



Minnesota
Minority
Education
Partnership, Inc.

New Initiative Will Focus on Our Promising Future

Follow up to Anniversary Dinner and inspired by Dr. Rosa A. Smith's challenge to rethink public education of African American male students.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results show: If you are an African American male enrolled in the eighth grade in a Minnesota school you have a fifty-fifty chance of reading below basic levels, and odds are better than even you are also functioning below basic levels in math.

Sadly, while statistics such as these remain alarming, they have long since failed to alarm.

These were just two of the sobering figures Dr. Rosa A. Smith, former president of the Schott Foundation for Public Education, referenced during the keynote address she delivered this past November at MMEP's 20th Anniversary and Annual Meeting of Members.

However, Smith's presentation entitled, "Black Male

Students: Minnesota's Litmus Test and Opportunity for Public Education," was much more than a grim recitation of impersonal data. She encouraged all those in attendance to view the "achievement gap" through a new lens, and to consider if we truly believe education is the bridge to a promising future how will we choose to become a lifesaver for the African American males in our society?

Promising Future continues: page 2

Otto Bremer Foundation Awards MMEP \$200,000, Three-Year Grant to Address "Achievement Gap"

Last month the Trustees of the Otto Bremer Foundation awarded Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc. (MMEP), a \$200,000, three-year grant to fund the organization's "New Tools for a New Age of Education Equity" Initiative. The grant, dispersed in gradually declining amounts, begins 2008.

In keeping with its twenty-year history of being on the forefront of education equity issues, the staff, board and research collaborative members of MMEP foresee the major elements of the coming new age as being:

- Wide acceptance of the importance of "closing the achievement gap" across sectors
- Perception of economic self interest tied to "closing the gap" in the business sector
- Restructuring K-12 education to stress rigor, high expectations and alignment with technology

- Statewide K-12 Accountability Systems
- Efforts to tie post-secondary with K-12
- Effective organizing in communities of color to capitalize on these advantages

In order to deliver well-educated students of color in growing numbers, Minnesota's institutions of education will need to be led and informed by a new cadre of educators

In response, MMEP developed the "New Tools for a New Age of Education Equity" Initiative.

Over the next three years staff, board and research collaborative members of MMEP will focus on: developing new leadership, publishing new qualitative research and harnessing social marketing tools. New Tools to meet the challenges of the New Age.

Leadership Development

In order to deliver well-educated students of color in growing numbers, Minnesota's institutions of education will need to be led and informed by a new cadre of educators who are well-versed in the dynamic of these communities and the complex ways in which racial identity impacts learning and teaching.

Anticipating the next generation of education policy-makers will have a strong need for competency in cross racial/cultural realities and understandings, the "MMEP Fellows Program" will be established.

New Tools continued: page 3

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SYNERGY

Spring 2008

From the Director's Chair...

“By addressing equity issues that affect communities of color, we can discover practices and policy that benefits and promotes all communities.”

The beginning of the state legislative session brings new opportunities to focus our state on race-based educational disparities. A Senate sub-committee has been holding hearings on “achievement gaps” and a House sub-committee has focused on integration revenue.

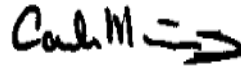
Bills to encourage more people of color to pursue teaching careers and to identify schools “Beating the Odds” will be introduced, as will a bill requiring all school districts to file a plan on how they will eliminate racial disparities in student outcomes.

Four of the five initiatives above are being shaped by leaders of color and is reflective of the new kind of urgency and drive that comes from people of color in leadership shaping major education policy and practices – action that can be more dynamically owned by communities of color who after all, represent the only growth in our K-12 schools.

At MMEP, we want to encourage more of that kind of leadership. The current U.S. presidential race – regardless of its outcome – reflects a new, emerging social desire for leadership that comes from communities of color.

By addressing equity issues that affect communities of color, we can discover practices and policy that benefits and promotes all communities.

Join our community as we work to create a leadership initiative, shaped and directed by people of color in multicultural solidarity with others, where new leaders of color can stretch out and powerfully unite racial equity with the common good. ■



Carlos Mariani-Rosa
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Continued from page 1

Inspired by Dr. Smith’s challenge, the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc. (MMEP) has convened an advisory group whose members have agreed to shape and nurture our newest initiative, “Our Promising Future.”

The working title of the group is the African American Male Education Advisory and members include: **Roger Banks**, Council on Black Minnesotans; **Dr. Ernest Davenport**, University of Minnesota; **Geovanni Ford**, Network for the Development of Children of African Descent; **Robert Johnson**, St. Cloud State University; **Shawn Lewis**, African American Men’s Project; **Shabaka McKey**,

Engineer/Educator; and **Phillip Miner**, Minnesota Private College Council.

In keeping with MMEP’s long-held belief that solutions currently exist within or should be generated from communities of color, advisory group members are all themselves African American male educators. Each of these talented individuals has exhibited a passionate commitment to equality of educational opportunities for all students.

