

# **Education Crisis: Public Schools Failing to Educate Black Children**

**A Call To Action**

By  
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### **About the author...**

The author writes from first-hand experience and study of segregated and desegregated public education systems.

Evelyn Winn-Bowden born 1954 in Greensboro, Alabama was raised and educated in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Attended segregated H. L. Goins Elementary School and Boteler High School before becoming part of the first full class of black students to attend Holt High School in 1969, and from there to attend The University of Alabama.

The mother of one son, Robert Milton Bowden, whose early development in a private educational environment gave him the foundation skills he needed for success in the public education system.

Ms Bowden has a degree in Social Welfare with a focus on Child Welfare and concentrated study of children in the public school system. Earlier related writings include "Public Education: Not Separate and Not Equal"; "Preventing Youth Crime and Violence", "African-American Students must Study Differently not Harder, Education Crisis: Elementary Schools Failing to Educate Black Children

She has a depth of knowledge of child development, education and career related topics which she shares with the public as creator and host of the "Let's Talk for the Children" radio talk show, Let's Talk with Evelyn Bowden on the Internet at [www.blogtalkradio.com/Evelyn-Bowden](http://www.blogtalkradio.com/Evelyn-Bowden), and through the website [www.ewbowden1.media.officelive.com](http://www.ewbowden1.media.officelive.com)

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## **DEDICATION**

**These writings are dedicated to:**

My son Robert Milton Bowden who is my inspiration, my supporter as well as my harshest critic; it was my journey with him through the public school system in Tuscaloosa, Alabama that led me to study its affect on other children. Robert was a very sharp, bright, quick-witted child, smart and eager to learn more. The system would have destroyed him except his father and me were there every step of the way.

The memory of Milton Lee Bowden who by his presence and life demonstration equipped Robert to be the man he is today.

Dear Reader:

In the 1990's I wrote a paper called *Education in the Public School System: "Not Separate" and "Not Equal"*. In that study I began by taking a look at the Tuscaloosa School System but as I researched I soon discovered the problem was a national one – not limited to Tuscaloosa City and County Schools. At the core of the matters affecting the performance of the children especially the black male, was "Expectations to Succeed in School or Expectations to Not Succeed".

I concluded that study with the idea that Pre-K through Elementary students would be better served if taught in a private school environment. There the basics of Reading and Math could be taught in a controlled environment along with the foundation of a positive self-image. This solid base of academic achievement coupled with a strong self-image would better equip the students when they entered the public school system. More importantly that positive self-image would empower them to accomplish the goals they set for themselves.

The 2005-2006 Alabama Accountability Report Card supports the findings of the 1990's study. The public schools are not separate and not equal in the educating all children. It is my opinion that the kind of intervention that is now necessary would require groups of people assume the responsibility for oversight into the basic education of the children, especially Pre-K – Elementary School.

This educational intervention must also include the education and emotional support of the parents as well, because an overwhelmingly large percentage of the parents of Pre-K-Elementary School age children are children themselves.

Thank you for taking the time to read these pages. Your comments are welcomed - visit [www.ewbowden1.media.officelive.com](http://www.ewbowden1.media.officelive.com) or email [ewbowden@hotmail.com](mailto:ewbowden@hotmail.com). Your actions are encouraged.

*Evelyn Bowden*

**"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent".**

Eleanor Roosevelt

## AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN – LEFT BEHIND

“No Child Left Behind” is actually leaving many African American children behind. The test scores show that the gaps between blacks or Hispanic students and white students appear in kindergarten and worsen throughout the 12 years of public education. In fact “poor and minority students are doing very poorly, and in most states are not making significant gains at all.” There are some exceptions according to Sam Dillon in his article: **“Schools slow in Closing Gap Between Races”**. NY Times, November 11, 2006.

- Morgan County Elementary School in Madison, GA was applauded for having significantly raised the scores of black 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. The principal attributed the success in part to after-school tutoring by volunteers in black churches.
- Edwin E. Weeks Elementary School in Syracuse, NY narrowed the gap between black and white students this success was due in part to a pre-kindergarten program & a school health clinic that helped keep poor children from missing class.
- Hoover Middle School in Lakewood, CA, raised Hispanic scores so much that in the spring of 2005 the Hispanic students out performed whites. How was this achieved? By focused instruction, frequent diagnostic testing and several tutoring programs some tutoring before the start of the school some tutoring after school.

