



AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE: A DEEPER LOOK AT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN OUSD 2010-11

Submitted by:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The African American Male Achievement Initiative (AAMAI) aims to reverse the academic and social inequities facing African American males (AAM) in Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in seven key areas: the achievement gap, graduation rates, literacy, suspensions, attendance, middle school holding power, and juvenile detention. To complement our earlier work developing and tracking indicators in each of those areas, Urban Strategies Council offers this report to provide further insights into the status of African American boys in OUSD.

To better understand how African American male students are faring across multiple areas, we created a framework of three levels of well-being: on course, at risk of falling off course, and off course. The content of these areas is based on research on early indicators of dropout risk. (1) These indicators include attendance, suspension, grade retention, passing grades in English and math, CST scores as detailed in Table 1, below.

Table 1: Thresholds for Three Levels of Well-Being

School Level	On Course	At Risk of Falling Off Course	Off Course
Elementary School	Attended school at least 95% of school days AND Not suspended AND Proficient or higher on ELA CST (grades 2-5)	Basic on ELA CST (grades 2-5) OR Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days	Retained (held back) OR Suspended once or more OR Chronically absent (Attended school less than 90% of school days) OR Below Basic on ELA CST (grades 2-5)
Middle School	Attended school at least 95% of school days AND Not suspended AND Grade of C or better in math AND Grade of C or better in English	Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days OR Grade of D in math OR Grade of D in English	Chronically absent OR Suspended OR Failed math OR Failed English OR Retained

High School	Attended school at least 95% of school days AND Not suspended AND GPA of C or better	Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days OR GPA lower than C OR Suspended once	Chronically absent OR Over-age for grade OR Retained OR Suspended more than once
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Highlights of Findings from the 2010-11 School Year

- For AAM students K-12, 45% were on course, 21% were at risk of being off course and 34% were off course (see Figure 1, below)
- For OUSD students K-12 overall, 63% were on course, 18% were at risk of being off course and 20% were off course (see Figure 2, below)
- One-third to nearly one-half of African American male students in OUSD, depending on school level, were on course
- Chronic absence in elementary school drove many African American boys off course
- More than half of African American boys in middle school were at risk of dropping out of high school, with suspension being a factors for 73% of those off course
- Almost one in five off-course African American male students was held back
- Health and support programs merit attention
- Neighborhood poverty and violence affect too many African American boys

Summary of Recommendations

- Ensure that Implementation of OUSD’s Strategic Plan Results in High-Quality, Effective Instruction for African American Boys
- Create Healthy School Climates for African American Males
- Use Alternatives to Suspension and Punitive Discipline
- Increase Focus on Promoting Good Attendance for African American Boys and on Providing Supports and Interventions for those who are Chronically Absent
- Prioritize Improving the Middle School Experiences of African American Boys
- Create Opportunities to Re-Engage African American Male Students in High School
- Engage More African American Boys in Afterschool Programs
- Ensure that School-Based Health Centers Reach African American Boys

Figure 1: African American Males in Grades K-12, by Level of Well-Being: 2010-11

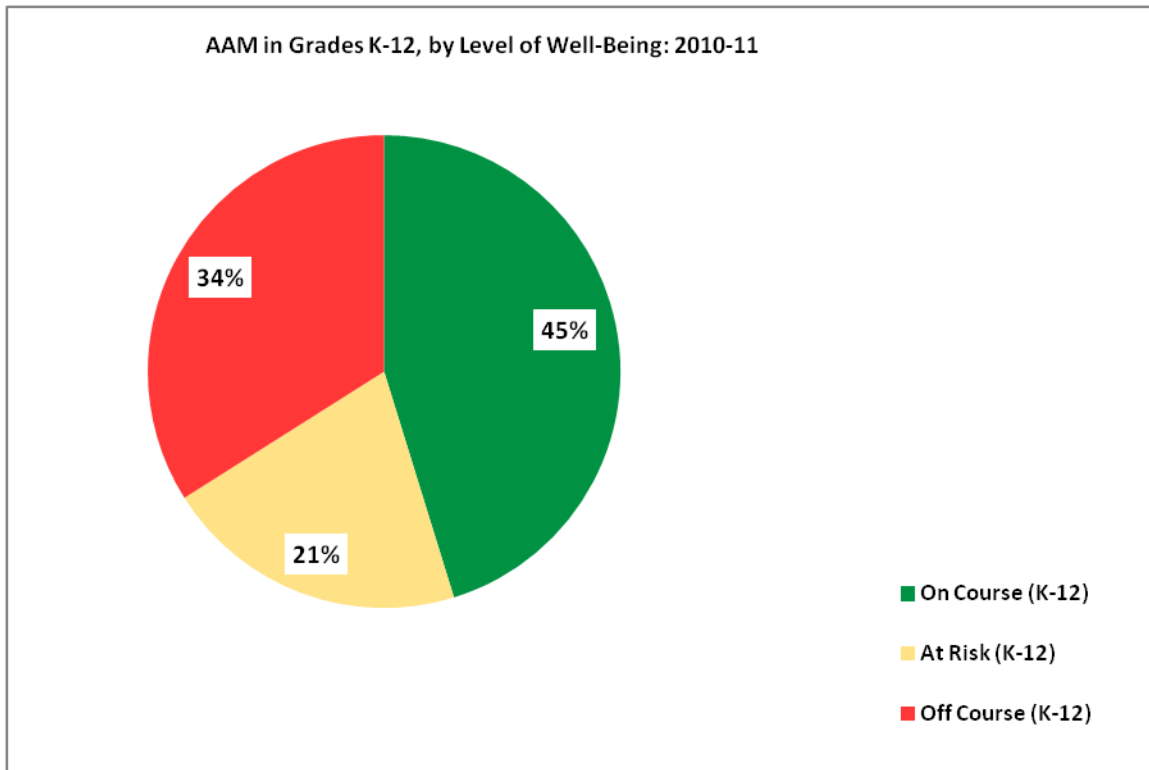
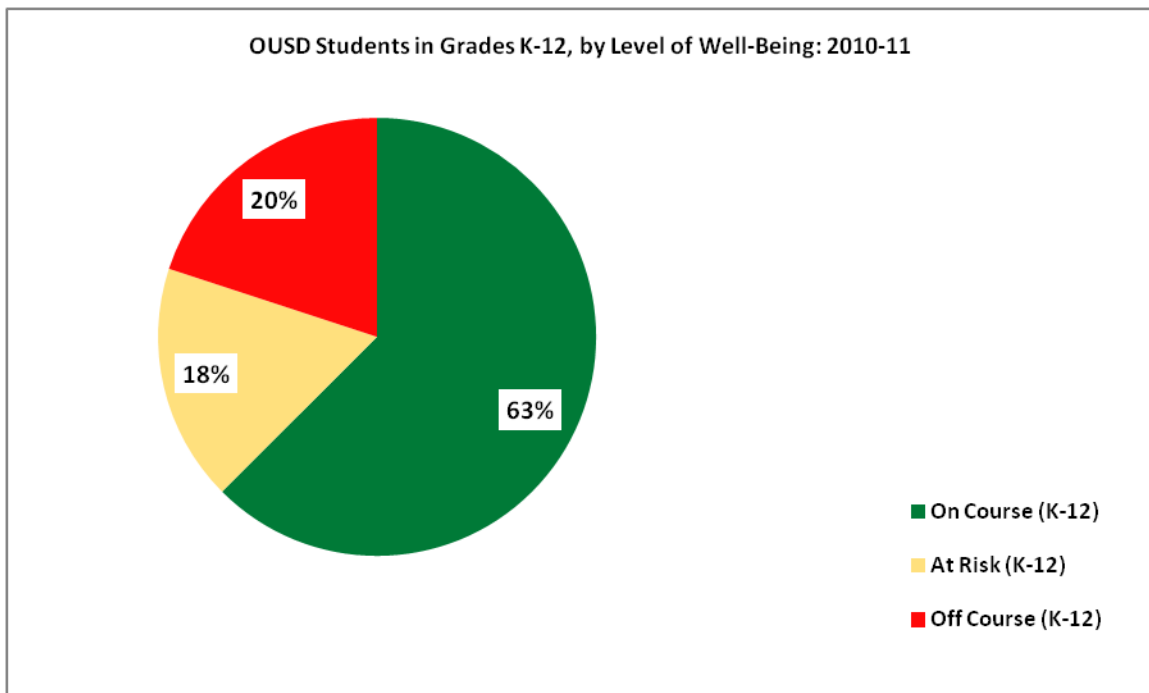


Figure 2: OUSD Students in Grades K-12, by Level of Well-Being: 2010-11



INTRODUCTION

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in partnership with Urban Strategies Council, Partners in School Innovation, and the East Bay Community Foundation, launched the ambitious African American Male Achievement Initiative (AAMAI) in late 2010. The AAMAI aims to reverse the academic and social inequities facing African American males (AAM) in Oakland in seven key areas: the achievement gap, graduation rates, literacy, suspensions, attendance, middle school holding power, and juvenile detention.

