

# Building Inclusive Higher Education Programs in Places Where They Don't Exist

## *A Series of Family Perspectives*

August 2024

### About this Series

This profile is part of the series, *Building Inclusive Higher Education Programs in Places Where They Don't Exist: A Series of Family Perspectives*. The series introduces inclusive higher education (IHE), shares lessons learned, and presents the stories of parent leaders who helped create IHE programs in places where they didn't exist. Author **Elise McMillan, J.D.** is the retired former director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and was the founding faculty member of Next Steps at Vanderbilt University, the first IHE program in Tennessee. This spotlight highlights the work of parent leader, **Baiyina Muhammad**.

## Baiyina Muhammad

### Introduction

Baiyina Muhammad is the founder and Executive Director of the non-profit North Carolina Black Disabilities Network.<sup>1</sup> Her son, Jabreel Brandon, graduated from the Integrative Community Studies Program, also known as Beyond Academics, at the University of North Carolina Greensboro in 2021. He works as a processor at The Scrap Exchange in Durham, where he processes and organizes their library collection.



### Why?

Muhammad is directing some of her North Carolina non-profit's efforts toward developing IHE programs for students with intellectual disability (ID), having discovered that none of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in North Carolina offered such programs.<sup>2</sup>

Muhammad's interest IHE is an extension of her passion for support for two sons with disabilities. Her advocacy began when Jabreel, the oldest of her four sons, received his diagnosis in preschool. Since then, she has been a passionate advocate and has continued to pursue training

<sup>1</sup> Learn more about the North Carolina Black Disabilities Network at <https://www.nc-bdn.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) includes a definition of a student with an intellectual disability (ID). Provisions of the HEOA including federal financial aid, Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs (CTP), and Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) are specifically provided for students with ID. The term Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) is often used to describe students with both ID and another developmental disability (DD) or students with ID or another DD. Some of the alliances mentioned in this series are working to build programs and services for the broader category of students with IDD who in some cases may not have an ID. Find out more information at <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html>.



and education focusing on the interconnectedness of race and disability. In addition to her PhD role as a professor of history, she has earned a certificate in autism, completed a yearlong Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disorders (LEND) fellowship at the UNC Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities, and obtained a Master of Arts in liberal studies (MLAS) at North Carolina State University.

## How?

Through her lived experience as a mother of two Black sons with disabilities, she gained experience in observing Black people encountering systems that are supposed to serve them but do not. This led her to create the North Carolina Black Disabilities Network. Part of her capstone project for her MLAS was to develop a statewide conference, “Equity at the Intersections of Race and Disability.” The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD) was one of the funders. After that conference, she began another project focused on developing IHE programs at HBCUs funded by NCCDD.

Muhammad shared that there are 11 HBCUs in North Carolina, none of which have an IHE program for students with disabilities. Through her yearlong project with NCCDD, she is conducting outreach in North Carolina with national and state IHE leaders, the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the aforementioned HBCUs. To date, she has offered to meet with the 11 HBCUs on their campuses. Six of the universities signed up and received training, which includes information about IHE and ID, model programs, and resources. Training participants also learned about funding criteria for financial support from NCCDD and other federal funders. Muhammad also updated the training materials to have a perspective more relevant to HBCUs. Her work is part of an initiative of the NCCDD to promote establishment of IHE programs at North Carolina HBCUs.<sup>3</sup>

## In Closing

Muhammad plans to continue her work through her non-profit to promote access to higher education and amplify the voices and experiences of Black disabled communities in North Carolina. She offers the following advice to others interested in developing IHE programs.

### Advice from Baiyina Muhammad

**Don't assume disinterest when reaching out to HBCUs or communities of color.** *“There were assumptions about why they weren't starting programs, and it was a matter of awareness, not disinterest. Whatever assumptions you have about the group you are planning to engage, leave those assumptions at the door. Always give them the benefit of the doubt.”*

**Engage communities before trying to create the programs.** *“Then you can work together to guide and shape programs that are mutually beneficial.”*

**Remember that representation is important.** *“For many disability organizations and agencies, there isn't enough talk about race and participation of impacted communities. Families are looking to see themselves reflected in who is offering the services and programs.”*

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<sup>3</sup> Learn more about the NCCDD's initiative to promote the establishment of IHE programs at North Carolina's HBCUs at <https://nccdd.org/initiatives/currentinitiatives/43-initiatives/1468-nc-black-disability-network-training-to-promote-establishment-of-ipse-programs-at-nc-hbcus.html>.

