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ABSTRACT
                This suggested blueprint for actions to promote
academic and personal success for the African American male student
begins with an analysis of cultural factors in the lives of these
students, starting with family structure. The shortage of positive
African American male role models, the perceptions of societal racism
and victimization, and the existing African American male subculture
work against academic achievement. To counter these forces, the
blueprint recommends: (1) high but realistic expectations; (2) parent
and family involvement; (3) parent centers; (4) emphasis on the whole
child; (5) building self-esteem; (6) cooperative learning; (7)
cross-age and peer tutoring; (8) learning-styles instruction; (9)
prevention and assessment of chilly classroom environments; (10)
integration of African American males into class activities; and (11)
enrichment of the classroom with African American male role models.
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Promoting Success for the African-American Male Student: A Blueprint for Action
by
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Defining the African-American Male Crisis

There is substantial evidence that, especially among urban and poor African-American males, a crisis is upon us. This African-American Male Crisis is characterized by some alarming statistics:

• **It is projected that, by the Year 2000, 70% of African-American males may be imprisoned, awaiting trial, addicted to drugs, or killed** (Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life, 1988). Moreover, fewer than 30% of all black students take courses that prepare them for a four-year college. Of all African-Americans in college, 43% enroll in two-year colleges, but only 10% make the transition to four-year colleges.

• **57.5% of African-American children live in single parent homes** (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992). A large number of African-American males are from single parent homes, headed by a matriarch guardian, older sister, aunt, or grandmother. Children from single parent families are more likely to show behavioral problems. Some of these problems include: absenteeism, tardiness, truancy, inefficient study habits at home, and disruptive classroom behavior.

• **60% of African-American children live in poverty.** A child's chances of living in poverty in a single parent family are six times as high as they would be in a two-parent family (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1992).

One must also consider the significant demographic changes that have already occurred in this country as well as the projections related to minority population increases. In 1970, students of color made up 21% of public school enrollment; by 1990, they made up 31% ("How We're Changing," 1994). By the year 2000, the anticipated increase in African-American enrollment is 19% (Kominski & Adams, 1991).

Numerous African-American students are not being adequately served by society, government, the community, their families, and the public schools. In school, they are disciplined, expelled, and suspended at higher rates than any other group, and are more likely than whites to be diagnosed as mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed. These students are turned off to life and to school (Comer, 1987). They feel they have no stake in the school. There is no sense that "this is my place." The students can perform adequately on the playground and in a variety of other places, but not in school.

Dr. James Comer contends that we must move rapidly in implementing solutions to the "Black Male Crisis." He states that if not attended to quickly and properly, the Black Male Crisis can escalate to a point where a solution is almost impossible (Comer, 1991).

Comer found that many of the schools' professional staff respond to young African-American males "by controlling, or attempting to control, or by having low expectations." This

caused the students either to not respond or respond in ways that made matters worse. As educators, we need to make these students feel that the school is their place. The urgent need to restructure both instruction and the curriculum is clearly evident.

Cultural Factors in the Lives of African-American Males

Family Structure

Based on recently released data from the U.S. Bureau of Census (1992), African-American children living with just one parent increased from 31.8% in 1970 to 45.8% in 1980 to 57.5% as of March 1991. Of the 5.8 million African-American children living with one parent, the vast majority, 5.5 million, live with the mother.

Adults other than a child's parents are taking on signifi- cant childrearing roles (Reglin, 1993b). In the last 20 years, the percentage of African-American children being raised by a grandparent has risen from 3.2% to 12.5% (one in eight) (Edwards & Young, 1992). The types of households in which African-American children under eighteen years of age live commonly include foster parents, extended families, children living with other relatives, adoptive parents, or reconstituted and blended families.

Shortage of Positive African-American Male Role Models

Few positive male role models are in the environments of African-American male children. Given the flight of middle-class African-Americans from inner-city neighborhoods and the high incidence of unemployment among those who remain, African-American male students suffer from a lack of appropriate, mainstream, male role models not only at home, but in their communities and in the media (Ascher, 1992).

Prince (1990), who runs a mentoring program at Morehouse College in Atlanta for African-American elementary school students, points out that "more than 40% do not see their fathers at all in a typical year." Only one in five sleeps in a father's home in a typical month. In short, more and more of these children simply do not know what it means to have a father. Instead, African-American males "are surrounded by an overabundance of negative images of black men."

The negative images of blacks on the streets, in schools, and in the media have worked serious harm on the self-esteem of African-American male students. Young African-Ameri-

cans see few alternative images or models. Moreover, the pervasive negative image of African-Americans influences teachers, who complete the vicious circle by doubting the abilities of their African-American male students.

