

September 11, 2008

Dear Fellow Educators:

I would like to share with you the significant work that Richard Franklin accomplished on my campus during the 2006 – 2007 school year. His impact on school climate and sense of belonging, as well as student achievement among our African American boys, did a great deal to transform Covington Middle School. Let me begin with the hard data, as that will be where your first questions about the program's success can be answered. As can be confirmed from the Texas Education Agency website for Covington Middle School (Austin, TX) our TAKS data shows the following:

African American Test Results

Test	2006 % of students passing	2007 % of students passing	Gain among African American Students	Comparative gain of All Students at Covington Middle School
Reading	68	85	+17	+4
Writing	84	99	+15	+6
Social Studies	67	79	+12	+11
Mathematics	46	68	+22	+6

How did this happen for us? I had studied the 2006 TAKS results and knew that if we did not do something fundamentally different, the school would be Academically Unacceptable and would fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress in 2007, driven by African American scores. So I began an outreach to African American students to change how they felt about school, about academic achievement, and their own potential for success. I took them to events sponsored by UT's Center for African and African American Studies. I took them to an event at the Carver Museum and then I took a group of boys to Michael Lofton's Conference for Men and Boys.

It was at the Saturday Conference for Men and Boys that I met Richard Franklin and began a yearlong conversation with him about what was going on with our young men. It was clear that we could not depend on the Saturday conferences because of students' obligations with sports, band and family. We needed to bring a program to them during the school day. He began coming to Covington Middle School once a week from October through May. I pulled the boys who wanted to attend from their classes, with assurances to the teachers that students would make up their work. The sessions began with sharing stories and a fair amount of laughter and playfulness. Sometimes the session was held in the gym, sometimes in an available classroom. Mr. Franklin brought guest speakers who had careers in the music industry and the NFL. He shared examples of how African Americans are portrayed in television and film and encouraged students to think about whether they wanted those media roles to define them. Additionally, he talked to them about their futures. These are some of the structured parts of his program. What held it all together was his charisma, authenticity and love for these young men. They began to ask more questions and began to see the connection between these discussions and their own lives.

My relationship with the participants changed. I knew their names, their concerns, their strengths and their personalities. They began to talk to me- -about school issues, home, things that needed changing and their successes. They did not hesitate to approach me about working something out, including one who used my office as his locker while he was on crutches. I retired at the end of 2007. I found in my basket of good-bye cards numerous notes from the students who participated in the weekly sessions. Their gratitude and their personal growth were deeply gratifying and touching.

When the state test results arrived, the teachers, counselors and administrators cheered when we unveiled the African American gains. We knew we had seen increased motivation and effort among our African American boys. We had not dared to hope for such tangible improvements. I can attest that the improvements in test scores should be attributed to Richard Franklin's work on the campus. Nothing else had changed between 2006- -not the teachers or the curriculum, not the staff or policies in the counseling and administrative offices.

I have every reason to believe that these results can be replicated on other campuses, where a principal clears any obstacles so that Richard and the students can meet weekly, bond with one another, and learn to love and trust one another.

Best regards,

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