

A BLACK EDUCATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS AGENDA



Rationale: Education is a Civil Right

The historic and documented educational underachievement of African American students in public schools throughout the nation is the most glaring inequity and unfulfilled initiative of the incessant struggle for social justice during the 20th and 21st centuries. Educational justice remains the most significant Civil Right that has not been provided to all African American students and families.

It is essential that a formal Black Educational Civil Rights Agenda be established, accepted, implemented and supported with adequate and necessary resources by all stakeholders who recognize the fundamental right of all citizens to a free and appropriate public education. It is also essential to recognize that it is a disadvantage to all, if a significant group of Americans remains consistently mis- and under-educated.

THE PLAN

I. Focus Areas

Four primary areas are targeted to impact the educational outcomes for African American students and families in K-12 education.

1. Implement educational policies and practices (including personnel assignments, training and evaluation) that advance and promote educational excellence for all African American students.
2. Improve high school graduation rates for all African American students.
3. Improve the educational progress and status of African American male and female students by understanding and coping with gender-specific needs. A special focus must address the causes of, and solutions to, the underachievement of African American male students.
4. Provide support for parents and families of underachieving African American students.

II. Action Items and Recommendations

Focus Area 1. Implement educational policies and practices (including personnel assignments, training and evaluation) that advance and promote educational excellence for all African American students.

- a. Establish a legal basis and introduce legislation to prevent the assignment of unprepared or ineffective teachers and administrators to schools with more than 20% African American students and/or schools designated as “underachieving” as measured by state standards.
- b. Provide appropriate, adequate and ongoing professional development for all teachers, administrators and other school staff who are responsible for educating African American students by emphasizing the unique educational, cultural, language and support needs of these students.
- c. Establish a Teacher Training Academy (TTA) to support the professional development needs of teachers and administrators in affected school districts with shared responsibility for funding based on teacher/student population. The TTA would operate in conjunction with local universities to provide assistance to teachers of African American students prior to their initial assignment to a school and continuing for the first five years with ongoing intermittent training.
- d. Establish legal support for required school site monitoring of instruction, support and evaluation of teachers and administrators that is fair, consistent, and adequate; and timely removal of district-level and school-site staff who are unsuccessful in educating African American students.

e. Ensure the adequacy of resources to provide after school academic support for students, particularly those who demonstrate a need for intervention and/or remediation in literacy and mathematics.

f. Develop and actively implement guidelines that enable the reconstitution of underachieving schools, i.e. all staff positions are open to replacement with the establishment of specific criteria that have been proven effective in improving outcomes for underachieving students and their families.

g. Establish legislation that requires support for the language needs of African American students commensurate with the emphasis and resources supporting non-English speaking students. Create opportunities for African American students to be bilingual.

h. Compile and use data to support The Plan by identifying specific areas of need, progress and required systemic response. Include research and evidence of urban schools that are successful in the education of African American students, with intent to replicate their “best practices.”

i. Adopt innovative curricular materials that include African American culture, traditions and learning styles.

j. Study whether funding formulas based on average daily attendance (ADA) adversely impact African American students due to higher absenteeism in inner city schools. Urge policy changes to correct such adverse impacts where they occur.

k. Study whether funding formulas based on standardized test scores adversely impact African American students. Urge policy changes to correct such adverse impacts where they occur.

l. Ensure that each student in predominantly African American public schools develops computer competency and has access to the Internet.

m. Ensure that school campuses are attractive, clean and safe.

Focus Area 2. Improve the high school graduation rates for all African American students.

a. Establish drop-out prevention and intervention activities and programs at middle and high schools including but not limited to strict attendance monitoring, student peer- counseling programs, family outreach, school site counseling, incentives for students who maintain attendance and enrollment, and extended day academic support for students with remedial needs.

- b. Adopt a “zero tolerance drop-out policy” by middle and high schools to enhance dropout prevention and student retention.
- c. Establish college/university awareness for secondary school students through the designation of dedicated “college counselor” positions at all middle and high schools. College tours and field trips—along with student outreach from the colleges to secondary students—are expected throughout the school year.
- d. Establish a “Speakers’ Bureau” at secondary schools to recruit and invite appropriate community based members/individuals to visit schools frequently during the school year to speak to students about education, careers and adult life expectations. Local professional trades people and business owners; organizational leaders, college students and other adult role models should be encouraged to address students on a regular basis to raise awareness of college enrollment and the acquisition of employable skills.
- e. Establish and expand Career Technical Education classes including collaborations and partnerships with local companies and organizations that can provide training, internships and employment opportunities for students.
- f. Establish alternatives to suspensions in secondary schools such as:
 1. Judicial council conducted by peers;
 2. Group meetings with parents;
 3. Assignment of personal responsibility activities for disciplined students;
 4. Counseling with church and community leaders; and
 5. Rewards and affirmations for good behaviors.
- g. Establish programs that target the specific needs of male students, such as:
 1. Promoting the importance of academic achievement;
 2. Teaching study skills;
 3. Non-violent conflict resolution training;
 4. Sex education, STD and pregnancy prevention;
 5. Challenging negative stereotypes of Black males and females;
 6. Encouraging the adoption of respectful language;
 7. Enhancing health, for example, by promoting healthy diets and nutrition, and providing HIV screening.
- h. Establish programs that target the specific needs of female students, such as:
 1. Encouraging achievement in math and sciences;
 2. Providing pregnancy and STD prevention education;
 3. Enhancing personal and academic self-esteem;
 4. Challenging negative stereotypes of Black females and males;
 5. Protecting female students from sexual harassment and/or interpersonal violence;
 6. Enhancing the presence of Black women in the curriculum; and
 7. Enhancing health, for example, by promoting healthy diets and nutrition, and providing HIV screening.

