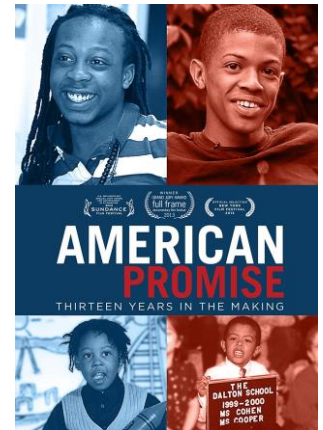


## AMERICAN PROMISE VIEWING AND DIALOGUE TWO GENERATION FAMILY EVENT

**DATE:** December 14, 2017 5:30 pm  
**HOSTED BY:** PFACTES, LLC Gayle C. Fowler  
PFACTES FAMILY CENTER  
109 White Allen Ave. Dayton, OH  
**26 ATTENDEES:** 18 ADULTS 8 YOUTH

- Parents - Mothers and Fathers
- Family Service Providers
- School Administrators, Teachers and Counselors
- Youth – ages 7- 16



### MOVIE DESCRIPTION



American Promise is an intimate and provocative account, recorded over 12 years, of the experiences of two middle-class African-American boys who entered a very prestigious--and historically white--private school on Manhattan's Upper East Side. The Dalton School had made a commitment to recruit students of color, and five-year-old best friends Idris Brewster and Seun Summers of Brooklyn were two of the gifted children who were admitted. The boys were placed in a demanding environment that provided new opportunities and challenges, if little reflection of their cultural identities.

Idris' parents, Joe, a Harvard- and Stanford-trained psychiatrist, and Michèle, a Columbia Law School graduate and filmmaker, decided to film the boys' progress. They and members of the Summers family soon found themselves struggling not only with kids' typical growing pains and the kinds of racial issues one might expect, but also with surprising class, gender and generational gaps. American Promise, which traces the boys' journey from kindergarten through high school graduation, finds the greatest challenge for the families--and perhaps the country--is to close the black male educational achievement gap, which has been called "the civil rights crusade of the 21st century."

At stake, beyond the challenges of being white or black in America, is the meaning of success in our country. "All American families want to give their children the opportunity to succeed. But the truth is, opportunity is just the first step, particularly for families raising black boys," says co-director and co-producer Michèle Stephenson. "We hope American Promise shines a light on these issues."

## **PARTICIPANT DIALOGUE**

Participants actively engaged in discussion following the film. The diverse roles, backgrounds and experiences provided for varied approaches and perspectives about the film. Parents shared personal experiences about observing their own parenting styles and behaviors in the families. One parent observed the interactions between Idris and his mother were quite similar to her own and helped her identify areas she needs to adjust for the emotional well-being of her son. Fathers shared how they had common experiences and thoughts as young men. Behaviors such as withdrawal and silence were learned responses to uncomfortable situations.

School selection was a significant discussion among educators and parents. The challenges of pursuing a school with a rigorous curriculum along with the appropriate social and education environment for a child that embraces cultural differences and learning styles is complex and challenging. School culture, climate and cultural competencies must be considered in the decision process or children will merely survive rather than thrive in a confident and healthy manner. Ultimately, Seun left the prestigious school and transferred to a local school that met his personal, social and academic needs.

The stressors and pressure Idris and Seun experienced created openly vulnerable emotional responses. An early childhood educator was moved to tears as she shared the biases, burdens and inequitable experiences she has witnessed.

An integrated approach to school selection that meets a child's academic, social and personal needs far outweighs the pressures of choosing a school based solely on reputation and academics was an agreed upon outcome of the discussion.

## **YOUTH**

The youth were very receptive, intrigued and attentive to the film. They gave very transparent and detailed feedback on the parallels and similar setbacks, triumphs, and adverse situations they have encountered that are similar to the boys, Idris and Seun. A few of the participants, elementary and high school, shared the racial criticisms and stereotypes they've experienced being the minority population in their schools. Most agreed they've felt similar stresses as Idris and Seun on a weekly basis in their school and home environments. Many of these stressors were in addition to the self-imposed expectations they create for themselves.

They enjoyed the film and during the discussion they learned their situations were more common among their peers than they realized. The youth agreed they would share with friends and recommend watching the film. All of the youth were challenged to expand the dialogue and discuss the film with their parents and families

## **PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS**

Overall, participants rated the film, dialogue and event as a very good experience.

Many shared an interest in continuing dialogue, training interests and other activities relevant to cultural understanding and African-American achievement gaps

How was your understanding of the issue(s) deepened?

- The screening helped me to see that the experiences that I had with my own son were not isolated incidents.
- I gained more information concerning our young men of color. I have a deeper understanding of the challenges they face as a result of the color of their skin and educational background.
- It was enlightening to see/hear in the documentary the personal viewpoints of two young people and how they perceived their educational experiences. It was powerful to hear from the other guests who were present as we come from diverse backgrounds and have a multitude of life experiences.
- My understanding was deepened in the aspect that I thought my family member was being very unreasonable about a current situation. But I now understand that she does not know how to handle the situation. The young men in the film have some of the same experiences as my family member which affirmed some of my concerns.

In what ways did you find the discussion valuable or not valuable?

- The conversation/discussion was valuable in that it allowed the participants to note the role and responsibility of the school, parent, and student in school selection.
- I am the mother of a preschool male. I was not aware of the discrimination he can or will face in the future as he grows and develops. As I gain more understanding about the issues surrounding our young men, I become better prepared to navigate through the challenges the future may bring.
- The discussion was a very important component as it gave everyone the opportunity to share what they observed during the viewing and discuss in depth the impact the decisions the parents made had on their children.
- Every teacher should be required to and want to take some type of cultural diversity courses so that they are competent in teaching all races and cultures. No child should ever go to a school and feel unwelcomed or not go to a school because they feel as if they do not belong.

Any other comments about the film and/or event?

- There was a great deal of planning and organization that went into the event. The presenters and guest facilitator were genuine in their passion for opening up the dialogue for a better understanding and appreciation for the diverse population of young people in our community. We were very impressed with the program and thankful to have been invited to be a part of the event.
- I would highly recommend the film to peers my age from all backgrounds because it would allow them to see how they may either be a victim of situations or be part of accidentally victimizing others.
- The movie really made me sad, particularly to see the young men experience what I interpreted to be implicit bias. Implicit bias, being mainly hidden and unconscious, is a real-life phenomenon that many White people fail to realize exists. Often times, White people are unable to truly listen to people of color in terms of experiences and stories of what implicit bias is like.