



# African Link Initiative (ALI)

THE EVIDENCE

# Why ALI Works

## The challenge

We've all been there. For most of us, our teenage years bring about the first time we consider our individual identities and how that may affect our future in life -- we begin to ask who we are and why. Teens in America get bombarded with countless data points, "factoids," and "big personalities" that influence how they view their world and themselves in it, which affects their perceived value (self-worth). Their perceived value directly impacts the quality of the decisions they make about their life and future. At the same time, teens can experience an increased awareness of how others may perceive them, which may then manifest as self-consciousness, experimentation, and even rebellion.

For Black youth, questions about identity are compounded by issues related to race and ethnicity. Most descendants of enslaved people have little or no connection to their ancestral heritage before the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

## Why identity matters

Identity describes one's sense of self and how one defines themselves in terms of values, beliefs, and role in the world. Our self-identity in adolescence forms the basis of our self-esteem later in life. Though teenagers have some control over their identity development, their identities are also influenced by external factors including peers, family, school, ethnic identity, media, and other social environments.

Studies have shown that programs for Black students that teach Black culture and instill cultural pride yield promising outcomes. Stanford University researchers studied a special class for Black teenage boys in Oakland, California called the Manhood Development Program. They reported that Black boys were less likely to drop out of high school if the class was offered at their school. In a high school with 60 Black boys in ninth grade, on average only three students dropped out as opposed to five students in schools that did not provide the course. Between the graduating classes of 2010 and 2018, the high school graduation rate for Black boys in Oakland schools increased from 46% to 69%.

**In 2010, Oakland, California schools implemented a culturally specific program for Black boys. The program helped increase the high school graduation rate for Black boys from 46% in 2010 to 69% in 2018.**



# Why ALI Works

continued...

## How ALI cultivates identity

ALI transforms how Black youth experience their world by first transforming how they experience themselves. ALI's evidence-based three-part program supports teen identity development by helping them explore three questions that are critical to identity formation:



### Part 1:

Where do I come from?



### Part 2:

Where am I now?



### Part 3:

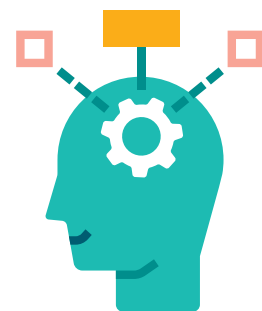
Where can I grow from here?

## How ALI works

Teens begin the journey of self-discovery by taking an **African Ancestry DNA test**, learning about Africans and the continent of Africa, and hypothesizing what their ancestral DNA results will be. Depending on the status of public health, teens may also participate in an overnight educational trip to Washington, D.C.\* with guided tours of Howard University, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art. Teens may also participate in a unique critical thinking experience called Egypt on the Potomac. ALI includes curriculum from IKG's Cultural Imperative Program (CIP), co-founded by renowned author, publisher, cultural historian, and educational consultant, Anthony Browder.



While their African Ancestry DNA results are being analyzed, ALI Scholars will begin **Part 2 of ALI: Influencer Academy™** and [African Link Initiative's TED-Ed Club](#). The way we see it, success must include the amplification of youth voices and their improved educational and life outcomes. We amplify youth voices using self-reflective journaling prompts, creative writing, storytelling, art, poetry, public speaking and presentation skills training. ALI is an approved Club by the [TED](#) organization. Our youth record TEDx (TED-Ed) Talks and become globally published speakers. We have five published TED-Ed speakers and one is now a sophomore at Princeton University.



\*Specific activities will depend on the status of COVID-19 at the time

# Why ALI Works

continued...

Influencer Academy is followed by **Part 3 of ALI: Teen Summit**. In this open forum of facilitated conversations, teens are encouraged to unpack and re-think individual, group, and cultural constructs like: identity, race, the juxtaposition between African American and African, popular music and its influence, colorism, Henrietta Lacks, Willie Lynch and so much more. Teens explore their ideals about how they see themselves both today and tomorrow. The goal is for teens is to learn by doing – thinking critically, being curious, journaling, and challenging their own paradigms, biases, and stereotypes.



Once the African ancestry results are received, ALI participants will take part in a **Family Reunion** Celebration/DNA Reveal where teens are joined by their family members for the revealing and celebration of their ancestry results. Each student's ancestry results will apply to every relative in their maternal or paternal family line. This makes an excellent bonding experience across generations within families and peer families. A past family reunion was attended virtually by 99 people who cheered, celebrated and cried as our scholars and families learned their African ancestry for the first time. This event was also watched via live stream by over 400 people around the world.



**ALI culminates with a birthright trip to Ghana\*** to experience African culture first-hand and visit historical sites of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This 14-day experience starts in Washington, D.C. with a diplomatic VIP sendoff at the Embassy of Ghana. In Ghana, teens will meet with their Ghanaian peers, take part in a youth-led community service project, a tribal naming ceremony, and so much more.

Each night, teens will spend time reflecting and journaling about their experiences and sharing their thoughts and feelings. This homecoming trip provides authentic, direct experiences to help heal the divide between African Americans and Africans, and helping African American youth heal the divide within themselves.

