

## Rites of Passage Program Proposal

### Needs Statement

The Burlington School District (BSD) recognizes the disparities for our most marginalized students of color. We have prioritized Closing the Achievement Gap, an Equitable Climate and Culture, and implementing Restorative Practices as district-wide goals. We are committed to addressing contributing factors such as Adult Bias, Racism, Mental Health issues, Cultural Barriers, and Drug Use to close the school to prison pipeline, address student drug and substance use, and close the achievement gap.

We know that our students of color need additional support. There is a significant gap between their suspension rates and learning proficiency levels compared to white or higher-income students. The Burlington School District (BSD) [Equity and Inclusion Data Report](#) is produced annually to help BSD understand how education is equitable and where improvement is needed. It tracks suspensions and academic achievement by demographic group. The latest report [\(2017-18\)](#) documents nearly 300 suspensions. The overall number of suspensions continued trending downward in the latest report, including significant improvements for students' marginalized cohorts. However, the percentage of suspensions for any group is still not proportional to their total population makeup. For example, students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches (FRL) make up about 50% of the population but account for 75.4 % of out-of-school suspensions. Likewise, students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) make up 18% of the population but account for 49.1% of out-of-school suspensions.

The Equity and Inclusion Data Report also looks at the achievement gap: the observed, persistent disparity in educational performance measures among subgroups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and gender. Our District data show that significantly fewer students who qualify for FRL and students of color perform at or above proficiency than do white or higher-income students, respectively. These are among the groups of students that are also disproportionately impacted by suspensions.

The percentage of male (roughly 52%) and female students (48%) in the district has remained relatively stable over the past four years; however, the most significant disparities between the groups occur in suspensions, where males represent just over three-quarters of in- and out-of-school suspensions, despite their closeness of population representation.

The district data points to a relationship between the rates of suspension and levels of achievement for many groups. Males are more likely to be suspended in- and out-of-school than females, and, at the same time, fewer males are proficient in reading than females as measured by the SBAC. Students from low-income households are more likely to be suspended in- and

Out-of-school than students who are not from low-income households and, at the same time, students from low-income families perform significantly less well in math and reading than their affluent peers as measured by the SBAC. The same can be said for black students compared to white students, where black students are also more likely to be suspended in- and out-of-school and are significantly less proficient in math and reading than white students.

Furthermore, in 2018, the Burlington School District facilitated a district-wide climate survey through the National School Climate Center. An identified focus area is based on both the student's and parents' responses to social-emotional security. Also, school connectedness and engagement decreased as students moved from elementary to high school. These two key areas identify a compelling need to provide support and a feeling of connection for all students above and beyond academics.

All of the data above reinforces the need for targeted and intentional programs for our students of color, especially the young men of color.

### **Project Goals**

Burlington School District (BSD) will provide a positive and supportive learning environment that promotes a healthy, holistic approach to working with young men and women of color.

Our aim is to keep them engaged in the learning process and create multiple academic, social-emotional, and career development pathways. To accomplish this work, we will deepen our alignment with the existing BSD programs, My Brothers Keeper (MBK) and My Sisters Keeper (MSK). We will also develop a new partnership with COSEBOC (Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color) and interested community-based agencies to adapt and implement the COSEBOC Rites of Passage program model for young men to use with middle and high school students (8th - 12th grade) of color in the community. The MSK program will expand to provide more resources and support for our young women of color, while we utilize the pilot year to identify and develop a complimenting girls-based Rites of Passage program.

Successful implementation of the program will accomplish the following goals:

- Decrease the number of boys and girls of color who interact with the juvenile justice system
- Increase the proportion of middle and high school students of color who graduate from high school
- Improve the college readiness of middle and high school students of color in academics, communications, and critical thinking
- Increase the opportunities for middle and high school students of color to participate in activities that demonstrate service to their community, individual creativity, and physical wellness
- Learn about their own cultural heritage and its relevance to their lives
- Participating students will take on leadership roles with their peers in and out of school
- Explore, develop and apply a deeper understanding of healthy concepts of manhood, womanhood, and family relationships and responsibilities

### **Program Alignment**

A foundation has already been laid for this type of programming. The district holds long-term goals of closing the achievement gap, reducing suspensions, and The district has had a strong working relationship with the City of Burlington's Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO) to implement the MBK and MSK programs for our students of color. Our partnerships also include Spectrum Family Services and The Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV).

