

African American students find inspiration and success through entrepreneurship education

Written by

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After Obama's speech last month in which he announced \$4.35 billion in competitive grants designed to help support innovative education reform efforts, education is on American's minds – and with good reason.



The nation's future rests on the shoulders of our school systems and the teachers who work with the children every day. Unfortunately, however, education is not enough to motivate and inspire many children to work hard and be successful in school - a fact that is often associated with minorities from low income backgrounds. President Obama specifically acknowledged this in his speech: "African American [and] Latino students are lagging behind white classmates in one subject after another, an achievement gap that by one estimate costs us hundreds of billions of dollars in wages that will not be earned, jobs that will not be done, and purchases that will not be made."²

But here's a fact: African Americans are 50% more likely than whites to start their own businesses, and 86% of African American teens polled by Junior Achievement expressed interest in starting a business. 26% of Black men with some graduate school education are

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trying to start a business, vs. just 10% of white men.¹

Clearly, success in today's global economy demands a quality education, but these statistics show that African Americans are looking to other means to create financial and personal success - through entrepreneurship. This fact reinforces the importance of entrepreneurship skills in today's youth, and one organization is committed to preparing low-income youth for the big world of business - NFTE, the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship.

NFTE is a non-profit organization that runs programs in 22 states and 12 countries and targets high school students from low-income communities, teaching them to think like an entrepreneur and providing an opportunity early on to take control of their destiny. NFTE teachers work with low income students to improve their academic skills but also to impart the business, technology and life skills required to go out and succeed in an increasingly complex global marketplace.

The NFTE formula has proven successful many times. Take 14 and 15 year old Brianna Hollins and Clynisha Clark, two driven and entrepreneurial African American ninth graders who noticed their peers consuming more fast food snacks and fewer freshly prepared meals or healthy foods. When they enrolled in the NFTE program in South Florida, run by their local Boys & Girls Club chapter, they worked together to create a business plan for a local food co-op, Rise & Shine, that would provide healthy food for their low-income neighborhood. Brianna and Clynisha competed against other students in South Florida on May 15 of this year and won first place in the NFTE Regional Business Plan Competition, where they won \$1,500 seed money to launch their business. Their achievement secured them a place in the national competition in New York City this October, where they'll compete against regional winners from all across the nation for the grand prize of \$10,000.

Rise & Shine grows its own organic produce in the "Good Food Garden," on a farm in South Florida. Local Club and community families will participate in twice monthly food distributions of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as food items at bulk prices. Membership offers participants classes in nutrition, "shopping on a shoestring," cooking demonstrations, and a variety of other health, nutrition and exercise activities. And keeping with the spirit of the two founders, the Rise & Shine co-op is run by twelve Boys & Girls Club teens, who have been hired to manage the program.