

# Black Male Achievement

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Dr. Asa G. Hilliard, III

*"I am a teacher, a psychologist and a historian. As such, I am interested in the aims, the methods and the content of the socialization processes that we ought to have in place to create wholeness among our people."*

— Dr. Asa G. Hilliard, III

Dr. Asa Grant Hilliard, III, world-renowned Pan-Africanist educator, historian, and psychologist, passed from this life on August 13, 2007 in Cairo, Egypt. Dr. Hilliard was in Egypt to deliver a keynote lecture at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization (ASCAC), an organization he helped found. He was also lecturing for a study trip led by Rev. Jeremiah Wright of Chicago. The cause of death is attributed to complications from malaria. "Dr. Hilliard was in his favorite place, with his favorite person—our mother, when he died," said his daughter, Robi Hilliard Herron.



Although I did not have the opportunity to study under Dr. Hilliard, over the years, I heard him speak on many occasions. The last occasion that I heard Dr. Hilliard speak was at the National

Council on Educating Black Children, whose national conference was focused on Educating Black Males. Dr. Hilliard had such a wealth of knowledge that I found myself taking copious notes whenever I had the privilege of hearing him speak. On this particular occasion I made note of three important points pertaining to the education of Black males, made by Dr. Hilliard:

- *There was a time when there was community-wide encouragement for Black children to go to college.*
- *The standards being pursued for Black students are AYP (Annual Yearly Progress), state proficiency, and high school graduation while the standards being pursued for White students are IB (International Baccalaureate), AP (Advanced Placement), and college.*
- *We must avoid riding the "One trip pony," i.e., "All we need to do is ..." There is no one road to increasing student achievement, but many different strategies.*

I believe in these pertinent and salient points, embraced by a remarkable and passionate scholar. The passing of Dr. Hilliard has left a void in the education of Black children and we have lost

a role model and powerful voice of advocacy for the education of Black males. It will take many voices to fill the void left by Dr. Hilliard and many more educators demanding that the issue of Black male achievement be moved to the forefront of the national education agenda.

Black Male Achievement

Dr. Hilliard, we will miss you.

When Black males lag behind in elementary school math and science assessments, fail to enter into advanced math and foreign language pipelines in middle school, and take the least-rigorous high school curriculum, it should come as no surprise that they represent the demographic subgroup most likely to fail their high school exit exams, score lower than other subgroups on both the SAT and ACT, are most likely to drop out of high school, and are the most unlikely students to matriculate into college. Changing the course requires that parents better understand the importance of elementary school assessments and that they become better informed as to how to chart their son's k-12 journey.

Parents must begin gathering Black student achievement data (Black male-specific when it is available) within their state, local school district, and local schools before the beginning of the school year and ideally before

**Georgia NAEP Results: Grade 8 2005  
Percentage of Students Scoring At or Above Basic**

<b>Ethnicity/Gender</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Writing<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Science</b>
Asian	79%	84%	86%	71%
White	79%	75%	87%	72%
Hispanic	59%	48%	58%	35%
Black	49%	43%	77%	29%
Female	73%	62%	89%	55%
Male	61%	62%	75%	51%

National Center for Educational Progress (2007). *The Nation's Report Card: State Profiles*. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/profile.asp>

1. Reflects 2002 scores.

their children enter kindergarten. Parents must also keep in mind that local assessments are important to measure what their child is learning compared to other children within their state.

However, national assessments such as the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) provide a measure of how their children are performing when compared against other students nationally. If you are a teacher, coach, counselor, or mentor, then your knowledge of how Black males are faring within your local school district should be used to assist parents in developing the necessary intervention strategies during the primary grades.

Our younger son is about to enter the 8th grade. At the end of this school year he will have to pass the Georgia CRCTs (criterion-referenced competency tests) in order to be promoted to the 9th grade. He will also have to maintain an '80' average in 8th-grade math to qualify for admission into the Math and Science magnet program at one

of our local high schools. My wife and I have carefully reviewed his 7th-grade CRCT scores and have been in touch with his math teacher to ensure early intervention should he struggle with any of the concepts.

