

Press Release draft:

Aquinas alumna, Lindsay Cherry (Master's in Education, 2019), received the 2019 ELATE James Moffett Memorial Fund Award. She will be presented with this award at the NCTE (National Council for Teachers of English) annual conference in Baltimore, MD on November 22. According to NCTE, "Moffett, a great champion of the voices of K-12 teachers, focused on such ideas as the necessity of student-centered curricula, writing across the curriculum, alternatives to standardized testing, and spiritual growth in education and life" (2019).

Lindsay Cherry is an English teacher at Harbor Lights Middle School in Holland. Her award submission titled, "Closing the Achievement Gap in West Ottawa Public Schools," is an extension of an afterschool program (Tomorrow's Leaders) she created and one she researched for her final thesis to complete her Master's degree at Aquinas.

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From Lindsay Cherry's submission:

The National Education Association defines the achievement gap as the inequality between the test scores of minority or disadvantaged students and their White and Asian peers. Research has been done and it is very clear that African American students are at a considerable disadvantage within the classroom in comparison to their peers. Research also shows that it is vital for the success of African American students, whether they are rich or poor, to have three pieces in place: *to be a part of a group that is focused on African Americans and based on high achievement, support in various capacities, and have contact with positive adult role models with whom they can relate to.*

In response to research on the achievement gap and the disparities within the district, Lindsay Cherry created *Tomorrow's Leaders* three years ago based on the best practices found to promote success for African

American students. *Tomorrow's Leaders* began at Harbor Lights Middle School and it is now expanding to the High School because of the demand from the students. The group focuses on the success of African American students through the development of positive leadership skills within the school community and strengthening of academic study skills. This group is made up of 20 nominated African American students who are empowered to achieve in and out of the classroom, carry themselves with dignity, and be confident in who they are. Lindsay Cherry facilitates discussions around current issues within the African American community, provides lessons on culture and history, organizes experiences, and schedules African American leaders to come and share their life experiences and wisdom with the students.

Throughout the creation and implementation of *Tomorrow's Leaders*, the director has been researching and experimenting strategies and best practices to find the most effective way for closing the achievement gap within her school and district. She has been left with the questions: If students continue to be involved in *Tomorrow's Leaders* (past middle school level) will their chances for success increase? Will the same results in successes be seen at the high school level? What will the impact be if intergroup dialogue is implemented between White teachers and Black students? This study will focus on and evaluate the impact of the expansion of the *Tomorrow's Leaders* to the high school and the use of intergroup dialogue through a book study using *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* by Dr. Joy Degruy.

### **The Connection**

James Moffett was all about student-centered curricula, writing across the curriculum, alternatives to standardized testing, and spiritual growth in education and life. This study will help teachers create a student centered environment through the lens of African American students. Through the intergroup dialogue, teachers will hear first hand who their African American students are and what they need to be successful in the classroom. The successes experienced will then be shared with other teachers for a rippling effect. This will positively impact the teachers' ways of teaching and how their classrooms are run which will ultimately impact the curriculum and assessments. By creating a group that focuses on African American students' success, history, culture and values; the school is creating an environment that is student-centered and creating a more

positive culture within the school because African American students gain confidence and a sense of belonging within the school. When the group is formed and the intergroup dialogue is complete, the spirit within the students, teachers, and school as a whole will become better because relationships will be built, a new understanding gained, and hope in the future is created.