

Moreover, we find that the present curriculum is not bias-free; inequity in the presentation of curriculum content attests to this. Educators remain uninformed about the proven benefits of coaching blacks for nationally standardized tests, despite the significant gains made in scores among blacks who have been coached. An overall outcome of ineffective schooling is an insufficient pool of black male high school graduates who are prepared to enroll in higher education — particularly in scientific and technical fields. It is not surprising, then, when we find that black males are the lower academic achievers in the educational system.

Issues of Opportunity

In order for one to accumulate the experiences that lead to advancement and progress, one must have the opportunity, the chance, to acquire those experiences. Barriers to experience for the black male include not only the social residue of prejudice and discrimination, but also government policies that fail to address the need to expand black access to enriching experiences in both aggressive and affirmative ways. Practices (such as disproportionate school suspensions) that end in the direct exclusion of a significant portion of black males from valuable and enriching academic, economic and social experiences add to the diminution of capacity that is *underachievement*.

The major issues nested within the issue cluster of *opportunity* concern the pattern of exclusion (suspension, expulsion and punishment) associated with the black male student population, the pattern of scholastic participation/attainment (track placement, high school completion rates, undergraduate and graduate degree attainment, and professional credentialing) and the issue of providing adequate and appropriate funds for the education of deserving and persistent black male students.

In the case of suspension, Gary (*op. cit.*) notes that black children in elementary school are suspended three times as often as white children and for longer periods of time. They are also twice as likely as whites to be suspended in the secondary grades. Low socioeconomic status and female-dominated households are positive correlates of school suspension (p. 205).

Yet, suspension is not the only factor. Black males also are subject to the imposition of corporal punishment at rates that are disproportionate to their percentage of total public school enrollment. Gary also reports, for example, that while blacks constitute only 16 percent of total school enrollment nationally, they are almost twice as likely as whites to be suspended, to be expelled and to receive corporal punishment (*Ibid*). Issues of justice and equity aside, these patterns of exclusion present another formidable barrier to black male academic success.

According to a 1984 study by the Florida Postsecondary Education Planning Commission (PEPC), black participation in public postsecondary education is steadily declining. While blacks comprised less than 9 percent of university undergraduate enrollment, this was a two percentage points decline from 11 percent in 1977. Black graduate enrollment declined from 7.4 percent in 1977 to 4.4 percent in 1983. A diminishing pool of high school graduates who are prepared to benefit from post-high school education, coupled with an increasing emphasis on quality, highlight the growing difficulty in providing further access to a larger proportion of minority and disadvantaged students (PEPC, 1984, p. 304).

The barriers presented by inadequate funding for black students wishing to pursue advanced studies are well documented. Of 422 National Science Foundation traineeship awards, blacks received two; of 725 National Science Foundation fellowship awards, blacks received 243; and of 10,206 institutional research assistantships, blacks received 156. Blacks who received their doctorates reported that they were generally more dependent on their own earnings while enrolled as advanced graduate students than were whites and international students.

For the most part, financial aid policies are unresponsive to the needs of low income blacks; and financial incentives to encourage black males to continue from two-year to four-year institutions are too few. Supplemental funds for the completion of undergraduate, graduate, and professional study in a normal time frame are critical for the black male. Few black males with the potential for leadership are given the opportunity to receive the type of professional development which would qualify them for appointment to administrative positions.