

**“CREATING ACHIEVERS FOR THE 21ST
CENTURY”**

EDUCATION SUMMIT

INTERIM REPORT

SUMMARY

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CREATING ACHIEVERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

SUMMARY

In response to the continuing and pervasive low achievement of African American students, the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs hosted a day-long education summit on Saturday, October 25, 1997, at Tacoma Community College, 6501 South 19th St., in Tacoma, WA.

With the purpose of identifying barriers and developing strategies to improve academic achievement among African American students, 235 superintendents, educators, parents, community group representatives and youth from across the state participated in the conference, entitled "Creating Achievers for the 21st Century.

In Breakout Sessions, participants divided themselves into six groups and discussed their issues and concerns and made recommendations around six core topics: Advanced Placement/Honors programs, State Competency Requirements, College Admissions Policies, New Technology, Educational Research and Parental Involvement.

Keynote speakers presented initiatives at the state, national and local levels that are addressing the low achievement and disproportionality. State Superintendent of Public Instruction Terry Bergeson addressed the results of the new standardized fourth grade assessments and strategies for improving outcomes. University of Washington Education Professor Geneva Gay provided insight into programs that provide culturally relevant teaching strategies and academic success; and Seattle Schools Superintendent John Stanford updated the audience on new initiatives in his District.

"This is a continuing effort on the part of the Commission to decrease disproportionality and to increase African American achievement," said Tony Orange, executive director of the Commission.

As a follow up to the October 25th conference, the Commission plans to meet with State Superintendent of Public Instruction Terry Bergeson in December to review recommendations from the summit and it will convene another conference on African American student achievement in Eastern Washington next spring.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

BREAKOUT SESSIONS: PROCESS

The 90-minute discussion and strategy session of the education summit was designed to maximize interaction between participants and to produce solid recommendations for educators, parents, and students in improving the achievement of African American students. In order to stimulate the thought-process, participants were given the following list of possible discussion points to utilize in the formulation of issues and recommendations.

1. College admissions policies
2. Affirmative action
3. State competencies requirements
4. Technology issues
5. Parental involvement (home, school, clubs/associations)
6. Sibling involvement
7. Test scores
8. Attendance issues
9. Afro-centric education
10. Learning style considerations
11. Non-traditional educational programs
12. Rites of passage
13. African American/Black teachers
14. Christian/church schools
15. Economics of education
16. Peer pressure
17. Career planning
18. Early intervention
19. Students' view of high academic performance
20. Incentives for high academic performance
21. Students helping students
22. After school programs
23. Self image ('I can't do this' syndrome)
24. Reading levels
25. Math aptitude
26. Learning as fun
27. Lifelong learning
28. Skills vs. grades/course numbers
29. Community involvement (village approach)
30. Community tutors (volunteers)
31. Grantseekers to pay for various initiatives
32. Legislative/political issues
33. Educators' involvement
34. Grassroots initiatives (home/church/neighborhood)
35. Other

BREAKOUT GROUPS: PROCESS (continued)

Six groups convened to discuss the top six priorities: the top points of discussion were: Advanced Placement/Honors, Competency Requirements, College Admissions Policies, New Technology, Educational Research, and Parental Involvement.

Each group had a facilitator, timekeeper, recorder and reporter. Each group divided into smaller groups to get to know each other's areas of interest and potential contribution to the process. After this ten-minute warm up, the whole group began the process of generating ideas and issues.

After a 15-minute briefing on the issues, each group began 40-minutes discussing directions for strategies. Questions such as Where do we go from here? Who should lead the way? What can we do as individuals? What can we not do without help? primed the discussion.

At the end of the strategies discussion, each group reported its issues and strategies to the entire audience of participants.

What follows are the summaries of each group's set of issues and proposed recommendations or options.

BREAKOUT GROUPS: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Group #1: Advanced Placement/Honors Programs

Facilitators: Marquette Brooks and Jennifer Roseman

Issues:

- Schools do not offer classes that are designed to promote thinking skills from the early years.
- Access to the programs is limited.
- There is no money to support opportunities for all children.
- And requirements for the programs are unclear.

Recommendations:

- Recognize and enhance successes.
- Provide AP access and curriculum for all students.
- Avoid separation of program options.
- Change our thinking towards success.
- Increase money to devote to AP/Honors programs.
- Create parent support groups.
- Create an AP academy to teach teachers (include a parent component).
- Demand systems support.
- Create a paradigm shift from pathology to excellence.
- Use existing success models.
- Provide sustainability of programs.
- Create assessment component for teachers.
- Educate parents.
- Form study groups.
- Increase accountability.

Group #2: Competency Requirements

Facilitators: Toni Wilson and Leroy Williams

Issues:

- Mismatch between homework and expectations.
- Inadequate supply of books.
- Lack of sufficient technology.
- Absence of teacher/parent involvement.

Recommendations:

- Notify students and parents of requirements.
- Teach according to requirements.
- Change the environment and methods of teaching.
- Train administrators and teachers in multi-cultural perspectives on a continuing basis.
- Implement courses of study for college students of all ages.
- Address attendance problems.
- Establish teacher/parent involvement programs.
- Teach teachers about the fact that economic standards of a family influence outcomes.
- Improve communication skills between parents and teachers.
- Provide a variety of reading materials and allocate time during school hours for students to read.
- Each district should share its objectives and teaching methods of achievement for all competencies with other districts.

