

BLACK MALES IN EDUCATION

JANUARY 20, 2011

DR. EDWARD EARL BELL

A SUMMATIVE COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

RESPONSE FROM

THE KWANZAA ADULT FORUM

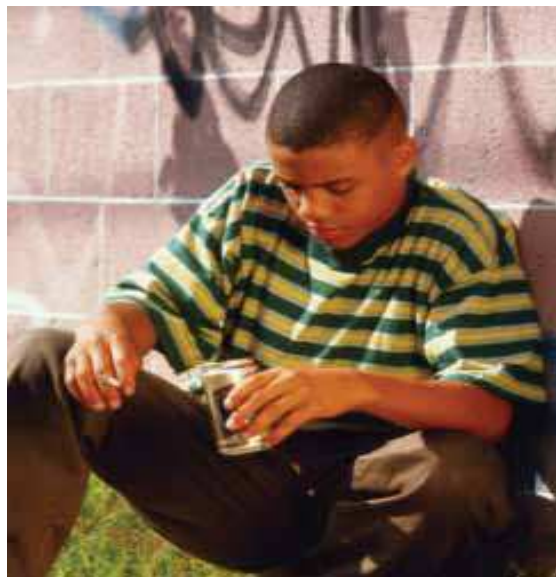
DECEMBER 27, 2010

Black Males in Education

Learning and Achievement

Dr. Edward E. Bell

www.dredbell.com



Black males are not achieving at comparative rates. North Carolina graduated only 46% of Black males as compared to 66% of White males in 2008/2009. The community needs to do a lot more in terms of preparing Black males for the educational process. It is not a good strategy to wait on the system to educate Black males, but, rather to work together to address social, cultural and mental health issues for these youth. Where is the “village” that the Black Community speaks vociferously about in the land?

Purpose of this Report

Kwanzaa¹ was celebrated in the City of New Bern on December 27, 2010. As a part of this cultural celebration, an adult forum was held to address the educational plight of Black males. An esteemed panel² was assembled to discuss a myriad of questions³, topics and/or concerns⁴ to better the lives of the Black Community. The primary purpose for this report is to discuss the two major themes that emerged from the panel discussion and to offer recommendations to the community. Most important, the aim of this panel was to accentuate what the Black Community can do and what the community is presently doing to advance the education for Black males.

The audience and the panel were instructed to not discuss the role of the school, unless for an historical reference. Therefore, this report addresses the COMMUNITY and NOT the school. Educating Black males is a community issue, and we call upon the village⁵ to handle this predicament.

¹ Kwanzaa is an African American cultural celebration, from December 26-January. http://www.findingdulcinea.com/guides/Entertainment/Holidays/Kwanzaa.pg_0.html

² Dr. Ed Bell, Facilitator, Dr. Anthony Cherry, Bishop, Mrs. Delzora Clark, School Counselor, Mr. Tarrick Cox, Educator, Mr. RaShard Curmon, Educator, Mr. Lionel Kato, Principal, Mr. Irving Glenn, Student, Ms. Tangye Middleton, Child Advocate

³ See page 9

⁴ See page 10

⁵ "It takes a village to raise a child." An African proverb.

Critical Analysis for Educating Black Males

Across America and in particular in your neighborhood, Black males academically lag behind their counterparts. Educators and scholars from various disciplines argue that teacher effectiveness and money present as two primary educational prescriptions that are traditionally portrayed as panaceas for addressing the educational needs of Black males. While teacher effectiveness and additional resources can facilitate academic growth, an alarming number of Black males continue to face an academic pathology of apathy and negative attitudinal dispositions toward schooling, which are often exacerbated by mediocrity on the part of parents, educators, communities, and students.

Research and policies continue to concern itself with the inundation of money and staff development to overcome the flagrant failure of Black males in education. After spending money, the infusion of the best educational practices, and the disaggregating of data, a disproportionate number of Black males continue to fail academically. Given the vociferous discourse and the semi-audacity for the failure of Black males on the part of the Black Community and mainstream America, Black males continue to plummet behind their contemporaries. Therefore, it may not be “good science” to continue to wait on the **system**, the infusion of money, and staff development to propel a comparative number of Black males toward academic parity.

