

BLACK CHURCHES NEED TO UNITE TO IMPROVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my thesis is to examine what Black churches are currently doing to help improve student performance. The church has a long history of encouraging and supporting the education of African Americans. Presently, school systems around the country face a crisis in education as minority academic performance continues to trail that of their white counterparts. The achievement gap has changed very little over the last fifteen years, and school districts are struggling to reduce it. I propose that the church is an option to help reduce the achievement gap, and improve student performance. In my thesis, I examine what three local churches are doing in New Castle County to help improve student performance. The goal of these interviews was to see how these churches are approaching this problem and in what ways they might need assistance. I found that the pastors were dedicated to helping improve student performance through various outreach efforts. However, each pastor encountered different obstacles that mired the success of the programs at their church. Although the outreach programs may help some students, there is no evidence of its broader impact. From the interviews, I concluded that churches need to work with other churches to build a broader coalition that will tackle this issue with greater resources and numbers than any single church could. Churches working at this problem alone are only reaching a small population of children. The problem is much larger than this and requires a collaborative effort of several churches. The church can draw greater attention to this problem and provide a forum for solutions. The church is one option among many possible solutions to academic achievement differences. There is no single solution to this problem, but I truly believe this one can be a vital tool in addressing the issue.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is believed to be the great equalizer in our society, and African Americans have dealt with numerous issues when seeking access to an education. From the colonial period to the present, the education of African Americans has been a turbulent issue in American history. In the colonial period, obtaining an education was difficult for all people who were not part of the wealthier classes. Therefore in the early stages of the new republic, many called for the development of a public education system that would allow for the advancement of White children regardless of social status. By the end of the 19th century, many White American children had access to a public education that might provide an opportunity for them to improve their station in life. However, for African Americans this journey would be somewhat different.

The first objective of my thesis is to examine the historical role of the church in education, and specifically how the Black church has supported and encouraged the education of African Americans. My second objective is to explain why Black churches, currently need to refocus and increase their efforts to help improve academic performance among minority students, because many school districts continue to struggle with this issue. I will also offer a few examples of what some churches are doing to address the issue of the achievement gap. Thirdly, I will examine this issue on a local level to provide an actual assessment of the situation

in Delaware. Through three interviews with local pastors in New Castle County, I am seeking to find out what some churches are doing to help improve student performance in New Castle County. The purpose of these interviews is to sample how churches are responding to this need within the community. Lastly, I will offer suggestions based on the research that I have conducted. Hopefully, this will help churches become more effective in this area. Recognizing programs that are effective and the sharing of ideas can be a vital tool in helping churches successfully address this issue.

In tracing the history of the church, I am emphasizing the capability of the church to respond to this crisis in education. It is important to examine this history, because it provides examples and insights into how the church today can be proactive in regards to education. This is especially vital due to the fact that many African American students continue to struggle in our public education system and need additional support. Black churches have been the longest standing independent Black institution, and for the most part the church has been dedicated to improving the lives of African Americans. The Church has also recognized education as paramount to that end. The Black community must recognize the severity of this crisis in education, and the community must use all of its resources to address this problem. The church has a clear history of educating the Black community and the infrastructure in place to continue to do so in the present.

The problems of poor student performance among minority students and the achievement gap continue to present difficult dilemmas for our public schools to address. According to various 1990-2005 Reading and Mathematics Assessment statistics that were

derived from the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, there continues to be a gap in achievement between White and Black students (Richardson 24). In 2000, there was a 34 point gap between White fourth graders and Black fourth graders in average reading scores. In 2005, it had dropped to just 28 points. During the same time period the eighth grade gap in reading scores had increased from 26 points to 28. In mathematics there is also a significant gap in student performance. In 2005, the gap between White and Black fourth graders was a 26 point average. The gap between White and Black eighth graders was a 34 point average. Over this fifteen year period the scores have changed by no more than seven points up or down. (Richardson 25). The average 17-year-old Black student has the reading and math scores of the average 14-year-old White student, according to the National Association for Educational Progress (Jackson 2007).

Unless school districts around the country are prepared to embrace significant changes, the achievement gap will remain a difficult problem to remedy. Several factors limit the school systems' ability to affectively bridge the gap. First, the prevalence of single parent households among African American students has an influence on their academic performance. More than half of all black children are being raised in single-parent households — 49% are being raised exclusively by their mothers and 4% by their fathers. An additional 9% live with neither parent. This leaves only 38% who are being raised in two-parent households (U.S. Census 2000). With the prevalence of single-parent households, many African American students are receiving less supervision and financial support from their parent or guardian. A study conducted by Rand's Institute on Education and Training sharply challenged this view that changing family structure

was a significant reason for poor student performance. This study, *Student Achievement and the Changing American Family* did reveal that the most important family characteristic influencing student performance is parent's education. For example, students with one or two college-educated parents performed significantly better than students whose parents were not high school graduates. The study also found that family income and a mother's age at birth modestly impacted student performance. The students whose families had higher incomes and those with an older mother performed better. Although the difference for a single-parent alone was not significant, such families tend to have lower incomes and mothers with lower educational attainment. It is often difficult for a single-parent to maintain a full time job and other responsibilities, and also meet the many academic needs of their children. African American students also face identity issues in the classroom that hinders their academic performance. Many students do not want to appear as if they are acting white or do not feel academic success is possible for them. In the study, "*Black Adolescent Girls: Do Gender Role and Racial Identity Impact Their Self-Esteem,*" the authors Tamara R. Buckley and Robert T. Carter attempt to examine the identity issue based on the studies conducted by J.E. Helms from the early 90s through the present day. The article suggests that during the adolescent phase, young Black girls and boys as well, struggle a great deal with the concept of racial identity. Many young African Americans struggle with what it means to be Black, and often will resolve themselves to the erroneous notion that it means little more than being anti-white (qtd. in Richardson 61-62). At some point in their socialization, young African Americans tend to identify being educated with acting White. Another factor is the lack of African American role models in elementary and

middle school. According to a *USAToday* article by Kathy Matheson, only 2% of teachers nationwide are African American men (Matheson 2009). This article discusses the need for black men in the classroom because of “the role model factor.” African American students would most likely benefit from an increase of African American teachers in the early stages of education as this might help them with identity issues and provide them with someone they are more likely to identify with.

