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**A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN  
FOR THE  
EDUCATION OF  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS  
IN THE  
STATE OF WASHINGTON**

Revised July 2005

**Office Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Higher Education, Certification, and Community Outreach**  
*Dr. Andrew H. Griffin, Assistant Superintendent*

# **A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN TO RECLAIM AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE STATE OF WASHINGTON**

October 2004

Of all the problems confronting the African American community today, none are more critical to our future than those related to the education of our children which continues to be in a state of emergency in school districts across this state. Much has been written on education based on research, observation, opinion polls, interviews, and analysis; yet, our public school system continues to fail many of our African American children. This is not because we are ignorant of what needs to be done or even how to do it. Ron Edmonds, the founder of the Effective Schools Movement stated, "We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far."<sup>1</sup> The increased focus on high academic standards has brought a heightened awareness of the disparities in student achievement as measured on various statewide assessments (Shannon & Bylsma, 2002).

African American children, for the most part, are the proxy for what ails American education in general (Hawkins, 1988). As we fashion solutions that help African American children, we fashion solutions that will help all children.<sup>2</sup> Unless we find solutions, many of our children will remain deprived of the skills and knowledge they need to function successfully in the years ahead. Schools must shift their focus from the supposed deficiencies of the African American child and the alleged inadequacies of African American family life to the barriers that stand in the way of academic success posed by the outdated, outmoded Eurocentric system of education and the ineffective methodologies of the instructional process that do not meet the learning needs of our children (METT, 2002).

Significant research supports the efficacy of effective and culturally responsive strategies, which improve the achievement of African American students. Ron Edmonds (1983) noted that "schools teach those they think they must and when they think they needn't, they don't". We must ensure that our children receive culturally relevant instruction and the necessary resources to achieve at high levels. For many African American children, our educational system is not merely ineffective, it is all too often openly hostile and damaging. Thus, while it is our children who are disproportionately receiving failing grades in school and not performing well on tests, it is the education system that has failed to meet their learning needs.

A number of educational changes will become effective in 2008 in the state of Washington and will have devastating consequences for many of our African American youth. Several Brown vs. Board 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events were held around the state that pointed out the lack of progress in education for a large number of our people.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ron Edmonds, founder of the Effective Schools Movement.

<sup>2</sup> The Honorable Augustus F. Hawkins, founder of the National Council on Educating Black Children.

Many important decisions and policies have recently been made in education:

- Major legislation was passed at both the federal and state levels.
- *No Child Left Behind* legislation has ushered in new expectations for ALL children and we embrace the focus it has brought to the plight of our African American children.
- Cut scores have been set by the *A+ Commission* for the Certificate of Academic Achievement and must be met by all students as of 2008 in order to graduate.
- Individual improvement plans are now required for each failing student.

The time has come for the African American community in the state of Washington to reclaim our children and help to make our communities whole again. Achievement data and other indicators signal that something is terribly wrong. There is considerable unrest in many of our schools, particularly in large urban districts. A public protest was held in Olympia by the Seattle NAACP and lawsuits have been filed over harsh treatment of several African American students in several districts. We, the community, must do our part to make a difference in the lives of our children. Schools and agencies can do only so much. Many of our children's problems stem from the home and we need to find ways to support our children, parents, families, and communities, in addition to our continued efforts in dealing with various inequities of the system. We have failed to hold policy makers, elected officials, and other decision makers accountable for the "educational malpractice" that is taking place with many of our children. The need is greater than ever!

Since 1990, the African American population in Washington State has increased by 8.3 percent, with 74 percent living in King and Pierce counties.<sup>3</sup> During the 2003-04 school year, African American enrollment in the state's K-12 public schools was 56,548 students (5.6% of school population), which more than doubled the enrollment of 21,431 students in 1972. This represents an increase of 128% in 30 years, with the most rapid growth in the last ten years. Another 3,322 African American students attend private schools for 4.1% of that total. From a personnel perspective, 2.11% of educational staff in the K-12 system during the 2003-04 school year were African American. Only 1.48% of them were classroom teachers, far from the student population of 5.6%. Complicating the disparity is the fact that many African Americans in the system are fast approaching retirement age with few replacement prospects in sight.

