

# Building Resiliency is Key for Black Male Achievement

Broward County Public Schools,  
Florida

## Demographics

- 11 public middle schools
- 7,550 students
- 75% African American
- 14% Hispanic
- 7% White
- 74% free/reduced lunch

## Challenge

Broward County Public Schools' (BCPS) serves approximately 100,000 African American students (40% of its population). A top priority of BCPS is to close the black male achievement gap. Efforts to improve the academic success of these students have been written into the district's Strategic Plan. One initiative includes addressing the social and emotional factors that contribute to academic achievement, which research has shown is particularly important among African-American males.

*Success Highways* was chosen as the curricular component to support this effort because of its track record of achieving results. Based on over 20 years of university research, *Success Highways* assesses and develops the critical resiliency skills that are scientifically linked to improved student engagement, achievement, and graduation rates. "We were particularly excited about *Success Highways*' early-warning assessments and reports," said Michaelle Valbrun-Pope, Executive Director of Broward County's Student Support Services. "This data helps us identify the root cause of our students' academic success or failure and can actually predict which students are at-risk of struggling in school before other warning signs appear."

## The Six Resiliency Skills

Assessed and taught  
by *Success Highways*

**Valuing education**  
**Academic confidence**  
**Connectedness**  
**Stress management**  
**Health and well-being**  
**Intrinsic motivation**

## Implementation

A multi-year implementation plan was set in place to support the district's initiative to build resiliency and improve the academic outcomes of black males. In the first year nine middle schools were selected to participate. Selection was based on the schools' high African American populations as well as their Title I status. "We focused on these schools because we felt we could make the most impact here and we had the Title I funds to support the program," said Ms. Valbrun-Pope.

To kick-off the program, Howard University professor Dr. Ivory Toldson hosted a panel discussion for district and school leadership. This powerful session included pre-

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**“Success Highways made me want to work harder and get good grades.”**  
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**6th Grade Student, Crystal Lake Middle School**  
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presentations made by black male students in which they shared their struggles about being homeless and facing pressure from drugs, gangs, and violence. The young men called upon their educators to care about their students and help them achieve their goals and futures. Dr. Toldson remained closely involved in the initiative and provided a series of workshops to help educators create a school climate that fosters success for black male students.

Before starting the program, teachers and school staff received training on *Success Highways*. Additional coaching sessions, data consultations, and parent workshops were held over the course of the school year. These sessions were designed to mentor teachers through modeling and observational feedback to improve their content instruction and build resiliency into their school culture.

The classes met weekly for 60-80 minutes during either Social Studies, Reading, or Language Arts. Teachers were shown how to take the resiliency concepts taught in a given week and incorporate them into the next week’s content instruction. Students looked forward to the lessons and reported feeling that *Success Highways* will help them succeed in school.

In Year 2 the district expanded the program to four additional middle schools. A new cohort of 6th graders will begin *Success Highways*, and the first cohort will receive extension curriculum.

## Results

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At the end of Year 1, all of the school principals agreed the program was an important initiative and were eager to continue it in Year 2. McNicol Middle School principal Horace Hamm said, “The actionable results from

ScholarCentric as well as the support from the company throughout the process was a critical part of the successful implementation of the program. I strongly support implementing this program in all middle schools.”

Teachers noted their students’ attitudes about education improved and their motivation and engagement in academics increased. One teacher at Crystal Lake Middle School said, “My students seemed very much refocused on making the right choices that will lead them in the direction of some form of higher or at least extended vocational education. They see a new value in persevering.”

Students’ resiliency also dramatically increased: over 50 percent of students reported lower stress levels, and 48 percent reported higher academic confidence. Over 40 percent had stronger connections, an increased motivation to learn, and an improved sense of well-being. Over one third indicated that school was more important to them than at the beginning of the year. “*Success Highways* made me work harder to achieve my goals” said a

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**“Success Highways was instrumental in assisting us to identify students (who you may otherwise have missed) using the resiliency indicators. Identified students became a part of our RtI process as well as part of our mentoring programs for at-risk girls and boys.”**

**Horace Mann, Principal, McNicol Middle School**  
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student at Dillard Middle School.

The district is tracking the academic outcomes of the students in longitudinal research to determine impact on academic outcomes. Previous research conducted in other districts demonstrate that students who participated in *Success Highways* achieved higher GPAs, more courses passed, more credits earned, and better attendance.