DRAFT PROPOSAL WITH EDITS 8/2/2021

Literacy Through Cultural Empowerment

Proposal to the California Department of Education-Extended Learning Opportunities

Presented by Five Keys Schools & Programs

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five Keys Schools & Programs will design and implement a new educational program for BIPOC secondary school students based on culturally responsive curricula, a proven factor in the improvement of reading skills.1 The program’s materials de-emphasize the narratives of oppression and instead emphasize power and achievement: sharing our stories on our own terms. The program emphasizes the educational responsibility of the parent/guardian as well; parents have many opportunities to learn along with their children.

The program will consist of a 4-week intensive in the summer. The cohort size will be 10 students, with three total cohorts for elementary, middle and high school. A similar program will be available for embedding by homeschoolers. The competency gained will be one reading level proficiency for the academic component. Program elements will include digital literacy, service learning projects and reading skills. Planned arts and dance elements serve to enhance cultural relevancy. The program will begin with a teacher training module to establish proficiency in the learner mindset, a research-based approach that incorporates active listening and personal accountability.2 Teachers will receive instruction in culturally responsive text selection and lesson planning, classroom management, writing pedagogy, equity-centered education and developing equity teams, as well as ongoing mentoring. They will receive a stipend for training.

The framework of the program is called Historically Responsive Literacy. This framework was established by Prof. Gholnescar Muhammad in her acclaimed book, *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* (Scholastic Teaching Resources, 2020).

Five Keys is uniquely positioned to provide a literacy program grounded in culturally responsive curricula. We provide FREE education to people of all ages in California at 100+ partner sites, including 25 county jails. Since our original school was formed in 2003, Five Keys has invested in individuals living on the margins, helping more than 30,000 people change their lives.

## Literacy Through Cultural Empowerment: Program Philosophy

Five Keys will develop a completely new curriculum for BIPOC primary and secondary school students that emphasizes culturally relevant texts, discussions and activities with narratives of empowerment. The goal is for each student participant in a four-week summer intensive to **gain one reading level proficiency in the academic component**. At the same time, parents/guardians will be encouraged and supported in taking a larger role in their children’s education with opportunities for learning alongside them and building accountability.

Culturally responsive texts and materials are a step in the right direction, but they are not enough. A systemic change in the curriculum is needed, and that is what the Five Keys program provides. Our teachers will be trained in framing lessons and activities around a different narrative around race than the one so frequently encountered by school-age students. We aim to create a narrative of empowerment and achievement, focusing on historical academic, leadership and other success by people of color, replacing a narrative of oppression. When a student who feels “reading is not for me” is exposed to a wealth of example set by forbears, people who looked like that student, the spark of interest is ignited and more seems possible than before. The voices of elders and ancestors speak to the young life, who can then pick up the threads and continue weaving a triumphant tapestry of experience.

This is not merely a metaphor. The use of culturally responsive curricula is a research-based practice, shown to support results in the reading classroom. We are inspired by works such as Gholnescar Muhammad’s *Cultivating Genius,* and Winn’s concept of restorative education in which the classroom experience becomes an enduring force in the world for achievement and peace. Five Keys works with students of all backgrounds. However, when gauging the probable effectiveness of an empowering curriculum for BIPOC students, it is worth remembering what we know already: Black students who have one Black teacher by third grade are 7% more likely to graduate high school, and 13% more likely to enroll in college. After having two Black teachers, Black students’ likelihood of enrolling in college increases by a substantial 32% (Perry, 2019).

## Program Structure, Goals and Feedback

The proposed Five Keys summer intensive program will include 3 cohorts of 10 students each, a total of 30 students. A program for homeschoolers will include 15 students. Teacher training will take place in early Summer 2022, between the end of the school year and the beginning of the program. The program will take place over the last two weeks of July/first two weeks of August, 2022. Total in-class instruction time will be \_\_\_ hours, with additional self-directed activities of \_\_\_ hours for a total of \_\_\_ hours.

The goal for each student participant will be to gain one level of reading proficiency by the end of the program, with testing before and after for validation of success. We will offer course credit and credit recovery for our teachers through our WASC-accredited program.

A feedback instrument will be administered to all participants, including students, teachers, and parents/guardians before and after the program. Data gathered this way will inform future iterations of the program.

## Teacher Credentials and Training

Teachers for the four-week summer intensive will be already credentialed teachers in the California school system, and will receive additional, stipended training in culturally responsive lesson plans and classroom management. Five Keys works with many teachers who are well qualified and eager to learn and practice culturally responsive pedagogy and we have an active teacher recruitment pipeline.

A **learner’s mindset** is a key component of teacher training for the program. The learner mindset (or growth mindset) as against fixed mindset consists of the full understanding of the idea that abilities, skills, and intelligence are traits that grow and change in response to stimuli and effort. Students with a fixed mindset have been led to believe that they have a certain amount of intelligence or talent and cannot build it any further; with a fixed mindset, students may refrain from participation in order not to display ignorance, or may give up altogether, thinking that change is not possible. With a learner’s mindset, teachers understand that good instruction makes a difference, and students understand that their own efforts and persistence make a difference. The Five Keys program teacher training will emphasize learner’s mindset, and teachers will learn that systemic change to the curricula is necessary to support learner’s mindset.

