

Black Males' Access and Awareness of Apprenticeship Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, students are taught to believe that attending a four-year university is the most beneficial and logical step following high school graduation. However, in the Career Technical Education (CTE) field, multiple career options have been identified as viable choices for Black males transitioning from high school. Indeed, “[w]hen it became apparent, after the turn of the millennium, that the college-for-everyone approach did not lead to success for most, US high schools and colleges started looking for ways to reconnect students with careers” (Koller, 2018, p. 24). Although the traditional college and university pathway is an excellent step for some students, including Black men, this study will explore other viable options for students following high school graduation, specifically apprenticeships, which can provide the necessary education and the hands-on training required for success in a targeted career field.

PROJECT PURPOSE

This project explores how awareness of career options, specifically apprenticeships, can provide Black men with a tool for a successful and seamless transition into positive careers after high school graduation. According to data from [apprenticeship.gov](https://www.apprenticeship.gov), in 2022, there were a total of 23,925 registered apprentices under the age of 24 in the state of California. Of those 23,925 apprentices, 0.02% (492) were Black men. This staggering statistic gives validity to the idea that Black men have limited access to beneficial career opportunities. Apprenticeship programs can provide a pipeline for students transitioning from high school to positive career pathways. According to one report,

Estimates suggest that the California economy could absorb at least 650,000 apprentices, or eight times the number that are currently being trained. The resulting \$300,000 increase in lifetime earnings per apprentice amounts to an injection of \$195 billion into the state’s economy. (Koller, 2018, p. 7)

With only 0.02% of California’s registered apprentices being Black men under the age of 24, this incredible opportunity is being missed. This project will explore the equity gaps that serve as a barrier, limiting access and awareness of apprenticeship opportunities, which can cause detrimental career decisions.

BACKGROUND

A lack of social capital has limited awareness of positive career options such as apprenticeships for young Black men. This lack of awareness gives access to destructive and unsustainable life trajectories following high school graduation and decreases motivation to engage in the high school educational setting fully. In one county in California, “Black juveniles are arrested at a

rate of 66.0 per 1,000 juveniles ages 12-17 years. This is a significantly higher rate than the countywide average of 18.5 per 1,000 juveniles and higher than any other race/ethnic group” (San Bernardino County, n.d.). Making young Black men aware of career options and helping them find and pursue their interests can significantly affect their motivation and success in school. Exploring positive career options and pathways through an apprenticeship can also help create more productive citizens and a more robust economy.

According to Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Schunk & Mullen, 2012), self-efficacy (perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels) is a critical cognitive variable influencing motivation and engagement. A lack of self-efficacy can also serve as a barrier for young Black men to positive career pathways. Apprenticeship is a tool that can build confidence by providing knowledge and relevant experience. In apprenticeships,

[l]earning takes place mostly on the job, making the tasks and classroom work highly relevant to their careers, and providing participants wages while they learn can give minorities increased confidence that their personal efforts and investment in skill development will pay. (Lerman, 2009, p. 2)

In the state of California, Governor Gavin Newsom has a goal of achieving 500,000 registered apprentices by the year 2029. According to California Community Colleges (2023), “While the goal is to serve 500,000 apprentices, California has currently served roughly 100,000, and the state has a need to create innovative ways to scale the growth of registered apprenticeships.” A five-point action plan is in place to help guide the process of achieving Governor Newsom’s goal and expanding apprenticeship. The five points included in the action plan are the following:

- supporting regional and sectoral apprenticeship intermediaries
- creating new apprenticeships outside of the traditional trades
- improving gender representation in the trades
- supporting youth apprenticeship for in-school and out-of-school youth
- building pathways into the public sector

The California Department of Industrial Relations (2022) reports that “[t]he 2022-2023 budget invests over \$231 million in apprenticeship-related spending this year and more than \$480 million over the next three years.” Currently, an overwhelming majority of the apprentices registered are White men. If the governor is to achieve his goal, including high school graduates of color, particularly Black men, is essential.

The University of California, Riverside (UCR)—Extension offers an apprenticeship program with project management and cybersecurity concentrations. Through the apprenticeship program, 200 individuals have been served, with 2% being Black men aged 18–24. Served individuals encompass those who have received service through the apprenticeship program, which includes a resume review, administering the Strong’s Interest Inventory Assessment, or referral to

additional services. Of actual registered apprentices in the UCR Extension Apprenticeship Program, zero have been Black men aged 18–24.

UCR Extension’s Apprenticeship Program, an Apprenticeship Ambassador recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor, recognizes that apprenticeships are viable career pathways for young Black men and a source of motivation to propel them toward success in their desired careers. Although young Black men can benefit from apprenticeship, a lack of awareness and access becomes a barrier, making taking advantage of apprenticeship opportunities difficult.

METHOD OF EVALUATION

Proposed Method of Evaluation

Initially, the intervention planned would collect data and provide information to a cohort of 10 Black male high school seniors. Through intervention, the project population would be aware of possible career opportunities available after high school, specifically apprenticeship opportunities. Participants in this study were proposed to attend weekly workshops to learn more about their interests, possible career opportunities, and apprenticeship opportunities that are available to them. The intervention was planned to occur through a series of virtual and in-person group meetings. Successful intervention would equip students with a written plan and goals to pursue after high school graduation. Participants would also understand the steps necessary to achieve set goals. Participants would know the postsecondary CTE opportunities available and have access to pursue apprenticeship through UCR Extension.

Implemented Method of Evaluation

Although the intervention did not go as planned, aspects of the proposed intervention were implemented. Valuable data were collected while making participants aware of apprenticeship opportunities and assisting them in creating career goals. Despite changes to the proposed project implementation, surveys were collected from each participant, and individual interviews were conducted with each participant.

The participants of this study included a total of 10 Black men, five of whom were high school seniors and five of whom graduated from high school within the past 2 years. Each participant completed a survey through which they answered questions regarding life after high school graduation and their awareness of apprenticeship and other career opportunities. After completion of the survey, individual meetings were conducted with the participants to gain a greater understanding and discuss survey findings. Individual meetings also served as an intervention based on the survey findings. The individual meetings were 30 minutes in length and were conducted virtually. These individual meetings allowed more in-depth discussion and profound insight into survey responses. The individual meetings also allowed an opportunity for coaching and guidance to the participant regarding career goals and options as well as

apprenticeship opportunities. During the individual meetings, participants were made aware of apprenticeship opportunities and offered assistance in preparing initial career goals to pursue.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Two surveys were issued to participants. The high school seniors completed one survey, and the recent high school graduates completed the other. Participants completed a survey of 10 - 12 questions. Tables 1 and 2 provide a summarized list of the questions answered and the participant responses. **A more detailed list of responses can also be found in the appendix of this document.**

Table 1. Career Options After High School (High School Seniors)

How do you feel about graduating from high school? # of Participant Responses	Ready to graduate but don't know what's next 3	Ready to graduate and move on to something else 2	
Do you know what you want to do after high school?	Yes 3	No 1	Not sure 1
Do you know how to get started in your desired career?	Yes 4	No 1	
Do you know about any school resources that can help you figure out what career to pursue?	Yes 2	No 3	
What options are you pursuing after high school?	Find a job 2	Military 2	I have no idea 1
Do you know where you can get help applying for college?	Yes 5	No 0	
Do you know where to get more info about joining the military?	Yes 2	No 3	
Do you know what an apprenticeship	Yes 3	No 2	

is?			
Have you looked into any apprenticeship opportunities?	Yes 2	No 3	
Overall, do you feel prepared to graduate from high school? Do you have a plan, or have you thought about what you want to do next?	Prepared 4	Not sure 1	

Table 2. Career Options After High School (Graduates)

How long have you been out of high school? # of Participant Responses	1 Year 2	2 Years 3	
How did you feel about graduating from high school?	Ready to graduate but didn't know what I was going to do next 3	I felt ready to graduate and move on 1	Nervous 1
Did you know what you wanted to do after high school?	Yes 2	No 2	Not sure 1
Looking back to when you were a senior, how prepared did you feel for life after high school?	Prepared 0	Not prepared 5	
Being out of high school for at least a year, do you feel like you were actually prepared for life after high school?	Yes 0	No 5	
Which of the following are you currently involved in?	College (4 year/community college/trade school) 4	Job 1	
Do you know where to get help applying for college?	Yes 5	No 0	

Do you know where to get more info about joining the military?	Yes 2	No 3	
Do you know what apprenticeship is?	Yes 3	No 2	
Have you looked into any apprenticeship opportunities?	Yes 1	No 4	

Through the use of the surveys shown in Tables 1 and 2, three key findings were identified.

All of the recently graduated participants indicated they were unprepared for life after high school.

Of the five recent graduates surveyed, all indicated they were unprepared for life after high school. Although they may have had an idea about what they wanted to do during high school, once they were actually in position, they did not have the necessary plan to execute their ideas. A program or system should be implemented to ensure that high school students have a clear plan and understand the steps necessary to execute it effectively.

Almost three-quarters (70%) of surveyed participants have never looked into an apprenticeship opportunity.

Although more than half of the surveyed participants indicated that they have heard of apprenticeships, 70% indicated that they have never looked into an actual apprenticeship. Apprenticeships allow students to transition into careers; receive hands-on, on-the-job training; and take the coursework necessary to obtain industry certification.

None of the current high school seniors chose college as an option they planned to pursue after high school.

College was not indicated as a top priority for any of the high school seniors surveyed. Participants identified other options. Looking at the high school graduates' responses, most indicated they were currently involved in college, whether it was a 4-year university, community college, or trade school. This finding shows that although college may not be a priority for seniors upon high school completion, it becomes more of an option during the years following high school.

Through individual discussion, three key findings were identified.

Students actually do not know what apprenticeship is.

Although the survey participants indicated that they knew what an apprenticeship is, it became evident after individual meetings that they needed a clear definition of apprenticeship. In most cases, the participants regarded apprenticeships as the same thing as an internship even though they are different. Apprenticeships are structured, paid, on-the-job training during which apprentices are assigned a mentor to help them succeed in the industry. Apprenticeships are usually 1–3 years long. Project participants understood that apprenticeships were usually unpaid programs and provided job shadowing for careers in which they had no interest. The individual discussions provided accurate information about apprenticeships; the specific apprenticeship programs offered through UCR Extension; and resources such as the apprenticeship.gov website, where they can access a list of apprenticeship programs based on their interests.

Seniors had ideas of what they wanted to do but no plan for how to get there.

Most of the seniors who took the survey indicated they knew what they wanted to do after high school. During the individual meetings, it was discovered that participants had ideas but needed a plan to achieve their ideas. In the individual meetings, seniors mentioned possibly going back to school but had no actual interest in attending college and saw college as the only acceptable next step after high school. Seniors had an awareness of the general college admissions process but did not know how to apply their admissions process knowledge. Because of this, students mentioned feeling lost and unmotivated.

Fewer than half (40%) of high school graduates currently attend college (4 year, community college, or trade school).

In the survey, 80% of the high school graduates indicated they were attending college. Individual conversations revealed that two of the participants were currently attending a community college. One participant was enrolled in a film school in Los Angeles but had yet to start a course. The other two participants had plans to attend college but were not enrolled at the time of the individual meeting.

Community colleges throughout California have policies that allow students to attend the community college at little to no cost. For many young students coming from a low-income household, this option is the most attainable and realistic. Community college recruiters provide presentations at high schools and can enroll students instantly to ensure that they have a guaranteed plan after high school graduation. Although this strategy is great, students may often have no interest in attending a community college, and after a few quarters, they drop out. According to one report, “a review of student performance data provided by the California

chancellor's office for community colleges indicates that African-American men are the lowest performing sub-group in the percentage of degrees earned, persistence rates and average cumulative grade point average" (Bush & Bush, 2005). This finding shows that students cannot connect with school and its application to obtaining a successful career.

Colleges are now making plans and creating initiatives to increase retention. Apprenticeships are one of those initiatives. Many of the community colleges in the southern California area have joined an organization called LAUNCH. According to the organization,

LAUNCH apprenticeships are designed to develop highly skilled workers capable of meeting the demands of the modern workplace to remain competitive in the new global economy. By combining supervised on-the-job training—provided by a participating business—with related technical instruction—provided by one of the LAUNCH partner community colleges—LAUNCH apprenticeships reinforce theories underlying those skills learned in the workplace and accelerate professional development. (LAUNCH, 2020)

Uncertainty About Next Steps After High School Graduation

When asked to give a response to the survey question regarding preparation for life after high school graduation, multiple participants commented that they felt unprepared for, did not know, or were unsure of what they would do after high school. One participant in particular recently experienced the loss of his older brother. This tragic loss was preceded by the loss of another brother and his father years earlier. The participant was looking for a way to escape the violence in the community to gain a more stable and sustainable lifestyle. He had plans to possibly join the U.S. Army but had no concrete plans after high school graduation. The graduating senior participant discussed only hearing about apprenticeship opportunities toward the final week of high school. Being aware of apprenticeship opportunities earlier in his high school career could have given him greater options for a seamless transition from high school to adulthood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Black Man Initiative to Increase Apprenticeship Awareness and Recruitment

Based on the findings from the survey and individual participant meetings, a Black man initiative is recommended to increase apprenticeship awareness and recruitment. According to research, "[i]t's well known that cohort programs provide social and academic support for students and can improve retention and graduation rates, particularly among Black and Latino men" (Ddamulira & Laughton, 2022). With a cohort of their peers, Black male high school students can work collectively as they gain insight into apprenticeship programs and how they benefit in the advancement of career opportunities. Researchers find that "[b]y interacting with others, people learn knowledge, skills, strategies, beliefs, norms, and attitudes. Students act in accordance with

their beliefs about their capabilities and the expected outcomes of their actions” (Schunk & Mullen, 2012, p. 220). Through this initiative, cohorts can be provided wraparound services to support their success in finding an apprenticeship program that fits their career goals. Wraparound services will also help to eliminate barriers to accessing positive career pathways after high school graduation. This initiative will make students aware of apprenticeship opportunities locally and nationally and empower them to make informed decisions as they transition from high school.

Increased Funding for Summer Industry-Specific Youth Employment Programs (SYEPs)

Evidence shows that

summer youth employment programs have the potential to reduce delinquent behavior, enhance academic aspirations and performance, and improve social and emotional development. Compared to more targeted behavioral programs, SYEPs provide job experience that may also lead to a future career or post-secondary education. (Modestino et al., 2019)

Learners should have the opportunity to explore and be exposed to various careers throughout adolescence. With industry-specific youth employment programs, learners will be more intentionally placed at employment sites based on careers that align with their strengths and interests. SYEPs can serve as an introduction to career exploration and build interest and motivation to explore preapprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. The ECMC Foundation has launched a mini-grant program, which will allow a small SYEP to be implemented. This program will collect additional data and program outcomes to provide evidence for the connection between a targeted SYEP and participation in positive career pathways.

Career Assessments Administered Through High School

Implementation of career assessments is another recommendation to increase career exploration and awareness. Students may not be aware of a career fitting their interests. Career assessments, such as the Strong’s Interest Inventory Assessment, align strengths and interests to possible career opportunities. Career assessments identify strengths and weaknesses and can be a starting point in a student’s career search. In speaking with the participants of this project, it was evident that they were waiting until the final months of their high school career before seriously considering a career pathway after high school graduation. High school students should complete career assessments once a year through the 4 years of high school. The career assessment results and the data should be tracked to create class schedules that align with noted career goals.

SUMMARY

Apprenticeships serve as a viable career pathway for students after high school graduation. A

lack of social capital and self-efficacy has limited young Black men's access to and awareness of apprenticeship. With the staggering statistic of 0.02% of registered apprentices in California being Black men between the ages of 18 and 24, interventions must be implemented to create more equitable access. Recommendations based on the research gathered in this project include a Black man initiative to increase apprenticeship access and awareness. In this initiative, participants will be accountable to their cohort members and receive the support of wraparound services to ensure their success in identifying appropriate pathways and apprenticeship opportunities based on their desired career goals. SYEPs can also create opportunities for career exploration and an introduction to preapprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. California Governor Gavin Newsome aims to achieve 500,000 registered apprentices by the year 2029. This opportunity is significant, and this project provides ways in which young Black men can gain access and awareness to take advantage of the push for increased apprenticeship opportunities.

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Appendix

Career Options After High School (High School Seniors)

Question Prompt	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
How do you feel about graduating from high school?	Ready to graduate, don't know what I'm doing next	Ready to graduate, don't know what I'm doing next	Ready to get up out of here	Ready to get up out of here	Ready to graduate, don't know what I'm doing next

	though	though			though
Do you know what you want to do after high school?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	I have an idea, not really sure though
Do you know how to get started in your desired career?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Do you know about any school resources that can help you figure out what career to pursue?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
What options are you pursuing after high school?	I have no idea	Military	Find a job	Find a job	Army
Do you know where you can get help applying for college?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Do you know where to get more info about joining the military?	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Do you know what an apprenticeship is?	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Have you looked into any apprenticeship opportunities?	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Overall, do you feel prepared to graduate from high school? Do you have a plan, or have you thought about what you want to do next?	I don't know	Yeah, I am very ready to start my new military life and after become a fireman	Yes, I do feel prepared	Yes, I have a plan, and my plan is to get a job and go to college	Yes, and I was thinking about going to the army

Career Options After High School (Graduates)

Question Prompt	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
How long have you been out of high school?	1 year	1 year	2 years	2 years	2 years
How did you feel about graduating from high school?	Ready to graduate but didn't know what I was going to do next	I felt ready to graduate and move on	Ready to graduate but didn't know what I was going to do next	Ready to graduate but didn't know what I was going to do next	Kinda nervous
Did you know what you wanted to do after high school?	I had an idea, but I wasn't really sure	Yes	No	No	Yes
Looking back to when you were a senior, how prepared did you feel for life after high school?	Not prepared	Not prepared	Not prepared	Not prepared	Not prepared
Being out of high school for at least a year, do you feel like you were actually prepared for life after high school?	No	No	No	No	No
Do you know about any community resources that can help you figure out what career to pursue?	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Which of the following are you currently involved in?	College (4 year/community college/trade school)	College (4 year/community college/trade school)	College (4 year/community college/trade school)	Job	College (4 year/community college/trade school)

Do you know where to get help applying for college?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Do you know where to get more info about joining the military?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Do you know what an apprenticeship is?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Have you looked into any apprenticeship opportunities?	Yes	No	No	No	No
Overall, do you feel like high school prepared you for life after graduation? If not, how could you have been more prepared?	I could have paid more attention	I feel that there are more areas that school could've focused on that helped us be ready for life such as filing taxes, building credit, resources for housing, etc.	No, I do not because COVID HAPPENED	No	It prepared me good for life after graduation, and it helped me somewhat in certain situations