When taking these factors into account it is difficult for the public school system on its own to significantly improve minority student performance and lessen the achievement gap without additional assistance. I believe that the black church can be a tremendous resource in improving student performance. The church has a long-standing history of educating Black Americans, especially in times when no other institution would do so. The church can help address these specific factors that can hinder academic performance among Black students. In examining the history of the church, I can highlight a few ways in which the church has addressed these factors. First, the church has been creating and shaping Black leadership since its creation. The church can provide role models that support both academic and character growth. It is a place in which a positive identity can be forged within a supportive community. The church can also be a support system for the single parent, as well as the two-parent household, both need all the support they can get to help successfully raise their children. The church also has a structural advantage. Black churches are in every local Black community and can reach every level of the Black community. It is important that Black churches seize this opportunity to make a major social impact as they did during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s.

As stated earlier, another objective of my thesis is to examine what some churches are doing to help address this situation. I have lived and worked as a teacher in New Castle County for the last four years. I am also a member of a church in New Castle County, and I was interested in finding out what churches are doing to address concerns about student performance. I also believe it is important to know what churches are doing to make a difference in student achievement, and in what ways church might need assistance and support to be an effective force. Ultimately, I would like to see them work with other churches to build a broader coalition that will tackle this issue with greater resources and numbers than any single church could. The church is one option among many possible solutions to improve student performance and lower the academic achievement gap. There is no single solution to this problem, but I truly believe the church can be a vital tool in addressing the issue.

Chapter 1

THE BLACK CHURCH AND EDUCATION

REVOLUTIONARY WAR PERIOD

According to Carter G. Woodson's *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, the earliest formal efforts to educate the Negro in America were led by the church. The church developed into a strong supporter of Negro education, so that the Negroes might learn the principles of the Christian religion. Throughout the colonial period, Quakers, Baptist, Methodists and other denominations helped to educate Africans and their descendants. Although these groups may have differed on their opinions of slavery, they agreed that Blacks should be educated.

During the period following the American Revolution and into the early nineteenth century, Black education expanded as many northern states prepared for gradual emancipation. A clear relationship developed between emancipation and efforts to educate Blacks. The Church continued to be the leading force behind Black education. The states and abolitionist societies supported and funded their goals of enlightening the colored people. At this time the education of Black Americans took on a more formal and sophisticated nature in the early nineteenth century. Many understood that in order for Blacks to be independent and successful citizens an adequate education had to be available to them. These early efforts were significant in establishing the independent Black Church after the Revolutionary War.

Two significant developments occurred during this period after the American Revolution. The development of independent Black churches took significant steps forward during this revolutionary period as Blacks sought to have more independence in their religious worship.

Also at this time Blacks were becoming more involved with efforts to create educational opportunities within the Black community. Although Blacks had already begun to establish fairly independent Baptist Churches in the 1770s in the South, much of the attention for this movement is credited to Richard Allen the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Invited to preach at St. George Methodist Episcopal church in Philadelphia in 1786, Allen felt a particular need to establish a church that met the particular needs of his people. Alarmed by the low attendance of Blacks in church, Allen started with prayer meetings that consisted of 42 members. Allen eventually attracted enough Blacks that the congregation proposed to separate the Blacks from Whites during worship services. Rather than accept this proposal, Allen, Absalom Jones, and a few other broke away from the church. Allen and Jones organized the independent Free African Society in hopes of establishing their own church.

Both men established separate independent churches in Philadelphia during the 1790s, but what was most important was that other Blacks followed their example in the North and upper South. Churches were organized in Baltimore, Maryland, Wilmington, Delaware and Salem, New Jersey. In other regions of the North as well, similar trends occurred and independent Black churches were formed.

The independence and growth of the Methodist in the North was crucial in helping Blacks develop the power to help themselves. First it provided an example of how Blacks could manage their own independent institutions. It also provided a place for the growing number of educated Blacks to coordinate plans for the community and pool resources. With the growth of independent Black churches in the 1790s; within the next decade Blacks started to organize

efforts to create their own schools. These early efforts started in urban areas where there was a heavier concentration of Blacks. One of the first schools established by free Blacks was in Charleston, South Carolina in 1810. The “Minor Society” organized the school to provide an education to orphaned children (Woodson 130-132). The District of Columbia was also a center of activity for Blacks to organize and raise funds for the creation of schools. In 1818, after a failed attempt to open a school some years earlier; free Blacks reopened the Bell School with the goal of improving the intellect and morals of the colored youth. A number of colored schools were established in the Washington D.C. / Baltimore area that were created and managed by Blacks.

Many of the schools were connected to black churches. In Baltimore, there were a number of schools operating out of churches. W. Livingston, an ordained clergyman of the Episcopal Church, had a colored school of eighty pupils in the African Church on Saratoga and Ninth. There were five other schools that were administered by women of color, whom had been taught by the Convent of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, a community of black nuns (Woodson, 141). Baltimore also had 600 blacks involved in Sunday-Schools and a day and night school that provided courses in Latin and French. This period was extremely beneficial to the educational development of Blacks in America. It would also provide the framework to sustain Blacks through the dark years ahead. As Blacks became more responsible for their education many obstacles arose to deny them this basic right of man.

From Ante-Bellum to Reconstruction

During the period before the Civil War, moral issues surrounding slavery diminished as economic opportunities and political concerns increased. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 and profits from the export of cotton would renew the demands for slave labor, and revive the institution of slavery. The industrial revolution taking place at this time created a strong demand for American cotton. Also the political implications related to the 3/5 compromise that was reached at the Constitution Convention forced Southern states to depend on the growth of slavery for political representation in Congress. This bound the Southern States to the institution and would be in part responsible for their more aggressive defense of slavery. The Haitian Revolution and the slave insurrections in Virginia and South Carolina in the early nineteenth century intensified the white population's fear of Blacks. This created an increasing repressive environment for Blacks and damaged efforts to educate them.

From about 1831 to the Civil War, education of Blacks in the South would be informal and quite often secretive. Blacks found ways to educate themselves despite the laws of the land, and were forced to hide what they had learned. Religion remained at the center of efforts to educate Blacks. Although there were efforts to preach the word to Blacks without teaching them to read or write, pastors and in many cases their children still taught Blacks to read the Bible for themselves. This made the Bible an extremely important book to Blacks, because it gave them an incentive to learn to read (Woodson 219).

