

Black Male Achievement

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Mychal Wynn

Rising Sun Publishing

P.O. Box 70906 • Marietta, GA 30007

(770) 518-0369 • FAX (770) 587-0862

E-mail: info@rspublishing.com • www.rspublishing.com

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Access and Equity

My apologies for not having written an October newsletter. I have spent the past month working to create the infrastructure for a new nonprofit foundation: The Foundation for Ensuring Access and Equity. The nonprofit purpose of the foundation is to expand our work into schools and communities by ensuring access and equity of underrepresented student groups in k-12 coursework, enrichment programs, extracurricular activities, and college enrollment. The data reveals that, predictably, Black males are the most underrepresented students in such programs. The foundation will be actively seeking grants and school-community partnerships in funding such strategic initiatives as starting ACCESS Clubs, Book Clubs, Lunch-n-Learn Seminars at local businesses, and student-parent presentations to provide a k-12 focus that inspires students and encourages parents to take ownership of course selection and EOG, SAT, ACT, and high school exit exam preparation.

Two prophetic events have influenced my thoughts and guided my selection of the data to be included in this month's newsletter. The first event was my pastor, Reverend Kenneth Marcus of Turner Chapel AME church in Marietta, Georgia sermons on the

topic, "Repositioning Yourself" based on Bishop TD Jake's book by the same title. The second event occurred when our church hosted Bishop Jake's BEST Conference, which culminated with Bishop Jake's sermon during the Sunday worship service.

In this month's newsletter I will focus on how we must "Reposition Our Children" for school success. Doing so will require that students and parents:

- *pay close attention to student's elementary and middle school test scores*
- *understand the qualifications for placement into elementary school gifted and talented programs*
- *understand the qualifications for entering into middle school advanced math and foreign language pipelines*
- *identify which middle school classes can be taken for high school credit*
- *understand what is necessary to enter high school on the advanced math and science track*
- *identify the high school subject areas where they are most likely to perform well in honors and AP level classes*
- *choose extracurricular activities and programs that provide leadership development and academic*

enrichment opportunities (i.e., student government, Beta Club, National Honor Society, math club, science club, foreign language clubs, etc.)

- *take the most rigorous high school curriculum that students can be successful in while balancing extracurricular activity involvement*

Reversing Trends

Following such strategies will help to reverse the current underachievement trend where Black students are among:

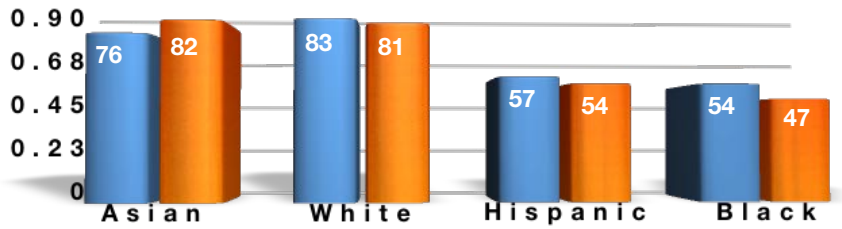
- *the most likely students to fail to meet the Basic level on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing*
- *the most likely students to be retained*
- *the most likely students to fail their high school exit exams*
- *the most likely students to have the lowest scores on the SAT and ACT*
- *the most likely students to drop out of school*

