A Case for the Black Male College Explorers Program

Inside

Dr. Edward G. Tolliver, Director
Black Male College Explorers Program
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Greetings:

It is indeed an overwhelming recognition of Florida’s Black-White achievement gap that prompted investigators at the Florida A&M University College of Education to undertake this study: “An Educational Exploration of the Critical Issues Effecting Black Males in Florida.” Moreover, we are extremely pleased to present this research in our inaugural publication aptly named Black Papers: Perspectives in African American Higher Education.

On July 23, 1992, Dr. Frederick S. Humphries wrote these words: “At Florida A&M University, one of our goals is to seek solutions to social problems facing our society today. Thus, some three years ago, we conceptualized and implemented the Black Male College Explorers Program.” Since 1990, the Black Male College Explorers Program has provided successful solutions to the high dropout rate and low graduation rate of black males in Florida. Although, we Floridians still have much work to do in creating a progressive, but sustainable educational environment that is also economically sustainable.

As state revenue projections languish and budget shortfalls continue, please keep in mind that throughout Florida “between 60 and 70 percent of the black male students in the largest Florida districts do not graduate with their class” according to the Schott Foundation. By conspicuous contrast, our program has achieved just about an 85% graduation rate since inception. Simply Remarkable!

On behalf of Ms. Adel Manatee, Dr. Rufus Ellis, Jr., and Dr. Ghazwan Lutfi we offer this descriptive research as a resource for improving the quality of academic life for many of Florida’s African-American boys. Florida A&M University is pleased to be an honest broker for pedagogical justice by designing prevention/intervention curriculums to prevent black males from dropping out of high school, facilitate their admission to college, and significantly increase their chances of earning a college degree.

Kind regards,

Edward G. Tolliver, Ph.D.
Director
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THE CRITICAL ISSUES EFFECTING BLACK MALES

An Educational Exploration of the Critical Issues Effecting Black Males in Florida

Dr. Ghazwan Lutfi, Associate Professor
Educational Leadership
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
302 Gore Educational Complex B, Tallahassee, FL 32307
850-599-8511, FAX 850-599-3906
Ghazwan.lutfi@famu.edu

Dr. Rufus Ellis, Jr., Associate Professor
Secondary Education
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
302 Gore Educational Complex B, Tallahassee, FL 32307
850-599-3675, FAX 850-599-8098
Rufus.ellis@famu.edu

Dr. Edward Tolliver, Director
Black Male College Explorers Program
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
302 Gore Educational Complex B, Tallahassee, FL 32307
850-561-2408, FAX850-599-8098
Edward.tolliver@famu.edu

Abstract

This study investigates the effects of various practices in kindergarten through twelfth grade education institutions on Black males. Influences and consequences of such measures as special education programs, low ability grouping, and grade retention represent documented evidence of societal disenfranchisement for Blacks in general, but more significantly for Black males. These findings have been generalized nationally since Florida is often referred to as a microcosm of the nation’s diverse population. Implications of the study and its results will be addressed.
Introduction

The persistence of a multi-dimensional Black-White achievement gap in the United States has been widely acknowledged as a major social problem, a controversial public policy issue, and a subject that demands the continued attention of academic theorists and researchers working from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Although Black-White differences in academic attainment and its primary socioeconomic correlates have shown some decline since the era of the Civil Rights Movement, they have remained large (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2008, p.2). The long-term trend data clearly indicate that the pace of progress in closing racial achievement gaps has slowed of late and may have actually undergone a reversal among young males. There is no doubt that an unconscionably large proportion of African American males is currently suffering a prolonged crisis that is distinguished by the severity of its manifest consequences and the likelihood that it will yield downward socioeconomic mobility within current and future generations. The nature of this opportunity crisis has been captured in the Schott Foundation’s recent statement that:

Over the last 25 years, the social, educational and economic outcomes for Black males have been more systemically devastating than the outcomes for any other racial or ethnic group or gender. Black males have consistently low educational attainment levels, are more chronically unemployed and underemployed, are less healthy and have access to fewer health care resources, die much younger, and are many times more likely to be sent to jail for periods significantly longer than males of other racial/ethnic groups (2008, p.3).

Although these inter-penetrating disparities can be discerned among Black males of all ages, the impact is most acutely apparent among adolescents and young men. Since the mid-1980s several scholarly observers have characterized Black male youth as an “endangered species” that is at inordinately high risk for failure across virtually all life domains (Jordan & Cooper, 2003, p.200).