My wife and I must take into account the performance of Black students on both the Georgia and national assessments when planning the appropriate intervention for our son. Black student performance on the 8th-grade Georgia CRCTs at 83 percent (Reading), 73 percent (Math), 84 percent (English), 60 percent (Science), and 77 percent (Social Studies) is cause for alarm. However, their performance on the 8th-grade NAEP at 49 percent (Reading), 43 percent (Math), 77 percent (Writing), and 29 percent (Science), is cause to sound the alarm! To identify how Black students are performing within your local school district:

- *Go to the National Center for Education Statistics' website (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/profile.asp>) to gather information about how Black students compare to the performance of other students in your state on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). My wife and I learned that the performance of Black males in Georgia schools is worst than that of Asian and White males across all subject areas with the largest gaps occurring in math and science in both fourth- and eighth-grade testing.*
- *Go to your state department of education's website for information regarding Black male performance on EOG (end-of-grade), CRCT (criterion-referenced competency tests), or EOCT (end-of-course tests) for the grade level that your son will be tested during the coming school year. The table listed here, was taken from the Georgia Department of Education's website ([http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea\\_communications.aspx?ViewMode=1&obj=1392](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_communications.aspx?ViewMode=1&obj=1392)).*

**High School Graduation Rates**

Identify the Black male enrollment and high school graduation rates within your state and local school district. Consider the Schott Foundation's report ([www.schott-foundation.org](http://www.schott-foundation.org)), *Public Education*

### Georgia High School Graduation Exams Pass Rates 2007

Ethnicity/Gender	English		Social	
	Lang. Arts	Math	Studies	Science
White	98%	95%	91%	80%
Asian	94%	96%	88%	87%
Native American	94%	89%	83%	71%
Black	93%	81%	73%	51%
Hispanic	88%	86%	73%	54%
Female	96%	89%	81%	63%
Male	94%	89%	84%	70%

Georgia Department of Education (2007). Spring 2007 Georgia High School Graduation Tests in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science. [http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ci\\_testing.aspx?PageReq=CI\\_TESTING\\_GHSGT](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ci_testing.aspx?PageReq=CI_TESTING_GHSGT)

### Special Ed./Gifted and Talented

the school’s courtyard, considered by many to be, “the white tree” three nooses were found hanging from the tree. The ensuing slap on the wrist of the White students identified as having hung the nooses from the tree, protests by Black students, and physical altercations between Black and White students ultimately resulted in the arrests of six Black students who were initially charged with second degree murder for their involvement in one of the physical altercations. An all white jury convicted Mychal Bell, a 16-year-old sophomore (Black male) of second-degree battery. Bell now faces up to 22 years in prison. Jena High School has a student population of 521 students that are 81.4 percent White; 17.3 percent Black; 1 percent Native American; and .4 percent Hispanic.

While the plight of the Jena Six has renewed awareness of the inequity in the discipline admin-

and Black Male Students: The 2006 State Report Card or go to the EPE Research Center to view graduation data within your state and local school district.

The current statewide Black male graduation rate in Georgia is 39 percent. The Black male graduation rate within our local school district [Fulton County] is 37 percent. In our county, the gap between Black male and White male graduation rates is the highest in the state (39 percent). A low high school graduation rate reveals a systemic k-12 problem. Black male performance during the primary grades goes unmonitored; students develop a weak language, writing, math, and science foundation culminating in lower level course assignment during the middle school years; students struggle—often falling further behind during middle school and enter high school as struggling learners. They are ill-prepared to enroll in rigorous academic classes. Frustrated by their inability to perform successfully across a broad

range of subject areas, they begin focusing their attention on peers, sports, and trouble making. The end result is lower high school graduation rates, higher rates of suspension and expulsion, and an overwhelming sense of frustration and hopelessness.

Currently making national headlines is the story of six Black high school students from Jena High School in Jena, Louisiana, i.e., the “Jena Six.” The day after a Black student sat beneath a tree in

Category	US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights 2002 Survey		Fulton County Schools Percentage of Students	
			Male	
	Black	White	Black	White
Enrollment	20.36	21.52	20.91	22.65
Gifted/Talented	7.17	37.93	5.57	36.04
Mental Retardation	27.03	13.51	40.54	11.71
Emotional Disturbance	12.20	7.32	47.15	30.08
Specific Learning Disability	12.82	13.54	32.85	29.78
Out-of-School Suspensions	24.57	3.72	53.62	12.02
Expulsions	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0

Holzman, M., (2006). Public Education and Black Male Students: The 2006 State Report Card. Schott Educational Inequality Index (p. 34). Cambridge, MA: The Schott Foundation for Public Education.