Brian Gong, executive director for the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, said it’s much harder for schools with multiple subgroups to meet improvement goals. “Some of the districts are considered good districts in general, but their special ed, for instance is not performing well,” Gong said, **“In general, it’s the African-Americans. Hispanic, free and reduced lunch, and special education subgroups that aren’t performing. Those groups are huge stumbling blocks for most districts.”**

Source: [www.tuscaloosaneews.com/aaas/pbs.dll/article?/Date=20051216](http://www.tuscaloosaneews.com/aaas/pbs.dll/article?/Date=20051216)

Could it be the children are not performing well because the teachers, viewing them as “subgroups” teach them as if they are “sub”, applying sub-standard teaching methods yielding sub-standard results.

Gong’s statement that the children are *huge stumbling blocks* for the districts appears to indicate a mindset that is out of touch with the purpose and goals of schools. The schools are there to teach the children, all the children despite their race or socio-economic status

### WHAT MUST BE DONE

Parents and community members must encourage the children to achieve to the highest of their ability and give support to the children and the schools as well. They can begin by

taking the very necessary first-step – that step is to help the children learn to READ. Teach a child to read the child can then use reading to help teach him/herself to learn and thereby get the best education possible even if it means educating himself.

To have any significant impact on the problem intervention must begin with the Pre-K and Elementary School age children.

**Public schools must be held accountable:**

Demand of them the educational resources, especially teachers that will ensure the children have every opportunity to learn.

Demand of them a demonstrated effort to teach all children. Be willing to make use of the educational system, political system as well as the legal system if necessary to get equal opportunity to succeed.

## IMPROVING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN READING AND MATHMATICS

Reading skills are critical. Both reading and math are important, but you cannot effectively perform mathematics if you cannot read. Developing reading and math skills is not an over night process, it takes time. The children must be given time and they must be given success. Children need to be having a measure of success at every step along the way. This builds self-esteem and encourages the student to continue because he has demonstrated that he can learn and will be eager to learn more.

### DIFFERENT STUDY PATTERNS

I believe that the African-American student needs to study differently not necessarily harder. If you look at the Asian-American students, the group with the highest scores in reading and math, you will note that they scored significantly higher than the white students who had the next highest scores did. If African-American students adopt the study habits of the Asian-American students, apply the exact same methods the end results would be the same. A math professor at UC-Berkeley noted that the African-American and Hispanic Students in his class were performing poorly compared to the Asian students. He discovered that the Asian students had formed study packs—groups of students who worked together on problems. These students stayed together until every student in the group could solve every problem. The African-American and Hispanic students studied alone, therefore when they ran into difficulty it was easier for them to give-in to the associated frustration and give-up. The professor organized the African-American and Hispanic students into study groups and just as he suspected, they had the same level of performance as the Asian Students.

### HOW TO MAKE THE CHANGE

The mechanics of this is simple, using the principle of divide and conquer, divide each subject into small sequential parts and study and practice until able to perform that part with 80% proficiency before moving to the next part in the sequence. In doing this they [students] give themselves a sense of success at each level as proficiency is reached. The student also learns the material to the point that they go to the next step with the necessary foundation to perform successfully. The other thing that must happen for the African-American student is “he must take responsibility for his own learning”. The African-American student puts responsibility of learning more on the teacher than on himself or herself. Study after study has demonstrated that they [African-American students] feel they need the teacher’s support and encouragement. This is different than the students of other races. These students want to be challenged. They thrive better on demands and challenges—sure they like teacher’s encouragement and approval. However it is not their highest priority. If the African-American students take responsibility for their own overall learning and study habits, they too can perform at higher level of standards. Self-responsibility – the individual is in control of his destiny when it comes to learning.

## PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

In the early years, parents are responsible to choose the time and place of study and for checking the materials being studied. As the child grows older he/she can take that responsibility for self. Say for instance that the parent sets the time of 6 p.m. for study, as the child grows older then at 6pm he/she knows it is time to study and goes to their study place. Also in the early ages the parents are responsible to check the student's work. However as the child grows older and more proficient in math and reading then he/she can check his/her own work and chart own accomplishments. As they do this they begin to reward self by feeling good as they have successes at each stage. They take ownership of it and take pride in it. This is one method I believe can start the process of closing the academic performance gap.

## WE MUST GIVE THE CHILDREN TIME

It will take time and time we must give the children. Teaching them to perform at their own pace at his/her own level thereby competing with self and not others. As they compete with themselves and begin to have successes then the internal rewards kick in. The student then takes charge of his/her own destiny as far as education is concerned.

