

The Opportunity

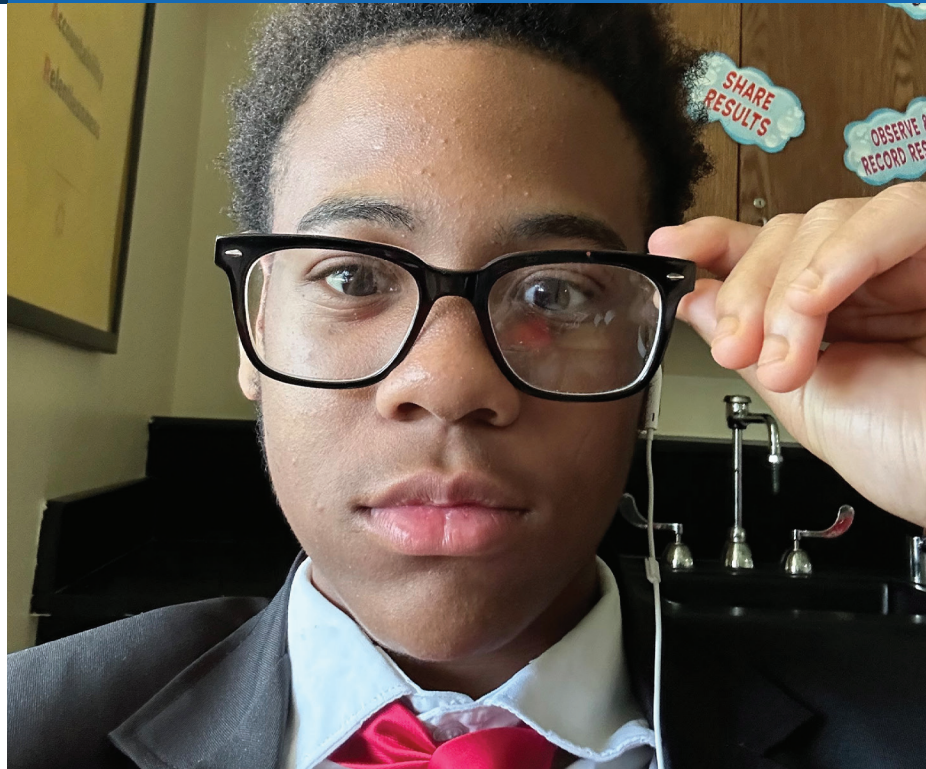
Upon arriving at the Black Male Leadership Academy, youth quickly get to know each other and learn that the essence of leadership lies in building strong, meaningful relationships. Through a blend of fun and educational activities, youth learn that college is not just a place for academic growth but also a fertile ground for cultivating a network of supportive relationships. The bonds youth form at BMLA become a cornerstone for their future, demonstrating the enduring impact of connection, mentorship, and community by offering support and opening doors for new opportunities.

In Practice

The Black Male Leadership Academy is dedicated to teaching young Black men about the importance of college and providing mentorship to guide them through higher education and beyond. It hosts a week-long Summer Academy at Roosevelt University for rising 10th and 11th grade students and provides monthly Saturday workshops focused on college preparation for Academy graduates during the school year. From the moment youth arrive, the Academy sets the stage for a transformative journey. In the first hour, youth eagerly exchange names and determine their dorm assignments, unaware of the profound bonds they are about to forge. This initial meeting marks the beginning of a journey that will reshape their understanding of connection, leadership, and the college experience. While many of the youth initially view college primarily as a path to academic achievement and career success, BMLA broadens their perspective on its multifaceted role. They learn that college is also a crucial period for networking and building a community that can provide support, open doors to opportunities, and serve as a foundation for future endeavors.

As the week progresses, youth are immersed in hands-on activities such as icebreakers, team-building exercises, and structured workshops on communication, leadership skills, and college readiness. Each session emphasizes the value of trust, mutual respect, and collaboration. They learn that effective leadership is deeply rooted in the ability to connect with others on a meaningful level, and practical strategies for building a network, such as effective communication and active listening, and how relationships are formed and maintained. The Academy also emphasizes the importance of diversity within youth networks. By connecting with people from different backgrounds and fields, youth gain a broader perspective and access to a wider range of opportunities. Youth experience the power of these lessons in action as the bonds they form with their peers strengthen, fostering a supportive atmosphere of camaraderie.

As youth laugh and share stories, they realize that the friendships they are forming are as valuable as the lessons being taught. They begin to rely on each other for support and encouragement. This sense of community is one of the most rewarding aspects of the Academy. Youth leave BMLA's Summer Academy with a deeper understanding of the importance of connections, a network of new friends and mentors, and the beginnings of a support system that can help them navigate the challenges of college and beyond.



YOUTH SPOTLIGHT

Brandon Tibbs
Black Male Leadership
Academy (BMLA),
Chicago, IL



“The Black Male Leadership Academy (BMLA) has profoundly shaped my personal growth, transforming me into a visionary leader. It has equipped me with the skills to lead both my community and myself. Through their guidance, I have matured significantly and gained clarity about my future aspirations. I am forever grateful for the impact BMLA has had on my development and vision for the future. BMLA truly transforms our college journey.”

The Challenge

While nearly 9 in 10 Illinois parents are in favor of public funding for afterschool and summer programs, far too many of our state’s young people don’t have programs available to them. In Illinois, for every child in an afterschool program, 4 are waiting to get in — that’s 1 million Illinois youth who are not getting the support they need. The unmet need nationwide is nearly 25 million children. Greater investment in afterschool and summer programs is needed to make sure that all young people have the same opportunities as the young people in Black Male Leadership Academy.

Brandon’s Tips

Join BMLA if you:

- ▶ Need a community that can help you go places.
- ▶ Need help with your homework
- ▶ Want to become a better, more in-tune and high worth Black man.