Prior to the Civil War about fifteen percent of the slave population was literate; therefore after the war it was essential to educate the former slaves. The Union army had provided some

opportunities for blacks to learn, but churches and volunteers soon followed behind the Union army. Northern missionaries headed south to establish churches and schools. All denominations took part in this effort, but the Baptist and Methodist were the most effective. During and after the war, schools were established, teachers recruited and money was raised for the education of southern Blacks. A number of Black colleges were founded at this time as well. The Baptist established Shaw University (1865) in Raleigh, Roger Williams (1867) in Nashville and Morehouse (1867) in Atlanta. The Methodist established Walden (1865) in Nashville, Morgan (1867) in Baltimore, and Clark (1870) in Atlanta. The Presbyterian, Episcopal and Congregational churches as well as the Friends Society were also active at this time establishing a number of Black colleges in the South.

The Black churches had also sent missionaries to the South to help set up churches and schools. The A.M.E. church, under the direction of Bishop Daniel A. Payne went to South Carolina in 1865, and helped organize missionaries and teachers in an effort to establish the A.M.E church in Charleston. The Black Baptist church was also effective at establishing churches and schools in the South after the Civil War. Moved by the efforts of other churches to educate Blacks in the South; the African Methodist established Western University in Kentucky, Allen University (1881) at Columbia, and Morris Brown (1885) in Atlanta. The Christian (Colored) Methodist Church established Lane College (1882) in Jackson, Tennessee. The Black Baptist established the Virginia Theological Seminary and College at Lynchburg and the Arkansas Baptist College.

Both the schools and colleges sought to provide the newly freedmen an industrial, social, intellectual and religious education. The goal was to shape morally upright and industrious

citizens through education. Also of great importance as Woodson notes, is that the emphasis of the northern churches was upon instruction rather than proselytizing immediately after the war. The churches understood the immediate need of the freemen, that in order to serve God wisely they needed instruction. Also the denominations worked together to meet this need. Students trained at Lincoln University, a college founded by Presbyterians, would go on to serve as Methodist preachers. This educational outreach of the churches conducted during reconstruction also provided a significant number of intelligent men to lead Black churches. Woodson states, "The minister who could not read nor write became an exception to the rule, and when still ambitious in spite of shortcoming he sometimes ceased to have a following." (Woodson: Negro Church 196)

JIM CROW

After Reconstruction came to an end in 1877, southern state governments started a systematic effort to remove political rights and economic opportunities away from Blacks and isolated them socially. In the name of public safety, Jim Crow laws were put in place across the southern states starting in the 1880s. The Jim Crow laws separated the races in all things social, from restaurants, businesses, bathroom, hotels, and most importantly schools. Jim Crow would be the law of the land for close to eighty years. During this time the Black church truly became the center of the Black community, to a greater extent in the South because of segregation by law. In the North, defacto discrimination allowed for a less restrictive segregation to take place. This created a few more opportunities for Blacks outside of their own community and allowed

for them to attend integrated schools. However, south of the Mason-Dixon Line, the state enforced segregation.

As the only truly independent institution in the Black community, the church served as the center of the community. According to Woodson, after the Civil War, Blacks attended church whether Christian or sinners. The other avenues for social interaction had not yet develop due to the lack of wealth in the Black community. In order to know what was taking place in the community, to meet people, and to conduct business, the church was the meeting place. A very important component of the church was the Sunday school. Now free to learn reading and writing without any repercussions; Blacks attended Sunday schools to learn reading and writing while studying the Bible. With limited opportunities in primary and secondary education, and a growing number of educated preachers, the church became the focal point for Black education. Woodson states, that the Bible unconsciously stimulated the efforts towards self-education. From reading the Bible or being taught from the Bible, individuals studied stories of dramatic history, philosophical essays, charming poetry, and beautiful oratory (Woodson, 245). The church also served as a source for developing leadership skills. From public speaking to organizing and managing finances the church provided opportunities for Blacks to cultivate particular skills. The development of these skills was essential to the progress of the Black community, because Jim Crow laws limited African American access to the outside world.

In an essay written by Henry Allan Bullock called Parallel Inequality, Bullock discusses the creation of two distinct socio-cultural worlds. With the acceptance of Jim Crow by Blacks, Whites and the Federal government through the Plessey case (1896); Blacks and Whites would

travel on different paths and education would not be immune to this separation. Education would actually be at the core of this separation. Bullock contends, that by the close of the nineteenth century the future of the Negro in American life had been settled for the next fifty years. That Negroes were to be kept socially isolated from whites by means of a rigid system of residential segregation; they were to be limited to special occupational pursuits by means of job restrictions; they were to be tailored in “Negro ways” through a rigid code of interracial etiquette; and they were to be reinforced in their obedience to caste rules through formal schooling. This followed along the lines of Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Compromise speech in which, Washington proposed the races be kept as separate as the fingers on the hand in all things social. With ninety percent of Blacks living in the South at this time and the North practicing its own form of segregation; Blacks lived in their own communities distinctly separated from Whites.

Most occupations available to Blacks were at the lower end of the income scale. Most worked in agriculture as tenant farmers or as domestic servants and some found work as laborers in manufacturing and mechanical industries. The professional class was very small and only served the Black community. Education was organized to maintain this economic order for Blacks. Although, many of the colleges that had been set up for blacks maintained both a liberal arts component and vocational; the public schools that were designed for Blacks at this time focused more on vocational instruction. Bullock argues that, Northern philanthropists that had raised money for these schools struck a compromise with southerners to provide schools for blacks if the schools were in line with the conditions prescribed by the segregated order (Weinstein 263). This created a conditioning process for Black students. First, they were

socially isolated allowing for only limited contact with their White peers. Secondly, Black students were taught by teachers who experienced the same isolation and were limited in their expectations for students. Thirdly, at the core of the county training school's program was vocational education. Made possible by the John F. Slater Fund and other philanthropic groups, secondary schools were available to Blacks in the South with these conditions.

Despite these goals to keep Black education mostly vocational, superintendents organized their curriculum with a basis in liberal arts, and sought out teachers with a literary training. This was the habit of educators in the United States and a difficult habit to break. Although the standards were set lower for Black students and vocations were impressed upon them. A significant number of students were still taking classical, scientific, English, and business courses as the hard core of their curriculum.