## SUMMARY

African-American students should study differently not necessarily harder. Beginning with dividing the subject matter into small sequential parts and studies each part until they reach 80% proficiency of execution before moving to the next part. If studying reading start with the pre-reading skills, then move to phonics, then on to vocabulary building, grammar and punctuation and reading comprehension. In addition to applying the "divide and conquer" concept, group study can be applied to increase successful progression from stage to stage. Ultimately the African-American student must become an active participant in his/her own development.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As a community we must share in the process by helping the students and their parents apply new tactics to this problem of below grade level academic performance in reading and mathematics. It is not an individual problem-we all benefit when the children learn and become the best they can be. ♦

*"Life is 30% of what happens to you and 70% of how you respond."* - **Unknown**

**PROJECTED HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES FOR TUSCALOOSA,  
ALABAMA** Source: [www.alsde.edu/accountability](http://www.alsde.edu/accountability)

Tuscaloosa City School System = 22.71%

Tuscaloosa County School System = 13.63%

**STATE OF ALABAMA**

Projected Dropout Rate State of Alabama = 11.18%

**NATIONAL DROPOUT RATES BY RACE**

**ASIAN = 1.2%**

**BLACK = 5.7%**

**HISPANIC = 8.9%**

**WHITES = 3.7%**

**ONLINE RESOURCES:**

[www.alsde.edu](http://www.alsde.edu);

[www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com)

<http://nces.edu.gov>

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

[www.schooldigger.com](http://www.schooldigger.com)

[www.ed.gov/policy/eisec/guid/schoolchoiceguid.doc](http://www.ed.gov/policy/eisec/guid/schoolchoiceguid.doc)

# What's Really Going On?

## Tuscaloosa City School Board of Education's Little Secrets that Put Black Children at Risk

- 1. Education of the African-American students not very high on its agenda:** Rock Quarry Elementary School's Report Card provides a clear indication of this. Academic performance by the white student population is above grade level across the board, however black students academic performance is significantly below grade level. With it's resources, particularly the number of highly qualified teachers, there is no way the numbers should be this different unless by design. 5<sup>th</sup> Graders performing below grade level in Reading 2005-2006: Black 43.75%, White Students 9.52%. *Rock Quarry Elementary School is also an Alabama Reading Initiative Literacy Site. Why are the black students not being taught at Rock Quarry? What is going on inside the walls of Rock Quarry Elementary School?*

Verner Elementary School in the same area of the city as Rock Quarry Elementary does not demonstrate the same problem in educating all its students. 5<sup>th</sup> Graders performing below grade level were 11.11% Black and 0% White students. Two schools, same community, yet one school can teach both groups of students to read, but the other (Rock Quarry Elementary School) can teach white students only. *Verner is ranked 25<sup>th</sup> of 658 Elementary Schools in the State of Alabama, making it the best Elementary School in Tuscaloosa (www.schooldigger.com).*

Martin L. King, Jr. Elementary School's academic performance warrants priority attention and guidance of the School Board and Superintendent. Yet this board did not see the urgency in providing a Reading instructor to this the districts poorest performing school [when it had (has) the funds to do so]. Overall Academic Performance for this school in 2005-2006 Reading 45.8%; Math 52.2%. Among the things listed on Martin L. King, Jr. Elementary School's Improvement Plan as reasons for its failure to reach Annual Yearly Progress are

- a. Lack of specified reading program
- b. Several new teachers need for Alabama Reading Initiative Training
- c. Language Goals were not written for students assessed by Alabama Alternate Assessment.
- d. Lack of focus on math and no intervention programs for math
- e. Lack of trained teachers in Alabama Mathematics, Science & Technology Initiative

- f. 22% of teachers feel proficient in technology
- g. Number of students who were 3-4 grade levels behind
- h. Lack of regular pullouts and push in with SPE teachers
- i. The participation goal for SPE Failed to meet 95%

Couple the lack of trained teachers in Reading, Math, Science, Technology and the City Boards failure to provide a Reading Coach with 1155 disciplinary referrals, 854 four-day suspensions, 3 students placed in Alternative School, and one student expelled, you have the perfect formula for failure. The appearance is that the system never intended to educate the children at Martin L. King, Jr. Elementary School especially since this school is as old or older than Verner Elementary. The provisions for these two schools should be the same. *Martin L. King, Jr. Elementary School ranks 4<sup>th</sup> on the list of Top Ten Worst Elementary Schools in the State of Alabama. Making it the worst elementary school in Tuscaloosa.*

In May of 2007 the City Board of Education put more students at risk of failure by rezoning students from schools making Annual Yearly Progress to Martin L. King, Jr. Elementary. This rezoning is a direct violation of No Child Left Behind Act, which says that students cannot be transferred to schools in improvement.

There is a range of options to deal with physical capacity of schools under NCLB, but sending students to failing schools to relieve perceived overcrowding is not one of them.

**If the children are to be properly educated, the entire community must get informed and involved.**

2. It appears that the recent re-structuring in the Tuscaloosa City School System was actually about making certain schools 'less black'. What affect will this have on the students being forced to change schools? Under this re-structuring several elementary students will be moved from the best school in Tuscaloosa to the worst school in Tuscaloosa. To add insult to injury, although the Board said no high schools would be affected by the restructuring it is requiring approximately 77 students currently attending Northridge High School attend Central High School, a school also in "School Improvement" status and cannot legally accept transfer students.