Student achievement for African American students lags considerably behind other students. The WASL test for 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> grades show the glaring disparity, but the results are no different than disparate scores on other standardized tests used over the last 25 years. The most recent WASL scores for 2004 show improvement but the situation is still grave. African American students have the highest rates of school dropout and suspension from school, the higher rate of teenage pregnancy and fatherhood, the lowest grade point average and standardized test results, the lowest graduation rate, the lowest percentage of post-secondary students, and the lowest rate of college graduation (especially athletes).

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<sup>3</sup> Office of Financial Management, Population Forecasts, September 2004.

The rate of juvenile arrests is much higher for African American youth. While the rates have been declining for all groups the past decade, the rate for African Americans is still more than three times higher than for white youth (Washington Kids Count, 2002).

In 2003, Blacks were two times more likely than Hispanics and five times more likely than Whites to be in jail. Half of African American male dropouts have prison records. A 2003 report of the Justice Policy Institute found that the shift in new funding from education to prisons is having a devastating impact on African American men. The report shows that these men in their early 30s are nearly twice as likely to have prison records (22%) than Bachelor's degrees (12%).

**The ineffective education of African-American children is evidenced by:<sup>4</sup>**

- Continued academic achievement gap
- Disproportionate low academic achievement
- Under-involvement in school activities other than sports
- Under-representation in programs for the gifted
- Overrepresentation in special education programs
- Disproportionate discipline referrals, resulting in suspension and expulsion
- Over-representation in the juvenile justice system.
- Digital divide
- Low graduation rates
- Low entry to higher education
- Under-representation in programs that prepare African-American students for the world of work
- Under-representation in gateway courses to college

**Other conditions of the system also contribute to this ineffectiveness:**

- Lack of cultural competency among most educators and administrators
- Staff members who communicate low expectations for behavior, and academic achievement of African-American children
- Staff members who fear African-American children and their parents, guardians, and colleagues and subsequently avoid interacting with them
- Staff members who destroy the hopes and generate feelings that adult opportunities for success are limited
- A belief system that perpetuates inferiority created by bias reports, publications, materials, and media portrayal
- Institutional racism
- Eurocentric paradigm that leaves little room to engage educational materials and pedagogy that use various worldviews, languages, cultural norms, learning styles, and multiple intelligences
- Educators who deal with African-American students from a deficit model

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<sup>4</sup> Blueprint for Action III, National Council on Educating Black Children, 1995.

## **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The question is often asked, "How can other racial and ethnic groups come to this country and succeed when African Americans have not after all these years?" Dr. James Corner offers an excellent explanation in an article, "No Need To Wait For A Miracle." He makes the following points:

- Black Americans have experienced four devastating shocks:
  1. The disruption of a close-knit African kinship structure that was at the core of all political, economic, and social functioning.
  2. The middle passage and the brutality of the slave trade.
  3. Two-and-a-half centuries of slavery with its imposed dependency, inferior status, and no opportunity for improvement.
  4. The release of slaves into a hostile environment in both the North and South-stripped African Americans of what little protection slave-masters provided them as valued property, leaving them neither slaves nor citizens.
- Blacks were denied the knowledge, skills, contacts, power, and information that could only be gained through interaction with mainstream political and economic networks.
- Huge disparities in investment in education took place at every level, making it necessary to move from uneducated and unskilled to highly educated and highly skilled in just one generation rather than the three generations available to immigrant groups.

Economic and social progress in the society has long been and continues to be rooted in access to quality education. It is a new millennium and the African-American community must not wait any longer for the educational establishment to address these issues. The interwoven results of deprivation will not be resolved unless we commit ourselves to a dramatic improvement in the quality of education available to our children.