The church and the Black community served as a force against this programming (Weinstein 276). As the Black church continued to grow in size and importance to the Black community, especially since it was the only place many Black people could turn to for solace in an intimidating world. The church recognized the importance of well rounded and intelligent youth that would be the future leaders of the church and the Black community. A growing number of preachers produced by Black private colleges recognized the value of a liberal arts education to the community. Churches also had increased their commitment to community uplift by the early part of the twentieth century, which created a demand for a well rounded congregation. The community also needed more professionals to administer to the needs of the isolated Black community. As Black communities grew larger and as businesses of various

natures increased, so did the need for law firms, insurance companies, banks, medical facilities and the personal that would staff them.

Although intended to follow vocational lines, it modeled in its own way the education provided for Whites. This push back against the established order for education was the first step towards challenging Jim Crow laws. In public schools and colleges across the South, Blacks would be offered more than just a vocational education, and the church served as an important reason for that, because of its demand for capable leaders and its responsibilities to the Black community. Furthermore in creating this separate society for Blacks, difficulties would be encountered when attempting to integrate the two societies.

THE IMPACT OF BROWN V. BOARD ON EDUCATION IN DELAWARE

The *Brown vs. the Board* of Education case was the first step towards creating educational equality. The NAACP pointed out that racially- segregated school systems have never produced more equal outcomes for Black students than desegregated systems. The less rigidly segregated school districts of the Northern United States had done a better job of educating Blacks than districts in the Southern United States prior to court-ordered desegregation in the 1960s and 70s; and the academic achievement gap between Blacks and Whites narrowed as school districts integrated their student populations.

Although the achievement gap was narrowed there is still a significant difference in academic achievement between White and Black students. Busing was the second attempt at addressing the achievement gap, but also failed to achieve satisfactory results. In Delaware, state

test scores continue to indicate significant differences in academic performance based on race. Delaware, which was one of the states involved in the *Brown case* began the desegregation process in 1961 and by 1967, the last of the Black school districts was phased out. However in 1974, the U.S. District Court found that segregation never has been eliminated from city schools, and orders the state to submit desegregation plans. In 1978, U.S. District Court Judge Murray M. Schwartz approved a "9-3" busing plan that sends city students into the suburbs for nine years and suburban students into the city for three. Wilmington's school district and 10 suburban districts are consolidated. In 1995, Delaware General Assembly passed legislation giving parents the right to apply to enroll at any public school in Delaware. This was a significant step forward in allowing parents to send their children to better funded schools, but it has not solved the problem. Furthermore by 1997, federal appeals courts upholds finding that schools have been desegregated (The Law and Schools). Yet, a significant difference remains in academic performance.

Since its creation the Black church has tried to serve the needs of its community. Education has been one of the central needs and the church has consistently tried to find ways to address this issue. From its earliest days, the church has been a model for Black independence, and providing leadership within the community. The church has understood that in order for Blacks to be successful in American society, education must be valued and supported. From Reconstruction to the end of Jim Crow, churches have pooled resources and attempted to tackle issues detrimental to the Black community. Churches must see the achievement gap and poor student performance in the same light as the earlier plights. This is an issue that threatens Africans Americans just as much as these earlier obstacles.

Chapter 2

WHY CHURCHES NEED TO INCREASE THEIR EFFORTS

THE BLACK-WHITE ACHIEVEMENT GAP IN DELAWARE

African American students on average are performing consistently lower than their White counter parts. In data collected from standardized testing, it appears that a significant number of African American students are not meeting academic expectations in Delaware's public schools. Delaware's school districts have been aware of this problem, and are struggling to find ways to appropriately address this dangerous trend in student performance. I propose that churches take on a more active and organized role in addressing the crisis at hand, because school districts need additional assistance.

In 2009, African American students in Delaware had the lowest percentage of students meeting expectations on the Delaware Student Testing Program tests, according to the Delaware Department of Education. On the third grade reading test, the percentage of African American students meeting expectation was 21.88 points lower than their White peers. With the exception of Appoquinimink school district, the gap percentage remained close to about a twenty point difference between White and Black students meeting expectation on the 3rd grade reading and math tests. On the math test for the third grade the percentage difference was 23.14. On both tests the percentage differences have increased since 2005. A significant gap on all tests is consistent throughout the testing data. In 10th grade, the last year of the reading and math tests, the percentage gap for reading is 28.41 and for math it is 34.85. The smallest gap percentage between White and Black students meeting expectation is on the science test in the 4th grade at 12.98. The New Castle County schools' percentages are actually slightly better than the entire

state's percentages. In the Red Clay school district on the 3rd grade math test only fifty percentage of African American students met expectations for the test. The New Castle County schools' percentage gaps are actually closer than the rest of state. This is just a snap shot of the testing statistics, but they bear a grim message for African Americans. Too many African American youth are not being prepared to make an adequate living in the United States based on their performance on the state tests, which is one of the few indicators of academic performance. SAT scores did not show much promise either on the 2009 SAT, the national average score for African American students was 1276 and for whites students it was 1581 based on the new SAT that includes a writing component (SAT's Growing Gaps). On the 2008 test, Black students' score average was the lowest in every category of the test. The average score for critical reading was 430. In math the average was 426 and in writing it was 424. The average score for Whites in those respective categories was 528, 537, and 518. For the high school class of 2009, the gap between Black and White students increased by two points. Given that we acknowledge biases within the tests and knowing that an individual's true intelligence cannot always be measure by a standardized test; we cannot deny the fact that these tests hold significant weight in diagnosing student performance and in determining college admissions. How are African American youth going to compete for college admissions and jobs? Also of concern is the graduation rate for African American high school students in Delaware; in a report conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education the graduation rate for the class of 2006 was 54%. This is 12% lower than the state's overall average. Performance in school and on these types of tests must improve in order to secure a brighter future for a significant number of African Americans. In a report conducted by the Urban League on the State of Black America, the report found that Blacks

remained twice as likely to be unemployed, three times more likely to live in poverty, and more than six times as likely to be imprisoned. Improving Black student performance and reducing the achievement gap is a vital step in combating these statistics.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT STUDENT PERFORMANCE

