Taraji P. Henson Activates a Campaign to Help Black Students

The actress designed a six-week program to fight the traumatic mental health effects of racism in school.

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For many Black students, school can trigger an enormous number of mental health problems. Activist-actress Taraji P. Henson says this is what motivated her to create The Unspoken Curriculum, an initiative to empower Black students to discuss mental health issues and their experiences in the classroom, reports People.com.

Henson once worked as a substitute teacher before launching her acting career. “I taught a special education class, but all of the students were Black boys who had all of their mental and physical capabilities,” she told People. “These children came from traumatic home situations, and the school labeled them ‘special ed.’”

The actress says that during her childhood in Maryland, she experienced racial bias that continues to affect her as an adult. “We need more professionals in education to recognize children dealing with trauma and help them, not criminalize them,” she says.

According to the American Psychological Association, findings show that discrimination and poverty negatively affect the overall health of Black youth. In addition, recent studies reveal an uptick in suicide attempts among Black teens.

Henson says she the destructive impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Black community as well as continued episodes of racial injustice and police brutality throughout the country inspired her to develop the program.

Active until June 21, the initiative was formed as part of The Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation, her mental health nonprofit. It features talks with mental health experts and chat rooms where student conversations are moderated by therapists and educators.

Henson explains that she’s leveraged her platform as an entertainer and public personality to speak her mind about these issues.

“The more we talk about it, and the more we educate ourselves, the more we know how to do

better," she says.

To learn more about Henson's work as a mental health advocate, read "Taraji P. Henson to Host Mental Health Show for Facebook" and "Taraji P. Henson Talks Mental Health and Healing."

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