## The Homeschool Option

A homeschool co-op is one approach that may work well with our framework. Homeschool co-ops provide social activities for both kids and parents, enlarge the support system for homeschoolers, expose students to a wider variety of teachers and teaching styles and more opportunities for group activities. [The Organized Homeschooler](https://www.organizedhomeschooler.com/how-to-start-a-homeschool-co-op/) website is a valuable source on this approach. The Five Keys program fits in well with a homeschool co-op as we can provide curricula and, when necessary, teachers and rented space. The homeschool option will be a capacity builder for parents/guardians who lack resources for homeschooling but for whom homeschooling is the best option.

Optimal access to homeschool options is practically absent in marginalized communities, with most of the homeschool resources designed for, and by, middle class white communities and for our participants, that education is not designed for them. Gholdy Muhammad’s Historically Responsive Literacy is a rigorous framework that creates a roadmap for success in culturally relevant curricula for the communities we serve. Having curricula and instruction available to parents in these communities that integrates the positive impact of Black leaders and communities will have a transformative effect. The opportunity for parents/guardians and students to take classes together in which they gain a greater understanding of their own history will empower them to become leaders in their own communities. Five Keys has a liaison with an enrollment recruiter in underserved communities who will help with homeschooler engagement.

## Historically Responsive Literacy

Muhammad’s Historically responsive Literacy (HRL) is a four-layered pedagogical model in which skills are placed at the same level as identity, intellect, and criticality. HRL is under the umbrella of culturally responsive teaching, and is applicable not just in reading/English literacy studies but in any subject. Identity comes first, helping students build a safe space for themselves to develop the other layers. Identity is important because when a student finds a work personally relevant, engagement is far more likely. Intellect in the HRL model refers to the joy of knowledge, of learning new things simply because knowledge itself is valuable, which Muhammad believes has lost ground in the skills-focused teaching of today. She believes in “treating young people as if they are scholars and intellectuals and thinkers,” which expands students’ ability to think of themselves as such and also reasserts an emphasis on knowledge for knowledge’ sake that used to be taken for granted in schools and among intellectuals. The criticality layer of HRL is akin to critical thinking, but goes beyond it to use critical thinking to probe power, equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression. Criticality in the classroom has the teaching asking “How does my teaching and learning help students understand power etc.” and has students probing these issues in their own minds. Each of the four layers of HRL builds on the other; intellect develops skill, which is a crucial component, just no longer the sole focus;

Muhammad draws inspiration from a Black-created curriculum that existed in the past with the Black “literary societies” of the nineteenth century, where Blacks in Northern cities formed discussion groups to read and discuss a wide range of ideas (literary and otherwise)-- an intellectual feast and reflection of ourselves. In a world where Black children fall behind educationally all too often, the HRL framework can help us find balance in a world that tilts.

## Peer-Reviewed Literature on Culturally Responsive Curricula

Culturally responsive teaching methods and curricula have been significantly associated with positive academic outcomes as well as identity development (Byrd, 2016). A study by Bennett et al. (2017) combined culturally relevant textual material with a repeated-reading method that included computer assistance for African-American second-graders in an urban setting; students self-directed their reading. The study found that the use of culturally relevant material in repeated reading led to gains in reading with other, new material, whether or not the new material was culturally relevant. Wyatt (2014) describes how the influx of scripted material in the wake of No Child Left Behind Legislation (NCLB), which was not a friendly environment for individually-selected readings but did leave room for culturally responsive "scripted" curricula which were found to be effective.

We know that teachers who are actively involved in bridging cultural gaps in their classrooms report higher levels of self-efficacy, a measure established by Albert Bandura that is a powerful indicator of overall teacher effectiveness as well as job satisfaction. Better reading skills lead to academic self-efficacy in students, where it is an indicator for future success and satisfaction. Culturally responsive teaching methods that encourage more student-centered participation, there may be more than enough measures to demonstrate success. It is crucial to query every aspect of the student’s reading experience and to find out what will best nourish the progress of every kind.

## Conclusion

A McKinsey & Company report (2020) suggests that the learning gap for BIPOC children is widening in the ongoing aftermath of COVID-19. The pandemic set learning back for all students, but the effects have been particularly severe for Black and brown students. The coming school year will be stressful. Our hope and expectation is that the Five Keys summer intensive program in 2022 can help students close some of the reading skills gap that may have occurred for them, while empowering them through Historically Responsive Literacy to stand proud in their identity and use it to grow skills, intellect and criticality in a safe environment.

## REFERENCES

**Executive Summary Footnotes:**

1 Byrd, 2016; Bennett et al., 2017; Shealy & Blanchett, 2016; Wyatt, 2014.

2 Dweck, 2016; Couros, 2015; Sisk et al., 2018.

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## BUDGET

The Program Budget is attached in Excel format. Major categories include fees for curriculum writers and consultants, salaries for teachers for a three-month program, costs for creative arts materials and activities like swimming, gymnastics, and dance, and space rental fees.