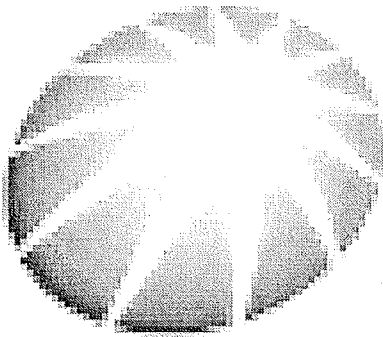


**Analyzing and Addressing the
Underachievement of African American Males *in*
Guilford County Schools**
A Report to the Guilford County School Board



**Guilford
County Schools**

STRIVING. ACHIEVING. EXCELLING.

Monday, June 23, 2008

Guilford County Board of Education Boardroom

712 North Eugene St

Greensboro, NC 27401

Table of Contents

Student Outcomes: What has Changed in 22 Years?

Dr. Nancy Routh, Former Principal, GCS Boardmember

Children of Color:

Implications of Early Experiences on School Success

Lynette Aytch, Psy. D, Director, Leadership Smart Start, Raleigh, NC

Where Do Teachers Stand on the Gap or Disparities in Education?

Dr. Muktha Jost, Associate Professor, North Carolina A&T University

The (Mis)Use of Assessment and the Failure to Connect Instruction to Student Lives

Dr. Anthony Graham, Associate Professor, North Carolina A&T University

Community Racism Index or Whose Achievement Gap is it Anyway?

Ed Whitfield, Activist Writer & Director, Fund for Democratic Communities

Accounting for Differences in Schooling Outcomes of Blacks and Whites: Historical Institutional Economic Factors

*Dr. Lawrence Morse, Associate Professor, Dept. of Economics,
North Carolina A&T University*

What Does All This Data Mean? And What Can We Do About It?

Marnie Thompson, Founder, Fund for Democratic Communities

Restoring the Image of and Belief in African American Male Success: Looking Back and Looking Forward

Monica F. Walker, Diversity Officer, Guilford County Schools

Student Outcomes: What has changed in 22 years?

The Comprehensive Study presented contains student achievement and student demographic data available for Guilford County Schools beginning in 1993. It is an attempt to show some of the variables known to be, or believed to be, factors affecting student achievement and overall academic performance relative to ethnicity and gender.

While the current focus on the “gap” that exists between and among the numerous target groups identified by No Child Left Behind has been a priority for less than a decade, the focus on student achievement and the impact of policies and instructional practices on this achievement has existed for a much longer time.

Each of the three districts, Greensboro City, High Point City and Guilford County, that were merged into the Guilford County School District (1993) had a slightly different history relative to desegregation of schools, organizational structure, curricular/instructional focus and student achievement. All measured student achievement by classroom performance, grades and standardized achievement tests (the exact instruments used may have varied).

Total desegregation plans for Greensboro City Schools were implemented in the 1971-72 school year. Elementary schools were organized into primary schools (K-3) and paired with an upper elementary school (4-6). In most cases a predominately black school was paired with a predominately white school for the elementary years and students were bused out of their neighborhoods for some portion of their elementary years. Junior and Senior High Schools used a feeder school pattern in order to desegregate schools at the secondary level.

State funded kindergarten programs also began in Greensboro in 1971 and the emphasis in the K-3 primary schools was on Early Childhood programs rich in experiences for language development, exposure to activities based on developmental needs of the children, and directed toward the acquisition of language arts/reading skills and understanding numeration. Upper elementary grades continued skill development through the content areas. All subjects were graded.

Within five years the board of education, the administration and the general public began to voice concerns about student achievement and the need to have clearly established grade level standards.

Competency testing at the secondary school level to determine eligibility for graduation was implemented in North Carolina in 1977. Programs designed to reduce the failure rate and to assure the acquisition of basic reading and math skills were added to the high

school course of study. The practice of placing a student at the next higher grade based on attendance or age, was abandoned by many schools systems and replaced with promotion criteria based on grade level expectations, grades and test scores.

During the 1977-1978 school year the Greensboro City Schools adopted a policy requiring promotion standards for all elementary grades including kindergarten. These standards defined specific mathematics, reading and language arts skills to be mastered and recommended requirements for all other subject areas. The skills required were based primarily on the current textbook adoptions and were revised as textbooks were changed. The Board of Education policy authorized promotion standards that were raised annually until all elementary grades, kindergarten through grade six, had grade level standards for reading and mathematics.

In order to avoid annual revisions, the administrative regulation was changed in 1983 to include the requirement of a passing grade or a "D" average minimum of all subjects for which a grade was given.

Within a year of the initial policy adoption, the number of students retained grew and by 1983-1984 school year the impact on students K-8 was being felt in every elementary and junior high school. Principals were aware of the impact at the individual school level and asked the administration to look at the district wide data. The data gathered in 1985 for the district confirmed the need to address the retention problem created by the district's rigid policy. A break down of the data by grade level and by ethnic groups showed the disparities. (See Table I, attached)

Parents concerned about the high numbers of non-promotions and the underachievement of students organized meetings with school administration and the board of education and demanded that action be taken to relieve the situation.

The Home/School/Community Committee For Student Achievement was appointed to study the problems of underachieving students in the Greensboro Public Schools. An organizational meeting was held on September 17, 1986. At this meeting the Superintendent stated that the tasks of the committee would be to: 1) identify factors within the school, the home and the community which may contribute to a student's low achievement, 2) identify factors within the school, the home and the community which support or contribute to higher achievement and 3) determine appropriate roles for each of these three entities as they relate to improved student achievement. Data already compiled by the school system was presented to the committee as background information.