Urban Strategies Council's role in AAMAI has been:

- Data analysis, indicator development and tracking, and quantification of targets in the seven goal areas
- Research into strategies to improve outcomes for African American boys and eliminate disparities
- Policy analysis
- Special research projects, including this report

Our analysis of indicators in the seven goal areas brings to light the dire situation of African American boys in OUSD. Generating effective strategies for changing outcomes in these seven areas, however, requires a more nuanced understanding of the situation of Black boys in the District. Knowing that 33% of African American male middle school students were suspended and that 18% were chronically absent in 2010-11 does not tell us what percentage of these boys are having trouble in both areas, nor does it tell us about those African American boys who are doing well.

This report begins to answer some of the questions that indicator tracking does not address including:

1. What proportion of African American male students are on course, despite the adverse circumstances they face in Oakland?
2. How do factors such as participating in afterschool programs, living in a high-violence neighborhood, living in a high-poverty neighborhood, or having asthma correlate with Black boys' chances of being on course, at risk, or off course?
3. Which grade levels have the highest percentages of on-course and off-course Black male students?
4. In which areas are off-course African American boys struggling the most (i.e. are more of them off-course because of academic, attendance, or behavior problems)?

To explore these questions, we reviewed relevant research literature to create three categories for each school level (elementary, middle, and high school): 1) on course – those students who appear to be achieving the broad milestones that put them on course for high school graduation, 2) at risk of falling off course – students who are not achieving those milestones but are not exhibiting the warning signs associated with heightened likelihood of dropping out of school, and 3) off course – students who are exhibiting at least one early warning sign associated with increased risk of dropout.

These broad categories, which necessarily are approximate and constrained by the availability of data, shape this analysis.

THREE LEVELS OF WELL-BEING FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN OUSD

Initially, we set out to learn about African American boys who are thriving in OUSD. Close examination of the data available led us to conclude that too many aspects of what it means for a child to thrive were not available from OUSD data, including any measures of physical, social, or emotional well-being. Instead of pursuing this line of inquiry, we created the on course, at risk of falling off course, and off course categories for this more extensive analysis.

Research on the early warning signs associated with dropping out of school shaped our design of these three categories for two reasons: increasing African American boys' graduation rates is one of the seven goal areas of the AAMAI; and, while not sufficient to ensure well-being in adulthood, graduating from high school is associated with better health, economic, and social outcomes, including life expectancy. (1) Moreover, extensive research in the past decade has identified readily-available indicators that are predictive of a student's likelihood of dropping out of school before graduation. (2)

To be labeled on-course in this analysis, a student needed to meet all of several criteria, which varied by school level. Students who did not meet all of those criteria, but did not exhibit the early warning signs of dropout risk, were considered at risk of falling off course. We considered all students who displayed distress in any key area off course, because showing significant distress in any one of those areas (e.g. failing English in sixth grade) is associated with higher risk of dropping out. (3)

These categories are intended to inform our understanding of the current status of African American male students in OUSD; to draw attention to the extent to which Black boys are doing well; and to highlight the substantial proportion who need immediate, sustained intervention in order to thrive. We do not imply that every student identified here as on course is thriving, nor would we suggest that all students identified as off course will drop out.

The thresholds for each level of well-being are drawn from research in other cities, and we do not know how they apply to Oakland students, nor do we know which factors are most predictive for African American boys. Local longitudinal research would enable identification of the particular factors that have the most predictive power for identifying and intervening with AAM in OUSD who are in danger of dropping out of school.

Table 2: Thresholds for Three Levels of Well-Being

School Level	On Course	At Risk of Falling Off Course	Off Course
Elementary School	Attended school at least 95% of school days AND Not suspended AND Proficient or higher on ELA CST (grades 2-5)	Basic on ELA CST (grades 2-5) OR Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days	Retained (held back) OR Suspended once or more OR Chronically absent (Attended school less than 90% of school days) OR Below Basic on ELA CST (grades 2-5)
Middle School	Attended school at least 95% of school days AND Not suspended AND Grade of C or better in math AND Grade of C or better in English	Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days OR Grade of D in math OR Grade of D in English	Chronically absent OR Suspended OR Failed math OR Failed English OR Retained
High School	Attended school at least 95% of school days AND Not suspended AND GPA of C or better	Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days OR GPA lower than C OR Suspended once	Chronically absent OR Over-age for grade OR Retained OR Suspended more than once

Elementary School: Key Measures

Attendance: Whether absences are excused or not, missing large amounts of school puts students at risk of falling behind academically and eventually dropping out. This is particularly true of low-income children and children in early elementary school. The threshold for chronic absence, at which a student is clearly at heightened risk of falling behind in literacy and dropping out, is missing 10% of school days or more. (4) Elementary school students who were chronically absent are in the off course category. To be on course, a student needed to attend at least 95% of school days, while students attending more than 90%, but less than 95% of school days are at risk of falling off course. (5)

Literacy: Literacy in early elementary school is the foundation of future academic achievement, including graduation from high school.¹ While research has identified reading proficiently at third grade as the most critical point, since fourth grade is when students move from learning to read to using reading to learn other material, we did not want to limit this analysis to third grade students. (6) Therefore, we designated a student as on course if he scored proficient or higher in English Language Arts (ELA) on the California Standards Test (CST). This measure only applies to elementary school students in grades 2-5, as kindergarteners and first graders do not take the CST.² Students who scored at the basic level were classified as at risk of falling off course, and students with below basic scores were classified as off course.

Suspension: Suspending students from school results in loss of instructional time, often increasing alienation from school. Being suspended is associated with lower academic achievement and increased high school dropout. (7) Since suspension is so harmful, any student who was suspended during the year examined was considered off course. To be on course, a student had to have received no suspensions. One could look at referrals to the office or behavior marks on a student's report card to identify at risk students, but that information was not part of the data set we analyzed.

Retention: Repeating a grade at any time in a student's school career is a risk factor for eventual dropout, so any elementary school student who was retained during the 2010-11 school year was considered off course.

Middle School: Key Measures

Attendance: Attendance continues to be important in middle school, and chronic absence in these grades is associated with dropping out of school. (2) Middle school students who were chronically absent are in the off course category. To be on course, a student needed to attend at least 95% of school days, while students attending more than 90%, but less than 95% of school days are at risk of falling off course. (5)

End-of-Year Math and English Grades: In predicting a middle school student's likelihood of graduating, grades in the core subjects of math and English are more predictive than scores on achievement tests like the CST. (3) Students with grades of C or better in math *and* English were considered on course, while students with a grade of D (but not F) in either math or English were considered at risk, and any student who failed *either* math or English was considered off course.

Suspension: There is evidence that students who are suspended in middle school are particularly likely to drop out and to become involved with the juvenile justice system. Since suspension is so harmful, any student who was suspended during the year examined was considered off course. (8) To be on course, a student had to have received no suspensions. One could look at referrals to the office or behavior marks on a student's report card to identify at risk students, but that information was not part of the data set.

¹ While math achievement in elementary school certainly matters, it is reading that emerges from dropout research as predictive of future graduation. (9)

² Kindergarten and first-grade students were designated as on course if they attended school at least 95% of the time and were not suspended.

Retention: Repeating a grade at any time in a student’s school career is a risk factor for eventual dropout, so any middle school student who was retained during the 2010-11 school year was considered off course.

High School: Key Measures

Attendance: Attendance continues to be important in high school, and chronic absence in high school is associated with dropping out of school. (2) High school students who were chronically absent are in the off course category. To be on course, a student needed to attend at least 95% of school days, while students attending more than 90%, but less than 95% of school days are at risk of falling off course. (5)

Grade Point Average (GPA): In predicting a high school student’s likelihood of graduating, grades in the core subjects of math and English are more predictive than scores on achievement tests like the CST. (3) Students with a current GPA of C or better were considered on course, while students with a GPA of D were considered at risk of falling off course, and any student with a GPA in the F range was considered off course.

Suspension: In high school, the implications of suspension on a student’s likelihood of graduating are not as clear as in middle school. Nonetheless, disengagement from school is a powerful predictor of dropout, so we have kept suspensions in our framework for high school. (2) To be on course, a student had to have received no suspensions. Any student who was suspended once was considered at risk of falling off course, and students who were suspended *more than once* were considered off course.

Retention: Repeating a grade at any time in a student’s school career – particularly repeating ninth grade or twelfth grade – is a risk factor for eventual dropout, so any high school student who was retained during the 2010-11 school year was considered off course.

Over-Age for Grade: Being over-age for one’s grade in high school, a rough proxy for having been retained in the past, is a warning sign of heightened dropout risk, so over-age students were considered off course. (9)

HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS ARE FARING

When we look at African American students across grades K-12, we see that slightly fewer than half of them (45%) were on course in 2010-11. (Figure 1) Roughly one in five was at risk of falling off course (21%), and 34% were off course. (See Figure 9 for data on the levels of well-being among AAM in grades 2-12 only.) In the District as a whole, 63% of students in grades K-12 were on course, 18% were at risk of falling off course, and 20% were off course. (see Figure 4) African American boys, then, were less likely to be on course and more likely to be off course than their peers in the district as a whole.

