

**FIRST PERSON**  
**AUGUST 2007**

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# ALL DRESSED UP WITH NO PLACE TO GO

The Path to Higher Education for African-American & Latino Males in North Philadelphia

[www.firstpersondocumentary.org](http://www.firstpersondocumentary.org)

## THE FIRST PERSON DOCUMENTARY PROJECT

First Person is a feature-length independent documentary film following the lives of six Philadelphia public high school students trying to make it to college.

Currently scheduled for public television broadcast in Fall 2008, First Person aims to raise awareness of the challenges faced by low-income urban public high school students on the path to college. Over two years, the young people featured in the film take viewers inside their pursuit of higher education—and their struggles to navigate the responsibilities of family, the pressures of the streets, and the challenges of a school system that fails to graduate almost half its students. Told in the students' own voices, First Person is an intimate portrait of how navigating the college pipeline results in scaled back dreams for too many of our young people.

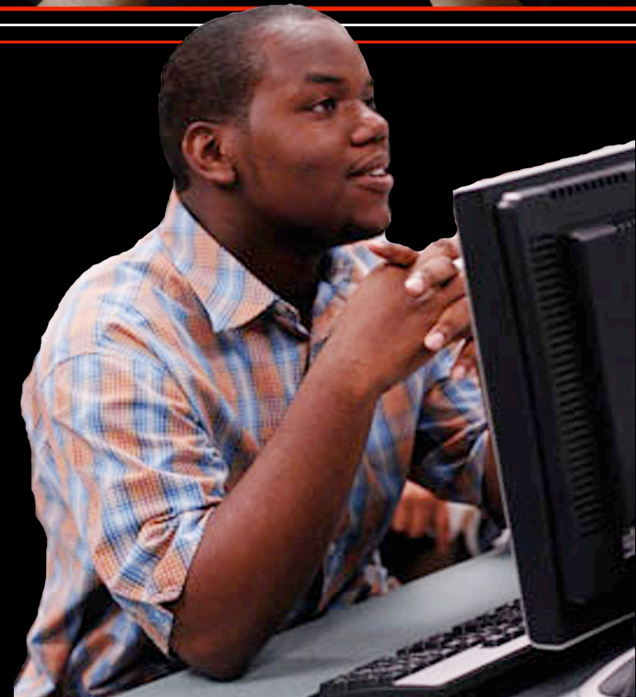


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## THE COLLEGE AMBASSADORS PROJECT

First Person also aims to catalyze an advocacy effort that challenges our understanding of the support systems that low-income urban public high school students need in order to be successful. During the Summer of 2007, First Person piloted an expanded outreach program entitled The College Ambassador Project. In partnership with Interactive Data Solutions, Temple Youth VOICES/The University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia, and the WHYY Learning Lab, First Person hired a group of young men from North Philadelphia to analyze the postsecondary opportunities available to African American and Latino males, to envision a more comprehensive support system that would better meet their needs, and to begin advocating for this system. First Person will seek to expand this effort in 2008.

To learn more about First Person and the College Ambassador Project, please visit [www.firstpersondocumentary.org](http://www.firstpersondocumentary.org)





How well does our Village provide African American & Latino males with the supports we need to make it to college?



