

# Y-PLAN Oakland AAMA



## Action Research Partnership Brief

*Improving education and cultivating civic agency through developing real world skills, practices, and partnerships*

### Partnership Background & Overview

With the start of the 2016-17 school year, the UC Berkeley Center for Cities + Schools (CC+S) and the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) launched a partnership between two of their internationally recognized initiatives: CC+S's Y-PLAN (Youth - Plan, Learn, Act, Now!) and OUSD's AAMA (African American Male Achievement). The emerging partnership leveraged the way that Y-PLAN turns classrooms inside out, making the community the text for learning, to interrupt traditional delivery of content, allowing teachers to guide student learning more authentically, with more relevance and rigor.

#### **Y-PLAN (Youth - Plan, Learn, Act, Now!)**

is a unique, award-winning educational strategy and action research initiative that empowers young people to tackle real-world problems in their communities through project-based civic learning experiences. Housed at the UC Berkeley Center for Cities + Schools, Y-PLAN has engaged thousands of young people, schools, teachers, and civic partners around the world over the last two decades.

#### **AAMA (African American Male Achievement)**

is an ambitious project designed to dramatically improve academic and life outcomes for Oakland's African American male students. Launched in 2010 to create the systems, structures, and spaces that guarantee success for all African American male students in OUSD, AAMA is leading the district by analyzing patterns and processes that are producing systemic inequities.

That first year kicked off with two AAMA facilitators from Skyline and Oakland High Schools completing the Y-PLAN Professional Development Institute, participating in on-site coaching from the CC+S Y-PLAN team, welcoming UC Berkeley undergraduate mentors into their classrooms, and implementing a Y-PLAN project in partnership with the regional transit agency, BART. The following year, the same two facilitators returned, although one moved from Oakland High School to McClymonds High School, and a third facilitator from Castlemont High School joined the fold. During that year, AAMA classes partnered with the mayor’s office for their project, and they contributed to the Resilient by Design | Bay Area Challenge, a regional effort that drew leading architects, planners, designers, and engineers from across the globe to consider resiliency in the Bay. In the 2018-19 school year, one of the facilitators continued, and his classes contributed to a project for MTC/ABAG’s Horizon Initiative. As the 2019-20 school year begins, the other original facilitator is returning to conduct a third Y-PLAN project in his classroom at Skyline.

<b>AAMA Kings</b>	300+
<b>UCB Mentors</b>	26
<b>Classes</b>	13
<b>Educators</b>	6
<b>Schools</b>	4
<b>Civic Leaders</b>	20+

### Project Clients & Questions

**2016-17: Bay Area Rapid Transportation (BART):** *How can BART better connect Coliseum BART station to the surrounding community?*

**2017-18: Mayor of Oakland’s Office:** *How can we foster a college-going culture bridging school and community that is inclusive to Oakland Unified School District students?*

**2018-19: Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC):** *How can schools and their communities thrive in the future? Consider impacts to and from: Transportation, Land use and Housing, Economic Development, Resilience*

Three years into this partnership, AAMA Kings have been to UC Berkeley to tour the campus, to present as the experts they are on resilience and on their community to regional leaders, and to be honored by the Chancellor for their contributions. They have been paid as interns, completing a consulting project at BART headquarters. They have presented in Oakland City Hall twice: once in Council Chambers to a packed room, and again in a more intimate

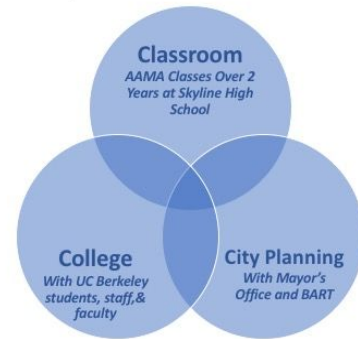


roundtable discussion with the mayor and selected city and district staff members to cultivate a college going culture in their schools and communities. As these young men have honed their skills in critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration, they have cultivated a deeper civic identity, recognizing themselves, and being recognized by others, as the critical stakeholders they are in shaping their city in the future.

## Cultivating Communities of Practice

The Y-PLAN AAMA partnership had crucial impacts on student, adult and civic levels, as it cultivated multiple Communities of Practice, which led to civic identity development through an increased sense of agency facilitated through shared practice. Students' movement through and interaction with city, school, and academic leaders across multiple Communities of Practice (CoP) show that CoPs that cross boundaries between race, age and positions of power can facilitate civic inclusion and involvement for young black men. As they worked together with city leaders to transform public spaces, they cultivated an increased sense of place ownership, leading to renewed responsibility and stewardship, a greater sense of agency, and civic identity development.

### Multiple Communities of Practice



### *Community of Practice 1: Classroom*

The AAMA classroom as Community of Practice and counterspace are two of the pedagogical means through which students were able to interrogate “truancy” within the broader context of school as a historically reproductive and exclusionary institution, and recast it from a deficit-based diagnosis of delinquency to a practice of place-making and belonging. Their discussions and interrogations into what constitutes truancy and belonging on their school campus informed their ultimate recommendations for what it takes to further cultivate a college-going-culture in their school and community, and for what kind of resources a college center should offer its students.

### *Community of Practice 2: College*

Students leveraged a field trip to UC Berkeley, a major part of the Y-PLAN process and pedagogy, to interrogate and play with modalities of inclusion and belonging. This was facilitated by interactions with black student leaders who took the students on a personalized tour of the campus and candidly discussed with AAMA students how they negotiate the experience of being the most minoritized group on campus. Students continued to cultivate a sense of civic agency, and when they returned to the campus to present their proposals they began to self-identify as experts.

### *Community of Practice 3: City Planning*

Students who participated in internships with civic clients following completion of their Y-PLAN projects showed continued shifts in sense of agency. This shift was especially apparent in the way the students expressed a sense of civic self through explanations of their work, notably captured here in the way the student refers to himself and his fellow students as “contractors”: “[w]e are contractors so we planned out a mural and with that mural we’re fitting to put our ideas from the culture of [our city] out. How we all perceive [our city] as people who actually live here and not people outside it” (Y-PLAN Video, 2018).

## Outcomes

*"Environmental designers must begin consciously to write and draw the under-represented and the disenfranchised into their schemes and plans rather than ignoring or excluding such groups.*

*They must also work actively to diversify the fields of practice in order to challenge white dominance in design and decision making. These efforts need to go beyond the kinds of tokenistic community participation" (Lipsitz, 2007, p. 20).*

For the black, male youth participants, Y-PLAN projects facilitated an **increased sense of ownership of place that had a direct impact on students' civic identity** by cultivating a deeper sense of agency through their ability to create change, interrupt social norms and expectations. Meanwhile, the collaborative community focus that acts as a central motor in Y-PLAN's engine, **opened up dialectical relationships** between civic agencies, low-income students of color, and their shared communities.

- BART **increased the maximum age for youth transit fares** to 18 to include teenagers, and **installed new ticket machines** that accept smaller bills.
- AAMA Y-PLAN scholars completed **paid summer internships** with BART.
- Skyline High School opened a new College and Career Center based on input from the Y-PLAN students.
- Young people increased adult's awareness of the **need for access to healthy food and caring adults** on and off campus for all students.

Through this process, **perceptions began to shift**. As the AAMA students and BART and city leaders became partners, sharing a practice of addressing the city's challenges together, they began to see each other as potential allies, viewing each other with less skepticism and increasing trust and respect.

## Scholarly Significance

As students move through the Y-PLAN process, they have the opportunity to situate themselves in time and space physically and metaphorically - whether by foot through mapping exercises, video, word, sketch, or memory. Data analysis shows that students use these multimodal research tools to explore and negotiate the spatial and temporal dimensions of their racialized and civic belonging. Current educational strategy tends to overlook these particular relationships to delineate and explore the parameters of youths' civic inclusion in this way. This partnership has important implications for education praxis and design-based research at large that seeks to resist racialized exclusion of youth by upholding marginalized students' voices and narratives, instead making them central to research, policy, and city planning.