The Black-White achievement gap is acutely apparent within the societal institution that has traditionally performed the function of equalizing opportunities among ethnic-racial and class groups, the nation’s public education system. At present, African American male students display the poorest educational outcomes of all major demographic groups in the United States (Levin, Belfield, Muenig, & Rouse, 2006, p.2). National statistics show that African American males are much less likely to graduate from high school, to attend college and to achieve a post-secondary degree than their White counterparts. They also reveal that Black males under-perform both White students and Black females on standardized tests administered at elementary, middle and high school levels. Throughout their public school careers
Black males are heavily over-represented among students assigned to special education, placed within the lowest ability groups, retained for one or more grades, and subjected to exclusionary discipline (Uwah, McMahon & Furlow, 2008, p.296). For many within their ranks the customary pattern of school completion leading to gainful employment has been replaced by school failure preceding or accompanied by incarceration. As several of the attendees at a research conference sponsored by the Civil Rights Project and Northeastern University’s Institute on Race and Justice in 2003 remarked, a large percentage of Black male adolescents is now part of or about to enter a “school-to-prison pipeline” (Fenning & Rose, 2007, p.538).

Given the obvious importance of obtaining a high school degree for socioeconomic status, secondary school graduation and dropout rates have been a focal point of investigations into the extent and the causes of the Black-White educational achievement gap. As will be discussed at greater length in this paper, the most commonly used indicators of high school completion that appear within nationwide figures from official sources are highly suspect. Using what is arguably a more valid definition of high school completion, the Schott Foundation has calculated that during the 2005-2006 school year less than half of all Black males received a regular high school diploma with members of their modal age cohort (2008, p.2). There are marked disparities between and within the nation’s fifty states. The Schott Foundation has projected that only one third of the one million Black male students who are currently enrolled in the public school systems of New York, Florida, and Georgia will graduate high school on a timely basis (Schott, 2008, p.2).

School failure has a calculable depressive impact upon the individual lifetime earnings of African American males. But as economists who have investigated this phenomenon have found, low levels of educational attainment among members of this demographic group entail substantial public losses. Levin and his associates have argued educational inequality for Black males leads “to large social costs in the form of lower societal income and economic growth, lower tax revenues, and higher costs of such public services as health, criminal justice, and public assistance” (Schott, 2008, p.2). In their estimation, the lifetime public benefits of an African American male graduating from high school amount to $256,700 per new graduate; if Black males completed high school at the same rate as White males, the net public savings would be roughly $3.98 billion each year (p.2).

The magnitude of the Black-White educational achievement gap, its increasing concentration among males, and evidence of a break from the constructive trends posted between 1970 and the late 1980s has evoked an exceedingly large body of research (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008, p.127). This corpus of work has increased dramatically during the past few years. Scholars from the fields of education, sociology, psychology, political science/policy and economics have sought to measure the gap and, even more importantly, to identify its antecedents for the purpose of formulating effective remedial policies and intervention practices. Yet there is no unified model of the Black-White educational achievement gap and/or the processes that contribute to school success/failure among African American males. Instead, the use of competing theories based upon radically different assumptions has generated a huge but unwieldy, and often contradictory, body of findings. The current Black-White school achievement literature embodies studies that have tested hypotheses that collectively encompass a very large number and broad range of study variables. At the same time, scholars who have investigated identical sets of variables using the same data bases or similar study samples have reported diverse results as a consequence of methodological differences. In some instances, they have transformed similar results into findings that are incompatible with those of their fellow researchers due to both methodological and ideological differences.
Like the study at hand, several investigations of the Black-White public school achievement gap have been conducted within the state of Florida while several others have examined the influence of statewide and district policies upon that gap and upon the experience of African American males. This is understandable. More African Americans are enrolled in Florida’s public schools than in any other state (Holzman, 2006, p.24). Despite some modestly encouraging signs in the 2007-2008 school year, Florida’s Black-White high school completion gap remains larger than the national average. According to the Schott Foundation, on the basis of Black-White high school completion rates in 2006-2007, Florida ranked 46th among all states (Schott, 2008, p.5). Using more stringent indicators, definitions, and computational methods than those employed by the Florida Department of Education, the Foundation’s researchers estimated that in 2006-2007 less than a third of Florida’s Black male high school students graduated “on schedule” (Schott, 2008, p.2). There are additional aspects of Florida’s case, notably those found in the state’s public school performance assessment and accountability regime that are of considerable interest to both policy-makers and scholars. At bottom, Florida’s Black male high school crisis exemplifies the nation-wide problem while its relatively poor record highlights the problem’s complexity and the constraints of addressing it.

Since the official statistics do not furnish a complete picture of the Black-White school achievement gap, a cursory analysis of the descriptive data relevant to the Black-White public school achievement gap in the United States and in Florida is presented here.

While there is no theoretical consensus about the causes of the Black-White school achievement gap or the plight of the Black male students, the next section of this paper will examine competing theoretical perspectives that have been brought to bear upon the subject. The paper divides these perspectives under three broad headings: (1) structural/systemic, (2) individual/family, and (3) interpersonal interaction/cultural discontinuity.

