FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

THE CHILDREN DERAILED FROM THE TRAIN TRACKS:
AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN
THE AMERICAN K-12 SCHOOL SYSTEM

AN ACTION REPORT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

REUBIN O’D. ASKEW SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY

BY

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AUGUST 2006
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA
August 1, 2006

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

My name is Christopher Small and I am a candidate for the degree of Master’s in Public Administration at Florida State University. It is with sincere pleasure that I submit to you The Children Derailed From the Train Tracks: An Analysis Of African-American Male Academic Achievement In The American K-12 School System. This document is the result of research and analysis on underachievement of African-American males in our country’s school system. This problem has implications for not only the population in question, but also for our society as a whole.

While No Child Left Behind has been able to address some of the issues faced by African-Americans male students, it has not been able to bridge the gap that exists due to cultural, psychological, and socioeconomic circumstances. The goal of the American educational system is to provide equal and quality educational access to all students within its jurisdictions. Consequently, if current policy and management styles are not equally benefiting every child equally we are charged with the task of implementing alternatives in order to give them an equal opportunity to succeed.

I have enclosed the results of this study as well as recommendations that have the potential to benefit the educational achievement of African-American males. The recommended programs will likely increase graduation and retention rates at the high school level, improve college enrollment rates, and decrease African-American incarceration rates.

I look forward to your reply and any questions or concerns you may have. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

The opposition to Negro education in the South was at first bitter... for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent. Nevertheless, men strive to know. -- W.E.B. Du Bois THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK, 1903

In an increasingly competitive, global economy the consequences of dropping out of high school are devastating to individuals, communities and our national economy. At an absolute minimum, adults need a high school diploma if they are to have any reasonable opportunities to earn a living wage. A community where many parents are dropouts is unlikely to have stable families or social structures. Most businesses need workers with technical skills that require at least a high school diploma. Yet, with little notice, the United States is allowing a dangerously high percentage of students to disappear from the educational pipeline before graduating from high school.

Specifically, dropping out and the forms of underachievement among African-American males constitute a major problem in the United States. Unlike many of their peers, African-American males have a history of problems in the K-12 system. Why are African-American males being incarcerated at early ages? Why are they not graduating from high school? Why are African-American males more likely to be placed in exceptional education classes? Is there an explanation for why African-American males are highly diagnosed with behavioral disorders? Can we find the answer to why this group is not performing as well on standardized testing? These are just a few of the concerns that the following analysis addresses.

The analysis considers the impacts that school tracking, zero tolerance, and sports commitment policies have had on African-American educational achievement in the K-12 system. Additionally, the study looks at options such as same-gendered schools, improved and
targeted teacher trainings, and using schools as a community center and mentorship house as potential ways to mend the achievement gap between African-American males and other groups.

**INTRODUCTION**

Every year about one million people who should graduate from high school don’t, condemning them to a lifetime of low incomes and limited opportunities. Students who fail to graduate from high school are also less likely to have access to our country’s political and social opportunities. Failure of public schools in America to foster the matriculation of African-American male students, who graduate at much lower rates than their Anglo-American and Asian peers, has to be considered one of the most urgent and alarming problems in educational policy.

The educational experience of children in America can be seen as a train track. Ideally, one should move along from the beginning of the train track (entering kindergarten) all the way to the end of the tracks and final destination (awarding of high school diploma prepared to enter college). However, a problem exists in the fact that too many minority students “derail” off of the tracks on the educational train route and never reach the end. The improvement of financial aid or making affirmative action policies more restrictive and aggressive is like adding more platforms to the train station at the end of the train tracks so that more trains can feed into the station at the same time. This has no effect on the journey of minority students into the arena of higher education because the problem is not congestion at the end of the train tracks; it is derailment in the middle of the journey through education. To be effective, any strategy for increasing graduation rates for African-American males has to be germane to addressing the
derailments in our public school system, ensuring that these males not only graduate from high school, but also possess the necessary skills to be ready for college.

Additionally, research shows that 1 out of every 4 African-American males between the ages of 18 and 35 are in jail or have been under court supervision. Researchers have identified various social factors that potentially impact the disproportionate incarceration of this population. Low socio-economic backgrounds, single parent homes, reduced employment opportunities, stereotyping, racial profiling, increased substance abuse, and a plethora of other factors have been identified as factors impacting the high incarceration rates of African-American males. Research on African-American juvenile offenders has identified common social factors among this population to include frequent alcohol or drug use, mental health issues, previous involvement or a family member’s involvement in criminal or gang activity, lack of contact with parents (i.e., single-parent homes), parental supervision, and school problems to include being expelled, involvement in alternative programs, and dropping out of school (Criminal Justice Council, 2002). The Criminal Justice Council of the State of Texas (2002) found that a majority of juvenile offenders are impacted by several social factors; however, school problems were the most prevalent factors influencing the incarceration of these youth.

The sociological factors impacting African-American males in education have an important legacy. Although there is not a substantial amount of literature directly related to the education of African-American males, their denial of access to education can be dated back to slavery. In contrast, Reconstruction was a positive era in history, when African-American males were able to secure expanded educational options and obtain power in public organizations.
Their access to education for the next one hundred years was limited by segregation laws and violence.

