

Project HARVEST: Getting Kids to College, One Student at a Time

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Of The Skanner News

For years, research has shown a crisis in the number of African American males graduating from colleges and universities.

While fewer men are earning degrees than women no matter their race nationwide, a 2010 study by the American Council on Education showed that in the African American community, 63 percent of degrees awarded go to women — considered to be the highest race-based gender gap in the nation.

In Portland, a handful of African Ameri-

cial activities for the participating youth.

“We began looking at our data on our African American male students and realizing that we needed to do something — we needed some kind of action,” Hurdle said.

“Also in helping to boost representation of students of color at the college level — we also wanted to do something there.

“What we realized was that we often talk to kids about — ‘we’re preparing you for college,’ ‘college is an option,’ ‘think about college,’ but many of these students have never seen a college campus or experienced going to a dorm or eating in a cafeteria or experienced talking to a professor,” Hurdle says.

“So it’s a disconnect — it’s out there somewhere,” he said. “But we don’t want it to be out there. We want them to have access to really experience it, so they can know that if you want it, you’ve got a vision of what to shoot for.”

Astor School Principal Karl Newsome, one of the adults who led Friday’s trip, says HARVEST is a good idea that is just now starting to spread across the district.

Today, Newsome says OSU is a full-fledged partner, with the university’s Dr. Janet Nishihara arranging many of the details.

“This year we’re growing it to 15 students,” Hurdle said. “This is the biggest we’ve ever been; normally it’s between 4 to 6 students.

“Normally we keep this very small for a reason: It’s because we want to be able to really have good conversations, we want to be able to connect with each student, we want to really inspire each student,” Hurdle said. “The district is supporting us to grow it, and we are.”

Hosford Middle School Principal Kevin Bacon — also OSU alum — went along last



Portland Public Schools Principals Karl Newsome, left, and Kevin Bacon chaperoned more than a dozen students on a tour of Oregon State on Feb. 24 with Project HARVEST

week with a group of young men from his school.

“This will be my first year joining Conrad Hurdle and Karl Newsome, who for the past few years have taken some of their African American boys to Oregon State for a chance to see a college campus, ask questions, participate in some specifically designed activities to motivate students around science,” he said. “They wanted to expand this year, so I jumped on it with four of our students.”

Hosford students Nate, Jared, Tre and Wesley all said they are very interested in college; Nate was the only one who had ever been to one, the University of Oregon where his brother attends school.

“I’d like to see the facilities at Oregon State, I’ve heard they’re good,” he said.

Asked why he was interested in college, he said to boost his chances at success. “Today’s kids are tomorrow’s leaders,” he said.

“I think now more than even when I was in middle school and high school, college is important to secure a good future,” Bacon said.

“But in addition to that, I think college allows a kid — 18-22 years old — to really ground themselves and answer those questions for themselves about what’s next.

“I know it was like that for me — to figure out what I wanted to do and how I would give back to society,” Bacon said. “So through this trip we’re talking about the fact that it’s never too early to talk about college.”

‘Many of these students have never seen a college campus or experienced going to a dorm’

can teachers are stepping into that gap to prepare more boys to be college men.

Last Friday, a busload of youths and teachers rode down to Oregon State University for a college tour and a long talk about future success, through Project HARVEST.

“HARVEST means Helping Adolescents Reach Viable Educational Strengths for Tomorrow,” says Ockley Green Principal Conrad Hurdle, a co-founder of the effort, which is in its fourth year.

Hurdle, and Portland Public Schools Administrators Tamala Newsome and Karl Newsome, started the program by bringing about half a dozen middle-schoolers to OSU — which partners with the Portland administrators by leading tours and setting up spe-

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