Figure 3: African American Males in Grades K-12, by Level of Well-Being: 2010-11

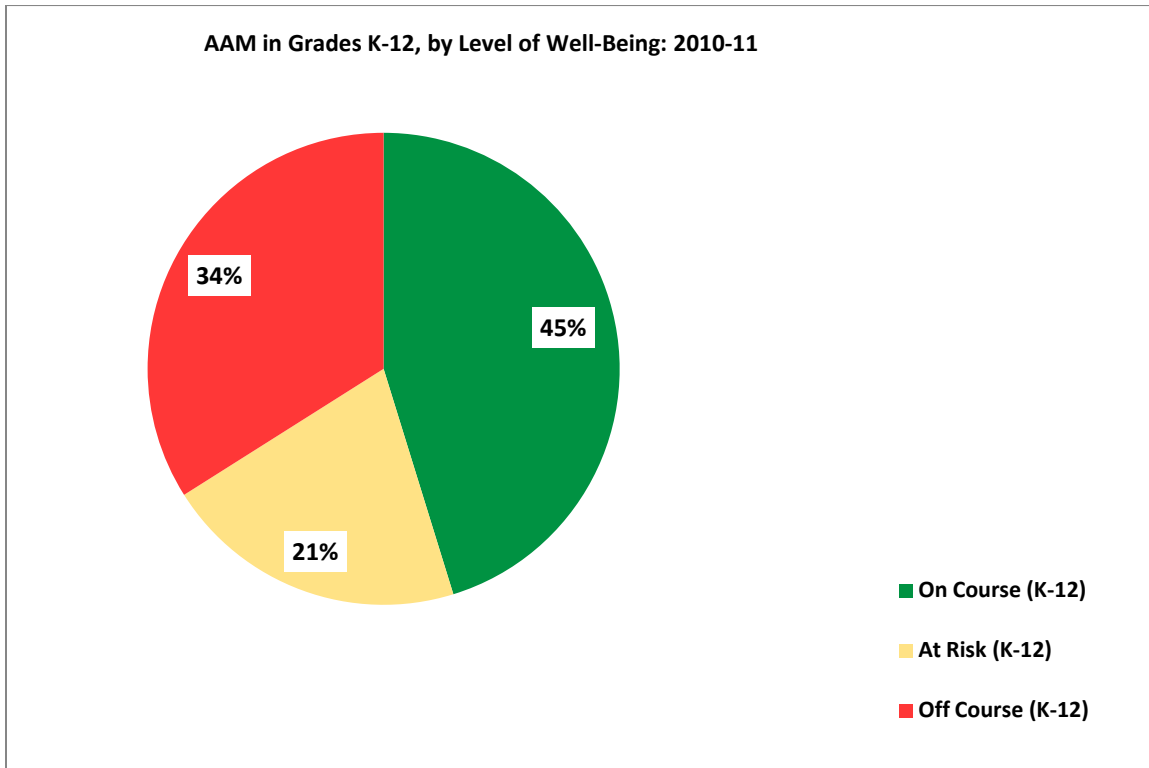
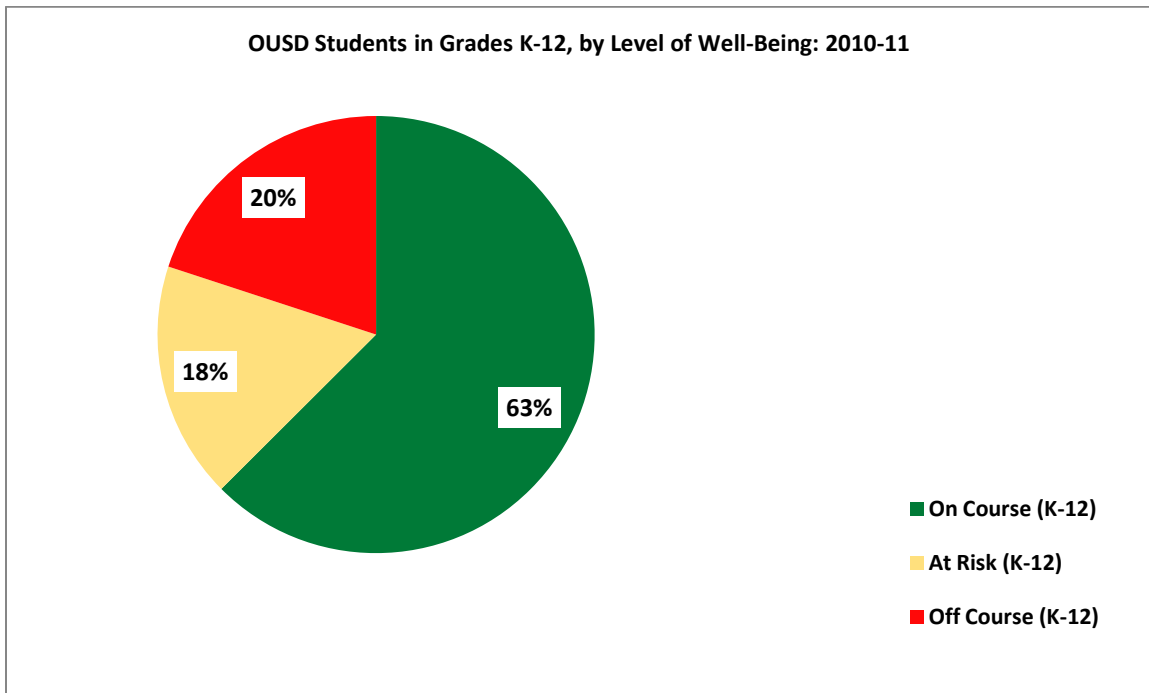


Figure 4: OUSD Students in Grades K-12, by Level of Well-Being: 2010-11



For pie charts of the well-being of African American males in elementary school, middle school, and high school in Figures 9-12 in Appendix 3.

ON-COURSE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

As important as drawing attention to the disparities facing African American boys in Oakland is highlighting those who are doing well. Celebrating their well-being is a step toward breaking through the misperception of the inevitability of failure that can come from repetition of the disparities affecting AAM.

To be considered on course, a student needed to meet specific criteria in the areas of attendance, academic performance, and discipline (with the exception of students in grades K-1, for whom we did not set an academic performance threshold). In 2010-11, 2,901 AAM students in OUSD were on course, which amounted to 45% of AAM students. Keeping these students on course and accelerating their progress will be essential in achieving the ambitious goals of the AAMAI.

Table 3 shows that an African American male student's likelihood of being on course varies by school level, with AAM in grades K-5 most likely to be on course. However, because students in kindergarten and first grade do not take the CST, the primary element of their classification as on course, at risk of falling off course, or off course is attendance (in addition to suspensions). When we focus only on students in grades 2-5, for whom we have academic performance data from the CST in addition to attendance and suspension data, the percentage of on-course AAM students falls to 23%, making this group the least likely to be on course.

Table 3: On-Course African American Males, by School Level, 2010-11

School Level	On Course AAM
Elementary School (Grades K-5)	52%
Elementary School (Grades 2-5)	23%
Middle School (Grades 6-8)	33%
High School (Grades 9-12)	43%
All Grades (K-12)	45%

Roughly one-third of AAM middle school students (33%), and 43% of AAM in high school were on course. See Table 2 for details on the criteria for being on course at each school level.

AT-RISK AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

These students are at risk of falling off course. This category is the most difficult to interpret, because it is primarily defined in the negative – these students are not doing well enough to be on course, but not poorly enough to be considered off course. Even if we

cannot quantify their risk of dropping out of school, it is clear that these students will need interventions to help push them into the on-course category.

In 2010-11, 1,335 AAM students in OUSD were at risk of falling off course, which amounted to 21% of AAM students.

Table 4: African American Males At Risk of Falling Off Course, by School Level, 2010-11

School Level	At Risk of Falling Off Course
Elementary School (K-5)	21%
Elementary School (2-5)	30%
Middle School (6-8)	12%
High School (9-12)	28%
All Grades (K-12)	21%

African American males in grades 2-5 were more likely to be in this middle category (30%), followed closely by those in high school (28%). AAM in middle school were least likely to be at risk (12%). See Table 2 for details on the criteria for being at risk of falling off course at each school level.

OFF-COURSE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS

Students in this category have substantial needs for intervention, and are at heightened risk of dropping out of school absent effective support. All of these students displayed at least one major risk factor in the areas of attendance, behavior, or academic performance.

In 2010-11, 2,179 AAM students in OUSD were at risk of falling off course, which amounted to 34% of AAM students. Designing and implementing interventions to assist these students will be necessary in achieving the goals of the AAMAI.

Table 5: Off-Course African American Males, by School Level, 2010-11

School Level	Off Course
Elementary School (K-5)	27%
Elementary School (2-5)	47%
Middle School (6-8)	55%
High School (9-12)	29%
All Grades (K-12)	34%

African American boys in middle school were most likely to be off-course (55%), followed by those in grades 2-5 (47%). AAM in grades K-5 and in high school were least likely to be at risk of falling off course (27% and 29%, respectively). It is likely that the lower

percentage of off-course students in high school is driven in part by some previously off-course students dropping out, given OUSD’s high dropout rate for African American males (43% in 2009-10).

That more than half of AAM in middle school were off course is particularly concerning because the predictive power of these early warning indicators is strongest for middle school students. (3) See Table 2 for details on the criteria for being off course at each school level.