The current experience of African-American males is of great concern to educators and society. Educational institutions and the practices of educators in these institutions remain a prevalent factor in the underachievement of African-Americans in the K-12 educational system. One of the best chances for changing the negative social and educational trends for African-American males is to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of this group and the factors that impact their educational achievement. With this understanding, innovative strategies and other mechanisms may be put in place to address the multi-faceted issues facing the underachievement of African-American males.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Challenges of Academic Achievement:**

African-American males are continually plagued and devoured by the various race-related problems that continue to exist. Although the terminology, symptoms, and defining characteristics may not be the same as they were during America’s early years of slavery, the very fibers of these problems and their consequences for African-Americans are still evident today. In recent years, “terms such as crisis, at-risk, marginal, and endangered have been used with increasing regularity to describe the plight and condition of black males” (Noguera, 1997).

One of the most profound problems with the notion of a crisis confronting African-American males has an intrinsic relationship with the use of the term “crisis.” The term crisis, as Nogurea outlines, “implies that there is a drastic deviation from a more stable norm.” Noguera also explains that its connotation suggests that there is a “period of temporary urgency or perhaps even a short-term emergency, and not a prolonged and persistent degenerative condition.”
Additionally, the word crisis leads one to believe that a “better and more secure period preceded the present condition, and that once the crisis is over the condition will return to the former state, whereby even if it is not ideal, it will be far better than the way things were during the moment of emergency” (Noguera, 1997).

Noguera (1997) explains that for males of African descent in the United States, there is no evidence that would lead one to believe that the current conditions are temporary. Most Americans believe that one of the most important means by which the American Dream can be obtained is through education (Ogbu, 2003). The American Dream holds that the educational system provides all children, regardless of their background, with equal opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and credentials that will enable them to enter the workforce and obtain jobs and wages based on a merit system (Ogbu, 2003). However, outside of the walls surrounding the American Dream, many African-American citizens have been disenfranchised by the lack of equality in learning experiences, policies embedded in institutions, misdiagnosis of learning abilities, and differences in culture. Consequently, many African Americans cannot compete equally with their White counterparts for social rewards based on educational credentials. Specifically, African-American males who lack a high school diploma are limited in job opportunities and ultimately are stunted in their progression towards economic success.

The African-American male crisis is characterized today by some disturbing statistics. The homicide rate for Black males ages 15 to 24 is seven times higher than that of White males in the same age group (Roper, 1991). Furthermore, an estimated 12 percent of black males in their late twenties were in prison or jail in 2005 in comparison to only 1.7 percent of white males (DOJ, 2005). Only four percent of African-American males attend college, while 23 percent of those college ages are either incarcerated, on probation, or in prison.
Mrs. LaTara O. Lampkin, a former corrections officer administrator for the state of Florida and current Adult Education Supervisor at Tallahassee Community College, explained that if only our legislative officials could take a few minutes to hear some of the stories of her male students regarding their educational experience and some of the causes of them not graduating from high school (personal communication, June 1, 2006). Many of the male students in her program feel that they lacked the presence of positive African-American role models during their years in regular public school. As she thumbs through some of her student files that she brought with her, reads me a statement from one of her student questionnaires that says, “[our] teachers would feed us this fake dream about what we could do if we passed our classes, but they never understood that what [we] needed to know was how to survive the streets when [we] got home and out of a classroom…how [could we] be successful if all [we] were given was a textbook and a number [we] needed to get to pass the FCAT”.

Lampkin went on to express the fact that a majority of the African-American males that she dealt with in the Florida correctional system had never completed high school and many were not fully literate. As a result she says these males resort to a life of crime, drugs, and procreation at a very early age as a means of survival. “It becomes a way of life that repeats itself generation after generation,” she explains. The African-American males that live in communities that exist in areas of low socioeconomic status are informally trained to believe that what defines one as a man is how many women you can sleep with and how much respect you can garnish from your peers. Mr. Tony D. Johnson, Director of Adult Education at Tallahassee Community College, added that there is a lack of connection with mainstream society and the ideals of reaching the American Dream, so as a result the young males of today resort to other means and definitions of reaching the ambiance of success (personal communication, June 1, 2006).
Jazzar (2005) explains that while nationally African-American children comprise approximately 17 percent of all children in public schools, they disproportionately represent 40 percent of all children in exceptional student education classes. Is this just a coincidence or are there underlying causalities of this statistic? Of the African-American children enrolled in exceptional student education classes, 85 percent of those students are African-American males and are placed in classes for learning disabilities and behavioral disorders (Wilson & Banks, 1992), which is nine times the special education placement rate of White males (Meier, Stewart & England, 1989). African-American males, while comprising only 8 percent of public school students, are four times more likely than White males to be suspended or expelled from school (Meier, Stewart & England, 1989). Moreover, fewer than 30 percent of all African-American students take courses that prepare them for a four year college. Are Black students just not interested in college or are teachers not equipping them with the mindset that they too can have a post-secondary education? Of all African-American students in college, 43 percent enroll in two-year colleges, but only 10 percent make the transition to four-year schools (Jazzar, 2005).