In order to address this problem we have to identify some reasons for this difference in performance. In looking at the history of African Americans and education in America, we can conclude that African Americans in the past have valued education and understood its specific importance to the race. Being denied educational opportunities throughout their history in the United States has forced many African Americans to seize opportunities to educate themselves when possible. Yet, the after effect of segregation has had dire consequences on African American performance in the classroom. Due to segregation, and other various forms of discrimination such as housing and job discrimination, Blacks have encountered some clear economic obstacles that have impacted student performance. The NAACP points out several of the economic consequences that have resulted in poor student performance. The NAACP has noted there is an academic achievement gap between White and Black students as they enter the public school system, with White students having a stronger educational foundation. White parents are more likely to have a higher income, better educated, and important educational opportunities. Such as high quality preschool programs, are among the advantages that more White students have (Closing the Gap). The academic achievement gap between Black and White students is also a byproduct of unequal educational facilities. For example, in many public schools, students in predominantly Black schools are exposed to a considerably higher

concentration of inexperienced and ineffective teachers, are assigned to larger classes, and have fewer textbooks and other instructional aides (Richardson 31). Another factor which reinforces and increases the academic achievement gap between Black and White students is the process of curriculum differentiation through ability-grouping, also known as curriculum tracking, or simply as "tracking." There is great concern in regards to how tracking may diminish student expectations and achievement. In her book, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*, Jeannie Oakes provided empirical evidence of the disadvantages endured by students placed in lower tracks. She revealed that some schools, under orders to desegregate, were promoting internal segregation by disproportionately assigning minority students to lower tracks. Oakes concluded that, "It does not appear to be related to either increasing academic achievement or promoting positive attitudes and behavior. Poor and minority students seem to have suffered most from tracking-- and these are the very students on whom so many educational hopes are pinned (qtd. in Hallinan 2)."

Some school districts in Delaware have moved to eliminate tracking, but Advanced Placement and Honors classes have replaced the tracking system. Another economic factor that may impact the performance of some African American students is the increasing cost of college. With college tuitions skyrocketing in the past twenty years; it is likely that many African American students are discouraged by their chances to attend a college of their choosing. The key motivation to performing well in high school is attending a college of your choice. If you are a high school student and you don't believe you are going to college, then many of the classes you are taking seem irrelevant to your situation. This situation is especially problematic,

because a college degree has become increasingly important to sustaining a middle class income level.

The other significant consequence of segregation is the social disconnect that hinders African American academic performance. The best example of this is W.E.B. Du Bois' description of the double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Du Bois, 9). Segregation helped cement a Black identity and culture that has difficulty adjusting to the majority's expectations. In some cases it is just basic difference in manners, language, and behavior. In some cases it takes the form of resistance to all things considered white. For example many Black students don't want to appear as if they are acting "white" or selling out. It can be thought of as a form of control over Black people, to be the "house nigger". There is a sincere desire not to lose a sense of one's self in learning to navigate in the White majority's world. It is ironic that the educated Negro once struck fear into the White man, for he understood that education was the key to his independence. Yet now too many students are afraid to be that person. For a race of people who have sacrificed so much and overcome many obstacles; there are still too many who have given up hope because of economic inequalities and perceived social stigma.

CHURCHES AND COMMUNITIES TAKING ACTION

The Black church can address some of these issues. With fewer resources and more obstacles the church acted boldly in helping to educate the Black race in the nineteenth century. Many scholars and community leaders are calling on the Black church to take a more active role

in helping to improve student performance. In a 1991 New York Times article on education and the Black church, the article highlighted one of the most ambitious projects in the country. It involved over 500 churches in Chicago that were working to improve math, science, and computer skills of the children they served. In addition to that, 10 churches offered summer school to 500 students. This initiative called the Black Churches Project, also helped to train church teachers and student tutors, as well as designing the science, math and computer courses offered at the churches. The Project also paid for field trips, recruited black science and math professionals to serve as speakers and mentors.

Building off of what was started by the Black Churches Project, Philip Jackson, founded the Black Star Project in 1996, an organization based in Chicago working to eliminate the achievement gap. Jackson and one hundred Black parents presented a plan to the Chicago Board of Education in 2007 to address the racial achievement gap in Chicago. The goal was to have parents and the community involved in order to successfully educate Black students in Chicago Public Schools. The first point of the eight-point plan called for the creation of a system of parental support and community involvement in the education of Black Students. The second point called for the development of a mentoring program and motivational services to re-inspire Black students to want to learn. The third component of this plan was to engage in a community-wide literacy/tutoring initiative that will ensure that all 1st-through 3rd grade Black boys read at grade level. The program would be housed in Freedom Schools- located in such places as schools, churches, and community centers. The plan also calls for an educational alignment among schools, parents, community leaders, government officials, business leaders, faith based leaders, students and other institutions on the solutions to the racial academic achievement gap.

This proposal also called for a special council to monitor progress on this issue (Jackson 2007).

In Oakland, California, educators have proposed a partnership with Black churches that involves opening 15 to 20 pilot academic centers within the Black churches. The centers would provide after school help to assist students in passing California's mandatory high school exam and prepare for college (Kong 2002). Black churches are also renewing their commitment to education in Missouri and Rhode Island. Parents, churches, and school districts in these states are coming together to discuss how churches can help improve student performance. Many of these programs are in their early stages, therefore making it difficult to evaluate their impact. The common factor among these programs is to create a community of support for students. Many of these students are lacking the family structure to successfully navigate through the public school system. The churches are serving as supporters and advocates on behalf of the children.

INTERVIEWS WITH THREE NEW CASTLE COUNTY CHURCHES

Efforts like the Black Star Project in Chicago and others must be examined and studied, so that any successful strategies developed from these programs can be implemented in other cities and states. Furthermore, I believed it was important to examine what some local churches in New Castle County are doing to help the children in their churches and communities. The purpose of these interviews was to discuss what churches are actually doing to help students academically within their church and community. I wanted to know the pastor's philosophy regarding the church and education. Was social service an integral part of the church's mission? I wanted to see if they were working with other churches. I was interested in finding out how

extensive their educational outreach programs are and if they had developed partnerships with the school district in their area. Another topic of interest was the role of parents and how parents responded to outreach efforts. I also wanted to know what difficulties they encountered with their outreach programs.

I selected the churches based on location, accessibility and their denomination. The churches are located in Newark, Wilmington, and New Castle, Delaware. These churches are within the Christina, Brandywine, and Colonial school districts; all of these districts have a significant African American population attending their schools. Accessibility was the next determinant. I needed to interview pastors that I believed would agree to be interviewed and would speak candidly about their churches role in helping to educate black youth. It was important that I was familiar with each church and had attended a few services. In two of the churches, I have family members that regularly attend and hold positions of responsibility within the church. The other church, Pilgrim Baptist, I am a member of. Lastly, I choose the Baptist and Methodist Episcopal denominations because of their long history with the Black community.

