

Black Male Achievement

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Curriculum and Content

Our son, pictured here, dressed in a tuxedo, preparing for his participation in the Georgia All-State Middle School Chorus, will be entering high school next year along with thousands of other Black males throughout the country. Unlike our son, most of the Black males entering middle or high school will not have full access to the curriculum and will be under represented in advanced middle and high school classes.

This month, Black males transitioning from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school, will be receiving 2008/09 course schedules. How many of their parents will have been adequately informed in regard to the type of classes that their sons should be taking to ensure successful college preparation? How many of their parents will fully understand the impact of their sons failure to enter into the advanced middle school math, science, and foreign language pipelines? How many of their parents will clearly understand the criteria for Gifted and Talented identification or honors and AP course enrollment at the high school level?

This month's newsletter is taken from **Chapter 4: Curriculum and Content**, in the book, *"Empowering African-American Males: A Guide to Increasing Black Male Achievement."* My apologies for the "April" newsletter being released in May, however, as a parent, my wife and I have been busily ensuring that our own son has a strong finish to his final year of middle school and that he will be receiving a rigorous course schedule as he enters into his first year of high school. We have gone through the painstaking task of setting up his four-year high school course schedule to take full advantage of the opportunities at

his high school in a way that will maximize his college admission opportunities. His 9th-grade course schedule (listed below) will put him on track to take AP Physics, AP Spanish, and AP Calculus, and College English in the 12th grade. Such classes will prepare him for the SAT and ACT, and make him a strong candidate for admissions into highly-competitive colleges and universities.

- *Honors Freshman Language Arts*
- *Honors Accelerated Math I*
- *Math Research Methods*
- *Honors Biology*
- *Honors Spanish II*
- *Intermediate Chorus*
- *Guitar I and II*

In addition to planning our son's course work, my wife and I also have to prepare our son emotionally for the inevitable cultural isolation that he will experience due to the predictable and foreseeable under representation of Black males in his high school classes. Despite the fact that the high school that he will be attending is 45 percent Black, he is unlikely to have many Black males alongside him in his forthcoming honors and AP classes. Hence, the focus of this month's newsletter.

2007 ACT College Readiness

Ethnicity	English (18)	Math (22)	Reading (21)	Science (24)	All Areas
Asian	73%	61%	56%	37%	32%
White	78%	49%	60%	33%	27%
Hispanic	49%	26%	34%	13%	10%
Black	37%	12%	21%	5%	3%

Under representation in Advanced Classes

“Kunta Kente was the product of a society that held its young in high esteem and developed a network of role models and functional institutions to assist him in his social development. Until the day he was attacked and kidnapped by slavers, Kunta Kente had been raised in a fashion that clearly defined who he was, his responsibility to his parents, relatives, and community, and his sense of manhood.”

- Useni Eugene Perkins

The answer to the question, “Do Black males and their families fully understand the complete scope of curriculum offerings in the district, the importance of advanced science and math, the weight of honors and AP classes on GPA calculations, and how to construct college-bound plans

to pursue student dreams and aspirations?” is NO! To ensure that Black males gain full access to the curriculum, are enrolled in academically rigorous classes, and develop comprehensive college-bound plans, parenting strategies and school-based strategic plans must account for the many barriers (e.g., peer pressure, low expectations, lack of knowledge by parents, and high counselor-student ratios in large urban high schools). For example, the report, “Roadblocks to College” notes:

- *California’s high school counselors are responsible for more students than high school counselors in any other state.*
- *California’s high school teachers are responsible for more students than high school teachers in any other state, and more than a quarter of California high schools routinely assign*

improperly trained teachers to college prep courses.