The risk factors affecting off-course African American boys vary widely by school level. As Table 6 shows, 73% of off-course AAM in grades K-5 were chronically absent, compared to 38% in grades 6-8 and 65% in high school. A full 73% of off-course AAM in middle school were suspended once or more, compared to 33% of elementary and 41% of high school students. (Note that to be considered off course, students in grades 9-12 had to be suspended *more than once*.) Poor academic performance affected 63% of off-course AAM in high school and 41% of those in middle school. It is not surprising that a lower percentage of off-course AAM elementary students showed poor academic performance, because students in kindergarten and first grade do not take the CST, and elementary school students who do take the CST are more likely than middle and high school students to score proficient or higher in recent years. Roughly 7% of off-course AAM in elementary school were retained (held back in the same grade at the end of the 2010-11 school year), and nearly one in five off-course AAM in high school was retained (18%), while no off-course AAM in middle school were retained.

Table 6: Off-Course African American Male Students, by Risk Factor & School Level, 2010-11

Analysis of Off-Course AAM Students: 2010-11			
	Elementary (n=877)	Middle School (n=798)	High School (n=504)
Chronically Absent	73%	38%	65%
Suspended Once or More	33%	73%	41%**
Poor Academic Performance*	28%	41%	63%
Retained	7%	0%	18%

*Below Basic ELA for Grades 2-5, F in English or Math for Grades 6-8, GPA below C for Grades 9-12

**In our rubric, off-course for high school was defined as having *more than one* suspension.

NON-SCHOOL FACTORS: THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS

A multitude of factors outside of school influences a student’s success in school, including family social, emotional, and financial well-being; physical and mental health; opportunities (or lack thereof) in the student’s neighborhood; participation in high-quality child care and youth development programs; supportive relationships with adults; physical and emotional safety; and exposure to trauma. An exploration of the situation facing African American boys in OUSD must attend to non-school factors. Reliable data on most of these factors are not available at the student level, however. Given these data constraints, we

selected four non-school factors to analyze: neighborhood poverty, neighborhood violence, participation in afterschool programs, and asthma.

We analyzed the correlation between poverty and violence with on-course, at-risk, and off-course status at a neighborhood level using census tracts. We were able to identify *significant correlations* for African American male students between neighborhood poverty, neighborhood violence and at-risk and on-course status.

At a student level we were unable to measure any correlation between afterschool program participation or having an asthma diagnosis and a student's likelihood of being on course, at risk, or off course.

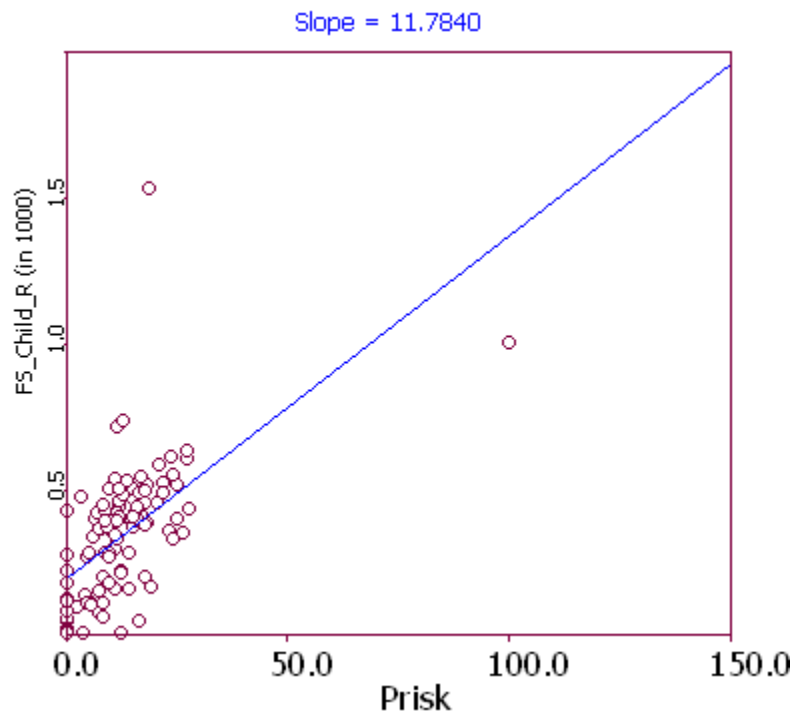
Why We Looked at Neighborhood Poverty

Family economic status is highly correlated with children's academic performance and other outcomes. However, the student-level data that OUSD collects does not contain any reliable measure of family income or poverty. Research in the past decade has explored the effects of neighborhood poverty on children and youth, finding in some cases that living in a high-poverty neighborhood influences child well-being regardless of the characteristics of the child's family. Although understanding of the mechanisms by which neighborhood poverty harms children's development is still nascent, many studies have established a correlation. (10) Our proxy measure for neighborhood poverty was the number of food stamp recipients (children specifically) in the Census tract in which a student lived. (Data on food stamp enrollment came from the Alameda County Social Services Agency via an agreement with the Alameda County Public Health Department).

Neighborhood Poverty and African American Boys' Well-Being

When comparing the rate of child food stamp recipients in each census tract with the percentage of African American boys considered at-risk, the data showed a strong positive correlation with a coefficient of 0.597. For those students considered on-course, a negative coefficient of -0.431 was found, both significant at the $p=0.001$ level. What these statistics and the graph in Figure 5 demonstrate is that at a neighborhood level, higher rates of poverty are strongly tied to a higher proportion of students at-risk while neighborhoods with lower poverty are correlated with more students on-course. This again illustrates the impact that living in a poor neighborhood can have on a student body. We did not find any significant correlations between the students off-course and poverty.

Figure 5: Scatterplot comparing Number of Food Stamp Recipients to the Percent of At-Risk African American Male Students per Census Tract



Why We Looked at Neighborhood Violence

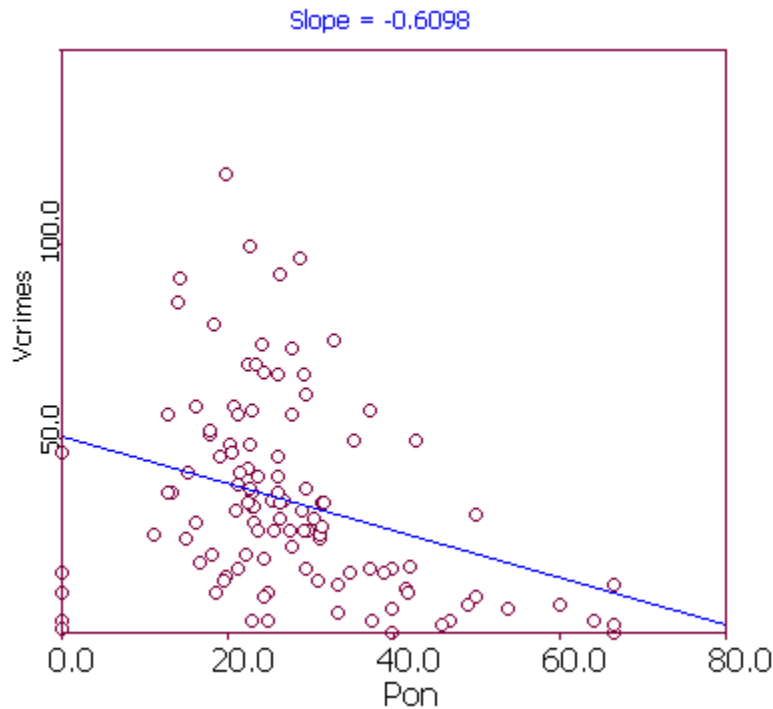
Living in an unsafe, violent neighborhood is associated with heightened risk of dropping out of school, poor health, impaired social development, and involvement in the juvenile justice system, among other issues. (11) The proxy measure for neighborhood violence we used was the number of shootings, homicides, and other violent crimes reported to the Oakland Police Department from July 2010 through June 2011.

Neighborhood Violence and African American Boys' Well-Being

The relationship between violence and student outcomes was consistent across all three statuses. For on-course students we identified a significant negative correlation (-0.32, $p=0.001$), for off-course students, a significant positive correlation (0.231, $p=0.05$) and for at-risk students a significant positive correlation (0.258, $p=0.001$). These relationships were not as strong as the connections between student status and poverty (food stamp use) however all three were statistically significant.

The relationships between violent crime and student status suggest that in high violent crime neighborhoods, students are more likely to be off-course and at risk while in parts of the city with lower violence they are more likely to be on-course.

Figure 6: Scatterplot comparing Number of Violent Crimes to the Percent of On-Course African American Male Students per Census Tract



Neighborhood Poverty and Violence Affect Too Many African American Boys

While this analysis is only the tip of the iceberg when considering the relationship between a student's neighborhood (place) and their outcomes, it gives some clear indicators as to the impact that place has on a student's chance of success. For African American males living in poorer, more violent neighborhoods there is a strong likelihood that student will be off-course or at risk, while those students living in wealthier, safer neighborhoods are less likely to be so and more likely in fact to be on-course by our measures.

As with any study of place and social measures there are myriad factors contributing to every person's condition and life outcomes. Granted that, we see here further evidence of the inequity in our city structure- eliminating the factors of race and gender, a student is much more likely to be at risk or off course simply by virtue of the fact they live in a high crime, poor community.