By organizing the empirical literature on the Black-White school achievement gap under these three rubrics, the researchers do not intend to imply that studies using a common set of variables adhere to a unified explanatory model. To the contrary, the taxonomy is simply meant to bring some degree of order to a field that is characterized by both theoretical fragmentation and a very large number of independent and mediating variables. Owing to the multiplicity of factors found in the empirical literature and the lack of a comprehensive database that contains a large set of co-variates related to racial differences in educational achievement, many scholars have devised ingenious but inherently problematical proxy variables (De Los Santos, Heckman, &Larenas, 2004, p.7). This, in turn, has generated greater fragmentation within the domain of Black-White school achievement research.

Theoretical Perspectives

As Uwah and her colleagues have recently observed, “multiple hypotheses have been suggested to explain the lower performance of African American students generally and African American male students specifically compared to their White counterparts” (2008, p.297). While these hypotheses often build upon the findings of prior empirical studies, at bottom, they are derived from theoretical constructs. The researcher’s selection of a particular construct effectively determines the identification of variables for testing and has a powerful influence upon study design. Yet there is no scholarly consensus concerning the validity of any model that might explain the Black-White school achievement gap or how student gender interacts with race. In fact, the relevant literature indicates intense conflicts among scholars about the structures and processes that contribute to that gap.
Lewis and his associates (2008) have delineated three interrelated but competing “paradigms” that have been used to account for differences in public school outcomes among Black and White students. The “structural-systemic” paradigm stresses the influence of macro-level forces, notably socioeconomic stratification and its correspondence with race. The “cultural deficit” paradigm, as Lewis et al. refer to it, focuses upon norms, attitudes, and behaviors grounded in African American culture that purportedly influence student engagement in educational processes. Lastly, what Lewis et al. designate as the “discontinuity paradigm” highlights apparent conflicts that stem from Black student experiences with and perceptions of public schools as manifestations of White culture and racial bias on the part of public school personnel, and most notably classroom teachers.

In their effort to explain the causes of elevated drop-out rates among African American high school students, Heck and Mahoe (2006) distinguished among four theoretical perspectives: individual (and family) deficits, resistance theory, school structure, and social reproduction (pp.419-422). Individual and family deficits resemble Lee’s (2002) “socioeconomic and family conditions” factor set and Lewis et al.’s cultural deficit paradigm. Both resistance theory and social reproduction overlap with Lewis et al.’s “discontinuity paradigm,” while Heck and Mahoe’s “school structure” perspective is broadly congruent with Lee’s “school conditions and practices” factor cluster.

For the purpose of organizing an extraordinarily diverse body of empirical studies on the Black-White school achievement gap, the researchers have formulated a three-category taxonomy of study variables: 1) Structural Systemic Factors, 2) Individual/Family Level Factors, and 3) Cultural Discontinuity Conflict.

The first component is comprised of structural-systemic factors. The controlling assumption is that both between and within school racial disparities mirror the structure of socioeconomic stratification in American society at large. The differences between Black and White student outcomes reflect and perpetuate a capitalist system in which Blacks are generally concentrated in the lower socioeconomic classes, are segregated from Whites by residence in low-income communities and are therefore over-represented within both “high poverty” and “high minority” schools. This category encompasses both individual/household and school/neighborhood socioeconomic status. Poor Black students attend schools with comparatively low resources and this, in turn, accounts for most, if not all, of the Black-White achievement gap. According to a Schott Foundation report structural-systemic variables exert a powerful affect on student learning (Schott, 2008).

### Structural/Systemic Factors

The empirical findings on the Black-White school achievement gap leave no doubt that school quality matters, and that “between school” factors explain a large proportion of the racial learning differences. Fletcher and Tienda (2008) used a unique data-set that embodied information about the high school backgrounds and the college performances of Black and White students admitted to four Texas public universities that varied in terms of their selectivity. The study’s main hypothesis was that differences in the quality of high schools attended by Black versus White students would contribute to the collegiate achievement gaps. The study’s findings strongly supported this proposition. Students from different racial/ethnic groups who attended the same high schools achieved similar levels of college success across all four universities. Moreover, the strongest correlations reported were with first semester GPA and freshman academic probation status. Regardless of their race, students from the same high schools tended to have similar grades in college. These associations diminished over time;
the connection between high school attended and sixth semester GPA was much weaker than the relationships with the study’s “earlier” dependant factors, suggesting that by the conclusion of their junior year in college, the influence of high school quality had dissipated. Without directly measuring high school quality, then, Fletcher and Tienda’s study suggests that school quality is a stronger determinant of learning than racial differences per se.