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- *More than one-half of California high schools offer too few college preparatory classes for all students to complete the college preparatory curriculum.*

With an inadequate number of counselors in schools throughout the country and an accompanying lack of encouragement and support for Black males to enroll in rigorous high schools classes, a walk through the classrooms of both urban and rural high schools will reveal that and the numbers of Black males in honors, AG (academically talented), or AP (Advanced Placement) classes is so small they are barely noticeable to anyone but themselves. They know they sit alone, separated from friends and isolated from their social-cultural support system. They are further isolated in the locker room, at parties, or at weekend gatherings where they cannot share classroom experiences with peers.

Perhaps Carter G. Woodson best summarized this phenomenon in his book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, where he notes:

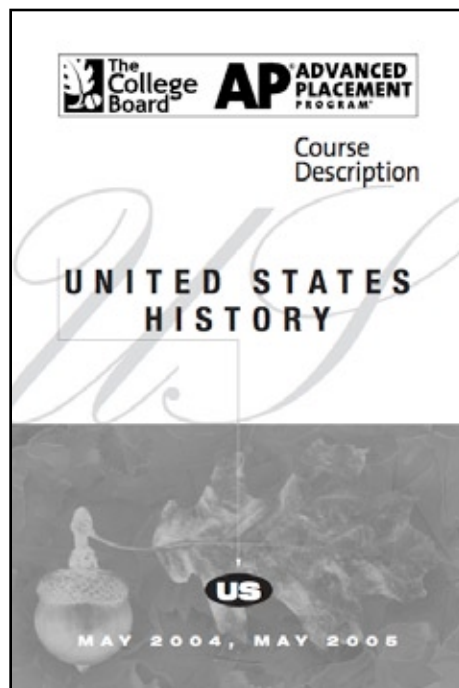
When you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his ‘proper place’ and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit.

The unspoken signals Black males are receiving in regard to their 'proper place' is that they belong in lower level academic classes. The experiences of my wife and I with this issue is a highly personal one, as witnessed through the experiences of our sons, conversations with other Black students and parents, and our discussions with teachers. While the reasons for the tragic lack of Black males in higher-level math and science classes is not explained by definitive research, the anecdotal evidence and experiences of Black students and families identifies several areas which can, and should be addressed through such strategies as:

- *Review course enrollment data to identify inequities*
- *Develop recruitment and support strategies by subject-area*
- *Engage in strategic planning discussions surrounding equity issues*
- *Ensure that parents are part of strategic planning discussions*
- *Create cohorts high performing Black males during the primary grades and provide the necessary support through middle and high school transitions*
- *Engage in vertical collaboration between campuses (i.e., elementary to middle school, middle to high school, and high school to local colleges)*

- *Create before- and after-school academic clubs and competitions*

Such strategies, together with helping parents to understand that the preparation for academic rigor in high school begins in elementary school and requires continuing intervention during middle school.



Ensuring Full Access

Despite school districts throughout the country focusing attention on the 3Rs (Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships), AP classes are oftentimes among the best kept secrets in many school districts. Randomly select Black males in your local high school and ask the following questions:

- *What does 'AP' mean?*
- *What are AP classes and why should you take them?*

- *How many AP classes are offered in your high school?*
- *What is the scoring system on AP exams?*
- *What AP exam score typically qualifies for college credit?*
- *What AP classes are you planning to take?*

To overcome this clearly identifiable "knowledge gap" we must develop stronger relationships between Black males (and their parents) and teachers, counselors, and coaches. Who must not only encourage but explain the importance of academic enrichment programs, academic clubs, or honors, pre-AP, and AP classes within any public school district. For example, at our church (Turner Chapel AME in Marietta, Georgia), we encourage our youth to enroll in summer programs as a means of preparing them for enrollment into rigorous course work during the forthcoming school year. Some of the local programs that our youth are already enrolled in, are:

- *Summer Institute of Robotics*
- *Summer Institute in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Research*
- *Stems Up Technology Camp*
- *Summer Blast Technology Camps*

**AP Exam Performance in U.S. Public Schools by the Class of 2006
During Their High School Years**

Race	Exam Scores for Total Exams Taken					Average Score	Total Exams
	5	4	3	2	1		
White	136,847	222,629	293,619	247,565	145,930	2.96	1,046,590
Asian	42,635	51,122	58,779	51,033	38,123	3.04	241,692
Hispanic	21,475	29,365	41,140	48,988	63,141	2.50	204,113
Black	2,733	7,128	15,349	27,426	41,920	1.96	94,556

Advanced Placement Report to the Nation (p. 84). (2007). The College Board.