## COLLEGE AMBASSADOR REPORT CARD FOR NORTH PHILADELPHIA

19121, 19122, 19132, 19133, 19134

**EDUCATION & ACADEMIC SUPPORTS**

**C+**

**MENTORING & SOCIAL SUPPORTS**

**C+**

**COMPETENT ORGANIZATIONS & PROGRAMS**

**C-**

**FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

**C+**

**NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP**

**D-**

**OVERALL GRADE**

**C-**





# INTRODUCTION

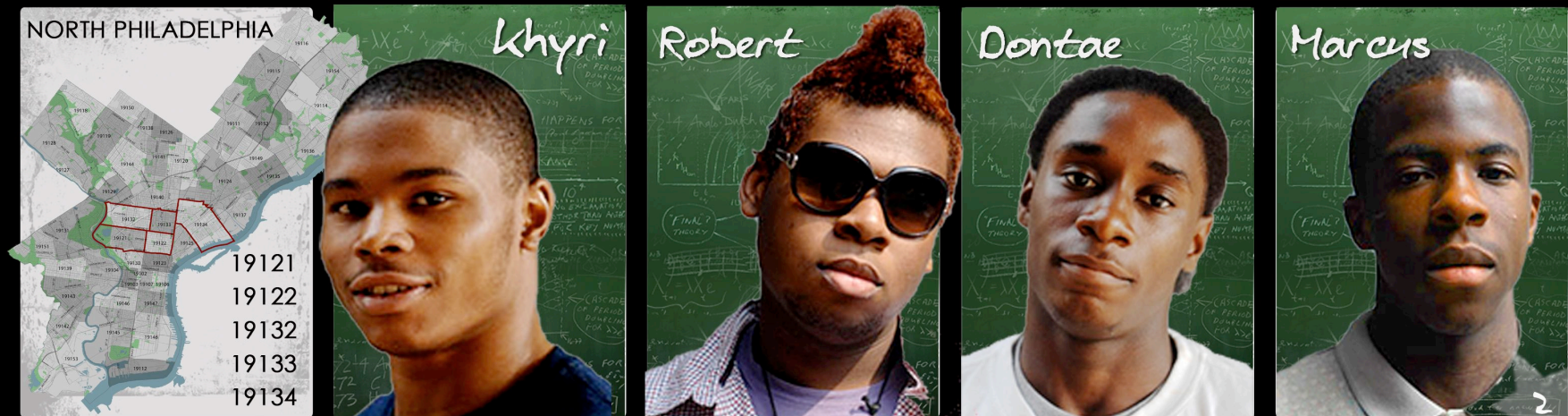
In Philadelphia, more than 40% of African-American students and more than half of Latino students don't graduate within six years (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). In addition, we believe that after graduating high school, African American and Latino males from North Philadelphia have a greater chance of making it to a jail cell than making it to a four-year college.

As College Ambassadors for the First Person Documentary Project, we are a group of African American and Latino males working to learn the challenges we face on the path to higher education. Philadelphia is home to the brothers of First Person and thousands of other young men our age. On the road to college, many obstacles sway in our path. Some of us are able to overcome them, but for many of us it's a struggle – a struggle that gets the best of many Black and Latino males. We believe that in order for an African American and Latino male to make it to college we need our communities, families, schools, and peers to direct us in a positive path.



Eric K. Grimes (center) leads the North Philadelphia College Ambassadors through their Statement of Commitment.

*"We as brothers, bound together like links to a chain, will work to have a positive impact on our communities, our families,*





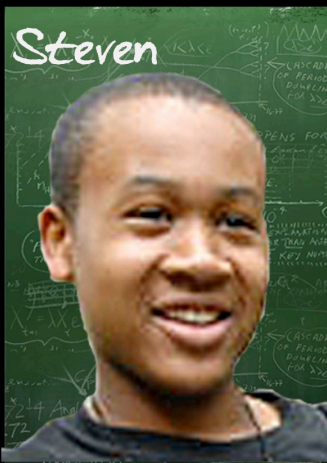
## OUR RESEARCH PROCESS



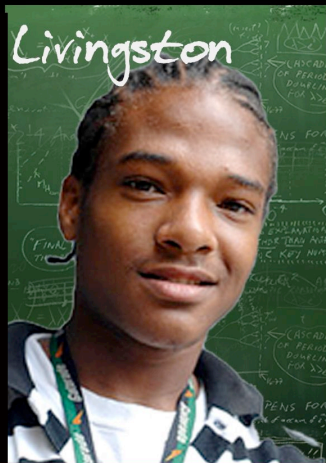
Steven Butler administers a Path to Higher Education Survey at the University of Pennsylvania.