Although Rouse and Barrow (2006) found that family socioeconomic status (SES) affects such educational outcomes as test scores, grade retention, and high school graduation (p.99), Sirin (2007) found that family SES is a much more accurate predictor of academic achievement among White students than it is among minority group students (p.441). He noted that investigations of the relationship between school or neighborhood SES and student achievement have reported that these compositional factors, rather than family SES, have the most powerful effect upon academic achievement in minority communities, particularly in African American communities (Sirin, 2007, p.441).

The adoption of a structural/systemic perspective on the Black-White public school achievement gap has disposed some observers toward a pessimistic outlook. As Jordan and Cooper (2003) have remarked: “In light of the intractable nature of concentrated poverty, proliferating urbanization, and racial isolation, many scholars and educators have summarily concluded that little can be done within the context of the existing educational system to significantly improve the conditions for poor students in general and Black male students in particular” (p.199). But some researchers, Rumberger and Palaridy (2005), for example, have reported that SES effects can be mitigated through “within school” changes in policies and practices. In fact, their finding suggest that even in low-SES schools that serve students living in poverty, it is possible to measurably enhance student outcomes to the point where they near parity with outcomes found in predominantly White, middle-class schools.

The second component of this review’s taxonomy is comprised of individual/family level factors. This cluster corresponds with Heck and Mahoe’s (2006) first class of school dropout variables. It also resembles Lee’s “socioeconomic and family conditions” category, but it excludes variance in income and focuses instead upon the skills, attitudes, and behaviors of individual students and their immediate family members. In this sense, it is akin to Lewis et al.’s “cultural deficit” paradigm. But Lewis and his colleagues viewed this perspective as shifting the blame for educational failure to the “the cultures of African American families and students as diseased and deleterious of worth” (p.137). In fact, several scholars have adopted a similar opinion of Black-White school achievement gap studies that take individual or family variables into account (see, for example, Ladson-Billing, 2006, p.4). They most often identify the Coleman Report on educational equality (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld & York, 1966) as the seminal example of this “cultural deficit” approach. Coleman et al. (1966) found that differences in Black-White school achievement were not the result of variance in educational inputs along racial lines systems, but were instead the results of family factors, such as parental educational attainment, degree of parental engagement in school, differences in parenting practices and so on.

In organizing the empirical research on the role individual/family background variables in the Black-White school achievement gap, the review at hand concentrates upon studies that have investigated influence of these family-based factors. It extends to student attachment to and engagement with school, social capital and social support variables, substance abuse rates, and high school transition processes. Taken collectively, these studies appear to explain at least a portion of the Black-White achievement gap, and do show associations with academic performance among Black students and are fairly powerful predictors of dropout among African American male high school students.
Individual/Family Factors

For students of all backgrounds, family functioning exerts a strong influence upon their levels of academic achievement. Reviewing the literature on the family’s role in the school achievement of Black boys and adolescents, Mandara’s (2006) study identified four sets of factors that are believed to have an impact upon educational outcomes for Black students. They were (1) parenting styles, (2) the use of physical discipline, (3) racial identity socialization, and (4) parental academic involvement. According to Mandara (2006), “African American boys who have authoritative parents are more psychologically and behaviorally adjusted and have higher academic achievement than those in other types of families. Those in neglectful and permissive homes tended to be more at risk for psychological, behavioral, and academic problems” (p.216). The judicious use of corporal punishment by parents has also been associated with superior school outcomes for Black male students. By the same token, Black male school children whose fathers instill a sense of racial pride in their sons do better in school than Black males whose fathers do not discuss race or who convey oppositional norms to their sons. Parental involvement in school activities also exerts a strong influence upon the academic achievements of Black male public school students. But as Ferguson (2007) reported, Black students are more likely to live in single-parent families, are less likely to receive close supervision by their parents, and are more heavily influenced by the racial attitudes of their age peers than by the racial identity conceptions of their fathers. Ferguson commented that these conditions are prevalent across the SES levels of African American households.

Stearns and Glennie (2006) probed into reasons for drop out in a sample of former North Carolina high school students that varied by race and gender. They initially distinguished between “push out” reasons (disciplinary sanctions or academic under-performance) and “pull out” reasons (employment, family responsibilities and moving). The researchers observed that while every ethnic group had its highest dropout rate in 9th grade and its lowest dropout rate in the 12th grade, this pattern was most pronounced for minority groups members, including Blacks of both genders (pp.30-31). Subjects who dropped out before reaching the age of 16 were more likely than advanced and older students to leave school for disciplinary reasons; older males were more likely to leave school for employment reasons. Black males were more likely to leave school earlier and for disciplinary reasons than any other race/gender group in the study’s sample. By contrast, Black females were less likely to be “pushed” out of school for disciplinary reasons than males in any ethnic/racial group. Contrary to their expectations, Stearns and Glennie determined that both African American males and females were also less likely than White males to leave high school for academic reasons (p.46).

