Black Males and Literacy in the U.S.

- Inequities in educational opportunities for Black children and youth lead to unacceptable disparities in literacy and academic success—with staggering impact on opportunities and life outcomes for Black males.
- The percentage of Black high school students who are college-ready in English and reading comprehension ranges from 17% in some states to as low as 3% in others.
- Approximately 16% of Black 8th graders read at grade level.
- “The link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime is welded to reading failure,” (U.S. Dept. of Justice). 85% of youth in the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate, and over 70% of prison inmates read at or below a fourth-grade level.

Making a Difference: CBMA Literacy Corps and Community Volunteers

While the statistics above are gut-wrenching to take in and have devastating impact on Black youth and our communities, there is hope. First, it is critical to reframe the gap between Black males’ literacy achievement and that of other groups as an opportunity and achievement gap, not a matter of Black males underperforming in or undervaluing literacy. Low literacy rates of Black males have been shown to be in strong relationship to the following inequities:

- Pervasive low expectations for Black boys and youth in preK-12 schools;
- Limited access to highly qualified classroom teachers and rigorous instruction;
- Teachers who do not value and/or build upon the learning styles, cultural richness, and interests of Black male students;
- Cultural mismatches between school-based literacy practices and Black students’ family and community literacy practices that devalue the latter;
- Limited access to Black men as literacy role models in Black boys’ early literacy experiences.

These are all things we can impact in ways that lead to more positive literacy (and life) outcomes for Black males. Literacy tutoring has been shown to positively support students’ reading growth and achievement. Literacy tutors can have tremendous impact on young men’s lives.

Creating a Mentoring Village

Tutors in the CBMA Literacy Corps support reading growth and serve as role models in the lives of high school students. There are three groups that serve as tutors to support the work:

- **Community Member Tutors:** individuals from the local community and businesses
- **Near-to-Peer Tutors:** university students
- **Peer-to-Peer Tutors:** high school students

Tutors meet weekly with their tutees in local high schools and commit to tutor an hour a week for at least one academic term. They are provided with training, tutoring plans and resources, and ongoing support. No prior experience tutoring or teaching is needed—one only the commitment to help young people achieve. Tutors are paid $13 per hour.

Becoming a Tutor

You must:

- Be ready to make a difference in the life of a young man
- Be available to tutor after school in a local high school.
- Participate in initial training to support your work as a tutor.
- Commit to serving for at least one academic term.
- Be 18 years or older.
- Pass a school district background check to work with youth.

For more information about CBMA and CBMA Literacy Corps or to sign up as a volunteer community literacy tutor, please contact CBMALiteracycorps@gmail.com and visit CBMA’s website: https://www.blackmaleachievement.org