Since the 1960’s, minority progress in higher education has been measured by whether or not enrollment, retention, and graduation rates have increased. Additionally, as we continue to grow and develop towards globalization and competition, the consequences of not completing high school are burdensome to individuals, communities, and our national economy. In the 2000 census, it was determined that 13.4 percent of White children were living in poverty and 30.2 percent of African-American children were living in poverty (US Bureau of the Census, 2000). Furthermore, poor children are much more likely than non-poor children to suffer developmental delay and damage, to drop out of high school, and to give birth during the teen years (Miranda, 1991). Additionally, poor inner-city youths are seven times more likely to be victims of child
abuse or neglect than are children of high social and economic status (Renchler, 1993). With the poverty rates for African-Americans being what they are it is clearly a possibility that these items impact the ability of African-Americans to be successful educationally.

As a national community, high school graduation rates are below par, with only an estimated 68 percent of students who enter the ninth grade graduating with a regular high school diploma in the twelfth grade (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2001). Additionally, this statistic is much lower for most minority groups, particularly males. In a joint study conducted by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard, The Urban Institute, Advocates for Children of New York, and The Civil Society Institute, it was recognized that in 2001 only about 50 percent of all African-American students graduate from high school. “The Census data for 2000, when corrected for various measurement problems, show that whites graduate with a regular diploma at a rate about 15 percentage points higher than blacks and about 13 points higher than Hispanics” (Colman, 2006). Furthermore, only 43 percent of African-American male students graduate from high school. Such disturbing information is made worse when we take into account that official “dropout” statistics neither accurately count nor report the vast numbers of students who do not graduate from high school because there is no standard means of calculation (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2001). In some schools, a missing student is presumed to either be in school or to have graduated, when in many cases these students could have potentially dropped out. “Some states report a five percent dropout rate for African-Americans, when, in reality, only half of its young adult African-Americans are graduating with diplomas” (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2001).

Interviews with other key stakeholders in the Florida education system revealed that school districts are under tremendous pressure to meet federal and state requirements.
Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Youth in Florida, Mr. Charles P. Ervin, Ph.D., specifically cited mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act, Secondary Education Act, and Department of Education regulations. As a result of such legislation states are finding it difficult to meet the demands of every requirement of every piece of legislation. Such pressures have on school districts can have impacts on overall school productivity. Additionally, as schools are placed under more and more legislation, the means by which they attempt to meet various requirements can become harmful in the long run. This is prevalent in many cases where school funding and budget allocations are based on certain benchmark requirements for compliance. Specifically, some schools may resort to unethical or unexpected practices in order to meet certain governmental requirements. Such concerns become a significant aspect of consideration because unfortunately accommodations for minority youth that are not meeting the proficiency levels of their Anglo-American peers are at risk of being overlooked.

Given that there is clear evidence that a number of factors negatively influence the success of African-American males in the educational environment, careful analysis of the ways by which education is used in this society to bestow the resources of the society is needed. Ogbu (1983) highlighted the experience that education, as an institution of the American society, has a great impact on how society functions. It continues to be used as a means by which social status and economic power are bestowed. Ogbu went on to suggest that any use of education as a means of distributing the resources of society demands that it be examined in order to ensure that the resources are equally and fairly distributed. To achieve this goal, a clearer understanding of those factors which impact the negative outcomes for individuals of color within this society is required.
There are overarching implications of the poverty status, circumstances within the communities, and the quality of instruction provided to African-American males. Collectively, they all play some role in the underachievement of African-American males in our educational school system. While some of these factors may play roles in achievement levels of other racial groups the fact that they are particularly detrimental to the population in question rationalizes the need for action. As policy makers we are charged with providing quality education and economic potential to each and every student within our school system and not just those who can be successful in the system that is currently in place.

The main gap in the literature that was utilized to complete this analysis was that there have been no national programs to address this issue of underachievement of African-American males. While research has been done on the status of African-American male educational achievement rates and lack there of, they have resulted in very little being done at the national level.

**Policy Overview and Analysis:**

The relative importance of attaining a high school diploma has changed dramatically over the years. It has been documented that young adults with low education and skills are more likely to live in poverty and to receive government assistance (Boisjoly, Harris, and Duncan, 1998). Society reinforced the importance of education by implementing the compulsory school attendance policy, increasing expenditures for education, and instituting several reform efforts. Furthermore, some African-American males’ underachievement in the United States’ educational system is inextricably linked to their lower economic status and marginalization from the mainstream society. Due to the fact that on many accounts our educational system fails to reach
out to this population of youth, these students do not have access to many promising career opportunities.

Since African-American male high school dropouts tend to become chronically under and unemployed (NCES, 2001), increasing dropout rates are costly to society. Especially since many unemployed individuals can become over-dependent on the social services. However, difficulties in the labor market are not the only problem that this group faces. African-American male high school dropouts are more at risk of engaging in delinquent behavior that may result in their imprisonment (NCES, 2001). Studies confirm that a large percentage of prison inmates are high school dropouts and that African-American males are disproportionately represented in penal institutions (Noguera, 1997). Consequently, one of the many repercussions of incarceration is exclusion from participation in the political system. This is significant due to the fact that marginalization from the political system denotes further alienation from mainstream society.

