

Creating Great Public Schools Through Minority Community Outreach

Background

Blacks have a rich history of survival, determination, and accomplishment. Nowhere is this more evident than in the pursuit of education. Throughout history, Blacks have sought to ensure that each generation exceeds the previous one in educational attainment. In spite of decades of slavery and often at great peril, Blacks sought literacy as a source of and means to freedom.

During the years of separate-but-equal education, Blacks persevered in educating their children in churches that served as schools, at all-Black schools in the heart of their communities, and in the establishment of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). During the slow integration of America's schools, Blacks found that they had to fight to keep the positions of qualified Black teachers and administrators and advocate vigorously for the equal educational opportunities of Black children within those integrated schools. As the direction of public education moved toward standards-based curriculum and high-stakes testing, Blacks faced a gap in student achievement on a variety of measures. This gap was exacerbated in high minority, high poverty schools in urban areas.

Today, the challenges facing Black children in America's schools are vast. In our neediest schools, there is little access to resources, qualified teachers, and a challenging curriculum. In our more affluent schools, Black students still fall behind on a variety of student achievement measures, and those who do fare well must contend with the notion that they are "acting white." In the future, promoting educational achievement for Black children will come from all aspects of a Black community steeped in a tradition of struggle and poised for a future of promise.

Education Issues

The Black community faces educational issues similar to other minority groups, including the need for adequate funding for schools serving minority and disadvantaged students, as well as other issues with a special impact on the community:

- Student achievement gaps need to be aggressively addressed. For example, the percentage of Blacks age 25 and older with a high school diploma or more was 72 percent in the 2000 census, compared to

85.5 percent for whites. In addition, the percentage of Blacks with Bachelor's degrees or more was 14 percent, compared to 27 percent of whites.

- Closing achievement gaps is a critical issue. The performance of Black students is systematically different from that of other racial and ethnic groups. Decreasing gaps in student achievement means that we must *increase* the learning gains of Blacks. This will require the creation of public policies and legislation that support public schools committed to identifying and setting high, worthwhile, and attainable goals for students and ensuring that teachers and students are supported in these efforts. It will also require meaningful collaboration among community organizations and leaders, parents, and the school. *The success of the school must become the success of the community.*
- There is a need to increase diversity and cultural competence in the teaching workforce. Recruiting and retaining teachers of color is important, as some children of color will go through their entire educational career without having a teacher who looks like them or who can identify with the uniqueness of their cultural heritage.
- Adequate and equitable resources are important to the future success and development of Black students. Far too often Black students, males in particular, are unnecessarily placed in special education classes, while the number of Black students who take honors and advanced courses remains significantly below that of other groups. School funding structures that lead to under-funding and under-resourcing our neediest schools have furthered the achievement gaps. All students deserve a quality public education, and this can only occur when we close the gaps in equity and access.

Black Community Issues

- Strengthening the family unit
- Securing adequate and equitable resources for education
- Increasing home ownership and improving economic status

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- Obtaining quality and affordable health care
- Reforming the criminal justice system to reduce the disproportionate number of incarcerated Blacks

Demographics

- There are 39,724,136 Blacks in America, representing 12.9 percent of the total population.
- Blacks make up over 25 percent of the total population in the following states: Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina, Georgia, Maryland, and Alabama.
- The top five cities with the largest Black population are:
 - New York (2.2 million)
 - Chicago (1.84 million)
 - Detroit (787,687)
 - Philadelphia (672,162)
 - Houston (505,101)
- Native-born Blacks comprise 94 percent of the total Black population. Blacks from the Caribbean, Africa, Central and South America make up the majority of the 6 percent of foreign-born Blacks.

- The percentage of Blacks living in poverty was 24.9 percent, double the national average of 12.4 percent, according to the 2000 census.
- More than 2 million Black children, ages five years and older, speak a language other than English at home.

Resources

C.A.R.E: *Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps* is a new guide from the National Education Association providing a multi-themed approach to closing the achievement gaps. It can be found at www.nea.org/teachexperience/careguide.html. For more information, contact NEA Human and Civil Rights, 202-822-7700, hcrinfo@nea.org.

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Special Reports, *We the People, Blacks in the United States*, (Washington, D.C.), www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf.

U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics. *Status and Trends in the Education of Blacks*, (NCES 2003-034) by Kathryn Hoffman and Charmaine Llagos. Project Officer: Thomas D. Snyder. Washington, DC: 2003.