



The REACH Program

Although there is still much work to be done, amazing progress has been made in bringing academic opportunities to disadvantaged youth. Academic programs have worked to level the playing field and bring real opportunity for intellectual growth and life success to children for whom this once seemed out of reach.

Despite successful scholastic outcomes for these programs, academic success does not necessarily imply psychological wellbeing. In fact, many children must still cope with the difficulties presented by discrimination, limited resources, and other factors known to adversely affect psychological health. For some youth, academic success also may bring with it the additional pressure to achieve not only for themselves, but also for their whole family. *Research clearly indicates that these types of challenges can ultimately hinder the effectiveness of academic programs and subsequently lead to additional social and mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, and substance use with the most severe cases resulting in violence and/or suicide.*

Clearly, we must move to develop our academic programs to meet these mental health challenges, but do so in a manner that fits with the settings in which they are to be utilized. This means moving away from mental health programs that are developed and tested in research environments far removed from the real world, without much input from those who will administer and receive the programs.

To address this issue, we have developed the program “Resiliency and Excellence through Action, Character, and Honor (**REACH**)”. The **REACH** program is modeled after an evidence-based and empirically-supported treatment technique and was derived from a wealth of psychological data which show that our actions on a daily basis positively impact our thoughts and feelings, while leading to greater self-esteem and reduced feelings of powerlessness. Moreover, **REACH** was developed in conjunction with academic program staff who are the most aware of and familiar with the needs of their program. Thus, **REACH** was designed to move away from the sterile confines of the research laboratory and to move toward building a program that was designed in the real world to work in the real world. Moreover, **REACH** is a prevention program aimed at a proactive approach to build strength before addressable issues become more severe. This allows for more efficient and manageable efforts that make mental health a seamless part of the culture of academic programming instead of a separate entity that often can become a drain on these programs.

Core Features of REACH

- Establish individualized values that will guide life choices
- Identify actions that fit with values – Valued Life Actions
- Utilize structure, support, & planning to complete Valued Life Actions on a daily basis

- **REACH** requires one 20 minute period in a group format at the start of each week and about 5 minutes of individual time the other days of the week.
- **REACH** fits well with the cultural values of academic programs as it aims to build goal setting, structure, use of available supports, and accountability.

The Current Project and Future Opportunities

- **REACH** is being piloted in a summer scholars program for DC youth from low-income communities
- The pilot includes **30** teachers over **3** Centers trained in **REACH** for a 5 week academic program
- Funding is sought for the expansion of the program into the full year academic program as well as for use in public school settings and other academic program



**For further Information about and opportunities to support
The REACH Program**

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