Oakland Technical High School
OAKLAND, CA

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GROUNDING COMMUNITY SCHOOLING IN A LOVE ETHIC

Community schooling is increasingly being used to address educational inequities by delivering targeted strategies, integrated services, and wraparound supports.[1] In 2010, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) initiated the process of converting schools districtwide into full-service community schools, or schools that provide services and support that fit each neighborhood's needs through a collaborative, participatory model.[2]

A Brief History of King Care

In response to community needs and opportunities identified districtwide, OUSD collaborated with community organizers, religious leaders, elders, teachers, parents, and students to launch the Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA) in 2010, the first of its kind in the United States.[3] AAMA's mission is to create the structures and spaces to guarantee success for all African American male students in OUSD. The current phase of AAMA's programming is called King Care and aims to empower "kings" and their families by focusing on academics, literacy, and transformative social–emotional learning.[4]

Through King Care, AAMA dramatically improves academic and life outcomes for African American male students by offering a comprehensive system of support that includes programs, protocols, intervention, and prevention activities that focus on student and family empowerment and student success.[5] King Care is a powerful example of community-led, culturally responsive and sustaining education because program staff draw on cultural knowledge and lived experiences to support students to recognize and combat social inequities.[6]

Rooted in a Love Ethic

King Care is currently operating in 13 schools throughout OUSD, including elementary, middle, and high schools.[7] King Care staff shared how leading with love and humanity is foundational to their approach with students and families. Program Manager Tiago Robinson cited love as the grounding principle of King Care, emphasizing how this depth of encouragement can feel startling and new to his students. He described how meaningful it was for him to have educators in his life who showed him this care and compassion.

> King Care is really something that I've just been doing my career because I was a kid that didn't finish high school, so I didn't get all the X, Y and Zs. And so, when I had that opportunity to come across some educators that just showed me that love. ... Being 18 and hearing somebody say, 'I love you,' and it's like, 'You love me? What is that?' And so, I just took what I learned and just did it so it wouldn't happen to others.

TIAGO ROBINSON
AAMA Program Manager

In *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*, bell hooks suggests that "[B]lack masculinist focus on hardness and toughness served as a barrier preventing sustained public acknowledgment of the enormous grief and pain in [B]lack life."[8] For hooks, subverting this socially prescribed presentation of "hardness" is choosing a love ethic by committing to service to others and acknowledging and breaking the cycle of toughness. Jerome Gourdine, Director of Targeted Strategies in OUSD, described what this looks like with students: "Especially as young Black boys, as Black teenagers, even as Black men, there's this [discomfort with] asking for assistance or help. ... We're trying to teach them, look, when you need help, you need to go get your help."

King Care in Practice

King Care programs look different depending on each school community's needs. At Oakland Technical High School, African American male 9th graders are automatically enrolled in King Care's Mastering Our Cultural identity course, which comes from Khapera Curriculum and teaches students about African American history and culture to combat the cultural biases that can hamper students' self-esteem, motivation, and engagement in school. Other King Care supports include counseling and student services and college and career pathway support and advising.

King Care programming is designed and delivered by African American male educators who understand firsthand the academic, material, and emotional resources needed for students to thrive. Instructors are chosen to reflect their students' ethno-racial identity, as research shows that Black instructors are more effective role models for Black students because they are more likely to set high expectations for them and support their academic growth than non-Black teachers.[9] AAMA teacher Omoaghe Kevin Akhidenor discussed the role he and his team members play at the intersection of students' social–emotional wellness and academic achievement to ensure that no one gets left behind: "Sometimes the students check out because the students will feel like, well, no one cares. And if they feel like no one cares, and if they're checking out, then how are they supposed to learn?"

The Oakland Tech team has already seen results on their Social–Emotional Learning platform, Sown to Grow, with King Care students demonstrating higher social–emotional well-being ratings than the districtwide average. The program has had a positive impact on African American students' academic achievement,

with grade point averages being 25 percent higher for Black male students who have participated in King Care programming. In addition, the number of African American male high school seniors who qualify for admission to the University of California (UC) or California State University is 6 percent higher among King Care participants than among nonparticipants.[10] Gourdine also cited higher attendance and graduation rates, along with the program's expansion across the district, as markers of King Care's success.

School Information	
Number of students	1,938
Geographic setting	Urban
Grades served	9–12
School model	Traditional public school

Student Demographics	
Black	26.9%
White	22.4%
Latinx	21.4%
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	15.7%
Multiracial	10.0%
Filipino	0.9%
Socioeconomically disadvantaged	57.3%
English language learners	7.7%
Students with disabilities	14.4%

Data sourced from the California Department of Education's School Accountability Report Card.

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Consider while you listen . . .

- The OUSD team emphasized how important it is for their African American male students to have role models who understand their backgrounds and experiences. **What opportunities exist in your school community for adult staff members to connect with students about their shared identities and cultures? If staff members' backgrounds do not align with those of your students, how might you draw on the assets of your surrounding community to connect students with adult role models in your neighborhood?**

- Program Manager Tiago Robinson discussed the central role that love plays in King Care programming. For King Care staff, loving students means building meaningful relationships beyond the classroom, from getting to know students' families to purchasing students' physical education uniforms to coaching them through college opportunities. **What would it look like for educators and school staff in your community to commit to practicing a love ethic outside of academic instruction? What positive effects might practicing a love ethic have not only on students but also on school staff and the larger community?**

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