

Source: Pam Belluck, "Reason is Sought for Lag by Blacks in School Effort,"

Upper-Class Black Students Underperforming

Educators are puzzled by data which show that middle-class and upper-income black students perform below levels achieved by white students of comparable background. While students of all races do better if their parents have more education, blacks whose parents have at least one graduate degree averaged 191 points lower than whites whose parents had the same amount of education, according to an analysis of 1995 SAT scores.

Blacks whose parents had no high school diploma averaged 137 points behind whites whose parents had none. Thus the gap between black and white performance is wider at higher achievement levels than at lower levels. As for family income, blacks whose parents earned less than \$10,000 scored 183 points lower than whites with similar backgrounds — while those with family incomes above \$70,000 scored 144 points below whites from comparable families.

Discussions with students, teachers, researchers and parents reveal a multitude of theories to explain the disparity. The explanations range from lingering racial inferiority complexes, to peer pressure, low teacher expectations, curriculum, parental involvement, access to information and vestiges of racism in schools.

Educators and others who have long blamed socioeconomic differences for lagging performance by black students are reportedly uncomfortable talking about the evidence that academic achievement among black parents and higher black household income are not having the desired effect on their children.

"This is not something that a lot of people feel comfortable talking about," reports Edmund W. Gordon, a professor emeritus of psychology at Yale University and the co-chairman of the National Task Force on Minority High Achievement, formed in 1997 by the College Board.

Some black students report that peer pressure keeps them from speaking correct English or outperforming in the classroom. Also, a national study asked students to name the lowest grade they could take home without their parents becoming angry. Black students consistently named lower grades than Asian, white or Hispanic students.