Consistent with Sterns and Glennie’s research findings, Holcomb-McCoy, (2007) noted that Black students experience inordinate difficulties in making the transition from middle school to high school (p.254). She wrote that African American adolescents appear to encounter greater problems in adjusting to the stricter regimen of high school life than their White peers do. Neild, Stoner-Eby and Furstenberg (2008) used survey and student record data for a cohort of Philadelphia public school students, a large proportion of whom were African-American. They found that ninth-grade academic outcomes within this sample were not simply proxies for student characteristics measured during the pre–high school years and that ninth-grade outcomes added substantially to their ability to predict which students had dropped out school.

The third set of studies covered in this review utilize factors that can be grouped under the rubric of “cultural discontinuity and conflict.” They include racial/cultural bias grounded in stereotypes, most notably the perception of White school personnel that Black male students “are hostile,
volatile, academically inferior, and emotionally disturbed. (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, p.255). Many of these works focus upon teacher attitudes toward, perceptions of and behaviors toward Black students in general and, again, male African American adolescents in particular. As Hinojosa (2008) has recently commented, a substantial body of research indicates that: (1) classroom teachers interact less with, and provide less praise to, African American students; (2) Blacks receive less support from teachers; and, (3) teachers have lower expectations for the academic success of Black students compared to their expectations for White students (p.176). Findings in these works are usually based upon the perceptions of African American students rather than direct measures. The research also shows that Black students do not simply fail to embrace conventional school culture values; they view academic achievement and its markers according to normative criteria that differ from those of White students (Blau, 2003; Griffin, 2002; Moller, Strearns, Blau & Land, 2006). This, in turn, influences their school performance.

The “cultural discontinuity” or “disidentification” paradigm highlights interactive processes, and tends to explain the relative poor performance of African American public school students as a result of their responses to perceived racial inequalities within the schools that they attend. This approach is currently prominent within investigations of the Black-White “discipline gap.” Adherents of this perspective stress the need for culturally sensitive school policies and teacher practices and for more African American teachers in predominantly Black schools. In fact, the most prominent recommendation appearing in these studies with regard to Black male students is the recruitment of more African American teachers (Jordan & Cooper, 2003, p.206).

The cultural conflict paradigm shares a great deal in common with Ogbu’s (1978, 2003), oppositional culture theory of the Black-White educational achievement gap. Ogbu divided minority ethnic groups in the United States into two categories based upon their historical mode of incorporation into American society. In contrast to immigrant (or “voluntary”) minorities, caste-like (or “involuntary”) minority groups, incorporated into the United States by enslavement or conquest, are under constant pressure to adopt the assumptions and practices of a dominant culture that has participated—and presently participates—in their oppression and exploitation. African Americans constitute the most prominent example of a “caste-like” minority. That status has two major consequences. First, there is the “blaming the victim” phenomenon: a societal-wide propensity to perceive members of an exploited minority group negatively (Brown & Jones, 2004, p.250). Second, while members of voluntary immigrant groups gauge their progress against that of other groups that have voluntarily migrated to the United States; caste-like minorities compare their conditions to those of the dominant group, i.e., Whites. This comparison identifies occupational barriers to success and thereby contributes to a sense that upward mobility efforts will not be rewarded. (Downey, 2008, p.109). As Downey stated in his recent exposition of the “oppositional culture” explanation for Black-White differences in school performance: “black youths look around them and perceive barriers to success for someone like themselves and so respond in a way that is psychologically protective—they embrace a collective identity that defines their group in opposition to current white-controlled institutions (2008, p.109). This perspective has generally focused upon the Black-White school performance gap among adolescents, because it is “during this stage of life, when peer group influences are most salient and the realities of the labor market are approaching, that the race-based resistance to school” is most apt to occur (p.114). It is important to recognize that in Ogbaru’s model differences in Black-White school outcomes are not the result of racism itself (although it may well
be present), but instead of Black student responses to perceived discrimination (Downey, 2008, p.110). According to Moller et al. (2006), African American students respond to perceived racial bias in school in one of three ways: (1) they persevere; (2) they act out, or (3) they give up (p.160). A substantial body of empirical work on the Black-White school achievement gap has concentrated on the “acting out” option in which the dependent variable is operationalized as the incidence of school disciplinary sanctions, notably suspensions and expulsions (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008, p.457).

