

Source: The Washington Times, Monday, Oct. 2, 2000

Black Pupils Lag Despite Economic Status

Recent nationwide studies comparing blacks' learning abilities with those of other minorities and whites have come up with some shocking results, which cast substantial doubts over cherished cure-alls such as greater federal funding and smaller class size.

- After decades of steady progress in the 1970s and 1980s, black children's test scores fell significantly behind in the 1990s – during the tenure of the Clinton-Gore administration, with its emphasis on pouring more and more federal money and regulations into public education.
- Black students have made some gains during recent years.
- But when compared with their relative position to some other minorities and whites, they continue to score far lower on the SAT, the ACT and the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) exams, which have charted the progress of students nationwide in core subjects since 1969.
- Economically privileged black children who share the same advantages as their white peers, including smaller class size, also are doing poorly, according to the Clinton-Gore administration's own Department of Education.
- It reported also that the gap is not confined to center-city, low-income, high-crime areas, but is fast becoming a suburban issue as well, as increasingly more blacks, attaining affluence, flee from the urban cores just as whites do.
- By way of illustration, in 1971 reading scores on national assessments for students of black parents who had gone beyond high school were 44 points lower than those of white students with parents of similar education levels.

By 1990, blacks had narrowed the reading gap to 27 points.

But by 1999, after seven years of the Clinton-Gore administration, the gap had widened again, to a 36-point difference.

It all has traditional educationists scratching their heads. Conventional-wisdom fixes aren't working.

Two of the non-traditional explanations being offered frequently now are:

1. Expectations that teachers and school administrators have of blacks are far below their expectations for other minorities and whites.

There is mounting evidence that when students – regardless of race or economic background or neighborhood – are pushed to higher achievements, they respond favorably.

According to Paul Hill, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington in Seattle:

“Black kids on average, especially in cities, are in schools that offer much-less-demanding curricula and don’t push the kids as fast. They don’t force them to exercise reading, analytic and mathematics skills like schools in the suburbs and schools with larger numbers of whites.

“You can see when black kids get into Catholic schools and schools that are highly demanding, they generally do about as well as anybody else does.”

He said that poor blacks attending non-public schools “usually end up with the same grades, test scores and scholarships” as other students there.

“A lot of it has to do with the intellectuality of the schools,” he said.

2. Regardless of race or economic status, children whose parents get involved in their education and insist on pressing them to meet higher expectations do better in school.

Kevin L. Martin, a black Maryland businessman raised in the District of Columbia, where his mother held him to high scholastic standards, reprimanded black leaders such as Jesse Jackson and members of the Congressional Black Caucus for not advocating personal responsibility and empowerment instead of a larger federal role in education.

“Until these so-called black leaders get out of that Democratic mind-set of treating African-American children as victims, and hold these parents as well as the schools accountable, African-Americans will continue to fail in education,” Martin said.

A member of the advisory council for Project 21, the National Leadership Network of Conservative African-Americans, Martin criticized those black parents who do not get involved in their children’s education.

“That is why their children get the worst of everything,” he said