



MAP ACADEMY

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[Episode 35: Once Students Feel Safe Opening Up, Real Progress Can Begin](#)

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Nick: Welcome back to *Education Disruption*. Map Academy is an alternative school built for students on the margins. It's high school done differently, from academics to wraparound supports to hybrid learning. Doing high school differently also means that graduating and completing your high school diploma looks different at Map. In this season of *Education Disruption*, we're talking to Map Academy students. They were tasked with reflecting on the life experiences that led them to their high school graduation. Today we'll hear from Javon.

Javon: It's exciting to finally graduate. **[00:00:30]** I'm the first one to do it in my mom's household.

Nick: We'll hear Javon sharing his story in front of an audience of the Map community and his peers. We'll also hear Javon reflect on what it took to get to this moment.

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Javon: This is my journey. It's mainly for the younger kids here at Map Academy. The streets aren't where you want to be. I grew up in Boston. I am 22, about to graduate high school, and I could have graduated on time or not at all. I had to find my way here on my own. **[00:01:00]** The people who help you want to see you be something. I see the potential in you. I got here today because of good people around me, yes, but because of me as well. You can't do anything unless you want to. At Map Academy, everyone wants to help you reach your goal. Open up.

Nick: During Javon's presentation, he had such great advice for the younger students at Map. We wanted to know what advice he might give to his **[00:01:30]** younger self before arriving at Map Academy.

Javon: I would've definitely told myself to leave the streets alone and definitely change your friend group. Just work and stay focused because once I did that, that's when I started developing. If I just had that one person to put that bug in my ear back then, I probably would've been graduated. Like I said, I could've graduated on time, but I didn't have the guidance. I didn't have the support.

It was like **[00:02:00]** if I had that back then I would've definitely told myself that like, "Change your friend group. Cut some people off because they're not really your friends." The ones who want to see you succeed and want to see you be focused, those are the ones you want to surround yourself with. Back then, I was just so distracted. It was hard. I couldn't really find myself out.

Nick: We wanted to know what effect these old friend groups had on Javon.

Javon: It had a lazy effect, not wanting to do nothing. The effect of thinking it was okay to talk [00:02:30] back to my parents, the effect of it was okay to skip in school or even going to school every day and just finding myself being a class clown because they made it seem okay. Just doing things as if I'm not a leader. I knew the schools and me having them friend groups wasn't working because no matter where I went, what school I went to, I always knew somebody in them schools.

That's why I was always easily distracted. It was like, "All right, I got to tell my mom I got to go to a legit [00:03:00] school where I'm getting one on one support and there's nobody I know that's going to be in there" because nobody my age, they're like, "Oh, I'm not getting no IEP, I'm not retarded." That's how the kids at my age, that's how they was thinking back then. Of course, if I'm hearing that at that age, I'm feeding off of that energy.

Always in school, I noticed I couldn't really sit still after I was done with work. I would want to just move around if there wasn't more work given [00:03:30] to me. Once that would happen, it was just hard for them to keep control of me because I would just roam the halls. My temper was different. Nobody could tell me nothing. I didn't listen to nobody. It was like I had to change all of that if I wanted to be something.

I'm trying to get in these kids' heads, if you want to be something, all that wanting to be tough, you don't have to put this act on that you're not. I'm sorry to say, but that's how people's dying nowadays because they want to be so tough in the wrong [00:04:00] places. There's a time and place for that.

If you want to be tough, go get a boxing gym membership and go to the boxing gym. You know what I mean? Stuff like that. There's a place and time for everything. Even since I was younger, I worked on my profanity, I don't swear as much no more because it's like I'm growing. By the way, I got a kid on the way. You know what I mean? It's like I'm trying to represent and change my ways.

I care about all the kids here at Map. I see potential in all of them. [00:04:30] I know they all can graduate, they all can be something in life, but they're letting whatever they got going on outside of school distract them, and I can see right through them.

I just want just talk to them, get something into their head to where they know there's definitely people here that care about you. I care about them, you know what I mean? I know that they can do whatever they want to do, but they got to use the assets that they have in this building. Yes, use it to your advantage, but don't abuse it. [00:05:00] That's what a lot of them do. They would just — I see it all the time. Teachers deal with a lot here. They deal with a lot.

Nick: Javon, as opposed to his previous school experience, talks a lot about the feeling of being cared for at Map Academy, and even his care for the Map community — like feeling a sense of belonging. We asked Javon, where does that feeling come from?

Javon: Map makes me feel that way because they had a lot to do with my growth, and they helped me [00:05:30] see the bigger picture. It's like me seeing kids come in how I came in, they're quicker to listen to me than they are a teacher because they're looking at me like, "Oh, he's one of me. He's a student. You feel me?" He's going through the same thing I'm going through.

If I'm telling them something straight from the heart, they're going to take it better than how they would take it from a teacher. Even after I graduate, I'm not just going to bounce, you feel me? I'm

going to always come check in on the students, make sure that they're doing what they're supposed to do.