**Cultural Discontinuity and Conflict Factors**

The individual/family literature related to the Black-White achievement gap encompasses studies into beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that are influenced by cultural differences, but the studies discussed in this section generally involve interaction processes between African American students and Whites, notably White classroom teachers. For example, Rosenbloom and Way (2004) interviewed and observed African American, Asian American and Latino adolescents attending an urban high school. Their findings presented a complicated “circular” process originating in Black and Hispanic student perceptions of teacher favoritism toward Asian students. Many of the Black and Hispanic students resented this bias and they responded by harassing their Asian classmates. This, in turn, resulted in disciplinary sanctions, including suspensions that left the perpetrators further behind academically and reinforced negative teacher stereotypes about Blacks and Hispanics.

There is one final dimension to Ogbu’s theory that commands attention. As part of the process of distinguishing their oppositional culture from the dominant White culture of public schools, Black youths “define certain symbols, activities, and ways of speaking as appropriate for whites but not blacks” (Downey, 2008, p.109). Black students who display these “symbols, activities, and ways” are vulnerable to the accusation of “acting White.” Thus, for example, an African American student who exerts a great deal of effort on his school work or exhibits a cooperative attitude towards teachers and other institutional agents of the White power structure is liable to receive harassment from their fellow Black students. Since these charges target a self-identity construct, students may modify their behavior to avoid being charged with “acting White.”

Among Black students who do persist, perceived racism can nevertheless have a powerful effect upon their academic performance. Steele (1997) identified one pathway through which this influence may occur as “stereotype threat.” In essence, stereotype threat involves an individual’s fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm a negative stereotype about the group to which he or she belongs (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, p.255). Among Black students, this fear might take the form of anxiety about performance on a standardized test (such the NAEP assessments, the SAT, or the FCAT) based on the premise that a poor grade or score would affirm the racial stereotype that Blacks are not as intelligent as Whites. Excessive anxiety would undermine actual test performance.

Even scholars that have employed the same data sets, methodological differences have yielded radically different study findings and conclusions (Reardon, 2008, p.5). Recognizing the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation, a large proportion of the current research has tested the influence of different variables. Stewart (2007-2008), for example, found that both “within school” individual/family variables and “between school” structural factors influence the academic achievement of African American high school students and that these terms interacted with each other.
**Conclusion**

Although it is far from complete, the existing descriptive research amply demonstrates that Black students are trailing behind their White counterparts on virtually every major indicator of public school performance, and that Black males are at especially high risk of educational failure. The Black-White achievement gap is apparent from the 4th grade onward, appears to widen through the 9th grade and then stabilizes partially as a consequence of disproportionately high dropout rates among Black students during the first two years of high school. The officially reported racial gap in Florida’s high schools generally mirrors national data. There is, moreover, strong evidence that the official data masks the gap’s true extent. The theoretical literature on the Black-White achievement gap is fragmented and conflicted. There is no scholarly consensus about the capacity of any theoretical model to explain the gap’s magnitude and persistence. Empirical work within this topical domain provides at least some support for the explanatory power of at least three distinct perspectives. Structural, individual/family, and cultural conflict variables appear to contribute to the Black-White achievement gap and to interact through multiple and complicated pathways. A review of the literature strongly indicates that additional descriptive and explanatory research is warranted and suggests that the prospective findings of an investigation into the Black-White/gender gaps within Florida high schools may prove significant as contributions to the field and as grounds for educational policy decision-making.

**References**


Recently, the plight and conditions of young black males have been, and continue to be described in such negative terms as crisis, at-risk or endangered. These descriptions are based on data that determine quality of life identified by social and economic indicators. As a group, black males are consistently ranked at the bottom when compared to the general population in such areas as education, employment, health and crime.

The Black Male College Explorers Program (BMCEP) is a statewide program. The program is implemented at four universities across the state of Florida in order to gain access to a wider pool of potential program participants. The program sites are Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU), Bethune-Cookman University, Edward Waters College and Florida Memorial University. Florida A & M University (FAMU) serves as the lead agency.

The BMCEP is a highly concentrated developmental experience designed specifically for Black Males during the summer. While attending one of the four program sites, participants will be provided academic tutorial assistance, cultural awareness, arts, workforce readiness and character education. The program curriculum is consistent within each of the program sites and the required mandates by the Florida Department of Education will be applied and adhered to at each location.

The Black Male College Explorers Program Changes Students’ Lives

Participants are enrolled in 7th through 11th grades:
- An African-American male enrolled in a Florida middle or high school.
- A child of a low income family.
- A depressed grade point average that does not adequately represent the potential of the student.
- A history of disciplinary problems or the propensity to display irregular behavior.
- Willingness to commit to the program through high school graduation.
- Willingness to consider post-secondary education after high school.

Anticipated Outcomes
- 75% of the students’ grade point averages will increase by 20%.
- 70% of the students will meet all college course requirements by graduation.
- 90% of the students will graduate.
- 70% of the students will enroll in college.
- 70% of the students will manifest a change of attitude by:
  - increasing their class attendance;
  - decreasing their discipline referrals;
  - improving their appearance; seeking college/university admission

Program participants attend a six-week summer school session at the FAMU campus. While the program curriculum will be the focal point of the summer session, the by-product is exposure to college, campus activities and lifestyle. Students will attend classes daily, Monday through Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Friday will serve as a personal development day.

