

# Engaging African American Girls in School

What really matters most?



**What is School Engagement?**

A student's investment and effort directed toward learning. It includes emotional connection, a sense of belonging, and belief in their ability to master learning goals.

**What does School Engagement do?**

When engagement is high, it leads to higher grades, higher test scores, greater attendance, reduced disruptive behavior, and reduced drop out from school.



## Our Project

African American girls in middle school participated in an intervention (Sisters of Nia) that focused on principles of African American living.

It promoted ethnic and cultural identity, belonging, and personal and community empowerment. We tested the effect of these concepts on school engagement.

## African American Girls are Engaged in School When...



...they believe in themselves and have affirming teachers



...they feel socially connected and a sense of belonging



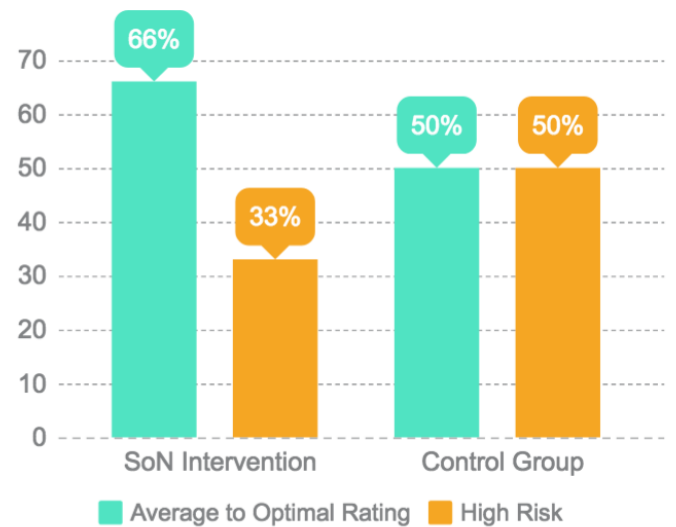
...their cultural identities are embraced and seen as important to society

## Beliefs and Academic Competence

African American girls need to believe in their abilities. It is critical that they know they can do well in school. Students enjoy school when they feel competent and expect success. It gives a sense of personal control.

African American girls need to hear messages from adults in school that affirm the belief that they will succeed. This message becomes internalized and can disrupt negative thought patterns such as stereotype threat.

### Academic Beliefs



At the end of the intervention, the girls in the Sisters of Nia group were 2 x more likely to believe that they were academically competent and expected to succeed in school

## Socially Connected to Others



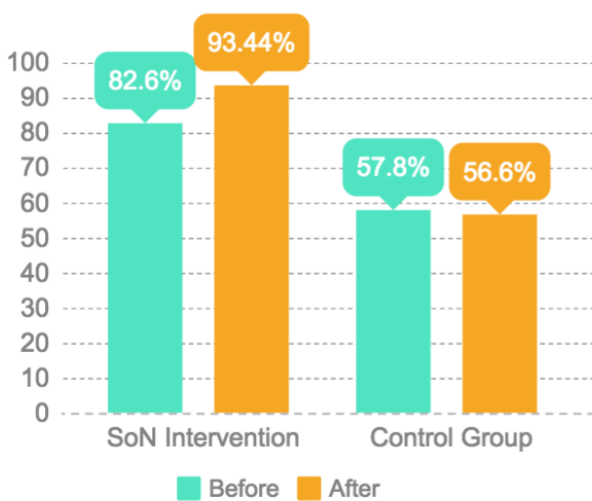
Girls in the Sisters of Nia Intervention group received affirming messages that someone cares and that their opinions were valued.

They developed relationships with other group members that sustained after the intervention ended.

The girls in the control group were relatively disengaged throughout study. There was no social connection among group members.

Their participation was inconsistent and few received the affirming messages that were included in the intervention.

## Cultural Identity via Humanism



Girls in the Sisters of Nia intervention showed a 10.8% increase while the girls in the control group decreased by 1.2%

## Cultural Identity

African American girls need to connect their cultural identity and heritage to the school environment. The intervention included messages that humanized African American culture as making a contribution toward creating a complete society.

When African American girls see themselves as valued members of society, they are more likely to engage with a sense of pride in their ethnic identity.

## ENGAGEMENT



2.4 x more likely

The African American girls in the intervention group were exposed to a curriculum that promoted positive ethnic identity, academic beliefs, and personal and community empowerment. Compared to the girls in the control group, they were more than twice as likely to be rated by their teachers as highly engaged in school at the end of the intervention. Similarly, these girls were also more than twice as likely to rate themselves as engaged in school.

### SOURCE

Jones, J.M., Lee, L.H, Matlack, A., and Zigarelli, J.C. (in press, 2017). Using Sisterhood Networks to Cultivate Ethnic Identity and Enhance School Engagement.