Perceptions of Racism and Victimization

Many African-American children are informed by African-American adults in the home and in the community that economic and social problems faced by their people are the result of racism by a white society. Conversations about being a victim are echoed throughout the lives of these children. They start thinking like a victim at an early age, even though they may not have experienced any racism. These children start to believe that working hard in school to get good grades will not lead to a successful future in their adult lives because of the inequities in society. Even in the absence of peer pressures, the victimization perspective will prevent the male children from adopting serious academic attitudes and persevering in their schoolwork (Ogbu, 1990).

The relationship between African-American parents and school administrators does not help to promote academic achievement among African-American children. African-Americans have acquired a basic distrust of both the public schools and school personnel and believe that their children are provided with an inferior education. Ogbu stated that the legacy of distrust among African-Americans may need to be addressed by more than high teacher expectations.

The African-American Male Subculture

Hale-Benson (1986), in her study of African-American culture and history, contends that the culture transmitted to black children through their families and churches stands in sharp contrast to the dominant culture's approach to education which the children encounter in integrated schools. Recent research studies discuss a new subculture dominant with African-American male students that causes cultural conflict in the school building (Majors & Billson, 1992; Owens, 1993; Reglin & Harris, 1992). The conflict adversely affects these male children's adjustment and learning. This subculture is formed from a significant focus on popular sports figures, popular entertainers (particularly rap groups), and interactions with the peer group. The peer group assumes the role of the extended family and becomes a major factor in reinforcing the values and behaviors that make up this subculture.

Much of the subculture derived from sports, music videos, entertainment (rap groups), peer groups, and TV are

attempts to fill voids in the students' lives. These voids are silent pleas to become a meaningful part of a group and to establish meaningful relationships. These children need many adults in their lives, especially male adults, with whom they can establish positive connections.

White-Hood (1990) believes African-American males represent a subculture that is unique. The group of behaviors which exemplifies this subculture is known as "cool posing." Majors and Billson (1992) describe cool posing as "a set of language, mannerisms, gestures, and movements that exaggerate or ritualize masculinity. The essence of cool is to appear in control, whether with an aloof facial expression, the clothes you wear, a haircut, gestures, or the way you talk." In Wylie (1990), Dr. Richard Majors defined cool posing as a coping mechanism used by African-American males to deal with the bitterness of racism in this society. He further explained that cool posing is an ego-booster comparable to the kind that white males find through work, school, media, support networks, and social surroundings. He contends that black males do not have the same opportunity to fulfill the traditional standards of manhood—for example, being the breadwinner, provider, or protector.

Majors and Billson (1992) see cool posing as a mask hiding many of the problems the African-American male child confronts on a daily basis. The cool pose is a camouflage within his environment, hiding his hurt, and it is often misread by educators as aggressive and irresponsible behavior.

A Blueprint for Action

All educators involved in the success or failure of African-American male students must be encouraged and trained to plan and implement effective strategies for African-American male students that will reduce feelings of hopelessness and despair and engender higher self-esteem and success. The remainder of this report will present specific strategies in a Blueprint for Action.

High but Realistic Expectations

According to Edmonds (1979), an effective school is characterized by a school climate that "brings an equal percentage of its highest and lowest social classes to minimum mastery" and promotes high expectations for all students. Even though this effective schools research was shared with educators many years ago, African-American students, especially males, still lag behind white students in achievement measures. A paramount reason is due to the

unchanged climate in the public schools, a climate which continues to reflect the white middle-class culture and values.

An important factor that perpetuates this climate and simultaneously fuels the subpar academic motivation and achievement of many African-American students is the failure to have high expectations for all students; instead there are differential expectations. There are high expectations for academics and behaviors for the majority white students and low expectations for African-Americans. High but realistic expectations for the achievement of all students should permeate schools.

Achievement standards are a part of the learning system that often present stumbling blocks for African-American male students. Too often, they perceive that much less is expected of them than other students. The standards for all students should be high but attainable (Reglin, 1990). Some students may take longer to reach the standards, but instructional programs should provide for continuing effort until the desired standards are reached.

Teachers must be made cognizant of the danger of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" and learn how to model behaviors denoting high but realistic expectations. According to Good and Brophy (1991), self-fulfilling prophecy effects are powerful because they induce a significant change in student behavior. Self-fulfilling prophecy effects are those in which an originally erroneous expectation leads to behaviors that cause the expectation to become true. What you expect, you get.