Fiscal Year 2009-2010 Program Appropriations
$298,699.00 FLDOE; and,
$298,699.00 FAMU
$132,000 Bethune Cookman University
$132,000 Edward Waters College
$132,000 Florida Memorial University
$201,398 Florida A&M University

The program includes transportation to and from the campus, lodging, food, books, and classroom materials. Given our current appropriations described above, FAMU will house, feed, insure, and provide personnel to instruct, mentor and counsel approximately 40 young men during our 2010 summer residential program.
Since 1990, the Black Male College Explorers Program has had an 85% graduation rate.

HEADLINE STORY — BLACK PAPERS

President Obama’s enduring message, which resoundingly calls for change, has never been more apropos than now. As markets and social conditions shift in the global economy, so does the competitive nature of those in it; the greatest loser in this struggle is the Black male. According to a 2008 Schott Foundation study “…the social, educational, and economic outcomes for Black males have been more systematically devastating than the outcomes for any other racial and ethnic group or gender.” This study obviously reveals a disturbing trend for Blacks in general, but especially for Black males. Scholars say the trend can be directly tied to a history of limited educational attainment. The trend unfavorably translates into the absence of employment opportunities, negative encounters with the judicial system, and deleterious health effects. Remarkably, each of these disturbing outcomes can be also linked in some way to elevated Black male mortality.

Over time, little has been done to completely erase the enormous gap which separates Black males from the American mainstream. Scholarly debates on this issue have ensued, but the most palpable discourse has focused on institutionalized practices, which preempt educational opportunities for this neglected population. Various data validates these claims. Also echoed by Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse (2006), “African American male students display the poorest educational outcomes of all major demographic groups in the United States.” Sadly these circumstances are showing little signs of improvement.

National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) data consistently reveals disturbing academic failings of Black males. Further, the Black-White achievement gap in Florida’s public school system displays all of the inequalities found at the national level (Tolliver, Ellis, Lufi—to be published 2010). The consequence of such devastating research is that fewer African American males graduate Florida high schools, or even go on to attend institutions of higher education. More disturbing is the fact that Black males in Florida are academically unsuccessful by comparison to White students in general. In addition, a disproportionately high number of Black Males are enrolled in special education classes or classrooms where the adolescent Black male is labeled a behavior liability. A scholarly commentary posited by Fenning and Rose, (2007), stated that many young Black males become channeled into the “school-to-prison” pipeline. In other words, while in school many of these young men experience a prelude to lifelong failure.

At what cost are we willing to sacrifice educational opportunities for Black males? Denying these young men the chance to pursue a meaningful and productive life through a quality education is unwarranted. Moreover, the price of losing even one Black male in this society is daunting. As President Obama so eloquently remarked “We have an obligation and a responsibility to be investing in our students and our schools. We must make sure that people who have the grades, the desire, and the will, but not the money, can still get the best education possible.”

Black Male Justice: A Clarion Call for Closing the Educational Divide

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As promised in our 2009 black male promo synopsis, we are pleased to introduce this series of **Black Papers** and culminating publication that will address Black male disenfranchisement and the Black-White achievement gap, with particular emphasis on Florida. The findings will also be generalized nationally since Florida is most often referred to as a microcosm of the Nation’s diverse student population. Beginning Spring 2010, the two-part **Black Papers** series will bring attention to incontrovertible evidence concerning the mistreatment of adolescent Black males in the educational system; the research confirming this plight; and actions under the aegis of the FAMU Black Male College Explorers Program (BMCEP) aimed at remediing this longstanding problem.

**Tolliver, Ellis, & Lutfi, 2009**  
Florida A&M University (FAMU) - College of Education (COE)

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**A Case for the Black Male College Explorers Program**

Since 1990, as evidenced by the overwhelmingly successful graduation rate (85%) of the BMCEP at FAMU, participating “at-risk” Black male students overcome academic obstacles in a positive and supportive setting. Enrolled Black males are immersed in rigorous, meaningful instruction, which engages them intellectually, and is coupled with workshops, seminars, and motivational field trips. Once completed, these young men immeasurably increase their chances of finishing high school. More importantly, many go on to pursue a college degree as well.

**References**


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**FAMU-COE Research Team**  
Dr. Edward G. Tolliver, Director, Black Male College Explorers Program  
Dr. Rufus Ellis, Jr., Associate Professor/Associate Chair, Secondary Education  
Dr. Ghazwan Lutfi, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership  

**Tallahassee, Florida 32307**  
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Black Male College Explorers Program

PURPOSE:
The goals of the program are to increase the amount of black males graduating from high school, facilitate their admission to college, and significantly increase their chances of earning a college degree.