Group #3: College Admissions Policies

Facilitators: Sadat Felder and Lawanna Lee

Issues:

- There are not enough African American entering college.
- Changes in admission policies are not being communicated to students, K-12 teachers, parents, or community leaders.
- Need to focus on matters, such as college admission policies, tests, essays, grade point averages, and overall index and exceptions.
- African American students are discouraged from trying.

Recommendations:

- Align teaching/learning with college admission policies.
- Communicate policies to the global community (K-12 educators, students, parents, community organizations, etc).
- Use information to prepare students to meet the standards
- Redirect emphasis on SAT scores.
- Learn and Communicate admission policies.
- College Admissions persons should communicate policies more effectively.
- Increase knowledge, productivity and total contribution of African Americans to society and encourage an improvement in our quality of life.

Group #4: New Technology**Facilitators: Jacob Lee and Sharon Greene****Issues:**

- Schools with high concentration of students who do not have home computers need more computers per student.
- Parents need access to computers so they can understand and be supportive of their children.
- Funding of maintenance of technology is just as important and as essential as the initial purchase of the hardware.
- Expand full funding of basic education to include technology literacy
- Understanding that some parents fear that technology may interfere with the family's values.
- Providing continuous training for the educator/staff in the classroom.

Recommendations:

- The Commission on African American Affairs should sponsor a technology expo for the African American community. This expo would include both the technology side, as well as a job fair.
- School districts could devise plans to utilize surplus computers by making them available to students for use at home.
- Parents must be viewed as equal partners in making decisions about their children's education.
- If human teachers continue to discriminate, then let the computer become the teachers, as it does not discriminate.
- Utilize Commissioners and their expertise in technology to develop a strategic plan around technology.

Group #5: Educational Research

Facilitators: Jimmie Lee II and Adriene Caver

Issues:

- **How will educational research affect student achievement?**
- **Research on Teacher Prep in Higher education and changes in curriculum**
- **Awareness of programs in schools where children of color are not predominate but are successful**
- **Factors that facilitate success, specific to Seattle/Tacoma areas**
- **Living in the NW and its effect on academic achievement**
- **Better decisions in researching “best practices”**
- **Research on academic placement (special ed)**
- **Research on achievement of students whose parent/guardians are actively involved**
- **Research on other programs doing research**
- **Policies and its effect on disproportionality**

Recommendations:

- **Tutorial programs to infuse cultural awareness**
- **Need for research training, teach data collection strategies, interpretation of data**
- **Establish research committee at state level involving educators, parents, teachers**
- **Mandate on Multicultural training of teachers in urban setting**
- **Minority educators take responsibility**
- **Dialogue with teacher unions regarding accountability**
- **Train teachers (all educators) then test students**
- **Education research can be done in educators own setting (ie; what works in your own building)**

Group #6: Parental Involvement

Facilitators: Trina Jones, Roman Dixon, and Rev. Dr. Ellis Casson

Issues:

- Need to increase involvement of parents in the educational process.
- There are negative communications/messages being sent.
- There is a lack of trust on both sides (between parents and educators).

Recommendations:

“How can we address the negative feelings?”

- Create meetings with parents after school to establish a relationship and overcome negative feelings.
- Increase communication between parents and teachers during the summer before school starts.
- Increase positive feedback to students and parents—not always negative.
- Recognize that all parents cannot be involved.
- Parents need to attend school board meetings.
- Increase community involvement – “village concept”.

“How can we support other parents?”

- Send clear messages, i.e., it is not acceptable to miss school.
- School districts need to do things differently.
- Arrange different, more convenient times for parent/teacher conferences.

“How do you get more parents to be more involved at home?”

- Use parent skills in the classroom (i.e., cooking).
- At teacher/parent conferences or Open Houses, teachers should provide parents with a clear set of expectations/objectives.
- Start a Black parent support group. Follow up with kids throughout
- Schools provide a telephone message requesting needs for school, i.e. volunteers for field trips, tutoring.
- Make connection between school and churches.
- Give parents strategies that will help them get involved.
- Change the school culture to make parents feel welcome
- Place visitor chairs in each classroom.

“How do we make system changes?”

- Start early.
- Positive reinforcement.
- Each one, reach one.
- Work with businesses to give “time credit” to allow parents into the classrooms to tutor or teach.

EVALUATION

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Overall, most people attended the summit out of a professional or personal desire to help African American students.

Most valuable aspect of the summit: the opportunity to share ideas in the breakout sessions and to hear keynote speakers.

Least valuable aspect: sessions that did not meet expectations of participants due to lack of time for full discussion.

Recommendations for future summits:

Include more grassroots educators, more scholars,

More opportunities for interaction between keynote speakers and participants

More time for breakout sessions

More practical ideas of how parents can help children

More information and strategies

Provide question and answer session after each speaker

Provide facilitators who are well-versed in the topic and who can make something happen after the conference

More student involvement

Extend conference to two days

Provide better facilities: too few rest rooms, cold temperature, space considerations

NEXT STEPS

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The Commission on African American Affairs will continue its involvement in decreasing disproportionality in student achievement and raising academic achievement of African American students.

- The Commission will meet with Terry Bergeson and her staff at the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to discuss recommendations coming out of the breakout sessions and how they might be incorporated into state reform efforts.
- Another summit will be convened in spring of 1998 in Eastern Washington.