\*Specific activities will depend on the status of COVID-19 at the time

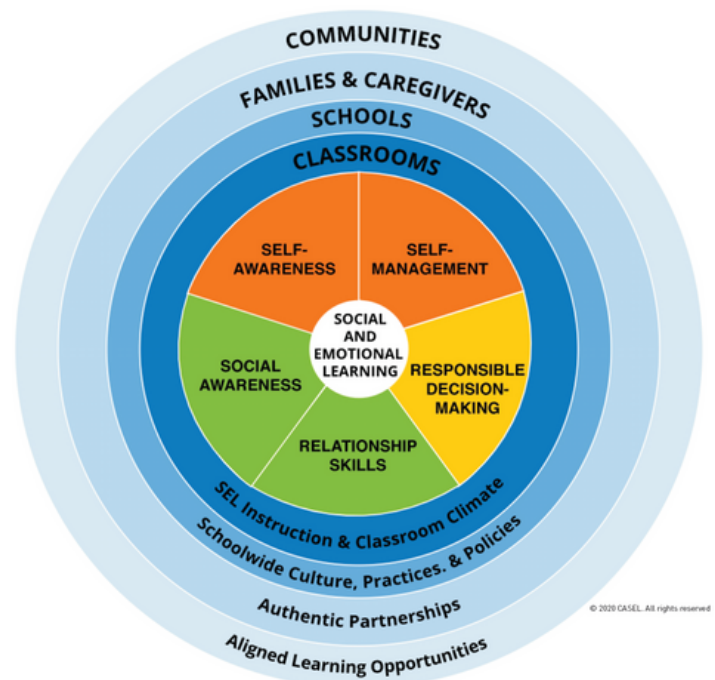
# The Evidence

ALI is tackling a big issue that will impact a vulnerable and impressionable population -- Black teenagers. To ensure our program gets it right the first time, every component of our program is rooted in proven techniques that have been shown to improve outcomes among historically disadvantaged or underserved groups.

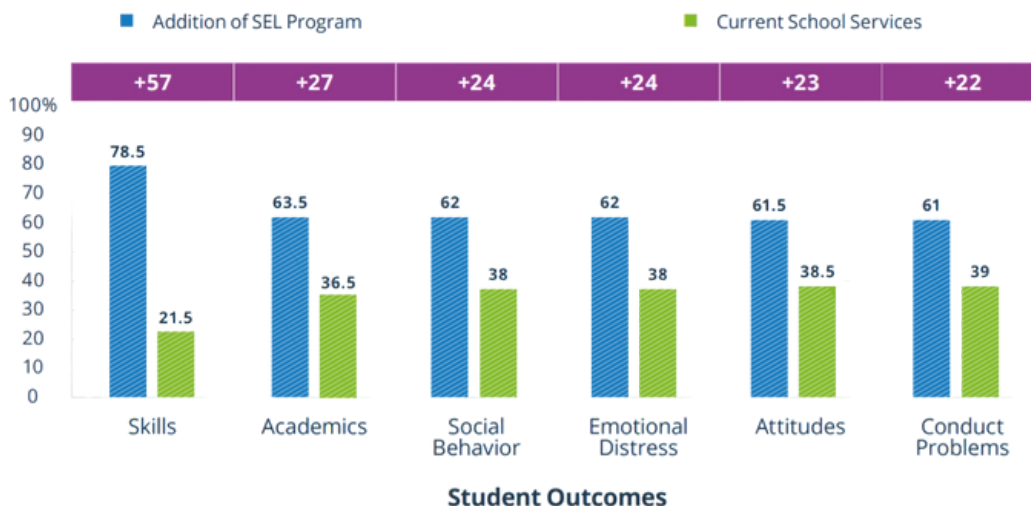
## Social and emotional learning (SEL)

At the core of our approach is social emotional learning (SEL), a framework through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. Source: [CASEL](#)



Percentage of Students Who Improve with the Addition of an SEL Program



# The Evidence

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ALI operationalizes proven and promising links between social and emotional learning (SEL), culturally responsive education, identity development, and improved life outcomes for Black youth.

A Stanford University study found, [this program](#), which focused on cultural pride for Black youth, yielded a

**50%  
increase**

in the Black male  
graduation rate

In October 2020, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) updated its definition of SEL to include identity development, which is the heart and soul of ALI.

**Cultural pride improves outcomes, including GPA, for Black students**

[Source: Hechinger Report 2019 & Cultural Imperative Program](#)

**300+**  
**Fortune 500  
Companies**

use Crucial Conversations™, a core component of the ALI curriculum

Programs that offer social and emotional learning strategies yield an

**11:1  
Return on  
Investment**

[Source: Columbia University 2015](#)

# The Evidence

continued...

**For Black children, racial inequities and intergenerational trauma are driving forces in suicide risk, according to New Jersey experts.**

**NJ Spotlight News**

**NIH** National Library of Medicine

**“Youth of color bear tremendous stress from racial discrimination, which is associated with suicidal behaviors.”**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**MMWR**

Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report

**“Black teenage girls are more likely to report symptoms of depression than Black boys or white teens”**

# The Evidence

continued...

**"From 2013 to 2019 the suicide rate of Black boys and men 15 to 24 years old rose by 47%, and by 59% for Black girls and women of the same age."**

**The New York Times**

**African Link Initiative includes 4 of 5 major protective factors: connectedness, life skills, self-esteem, and cultural beliefs.**



**"From 2000 to 2020, the suicide rate for Black youth ages 10-19 increased 78% and Black youth ages 5-12 are twice as likely to die from suicide than their white counterparts."**



**Major protective factors that help protect people from suicide include: effective behavioral health care, connectedness, life skills, self-esteem, and cultural beliefs.**



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