African American children are at historic lows in their academic failures within the Minneapolis Public Schools. Black graduation rates in Minnesota are the lowest in the country at 38% while their white counterparts' graduation rates soar to 83%, which is amongst the highest in the country. As a result of these contradictions, the African American Mobilization for Education (AAME), made up of community activists, organizations and educators, created a Covenant that was approved by the Minneapolis Public School board in June, 2008, to develop specific strategies that would assure academic excellence for all African American children in the Minneapolis Public Schools.

The Covenant Working Group has been meeting for one year to develop a pilot program based on tenants of the covenant. It is intended to start in September 2009. The pilot is called Ubuntu, which is an ethic focusing on people's allegiances and relations with each other. The word has its origin in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa. Ubuntu expands the model of Rites of Passage as practiced at Olson Middle School, in Minneapolis. It includes early childhood, middle and high school Rites of Passage. The pilot includes reading, problem-solving, calculations, effective writing, as well as service learning, caring about others and being productive citizens.

Mentoring as well as parent and community involvement is also part of the pilot. Psychologists, parent advocates, as well as individual histories of each student participating in the program will be included. Parents and community elders will be trained to work with students and monitor classrooms to assure that effective learning is happening for all students. Participants will be taught about their African history and culture, which includes African contributions to American society. Teacher training will assure that teachers who are working with African American students are culturally competent.

The benefits of the pilot stretch to include changing the culture of classroom dynamics between teachers and students to a more horizontal arrangement that is collaborative and cooperative. It also works at reducing the over-representation of African American students in negative behaviors, as indicated by absences, suspensions and truancies. The power of the covenant and the pilot program is designed to rekindle the fire for education in the African American community.

An historic first has happened with the Covenant Pilot program by including several organizations that have a history of creating successes with Black children. The organizations involved are: the African American Acceleration of Learning (AAAL), Gary Miller and Associates, Interlocking Realities, National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC), Phyllis Wheatley Community Center (PWCC), Pink Consulting, Way to Grow, and WE WIN Institute, along with Minneapolis Public School staff, who will be responsible for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the pilot covenant program.

The Covenant Working Group is applauded for their hard work in developing a pilot program that will make a difference in the lives of African American students in Minneapolis. All members of the Black community and their supporters are called on to be of assistance and give of their time; to assure that the Ubuntu Project is a success.