

# RESEARCH BRIEF

Creating Literacy-Based Partnerships Between Urban High Schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities to Increase College Readiness



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### Introduction

In 2015, the National Assessment of Education Progress released findings that show approximately 37 percent of high school seniors nationally are underprepared for college-level math and reading (Camera, 2016). Therefore, many institutions of higher learning rely on placement tests to determine the need for remedial coursework for incoming students mainly in the areas of English, Reading, and Math. Some incoming freshmen are required to enroll in three or four courses within a developmental area (Jaggers, Edgcombe, & Stacey, 2014). Complete College America (2016) reports that 24% of incoming college students are enrolled in remedial math courses, and 12% of students are enrolled in English remediation. In the field of English, 31% of African American students who enter college at four-year institutions across the nation are required to enroll in English remediation courses in comparison to 15% of Hispanic students, 8% of White students, and 11% of Asian students (Complete College America, 2016). Since African American students are placed in English remedial courses at higher rates than other demographics (Complete College America, 2016), there is a need to determine how these students can be better prepared to enter college, particularly in the subject of English. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), established with the goal of educating African American students serve as harbors of

support for those students placed in remedial courses by providing academic support coupled with cultural relevancy (Brown & Davis, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). To provide the necessary academic enrichment that students need upon entering college, these institutions are more likely to place incoming freshmen in remedial courses than non-HBCUs, but as a result, studies have proven that HBCUs have higher retention and graduation rates among students (Anderson, 2017; Bonaparte, Lim, & Okoro, 2015). This research brief will explore the option of partnerships between urban high schools with a high population of African American students and neighboring Historically Black Colleges and Universities with the goal of increasing college-readiness for students in the area of literacy

### Literature Review Remedial Courses

Remedial courses are designed to assist students with obtaining skills in core subject areas upon entering college. Research has shown that students who take remedial courses upon entering college are successful in their college-level work, although some of their success can be attributed to the academic preparedness they received before entering college (Boatman & Long, 2018; Illich, Hagan, & McCallister, 2010). Also, remedial courses have been effective for students with lower levels of academic preparation, especially at two-year institutions (Boatman & Long, 2018).

Although remedial education has academic benefits, critics of the courses argue that they are expensive, costing students nearly 1.3 billion dollars annually (Douglas-Gabriel, 2016). In addition, low student attendance and withdrawals has been reported within remedial courses since the courses often do not provide course credit toward degree completion causing a lack of persistence (Attewell et al., 2006).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2016) reports that students who participate in remedial courses are most likely African American or Hispanic, stem from low-income backgrounds, are first-generation students, and identify as female. HBCUs across the nation serve students from these demographics and have remedial education services to serve students during their tenure in remedial courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Since most students who are arriving to HBCU campuses enter directly from high school, their academic performance in college is often a reflection of the preparation they received in high school (Johnston, 2010).



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## High School and College

**Partnerships** To aid in the transition from high school to college in terms of academic preparation, some HBCUs and high schools across the nation have partnered to increase academic preparedness for students. In 2009, the Thurgood Marshall College Fund matched high schools that educate high-risk students with local HBCUs (Delos, 2009). In the Redesign Network, colleges assisted high schools with resigning curriculum to better align with college course standards (Delos, 2009). Partnerships within the network included Coppin State University and Coppin Academy High School (Baltimore, MD), Southern University and Capital Pre-College Academy for Girls/Boys (Baton Rouge, LA), Winston-Salem State University and Winston-Salem Preparatory Academy (Winston-Salem, NC), and Texas Southern University and Texas Southern University Math & Science at Jones High School (Houston, TX) (Delos, 2009). Test scores in the areas of math, social studies, and English improved for high school students in the Redesign Network as they met state standards.

### Recommendations for Literacy-Based Partnerships

This research brief suggests an extension of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund's Redesign Network's initiative by providing recommendations for high schools and HBCUs to partner on the basis of increasing literacy skills for incoming freshman students. Strong literacy skills can not only affect placement scores but also lead to success within communication skills in almost every career field (Faletti, 2007). The partnerships will have the goal of preparing students to enter college and decrease the percentage of African American students who are placed in remedial English courses. The literacy-based partnerships would focus on two areas:

academic preparation and extra-curricular writing enrichment.

#### Peer Tutoring

Students from HBCUs can tutor African American students at local high schools with their English coursework. Peer mentoring has been proven to have positive effects on student achievement (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Since 43 states including the District of Columbia require four Carnegie units of English coursework for high school graduation, providing assistance to those students who need extra academic support can be beneficial for them in meeting their academic requirements (Dounay, 2007). The peer mentoring groups can be formed through honors societies, sororities, fraternities, or other campus organizations. Peer mentors from college campuses can partner with high school teachers to work with students on homework or classwork assignments during instructional time or after school with students one-on-one or in a group setting. The tutorial sessions can emphasize current high school instruction, but also concepts that are covered in freshman English courses such as argumentative and narrative-based writing. College students can also work with high school seniors who are planning to enroll in college on ACT/SAT preparation since these placement tests often determine the need for remedial courses.

#### Student Journalism

Furthermore, students involved in the field of journalism from HBCUs can partner with African American students on literacy initiatives outside of the classroom. High school students can practice their writing skills and develop their awareness of writing concepts such as audience and context by contributing to a campus newspaper. If the high school does not have a newspaper, high school students can become involved with student newspapers at HBCUs to cover news stories and engage with critical conversations about local, state, and national

issues. For decades, HBCU student newspapers have prepared African American students for careers in journalism as students are able to receive formal training to enhance their writing skills (Stuart, 2018). Some HBCU newspapers include *The Hilltop* at Howard University, the *Blue and White Flash* at Jackson State University, and the *Campus Echo* at North Carolina Central University. In return HBCU campuses can potentially gain incoming freshmen journalism majors to meet the demand of minorities in the media (Stuart, 2018). Involvement with student newspapers can aid African American students with their writing skills to assist them with placement exams upon entering college.

### Conclusion

Partnerships between high schools that serve a high population of African American students and local HBCU campuses can assist students by providing more development of writing skills. This development can help students be academically prepared for college. Through the academic and extra-curricular forms of engagement with college students, high school students can gain more exposure to college-level concepts in the field of English. This enrichment can also benefit students as they move into careers. Means of support that provide access and exposure for African American students in urban high schools can hopefully decrease the number of students who are required to enroll in remedial courses upon entering college.



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- Submission Guidelines:** The Urban Education Research and Policy Collaborative accepts manuscripts for review and publication consideration for the *Research Brief* series. Submitted manuscripts should not exceed 1,000 words and must conform to the guidelines outlined in the 6th Edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. All manuscripts will undergo a blind review and refereed process. The review process takes approximately 3-4 weeks. Manuscripts can be submitted for review via e-mail to Dr. Chance Lewis ([chance.lewis@uncc.edu](mailto:chance.lewis@uncc.edu)).
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