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New Report on Black Male Achievement in America Reveals 'National Catastrophe'

Urban School Group Calls for White House Initiative

WASHINGTON, Nov. 9 -- Young black males in America are in a state of crisis.

So says a new report by the Council of the Great City Schools that presents stark data on the differences between black and white academic and social achievement from the cradle to adulthood, describing "comprehensive challenges" facing African-American males nationwide and in the major cities.

"Black males continue to perform lower than their peers throughout the country on almost every indicator," says the groundbreaking report titled *A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*.

But the study points out that there has been no concerted national effort to improve the education, social and employment outcomes of African-American males, who are not receiving appropriate attention from federal, state and local governments or community organizations.

"This is a national catastrophe, and it deserves coordinated national attention," stresses the report.

"The issues that emerge from the data are both moral and economic, calling into question the nation's ability to harness all of its talent to maintain a leadership footing in the world," says Council Executive Director Michael Casserly. "How can you narrow or close the country's black-white achievement gap when African-American males are not getting the attention and support they need to succeed?"

Study Findings

The study focuses on six areas of the lives of African-American males. Highlights of the report's findings show:

- In **readiness to learn**, black children were twice as likely to live in a household where no parent had full-time or year-round employment in 2008. And in 2007, one out of every three black children lived in poverty compared with one out of every 10 white children.
- In **black male achievement at the national level**, first-time analysis of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) reveals that on the 2009 fourth-grade reading assessment only 12 percent of black male students nationally and 11 percent of those living in large central cities performed at or above proficient levels, compared with 38 percent of white males nationwide. In eighth grade, only 9 percent of black males across the country and 8 percent living in large cities performed at or above the proficient level in reading, compared with 33 percent of white males nationwide. Math results were similar in both grades.

Moreover, the average African-American fourth- and eighth-grade male who is not poor does no better in reading and math on NAEP than white males who are poor; and black males without disabilities do no better than white males with disabilities.

- In **black male achievement in selected big-city school districts**, 50 percent of fourth- and eighth-grade black males in most urban districts and nationwide scored below *Basic* levels.
- In **college and career preparedness**, black males were nearly twice as likely to drop out of high school as white males. In 2008, 9 percent of black males dropped out of high school compared with 5 percent of white males.

In addition, black male students nationally scored an average 104 points lower than white males on the SAT college-entrance examination in reading. And black students generally were about one-third as likely to meet ACT college readiness benchmarks as white students.

- In **school experience**, black students were less likely to participate in academic clubs, more likely to be suspended from school, and more likely to be retained in grade than their white peers.
- In **postsecondary experience**, the unemployment rate among black males ages 20 and over (17.3 percent) was twice as high as the unemployment rate among white males of the same age (8.6 percent) earlier this year. In 2008, black males ages 18 and over accounted for 5 percent of the college population, while black males accounted for 36 percent of the nation's prison population.

Although the report presents dismal data on the achievement of African-American males in general, it also profiles black males who are succeeding in urban public schools and are on the path to success in their chosen careers.

The Council of the Great City Schools plans to continue its research focusing on the social and educational disparities among African-American males as it launches a new initiative to address the comprehensive challenges facing them.

Plan of Action

In a plan of action at the conclusion of the report, the Council calls for a White House conference on the issues to help lay out a comprehensive plan of action that leaders at all levels can pursue. The organization also aims to marshal the help of school district, state, national and university leaders, as well as civic and faith-based leaders and governmental officials to address black-male issues.

"We plan to convene a panel of esteemed leaders, which would provide advice and guidance to the Council on the formation of strategies for improvement," says the Great City Schools leader Casserly.

"The nation's urban public schools see this issue as national in scale, but is eager to take the lead on addressing these challenges because of the large numbers of black male young people who live and attend schools in our major cities," he explains.

"We are not interested in reflecting and perpetuating society's larger inequities; instead, we are committed to overcoming them."

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(The Council of the Great City Schools is a coalition representing the nation's large urban public school districts.)