

African American Male Summit: “Living the Dream”

*Tallwood High School
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

Young black males from middle and high schools in Virginia Beach dared to dream of greater academic and career success during a summit celebrating Martin Luther King’s birthday. Tallwood’s first African American Male Summit: “Living the Dream” focused on issues of race, peer pressure, academic success and goal-setting.

Administrators at Tallwood developed the summit to address the achievement gap between white and black students. In the 2006-07 school year, African-American males scored 7 to 13 percent lower than white males on English and math tests. Tallwood’s staff decided to try to change this by providing students with additional resources they need to succeed and also by presenting inspiring stories from successful African American men.

The school publicized the event through a letter sent to parents and an invitation card mailed to their students. They also distributed fliers and e-mails to teachers who made announcements in their classrooms.

On a Saturday morning in late January, 114 students and 30 teachers and administrators gathered at the school for the summit. A local male choir entertained while students from grades 8, 9, and 10 registered. More than 30 students from grades 11 and 12 helped staff the event, manning the tables or participating in panel discussions.

The summit opened with an inspirational panel discussion led by black educators and business leaders from the Virginia Beach community. Panel members talked about their lives and how they overcame many social and academic challenges to attain success. From there, the group split into smaller sessions, such as “Step Up Your Game,” “How U Gon’ Act” and “Brothers Rap Time.” These panels discussed topics such as test preparation, peer pressure, maintaining good teacher relationships, the importance of rigorous courses, and community service opportunities. The day

ended with a panel of senior students, who discussed what they believed to be the keys to their academic success.

Student evaluations reflected general enthusiasm. Most gave the summit high marks for student motivation and empowerment. “The students commented about the camaraderie of the young men and the school climate for the summit,” said one of the organizers. “They felt a spirit of encouragement from the teachers, community leaders and counselors Most importantly, they saw that they could change poor habits, build on their strengths and get the best out of their high school education.”

The event cost about \$1,200. The school relied heavily on donations from business partners and student groups to cover the costs for food, invitations and T-shirts.

Based on the response to the first summit, Tallwood’s administrators are planning another African American Male Summit. They are looking into ways to include more students from other schools next year, perhaps teaming up with two or three area high schools to pool resources.

*Sharon Mims
Assistant Principal
(757) 648-5700
sjmims@vbschools.com*