As a group, we started our research by brainstorming opinions about our communities, schools, and what we face everyday. We debated what problems are present and why they are present. We then gathered information from research reports and compared and contrasted neighborhoods based on statistical data. Through this gradual process, we identified five key factors that impact college readiness: Education & Academic Supports, Mentoring & Social Supports, Competent Organizations & Programs, Financial Assistance, and Neighborhood Leadership. We compiled a survey based on these factors and gave out the survey to 232 people within the ages of 16-25 at four locations: Temple University, Community College of Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, and Benjamin Franklin High School. Based on our research, we each assigned our own neighborhood a grade for each of these five areas. Then, as a group, we developed a formula for grading the entire North Philadelphia 'Village.' On page one, you can see our report card for North Philadelphia. The rest of the report explains the grades we gave.

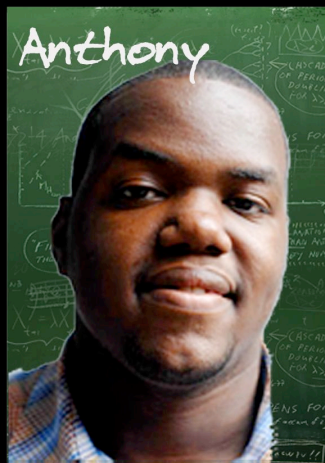
*those around us, and those yet to come, especially the children, for they create our future. Ache."* - Statement of Commitment



Steven



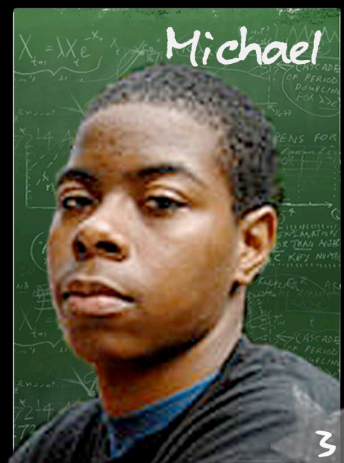
Livingston



Anthony



Andrew



Michael



# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As College Ambassadors, we believe that it takes more than one resource and more than one support to have good college preparation. We believe it takes a Village to get an African-American or Latino male into college. And since we believe that the youth have a voice, we believe we have the right to evaluate and judge those in our Village who are supposed to be providing us with these supports.

Our Village first consists of our Community, which includes our neighborhoods, programs inside the neighborhood, and our old heads (what we call mentors). Right now we are struggling in our communities because of the obstacles placed in front of us everyday. For example, the drugs and violence that are everywhere in our community limit our chances of enrolling in college. From January to June 2007, 203 people were killed in Philadelphia. 159 of the victims were Black people, 143 of them were males, and 61 of them were under the age of 21.

Another part of our village is School, which consists of teachers, staff members, counselors, and other school supports. Some of the obstacles we face in our village school-wise in North Philadelphia are the few rigorous academic programs, the lack of tutoring, the shortage of college-related information, and the lack of commitment to help our brothers make it on our path to college. Only 55% of high school students in Philadelphia graduate within four years.

Family is another part of our village. We expect our family to be there to provide us with encouragement and motivation on our path to college. We also are looking for their support if we have a financial problem. But 65% of Black youth in North Philly live in single parent homes, and 68% of Black families in North Philly live under the poverty line.

Our Peers and Friends are another part of our village. In our village, almost none of our peers and friends are willing to encourage and motivate us on our journey to college. Too many are smoking, drinking, out on the corner selling drugs, or imprisoned. We have friends who have a positive outlook on college, but that's only a slim margin. We need more.

We believe that in order for us to get into college, our village must provide us with five supports:

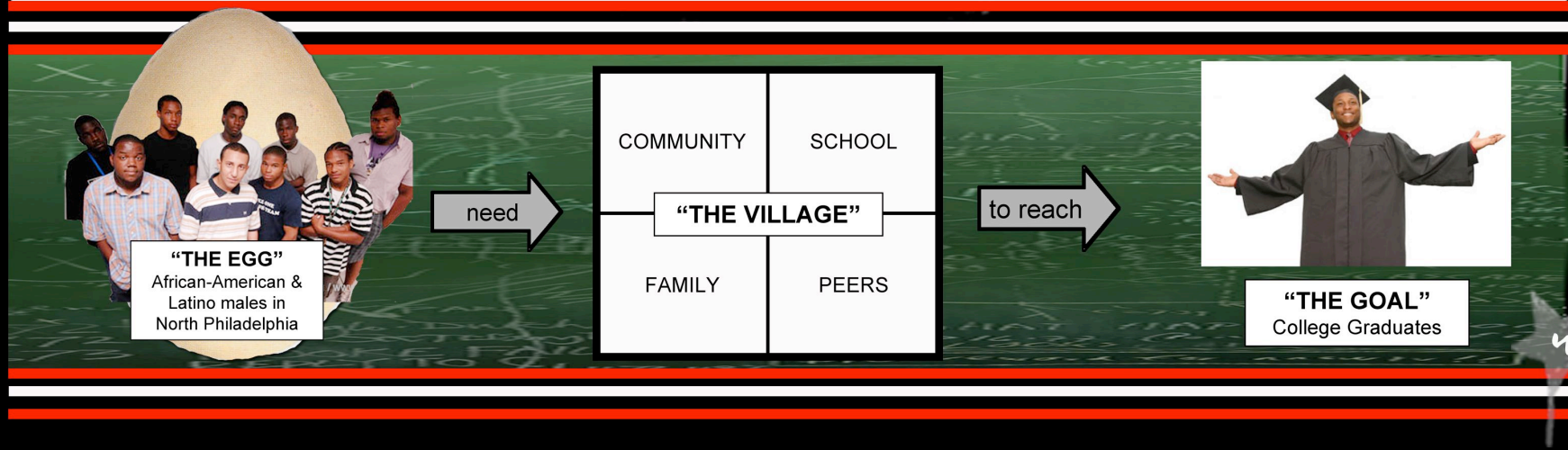
**Education & Academic Supports**

**Mentoring & Social Supports**

**Financial Assistance**

**Competent Organizations & Programs**

**Neighborhood Leadership**





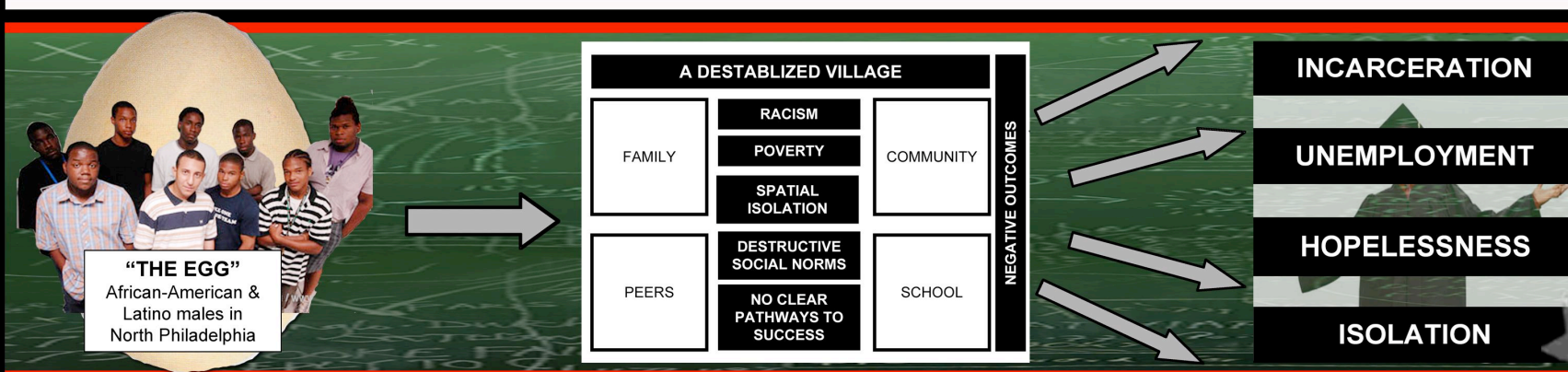
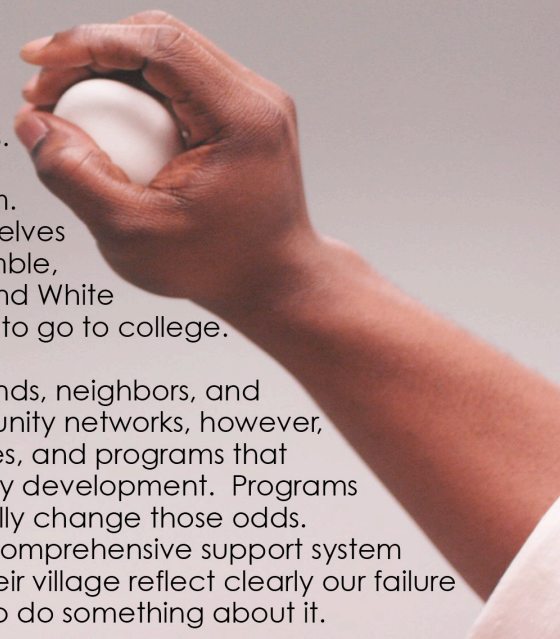
# The Challenges Our Young People Face

