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## Opinion: A movement to send more black males to college



2017 College Bound Brotherhood Graduation ceremony at Merritt College. (Photo by Pendarvis Harshaw, courtesy of College Bound Brotherhood program)

By **ALICIA DIXON** |

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I believe in each and every one of our young people. I believe they possess incredible talent, and that we must nurture that often untapped potential. It’s how I’ve raised my own children, as the mother of black boys in Oakland.

But I often grow wary of the expectations placed on our young men to turn around decades of disinvestment in their education. The fact that so many black boys are failing academically in our public education systems is reflective of our collective failure. Let’s ask what must change to see measurable gains in their academic success.

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That’s what we set out to do through the College Bound Brotherhood, an initiative that promotes accountability and improvement at the individual, school and district levels for black male students in the San Francisco Bay Area.



Alicia Dixon, executive director of Marcus Foster Education Institute, lead agency of the College Bound Brotherhood, awards a graduate a kente cloth stole in recognition of his graduation achievement and matriculation to college at the College Bound Brotherhood graduation ceremony at Merritt College. (Photo by Pendarvis Harshaw, courtesy of College Bound Brotherhood program)

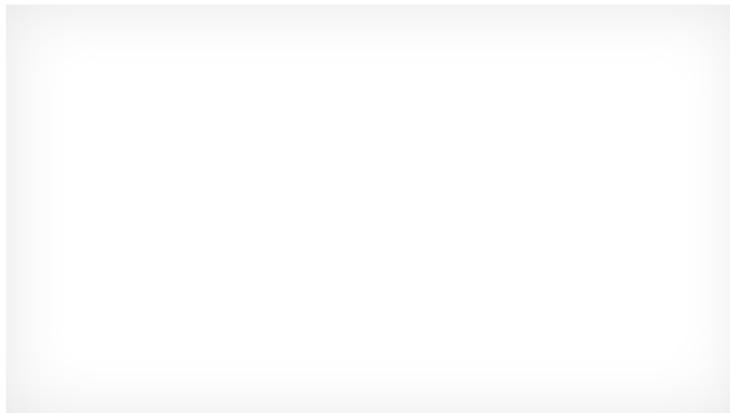
Since 2013, the Marcus Foster Education Institute has worked with nonprofits and five school districts — Antioch, West Contra Costa, Oakland, San Francisco and Hayward — to build a movement to improve systems and get more African-American young men to and through college.

They need us — adults and decision makers — to address the barriers that stand in the way of far too many accessing and completing college and succeeding in life.

Through this work, we seek to change the “water” in which the “fish” swim — transforming the environment that students must navigate to promote a college-going culture and providing support to ensure postsecondary education.

Our efforts have met with initial success. A [new report](#), by RDP Consulting, on College Bound Brotherhood spotlights areas of impact as well as opportunities to scale our efforts. The report finds that from 2013 to 2016, the program succeeded in laying a foundation for accountability in the five school districts.

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In addition, \$800,000 in scholarship funds have been awarded to more than 300 young men attending two- and four-year institutions throughout the country. The Brotherhood scholarship recipients remain in college overall at a rate of 98 percent, and at four-year institutions they have a 100-percent persistence rate.

The Brotherhood met its goal of engaging over 1,000 African-American young men across the Bay Area school districts where we are active. In addition, each of the five districts implemented data-sharing practices to determine whether or not their respective interventions were having a measurable impact.

While we are proud of our progress, more work remains to be done. In California, young black men often struggle to successfully achieve high school graduation — a critical milestone that provides access to postsecondary education and career pathways. In 2014-2015, less than two-thirds of African-American males earned their high school diplomas compared to 88 percent of all students.

To be successful, we need to expand partnerships that include school districts, postsecondary institutions and non-profits throughout the Bay Area along with caregivers and community; deepen relationships with parents and guardians; and strengthen advocacy efforts to make college more affordable and accessible to young black men and boys.

We cannot do this work alone. We require widespread support from local community leaders, nonprofits, elected officials, businesses and faith leaders to truly change the systems so our young people can thrive.

Real success means nourishing a college-going culture for young black men and boys — and all young people — not only in our region, but across the country. Let’s show our young men what it looks like when we believe in them while holding a higher expectation for us all.

*Alicia Dixon is Executive Director of Marcus Foster Education Institute, lead agency of the College Bound Brotherhood.*

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