Teachers who expect that African-American male students cannot achieve academically will model inappropriate teaching behaviors to support this erroneous assumption. The behaviors will detract from the achievement opportunities of these students resulting in lower achievement by African-American male students.

There are effective strategies that, when used with African-American male students, support high and realistic expectations: (1) the use of activity-oriented learning with real problems; (2) the development of higher-level thinking skills to deal with problems and conditions in their lives; (3) acceptance of the students as they are, giving them the necessary experiences to help them become autonomous; and (4) elimination of the debilitating system of competition in the classroom and replacement of the system with one that is essentially cooperative in nature.

When high achievement and high standards are expected of African-American male students, they will rise to the challenge. When teachers set low standards of perfor-

mance, they can expect these children to adopt the low standards. All African-American students are capable of greater success in school.

Parent/Family Involvement

There is a misperception that many parents or families of low-income or underachieving students are unskilled and feel they have nothing to offer the public schools. This is definitely untrue! More than anything, it is these parents who need to become a part of the educational setting. They need to be made to feel comfortable doing whatever it is they do best.

Educators need to restructure their conceptualization of parent involvement to reflect the 1990s—a parent/family focus as opposed to a focus on promoting school involvement of only biological parents. A parent/family focus targets strategies at significant family members of underachieving students to get the family members to become active in meaningful educational activities with their children (Reglin, 1993b). This comprehensive definition recognizes parents/ family members as having talents and skills which can be used for their own welfare and well-being as well as the welfare of their children and school. Parents/family members must be "invited" into the school to use their talents and skills.

Having African-American male children's own parents/ family active in the school makes a big difference :o the academic program (Brandt, 1986). Students hurry out of their classrooms after class to show their papers to family members who are in the school. In addition, these students don't act in troublesome ways because they want to maintain the respect of both family members and teachers.

A survey of families is an important first step in pursuing school involvement with a parent/family focus. Survey questions could include: occupation of parents/family members: times available during a 24-hour-day when they would be able to work with or assist the classroom teacher: various interests and/or avocations of this group: and their willingness to share these with their child's classroom teacher and fellow students.

Parent Centers

The purpose of parent centers is to ensure that parents who traditionally don't get involved in school will feel more positive about the school and more welcome in the school (Stevens, 1992). There are many elements of an effective parent center. A center should be open during morning, afternoon, and evening hours to accommodate working and nonworking parents. One or two paid parents of students in the school should coordinate the parent center and aggressively recruit more parent volunteers.

A center could sponsor General Education Development (GED) classes for parents as well as other relevant classes. Parents could contact other parents to relay information about problems at school, medicine that may be urgently needed, and arrangements for school social functions. Parents should be available to offer comfort to children in moments of crisis. A parent center can be organized in any school. The cost is low: money from Chapter 1 and other special programs can be used, or small grants from local businesses or foundations could be obtained.

An Emphasis on The Whole Child

Like all children, African-American male students perform better in a classroom where teachers do not merely teach subjects, they teach people. Educators must model better interpersonal skills and establish a good rapport with the student. There are many ways to do this.

1. Show empathy for the personal problems of students. Model respect and genuine sincerity at all times.

2. When conferencing with students concerning academic and discipline problems, attempt to have private conferences and remember to begin and end the conversation with positive information.

3. Practice good listening skills. Don't interrupt the student while he is trying to tell his side of the story.

4. Help students solve their personal and immediate concerns. Work on trust-building. Show patience and give the trust enough time to build.

5. "Catch the students being good" and reinforce these positive behaviors. Dwelling on negative behaviors will result in alienating the students and reinforcing the negative behaviors.

6. Send positive notes home, make positive telephone calls, and make positive comments to parents and family embers when warranted.

7. Do not be aloof with students but deliberately plan to have many positive interactions with them, particularly at school events and in the presence of parents/family and friends.

8. In the classroom, do not embarrass or "push the students in a corner."

Self-Esteem Building

When African-American male students feel better about themselves, they do better in school. The simple fact is that

many African-American males today are not receiving enough positive, nurturing attention from adults, either at home or at school. This causes more and more of these students to have low levels of self-esteem. Following are three strategies that promote high self-esteem (Canfield, 1990).

1. **Teach the African-American male students to focus on the positive.** In order to feel successful, you have to have experienced success. Many students, because they feel they have never done anything successful, need to be coached. Often this is because they equate "success" with winning a medal, getting rich, becoming class president, being a successful rap singer, or being a Michael Jordan. As a class activity, have the students draw and share their past achievements. With some probing and discussion, assist the students in identifying some successful aspects of their lives they have not recognized before.