Pilgrim Baptist Church

I conducted my first interview with Dr. Lonnie E. Rector of Pilgrim Baptist Church in Newark, Delaware on May 6, 2009. He has pastored the church for the past five years. The topics covered in this interview and the others are the church's demographics, the role of the church in education, and education outreach programs conducted by the church. In looking at the demographics of Pilgrim Baptist, Pastor Rector stated that the church has a good variety of occupations and income levels; professions ranging from teachers, lawyers, and doctors are part of the Pilgrim congregation. The average median household income in Newark is \$54,395, which

is higher than both Wilmington and New Castle. The church also has a significant number of adult males in attendance on a regular basis, and a number of families with both the mother and father appearing to be present. It is a rapidly growing church with a membership of several hundred congregants. Pilgrim's congregation appears to be a solid foundation to build educational outreach programs upon. It appears to have a significant working and middle class population in attendance. The church has a number of people who can serve as positive role models and mentors for young men and women in the church and community.

Pastor's Perspective. In accessing the role of the church in dealing with the achievement gap, Pastor Rector was enthusiastic about the church taking on more responsibility in this area. Dr. Rector believes the church has a pivotal role in reinforcing family values, supporting and encouraging academic excellence in youth. He wants the church to be a resource for both students and parents. He stresses the importance of the church reclaiming its historical role in supporting education as a means of self-improvement. He mentions how the church needs to provide a sense of unity and framework for working together to reach a common goal. He also expresses concerns for parents and teachers, and how they need assistance in helping to educate the youth. With a number of young and single parents in the community it can be difficult to maintain the necessary supervision and guidance for a school age child. Often these parents are working long hours and trying to make ends meet and are not fully mature themselves. He believes the church must provide assistance and support to these parents or their children may be lost to other influences. Also teachers face difficulties because of classroom size and an inability to identify with some of their students. This makes it difficult to meet the needs of their students

and can result in students passing through without meeting expectations. Another important role for the church is to provide roles models that demonstrate good moral character and what it takes to be successful. Dr. Rector believes this is very important in order to diminish the impact of negative influences on the youth.

Church Programs. Dr. Rector also discussed outreach programs that he believes will have a positive impact on student academic performance. The church offers tutoring in various subjects. The pastor randomly visits students in school, in order to let the kids know education is important to him and that he is keeping an eye on them. Every third Sunday, Deacon Arnold Saunders reads report cards to the entire church. The goal is to recognize students who have performed well in school, but also to encourage those who have not performed as well as they also recognize improvement. The church also provides seminars for both students and parents on various topics. Pilgrim has conducted seminars on scholarships, grants, financial planning and investment strategies that will help provide money to help pay for college. The church also offers scholarships to help pay for books and others materials student will need for college. Pilgrim is also working to establishing mentoring programs within community schools. Although most programs are geared towards members of the church, Pilgrim currently has two mentors working with students at Downes Elementary School.

Obstacles and Opportunities. Dr. Rector also discussed the role of the United Baptist Convention of Delaware in addressing educational concerns within the state of Delaware. As President of the United Baptist Convention of Delaware, Dr Rector is working with other churches to provide scholarship funds and making sure there is appropriate funding for Delaware State University, a historically Black University.

St. Paul A.M.E. Church

In my second interview, I talked with Pastor Charles Amos on May 6, 2009. Pastor Amos has been the pastor at St. Paul U.A.M.E. for the past six years, but has been full time for only the past year. I found my interview with Pastor Amos to be very insightful. I appreciated his candidness and openness about his struggles to bring a greater emphasis on education within the church. Currently a student himself at Liberty University, Pastor Amos seemed to have a real passion for education and helping children within the church and in the community.

St. Paul is located on the Westside of Wilmington on Market Street. The church was founded in 1887 in a house on Wilmington's Westside used for prayer meetings. The church membership is mostly working class, with a significant number of retirees. Pastor Amos believed that the church has about ninety members college age and younger. The church's total membership is about four hundred. He also noted that the church had a small percentage of unemployed members about five percent. The median income for a household in Wilmington was \$35,116, according to the 2000 census. It also has a poverty rate of 21.3 percent which is about eight points higher than the national average at 12.5. In comparison to Pilgrim Baptist, St. Paul is somewhat smaller and older in its membership. It also has fewer men in the age range of 30 to 50 years old in its congregation. About half of its congregation lives in the city of Wilmington.

Pastor's Perspective. Pastor Amos has a high view of education and its importance to people of faith. He believes it is important to the success of the individual and the community. He regards social service as an obligation of the church and in order to reach the community spiritually; he must meet their other needs as well. He wants the church to help eliminate

roadblocks to achievement. To encourage and offer opportunities to African American students, who might not be encouraged academically, and receive the necessary support for success. He reflected on his own experience in High School, and how he wanted to attend college right after High School, but no one pushed him in that direction. He would like to see the church be an advocate for African American students; offering support and information to students and parents. He also believes the church needs to help with student self-esteem, because many students don't believe they can do well in school or can afford to attend college. He is greatly concerned about self-esteem issues undermining academic achievement. Through Sunday school and Bible camp, the church tries to build up the students' self- image with positive reinforcement. He also stressed concerns about family structure and how finances play a part in student performance in school. That it is difficult for students to focus on school when their home life is in chaos. In his sermons he tries to speak to these issues and stress the importance of changing destructive patterns and offering your child something different. The church also provides a few programs to help with this outreach.

Church Programs. Currently, the church offers tutoring every Tuesday evening and it varies from 5 to up to 15 kids in attendance, and many of the children are not members of the church. The tutoring program is facilitated by a member of the church, Sister Mary Stanley, a retired teacher. The students bring their homework and projects to the church and get assistance. The Pastor stated that he would like to see more volunteers, particularly his college aged members so that they can serve as positive role models as well as tutors. During Sunday services, Pastor Amos also recognizes student achievement by giving certificates to students who have made the honor roll. Also if they make the honor twice, the Pastor takes the children to

dinner as an added incentive. The Union of American Methodist Episcopal church conference also offers a scholarship for college. In a less formal manner the church also makes funds available to students who need money for books and other cost that come with attending college.

