



Inaugural OnRamp Program

Preliminary Results
December 2023

AUTHORS

Emily Parrott, PhD
Senior Director of Research & Evaluation

Marc Whittaker Bennett
Director of OnRamp

Sarah Hehrer
Manager of Data, Impact, & Evaluation

Jarell Skinner-Roy, PhDc
Education Research Specialist

CaVar Reid, PhD
Managing Director of High School & College Programs

Steve Stein
Chief Executive Officer



Overview

Building on 20 years of experience supporting high-achieving, economically disadvantaged students of color to attend top colleges, Thrive Scholars has launched a program with the goal of boosting admission, attendance, and graduation for Generational African-American boys—identifying as descendants of enslaved people in the United States. Thrive Scholars' overall mission is two-fold, and focusing on top colleges allows us to do both: facilitate mobility for economically disadvantaged students of color (Chetty, 2020) and diversify top leadership in the US (Chetty, 2023).

We launched this program because our overall trends mirrored national ones: Overall, Black boys were underrepresented in our program and in top colleges. Specifically, we had fewer Generational African-American boys in our program than Black immigrants or children of immigrants. Though the data are difficult to disaggregate, Harvard is one example—Professors Gates and Guinier estimated that only about one-third of Black Harvard first-years had four US-born grandparents, all descendants of enslaved people (Rimer & Arenson, 2004). This matters because educational outcomes differ by immigrant status of parents; Black adults with immigrant parents are more likely to have college degrees (Anderson, 2015). Moreover, overall trends show that Black boys' college enrollment decreased from 35% in 2010 to 31% in 2020 (NCES, 2023), and Black male graduation rates continue to trail other demographic groups (NSC, 2022).

In addition to looking at our own data, we investigated the research behind these trends to understand why this was happening and what we could do about it. On one hand, research shows that Black boys have fewer of the necessary requirements to attend and graduate from top colleges—such as lower GPAs (U.S. Department of Education, 2019), and lower AP course completion (NCES, 2014; Rodriguez & McGuire, 2019). On the other hand, it shows something that we know to be true for all our Scholars: that these disparities for Black boys are not internal (such as a student's lack of motivation or time constraints) but rather external, due to systemic racism. This systemic racism shows itself in multiple ways, such as Black boys having a lack of equal access to AP opportunities as other students (Education Trust, 2022), not being identified by teachers as high achieving (Rodriguez & Hernandez-Hamed, 2020), and/or being disciplined at higher rates (Milner, 2013; Smith & Harper, 2015).

We were also encouraged by research showing that Black boys succeed academically and build a positive sense of identity in high school and college when educators, counselors, and program leads help students leverage family, school, and community support systems (Orrock & Clark, 2018). Our program seeks to do just that—coaching students to leverage their school, community, and family support systems so they finish high school in a strong position to be admitted to top colleges, graduate from them, achieve personal economic mobility, and become part of top leadership in the US and globally.



OnRamp Programming

OnRamp engages Generational African-American sophomore boys, one year before our Six-Year Program starts. Our primary goals are for our inaugural cohort of 14 OnRamp Scholars to develop scholarly identities as Black boys and gain the academic and navigational skills that will support them to succeed academically in and navigate through their final years of high school, which will set a foundation for them to succeed in and graduate from top colleges. The core aspects of our programming include academic and intellectual growth, empowerment, mentorship, and community-building.

OnRamp programming begins the summer before Scholars enter their junior year in high school, at our residential Summer Academy at Amherst College. Summer Academy is Thrive Scholars' signature six-week intensive program that Six-Year Program Scholars attend as rising seniors in high school and rising first-years in college.

Summer Academy positions Scholars to achieve academic success at top colleges. The program was started in 2012 and inspired by Scholars who were getting into great colleges but not thriving academically, which limited their ability to complete STEM degrees and maintain GPAs needed for competitive internships and jobs needed to start their career. Despite being just as talented as their college peers, most of our Scholars attend under-resourced high schools unable to provide them with the academic opportunities they need (and deserve) that would provide a solid foundation for academic success in college. To fill this opportunity gap, our summer programming includes over 300 hours of math and writing instruction, taught by experienced professors that model the rigorous learning environment they expect of their college students. Our early research on Summer Academy demonstrated its effectiveness: Scholars who attended Summer Academy had statistically significantly higher GPAs and more positive math and science course outcomes than those who did not, and attending twice had even greater effects (Crouser, 2019). In the years since, our Scholars have increasingly high average GPAs, STEM persistence, and internship attainment.

In addition to academic coursework, all Scholars participate in community events, clubs, and trips throughout the summer session—allowing them to connect with peers, engage with Thrive staff, and build community through this unique shared experience. OnRamp Scholars also participate in programming and 1:1 coaching to prepare them for navigating high school, the college admissions process, as well as an early introduction to the myriad of careers open to them and how their college and major choices are important for their economic mobility.

Following Summer Academy, OnRamp Scholars are continuing to engage in monthly workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions with OnRamp coaches during their Junior year.



Key Summer 2023 Outcomes

After Summer Academy, we believe Scholars are on track to achieve our programming goals of academic and intellectual growth, empowerment, mentorship, and community-building:

Academic and Intellectual Skills

- In Math, Scholars showed a statistically significant 46-point gain from pre-test to post-test (21 to 67 percentage points on a 100-point test; 219% increase). Their confidence to succeed in college-level math and writing courses also increased significantly from pre- to post-test.

"I have grown in my writing and math abilities and am ready to take on college-level courses in the future." - OnRamp Scholar

Empowerment

- 86% of Scholars strongly agreed that they feel more prepared for picking high school courses, 85% for building better relationships with teachers, and 71% for exploring top-ranked colleges.

"I've definitely matured in terms of making sure I maintain academic excellence." - OnRamp Scholar

Mentorship

- 93% of Scholars reported that their overall experience working with their coach has been "very good."

"If it wasn't for this program I most likely would've not had the opportunity to meet various mentors which can range from the hard-working staff to our professors." - OnRamp Scholar

Community

- 93% of Scholars strongly agreed that they feel more prepared to build community amongst their peers.

"I plan to surround myself with more people that are passionate about their work." - OnRamp Scholar

We are encouraged by these initial results and will continue to measure the outcomes of our inaugural cohort through the year, specifically their ability to navigate high school and position themselves to succeed in college admissions. We will have further data to share in spring 2024.



References

Anderson, M. (2015). Chapter 1: Statistical Portrait of the U.S. Black Immigrant Population. Pew Research. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org>

Ashkenas, J., Park, H., & Pearce, A. (2017, August 24). Even with Affirmative Action, Blacks and Hispanics are More Underrepresented at Top Colleges than 35 Years Ago. New York Times. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/24/us/affirmative-action.html>

Chetty (2020): Mobility Report Cards: Income Segregation and Intergenerational Mobility Across Colleges in the United States. Quarterly Journal of Economics, 135(3): 1567-1633. Retrieved from: <https://opportunityinsights.org>

Chetty, R., Deming, D., Friedman, J. (2023). Diversifying Society's Leaders? The Determinants and Causal Effects of Admission to Highly Selective Private Colleges. NBER Working Paper No. 31492. Retrieved from: <https://opportunityinsights.org>

Crouser, J. (2019). *SCS Noonan Scholars Program: Analysis of 2012-2020 Cohorts*. Internal Thrive Scholars report: unpublished.

Education Trust (2022). Why are Black and Latino Students Shut out of AP Courses? The Education Trust. Retrieved from: <https://edtrust.org/>

Milner IV, H. R. (2013). Why are students of color (still) punished more severely and frequently than white students? *Urban Education*, 48(4), 483-489.

National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. (2014). Table 225.60. Number and percentage of public high school graduates taking dual credit, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses in high school and average credits earned, by selected student and school characteristics: 2000, 2005, and 2009. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov>

National Center for Education Statistics [NCES]. (2023). College Enrollment Rates. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov>

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center [NSC]. (2023). Completing College: National and State Reports. National Student Clearinghouse. Retrieved from: <https://nscresearchcenter.org>

Orrock, J., & Clark, M. A. (2018). Using systems theory to promote academic success for African American males. *Urban Education*, 53(8), 1013-1042.

Rimer, S. & Arenson, K. W. (2004). Top Colleges Take More Blacks, but Which Ones? New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com>

Rodriguez, A., & Hernandez-Hamed, E. (2020). Understanding Unfulfilled AP Potential Across the Participation Pipeline by Race and Income. *Teachers College Record*, 122(9).

Rodriguez, A., & McGuire, K.M. (2019). More Classes, More Access? Understanding the effects of course offerings on Black-White gaps in Advanced Placement course-taking. *The Review of Higher Education* 42(2), 641-679.

Smith, E. J., & Harper, S. R. (2015). Disproportionate impact of K-12 school suspension and expulsion on Black students in southern states. University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education. Retrieved from: <https://race.usc.edu>

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) High School Transcript Study, various years, 1990–2019.