To this day, I still make **[00:06:00]** sure that every student I check in with is at least getting three tasks done a day. Why? Because you're here for eight hours a day. What are you doing, bro? I'm out eight hours a day. I'm making money. When I was here, I was getting stuff done, bro. You don't want to be here till you're 22 like I was. I always throw it in their head because I know when they hear that, they're like, "Oh, hell no, I don't want to be in school till I'm 22." Exactly, bro. Yes, I put myself in this predicament. You don't have to do that. You're in a good spot to where you can graduate on time.

Nick: Javon talks about encouraging other students at Map, **[00:06:30]** but he also experienced this encouragement himself, including from Map co-founder and co-director Josh Charpentier.

Javon: I realized how many times I told Josh I was going to sign out, and he would not let me. He would do everything in his power. He would literally tell me, "Oh, if you have no way of getting here, I'll pay for an Uber. I'll pay for you to get here however I got to. It don't matter if I have to buy you tickets for a week to get on a commuter road to Middleborough from Brockton and me getting you Uber from **[00:07:00]** Lakeville to Plymouth."

He was like, "I'll do it. Whatever I need to do." He did. He did it, and I actually allowed him to because I did want to graduate. And it was like I said, me being in other schools when I would just leave like that, they'll let me fall off. They didn't let me fall off here. I knew I'm like, "Yeah, now I got to let my guard off and let them take me in because they're actually helping me more than just a school. They're like becoming a family to me at this point."

[00:07:30] I just realized I had to let go of myself because they're really helping me. One thing I can say is my trust always been skyrocketing. That's one thing I had to let go of, too. What I really realized is they would really go out of their way to do anything.

There was times where I was down bad, and I had basically nowhere to go, and **[00:08:00]** they just did everything in their power to make sure I was good. They would try to get me in the shelters. Anything you say, you name it, they would do for you like they did for me.

That made me really open up to them and want to trust them because it's like they never let me down. They didn't. I really just say, trust who you got around you. Don't let your pride get — don't let it get **[00:08:30]** too control over you. They're not teachers who are just here for a paycheck. They're actually here to make sure you succeed and you reach your goals and you have the attention you need and all that.

I'd honestly just say to whoever here is in their shell to just open up. Go to whoever you've been working with and just talk to them. Open up and you'll see how better you'll feel **[00:09:00]** just by talking to them.

As they say, you always have to start somewhere. It's like, "Why not start now?" You have the assets. You have the people who can help you build up to that person you want to be. It's like, just use them and don't be scared. Open up. Talk. Be friendly.

Nick: Now that Javon was approaching graduation, we wanted to know how he felt about reaching this milestone and what's next for him.

Javon: It feels amazing. This is definitely an accomplishment. Coming here, starting fresh [00:09:30] and achieving my goal and accomplishing it here is amazing to me because they've seen and they've helped my growth. It's like they know what I was like and what I was coming from, and they always told me, "You're a great person." I just needed the right people around me, and that's what I had. I grew.

Yeah, it's exciting to finally graduate. Like I said, I'm the first one to do it in my mom's household, so that's an even bigger accomplishment because it's like [00:10:00] my mom herself, she didn't graduate due to having me and my sister. It's a big accomplishment.

It's funny because when I first came into the school, I wanted to graduate and go to school for criminal justice. Now that I grew up, everybody is telling me I'm good with talking, and this and that, so I want to be a social worker. I want to work with kids. I want to get that whole "Oh, the streets is where it's at" out of their head. I'm not even going to say the streets, just [00:10:30] all the nonsense. Leave it alone. It's not worth it. Anything that's distracting, anything that's just making you feel like it's a setback, let it go.

I know it's hard, and I cut off some deep friends before, but you have to. You have to do what you have to do to achieve your goals, and you'll see how good you feel once you achieve them goals. I want every kid to be something, because we did not come on this earth to live and die. God put us on this earth to live and be something of ourself [00:11:00] and try to make a family tradition, you know what I mean, not just live and die. That's not what it's for.

It's like I said, I'm 22 about to graduate high school. I could have graduated at 17. Like I said, it's a big accomplishment. It feels good, and you can graduate at 17, 18, so do it. Don't be like me and try to be the class clown for so many years. No, it's not the wave. Trust me, it's not. It don't matter where you [00:11:30] are, whether you're being in colors or a street, it's not the wave.

Whether you're just trying to follow your friends and claim a side, anything, claiming anything other than books, it is not the wave, bro. I'm telling you because you're not going to get nowhere. I've done it. I've been there, done that, and look where I'm at. I kept going because I knew I wanted to be something.

[music]

Nick: Thank you so much to Javon for opening up and sharing that story with us and [00:12:00] congratulations on earning your high school diploma. If you want to hear more inspiring stories from the Map community, subscribe to *Education Disruption* on your podcast platform of choice. You can find more information about Map at themapacademy.org and more resources at educationdisruption.org. My name is Nick Tetrault, our editor is Susie Blair. Our executive producer is Kristen Hughes, and this is a Hairpin production.

[00:12:23] [END OF AUDIO]