

# Classroom lessons for the real world

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The Young Men of Progress was born with a casual conversation and a little luck, now it is changing the lives of students every year.

Matthew Hunt and Devin Patterson, principal and English teacher at Northern High School, met in the fall of 2008 to discuss the best way to use a grant from the National Education Association.

"I talked to him about how it would be really cool if we had a program for African-American males that started in ninth grade so they could be successful all four years," Patterson said.

Hunt had already set this idea in motion and they decided to make a program called Young Men of Progress. 16 students are enrolled in the program. Patterson teaches the English class, and Pam Adams teaches math.

Patterson's students watch her attentively as she walks around the room answering questions and allowing playful banter between her students. The students are smiling, even though they have a quiz on their latest reading assignment, "Thirteen Reasons Why."

"I picked this book to show them what you say about females can destroy their reputation and your own as a human being," Patterson said.

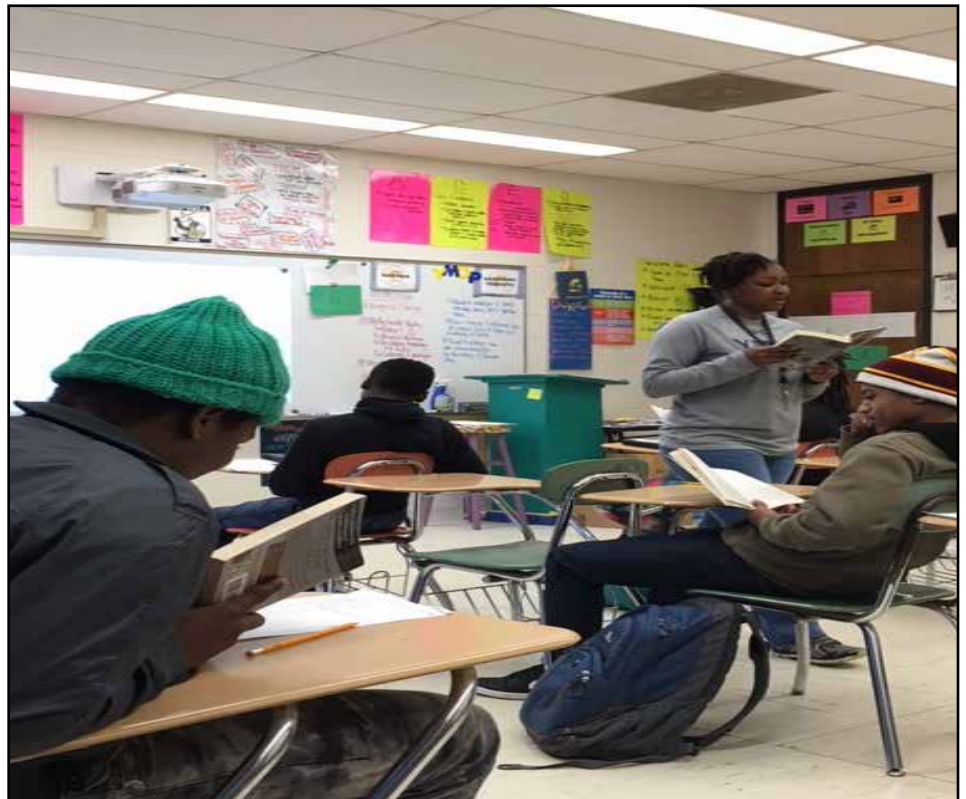
After the quiz, students took turns reading back and forth with Patterson. The book tells the story of a young girl who is a victim of suicide after vicious rumors are spread about her at a new school.

**"Since freshman year, it teaches you to take responsibility for your actions," Keyshawn White said.**

Instead of having her students diagramming sentences Patterson assigns reading stories that are relevant to their lives. As a result, students are eager to participate.

"I try to find things for them that they can relate and connect to," Patterson said.

The lessons taught in Patterson's



**Students take turns reading in character from "Thirteen Reasons Why," a young-adult fiction book about a young girl who is a victim of suicide due to rumors. Devin Patterson, program director of Young Men of Progress, said she focused her lessons on maintaining student interest and preparation for life outside the classroom.**

classroom manifest in her students' lives.

"Since it's freshman year, it teaches you take responsibility for your actions," freshman Keyshawn White said.

The program teaches students responsibility and works to close the achievement gap in African-American males. However, there is always room for students to learn from their mistakes without harsh grade repercussions.

"You have time to learn in case you mess up," freshman Eli Sharper said.

Since the class is small Patterson is able to connect with her students and help them grow at their own pace while teaching them responsibility both in and out of the classroom.

One of Patterson's former students, Jalen McFadden, attested that the program prepared him for higher-level courses.

Enrollment in honors and Advanced Placement classes typically leads students toward college, which is another

goal of the program. All the students in Patterson's class said they hoped to attend college one day.

But it's more than making it to college—learning how to make ethical and moral decisions are also guiding principles. Students must adhere these guidelines and reminders are throughout the classroom.

One poster asks: "How do you make the choice to walk away from someone that isn't good for [you]?" The bottom of the poster is filled with student responses on sticky notes.

"I like to relate it to them to prepare them for things they may be going through," Patterson said.

The combination of valuable life lessons and a little bit of fun are paving the way for the Young Men of Progress.