achievement.
Children must be able
to read at a high level

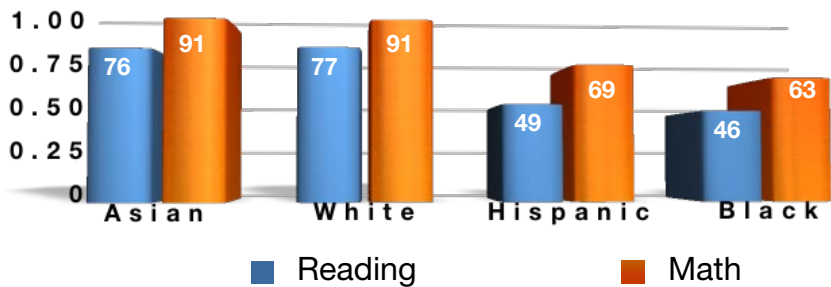
to gain full access to all areas of the curriculum--science, social studies, math, foreign language, all require that children be able to "Read." Not only must children be able to read the words, but they must be able to do so with an understanding and comprehension of what the words mean, what the author is attempting to convey, within what context the words must be understood, and what actions must now be taken. Children must be able to solve problems and to apply critical thinking. They must be able to understand the language of math and they must develop a math foundation, whereas each school year the formulas, concepts, and applications of math build on their preexisting knowledge of mathematics and mathematic principles. Children who do not fully understand fractions when they are taught in the second and third grades will struggle when algebra is taught in the eighth and ninth grades. This is why parents MUST pay attention to the test scores and assessments that are sent home during elementary school.

An analysis of such data should assist parents and educators in expanding their understanding of the link between Black student performance during the primary and middle grades and the gaps that ultimately (if not predictably) develop between Black students and virtually all other student groups in high school course enrollment, SAT/ACT performance, and college readiness. The performance of Black students decreases as they move through the school system (i.e., from

2007 8th Grade NAEP Results Percentage of Students Performing At or Above Basic



2007 4th Grade NAEP Results Percentage of Students Performing At or Above Basic



Source: The Nation's Report Card: Mathematics 2007. National Center for Education Statistics. http://nationsreportcard.gov/math_2007/

Source: The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2007. National Center for Education Statistics. http://nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2007/

If we want to reposition Black children for school success then we must:

- *develop a sense of urgency in our schools, churches, athletic teams, community programs, and homes*
- *pay careful attention to report cards, test scores, class placement, and course enrollment*
- *talk about academic achievement with the same passion and esteem as we talk about athletic achievements*
- *develop a community-wide expectation of academic excellence*

As you review the data that follows, keep in mind that whenever Black students are under performing as a group, that Black males perform at an even lower

rate than Black females. Therefore, if the data is bad for the group, it is even worse for Black males!

NAEP Performance

As indicated on the table above, Black students perform lower than all other student groups on both the fourth- and eighth-grade NAEP testing (The Nation's Report Card (NAEP Results)). By fourth grade, less than half of Black students are performing at or above the basic level in reading and by eighth grade, less than half of Black students are performing at or above the basic level in math—with math being one of the two subjects that are clear predictors of college success (the other being science). In essence the academic future and career opportunities for Black children are severely limited before they even exit elementary school! Reading and mathematics are the cornerstones of academic

elementary to middle school, from middle to high school, and from high school to college). In the report, “The Achievement Trap: How America is Failing Millions of High-Achieving Students From Lower-Income Families” the authors note:

“Sadly, from the time they enter grade school through their postsecondary education, these students lose more educational ground and excel less frequently than their higher-income peers. Despite this tremendous loss in achievement, these remarkable young people are hidden from public view and absent from public policy debates. Instead of being recognized for their excellence and encouraged to strengthen their achievement, high-achieving lower-income students enter what we call the ‘achievement trap’—educators, policy makers, and the public assume they can fend for themselves when the facts show otherwise.”

The authors go on to note:

- Only 56 percent of lower-income students maintain their status as high achievers in reading by fifth grade, versus 69 percent of higher-income students.
- While 25 percent of high-achieving lower-income students fall out of the top academic quartile in math in high school, only 16 percent of high-achieving upper-income students do so.

Black children make up a disproportionately larger number of lower-income students who fall into the lower-income trap. Black students are:

- less likely to be encouraged to pursue academically gifted and academic enrichment activities, programs, and course work.
- less likely to have the necessary “college knowledge” to fully understand class placement, course enrollment, or the importance of early tutorial intervention in math and science.
- less likely to attend schools where there is a focus on AP, IB, and college as oppose to a focus on AYP and proficiency.
- unlikely to participate in study groups with the highest performing students if those students are outside of their immediate peer group.