Since numerous community and societal rewards would result if marginalized African-American males completed high school, appropriate strategies should be in place to assist these men in reconnecting to the educational system before they are drawn in the criminal justice system.

African-American boys are typically more kinetic and research has shown have higher levels of testosterone than White boys. Hale (2001) suggests that a learning environment conducive to learning for African-American children should rarely use “ditto sheets, workbooks, textbooks, and skill and drill exercises. Instead, a conducive environment for these children would include hands-on activities, projects, interrelated learning experiences, field trips, speakers, and classroom visits” (p. 178). Most programs of African-American males reflect several characteristics (a) male role models (b) identity creation and self-esteem (c) academic values and social skills (d) parents and community strengthening (e) transition to manhood (f) a
safe haven (Ascher, 1992). Programs that serve African-American males through early interventions are often not studied empirically and are covered only through local news stories (Lacy, 1992).

Additionally, the statistics are startling about the number of males that do not succeed at high levels in the social institutions of America. Inasmuch, 42 percent of all African-American boys have failed at least one grade level, 34 percent of African-American students earn bachelor degrees, a 1992 study found more than half of African-American high school graduates are not prepared for college, and 60 percent of African-American students stop at the basic math necessary for graduation (US Department of Education, 2004; Few, 2004; U.S. Census, 2000).

The images that African-American males internalize is often from the “racial formation process by which social, economic, and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meaning” (Omni & Winant, 1986). As Craig Saddler (2004) explains in his article discussing the Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas decision that Black students have a history of suffering in American schools due to faculty and staff that possess the power influence to label, classify and define its student population. Lerone Bennett (1972) contended:

He who controls images controls minds, and he that controls minds has little or nothing to fear from bodies. This is the reason why Black people are not educated or are mis-educated in America…The system could not exist if it did not multiply discrimination…An educator in a system of oppression is either a revolutionary or an oppressor…The question of education for Black people in America is a question of life and death. It is a political question, a question of power… Struggle is a form of education – perhaps the highest struggle.

Teacher preparation programs have evolved through a tradition of preparing White Protestant teachers to enter the classrooms of America. Traditionally, the definition of how
White teachers should teach and to whom has always had a wide range of understandings. What are the goals of public high schools? For John Dewey, “high schools should produce citizens who will further democracy as social agents,” for the U.S. Department of Labor, “they should train students for the world economy”, and based on the Reagan administration’s report entitled *A Nation at Risk* (1983), “they should prepare students for postsecondary education (Ansell, 2004). These competing dichotomies suggest that there are a plethora of contentions for teachers. As the evolution of the profession attempted to define a loosely coupled system, so did the roles and responsibilities of teachers.

**School Tracking Policies:**

One of the factors that have been though to be responsible for African-American underachievement has been school tracking policies. In an era of increased accountability, school systems are responding by implemented scientifically-based school reform initiatives. Some of the most popular reforms include: magnet schools, school choice, direct instruction or SRA classes, integrated whole language instruction, and the advent of accelerated reader programs. These curricular and school reforms are presumed to have a positive impact on student achievement levels. In an attempt to remedy this tension between learning styles, cultural capital, and student cognitive levels- the answer was student tracking. Specifically, student tracking policies are geared towards capitalizing on what students know and are able to demonstrate, and then streamlining them into a program that will meet their individual needs.

Three broad types of ability-grouping models have been used in schools, they include; whole-class instruction, between-class tracking, and within-class grouping. “Whole-class instruction is characterized by the utilization of a traditional, textbook dominated curriculum (Goodlad, 1984 Reis, et. al., 1993) in which students move through the curriculum at the same
pace using the same methods and curricular materials, same instruction and class time” (Cuban, 1984; Goodlad, 1984, Good & Brophy, 1994). The second type of tracking is between-class tracking, the Joplin Plan, in which students are grouped temporarily while they are in a specific grade. The advantage of this plan is that it is focused on individual instruction for students. This system has had positive effects because it promotes diverse learning communities and increases the self-esteem of students. The third model is within-class or flexible grouping in which students in the same class are segmented in smaller groups for specific activities or purposes (Kulik & Kulik, 1992, p.75).

Ability grouping’s purpose is to focus on the specific strengths and weakness of student’s skill and ability levels. Its ambition is to help lower achieving students to maximize their functioning skills while simultaneously providing the academic rigor for higher functioning students. The negative outcome of ability grouping is the effect it has on different groups. Minorities and other disadvantaged groups have not been successful with tracking. Students who are tracked into lower functioning classrooms typically have less qualified teachers and an inferior curriculum (National Boards Association, 2004). Because of such unfavorable outcomes of tracking policies, school districts have begun to implement detracking regulations (Maddy-Bernstein, et.al., 1995). The success of detracking is its attempt to mainstream all levels of functioning students into heterogeneous classrooms.