2. **Teach the African-American male students to monitor self-talk.** Each of us thinks 50,000 thoughts per day, and many of them are about ourselves. Because of bad experiences, many African-American male students think negative thoughts. Conduct brief (about five minutes) activities designed to replace negative thoughts—I can't dance, I'm not smart, and I don't like my face—with positive self-talk—I can learn to do anything I want, I am smart, and I love and accept myself the way I am. Teach the students to say, "Cancel, Cancel" when they hear themselves or another person saying something negative about them and to replace the negative remark with a positive one. Also, whenever others put them down, they are to repeat the following "antidote" sentence: "No matter what you say or do to me, I'm still a worthwhile person."

3. **Establish classroom support groups.** It is possible for some African-American male students to come to school for a whole day and never once be the center of positive attention. Support groups help focus this kind of attention on the student. Ask the students to find partners and then give them three minutes to talk about any positive topic they may be interested in. For example students might ask, "What movie did you see last? Did you enjoy it? Why? If you could become president of the United States for one day, or alternatively, president of your neighborhood organization, what changes would you make and why?" Students learn that it is a positive, healing experience to talk about their feelings, and they become bonded to their fellow students.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is defined as students working together in groups with group goals and individual account-

ability. The groups are organized using both high- and low-achieving students, whites and minorities, and males and females. They work together to be rewarded as a team, as well as for their individual achievement and improvement (Tyrrell, 1990).

Cooperative learning helps students from culturally diverse backgrounds become friends and understand each other's culture. Cooperative learning is helpful in learning academic content, developing cognitive skills, developing social skills, and enhancing character education. There is evidence that cooperative learning has a positive effect on classroom climate, self-esteem among students, internal locus of control, role-taking abilities, attendance, and the liking of learning among minority students (Johnson & Johnson, 1988). It is estimated that only about 10% of all teachers are using cooperative learning (Willis, 1992), but it is spreading fast.

Cooperative learning procedures can reinforce the efforts of African-American male children to carry on their schoolwork successfully. African-American male students working on projects in groups rather than in isolation are usually more motivated to carry out the project.

Cross-Age and Peer Tutoring

A significant number of research studies documents the positive effects of tutoring on self-esteem, attitudes, and achievement (Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982). Tutoring causes antisocial students and underachievers to take their own work more seriously. Cross-age tutoring is more effective when African-American male students tutor younger students.

African-American male students relate well to those who are not far in age and experience from themselves. Younger students may learn more from the tutor than from the teacher because of personality clashes or communication problems. The tutor may use language or examples that are more readily understood by the tutee. Tutors who are close in age to tutees may remember their own difficulties with the materials. If possible, coordinate cross-age (older children working with younger children) and peer tutoring (students tutored by classmates) to be accomplished in cooperative learning groups. This will prevent many problems such as an African-American male student being afraid of losing face before his peers, or a student believing he knows more than the student who is tutoring.

Learning Styles Instruction

Goodlad (1984) found that teachers tend to teach the way they prefer to learn. As a result, the learning styles and needs

6

of many African-American male students, which are different from the teachers, tend to go unmet. These findings held true from kindergarten through university, with the variety of teaching styles and strategies decreasing the higher one went in school. From the fourth grade on, Goodlad found lecture to be the primary teaching style about 70% of the time. This figure increased in high school.

Hale-Benson (1986) states that African-American students have a different learning type than white students, one that is unique to the African-American culture. A significant number of researchers supporting learning styles instruction contend that the emphasis of traditional education has been upon molding and shaping African-American male children so that they can be fitted into an educational process designed for white, middle-class children (Delpit, 1988; Shade, 1989). African-American children often learn best when cooperative rather than competitive teaching techniques are used (Cohen, 1988; Slavin, 1983; Stahl & VanSickle, 1992).

After reviewing the research, Banks (1994) concluded that African-American and Hispanic-American students tend to be more field-sensitive in their learning styles than mainstream white students. Field-sensitive students tend to work with others to achieve a common goal and are more sensitive to the feelings and opinions of other people than are field-independent students. Field-independent students prefer to work independently and to compete for and gain individual recognition. According to Banks, students who are field-independent are more often preferred by teachers and tend to get higher grades.

The Myers-Brigg Type Indicator (MBTI), a learning style instrument that provides bias-free learning style profiles, was given to five high school science classes in a county with one of the highest rates of both poverty and African-Americans of any county in North Carolina (Melear & Pitchford, 1992). This study found a significant difference in the learning styles of African-Americans and white students in the science classes. It found that African-Americans, particularly the males, had higher scores than the white students in four categories: Extraverts (E), Sensing (S), Thinking (T), and Perceiving (P).