The second meeting of the committee was with Dr. Asa Hilliard on September 22, 1986. Dr. Hilliard shared his knowledge and the results of his work with minority students throughout the United States.

Sub-committees studied three areas: 1) programs currently provided by the school/s 2) programs available in the community and 3) the communication system between the

school, home and community. A report was compiled and presented in December of 1986. Recommendations were made to address individual student needs and to provide alternatives to grade retention.

The 1985-1986 Retention Report and other demographic and achievement data are available.

The following is taken from the 1986 report:

When Dr. Asa Hilliard met with the study committee in September, 1986, he stated that demonstrations with children show that every child can learn, wants to learn and that his/her parents are concerned about his academic accomplishments. Local statistics as provided by Mike Booher, school psychologist, confirm that Greensboro students can indeed learn; for Greensboro students typically out perform other students regionally, statewide, and nationally. Yet, apparently, a number of our students – 1,804 (see Table I) – were not promoted to the next grade level at the end of the 1985-86 school year, i.e., they failed to achieve the necessary skills/knowledge to move ahead.

While the 1986 report addressed the impact of a rigid promotion standard based on a “grade level” determined by textbooks and grades, the external variables affecting the number of students who were non-promoted and considered to have failed, are not unlike the variables currently identified as impacting the achievement and academic performance of our students as measured by state mandated testing.

Changes were made in 1986 and some progress made. The focus was on the individual student. Personal Education Plans (PEP) were written extra help provided through, reduced class size, extended day instruction, and summer programs planned to provide remedial, enrichment and recreational activities. Improvement was shown during the late 80’s and into the early 90’s. After-school and community programs planned to serve students in specific schools or areas of the district changed as a result of merger, redistricting (both before and after merger), the state’s Basic Education Plan and accountability mandates. All of these factors have served to modify or change instructional programs and practices.

We have years of data, both before and after 1993; we know how children learn and how they develop skills needed to acquire knowledge, solve problems and think critically. We have not improved in our ability to welcome all of our students and families into the school community; provide appropriate instruction during the early years; actively involve students, parents and community in the learning process; and to keep our students successfully connected to schools through an effective communication process that moves students from elementary, into middle grades and into the appropriate pathway or setting at the high school level to assure each one is prepared for future study and work.

It’s time to use what we know. Success for all is achieved one by one.

Attachments:
Tables I – VIII

Prepared by:
Nancy Routh

Children of Color: Implications of Early Experiences for School Success

Research in early childhood development provides clear evidence that early experiences establish the foundation for learning throughout life. The scientific advances from this research have generated a much deeper understanding and appreciation for: (1) the importance of early life experiences on the development of the brain and human behavior, (2) the central role of early relationships as a source of either resilience or risk, (3) the capabilities, emotions, and social skills that develop during the earliest years of life, and (4) the capacity to increase the odds of favorable outcomes through quality early developmental and learning experiences and interventions (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

The Perry Preschool study and the Abecedarian study are highly regarded longitudinal studies that examined the relationship between high quality early care and education and child outcomes for African American children from low-income families. This research provides evidence of a positive relationship between child care quality and virtually every facet of children's development. Poor quality early care and education experience is associated with less optimal child outcomes and higher quality care and education is associated with desirable outcomes (High Scope/Perry Preschool Study; 2005; Carolina Abecedarian Study, 2002).

Despite the increased awareness of the importance of early childhood experiences and availability of high quality childcare opportunities, African American children, particularly males, continue to experience significant disparity in practically every major indicator of early childhood health, development, and well-being as compared to white children. Below are some troubling disparities for recent North Carolina data for African American (or minority) children that can have long term implications for education and life outcomes:

- ◆ The mortality rate for African American births is nearly 14% compared to 6% for white births
- ◆ The low birth weight incidence for minority babies is twice that of white babies, 14% compared to 7% respectively.
- ◆ African American children under the age of 18 are three times as likely to live below the federal poverty level as white children.
- ◆ 28% of African American children who meet the income eligibility requirements for Medicaid or Health Choice are not enrolled. This percentage is actually lower than that of white children who are eligible (35%) but are not enrolled.
- ◆ 73% of African American children score at 3rd grade proficiency in reading compared to 91% of white children. 53% of African American children score at 3rd grade proficiency in math as compared to 83% of white children.

Based on the fact that these disparities are evidenced early in the life of many African American children, it can be anticipated that these disparities will continue to exist as children progress through youth and adult life without intentional efforts to address these inequities. There is strong evidence that children of color, particularly boys, are disproportionately victims of health, educational, and well-being disparities. Mychal Wynn, in his book *Teaching, Parenting, and Mentoring Successful Black Males*, states that there must be a clearly articulated vision and mission that guides and focuses intentional efforts to improve the development, educational achievement, and life outcomes for African American males. This mission must be a collective effort shared by the family, community, and school.

This focus on the shared responsibility of family, community, and school is at the heart of the North Carolina Ready Schools Initiative. In this initiative, a Ready School is defined as having an inviting atmosphere, values and respects all children and their families, and is a place where children succeed. The distinguishing factors of a “ready school” are that it (1) has an expectation of excellence for every child, (2) understands and appreciates that its success as a school is dependent on valuing and respecting the role of parents/families in the learning process, and (3) understands the value of being deeply engaged with (and a resource to) the community in which it exists. These schools know that they function within a social context in which helping to ensure that children and families have opportunities for adequate financial resources, safe communities, health care, quality early education, and other family/parent support services is essential to the academic success and well-being of the children that they serve.

Lynette Aytch,
Director, Leadership Smart Start
North Carolina Partnerships for Children, Inc.