Focus Area 3. Improve the educational progress and status of African American males and females.

- a. Establish a public and unapologetic focus on the status of Black male students and adults – including publishing data on academic achievement, social adjustment, employment and incarceration rates and family unity. The intent is to identify—and then alleviate—documented needs.
- b. Establish pilot “gender-separate” classes in core courses in middle school grades based on research that supports the improved academic outcomes of male students when attending male-only classes, and the improved academic outcomes of female students when attending female-only classes. Provide monitoring, support and documentation to enable replication and expansion of successful classroom models.
- c. Establish a pilot “Support Program” for targeted male students through centralized support from business leaders, philanthropists, educators, church leaders and community-based organizations. Female students should also be an essential component in the planning and implementation process.
- d. Establish “Future Teachers” clubs or programs in secondary schools to encourage male students to enter the teaching profession.
- e. Utilize athletic coaches and other adults responsible for male sports or group activities to adopt “community service projects,” in order to emphasize personal and social responsibility.
- i. Research the causes of African American over-representation in remedial and special education. Understand the reasons why this over-representation is dramatically worse for males. Ensure that instruction in such programs is properly funded and productive.
- j. Utilize curricular materials and pedagogical approaches that are proven effective or may be proven to be effective for African American students.
- k. Schedule, at least twice each semester in middle and high schools, special assemblies involving all female students, and separate assemblies involving all male students, in order to promote healthy development into adult female and male roles. Such assemblies must be sufficiently funded to bring in outstanding speakers and other talent who can inspire students and serve as positive role models.
- l. Implement programs that promote positive intercultural relations, especially with Latino students.

Focus Area 4. Provide support for parents and families of underachieving African American students.

- a. Establish a dedicated “Parent Support/Education Program” at school sites utilizing the volunteer assistance of parents of “successful students” as peer supporters of other parents whose children are less successful.
- b. Provide parenting workshops to assist families in preparing children for elementary school and for sustaining success through high schools.
- c. Encourage and recruit churches, community organizations and other agencies to collaborate with schools to identify parents/families in need of assistance and offer needed resources including counseling, monitoring and community support for the parents. These groups/organizations should be available when students are performing in less than satisfactory ways to intervene with the family members of the student and provide assistance to remedy the situation.
- d. Legislation and other legal interventions are needed to require parental response to schools when students are demonstrating unsuccessful behaviors. The absence of required parental participation, by ignoring school outreach efforts, significantly restricts the schools’ ability to provide assistance or to successfully engage in prevention activities.
- e. Adequate counseling services for the community, during evening hours, should be available to provide family support for those in need of assistance.
- f. Generate financial support, through contracts and grants, to support a parent/family outreach effort.
- g. A dedicated “Family Center” or “Parent Room” should be established on every campus and staffed by carefully screened and selected local parent/community members as employees, who are responsible for generating all school site parent support activities, including regular visitations to schools during the instructional day to observe their children and provide a visible presence on campus.
- h. Develop an independent “Black Parent Union” with training on school structures and procedures, functions of advisory committees, school site governance, etc.
- i. Develop an assessment instrument to enable parents and community members to objectively determine school effectiveness.
- j. Develop communication and mobilization systems utilizing phone trees, e-mails, and other devices.
- k. Statewide legislation should be established to expand California Assembly Bill (AB 3782), which permits parental release time from employment to visit schools during the school day. Current legislation encourages parental visits and suggests the use of vacation or other earned compensatory time; however legislation is needed to require employers to release employees to support schools through personal visits in the same manner that employees are required to serve jury duty and/or respond to court subpoenas.
- l. Provide education and support for enhancing nutrition in African American families.

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The Education Is A Civil Right Committee — A Black Educational Civil Rights Agenda

In February 2006 a group of professional educators, elected officials including local school board members, community representatives and civic leaders in the Southern California area in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Alliance of Black School Educators (LACABSE) began to meet and discuss the need for an enhanced and focused approach to the improvement of educational outcomes of African American students in public schools. The initial group expanded its efforts to regular planning sessions with other groups which included the Alliance of California African American Superintendents, the Council of Black Administrators(COBA), the NAACP-Los Angeles, and the Western Regional Council on Educating Black Children (WRCEBC). Our work resulted in the finalization in April 2007 of a formal document, “A Black Educational Civil Rights Agenda” (BECRA), that is designed to provide strategies and activities for use in school districts serving a significant population of African American students.

The planning group was formalized into the Education is a Civil Rights Committee (ECRC), which is based in the Los Angeles area. It is our intent to stimulate discussion, collaborations and action throughout the nation for the purpose of holding ourselves, local communities, school districts, state officials and national legislators accountable for developing effective responses to the action items identified in the BECRA that address the inequitable educational outcomes for African American students as a long denied civil right. We further intend to pursue legal, educational, political and economic resources that are required to provide adequate responses. Please refer to our website, at www.EducationIsACivilRight.com, for updates on meetings and activities.