Eric K. Grimes

Youth living in well-resourced, middle and upper income villages often find the supports they need to get to college comprehensively delivered through aligned programs and processes within the interconnected worlds of school, community, peer group, and family. Even when these youth stumble along the path to college, the ready supports and social capital present within their villages often still carry them to college. These youth have to try hard NOT to end up in college.

But many of our young men live in low-resourced villages. They attend low-quality schools in high-poverty neighborhoods. They are often provided with no clear pathways to success. They must independently seek out the supports they need within disconnected, and often competing, worlds of school, community, family, and peers. Furthermore, the systems they must access are often not capable of helping these young men to overcome the additional barriers they face due to racism and classism. Even when they do everything right, many of these young men still do not find themselves adequately prepared and on the path to college. And when these young men stumble, punitive outcomes, often including incarceration, await. Unlike their more affluent and White peers, low-income Black men too often must fight through a multitude of challenges to go to college.

When facing challenges and in need of support, people turn to family members, friends, neighbors, and authentic community institutions. Due to systemic disruption of our family and community networks, however, Black people are disproportionately involved in the deficit-oriented services, agencies, and programs that dominate the collective resources that our nation dedicates to youth and community development. Programs and heroic efforts will help a few youth to beat the odds, but they won't systematically change those odds. Our College Ambassadors have put forth a conceptual framework that envisions a comprehensive support system that works for many young people in this country. The grades they have assigned their village reflect clearly our failure to provide them with the same opportunity structure. Together, it is our responsibility to do something about it.





# Education & Academic Supports C4

Education and academic supports are the preparation we need for postsecondary, career, and social success and for a lifelong learning process. These supports include:

- \* SAT/ACT Preparation
- \* Challenging classes
- \* Qualified teachers
- \* High Expectations

These supports are important because colleges look at students who take challenging classes and have academic preparation.

In our village, however, the majority of 11th graders at every neighborhood high school but one scored Below Basic on their PSSAs. At many schools in our village, like FitzSimons, Vaux, and Kensington CAPA, 90% of 11th graders are Below Basic in Reading or Math. This shows us that our schools are not preparing us well.

We are academically unprepared to compete with other students. We feel discouraged, angry, and like we have been set up to fail. This is why we need Education and Academic Supports. The people we surveyed who are from Philadelphia thought that Qualified Teachers and Challenging Classes were the most important of these supports. But along with SAT/ACT prep, these were the supports they were least likely to receive.

*"The comprehensive schools in the area are not strong, and there are not enough special admission high schools within our village."*

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN OUR VILLAGE (2006 11th Grade PSSA Scores)

Neighborhood High Schools in Our Village	% Advanced		% Proficient		% Basic		% Below Basic	
	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading	Math	Reading
Thomas FitzSimons	0	0	2	2	0	6	98	92
Kensington Business	3	1	3	7	12	12	83	80
Kensington CAPA	0	0	3	5	3	5	94	91
Kensington Culinary Arts	2	3	5	3	10	12	83	81
Strawberry Mansion	15	1	38	44	1	15	46	40
William Penn	1	2	4	14	13	21	83	63
EW Rhodes	0	2	4	9	7	33	89	57
Robert Vaux	0	0	2	7	7	9	91	84



# Mentoring & Social Supports

C4

Mentoring and social support is the motivation, information, counseling, and connections we need to help us with school work, finding college information, and with emotional support. The supports we need include:

- \* Tutoring
- \* Motivation/Encouragement
- \* Help with Personal Problems
- \* Networking Opportunities

These supports are important because a student can have great scores and good grades but still need nurturing to raise their expectations and let them know people care for them. This support can make all the difference!