Why We Looked at Afterschool Program Participation

High-quality programs after school and during the summer support a child's academic progress and overall positive development. (12) Participation in such programs is linked with healthier behaviors and better outcomes, while children who are unsupervised after school are at heightened risk of being victims of crime and engaging in a host of negative behaviors. (13) Research indicates that lack of access to summer learning opportunities is a major driver of the achievement gap between low-income students of color and their white

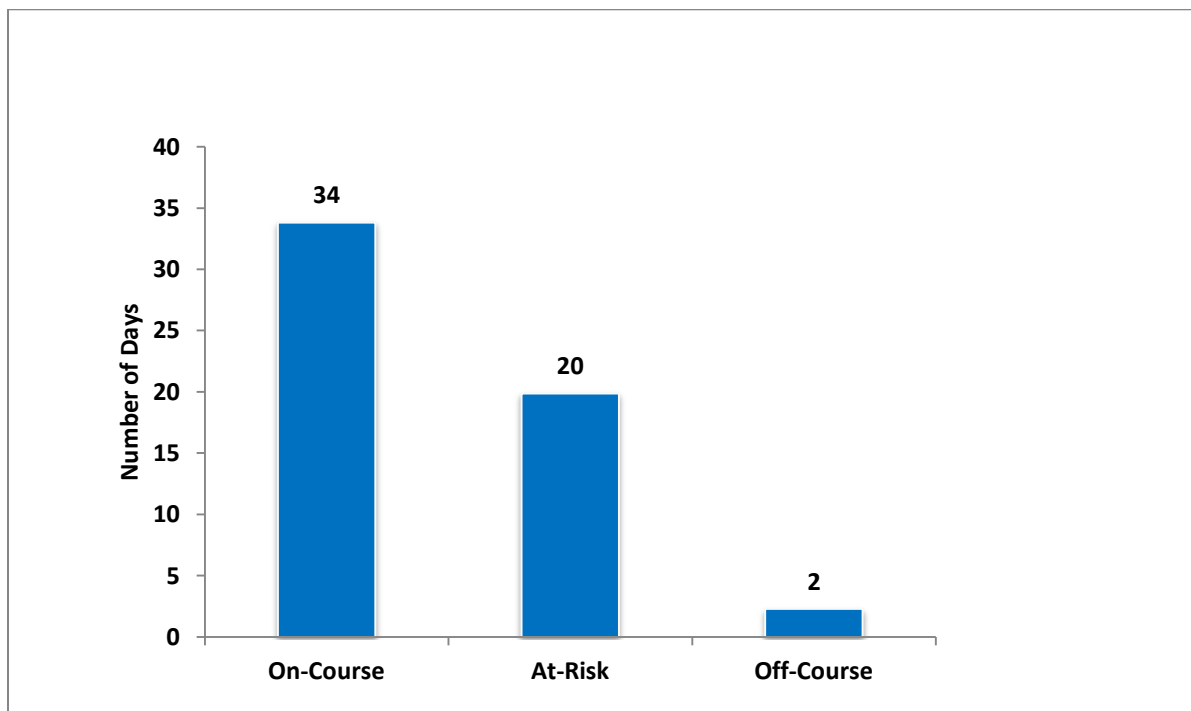
and higher-income peers. (14) Our measure of participation in afterschool programs was the number of days a student attended such a program; it did not include any information about summer programs.

Afterschool Program Participation and African American Boys' Well-Being

On-course AAM students attended afterschool programs for an average of 34 days, compared to 20 days among at-risk AAM students, and 2 days among off-course students. (See Figure 7). Further, the data showed a 21% correlation between afterschool attendance and well-being.

Whether afterschool programs are more successful in engaging on-course students, or participating in afterschool programs helps students get or remain on course, these data suggest that afterschool programs could do a better job of reaching at-risk and off-course African American boys.

Figure 7: Average Number of Days African American Male Students Attended Afterschool Program, by Level of Well-Being: 2010-11



Why We Looked at Asthma

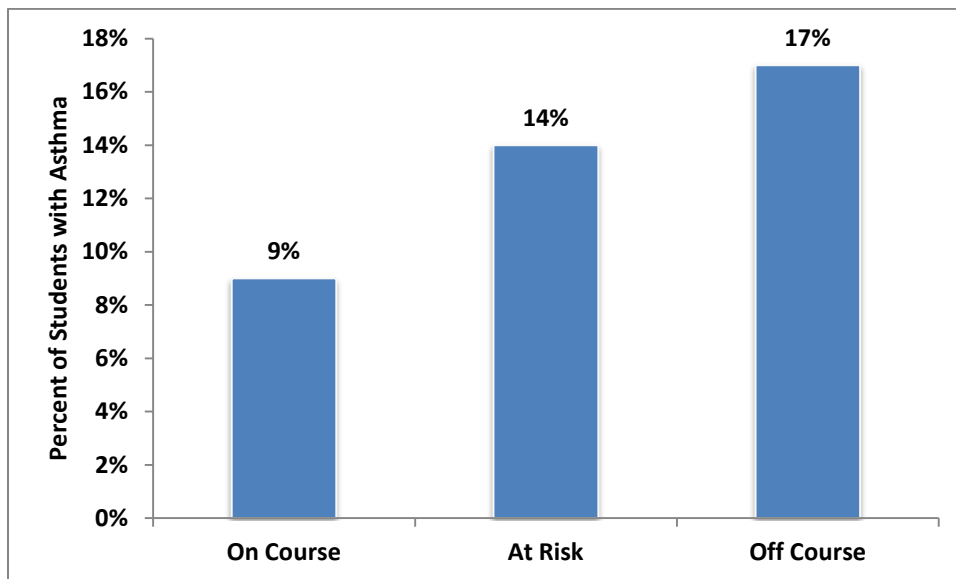
Asthma is the most common chronic health condition among children and is a leading cause of absence from school. In 2003, children in the U.S. missed an estimated 12.8 million school days due to asthma. Nationally, asthma affects African American children disproportionately – in prevalence, emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and death. (15) In OUSD in 2010-11, 19% of African American boys had been diagnosed with moderate or severe asthma, a higher rate than students in any other ethnic group (not including African American girls). In California,

children who experience frequent asthma symptoms are much more likely to miss school than are children who do not have asthma, or children diagnosed with asthma but who do not frequently experience asthma symptoms. (16)

Asthma and African American Boys' Well-Being

While 9% of on-course African American boys in OUSD had a diagnosis of moderate or severe asthma in 2010-11, 14% of at-risk AAM, and 17% of off-course AAM had such a diagnosis. (See Figure 8) Note that there was not a statistically significant correlation between having an asthma diagnosis and a student's level of well-being.

Figure 8: Percentage of African American Male Students with a Diagnosis of Asthma, by Level of Performance: 2010-11



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

One-Third to Nearly One-Half of African American Boys Are On Course

Despite the adverse conditions many of them face, in 2010-11, 45% of AAM in grades K-12 in OUSD were on course. If we look only at AAM in grades 2-12, for whom we have data in all three areas – academics, attendance, and suspensions – 33% were on course. (See Figure 9)

Chronic Absence in Elementary School Drives Many African American Boys Off Course

Chronic absence is jeopardizing the academic progress of a substantial proportion of AAM in elementary school, with 80% of off-course students in grades K-5 chronically absent in 2010-11.

More Than Half of African American Boys in Middle School Are at Risk of Dropping Out Before Graduating from High School

African American boys in middle school are particularly vulnerable to being off course, with more than half (55%) displaying one or more early warning signs of dropout risk: chronic absence (40%), failing math or English (42%), or being suspended (52%).

One in Five Off-Course African American Male High School Students Held Back

In 2010-11, off-course AAM in high school showed high levels of distress in attendance (67%), academic performance (55%), as well as being retained (20%).

Health and Support Programs Merit Attention

While the apparent relationships between greater attendance in afterschool programs and greater likelihood of being on course, and between asthma diagnoses and greater likelihood of being off course were not statistically significant, the results of this analysis in the context of national research indicate that improving the physical health of AAM students and increasing their participation in high-quality programs after school and during the summer have the potential to improve their well-being and academic success.

Neighborhood Poverty and Violence Affect Too Many African American Boys

Despite the limitations of available measures of poverty and neighborhood violence, our analysis indicates that AAM students living in neighborhoods with higher levels of poverty or violent crime may be less likely to be on course than students living in neighborhoods with lower levels of poverty or violent crime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the African American Male Achievement Initiative, with its ambitious goals and its focus on the interactions of race and gender in the pursuit of equity, OUSD has an opportunity to change the trajectory of a generation of African American boys. Without sustained action and marshalling of resources to address the situation facing AAM in Oakland, many of the African American boys currently enrolled in OUSD face diminished life chances.

1. Develop and Implement an Early Warning and Intervention System to Identify and Intervene with AAM Students Who Are At Risk or Off Course

Several conversations are occurring within OUSD and across the community regarding the development of an early warning and intervention system for boys of color, including the High School Success Project being developed by a group of county and city public agency leaders through The California Endowment's Oakland Boys and Men of Color Project. OUSD should convene representatives from these various efforts and combine resources to launch an effective early warning and intervention system for AAM. Critical to such an effort is not only identifying those AAM who are at risk or off course, but also developing and implementing individualized plans for reducing the risks and supporting their positive development.