It is definitively clear that Black males have been the beneficiary of academic strategies to enhance student achievement such as innovative teaching approaches, creative/effective instructional processes, and a battery of resources that are intended to promote academic growth. However, it is even

clearer that “just” addressing the **academic needs** for Black males may not be adequate! The intent of the findings for this report is to delineate key themes that may positively impact the academic growth and/or potential for Black males by rallying the support of the Black Community as we better understand the contention that **non-academic** factors may promote the academic growth of this population. Considering the social pathologies plaguing Black males in low-income and fatherless households, placing these students in a failed school paradigm, as opposed to a place where institutions or communities value their contributions and where faith-based options and the Black Community are compelling solutions in educating this population, is academically destructive. Where is the community? Where are their voices? What happened to the men and women, like those who pushed into realization the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* case? Let’s call on their predecessors! Where is the village--we need the villagers!

The Findings:

Based on panel and audience discussions, the following two themes primarily emerged that characterized responses: church and social skills. They are developed below. The following narration outlines the **non-academic** factors that may increase the academic achievement levels of Black males.

Church

The most powerful institution in the Black Community seems to be the church; however, some say that the black church⁶ is dead. Historically, and without equivocation,

⁶ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html
<http://friendsofjustice.wordpress.com/2010/03/10/is-the-black-church-dead/>
<http://www.politicsdaily.com/2011/01/15/is-the-black-church-dead-debate-flares-among-african-american-c/>

the black church led the charge for social and cultural injustices, in addition to its inherent calling in saving and winning souls for Christ. Below are some comments regarding the relevance of the black church in educating Black males from the panel discussion, panelists and audience responses.

“The church can’t do it today.” “The church houses people and the people are responsible for doing.” “The church is more concerned with buildings and church stuff and kids suffer.” “Churches can help, but they don’t.” “What can the church do?” “The church has lost its usefulness for working with youth.” “The church is not interested in graduating Black males; they are more interested in getting tithes from the old people.” “Black students don’t pay tithes; they have no voice.” “Churches do not even offer after school programs.” “Kids don’t even go to Sunday school.” “The black community needs to sound an alarm.” “There needs to be an uproar in the community.” One of the panelists remarked, “biblical/scriptural teaching should be taught in a way that it follows the student, from church, to school, and to the community.”

Clearly, the responses that were generated from the discussion suggested that the church may have lost its historical significance in addressing the needs of the Black Community. Has the church lost its focus in addressing the needs of its members beyond the sacred walls of the sanctuary?

Recommendations: The church may need to implement after school programs in their building (the audience was asked to name one church in the Black community [New Bern, NC] that provided an after school program--none was named); aligning the Sunday School lesson with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study; taking youth

congregants on social/cultural outings; highlighting the achievements of youth congregants beyond the Sunday proverbial youth recognition, 5-minute service; pairing Black males with community mentors, church members, and implement a beyond-the-walls-of-the-church programs for Black males such as seminars to promote academic socialization⁷.

Social Skills

An alarming number of Black males need social skills for the classroom. Their behavior impedes learning such as on-going classroom disruptions. While such behavior may be acceptable in their communities, in some classrooms it is not tolerated; therefore, they are suspended or removed from schools. Black males need to be taught the art of code switching⁸, which prepares them for interacting with others, who may not have the social benefit of understanding the cultural nuances of Black males. Is it fair for teachers to repeatedly address conduct, rather than the academic content? Comments relating to social skills for learning from the panel discussion, panelists and audience, are presented below:

“We’ve got to teach this at home.” They know how to act in church.” “Teachers can’t teach and address these behaviors.” “Perhaps, the church can help out.”

“There are so many single parents.” “Our kids end up in jail.” “They are not bad, only that their behaviors are not appropriate at school.” “We [have] got to find a way to teach our kids how to behave at school.” “When they misbehave, they are

⁷ Understanding African American Males. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED511010)

⁸ http://www.colorado.edu/ling/CRIL/Volume19_Issue1/paper_NILEP.pdf
http://www.psinnovation.org/files/Discipline_in_Schools_-_summary_-_1_16_08.pdf

put out of school, and later they fail or end up in jail.” “I think community organizations need to implement social skills programs for Black males.”

“Churches are not addressing this issue.” “When they [Black males] go to school and cut up [misbehave] they are suspended.” “Teachers do not have time to address behaviors, since they are there to teach.” “I don’t want my child in a classroom where teachers are constantly addressing loud outbursts and crazy behaviors.”

Disruptive behaviors cannot be tolerated in classrooms across America. Black males tend to be suspended, in part, because of their disruptive behaviors and/or because of their willingness to not conform to a traditional classroom setting or perhaps as a consequence of the cultural incongruence between teacher and student. The community must address this pervasive issue; the school has addressed it -- the removal of Black males from school.