AP Course Enrollment

Understanding these barriers can help schools and community organizations to focus school-wide and community-wide attention on encouraging and celebrating the academic achievement of Black students and building bridges between Black students and high-performing students from other

racial groups.

Black students take fewer AP (Advanced Placement) classes (see table) and have lower AP exam scores than other student groups. This under enrollment in the most rigorous high school classes has resulted in a predictably lower performance on the SAT and ACT exams. While the number of Black students taking AP classes has increased, they still take substantially fewer AP classes than their Asian, White, and Hispanic peers.

Closing the AP course enrollment gap will require such actions as:

1. Parents must pay closer attention to the standardized test scores, NAEP results, and EOC or EOCT scores during the primary grades.
2. Counselors must encourage Black students to challenge themselves by enrolling in advanced math and science classes during middle school.
3. Black students must be engaged in college-bound discussions and exploratory activities during the primary grades.

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.

4. Parents must be engaged in understanding the data and in constructing middle-through-high school college-bound plans.
5. Athletic coaches must be more encouraging of their athletes reading books during their long stretches of inactivity and enrollment in rigorous high school course work.

Achieving equity in Black student enrollment in rigorous course work will require school-based and home-based strategies:

School-based strategies:

1. Collaborate with feeder schools to identify students.
2. Create cohorts of high-achieving students who take classes together (thereby providing both cultural and gender support).
3. Clearly and accurately explain class placement and enrollment criteria to parents and students.
4. Provide the appropriate support mechanisms for students who are making the transition from on-level classes into more rigorous course work.
5. Engage in teacher collaboration around student achievement and class performance issues.

Home-based strategies:

1. Parents and students must prepare k-12 class schedules, driven by student interests, college aspirations, and that

- reflect the highest level of rigor that students believe themselves capable of.
2. Identify tutors and organize after school and weekend schedules PRIOR to the first day of school.
3. Nurture relationships with students and parents of high-achieving students to build study groups.
4. Expose students to college campuses during the primary grades.
5. Engage in continual assessment of student talents, gifts, abilities, interest, and academic achievement levels.

While every student may not have the academic ability to be successful in such courses as AP Calculus or AP Physics, we are assured that more students would be able to be successful in more rigorous high school classes if we nurtured student areas of interest and provided more timely and effective intervention during the primary and middle grades. We also know that there are many quite capable students receiving 'A's' in on-level classes who, while being challenged, would perform well in honors-level classes.

SAT/ACT Performance

Low performance on 4th and 8th grade assessments, failing to enter into the advanced math and foreign language pipeline in middle school, and lack of rigorous course enrollment in high school, results in predictably lower performance on the SAT and ACT exams. There is a significant performance

gap between Black students and other student groups on the 2007 SAT.

The mean total score of Black students on the 2007 SAT was 1297. This score was:

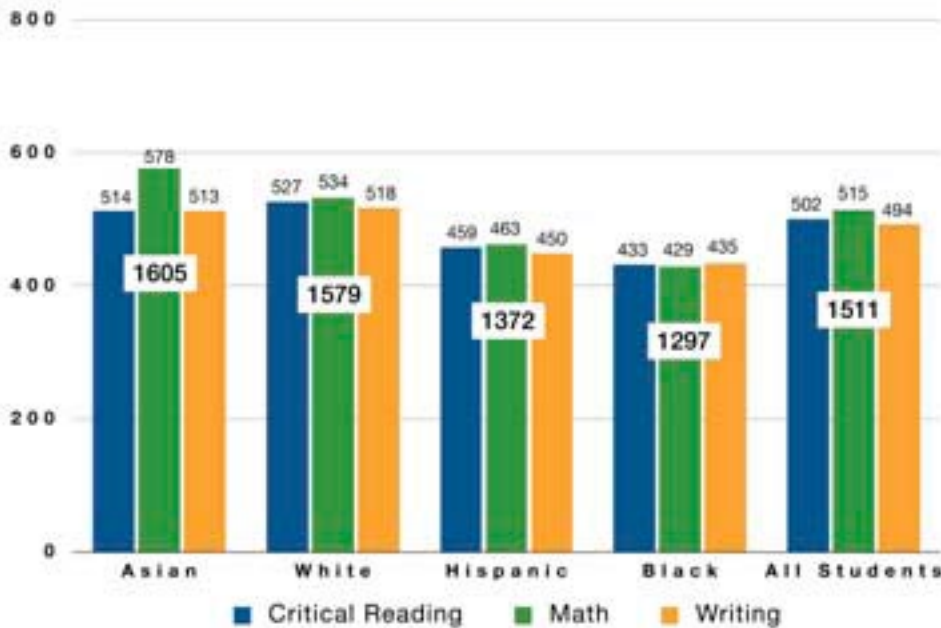
- 23.7 percent (308 points) lower than Asian students.
- 21.7 percent (282 points) lower than White students.
- 5.8 percent (75 points) lower than Hispanic students.