There is a commonly held misperception by Black students that honors and AP classes are beyond their capacity, that such classes are for White and Asian students. Subsequently, Black students lack sufficient encouragement from parents and peers and support from teachers to pursue honors level and AP classes. Peers often accuse Black students who enroll in such classes as, “acting white.” This is hardly a new phenomenon, however, authors Ford, Grantham, and Whiting in their book, *“Another Look at the Achievement Gap”* provide current research on this issue. Subsequently, as a group, Black students take fewer AP classes and score lower on the AP exams than virtually every other ethnic group. Contributing to this under enrollment phenomenon is the knowledge gap. Black students and their parents typically do not fully understand why such classes are important, the impact of the additional weight on their GPAs, and why colleges typically place a high value on such classes during the admissions process. When I help parents to understand the potential tuition savings they can receive as a result of their children receiving college credit for AP classes taken in high school I have seen parents turn to their sons and say, “You are smart enough to take

some of those AP classes. You like to draw don’t you? Don’t tell me you can’t take AP Art!”

To ensure that Black males are equitably represented in academically rigorous classes, enrichment programs, and academically oriented clubs and activities, each school must gather its disaggregate data pertaining to Black male enrollment and performance.

- *Ensure that each young man has a kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade course schedule based on his areas of interest, i.e., art, music, dance, science, math, athletics, computers, acting, or talking.*
- *Help each young man set up a subject-area binder for each class, each school year to contain the course syllabus, assignment log, monthly calendar, study sheets, and tabs (i.e., homework, notes, tests and quizzes, extra credit).*
- *Discuss or create a visual of how each class relates to his kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade plan.*
- *Create a parent information sheet that outlines what parents can do to assist students in achieving the highest grade in your class*

and establish a preferred home-school communication method.

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- *Tell students/families at the beginning of the grading period what they will be expected to know at the end of the grading period.*
- *Clarify the standards in parent-friendly language.*
- *Create at-home tips (refrigerator sheets) to reinforce content areas.*
- *Ensure that unit tests, quizzes, and exams are aligned with the standards, reinforce problem-solving approaches, and reinforce testing language (i.e., contrast, compare, and most likely).*
- *Identify student incentives (i.e., grading methodology, make-up policy, and extra credit opportunities) to tap students’ intrinsic motivation.*
- *Provide students and parents with clear grading rubrics for major projects and assignments that are written in parent-friendly language. Grading rubrics should provide examples of quality work and clear step-by-step instructions of how to successfully meet your expectations.*



Math and Science

Algebra is considered the gateway class to higher-level mathematics. The typical high school math track for students being prepared for college enrollment is algebra I, geometry, algebra II, and either algebra III/trigonometry or pre-calculus. Many school districts provide students with the opportunity to not only successfully complete algebra I and geometry during middle school, but award students high school credit toward their high school graduation requirements. Subsequently, students are able to enter onto an even more aggressive math track in high school (e.g., pre-calculus, calculus, AP Calculus AB/BC, AP Statistics, and AP Computer Science) which may provide college credit (in the case of AP classes) and provide excellent preparation for technical or pre-medical areas of study in college, i.e., medicine, science, and engineering.

