



November PIC Spotlight

Jason B. Allen

*Family Academic Engagement Specialist - KIPP Charter Cluster Schools
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Atlanta Public Schools (APS) organized its Title I schools into “clusters,” and since 2012 it has provided a Family Academic Engagement Specialist (FAES) to help each cluster successfully engage families at every Title I school. Currently, there are nine clusters, each with a FAES to bolster support for school administrators, school-based Parent Liaisons, and families. Jason Allen, FAES for the KIPP Charter School Cluster, has tackled the difficult task of engaging fathers and male guardians in their children’s education through the Male Academic & Leadership Initiative. This initiative was created through a collaborative effort between all the cluster schools’ Parent Centers.

Starting in 2013, unique school-based programs ranging from elementary to high schools participated in a cluster event which made it possible for parents, men and single dads in particular, to see how they are needed in schools. The event provided various forms of engagement to create and continue the growing initiative.

Jason cites his father, Darryl Allen, and Jason’s own predecessor, Dr. William Shepherd, as inspirations for creating the initiative. Dr. Shepherd previously developed an annual program for Male Engagement at APS and Jason, using the program as a model, developed an annual program with the help of the Parent Liaisons in the Mays Cluster schools. The annual program is a seminar for fathers, male guardians, and students from all feeder elementary and middle schools that focuses on topics such as Academic Success, College and Career Readiness, How to be a Gentleman, Understanding the Law, and additional topics.

The initiative also provides several academic-based programs for fathers and male guardians throughout the year at the individual schools where they experience interactive,

engaging, and informative seminars, meetings, and sessions where they take turns listening to each other. By the end of the program, they are equipped with effective ways of implementing academic strategies, gain support from the community, and network with other parents and guardians who are experiencing the same challenges. The programs are based on grade span. Programs at elementary schools focus on Male Leadership, Involvement in Safety, Student Discipline and Leadership, and academic projects. Middle school-based programs focus on Male Leadership, Involvement in Parent-Teacher Conferences, Mentoring, and Volunteer Programs. The high school programs focus on Male Leadership, Involvement in College and Career Readiness, and Job Training/Internships.

For the initiative to be successfully implemented, Jason says it takes the buy-in of the Cluster Principals, faculty, staff, and parents. He says “We looked at the ongoing dynamics of academic, social, and disciplinary concerns and developed creative, innovative ways to engage the men of our schools to help in these areas.” Each school has the autonomy to adapt the framework to the type of program they desire and need for the sake of the unique school community.

The Male Academic & Leadership Initiative has empowered male leadership, and through the engagement of fathers and male guardians, has created safer environments for students, aided the improvement of student discipline, strengthened volunteer and mentor programs, and aided after-school programs. By being involved and making connections in the initiative, some men have even found gainful employment and opportunities for home ownership.

Jason says, “In some programs, we also have male figures who support the academic goals in community programs and services provided by local churches and programs. There are also men who accepted the challenge of being a representative for other neighborhood children. They may not have a male representative in the home.” Men who participated in the initiative are also developing the School-Parent Compacts with their child(ren), teachers, and school leadership to emphasize academic goals. Male involvement has had a direct effect on student achievement because the men are now involved in academic planning, parent-teacher conferences, and training and support initiatives through the Parent Center.

If you are interested in learning more about engaging fathers and male figures in education, contact Jason Allen at jballen@atlanta.k12.ga.us.