A look at the racial makeup of City schools shows some interesting findings. For example Woodland Forrest Elementary white to black student ratio was approximately 4 to 1 in 1989 in 2006 it was 1 to 4.

Tuscaloosa City Public Schools are approximately 73% Black, 24% White, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. Is this Board trying to manufacture a situation to appear more favorable for the white community to encourage migration from private schools to the public system at the expense of its Black students?

3. Another critical point not being dealt with is the high dropout rate. Tuscaloosa City Schools project a High School Dropout Rate of approximately 23%. By allowing the

students to dropout the school system immediately raise it performance scores without improving on educating the students. The student leaving school takes with him/her the usually low grades they made; therefore the grades are not calculated as part of schools yearly performance.

***Inadequate education in elementary and middle school years lead students to dropout in High School. The only reason they stay that long is because law requires them to.***

***Help the children succeed despite the actions of the Superintendent, the School Board and the environment it creates. Keep them encouraged, tutor and mentor them or get someone else to help them if you can't. Get involved in the PTAs, Go to School Board Meetings: Get involved politically and legally if you must. Jealously guide and teach the Kindergarten and Elementary School Age children. The children really are in danger.***

## **Education in Crisis for African-American Children**

In year 2007 Education remains a crisis situation that faces African-American Children. Not only does education remain in crisis it is getting increasingly worse. With this in mind what will be the potential impact of the U. S. Supreme Court's Recent Decision in two School Integration Cases?

Over 50 years ago Court ordered de-segregation virtually forced the majority population in the United States into a situation it did not want. This being the case efforts has been made over the years to look for ways to reverse the court order. In the mean time those who were against desegregation turned to Private Schools to educate their children. In one state some 75% of the White Student Population attended Private Schools therefore never really desegregating [court ordered desegregation applied only to the public school systems].

The specific school systems involved in the U. S. Supreme Court decision of June 28, 2007 were trying to maintain the few accomplishment they made under the court order; acknowledging that still remained negative effects from the years of segregation that existed prior to that order. Also knowing that with the order now lifted the school systems would ultimately re-segregate.

There are some inherent affects of segregation that reach beyond the school and have lasting long-term effects [most negative] on the minority population. This is especially true now as community involvement and economic involvement has become global, reaching into other countries and cultures. In order to effectively become a part of this global explosion each student must learn to communicate with diverse groups of peoples, from various cultural, religious and political origins.

The public education system in this country is the one vehicle that can offer an environment where those involved can learn about people of different races, nationalities, and cultures first hand while working side by side to achieve the same goal of getting the best academic education available.

The Justices in the Brown v. Board of Education [Topeka Kansas] case determined that the policy of separating the races was interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group. "That a sense of inferiority affects the motivation of a child to learn therefore segregation with the sanction of law has a tendency to retard the educational & mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system thus depriving them of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment – protection to ensure that every child [even minority children] has an equal chance to succeed".

Integrated schools allow children to be exposed to the differences and similarities of

people and environments outside their immediate neighborhood. They have the opportunity to develop skills needed to communicate and interact successfully in the society at large once they leave the school environment.

The ultimate effect of the current Supreme Court ruling will be determined by the reaction of the African American community, its response within each local school district and system; its response politically and its response within each home and community.

Information has to be passed on as to what is “really going on” in this country and the actual as well as the potential long term impact on African American children individually and collectively.

Pressure must be put on the local school districts to educate the children, to put the highest-quality teachers and also up-to-date resources within the schools. Pressure must be put on the politicians representing the districts to bring in adequate funding, and resources needed to provide the best education available. ♦

*“Character is not made in a crisis – it is only exhibited.”*  
*--Robert Freeman*

# Education Crisis: Public Schools Failing to Educate Black Children

## A Call to Action

“Gong said, “In general, it’s the African-Americans. Hispanic, free and reduced lunch, and special education sub-groups that aren’t performing. **Those groups are huge stumbling blocks for most districts.**” (Page 6)

Could it be the children are not performing well because the teachers, viewing them as “subgroups” teach them as if they are “sub”, applying sub-standard teaching methods yielding sub-standard results.

Gongs statement that the children are huge stumbling blocks for the **districts appears to indicate a mindset that is out of touch with the purpose and goals of public schools.** The schools are there to teach the children, all the children despite their race or socio-economic status.

### Comments about the book:

“This book is really, really good.”

“This is great, its gives you something you can work with.”

“It leaves the reader with a since of, ‘there is hope and there is something that I can do.’ One does not feel helpless or overwhelmed, or hopeless. Thank you.”