The group held its initial meeting in February and at that time decided to proceed in two directions. First, develop a website repository for research and best practices; including the seven principles of Nguzo Saba.

Second, create a collective approach to operational sustainability by convening a collaborative of the groups currently working on African American Achievement.

The collaborative approach will be undertaken so as to not steal any group’s power, but expand impact and recreate vital and necessary infrastructures.

We anticipate this initial convening will take place in April. Watch for updates in the summer edition of Synergy. ■

Mona Miller Harris
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SYNERGY

A quarterly publication of Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc. (MMEP). 2233 University Ave W, Ste 220, Saint Paul, MN 55114 p: 651.645.7400, www.mme.net MMEP is a nonprofit collaborative, founded in 1987, that seeks to increase the success of students of color in Minnesota schools, colleges, and universities.

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New Tools, continued from page 1

The Fellows Program will draw on the extensive experience of MMEP staff: **Carlos Mariani**, executive director and a key policy-maker in Minnesota; **Jennifer Godinez**, associate director and herself an alumna of a policy fellowship program; and **Mona Miller Harris**, program director with many years of work in communities of color.

Additionally, the rich diversity of MMEP's board of directors, spanning the gamut of educators to administrators to diversity consultants, will also serve to enhance program outcomes.

New Qualitative Research

MMEP will conduct much-needed qualitative research to help all Minnesotans understand the real connections between existing policies and practices and the powerful ways in which inequity is perpetuated and tolerated in our state's schools, colleges and universities.

This research will complement the Fellows Program and the research working group model currently in place.

Harnessing Social Marketing Tools

Young people of color are not inspired by present outreach messages of mainstream educational institutions. Authentic messages need to be developed that speak directly to these market segments of Minnesota's student population.

MMEP will conduct product research into social marketing, and working groups will be convened across public and private sectors, young

people of color and communities of color, in order to design and test new marketing approaches that will induce positive changes.

Being surrounded by public messages encouraging success as an expression of one's racial and ethnic identity will help offset the all too often negative messages that youth of color receive from various sources; and will encourage young students of color to claim ownership over their own educational experience at an early age.

The social marketing tools will begin to be implemented in the latter phase of the three-year grant.

Creating Equality of Opportunities

The Otto Bremer Foundation's grant will support MMEP's creation of tools that will serve to chip away at existing opportunity gaps. **As opportunities become equal so too will academic success** for all Minnesota students.

Named after Otto Bremer, a German immigrant who moved to Minnesota in 1886, the Otto Bremer Foundation, "assists people in achieving full economic, civil and social participation in and for the betterment of their communities." ■

For more information about the Otto Bremer Foundation visit online at: <http://www.ottobremer.org>

Save the Date!

State of Students of Color
Conference

November 6, 2008

MCAN: Integral to College Access Resource Center Planning in Saint Paul and Beyond

It has been an exciting new year as I have traveled statewide to provide advice on college access resource center planning in my role as executive director of the Minnesota College Access network (MCAN). One pilot center shaped by MCAN's expertise and facilitation role is the college access resource center planning at **Neighborhood House** on the Westside of St. Paul.

This amazing project was made possible with assistance of several partners including representatives from: **Minnesota Private College Council, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the City of St. Paul, Admission Possible, TRiO, Inver Hills Community College** and Neighborhood House volunteer and youth development staff. MCAN is also exploring college access resource center plans in Willmar and St. Cloud as pilot rural projects.

MCAN has also been a part of the City of St. Paul's efforts to develop college ac-

cess resource sites. I am proud to report two new sites will open this year as a result of the City's commitment to college access pathway development--**Dayton's Bluff Recreation Center** and **Sunray library**. MCAN, one of several partners who assisted in initial planning, will continue to advise the centers on progress and development.

Are you a member of MCAN? MCAN derives support from college access programs, universities, businesses, school districts and others with a direct stake in developing more college graduates Minnesota.

Members receive discounts on professional development opportunities which have been hailed as necessary in college access programming—with presenters' expertise centered on low-income youth, communities of color and college access. ■

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MMEP Partners

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Save the Date!

State of Students of Color
Conference

November 6, 2008

**Minnesotans collaboratively weave the basket of MMEP with their talents and resources,
encircling students of color and encouraging their success.**

Our Thanks to New and Renewing Members*

Support Level: \$10-\$99

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*Jan. 1-March 12, 2008

Support Level: \$100-\$249

A democratic society cannot exist unless all students are succeeding academically.

Become a member today and help MMEP achieve its mission of increasing success for students of color in Minnesota schools, colleges and universities.

Join online at www.mmep.net/Join_MMPEP.html or call 651.645.7400.



www.mmep.net

New additions are being made to MMEP's website all the time.

Take a few moments to browse our pages, and be sure to drop us a line and let us know what you think.

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SYNERGY

Summer 2008

The summer 2008 issue's theme will be Research.