

The Character Club

A partnership between Mount Olive Baptist Church and Hoffman- Boston Elementary School of Arlington, Virginia

Used by permission of Rev. Dr. Walter A Smith, III, Outreach and Service Minister for the Mount Olive Baptist Church

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Motto: *Anything That Interferes With Your Education Is Unacceptable*

Background

- Mount Olive Baptist Church and Hoffman-Boston Elementary School, both located in Arlington, VA, across the street from each other, entered in to a partnership in 2004 based on a mentoring program for fifth grade males.
- The program entitled "Character Club" asks the question: How can Mount Olive Baptist partner with Hoffman-Boston and provide male mentors in the areas of character development and leadership skills, in ways that reflect the teachings of Christ, without proselytizing?
- At the time of the partnership Hoffman-Boston was the first school in Northern Virginia that because of its failure to meet the National No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards was under a Federal mandate to restructure.

Student Profile

- Three-fifths of students qualified for "Free and Reduced Lunch."
- 43% of students-Black
- 30% Hispanic
- 20% Asian
- 7% White
- Black student scores for math and reading did not meet Federal standards for the sixth year in a row. The black student score impacted the overall school score under the NCLB guidelines and the school was a candidate for restructuring.

Pastor James E. Victor of Mount Olive Baptist Church approached the Principle of Hoffman-Boston Elementary School to see how the church could help the school.

The following steps were taken to implement the male mentoring program at Hoffman-Boston:

- Meeting of church and school leadership to determine scope of any program activity and goals, objectives, and desired outcomes
- PTA and Arlington County informed of plans for the program
- The male students for what was to be the Character Club were determined by the principal
- Signed parental approval was required for student participation.
- Male members of Mount Olive Baptist Church were recruited to serve as mentors. Each mentor was thoroughly screened, including complete background check, and required to undergo a Child Safety Class.
- Each young man is paired with an adult male mentor. The hope is that the mentor will form a bond of trust with the mentor.
- It was agreed that the class would follow the Six Pillars Of Character which are: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. The mentoring program adopted the name of The Character Club

Character Club Goals

- A mentoring program designed to help primarily 5th grade boys develop their character skills through fun, constructive and interactive activities.
- Mentors serve as a support and a resource for the boys, with the goal of maximizing their academic achievement as well as their overall success in school and in life.
- Focus on activities to address personal growth, decision-making, problem-solving, leadership development, communication skills and character building based on the Six Pillars of Character.
- Program class size: has run as 12 mentors and 12 mentees to a low of 12 mentor (available) 5 mentees

Some Topic Discussed:

- Respecting Self and Others
- Sportsmanship
- Effective Communication and Listening Skills
- Achieving Academic Success
- Conflict Resolution
- Coping with Change and Transition
- Etiquette Training
- Activities: Basketball or Soccer
- Field trip (US Marshal Service/Courts, Washington D.C)

Actionable Strategic Steps

- Understand the educational issues in your local public schools. Things such as test scores, graduation rates, etc. by gender and ethnicity are important. Also attend public meetings on educational issues in your community.
- Stay abreast of the youth-related climate in your community. Local law enforcement can address issues such as gang-related activity including recruiting, tagging, etc. in your area.
- Involve your Youth Ministry/church youth in the discussion regarding the state of young people in the community.
- Reach out to both county officials and local school leadership to see where they see the greatest need for outside help in the schools.
- Parental involvement is critical to any mentoring program success; therefore, attend PTA meetings. Successful mentor programs are like a “three legged stool” for the mentee with support from home, school, and the mentor.
- Be honest in your assessment of your congregation’s willingness to commitment to be involved in a mentoring program since they will be the source of your volunteer mentors and other forms of support (clothing drive, school supplies, etc.).
- Have strategic planning meetings with school leadership to establish clear program mission, goals, expected outcomes, roles, and responsibilities before moving forward. The mentees should view selection for this program as positive recognition of their potential and not as a punitive move that addresses poor behavior. Be prepared to develop outcome measurements for the program.
- Develop community partnerships: e.g. college and professional sports teams, high school athletes, fraternities, military personal, Federal Agencies, Space Museum, etc. to give the mentees various life experiences. The experiences augment the mentor-mentee relationship for a more well-rounded character building experience.