In addition, the district identified Restorative Practices in the [BSD Strategic Plan](#) as critical to ensuring an Equitable Culture and Climate, one of three main goals in the plan. The plan was developed with extensive outreach during the 2016-17 school year, including Community Forums, a Burlington School Board Retreat, a Student Forum, a New American Community Forum, and a BSD Faculty and Staff Strategic Planning Day.

The overarching goal of the Restorative Practices work is to improve school culture and climate for youth and adults by creating a sense of belonging, building positive relationships and community district-wide, and increasing opportunities for engagement at every level. The changes expected from this work are improvements in student attendance, student academic performance, teacher morale, and community-parent involvement.

In order to develop the in-district capacity for embedded professional learning/training on a continuous basis, the district has built strong relationships with partners at the Burlington Community Justice Center and other consultants across the region.

### **Student Experiences**

**Introductory Events.** The Burlington School District will work with COSEBOC to recruit 40 middle and high school students of color to participate in the COSEBOC Rites of Passage program during its first year of operation. These students (and any new cohort of students recruited in subsequent school years) will attend a series of events in the fall to introduce them to the program and to each other. This will include two half-day events at the high school and an off-site, 3-day retreat. These events will include activities designed to introduce students to concepts related to their cultural heritage, personal identity, healthy manhood, explore rites of passage to manhood and begin transformative conversations on these issues.

**Opening & Closing Ceremonies.** During the school year, students participating in the program will have a weekly meeting where they begin and end each with 15-minute opening and closing ceremonies. These ceremonies will be conducted by program staff and will involve culturally-grounded rituals designed to connect students to their cultural heritage and introduce them to rites of passage concepts. It would be intended for this meeting to occur daily if the pilot is successful.

**Rites of Passage Friday (high school)/ Wednesday (middle school) Seminar.** This will be a class each week conducted by program staff with middle and high school teachers.

All students participating in the program will be enrolled in this class. Two types of learning activities will be conducted during this seminar:

- Half of the sessions will be used to conduct a series of culturally-grounded learning modules based on the COSEBOC Rites of Passage curriculum framework and adapted by program staff to reflect the needs, experiences, interests, and learning styles of the participating students.
- The other half of the sessions will involve a series of mini-courses or workshops focused on communication, use of technology, culturally-grounded artistic expression, social/emotional development, life skills, career exploration, and college preparation.

All learning activities will use a student-centered approach that reflects the program's learning principles, including a focus on interdisciplinary studies, use of authentic student learning experiences, promotion of peer learning experiences, and an emphasis on students' culture and community as an engaging context for learning. Together, program staff, teachers, and students will use these activities to build a positive learning community characterized by commitments to personal growth, peer teaching, and life-long learning.

The following are some general themes that are centered on rites of passage concepts:

#### The Call to Manhood

- What is a rite of passage?
- My Vision, Mission, and Purpose
- Life Mapping
- Maleness to Manhood (Male by Birth, Men by Choice)
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Manhood
- As We Know Our Story, We Know Our Power (How does History shape our identity?)
- Why School? Education vs. Schooling
- Power of Words (Thought to Destiny)
- History of Education of People of African, Latino, and Indigenous Ancestry
- The Power of Ritual
- Lessons From Nature and the Earth
- Youth Culture and the Ancestral Memory
- Sex Education
- Fitness and Nutrition
- Hygiene
- Mindfulness – Spiritual, Mental, Physical and Emotional Health
- Martial Arts
- Social Justice and Consciousness
- The Art of Thinking
- Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome –Trauma as a Path to Healing and Enlightenment
- Building a Champion Mentality
- Restorative Practices- Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation
- From N's to Men
- Resilience – The Value and Benefits of Pain, Fear, and Challenges

- Family Relationships and Responsibilities
- Careers that Align with Our Gifts and Developing Purpose
- Financial Literacy
- Entrepreneurship

The following are school-wide or programmatic systems and practices that are essential for an effective rite of passage experience:

- At Least 4 Mission Centered Instructional Days (Young Men's Passage)
- Weekly or Monthly Manhood Trials (Mental, Physical, Emotional and Character Initiations)
- Daily Rituals
- Monthly Manhood Circles
- At Least 4 Portfolio Assessment Presentations
- Rite of Passage Field Trips
- Annual Men's Conference (COSEBOC Annual Gathering, Rumble Young Man Rumble)
- School and Community Ceremonies that Celebrate Achievement
- In-School Leadership Posts
- Annual Student Retreat (Nat Turner Akoben Camp)
- Monthly Rite of Passage PD for Educators
- Quarterly community-building activities for educators (Preferably outside of the school)
- Reflective Retreats for Educators

***Classroom Use of COSEBOC Standards.*** High school faculty and staff will be encouraged and supported to incorporate instructional practices, curriculum, and support strategies identified as effective in educating middle and high school students of color. This will draw upon both the research literature and the experiences of COSEBOC members in seven areas: culturally-relevant instruction; multicultural education; gender-relevant instruction; student-centered instruction; rigorous instructional design; character education; and teacher self-awareness.

***School Day Support.*** Program meeting space will be established at the high school to allow students participating in the program to meet informally with program staff during lunch and free time as well as before and after school. Program staff will provide informal mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and other assistance to students with their academics, social-emotional development, and personal growth and to manage their school day. The meeting space will celebrate the ancestry and cultural traditions of the participating students as well as their own future promises.

***Out of School Activities.*** In addition to activities conducted during the regular school day, the program will also offer additional learning opportunities for interested students after school and during the summer. This could include:

- Community-building activities built around culturally-based rituals and routines
- Group discussions continuing the Rites of Passage learning modules
- Additional mini-courses or workshops similar to those conducted during the Rites of Passage Seminar
- Additional support for college and career exploration

**Community Learning Activities.** Once a month, all Rites of Passage students will participate in a day-long, community learning activity outside the school building. These activities will be organized, facilitated, and managed by program staff in collaboration with community partners. The activities are intended to be enjoyable and engaging for the students, to expose them to venues and opportunities outside their daily experiences, to help them explore their own cultural heritage, and to increase their understanding of the larger community. Activities may expand to include a monthly Saturday Academy in the 2nd phase of the pilot program.

### **Program Structure & Staffing**

**Lead Agency.** The Burlington School District will develop a written memorandum of agreement with the City of Burlington Community Economic Development Office (CEDO)) to serve as a community partner in this work. CEDO will work with the school district to develop and implement this program. BSD will contract with COSEBOC to assist and support the development and implementation of the program.

**Program Staff.** CEDO will support a Coordinator and two Facilitators to work with the initial cohort of 40 students. If the program is expanded in the future, additional Facilitators will need to be hired to work with the expanded student population.

- The Coordinator will be responsible for managing the overall operation of the program, supervising the work of the Facilitators, coordinating with the school district and COSEBOC, and collaborating with community and higher education partners.
- The Facilitators will work directly with the students in the implementation of all elements of the Rites of Passage program. They should be individuals from the community who demonstrate a strong commitment to the goals and principles of the program. Emphasis should be placed on recruiting individuals with broad life experiences, past experience in teaching and counseling, and personal passions in areas such as writing, art, technology, history, community service, or sports.

**School Staff.** The school district will assign an administrator and at least one teacher and one counselor at each high school to serve as cooperating staff to the Rites of Passage program. The cooperating administrator will work with program staff to ensure effective program implementation. The cooperating teacher(s) and counselor(s) will work with the Facilitators to carry out program activities both during and after the school day. They will also serve as informed advocates for the COSEBOC standards within their schools.

**Partners.** BSD will recruit higher education institutions and other community organizations to serve as program partners. Within the community, they will particularly focus on recruiting organizations serving communities of color and those focused on cultural heritage. Written partnership agreements will be developed to define the contributions, roles, and responsibilities of each partner to the program.

**Parents.** Parents will serve as critical partners in this work. All parents will need to sign off on their student participating and attend an introductory event, as well as family events

throughout the year. A Parent Advisory Council will be created in Phase 3 to help guide and advise the overall program and its future work.

