

Communities of Color Know Best

When it comes to genuine impact for youth of color, communities of color-based organizations outperform mainstream organizations



BACKGROUND

- ▼ ○ Too many youth of color in King County are not completing high school. As the county continues to become more diverse, the issue becomes even more pressing. There are significant disparities in academic resources and outcomes for youth of color. As mainstream institutions, schools tend to push assimilation -- fully adopting the white/European culture and leaving the home culture -- thereby inadvertently forcing students of color to choose between their home culture and the mainstream culture. However, assimilation is associated with lower school self-esteem while positive ethnic and cultural identity are associated with higher self-esteem, which in turn are positively associated with youth strong social-emotional skills, academic orientation and outcomes [Neblett]. The degree to which youth of color, including immigrants and refugees, adapt to the dominant culture can affect their life trajectory, particularly within the school system.

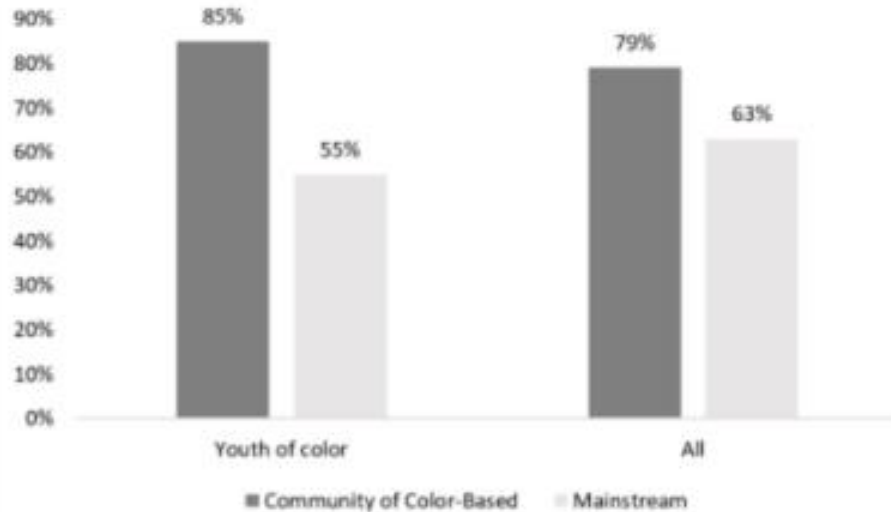
OVERVIEW

To address long-standing disparities in high school graduation for youth of color, United Way of King County funded programs operated by communities of color-based organizations promoting ethnic pride and allowing youth to integrate into mainstream society. We wanted to compare results for youth of color for these programs to general out-of-school/afterschool programming (not specific to a particular race/ethnic community) offered by mainstream organizations. We funded 18 communities of color based organizations and 30 mainstream organizations and analyzed data from January 1, 2017 - June 30, 2018.



FINDINGS

Communities of color based organizations had higher outcome achievement rates for youth of color (85% compared to 55% for mainstream organizations). Moreover, communities of color based organizations had higher achievement rates overall (79% compared to 63% for mainstream organizations for all youth served). While communities of color-based organizations have higher achievement rates, they serve fewer in number at 2,722 youth of color compared to 9,222 for mainstream organizations.



DISCUSSION

Not surprisingly, communities of color-based organizations know their communities and are best equipped to produce results for youth in their community. They are preparing youth to be successful not only in school and in life outcomes. It will be important to understand the essential elements of race/ethnic-based programming that contribute to improved outcomes for youth of color. While mainstream organizations served more youth, the number of mainstream organizations was higher and they received a larger portion of funding compared to communities of color based organizations. Communities of color based organizations could serve a larger number of youth if provided more resources.

Communities of color-based organizations represent the best opportunity for moving the needle on longstanding disparities in educational outcomes for youth of color. They understand the needs and nuances of their communities better than anyone. Yet, they're often underfunded and under-resourced, leaving larger organizations external to the community to help, which bring an outsider's perspective and hence poorer results. If a community of color based organization exists to serve youth in their community, funding should be prioritized for these organizations that have the expertise, relationships and proven results working in their community.

Communities of color know best the issues facing their communities AND how to solve them.