Obstacles and Opportunities. Unfortunately Pastor Amos has encountered some difficulties with his outreach programs. Often the students need to be fed, and parents often arrive late to pick up their children from the tutoring sessions. In one case, a student coming in for tutoring was involved in dealing drugs. These types of problems make it difficult to efficiently operate the tutoring program. Pastor Amos believes many in the church don't see a need for a more aggressive approach to educational concerns. Many in the congregation are retired and don't quite understand the increasing importance of a secondary education and college. Some believe that the children just need to get themselves together and don't fully recognize the difficulties students are encountering. Pastor Amos would also like to have access to more space, so that the church can dedicate a specific place for educational outreach and set up computers to assist with the tutoring program and allow for computer training classes. He has reached out to the Wilmington City Council to find a location for outreach programs, and has looked into acquiring grant funding through faith-based initiatives. He also wants to establish a resource for parents and students to provide them information on scholarships and financial aid to help pay for college. Pastor Amos has a number of good ideas to help the church be a more effective force in assisting students, but acquiring more volunteers and getting more people to see the need for more outreach are difficult hurdles before him.

Mt. Sinai Baptist Church

In my third interview, I spoke with Pastor Barron Sherrer of Mt. Sinai Baptist on May 20th and September 3, 2009. This interview was particularly interesting because Pastor Sherrer is also an educator. He is currently the Principal at the Hope Academy a recently opened alternative school in Bridgeton, New Jersey. He has been the pastor of Mt. Sinai for the past seventeen years, and has also been a full time educator as well working in the state of New Jersey.

Mt. Sinai is located in New Castle, Delaware on New Castle Avenue a few miles outside of Wilmington. The church was founded in 1963. It is mostly a middle class church with most of its members ranging in age from 35 years of age to 60. The church has close to four hundred members. Their professions range from self-employed, educators and bankers. The median income for a family in New Castle was \$56,368 according to the 2000 census. It has about 80 youth that are high school age and younger.

Pastor's Perspective. Pastor Sherrer's view of the church's role in education is that the church needs to play a major part. He believes it is important to invest in our children. He stated that the church needs to reclaim its role as a major contributor to the education of African American students, because the church may have a better chance at reaching the youth. Pastor Sherrer believes African American youth will identify better with African American adults when it comes to issues surrounding education. He also believes the church can provide the forum for these interactions. Pastor Sherrer stresses the urgency needed because he fears that student performance will continue to slip if something is not done. Pastor Sherrer believes there are enough resources if churches work together to address this problem. However, he is

disappointed because churches are not working together and many churches are finding it difficult to organize educational outreach programs.

Obstacles and Opportunities. Even with his desire to step up more educational outreach programs, Pastor Sherrer is finding it difficult to set up a consistent and comprehensive outreach program in his church. Currently, Mt. Sinai does not have an afterschool tutoring or mentoring program. The church does recognize students who have made the honor roll, graduated, or performed community service during Sunday services. The church provides assistance to seniors that are graduating by helping the transition into college. This takes the form of taking students on college visits, completing necessary forms for financial aid, recommendations, and also providing some financial help as well. Pastor Sherrer plans to expand this outreach to include, after school tutoring, job training, mentoring, and computer training classes.

Pastor Sherrer wants to do more for the youth in his church and in the surrounding community, but finds it difficult to get committed volunteers and enough funding. He admits much of his hesitation to put programs into action stems from his desire to direct the programs himself. Between working a full time job and pasturing a church, it makes it difficult to organize and run these types of programs without committed volunteers. Pastor Sherrer also feels as though the church is waiting on him to provide a clear vision and directive on these programs.

Summary and Implications.

From my interviews I drew some conclusions about the Black church and efforts to improve student performance. It is very important that churches recognize this situation and for pastors to take action on this cause, because many do not fully recognize the severity of the

situation. I believe there is a desire by each pastor to do more in this area, but getting a collective force behind this effort will be challenging.

First, the church as a whole does not fully recognize its potential to help in this situation. Each pastor felt as if there was no real sense of urgency within the church to address this need. Except for Pilgrim, the other churches were having some difficulty getting volunteers and support for their programs. Pilgrim seems to be more successful in this area and I believe the demographics of the church are a significant factor in this. Pilgrim is located in a higher income area, has a number of college educated professionals in the age range from thirty to fifty. It also has a significant number of men within that age range as well. This provides a source for mentors and those who are more familiar with the current state of education. St. Paul for example has a significant number of retirees in the church that do not quite understand the environment that students have to navigate in schools presently. Many of the older members did not have to attend a college to secure a good job. Therefore, urgency about student performance and attending college is not a priority for them. Also many may have not graduated from high school either and feel as though they cannot truly help students in schools today. They are all willing to help youth by raising money for scholarships, but that only helps the student that has gotten into college. Much more has to be to address this problem and those that have successfully navigated their way through college are important to maintaining effective outreach programs.

Secondly, each pastor expressed concerns about parental involvement in their children's education. The pastors were concerned about the lack of effort from many parents. They were concerned about parent involvement in school functions and church functions that dealt with

education. It appears as if some parents are not very interested in their children's education. The pastors would like to see more commitment from the parents on this issue. They have preached about this issue and offered their assistance, but realize it can only go as far as the parents take it. Dr. Rector and Pastor Amos both expressed concerns about parents that are members of their churches not bringing their children to programs that are offered at their churches such as tutoring and seminars on college admissions and financial aid. Pastor Rector commented that he has volunteers and the funding for education outreach programs, but often lacks the parents' support in bringing the children to such programs. This prompts the question of why some African American parents have distanced themselves from their children's education. Most successful schools whether public or private believe parent involvement is essential to their success. Pastor Sherrer noted that as a teacher this is an alarming trend that troubles him, the low attendance at Open house and Parent-Teacher conferences signal a lack of interest in their child's performance in school. This was the most troubling concern I heard from the Pastors, because it was difficult to explain this occurrence.

Another point I wanted to note was the difficulty of maintaining the membership of the eighteen to twenty-five year old age group. Many churches across the country have difficulty maintaining this age group, because many parents lose influence over their children at this point. At this age many are seeking answers for themselves and trying to figure out who they are as an individual. Some are off to college, other are possibly moving out of the parent's home, and others lose interest in the church. This is a particularly important group because they can be wonderful examples for the younger children. They can serve as tutors, mentors, and role models. It is important to invest in the youth of the church to hold on to this group as they get

older, these are the future leaders of the church. If churches aren't providing meaningful outreach to these individuals then the church is just another place for social gatherings. I firmly believe if the church invested more in education outreach more people from this age group would remain in the church.

