

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES  
NOT SEPARATE AND NOT EQUAL

A Proposal to Make a Difference

By

Evelyn Winn Bowden

Planning to make a difference...  
© 1992, 2001 Tuscaloosa, Alabama

“More Blacks Graduate,

Sixty three percent (63%) of Blacks aged 25 and over were high school graduates in 1990: compared to 31% in 1970 (1990 Census).

Much progress? Maybe not.

“Blacks still score lower than whites in math, science and writing tests.”

‘Dr. Mary Hoover, Dean of the Education Department at Howard University, urge parents to....make certain black students have the skills necessary to function in society and not just a piece of paper.’”

Emerge Magazine, November 1992, p. 21.

The average SAT scores among students in the top-tier colleges and universities are 1200 or more. In 1983, there were fewer than 600 Black students in the entire country what met that standard.<sup>1</sup> Things have not gotten better.

How is it that after more than twenty (20) years of public school desegregation there remains such a wide gap in academic performance between Black students and White students in this country? I believe that:

- (1) What we have in our education system is a condition of “not separate yet not equal”;
- (2) We (Black parents) are failing in our responsibility to ensure our children the be education possible’
- (3) Artificial failures are being made of our children by the pubic school system; colleges and universities continue the process;
- (4) Conditions exist that put limits on what is to be taught one group of students (mostly minority) while at the same time removing the boundaries of a fixed prescribed curriculum on another group (primarily white).

According to one study of urban school systems, during the 1986-87 academic year black students made up 43% of the student population. Yet, 58% of non promotions were black; 65% of suspensions, 80% of expulsions and 45% of drop outs were black students.<sup>2</sup> As reported in the Journal of Negro Education Vol. 61, Winter 1992, there were 1470 non promotions among First Grade students—800 of these (54%) were black. There were 2800 non-promotions in Grades 6-8, 1600 or 57% were black. These students felt that teachers did not believe, expect, or encourage them to perform. Therefore, they did what was expected.<sup>3</sup>

Another study of a different set of school systems had similar findings. Antoine M. Garibaldi in his article “Educating and Motivating African American Males to Succeed”<sup>4</sup> reported that:

- a) Adverse performance begins early (test scores were compatible to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade for all students, then began the sharp decline of black students from Grade 4 through Grade 6);
- b) Teacher expectations play a major role in student’s performances. Teachers in this study do not set high goals for black students,

- especially black males. Six out of every ten teachers expected these students to fail. The majority of the teachers taught elementary school and 65% of the teachers expecting failure were black;
- c) Peer pressure to “Not Act White” was another factor relating to poor performance among the students in this study;
  - d) Against popular beliefs, at the outset parents at all socio economic levels had high expectations for their children and believed they would succeed in school.

The favorable beliefs and expectations of parents for their children have to be expanded and energized into instruments to secure the best education available. “Parents must acknowledge and reward academic accomplishments; require students to do their homework; emphasize the value of learning; meet and talk with teachers; identify areas where students need assistance and find ways to provide that assistance; and monitor courses taken by students.”<sup>5</sup>

Though based on the premise of providing each student the opportunity to develop to his or here maximum potential, in practice the multi-curriculum format of our own public school system creates wider gaps socially, emotionally and academically. The two diploma system; advanced placement and enrichment programs; special education, Title I and alternative schools, coupled with negative preconceptions and expectations about black student’s capabilities, and the economic difficulties that plague the education system, creates conditions under which choices and selections are made that put black students in situations that places limits on their academic achievement.

What happens to those students who do proceed on to college? Black college students are approached by college professionals from a deficit perspective.<sup>6</sup> They are viewed as dis-advantaged, poverty stricken, special need and high risk. This negative expectation is also passed on to the students. College creates failure among black students artificially, by recruiting only the best white students (those in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile academically) and by recruiting ‘bodies’ among black students.<sup>7</sup>

According to Thomas Sowell in his article “The New Racism on Campus”, at Cornell University black student at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile were competing with white students in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile—mismatched.<sup>8</sup> The performance level of Black Students at Cornell is very low when

compared with their white counterparts. Thus, failures were made of students who are very bright in comparison to all students nationwide. One study showed that the average black student at MIT had math scores in the top 10% of all American students—these same scores were in the bottom 10% among the students at MIT.<sup>9</sup> Almost one-fourth of the black students at MIT failed to graduate.<sup>10</sup>

The ideal situation for our children would be that of a highly structured, closely monitored private education Grades K-6, in order to build in our children strong healthy self-images. Children with strong self-images will not easily bend or broken by educators with biased, negative images of black students. Teachers communicating their expectations create an environment that, will guarantee failure and low academic performance.

Because this ideal situation does not exist, I propose the development of community based strategic educational programs, with aggressively taught curriculum based on need, designed to improve the performance and achievement of the students. The programs would supplement traditional education and expand the scope of the educational process for the students.

To provide for improvement, academically and intellectually, we must work at it. It is not enough, for example, to argue achievements tests are culturally biased. This argument may be true, but a larger truth is that these tests are the existing instruments used to measure academic performance and we must prepare our students to overcome as many of the biases as possible.

I believe that if we provide students with diversified learning situations, exposing them to environments beyond the status-quo we can begin to close the gap. We must:

#### I. Lay the foundation

- a) Ultimate Goal – Productive, successful lives beyond mere existence
- b) Utility – Education
- c) Plan – Get the necessary education
  - (1) Curriculum and
  - (2) Financing

II. Teach our children to:

- a. Chart a path
- b. Follow the path
- c. Recognize the detours and alternate routes
- d. Make the necessary turns along the way

**Sources:**

<sup>1</sup> “The New Racism on Campus”, Thomas Sowell, Fortune Magazine, February 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Negro Education, Vol 61, Winter 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> “Educating and Motivating African American Males to Succeed”, Antoine M. Garibaldi, Journal of Negro Education, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> “Approaching Minority Students as Assets”, J. Herman Black, 1985

<sup>7</sup> “The New Racism on Campus”, Thomas Sowell, Fortune Magazine, February 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

# **Strategic Educational Programs**

*To Supplement Traditional Public Education*

By Evelyn Winn Bowden

## **SELF DIRECTED IN THAT WE:**

1. Identify academic requirements and resources
2. identify ways to equip our children to meet those requirements
3. plan for financing higher education
4. Remove boundaries of traditional education.

## **OBJECTIVES:**

1. teach creative and critical thinking (how to ask who, what, when, how, why, what if, etc
2. teach students to teach themselves and each other  
(Leadership skills and group participation)
3. provide a format where parents and students can learn and grow together
4. Build self-esteem and motivate students to learn.

## **GOALS:**

1. Get ACT & SAT Scores to National Average or higher
2. Identify and secure sources of funding for higher education
3. Concentrate on preparation for the professions and jobs that are and will be in demand.

**FORMAT:** Community Based.

PUBED0001