**COSEBOC Roles.** COSEBOC staff will play several roles to ensure effective implementation of the Rites of Passage program. This will include:

- Working directly with program and school staff to provide assistance in the design of the program draws upon its existing Rites of Passage program model and the *COSEBOC Standards for Educating Boys of Color*
- Conducting regular professional development sessions and providing on-site and virtual coaching directly to program staff (Coordinator and Facilitator) and to the cooperating school staff to support effective implementation of the program
- Advising and supporting the program and school district in the recruitment and collaboration of higher education and community partners
- Conducting periodic professional development sessions for all high school faculty and staff on research-based practices, approaches, and strategies for educating and supporting middle and high school students of color

By becoming a member of COSEBOC, the school district will also get access to additional members-only resources and information to support effective program implementation.

**Program Evaluation.** COSEBOC will work with the school district and lead agency to establish and implement an evaluation plan for documenting the operation and impact of the Rites of Passage program.

### Measurable Outcomes

- **GRADUATION RATE:** High school seniors enrolled in ROP will successfully graduate by the end of the school year.
- **ACADEMIC COMMITMENT BY STUDENTS:** The majority of participating ROP students will report that program participation has changed their motivation and increased their commitment to academic success.
- **SCHOOL ATTENDANCE:** Regular participation in ROP will lead to improved and higher school attendance rates this school year compared to last year.
- **ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOL:** ROP will give male students of color reasons to come to school, experiences in school they can enjoy, and people with whom they can spend time. This will contribute to changes in student motivation to succeed in school and attitudes toward school and school staff.
- **CULTURAL & PERSONAL IDENTITY OF STUDENTS:** ROP students will increase understanding of their own potential as well as the strength and richness of African-heritage cultures.
- **STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH “FUTURE” THINKING:** ROP students will understand and explore their future opportunities and options – with their families, friends, and peers; in higher education; in employment; and in their personal development.

- **COMPARISON TO OVERALL STUDENT POPULATION:** Students who participate regularly in ROP will have much higher course completion and school attendance rates and much lower violent incident and school suspension rates than male students in their schools not enrolled in ROP.

**Program Implementation Phases**

**Phase 1 (Fall 2021).** During this phase, the lead agency, school district, and COSEBOC will focus on planning, staff training, and participant recruitment. Events will be conducted in Fall 2021 to introduce students to the goals and activities of the program. A retreat will be to bring together program staff and students and provide a foundation for the implementation of program activities during the 2021-22 school year. In addition, out-of-school time programs will be created at the middle school (MBK, MSK). Finally, work will begin to identify and develop a Rites of Passage program for girls of color, that will build upon the MSK program.

**Phase 2 (Spring 2022).** During this phase, the program’s school day and out-of-school time activities will be implemented. This will include the opening and closing ceremonies, the Rites of Passage Seminar, and Facilitator support during the school day and after school, as needed. Regular professional development and coaching will be provided to program staff and cooperating school staff. The program will begin to recruit community partners. Summer programming will also be developed during this time. The Rites of Passage program for girls will be finalized to begin in phase 3.

**Phase 3 (Fall 2021).** During this phase, the program will be expanded to include monthly community learning events. These activities will generally be conducted in cooperation with community or higher education partners. Where appropriate, partners will also be integrated into the school day activities. The Rites of Passage program for girls will be implemented, closely aligned with the COSEBOC programming for boys and the steps it took in Phase 1 to recruit students. Professional development on COSEBOC standards and practices will be offered to the overall high school faculty and staff. Results of the program evaluation will be reviewed and used to inform planning for the spring 2022 and the 2021-2022 school year. The Parent Advisory Council will also be developed during this time.

**Budget**

Funds will work in alignment with the greater BHS state funds to improve student support, with a focus on our students of color.

\$100,000 in funding is requested annually throughout the 2-year pilot to cover expenses related to:

Item	Description
Staffing	Program facilitators, up to 3



Staffing Benefits	FICA/WC, 7.65% of salary
Travel	Trip to Seattle for COSEBOC conference
Stipends	For student participation up to \$500/student x 40 students
Dues & Fees	COSEBOC Affiliate Fee
Transportation	Busing to and from field trips
Supplies and materials	General supplies
Conference registration	COSEBOC: \$500 \$125 - students
Stipends	Stipends for beyond contract time for staff attending professional learning opportunities and committee work at a contracted amount of \$285/day
Professional Services/Vendors	Community Partners support, such as the University of Vermont for data and additional resources