Unfortunately, I was not able to assess the effectiveness of these outreach programs, and the churches did not have any formal means of evaluating the success of their programs. Overall, I found myself deeply concerned about the impact of these programs, because the churches are not working together, nor do they have a set curriculum or plans in place that would provide markers for success. Churches will have to focus more attention and effort to this matter, if they are to improve the academic performance of minority students. From the interviews, I do not believe that churches understand the gravity of the situation and how much more churches could do to affect the situation. The churches are trying to help, but they seem to lack a sense of urgency necessary to adequately address this gap in academic performance. I believe the churches are a valuable resource, and have the potential to be an effective agent for change. However, the lack of unity among churches limits the effectiveness of their outreach programs. Church must unify to collectively address this problem. I believe churches must seek out other churches to collaborate with on this issue. The blueprint for success has been drawn by earlier generations, during Reconstruction and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, churches worked together to confront an issue that affects so many. The efforts started with the churches, but developed into broader coalitions that effectively brought about change. Churches working together will bring a greater focus to this issue. They can provide a forum in which solutions can be offered and the community as a whole can begin to tackle this problem.

Churches must unify to make significant progress in elevating student performance. Some churches will have to go unrecognized and others will not be able to lead the outreach programs. The more important goal must be achieved, and that is helping the youth.

CHAPTER 3

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

STEWARDSHIP

In her book, *Can the Black Church Save Young Black American?*, Dr. Temeca L. Richardson identifies how the church can be instrumental in closing the educational achievement gap. Dr. Richardson offers three strategies that might prove effective in helping address the achievement gap. She calls for a greater focus on financial stewardship that allows for effective outreach to the community, increased cooperation between churches, and that a position be created within the church leadership that focuses on students' performance in school.

Dr. Richardson's implores churches both large and small to cultivate wise financial stewardship not only within the church, but with its member's personal finances as well. This will allow congregations to effectively raise funds and use them for community improvement. She mentions the Mormon Church as a model for which the Black church can draw ideas. She specifically points out their success in the realms of educational and fiscal empowerment. She comments that Mormon leaders have historically and visibly mandated that their followers attempt to place their children in a position of power by keeping their own financial matters in order. The Mormon Church also emphasizes the importance of an educated following. By stressing the importance of financial independence and higher education the church strengthens its own future as a successful organization (Richardson 113). Some predominantly African American churches have managed to have this focus as well such as the Potter's House. The Potter's House is a nondenominational church, located in the southern sector of Dallas, Texas,

that was founded in 1996. In just over seven years, *The Potter's House* grew from 50 families to more than 28,000 members who step out in force, inspired and spiritually armed by Bishop T.D. Jakes to help others in their communities and across the world. *Christian Today* and *The Dallas Morning News* tag *The Potter's House* church as one of the fastest growing churches in the nation. Similar to the Mormon Church there is a focus on financial stewardship, but also providing a clear vision for social action. The size and the scope of the Potter's House cannot be easily duplicated but that is not the important point. What is important is the focus of the church on how they choose to raise and spend their money. Dr. Richardson believes that these churches are successful not because of their access to wealth or because of the color of their skin, but because of their outlook and concentration on a centralized and highly publicized set of financial, educational, and social goals.

COOPERATION AMONG CHURCHES

Cooperation between churches is the second suggestion proposed by Dr. Richardson. Although, Dr. Richardson calls for a national plan of action among the black churches, I believe regional and local cooperation can be successful as well. This requires for pastors and congregations to reach to one another for a common goal. In my interview with Pastor Sherrer, he commented that just on New Castle Avenue where his church is located; there were enough churches to have a dramatic impact on the children in that community. Unfortunately, the churches have not come together to address this issue, because some churches may be too concerned about which church would receive the most recognition for the outreach programs. Pastor Sherrer believed that some pastors would not participate for fear of losing members.

However if churches cooperate just within a school district much can be achieved. First, the responsibilities are spread among three to four churches. Each church could bring different resources to the program. The church with the ideal location and facilities would serve as the home base for the program. Another church could provide school supplies and lesson plans. A third church would provide the volunteers and the training for tutors. If churches were to cooperate and organize their outreach programs in such a manner; they could share the cost of such programs and be more likely to have a sufficient number of volunteers.

PUBLIC EDUCATION LEADER

The third strategy offered by Dr. Richardson is to create a position within the church leadership, a public education leader. She believes that each church of color needs to appoint a leader that has free reign to talk to and advise pastoral staff on the condition and direction of all church-sponsored outreach programs for the youth (Richardson, 168). Dr. Richardson, states that this person should be well-read on current educational legislation and maintains a working knowledge of the performance of local schools and their students via report cards, test scores and behavioral records. This position's sole responsibility would be to manage the educational outreach program, and a clear distinction must be made between this position and a youth minister. This position would be vital in relieving the pastor or other ministers from the stress of managing an outreach program in addition to any other duties. Both Pilgrim and St. Paul have their own versions of this position. Pilgrim has an education ministry that is separate from the Sunday school ministry and St. Paul has a person supervising their tutoring program. However,

they currently do not have the clear directives set out by Dr. Richardson. This would send a clear message to the congregation and to the larger community that the church is investing in the youth.

The public education leader would also be responsible for collecting data from the schools about student performance. This would allow the public education leaders to be a liaison between the churches and schools. The intended goal would be to provide information to help plan strategies and methods to improve student performance. Parents would also benefit from have an additional advocate on behalf of their children. Parents are often unaware of school policies and procedures in regards to placement of their children, academic rigor of courses, and the college application process. The public education leader could serve as valuable resource to parents.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH SCHOOLS

Establishing relationships with schools can be another effective tool for churches to use. By creating a working relationship with schools, churches will know what is happening in local schools. Churches can expand their outreach efforts and reach children outside of their church. This will provide churches with ideas on how to assist schools in meaningful ways. Churches can develop tutoring programs in line with school objectives. Churches can also provided mentors for students. The mentors can provide assistance with homework and projects and be a positive role model for the student. Churches will also be to develop incentive programs closely aligned with student progress in school. From this relationship with schools, churches should be able to know exactly what a particular school's needs are. