

# SSC Recommendation: Stereotype Threat and Psycho-Social Intervention.

## Research and Site Committee Discussion.

The School Site Council discussed the issue of stereotype threat which is the underperformance of an individual in a context where that underperformance was stereotypically expected. Member Satish Rao presented data that indicated that this may be a particular issue at Berkeley High; in particular, that African American performance in English Language Arts plummets in ninth grade, even relative to state and similar school performances.

The School Site Council considered material on a psycho-social intervention [2] shown to be effective in addressing stereotype threat.<sup>1</sup> The example in [2] suggests that a short writing assignment can be effective in significantly improving grades months later for African American students. We note that this writing assignment had no effect on European American performance and thus it may have specifically ameliorated the effects of stereotype threat.

## Recommendations.

We suggest that Berkeley High run the psycho-social experiment presented in [2].

In particular, that it places writing such as those assignments A and B (see attached) in envelopes specifically labeled and provided to a student in their ninth grade English classes. The students should complete the assignment in class and return it in the envelope. It is crucial that the teacher and parent of the student not know which version of the assignment that they received. This should only be known to the personnel running the experiment.

Mid semester and end of semester grades should be analyzed to see if there is a significant difference with respect to which version of the assignment. The analysis should be done for each demographic group separately.

If there is evidence that one intervention is effective, Berkeley High School should incorporate this intervention and perhaps others into its normal practice.

We refer the school personnel to the supplementary material to [2] in [1] for implementation purposes.

## References

- [1] Supplementary material for psycho-social intervention.  
<http://www.sciencemag.org/content/suppl/2006/08/29/313.5791.1307.DC1/Cohen.SOM.pdf>.
- [2] Geoffrey L Cohen, Julio Garcia, Nancy Apfel, and Allison Master. Reducing the racial achievement gap: A social-psychological intervention. *Science*, 313(5791):1307–1310, 2006.
- [3] David S Yeager and Gregory M Walton. Social-psychological interventions in education; they are not magic. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2):267–301, 2011.

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<sup>1</sup>This intervention was also one suggested in an article provided to the principal by Frank Worrell [3].

## DRAFT: Version A and B, page 1.

Consider the values of

- athletic ability,
- being good at art,
- being smart or getting good grades,
- creativity,
- independence,
- living in the moment,
- membership in a social group (such as your community, racial group, or school club), music, politics, relationships with friends
- family,
- religious values,
- sense of humor.

Please reread the list of values above and think about each one. Mark the value that is most important to you with “M” and mark the value that is least important to you with “L”.

## DRAFT: Version A, page 2.

Look at the value you picked as most important, and think about when this value was important to you.

Write a few sentences why the value was important to you. Focus on your thoughts and feelings and don't worry about spelling, grammar, or how well written it is.

## DRAFT: Version B, page 2.

Look at the value you picked as least important, and think about why this value might be important to someone else.

Write a few sentences why the value might be important to someone else. Focus on your thoughts and feelings and don't worry about spelling, grammar or how well written it is.

**DRAFT: Version A, page 3.**

Write the top two reasons why this value is important to you?

**DRAFT: Version B, page 3.**

Write the top two reasons why this value might be important to someone else?

## **DRAFT Versions A and B, p. 4**

TO DO!

The material suggests writing for each value, four easy to agree with statement about each value and having the student agree or disagree with each for his/her chosen value.

I can try to do this, but I would suggest that the school does this based on the supplementary material.