istered to Black youth, both in schools and in the criminal justice system, the inequities between Black and White students extends beyond out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (and in this case, criminal prosecution) to gifted and talented identification, special education placement, and course enrollment at all levels of schooling (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). In 2002, long before the Jena Six grabbed national headlines, the U.S. Department of Education reported the following statistics in regard to public education within the state of Louisiana [*Public Education and Black Male Students: The 2006 State Report Card*, p. 43]:

- *Black males are 300 percent less likely than White males to be identified as gifted and talented.*
- *Black males are 255 percent more likely to be identified as suffering from mental retardation than White males.*
- *Black students make up 47.74 percent of the student population and account for 66.74 percent of suspensions and 69.54 percent of expulsions.*
- *Black males are 229 percent more likely than White males and 612 percent more likely than White females to be expelled from school.*

The table on the preceding page was also taken from the Schott Foundation's report. White males within our school district [Fulton County Schools] are 647 percent more likely to be identified

as Gifted and Talented while Black males are 346 percent more likely than White males and 300 percent more likely than White females to be identified with mental retardation. The data also indicates that Black males are suspended from school at a rate of 446 percent more than White males and 1441 percent more than White females.

Such disparities have, and continue to be, contributing factors to the low Black male high school graduation rate and influences the perceptions of Black student potential in the minds of parents, teachers, and students themselves. Such disparities are not limited to Fulton County (as indicated in the table) or Jena, Louisiana, but are reflected by the data in school districts throughout the country.

As was previously noted by Dr. Hilliard, "*The standards being pursued for Black children are AYP, proficiency, and high school graduation.*" Only when we gather the disaggregate data pertaining to special education, gifted and talented, honors, Pre-AP, and AP enrollment and assign someone the mission of identifying and correcting such inequities will we begin to tap into the undeniable gifts of Black children in general and Black males in particular.

Reversing such trends will require taking such steps as:

- *Reassessing how and who identifies the gifts and disabilities in students.*
- *Creating stronger relationships with Black families to avoid missing the gifts of their children and misdiagnosing potential*

- *Recognizing the cultural isolation and providing stronger support for, and encouragement of, Black students who are placed into gifted and talented and other academically accelerated programs.*
- *Building stronger relationships between Black families and their respective school communities so that schools serve as extensions of the community in monitoring and influencing the behaviors of Black students.*
- *Being data driven in our analysis of discipline policies, discipline infractions, and discipline consequences to ensure equity and fairness for all students.*

Special consideration for parents:

- *Identify your child's gifts and bring them to the attention of school-based personnel.*
- *Know what the qualifications are for gifted and talented placement and advanced course enrollment for your school district.*
- *Recognize the potential cultural isolation to be experienced by your child and cultivate relationships with teachers and other families to provide a support mechanism.*

- *Develop the necessary support (i.e., friends, tutors, supplemental materials, after school study-time, etc.), PRIOR to pushing your child into academically accelerated classes.*
- *Celebrate your child's academic achievements as enthusiastically as you do their athletic or creative accomplishments.*

Without such strategies the low math/science performance of Black students during the primary grades, together with their under enrollment in gifted and talented classes will lead to foreseeable under enrollment in middle school advanced math and foreign language classes, and under enrollment in high school honors and AP classes. The College Board's, *Advanced Placement Report to the Nation 2007* (see table in next month's newsletter) highlights the huge disparity between Black students and other ethnic groups on both the number of AP exams taken and scores earned.

## Tracking Performance

Tracking Black male performance on state and national testing within your local school district and identifying inequities in talented and gifted and special education placement; suspensions and expulsions; middle school advanced course placement; and high school honors and AP course enrollment can all help to shape a holistic plan of timely intervention and strategies for encouraging and supporting increased Black male enrollment in rigorous middle and high school courses.

As 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. Next month, I will examine the inequities in rigorous course enrollment in high school and the resulting low performance on the ACT and SAT examinations.

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*Sincerely,*

*Mychal Wynn*

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**Georgia CRCT Results: Grade 8 2007**  
**Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding the Standard**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>English Lang. Arts</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Social Studies</b>
Asian	94%	96%	94%	89%	93%
White	94%	89%	93%	86%	92%
Black	83%	73%	84%	60%	78%
Hispanic	80%	75%	78%	65%	77%

Georgia Department of Education (2007). CRCT Results for Grade 8, 2007. [http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea\\_communications.aspx?ViewMode=1&obj=1392](http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/pea_communications.aspx?ViewMode=1&obj=1392)