2. Reduce the Use of Suspensions for Non-Violent, Non-Serious Offenses

Far too many AAM students are involved in suspensions from school. As detailed in our report analyzing suspensions for AAM, a significant number of those suspensions and the attendant disparities, result from two offenses which do not represent a danger to people including disruption/willful disobedience and profanity/vulgar acts. The district should identify specific alternatives to suspensions for these offenses in an effort to reduce the number of AAM who are subjected to suspensions. Evidence-based alternatives to suspension and other forms of punitive discipline must be implemented.

3. Identify and Immediately Implement Strategies to Improve Attendance Among African American Boys

Coordinated efforts monitored by continuous evaluation and tailored to the attendance barriers facing AAM at each school level are essential. The district should develop a framework for tracking and providing timely intervention and support for chronically absent AAMs.

4. Ensure that School-Based Health Centers Reach African American Boys

School-based health centers have the potential to support AAM in managing many of the health and social factors that inhibit their success. Health centers must learn how best to engage and support AAM.

5. Engage More African American Boys in Afterschool Programs

Incentives for afterschool programs to reach at-risk and off-course African American male students should be created. Increasing attendance in afterschool programs among the on-course AAM students already participating in such programs has the potential to boost their achievement and well-being. A recent report on effective out-of-school time programs' effectiveness for African American students concluded that programs that involve students more frequently, for more time; engage families; and link schools with community organizations improve a range of outcomes for African American children and adolescents. (17)

6. Ensure that Implementation of OUSD's Strategic Plan Results in High-Quality, Effective Instruction for African American Boys

Accelerating the academic achievement of AAM students from kindergarten through 12th grade must be the cornerstone of every effort to meet the goals of the AAMAI.

7. Create Healthy School Climates for African American Males

When a school's climate is orderly, with caring relationships between adults and students, is characterized by low teacher or administrator turnover or high expectations, students are more likely to succeed. Implementing school-wide systems to support positive behavior by students and adults and creating safe, orderly, and productive learning environments is a precursor to improved academic achievement.

8. Prioritize the Improving the Middle School Experiences of African American Boys

Too many AAM are falling off course in middle school. Reversing this situation will require simultaneous efforts in the areas of academics, attendance, and social/emotional support.

9. Create Opportunities to Re-Engage African American Male Students in High School

Concerted efforts to ensure on-time promotion from grade to grade and providing all AAM with access to in-school and out-of-school learning opportunities that lead to readiness for college and career must combine credit-recovery with academic acceleration.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This report's findings raise questions that might guide future research to deepen understanding of what it will take to achieve the goals of the AAMAI.

Longitudinal Analysis to Refine Early Warning Signs and Levels of Well-Being

The early warning signs and levels of well-being used in this analysis were adapted from research in other cities. To better understand which indicators are the most powerful predictors of graduation or dropout in OUSD, and among AAM in particular, student-level data could be analyzed over time (retroactively or prospectively).

Detailed Analysis of Students Who Drop Out of OUSD

High school dropout is not a single phenomenon. To better design interventions with students at risk of dropping out, a detailed analysis of students who drop out could answer such questions as: When do OUSD's AAM students drop out? How far are they from graduation when they drop out? Do the profiles of dropouts identified in other research (academic failure, disengaged students, behavioral push-out) emerge from the data? (9) What are the relative proportions of various dropout profiles among AAM in particular? To what extent is the California High School Exit Exam a barrier to graduation for AAM?

Analysis of five- and six-year graduation rates would yield insights into the success of efforts to reengage disconnected youth.

Explore the Relationship between Discipline Issues and Attendance

Since chronic absence and high rates of suspension both affect a large proportion of AAM students, developing a better understanding of the relationship between the two would inform efforts to achieve the AAMAI goals in these areas.

School Level Analyses

Analyzing the three levels of well-being among AAM at each school in OUSD would help to identify school factors influence students' likelihood of being on course, at risk of falling off course, and off course.

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Appendix 1: Methodology

This analysis uses OUSD’s end-of-year student database, reflecting the students enrolled at the end of the 2010-11 school year. This database includes information on students’ participation in OUSD afterschool programs and whether a student has a diagnosis of moderate or severe asthma.

To investigate neighborhood violence and poverty, we used crime report data from the Oakland Police Department and food stamp enrollment data from the Alameda County Public Health Department. Using this data, a geospatial analysis was performed to analyze whether there is a correlation at the neighborhood level of analysis to individual students’ well-being.

Based on our review of relevant literature, particularly of indicators associated with students’ risk of dropping out of school, we constructed three categories: on course, at risk of falling off course, and off course. The definition of each category varies by school level, as shown below.

School Level	On Course	At Risk of Falling Off Course	Off Course
Elementary School	<p>Attended school at least 95% of school days AND</p> <p>Not suspended AND</p> <p>Proficient or higher on ELA CST (grades 2-5)</p>	<p>Basic on ELA CST (grades 2-5) OR</p> <p>Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days</p>	<p>Retained (held back) OR</p> <p>Suspended once or more</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Chronically absent (Attended school less than 90% of school days) OR</p> <p>Below Basic on ELA CST (grades 2-5)</p>
Middle School	<p>Attended school at least 95% of school days AND</p> <p>Not suspended AND</p> <p>Grade of C or better in math AND</p> <p>Grade of C or better in English</p>	<p>Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days OR</p> <p>Grade of D in math OR</p> <p>Grade of D in English</p>	<p>Chronically absent OR</p> <p>Suspended OR</p> <p>Failed math OR</p> <p>Failed English OR</p> <p>Retained</p>

School Level	On Course	At Risk of Falling Off Course	Off Course
High School	Attended school at least 95% of school days AND Not suspended AND GPA of C or better	Attended school less than 95%, but more than 90% of school days OR GPA lower than C OR Suspended once	Chronically absent OR Over-age for grade OR Retained OR Suspended more than once

Some of the most important limitations of this analysis are:

1. Many important aspects of child and youth well-being are not available at the student-level collected by OUSD including family composition, family economic status, involvement in child welfare or juvenile justice systems, elements of physical health other than asthma diagnoses, and indicators of social and emotional development.
2. Data on young people who dropped out of school before the 2010-11 school year are not included.
3. The extent to which early warning signs identified elsewhere predict eventual dropout among African American boys in OUSD is unknown.
4. We did not have measures of the academic progress of students in kindergarten and first grade.

Appendix 2: Additional Data

Figure 9: Levels of Well-Being among African American Male Students in Grades 2-12, 2010-11

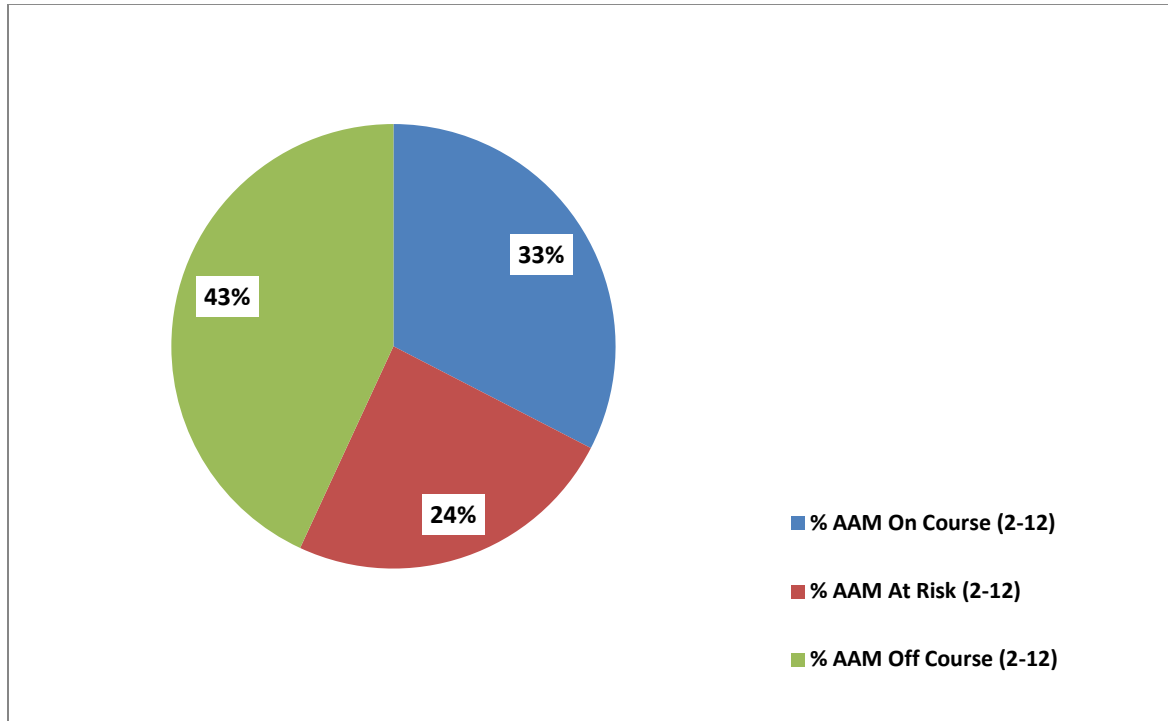


Figure 10: Levels of Well-Being among African American Males in Elementary School (Grades K-5), 2010-11