The SAT, which is designed to assess a student's reasoning skills, has been considered by scholars to be both culturally and socioeconomically biased. The mean total scores of students from households earning over \$100,000 per year is 1637 while the mean total score for students whose households earn under \$40,000 per year is 1427. However, the low performance of Black students and the gap between them and other student groups is not limited to their performance on the SAT.

The performance of Black students on the ACT, which is based on what students should have learned through their high school course work, is also lower than the performance of other ethnic groups:

1. The mean composite score of Black students (17) is 33 percent lower than Asian students (22.6), 30 percent lower than White students (22.1), and 10 percent lower than Hispanic students (18.7).

2007 National SAT Performance



- Black students score 35 percent lower than Asian students in English (16.1 versus 21.7).
- Black students score 12 percent lower than Hispanic students in math (17.0 versus 19.0) and 39 percent lower than Asian students in math (17.0 versus 23.6).
- Black students score 32 percent lower than White students in Reading (17.1 versus 22.5).

Asian students are 366 percent more likely than Black students to enroll in a rigorous high school curriculum (see NAEP Transcript Study profiled in the September newsletter). Subsequently, there is a direct correlation between their higher performance on the ACT exam (which is content based) when compared to that of Black students. Again, the focus on meeting “AYP” rather than preparing Black children for “AP” fails to make the connection between primary and middle

school preparation and course selection and the necessary level of college readiness that Black children need for postsecondary success and their ability to have a broad range of career options.

Despite persistent under performance of Black students on elementary, middle, and high school testing, we are encouraged by the reactions of both students and parents when presented with the data. Comments by both parents and students at a recent college-planning seminar at our church and at the recent introduction of an ACCESS Club at North Springs High School in Atlanta, Georgia reaffirm the importance of sharing k-12 Black student performance data:

“I need to meet with my child’s counselor...RIGHT AWAY!”

“I plan to start a college file ASAP. I also plan to demand excellence from my son and to PUSH him into more rigorous course work!”

“I plan to create a custom

strategy for getting my child into college and to take BACK ownership/involvement of his high school career and to definitely work more closely with his counselor and school administrators.”

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As the late Dr. Hilliard advocated, we must look beyond AYP and meeting state proficiency levels to excellence. Instead of focusing on closing the gap between Black and White students we must look to close the gap between Black students and the best students internationally.

Please continue to forward each month’s newsletter to friends and colleagues. Only when there are enough people discussing the issue of Black male achievement will it receive the necessary focus and allocation of resources within school districts throughout the country. Please contact us if your school or agency would like to partner with our foundation (www.accessandequity.org) or to start an ACCESS club in your school or organization.

I will be presenting the opening address on “Teacher Day” at the National Alliance of Black School Educators conference (NABSE) on Friday, November, 16, 2007 (9:15 a.m. in Tennessee AB) at the Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville, Tennessee. I hope to see you there.

Sincerely,

Mychal Wynn