A version of the following strategic plan of action was first developed by the African-American Think Tank composed of educators and community members in the spring of 1998, under the auspices of Dr. Andrew Griffin of the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and with the facilitation and authorship of Dr. Thelma A. Jackson, Education Consultant.

## **STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN**

### **MISSION:**

To reclaim the brilliance of African-American heritage so that African-American youth can be fully empowered to excel in the 21st century.

### **VISION:**

All African-American students in the state of Washington will be thoroughly prepared for life in the 21st century and meet or exceed all academic standards that challenge them.

### **WE BELIEVE:**

1. Educators must be culturally competent in the use of curriculum and effective teaching and learning strategies to ensure academic success of African American children.
2. Race matters: An education environment free of prejudice, racism, inequities, bigotry and stereotypes must exist for African-American students, parents/guardians, and staff to achieve success.
3. The educational system must be held accountable for causing and eliminating academic disproportionality and to ensure high levels of achievement of African-American students.
4. The current system of education must be comprehensively and systematically reformed and restructured to ensure that African-American students are fully prepared to meet the new demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
5. The school climate needs to be a caring and nurturing environment that sees to the needs of the whole child.
6. All educators must possess the cultural competence, knowledge, and skills necessary to develop and empower African-American students to achieve at high levels African-American educators must be fully represented throughout the education system.
7. African-American students achieve at high levels when teaching is aligned with learning styles and can demonstrate brilliance through multiple intelligences.
8. Instructional methodologies and materials must be culturally responsive and relevant for African-American students, recognizing that self-knowledge from a historical perspective is key to their high achievement.
9. African-American students are capable, desirous to learn and can achieve at high levels.
10. The African-American community must be active participants in the education of our children and be accountable for ensuring the success of African-American students in the variety of settings where learning takes place.
11. The current academic trend of failure among a vast majority of African-American students is not an indication of their true abilities to learn.
12. African-American students achieve when high expectations exist and effective instructional strategies are utilized as they are nurtured and respected in the educational setting.
13. Parents of African-American students want opportunities for their children to achieve at high levels, realizing that they are their first teachers and must be advocates for them.
14. Early childhood education is vitally important in preparation for readiness to learn.
15. The higher education system must play a leading role in the training of professionals by addressing the unique needs of African Americans and mandating cultural competence for all staff.

16. The business community has an obligation to assist in the alleviation of the inequities that exist among African Americans.

### **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

The outcomes for African-American students must include the state learning goals:<sup>5</sup>

1. Read with comprehension, write with skill, and communicate effectively and responsibly in a variety of ways and settings.
2. Know and apply core concepts of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history; geography; arts; and health and fitness.
3. Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and to integrate experience and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems.
4. Understand the importance of work and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect career and educational opportunities.

In addition to the state goals, additional outcomes are expected:

5. Apply strategies of conflict management and mediation of cross-racial concerns.
6. Acquire and utilize computer and technology skills.
7. Know and apply knowledge of self and the perspectives of others.
8. Function as caring, responsible individuals and as contributing members of families, work groups, and communities, enjoy a productive and satisfying life.
9. Belief in self and ability to achieve at high levels
10. Become continual learners, resourceful and flexible in the face of the known and unknown.
11. Resiliency
12. Ability to network and maneuver the system
13. Cultural competency

### **GOAL I**

Collaborate with the education system to develop a performance-based system of accountability that is fair and free of bias.

### **STRATEGIES:**

1. Extend opportunities to learn by restructuring space and time for a more flexible education.
2. Develop a system of continuous monitoring and evaluation of student performance and provide intervention early in the process.
3. Utilize effective curriculum reform designs to improve instruction for African-American learners.
4. Secure resources to support highly impacted African-American students and hold the school accountable for utilizing these resources.
5. Infuse appropriate and accurate comprehensive African-American history and culture into K-12 academic curriculum and offer African-American history and culture courses in the curriculum.
6. Identify and utilize available resources of OSPI and other agencies.