In many parts of our village, however, less than 5% of adults have a Bachelor's degree. The people from Philadelphia who we surveyed were less likely than people from other areas to believe that adults in their communities and peers in school were qualified sources of mentoring and social support. We have lots of people who care for us as people, but they don't think college is important. They think it's OK to just graduate high school and get a job and be mediocre. We want to go to college, but it feels like we are playing tag by ourselves. By that we mean we are reaching out for college supports, but everyone is running away from us. Eventually we get discouraged and we just sit down and wait for people to come to us. When no one comes, we label ourselves as failures just like everyone else has. This makes us think that we are not made for college, even though we are.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & EMPLOYMENT IN OUR VILLAGE

Zipcodes In Our Village	% Adults with High School Diploma	% Adults with Bachelor's Degree	% Adults Unemployed
19121	33.6	4.4	10.1
19122	27.9	9.0	8.9
19132	35.6	4.2	8.5
19133	29.9	2.6	10.1
19134	36.9	4.3	8.2

Source: 2000 United States Census

"Telling us to stay out of the streets isn't enough. We need information and guidance on what it takes to get to college."



# Competent Organizations & Programs C-

Competent organizations and programs exist outside the basic school structure and prepare students academically and culturally for college. In order to be considered competent in helping students get to college, a program or organization should provide:

- \* SAT/ACT Prep
- \* Personal Skill Development
- \* Organized Learning Activities
- \* Cultural Exposure

Getting good grades isn't enough to get into college. We need to do well on college entrance tests and have a lot of extracurricular activities. We need to be exposed to different demographics, and we need to be educated on how to deal with people outside of our own neighborhoods. We need trips to colleges and art museums and help finding our inner talents. We must show that we are versatile and serious about education.

There are some competent organizations and programs in our village, but too many local Beacon and Recreation Centers are just "hang out" areas that don't give students the extra support we need. For example, our neighborhood high schools don't offer many AP classes, and they often have low average combined SAT scores. Despite this, the people we surveyed who are from Philadelphia were less likely than others to receive SAT/ACT prep in the organizations and programs in their communities. We feel that we have to travel outside of our village if we want to find the support we need. This is an added burden and makes us less competitive with students who can find these supports right in their own villages.

*"In my community, there are basketball leagues to keep kids off the street, but there are not really any services regarding college."*

## PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE IN OUR VILLAGE

Neighborhood High Schools in Our Village	Number of AP Classes	Average Math SAT Score	Average Verbal SAT Score
Thomas FitzSimons	NA	NA	NA
Kensington Business	1	NA	NA
Kensington CAPA	1	NA	NA
Kensington Culinary Arts	1	NA	NA
Strawberry Mansion	1	341	332
William Penn	3	338	328
EW Rhodes	1	NA	NA
Robert Vaux	0	NA	NA

Source: PA Department of Education



# Financial Assistance



Financial Assistance includes anything that helps you money-wise with getting to college, especially:

- \* Grants
- \* Loans
- \* Scholarships
- \* Good Financial Advice

Financial assistance is importance for helping most people to pay for college. In our survey, Financial Assistance was rated as the most important factor in determining students' desire and ability to pay for college.

But we believe it is especially important for us because of the low income levels in our communities and families. The highest median household income in any zipcode in our Village was \$20,903. That is very low.

