

# **AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE EDUCATIONAL CONDITION OF BLACK MALES IN FLORIDA: PROBLEM, PURPOSE AND PROCEDURES**

## **The Problem**

Black male students in Florida occupy the lowest strata of academic access and attainment and the highest incidence of academic exclusion and failure. They exhibit lower success rates than do their non-black male and all-race female counterparts on such measures as high school graduation, undergraduate enrollment, degree attainment, graduate program admission and professional credential acquisition. Conversely, black male students in our state have higher rates of suspension, expulsion, corporal punishment and premature school leaving ("dropping out") than do other students in the system. These academic problems contribute not only to the high unemployment and underemployment rates noted among the black men in our state, but also exacerbate a host of societal problems associated with the black male population, of which crime and delinquency are perhaps the most disturbing.

The recurring pattern among achievement indicators identifies black males as the student group whose needs are least served by the educational system. Although many individual black males successfully negotiate the public elementary and secondary school systems, the negotiation of those structures by the aggregate black male population is often marked by failure and the truncation of educational experience. Not surprisingly, black males who do not succeed in negotiating the ladder of educational achievement may develop less than positive conceptualizations of themselves and be unable to contribute to the general society what their beginning, innate potential may have promised.

It is not enough simply to repeat the oft-heard criticism that "our schools are socially middle-class structures transmitting middle-class values by middle-class teachers." Schools retain significant power to screen and control the future life chances of all those who attend them. Black males also find that the quality, organization and policies of the schools they attend significantly affect their academic achievement, their view of self, and their subsequent economic and social disposition. The disappointing scores achieved by black male students at all levels of education, the apparent reduction in the number of black males participating in higher education, and the lack of academic success proportionate to their number at every level of education in Florida — all these have contributed to the sense of alarm felt by academic, economic, and political decision makers in our state.

## **Purpose and Procedures**

The Florida Institute of Education exploratory study of the educational condition of black males in Florida focused on data, public testimony and expert opinion gathered and analyzed in an effort to identify causes of the markedly low academic access, achievement, and program completion exhibited by black male students within our state's system(s) of primary, secondary and postsecondary education.

Paying particular attention to the achievement level of the black male student, the study addressed four specific objectives:

1. to define the problem associated with black male student performance in the State of Florida;
2. to identify causes of the markedly low rates of academic access, achievement, and completion exhibited by black male students;
3. to identify strategies, policies, and actions that will improve black male student performance; and
4. to make recommendations to academic, political, and economic decision makers in the State for improving the performance of black male students.