Black males are among the least likely students to enroll into advanced math and science classes and are among the most likely students to be directed toward trade and vocational studies rather than college preparatory studies. They are still being directed toward becoming employees rather than employers, toward become voters rather than policy makers, not to mention they are the most likely students to be relegated to remedial and lower level classes. Changing this dynamic requires a radical change in thinking and raising of expectations. An example of such a revolutionary change in thinking is *The Algebra Project in Cambridge*, which is inspiring and preparing Black students for entrance into higher-level high school mathematics classes:

The Algebra Project was born out of one parent's concern with the mathematics education of his children in the public schools of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Bob Moses, who had taught secondary school mathematics in New York City and Tanzania, decided that an appropriate goal [vision] for those students was to have enough skills in algebra to qualify for honors math and science courses in high school. His success in producing the first students from the Open Program of the Martin Luther King School to pass the city-wide algebra examination and qualify for ninth-grade honors geometry was a testament to his skill as a teacher. It also highlighted a serious problem: most students in the Open Program were not expected to do well in mathematics. An answer to the question 'What do we need to include in the mathematics education of every middle school

student?' also frames the Algebra Project.

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Dr. Freeman Hrabowski, a graduate of Hampton Institute and President of the University of Maryland Baltimore County, developed the highly successful *Meyerhoff Program* for aspiring Black scientists. The program, which began in 1989, was developed with a clear mission/vision to provide mentoring of targeted Black men initially, then Black women, to prepare them for careers in science, engineering and medical research. The first group of Meyerhoff Scholars were 19 young Black men who enrolled in the fall of 1989. A year later the program was expanded to include Black women and students from across the country. The program has graduated more than 200 students to date, 98 percent of whom are Black. The vast majority have gone on to graduate school. Hrabowski attributes the success of the program to committed professors who foster a culture of collaboration, responsibility, and high expectations among students:

The sophomores help the freshmen and so on. Not only are they expected to excel academically, but they are encouraged to work with inner-city kids and pursue artistic interests as well. Hrabowski further sites: Today, UMBC has become the leading producer of African Americans going on to earn PhDs in science and engineering.

- *Create a collaboration between elementary, middle, and high schools to identify young men who are gifted*

or interested in math and science in the primary grades and create a program to encourage and support their enrollment in academically-challenging classes.

- *Develop programs which recognize and celebrate math and science achievement as pompously as Pop Warner football, AAU/USATF track and field, and youth basketball.*
- *Match young men with professionals, students taking higher-level math and science in high school and college, and teachers who serve as faculty advisors to math and science clubs in middle and high school with primary-age boys to inspire and encourage long-term scholarly achievement.*
- *Have AP and honors high school teachers collaborate with middle and elementary school teachers to identify and nurture the qualities and traits to prepare students to become successful high school students.*
- *Create math and science clubs in the primary grades which feed into companion clubs at the middle and high school level.*
- *Require young men to develop a list of Black mathematicians, scientists, and scholars as a prerequisite to signing up for athletic programs, attending school dances, going to the movies, or playing video games!*

- *Require athletes to compute, maintain, and explain the statistics pertinent to their sport, i.e., batting averages, on-base percentages, free throw percentages, scoring proficiency inside the red zone, or average yards per carry.*
- *Require athletes to be able to explain those components unique to their sport, i.e., speed, agility, lactic acid, metabolic rates, resting heart rates, protein synthesis, carbohydrates as a source of energy, or carbohydrate-versus protein-rich food sources.*
- *Identify young men who have high interest levels or highly-developed math and science abilities and push them into challenging classes, enroll them in challenging programs, and identify after-school and summer programs to nurture and further develop their math and science skills and abilities.*

Incorporating the type of strategies outlined in this month's newsletter will require greater collaboration between feeder schools (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school); a partnership with parents; greater involvement by coaches and mentors in the academic planning and course selection of young men; and a systemic k-12 focus on college preparation. If your school district is only beginning to talk earnestly about college preparation when young men enter into high school then you are already 9 years too late!

Later this month, a look at instruction and how to ensure that Black males get a jump start on the school year and are prepared to succeed academically.

Sincerely,

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