SUMMARY:
The Black Male College Explorers Program is an At-Risk prevention/intervention program designed specifically to prevent black males from dropping out of high school, facilitate their admission to college and significantly increase their chances of earning a college degree.

High schools are asked to identify “At-Risk” black males in grades 7th-11th. A team of school and community leaders are required to provide supportive services for the student during the regular year. FAMU provides six (6) weeks of highly concentrated developmental experiences designed specifically for black males during the summer. An appropriate number of black male college and high school teachers are hired to teach subjects that include English, Mathematics, General Science, Art, African American Studies and Computer Sciences. Personal Development activities are provided through weekly seminars, workshops and motivational trips.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:
A high school black male; An 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, or 11th grade student at the beginning of the summer session; A depressed grade point average that does not adequately represent the potential of the student; A history of disciplinary problems or the propensity to display irregular behavior; An expressed interest in the program; Any unique situation/problem that makes a student potentially at-risk. Willingness to consider post-secondary education after high school;

COST:
Students selected by participating schools must pay a ($300.00) Three Hundred Dollar Registration Fee.

Non Participating School: Tuition options include:

1. For in-state students outside of Leon County - $1,700.00.
2. For Leon County students - $1,600.00.
3. For out-of-state students' - $1,600.00 and transportation cost.

TUITION:
The program includes transportation to and from the campus, lodging, food, books, classroom materials and a weekly (*$25) stipend is provided at no cost to the students selected for sponsorship. Other students may be included if parents or local community organization(s) sponsor them.

The entire APPLICATION MUST BE COMPLETED “NO EXECPTION” and mailed with an official copy of student transcript.

*Based on good behavior and academic achievement. Fee(s) are subject to change without notice.

Contact Info
Dr. Edward Tolliver, Director
Florida A&M University
College of Education
Black Male College Explorers Program
302 Gore Education Center - Unit-B
Tallahassee, Florida 32307-4900
Voice: (850) 561-2407 or 561-2408
Fax: (850) 599-8098
E-mail: edward.tolliver@famu.edu
Black Male College Explorers Program
The Florida A & M University College of Education and the Black Male College Explorers Program (BMCEP) recently established the FAMU SMART (Science, Math, Arts, Reading and Technology) Academies at the Florida A&M University Developmental Research School in Tallahassee, Florida. The SMART Academies, which have been made possible through the Florida Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program, is a key component of the No Child Left Behind Act (Federal Education Act). This Act is authorized under Title IV, Part B.

SMART Academies focus on improving the academic performance of “at-risk” students, specifically in the areas of science, mathematics, reading, and technology, and facilitating at-risk students’ admission to college. A major goal of the SMART program is to increase the number of African-American students graduating high school.

Eligibility for SMART Academies include: students in grades 3rd through 12th with FCAT scores below level 3; students with disabilities (ESE); and English Language Learners (ELL). SMART students learn academic fundamentals through rigorous instructional models that are infused with visual, performing and culinary arts. Overall goals of SMART Academies are aligned with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. By instructional design, students are academically challenged through project-based activities, which are tailored to meet the academic needs of each student. Students also benefit from tutoring, homework assistance, field experiences, and career exploration.

BMCEP Researchers Invited to Present at the American Institute of Higher Education International Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia

The Black Male College Explorers Program research team, Dr. Edward Tolliver, Dr. Rufus Ellis, Jr., and Dr. Ghazwan Lutfi presented a scholarly paper at the American Institute of Higher Education’s Fourth International Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia, March 17-19, 2010. The session was entitled An Educational Exploration of the Critical Issues Effecting Black Males in Florida, which provided the latest research related to Black males in Florida public schools.
Who is eligible for SMART?

FAMU SMART Academies target students in grades 3rd through 12th at FAMU DRS with FCAT scores below Level 3; students with disabilities (ESE); and English Language Learners (ELL).

What will the SMART Academies offer?

SMART Academies offer five academic areas which are science, mathematics, reading, and technology. Visual, performing and culinary arts are infused into each academy. The academies’ goals are aligned with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and focus on the academic needs of students through:

- Project-based activities
- Homework assistance
- Tutoring
- Field experiences
- Career exploration (job shadowing)

SMART Goals

- Increase the number of African Americans graduating from high school
- Improve the academic performance of students at-risk of dropping out of school
- Facilitate high school to college transition
- Improve student self-esteem, health and wellness
- Improve academic confidence
- Increase student awareness of career opportunities
- Increase parental involvement
Black Papers: Perspectives in African American Higher Education

Florida A&M University
Tallahassee, Florida 32307
www.famu.edu

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