That means that most of us see making it to college as a way of making money. But in the choice between college and making money right now to help out our families, money now usually wins. When we get jobs and try to be responsible, it seems like the expectations and burdens placed on us just keep piling up. its like there is a penalty for trying to do the right thing. Because of this, many of us start to avoid our responsibilities and think it is better to be a slacker and conform to the norm. Once this happens, we lose our motivation for trying to find the financial assistance that is out there. We believe that there is financial assistance available, but we need more of it, its harder for us to find, and there is a penalty we pay for trying to be responsible and finding it.

## POVERTY IN OUR VILLAGE

Zipcodes In Our Village	Median Household Income	% of Households Below the Poverty Line	% of Homes That Are Owner Occupied
19121	\$15,888	43.1%	42.0%
19122	\$18,395	40.8%	45.5%
19132	\$18,777	37.1%	60.6%
19133	\$13,828	53.2%	49.7%
19134	\$20,903	34.6%	66.7%

Source: 2000 United States Census

"There are some financial aid resources and scholarships in our area, mostly because of the low-income families and households."





# Neighborhood Leadership

D-

Neighborhood leaders are any individuals or groups who can deliver what the community needs and speak up for the community to those in power. Neighborhood leaders can be block captains, PAL and Rec Center leaders, people who work in the organizations and programs in our communities, religious leaders, other young people - anyone who wants to make a difference. The components of neighborhood leadership we need are:

- \* Competent, available adult role models
- \* Removal of obstacles from the community
- \* Political connections

Our neighborhoods are still dirty, drug-infested, and full of crime and violence. In our village in 2005, 649 young people were arrested for drug offenses, 236 young people were shot, and 29 young people were murdered. These young people are us. We are worried about things that we should not have to worry about like being beat up, robbed, shot, killed, using and selling drugs, and how we can get money.

The drugs and violence in our community force young people to make choices between school and the safety and well-being of themselves and their families. The drugs and violence also scare our supporters away because they are afraid to come into our neighborhoods. The drugs and violence also lead to us getting stereotyped and stigmatized. All of this kills our hope and limits our enrollment in college.

As a group, we gave North Philadelphia a D- for Neighborhood Leadership, and that's exactly what it deserves.

*"The city is in turmoil and nobody seems to care. That's why I want to get into politics - so I can be the leader the neighborhood needs."*

## DRUGS AND VIOLENCE IN OUR VILLAGE

Zipcodes In Our Village	Gunshot Victims, Age 2-24	Homicide Victims, Age 7-24	Drug Arrests, Age 17 & Under
19121	68	10	139
19122	21	1	43
19132	65	8	140
19133	41	3	149
19134	41	7	178

Source: Philadelphia Safe and Sound Community Report Cards



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Black and Latino males want to go to college, but too many people don't expect us to go. We understand that in order to get to college, we need our village. We have envisioned and shared with you the support system we would like our village to provide us. We have also graded North Philadelphia for its ability to provide this support system. Because the overall grade was only a C-, we are making the following recommendations.

1. **We need more challenging classes in our schools.** Even when we do everything that is asked of us, we are still not being prepared to compete academically with other students from other villages.
2. **We need adults in our families, schools, communities, and programs to raise their expectations of us.** We don't believe that just graduating high school is enough. We are getting support, but just telling us to stay off the streets isn't enough. We need adults to provide us with college information and with the encouragement we need to get to college. That is what mentoring and neighborhood leadership means to us.
3. **We need current college students to interact with us on a regular basis.** We need to see other brothers who know where we come from and who also know what it takes to get to college.
4. **We should have the right to evaluate those in our village who are supposed to be providing us with college support.** We know what we need and we know when we are not getting it. Many people and organizations are getting a lot of money to provide us with these supports. We need to have a voice in determining if they are doing what they are supposed to do to help us get to college.