The conclusion was that the learning environment for students with these preferences was best met by: (1) providing opportunities for talking; (2) providing learning experiences which are mostly concrete, related to real-life situations, and practical; (3) providing logical learning experiences; and (4) allowing flexibility in both completion and location of tasks.

Teachers can best accommodate the varied learning styles in the classroom by using a variety of learning situations and media with students. For example, some students should be permitted to work with other students, with teachers, with other adults, with multimedia, and cooperatively on computers.

Prevention and Assessment of "Chilly" Classroom Climates

A warm and supportive learning climate is encouraged when teachers make positive statements about the behaviors of all students. Teachers should stress the positive aspects of African-American male students when discussing information about these students in places such as the teachers' lounge (Reglin, 1993a). Much of the conversation about students that takes place in the teachers' lounge is negative and promotes a "cold" learning climate. Teachers should avoid such damaging and unprofessional talk at all times.

There are many excellent classroom climate surveys (Reglin, 1993a) that are helpful in assessing the climate of the classroom. Teachers should administer the survey to students during the first two weeks of class and every three months thereafter. Teachers need to ascertain if their teaching behaviors or activities have created a warm or cold classroom climate, particularly for African-American male students. If the survey indicates a cold climate, the students do not feel the teacher is approachable and the activities are not fun, interesting, or relevant. The teacher must then evaluate himself or herself and the teaching behaviors and activities.

Teachers must model appropriate behaviors in and out of class; i.e., smiling more, being more friendly, not making sarcastic remarks, and demonstrating more enthusiasm and concern for the students. Effective places to accomplish this are in the hallways, cafeteria, library, and at after-school and weekend events.

Integration of the Interests and Experiences of African-American Male Students in Class Activities

The most common difficulty African-American male students encounter is in the use of artificial or simulated activities or exercises to practice what they are expected to learn. Many of these exercises are embedded in situations that are strange to minority students. For example, there was a sixth grade class in Florida in which balancing a bank checking account was used for practicing some mathematical skills (Tyler, 1989). On inquiry, it was found that none of the

students had bank accounts, nor did many of the parents. They were puzzled and confused about the context of the practice exercises and did not concentrate attention on the mathematical skills.

Using African-American students' interest, and experiences can help to make exercises much less boring and much more effective. Everyone likes to feel that someone is interested in his life. This interest also helps to improve students' feelings of self-worth. Teachers can ascertain the African-American male students' interests and experiences through inventories, class discussions, and teacher-student discussions. Find out who the students' heroes are and what their favorite sports teams and hobbies are. Make a point to talk to students after class, in the halls, and at after-school events.

Enrichment of the Classroom with African-American Male Role Models

If the current demographic trends continue, the number of minority teachers will actually decline (Daniels, 1989). While we can do a better job of preparing white teachers for minority classrooms, there must be more visible African-American male teachers as role models in the classroom.

Since it will take time to attract more African-American men to the teaching profession, the community must provide African-American male students with positive male role models. They must come into the classroom in order to tell their story.

Numerous studies and experiences concur that the classroom is enriched by outside sources. There are valuable human resources in many communities that, if invited, will share their experiences with students. For example, the greatest source of African-American male role models may be found in local businesses. The community should assist in this endeavor in four ways:

1. Encourage the participation of minority male physicians, corporate managers, dentists, policemen, ministers, and military officers as mentors, tutors, and guest speakers. They can spend 30 minutes of a lunch hour or several hours a day in the classroom.

2. Invite minority male mentors, tutors, and guest speakers from colleges and universities that are near the school. They may be university professors, staff personnel, or college students.

3. Solicit minority mentors, tutors, and guest speakers from local churches. Minority churches can be rich resources because ministers realize the importance of the current need

and can promote participation with local schools, neighborhoods, and organizations.

4. Establish community- and church-based mentoring programs that will focus on four objectives: attendance, academic achievement, "gentlemen's social graces," and appropriate behavior for school life.

Conclusion

The best way to implement this Blueprint for Action is through staff development. Schools and school districts can employ this plan of action as the core of their staff development efforts for both teachers and administrators. Implementation of all facets will be exciting, easy, and incur little cost.

This Blueprint for Action offers educators and the community the foundation for a coordinated plan to significantly address the African-American Male Crisis. This plan effectively responds to the need for restructuring the curriculum to ensure more successes for African-American males. It also gives them the feeling that the school is also their place. This action plan is school reform at its best.

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8

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