Zero Tolerance Policies:

A second policy item that has disproportionately impacted African American males has been school zero tolerance policies. The term "zero tolerance" refers to policies that punish all offenses severely, no matter how minor the infraction may be. This approach grew out of state and federal drug enforcement policies in the 1980s. By 1993 zero tolerance policies were being
adopted by school boards across the country, often broadened to include not only drugs and weapons but also tobacco-related offenses, grooming and clothing regulations, and school disruption offenses. Research provides that African-American males are also more likely to be punished with severity, even for minor offenses, for violating school rules. There is a clear link between early school failures and their introduction into juvenile institutions and prisons where nine out of ten felons never complete high school (Kipnis, 2002). Moreover, considering the incarceration rates presented earlier for Black and White males, it is no surprise that these youthful offenders never graduate from high school. As more minority boys are diverted from secondary education, their enrollment in higher education and likelihood of becoming economically stable is also steadily declining.

Emphasis and Time Commitment to Sports:

Finally, there has been a high emphasis and time commitment to sports for African-American males during their K-12 educational experience. Athletics and sports figures are held in high regard in society. Indicative of such is the media’s promotion and society’s, particularly youth’s, adulation and admiration for feats of athletes such as Michael Jordan, Shaquil O’Neal, and other multi-millionaire athletes. Thousands of black athletes regularly dominate the airways. Although in most cases the images conveyed by black athletes are positive, they “promote more the idea of black physical excellence than that of black intellectual prowess” (Booker, 1999, 14).

Most African-American males learn early in life the importance of doing their best athletically. They are encouraged by their peers, parents, coaches, and society as a whole. Involvement in sports provides many students, including African-American males, an opportunity to engage in positive behavior and in some cases an incentive to earn higher grades to meet eligibility requirements. In lower socio-economic communities entertainment and sports
in many cases are viewed as the only chance for “making it out” of poverty. Engagement in these activities also potentially keeps these students away from negative influences such as gangs and drugs. Although there are clearly benefits for African-American males participating in sports, an overemphasis on these activities and the long hours needed for commitment to these activities can potentially overshadow academics. Indicative of such, are the responses that male students provided which indicated that they were mentally and physically drained after arriving home after practice and did not have enough energy to complete chores and homework after a long day of school and practice (Carter, 1999).

Sports as a means for economic advancement also potentially places additional importance and stress on African-American males, particularly those from lower social classes, to excel in sports at all cost. This overemphasis on sports potentially influences and impacts academic achievement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

Data for this analysis was collected by using: reviews of academic literature and research, personal experiences, and personal interviews with educational experts and practitioners. Academic research was collected by using the following databases: JSTOR (1982 – present, InfoTrac (1990 – present), and the Department of Education and Department of Corrections Statistics. Personal interviews were conducted and collected by the researcher. Structured personal interviews with the Adult Education Supervisor and the Director of Adult Education at Tallahassee Community College were completed on June 1, 2006. This meeting lasted approximately two hours and was held at the University Center Club on the campus of Florida State University. The purpose of this interview was to gain a practitioners opinion on the
educational status of African-American males entering into Florida Adult Education Programs and the trends in why so many of them are not completing high school.

The second interview was a structured telephone interview with Mr. Charles P. Ervin, State Coordinator for the Education of Homeless Youth in Florida. This interview took place on March 6, 2006 and lasted approximately three quarters of an hour. The purpose of this interview was to determine what educational policy and implementation of educational policy concerns are currently being faced by state officials. Additionally, it gave insight into barriers to policy success and their impacts on African-American male educational achievement. As an African-American male, I was raised in a household and have had the opportunity to face many of the typical challenges African-American males face in today’s society. I am also currently an Educational Administrator with a local grant funded educational program and have worked in collaboration with Title I schools in the Gadsden County area of Florida to provide literacy instruction. As a result, some of the data used in this analysis is based on my own personal observations and experiences.

This study was operated with the following understandings of this term:

African-American Men

This analysis focused on the males that inherently recognize themselves as having genetic ties to an African descent. Additionally, the males in question are not only recognized demographically in secondary education as being of primarily African descent, but also view themselves as being a part of or closest to their African-American heritage. The terms “African-American” and “Black” were used interchangeably for the sake of textual flow, but “African-American” is the preferred term for reference throughout the study.
Evaluative Criteria:

This analysis describes and evaluates three policy options by using the following criteria: political viability/political perception, fiscal resources required, and evaluation/accountability. Each criterion will be given a score of one, two or three, with one being a reflection of being negative/low and three being a reflection of positive/high. A rating of three means that there is a thorough accomplishment of the criteria; a two means that there is an average accomplishment of the criteria; and a rating of one means that there is minimal to no accomplishment of the criteria.

- Political viability and political perception is an essential element of the policy process. The ability of politicians to legitimate the need for a program, secure adequate support of it and maintain a high level of support throughout the policy process can determine the outcome of any policy proposal. Specifically, this criterion targets the likelihood of recommendation being passed by congress. As a result, when evaluating political viability a program rates a three if it is likely that there will be a sound and meaningful political support system to reach legislative consideration and passage.

- Fiscal resources required are determined based on how much a program involves and if the funds involved will be enough to ensure an adequate approach to the problem. It is essential that there are enough funds allotted to these programs in order to prevent the development of the notion of an “unfunded mandate.” If a proposed option scores a three in this criterion it is likely that there are funds available to successfully carry out the policy’s components.
Evaluation/Accountability is an important part of current policy proposals and the policy process. Citizens and legislatures want to ensure that leaders and organizations are fulfilling the missions that they set out to accomplish. Programs that score a three in this area are equipped with the necessary components to ensure adequate program evaluation is conducted and reported for public review.