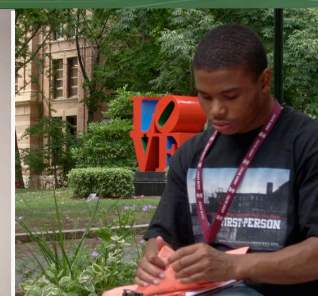
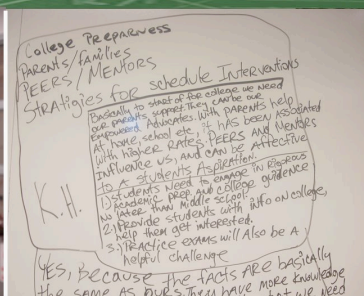
# A Final Word From Our Leader

Eric K. Grimes

It's no secret that Black youth are faring poorly in inner-city communities in Philadelphia and across the country. Though their ancestors helped to build this country, by almost every measure, Black young men and boys are struggling to gain a foothold in the American mainstream opportunity structure. Institutionalized barriers created over centuries of enslavement, Jim Crowism, segregation, and impoverishment systematically prevent equitable participation in the life of the nation. Young Black males disproportionately occupy special education and remedial classes, detention halls, prisons, hospital emergency rooms, unemployment lines, homeless shelters, social service systems, street corners, and cemeteries.



Philadelphia has been at the forefront of efforts to improve college access. Yet, despite the best intentions of any number of interventions, the school completion, college-going, and postsecondary completion rates of Philadelphia's neighborhood high school students continue to reveal persistent challenges for low-income Black and Latino males. Like many of these young men, our College Ambassadors have accepted an appropriate level of responsibility for their futures. They want to go to college, and they are looking for the path that will lead them there. Their voice, however, is as clear as the numbers: we have failed to recognize and provide them with the supports that they need. It is our responsibility to take both the numbers and these young men's words seriously. No longer can efforts to improve college access that do not honestly engage the realities faced by young Black males be considered credible. It is our responsibility to make sure that these young men are at the center of a community change process aimed at creating real access to this country's opportunity structure.





## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To view an interactive web application highlighting this work and providing additional public data on Philadelphia neighborhoods and high schools, please visit [www.firstpersondocumentary.org](http://www.firstpersondocumentary.org). To learn more about Interactive Data Solutions, who combines interactive web technology with hands-on community education, visit [www.democratizingdata.com](http://www.democratizingdata.com).

To view a short video featuring the North Philadelphia College Ambassadors, please visit [www.firstpersondocumentary.org](http://www.firstpersondocumentary.org). To learn more about the WHYY Learning Lab, an afterschool youth video production facility in Philadelphia, please visit [www.whyy.org/learninglab/index.html](http://www.whyy.org/learninglab/index.html).

For more information on the issues explored by First Person and the College Ambassador Project, please see:

- \* Ainsworth, J.W. (2002, September). Why Does It Take a Village? The Mediation of Neighborhood Effects on Educational Achievement. *Social Forces*, 81 (1).
- \* Gerald, D. and Haycock, K. (2006). *Engines of Inequality: Diminishing Equity in the Nation's Premier Public Universities*. The Education Trust: Washington, DC.
- \* Harper, S.R. (2006). *Black Male Students at Public Flagship Universities in the US: Status Trends and Implications for Policy and Practice*. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute-Dellums Commission Report: Washington, DC.
- \* Haycock, K. (2006). *Promise Abandoned: How Policy Choices and Institutional Practices Restrict College Opportunities*. The Education Trust: Washington, DC.
- \* Holzman, M. (2006). *Public Education and Black Male Students: The 2006 State Report Card*. The Schott Foundation for Public Education: Cambridge, MA
- \* Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board (2007). *A Tale of Two Cities*. PWIB: Philadelphia.

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## SHOUT OUTS

The College Ambassador Project is made possible with the generous support of:

- \* The Children Can Shape the Future Foundation \* [www.childrencanshapefuture.org](http://www.childrencanshapefuture.org)
- \* Temple Youth VOICES & The University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia \* [www.temple.edu/uccp/voices.html](http://www.temple.edu/uccp/voices.html)
- \* The Annenberg Institute for School Reform \* [www.annenberginstitute.org](http://www.annenberginstitute.org)

Special thanks also to:

- \* Decoteau J. Irby
- \* Kenneth Perry
- \* Michelle Schmitt
- \* Photos by JJ Tiziou \* [www.jjtiziou.net](http://www.jjtiziou.net)

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