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<sup>5</sup> Commission on Student Learning, Essential Academic Requirements; July, 1998.

7. Identify and duplicate exemplary programs and successful practices for African-American students and incorporate them into teacher training and instructional methodology.
8. Ensure that occupational and technical education is an integral part of the curriculum.
9. Provide focus to the issue of language difficulties possessed by many African American students.

### **GOAL II**

Mobilize the community, ensuring family and parental involvement in the education process of African-American children.

#### **STRATEGIES:**

1. Provide training to successfully develop leadership within communities to carry out plans for educational improvement.
2. Design and implement a model for community mobilization.
3. Develop community-based family involvement centers, including tutoring, mentoring, parent training, technology training, etc.
4. Help parents to access the educational system and understand how it operates.
5. Ensure that African-American parents are broadly involved in decision-making processes in schools, districts, and the state.
6. Encourage volunteerism and other involvement of African-American community members in the schools.
7. Institute social service collaboration between schools and community entities on behalf of children.

### **GOAL III**

Provide assistance in the development of cultural competency for teachers, administrators, counselors and staff through continuous training and professional development.

#### **STRATEGIES:**

1. Ensure that professional development training includes multicultural education, and gender and ethnic bias awareness.
2. Provide training on integration of African-American history and culture across the curriculum.
3. Provide teachers with resources and tools to assist with implementing multicultural education in the classroom.
4. Provide training for all educators in the unique culture, characteristics, and learning styles of African-American students, including pre-service training.
5. Assist teachers in understanding the importance of incorporating students' voices, culture and world-view in the classroom and school environment.
6. Strengthen the role of paraprofessionals

### **GOAL IV**

Reclaim our youth through a program of designed activities in our communities that address the needs of our youth and the necessity for them to be actively engaged in their education.

#### **STRATEGIES:**

1. Mobilize the African-American community to respond to student needs.

2. Develop a safe, caring, responsive environment where students exist without labels.
3. Place teachers/staff in their areas of expertise and competence.
4. Establish academic programs from birth to grave.
5. Build meaningful relationships to assist African-American students in the development of self-knowledge, motivation, and overall responsibility.
6. Establish efficient, effective ways to monitor student achievement.
7. Expose African-American students to a variety of experiences that promote and expand their horizons.
8. Provide models to teach interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and social skills development.
9. Adapt and implement a rites of passage program at the community level.

### **GOAL V**

Impact the various policymakers and the Legislature on changes needed to improve learning opportunities and academic achievement of African-American students.

#### **STRATEGIES:**

1. Work with policymakers on the national, state, and local levels to ensure positive treatment of African-American students.
2. Increase representation of African-American educators on committees and advisory boards of the OSPI and other education agencies and entities.
3. Partner with other groups to get what's needed for our kids.
4. Increase numbers of African-American educators in the schools at all levels.
5. Employ ombudsmen to advocate for students/parents in handling discipline problems.
6. Confront the issues of attitudes, racism, the state system, negotiated contracts, and other aspects of the problem that are rarely discussed.
7. Provide additional resources to help students in need.
8. Allow the system to enter contractual agreements with agencies to provide alternative education for students not succeeding in the conventional system.

### **GOAL VI**

Impact postsecondary education institutions, policies, programs, and practices, making them more accessible and responsive to the needs of African-American students.

#### **STRATEGIES:**

1. Convene a postsecondary group of policy makers and administrators to discuss the needs of African-American students.
2. Influence future planning of higher education to include radically different approaches to professional preparation and development.
3. Maintain access to educational opportunities for African-American students through affirmative outreach, recruitment, and other programs of inclusion.

## **CONCLUSION**

The implementation plans for these goals and strategies must still be developed by local African American communities. Different levels of involvement are required of the various individuals throughout the spectrum of the African American community and the educational system. Every attempt will be made to impact current and future decisions concerning schools and African American children in order to accomplish the goals and strategies that have been articulated in this plan.

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