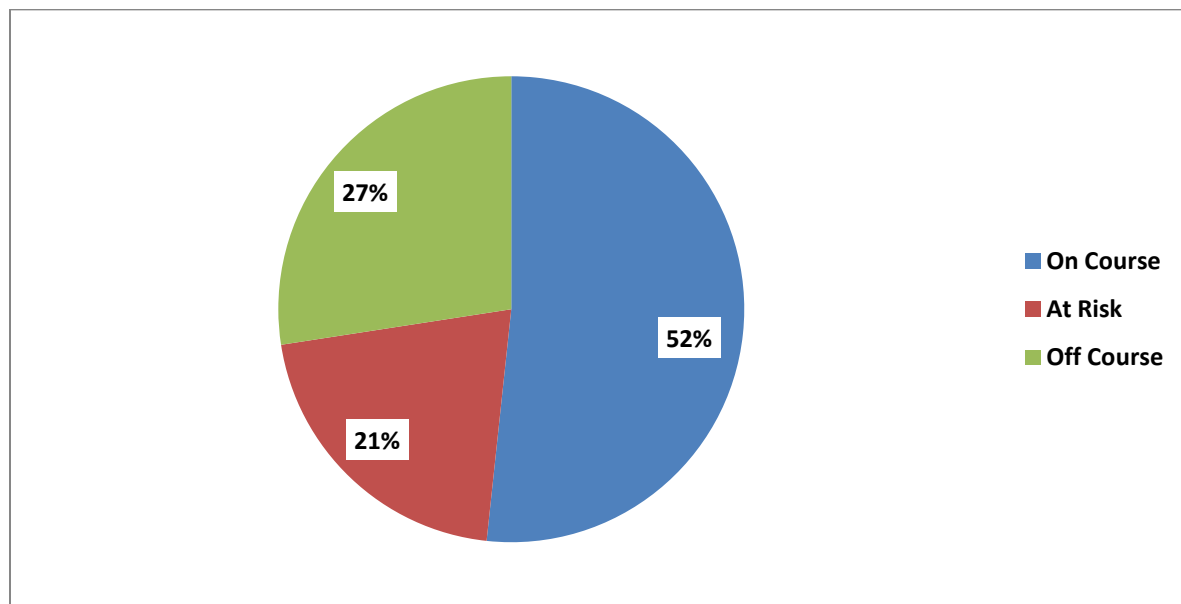


Figure 11: Levels of Well-Being among African American Male Students in Grades 6-8, 2010-11

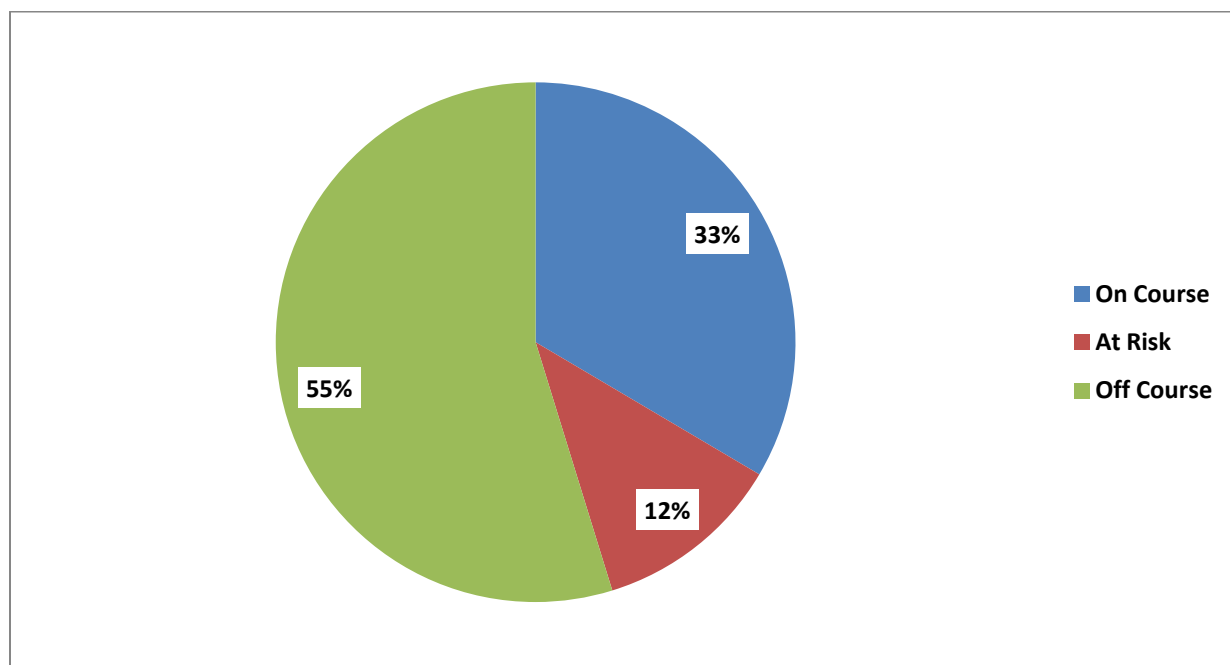


Figure 12: Levels of Well-Being among African American Males in High School (Grades 9-12), 2010-11

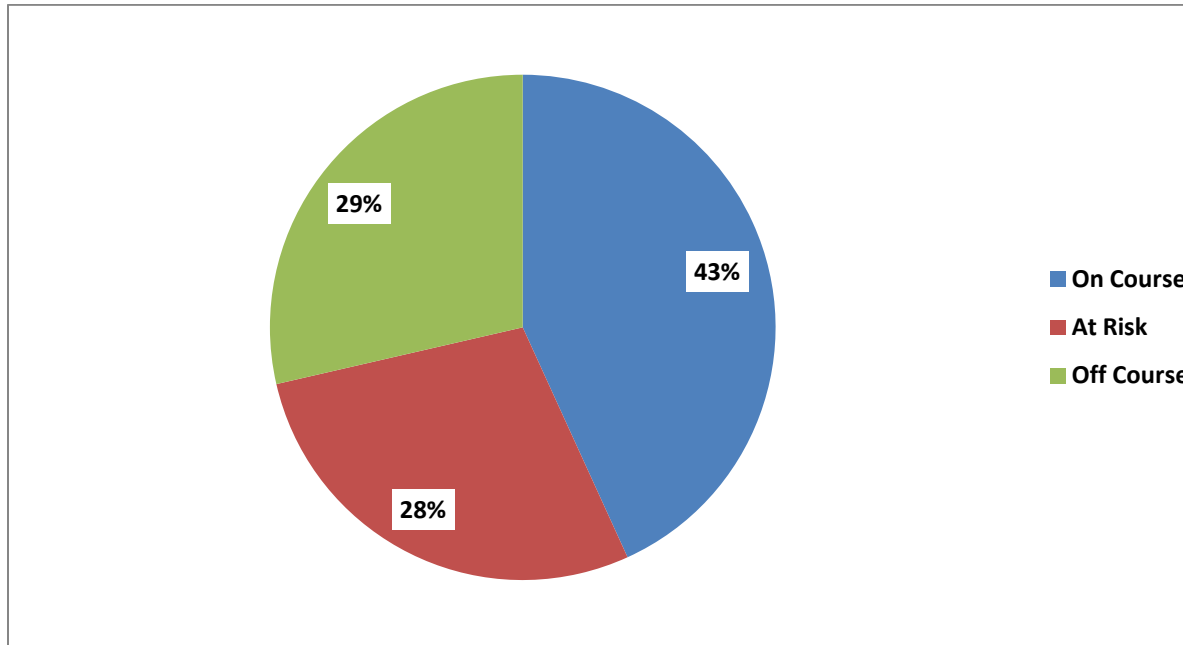
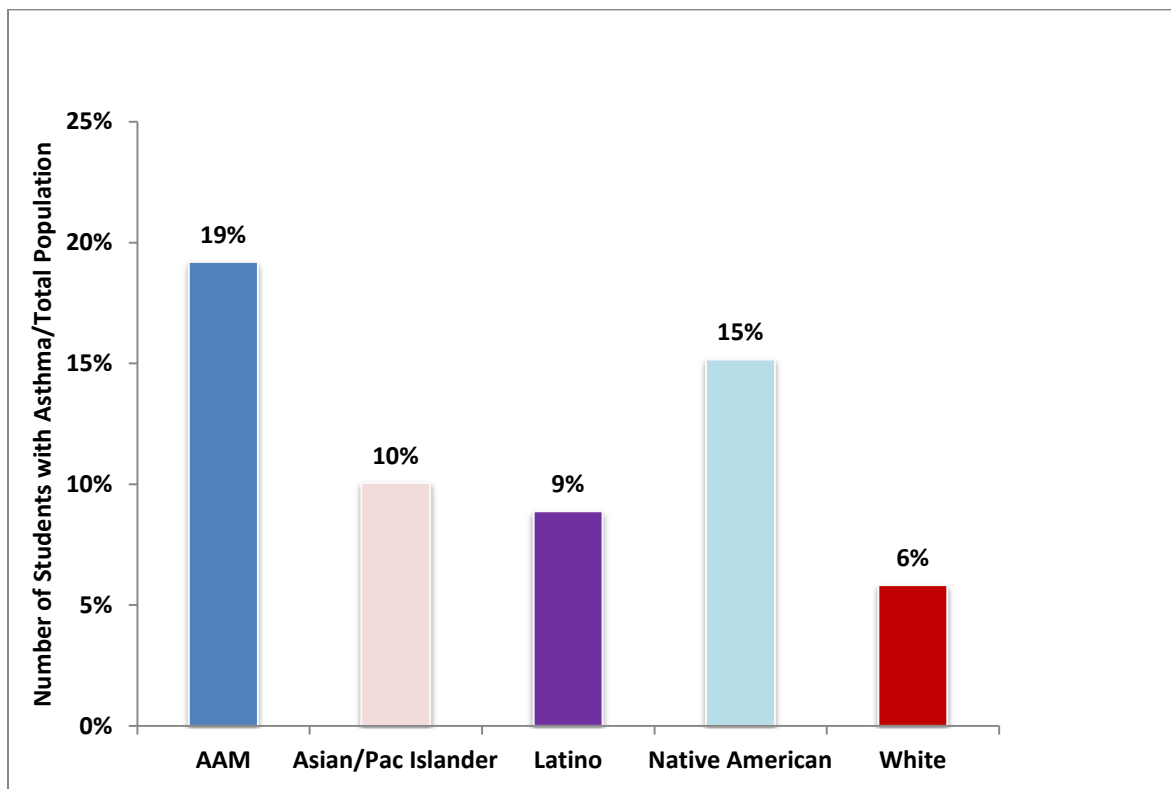


