their lives became an intellectual exercise, which seemed to interest them and caused them to listen to the opinions of others. There were moments of debate between Potential Scholars, which prompted others to raise their hands in agreement or disagreement. The Scholars subsequently reported that meetings which included these topics were generating active participation from younger students.

The following pages are sample agendas from past meetings. They reflect the work of the MAC Scholars in their planning meetings, which precede each Potential Scholar meeting. The advisor asks questions when their plan needs clarity and takes notes on how they decide to present the topic for the meeting. The agendas are then typed and distributed to the Scholars so they can review them before the Potential Scholar meeting.

The MAC Scholars program, and the meetings that embody the philosophy and the substance of the program's mission, are the product of the thinking and commitment of these young leaders to the goal of improving the academic achievement of African American males at Shaker Heights High School.

SPREADING THE WORD AND SHARING THE MAC SCHOLAR CONCEPT

With the help of the media, word of the Shaker MAC Scholars program has spread to many cities around the country. Such publications as *Newsweek*, *The Plain Dealer*, *The New York Times* and

Education Week have published articles on the program. It is also referenced multiple times in the book by Dr. John Ogbu, *Black American Students in An Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement*.

In 2004, *CNN Presents* spent several weeks filming at Shaker Heights High School in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision. They followed a MAC Scholar through his school day and interviewed several other MAC Scholars as part of this program. *CNN Presents Shaker Heights High School: Brown vs. Board of Education* was aired over several weeks in May 2004. Following this national exposure, dozens of high schools contacted us for information and assistance in setting up a similar program.

The MAC advisors have made presentations at several national education conferences including NASSP, NABSE and the Boston Metco program. By invitation, the MAC advisors and, on several occasions, a representative group of MAC Scholars, have conducted workshops to assist other high schools around the country in implementing a similar program. To date, we have been in touch with over 70 high schools engaged in various stages of establishing a MAC Scholars program. We continue to receive updates and reports of success from these schools and we continue to get inquiries from other high schools as the word of the program spreads from school to school, and through media exposure.