MANAGEMENT AND POLICY OPTIONS

Research on African-American children uses a variety of psycho-social indicators to explain their school performance. The initial studies of the 1960’s focused on social and cultural deprivation models to explain African-American student deficits (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). However, authors such as Valencia (1997) argue that factors outside of the deprivation model should be analyzed to explain the under-achievement of minority students. Such factors that fall outside of these models include environmental and situational factors that are outside of the scope of most studies of minority children. African-American children are aware that there are socio-political perceptions that exist for their race as compared to Whites (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999). As such, African-American children respond to situations in schools differently based on this understanding of differences in treatment based on racial categories. African-American children bring with them specific cultural values that are not embraced, supported, nor understood in many public school systems. Polite (1999) suggests that understanding this interconnectedness between the two cultural understandings are key to promoting school achievement for this group.

Option One: Strategic Teacher Trainings
One of the possible solutions for working with African-American males include teacher training. Professional development is the cornerstone of a professional educator and as is such these experiences should include: (1) creating an inclusive environment for all students by drawing upon students’ experiences, knowledge, and beliefs (2) the postulate of recognizing and understanding how students differ from one another (3) creating a classroom setting that supports diversity by providing learning opportunities for individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences, abilities, values, and perspectives (4) developing and initiating, implementing, and evaluating curriculum and resources which enhance learning to meet the needs of all learners.

Scholars have researched to what extent do teachers play in the educational achievement of African-American males. Teacher apathy has been identified as a factor that impedes the academic achievement of students. Unfortunately, it has been found that often teachers have a negative view and decreased expectations of African-American males (Mathews, 1996; Garibaldi, 1992; Hale, 1994). Moreover, further research suggests that African-American males perform at higher rates when they have a higher proportion of teachers who are also African-American. Glasgow (1980) supports this assertion:

“The commonality shared by socio-economic and racial class of the students and teachers enriched the learning environment. The associations in and outside of school made learning a community experience. For these students the teacher cared and they forced the best out of us” (p. 55).

As a correlate to such findings, groups have attempted to further explain how an optimal learning environment for African-American males should be designed and implemented. One solution to the crisis affecting African-American males in schools was introduced by the African American Male Taskforce in Milwaukee, WI (1990). They assert:
“To address the academic achievement of Black males, it is not necessary to recognize just their needs that they bring to the school setting, but also change the structural and functional ways schools deal with them” (p. 15).

Political Viability:

Currently in the field of educational policy school are under the regulations of the No Child Left Behind legislation. This legislation addresses regulations including: 1) State Accountability Systems; 2) Adequate Yearly Progress; (3) School wide Programs; and 4) Qualifications of Teachers and Paraprofessionals. Additionally, under the terms of NCLB, school districts are required to spend an amount equal to 20 percent of their Title I, Part A funds for parental choice options of supplemental educational services and transportation for students who exercise their public school choice option. Supplemental Educational Services may be arranged after school, on weekends, or during the summer, and would include tutoring and remedial services in reading and mathematics. The district must continue to offer services during each school year until the school is no longer identified for school improvement.

As a result, there is a policy framework already in place for insuring that teachers are “highly qualified” to instruct all students and not just the ones that come from mainstream society. Due to the vagueness of the term “highly qualified,” states have developed their own approaches to meet this standard. Some states have included combinations of in class instruction hours, in-service hours, training agency conferences, and standardized assessments as requirements for meeting this standard.

With the above information in mind there is a need for teachers to be trained on how best to service those African-American males who are not completing the planned educational requirements. While one would hope that this intervention option would score very high in
political support for a group that obviously needs assistance, America does not have a good track record for legislative support being shown for programs that are seen as social services to minority groups. Labels and terminology play a very important role in the ability to get legislation passed. This policy does run a very high risk of having a “black only” stigma attached to its name. As a result of the implications that come along with trainings that may be seen as additional support for African-Americans this criterion scores very low.

**Fiscal Resources Required:**

Fiscal management is an aspect of government operation that acts as the glue that keeps its functions operational and levels of citizen support and faith at sustainable levels. The future course of educational financial management in America is increasingly being viewed in the context of sustainable systems. Such systems must exhibit sufficient institutional, technical, managerial and financial resource management in order to prosper and endure. The question of how to pay for – or how to adequately and evenly finance – the continuing demands of our bruised educational system is a central theme for the work of budget officers, interest groups, and education administrators.

Since there has already been funding set aside under NCLB for supplemental services to be offered in local schools as needed, this intervention scores high in the area of cost administration. However, at the national level there may need to be evaluations done regarding the rate of increase for educational funding over the next few years.

**Evaluation/Accountability:**

Due to the fact that this intervention option addresses that practitioner roles and responsibilities of in class instruction, the results of such trainings should be visible in African-
American graduation rates and educational gains. There are currently assessments in place that are used under NCLB in order to track student performance and these will serve as the stepping stones for ensuring schools are being held accountable. Moreover, this criterion scores very high in this area because there are processes that are currently in place to ensure adequate program evaluation results.

For many African-American males the perception of the social environment in which they live and the perceptions of limited socioeconomic opportunities outside of the classroom has drastic impacts on their school achievement level. As a result of these frameworks impacting the African-American male outlook, educators must be aware of these things in order to create enriching learning environments. Boutte (1999) suggests that the inability of teachers of African-American children to understand them, promotes the graduation of students who are ill-equipped and unable to speak Standard English. The mastery of Standard English allows individuals to be upwardly mobile in American society (Payne, 2001). Hence, Hoover (1998) found that there exists a positive correlation between a child’s ability to distinguish between Standard English and African-American vernacular English. Further, children who are unable to read effectively are also unable to learn other subject areas because through reading students are able to gain content knowledge (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Yet, African-American children who are able to code switch can successfully matriculate through the educational system (Smitherman, 1998).

Option Two: Same-Gendered Schools

Outside of the professional development of teachers, restructuring programs have been piloted to improve the achievement of African-American males. One solution to address African-
American male achievement includes same-gendered classes and/or programs (Kunjufu, 1989; Gill, 1991; Davis, 1994). Throughout the United States and in international areas, a few urban cities have pioneered such programs in hopes that such radical reconstruction will remedy the African-American males’ plight. The Malcolm X Academy instituted in San Francisco Unified School District at Bayview Hunters Point, in Dade County, FL at Pine Vera Elementary, and in New Jersey at Hatch Middle School have all experimented with same-gendered African-American male classes (Wright, 1991; Viadero, 1996; Gibbs, 1991). Short-term annual assessment data suggests that African-American males who participate in these programs demonstrate academic gains. The 2005 California Standards Test (CST) results released by the California Department of Education show that Malcolm X has increased the school-wide percent scoring at "proficient or advanced" in math from 8 percent in 2003 to 33 percent in 2005 (Kerr, 2005). Further, its African American students increased English language arts scores from 7 percent in 2003 to 16 percent in 2005. Yet the lack of longitudinal and consistent data is not available to support such long-term programming. Legal implications have put an end to these programs, such as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Stark opponents of these immersion programs include the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) (Viadero, 1996).

Political Viability:

Restricting enrollment in a public school program according to sex has in the past been seen as a possible violation of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any educational program receiving federal funds. Though Title IX does not specifically disallow a district from offering single-sex schools, it does require that districts provide
comparable facilities, courses, and services to boys and girls. While the new regulations being
developed by the Department of Education are likely to create a more favorable climate for
single-sex schools, exactly how this will play out remains to be seen. It should also be noted that
in addition to federal law, some state constitutions have equal protection provisions or equal
rights amendments. These may be interpreted by state courts even more rigorously than federal
law. As a result of such precedence and so many unknown variables, this intervention scores low
on the evaluation criterion.

Fiscal Resources:

There are a few options in terms of how these same-gendered African-American schools
can be created within school districts. One is of course to build new infrastructure to house these
students. This would give districts to opportunity to create learning environments that are fresh
and new in hopes of creating an atmosphere of change within the community. A second option
would be to utilize existing infrastructure in order to initiate renovations for capital improvement
plans to house these schools. Finally, school districts could possibly strategically shift African-
American male students around to newly designated schools that would only house the same
gender.

With this in mind, this intervention clearly has some up-front costs as it relates to capital
improvements. There would need to be funding allotted for school districts that needed
additional housing space for such institutions. In a budget season marked by the President's
determination to cut the federal budget deficit in half by 2009, the proposed education budget
requests are not conducive to promoting the competitiveness of our students and our nation in an
ever changing society. President Bush requests $54.4 billion in discretionary appropriations for
the Department of Education in fiscal year 2007, a decrease of $3.1 billion, or 5.5 percent, from the 2006 level. Depending on how financial trends sway in the future there will definitely need to be an evaluation done of what items are of priority to our nation and what are less of a priority. This option scores in the low of the evaluation criteria due to the fact that education is a priority for our country, but funding is becoming stagnant in many logistical areas.

Evaluation/Accountability:

The major objective with this intervention, much like with the others, is that of student progress. It has been shown that these types of programs work and can produce results. There are certain subjects within educational curriculum that African-American boys feel more confident where their away from a certain peer group. As a result of allowing for educational atmospheres that foster intense focus on personal development and scholarly achievement instead of impressing the opposite gender, learning gains will be enough to substantiate this intervention method. Nonetheless, this option scores high in terms of producing high quality results.

Option Three: School as a Community Center and Mentorship House

In an effort to improve the flow of African-American males down the train tracks of secondary education a possible solution that many agencies and communities alike have agreed upon has been to bring the community inside the school building. Aside from after-school programs and occasional parent-teacher conferences, communities across the country are engaging manifesting school as an extension of the area in which students reside. Given that African-American women are increasingly more likely to be responsible for raising young children alone, the impact of low wages and impoverished living conditions is stifling to
African-American male development. This process of making the aforementioned process a reality may also include equipping schools with adult education programs, English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) courses, and job trainings for community members.

Currently programs like Young Men With a Future, sponsored by the Ohio Council of Churches are springing up in order to ensure that young Black males can see a brighter tomorrow ( Essence, 1995). In the three years since its inception, YMWF has grown from a one-city project in Columbus, Ohio, to encompass Dayton, Cleveland, Cincinnati and Youngstown. Prominent African-American men – local judges and community leaders – give seminars on subjects that range from career planning to development of self-esteem and preventing violence (Essence, 1995). Once enrolled in the program, each participant is paired with an adult male mentor who follows his progress through the year. Former chairman of the Council’s African American Male Task Force, Reverend Harvard Stephens, designed and developed the program curriculum and to date more than 400 young males have successfully completed the program (Essence, 1995).

Political Viability:

Education in the African-American community was once viewed as the key to living the American Dream. “It’s now viewed by many young African-American males as an unnecessary barrier that stands between them and making fast money (Hefner, 2004). Additionally, a huge part of the failure, many believe, is the fact that “increasingly Black boys in public schools are being taught by White female teachers who are more likely to label them with discipline problems” (Hefner, 2004). There is a legitimate need for schools to become more involved in communities that they serve and educate. There is an unprecedented need for our schools to become a haven for children that may lack educational guidance at home due to parents not
being educated themselves. Specifically, black males have a need for mentorship in the principles of manhood due to the fact that many don’t have other positive examples. However, much like with option one, this type of programming is likely to be viewed politically as more of a handout to the African-American community and not as a policy that will improve society as a whole (i.e. crime rates, level of social services for single-parents, etc). Nonetheless, this intervention option scores low on the evaluation criterion.

Fiscal Resources:
While many of the aforementioned policy options, much like any other, is going to involve costs, this policy approach could possibly be outsourced to non-profits and social organizations that primarily rely on volunteer hours. These types of agencies would utilize current government grants in aid and other funding that targets at-risk youth in order accomplish this additional goal. The federal government would need to tailor existing Requests for Applications to encompass new standards targeting Black males in order to substantiate possible additional program funding. As a result of using existing grants-in-aid funds that target similar community problems and utilizing community volunteers, fiscal costs could be kept to a minimum. Nonetheless, criteria scores high in the area of fiscal resources.

Evaluation/Accountability:
This policy option comes with no current set curriculum guide or standardized assessment that is being used to gauge Black male personal development in these programs. However, much like with other public policies the federal government would need to depend on the use of the state and local governments to develop a plan and curriculum that would best fit their communities. Also, this would allow for current mentorship programs to continue utilizing
their current practices and organizational culture to best suit their students and possibly partnership with other programs to cross-train and share ideas.

The major accountability and evaluation piece that would be used here are the overarching end results. States would continue to report crime rates, homicide statistics, types of conviction charges, and educational rates in order to determine if areas that implemented these types of Black male mentorship programs had seen an increase or decrease in these various statistics. Due to the fact that accountability and evaluation would more than likely not be as immediate and concrete in the aspects of measuring if these programs were producing results, this option scores low in the area of evaluation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Why focus on the literacy of black males? The literature suggests that black African-American males are often conspicuous in advanced and upper level classes and are disproportionately representative in remedial classes. High drop out rates and low academic achievement are too often the characteristics of the educational experience for African-American males (Bailey, 2004). African–American males achieve at the lowest levels compared to Whites, and other ethnic minorities even African-American girls. They are also underrepresented on college campuses and in most professions, particularly white collar professions. African-American males are also the only group that more of their population is in jail or prison than in post-secondary institutions. They are also the only group of males to be outnumbered by women in college enrollment (Tatum, 2003). Thus, finding solutions to address the underachievement of this population is essential to ensure their inclusion in democratic society.
With the above options in mind, it is clear that they all make a conscious effort at achieving the ultimate goal of improving African-American educational achievement. However, based on the evaluation criteria (See Table 1) it is clear that the improvements in teacher training and professional development in order to mediate better African-America retention and achievement rates in our educational system is the best option. Quality teachers are the backbone of our American educational school system. They are the very fiber of all of the elements that contribute to which students will be derailed from the educational train tracks and which students will be able to make it to the cross-section of high school completion and college admission. If we are to face the concerns and downfalls of the underachievement of African-American males we must address the problem at its embryonic roots and not at its wooded and developed trunk or branches. It is at these exterior points of reference that the trend and path of development has already been tainted in some ways and will be slightly more challenging to correct.

The promises of public education and freedom remain elusive for African-American boys. Slowly, positive steps are creating a cautious faith in our will to ensure that this group of students will not waste away due to the public's silence. We, the public, have choices to make about who gets to receive a quality education, who benefits from the promises of public education, who enjoys optimal freedom in America and who does not. The challenge has been issued and not society must answer the call of duty.
REFERENCES


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Maddy-Bernstein, C., Matias, Z., Cunanan, E., Krall, K., Kantenberger, J. , Iliff, L.


APPENDICES

**Table 1**

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<tr>
<th>Evaluation Criteria</th>
<th>Political Viability</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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(Scoring: One, Two, and Three with one being negative, two being average, and three being positive in regards to the evaluative criteria.)