Figure 13: Percentage of OUSD Students with Asthma Diagnoses, by Race/Ethnicity: 2010-11





Appendix 3:

A Profile of African American Boys in OUSD with Perfect California Standards Test (CST) Scores in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011

Urban Strategies Council
November 14, 2011

Introduction

In the fall of 2010, a mother whose son had earned a perfect score on one of his California Standards Tests (CST) contacted the director of the African American Male Achievement Initiative (AAMAI). She pointed out that while there seemed to be a great deal of attention paid to the challenges facing African American males, no one had recognized her son’s remarkable achievement. Her prompting led AAMAI leaders on a search for other boys who had also performed this amazing feat. In total, they identified 29 African American boys in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) who had perfect CST scores in the 2009/2010 school year and organized a community event to honor them. This effort has continued and 26 boys were also identified in the 2010/2011 school year. The following is a profile of the boys from both years.

Number of AAM with Perfect Scores

In 2009/2010, there were 6,495 African American males in OUSD, 29 (0.4%) of whom had a perfect score on the CST. Among the 29 African American male students with a perfect CST score, 27 scored perfectly in math, while two had perfect scores in English and

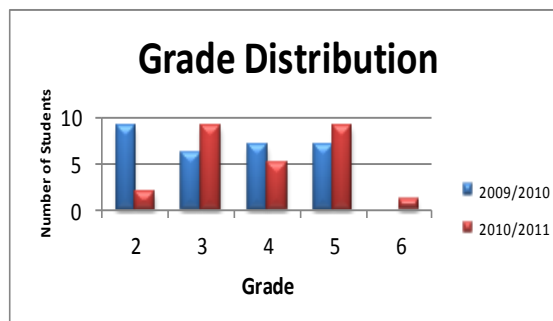
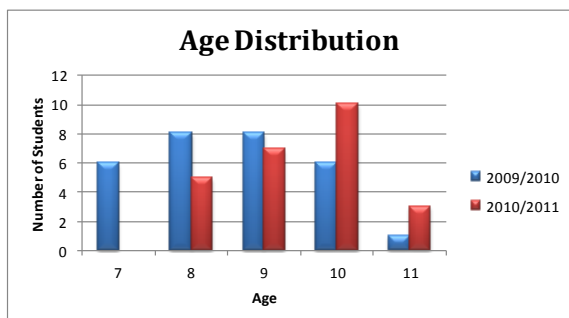
Number of AAM with Perfect CST Scores		
	2009/2010	2010/2011
Math	27	25
ELA	2	1
Total	29	26

Language Arts. In 2010/2011, there were 6,415 African American males in OUSD and 26 scored perfectly on one of their CST tests. Twenty-five of these perfect-scorers were in math and the other in ELA. *Four of these students scored perfectly in math two years in a row.* To put this in context, these numbers are comparable to the statistics of Latino and Filipino male students who have .4% and .9% of male students scoring 600 on their CSTs, respectively. Male students of multiple races and white males were somewhat more likely to score perfectly on the exams at 1.9% and 3.2%, respectively, while Asian students were vastly more likely at 23%.

Gifted Program Enrollment

Gifted Program		
	2009/2010	2010/2011
No	13	15
Yes	16	11
Total	29	26

More than half (16) of the boys in the 2009/2010 cohort were identified as gifted, as were 11 (42%) of the 2010/2011 cohort. Compared to the cohort of males in OUSD that scored perfectly on their CSTs from other ethnic groups, 71% of Asian males are represented in the gifted program, 56% of Latino males, 80% of males from multiple races, and 61% of white males.



Age and Grade Level
The average

age of the perfectly scoring males was 9 in both 2009/2010 and 2010/2011, and all were in elementary school. None of the boys were retained in their 2010/2011 grade.

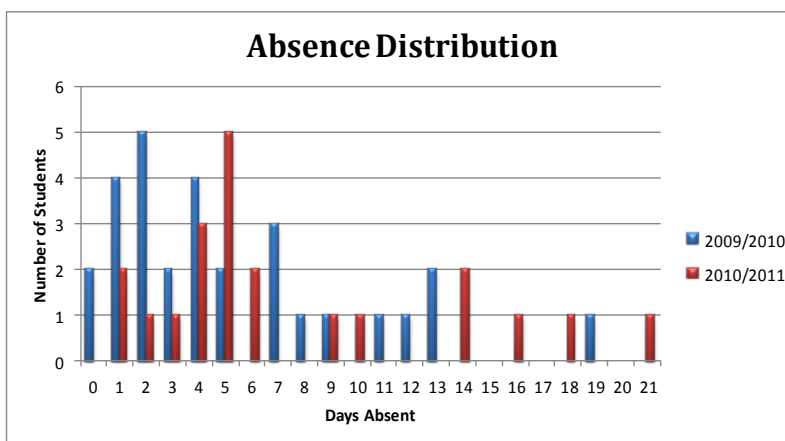
English Fluency

In 2009/2010, all but two of the boys were “English Only” speakers, with the remaining two being initial English fluent and reclassified English fluent. In 2010/2011, one boy was an English Learner, one was initial English fluent, and two were reclassified English fluent.

English Fluency		
	2009/2010	2010/2011
English Only	27	22
Initial English Fluent	1	1
Reclassified English Fluent	1	2
English Learner	0	1
Total	29	26

Attendance

The average number of days absent among this group of high-achieving African American male students was 5 days, or 3% of a 180-day school year, in 2009/2010, compared to an average of 9 days, or 5%, for African American male students in general. In 2010/2011, however, the average amongst the perfectly scoring boys was closer to the general population of African American males at 8 days.





Chronically Absent		
	2009/2010	2010/2011
No	28	24
Yes	1	2
Total	29	26

While 23% of African American male students in the OUSD system, and 22% of African

American male elementary students, were chronically absent in 2009/2010, just one of the boys with a perfect CST score was chronically absent in 2009/2010 and two (8%) were chronically absent in 2010/2011.

Students with Suspensions		
	2009/2010	2010/2011
No Suspensions	28	25
One Suspension	1	1
Total	29	26

Suspensions

While 9% of African American male elementary school students in OUSD were suspended once or more in 2009/2010, just one of the African American boys with a perfect CST score was suspended. The other 28 boys were not suspended at all during the year. The perfectly scoring boys in 2010/2011 followed the same pattern with one boy having one suspension.



Schools Enrolling Students with Perfect Scores

Schools	
	2009/2010
ACORN Woodland Elementary	1
Bella Vista Elementary	1
Burckhalter Elementary	2
Carl Munck Elementary	2
Chabot Elementary	1
Cleveland Elementary	1
Emerson Elementary	1
EnCompass Academy	1
Glenview Elementary	1
Grass Valley Elementary	2
Greenleaf Elementary	1
Hillcrest Elementary	2
Hoover Elementary	1
Lakeview Elementary	1
Learning Without Limits Elementary	1
Marshall Elementary	1
Peralta Elementary	2
Piedmont Avenue Elementary	2
Prescott Elementary	1
SEED Elementary	1
Sobrante Park Elementary	1
Think College Now	1
Thornhill Elementary	1
Total	29

Schools	
	2010/2011
ACORN Woodland Elementary	1
Allendale Elementary	1
Brookfield Village Elementary	1
Burckhalter Elementary	1
Carl Munck Elementary	4
Chabot Elementary	1
Claremont Middle School	1
Cleveland Elementary	1
Emerson Elementary	1
Fruitvale Elementary	1
Grass Valley Elementary	3
Joaquin Miller Elementary	1
Lakeview Elementary	2
Marshall Elementary	2
Montclair Elementary	1
Piedmont Avenue Elementary	2
Santa Fe Elementary	1
SEED Elementary	1
Total	26