Recommendations: Fraternities, sororities, and other community organizations need to concentrate on implementing programs or opportunities where students can develop social skill building and embrace the notion of code switching. The current *Balls*⁹ that many of these groups sponsor do more to raise funds, but, little to significantly impact the academic achievement of Black males. If these community groups and others would collectively do the following, their efforts may promote student achievement: implement *community* career/college days; sponsor parent/school advocacy nights; implement *community-wide* back to school pep rallies; sponsor “gentlemen” and social training for Black males; adopt a neighborhood and/or community; adopt a school; implement a

⁹ Some of the social organizations sponsor events called “Balls” to introduce young ladies, typically, to society by availing them to a menu or social/cultural opportunities; perhaps, this can be done, more, for Black males.

parent university; implement a Saturday University for the Black community; formulate an on-going think-tank to problem-solve the issues that plague the Black community; establish an alliance with schools in the district such as with ministers, educators, and community groups; help the community to value schooling as much as sports; and most important, get rid of the divisive nature of community organizations! Organizations in the Black Community need to come together for the benefit of Black males.

Summary

There is work to be done! It is clear that Black males, in particular, are suspended more than their contemporaries. While we wrestle with what to do and how to do it, Black males are suffering academically. The nation graduated only 47% of Black males and only 46% in North Carolina, as compared to 66% of White males¹⁰ in said state during 2008/2009. No system has collapsed, no school has closed, and no economy depressed because of the academic failure of Black males. Incarceration rate soars, the graduation rate is poor, and the suspension rate remains abysmal! It is not *good science* to wait on the system to fix the educational needs of the Black males--who sit in the aisles of classrooms across America.

The Black Community must sound an alarm. We must not use a flute to address what ails Black students, but a trumpet¹¹! We have an obligation! Where are the exceptional men [ladies] that Dubois¹² spoke of, these are those who will save the race [Black males].

¹⁰ <http://www.blackboysreport.org/bbreport.pdf>

¹¹ Remark by one of the panel members, Tangye Middleton

¹² Dubois, W. E. (1903). *The Souls of Black Folk*. A.C. McClurg and Company: Chicago.

Guiding Questions for the Kwanzaa Adult Panel Discussion

Facilitated by: Dr. Ed Bell

- The need to educate black males is critical. Only 47% of black students (nation-wide) graduate from high school. What is the role of the community (organizations) in graduating more black students, especially males?
- Define an effective classroom teacher. How does race impact student performance? How do we prepare black students to overcome issues of bias and race in classrooms?
- The Black Church is an important institution in the black community. Historically, it was the gathering place for solutions. What is your perception of the black church in keeping its congregants in school and graduating? Has the black church lost its *community reach* in addressing social/academic issues?
- Family involvement is key to student performance. Why is this important and how do you define it? How can the community help parents **parent** for academic success?
- In Wake County, in particular, the education debate seems to center around neighborhood schools or not. Historically, we (many of us) were educated in our *own* schools and primarily by our *own* people. Can we (the African American community) learn anything from that experience?
- How important is the mental health system in keeping Black students in school? How is the *health* of students related to academic performance? What can the community do to support the “needs” of its students?
- Is it appropriate for teachers to teach, to parent, and to *doctor* in order to educate? What is a teacher’s role? How can the community support the role of the teacher?
- Is it appropriate to blame the public school system for the academic failure of black students? Why or why, not? How can the community work with schools to support student growth?
- Is “*saving*” black males (students) an option or a must? Explain.
- How do we (the Black Community) address the disruptive classroom behaviors from “our” students? How do we prepare them to enter school socially ready to learn?

Concerns from the Kwanzaa Adult Forum:

- Church not relevant with educational issues-individuals are; seems concerned with buildings.
- Black males need social skills for the classroom-behavior impedes learning; teachers spend more time addressing behavior than teaching; is it fair to teachers to repeatedly address conduct, rather than the academic content?
- Assistance with parenting and values for schooling; students respect church - taught how to behave; who teaches how to act in school?
- What is the role of social organizations in the education of black males, sororities, fraternities, etc...?
- Social/culture exposure is needed for black males.
- Community needs to be alarmed and sound a "trumpet and not a flute", silence in the community, no sense of emergency in the black community.
- Failure of Black males must be shared with the home, student, and community.
- "Systems" have not collapsed, no schools closed, because of the failure of black males; is saving black males an option or a must?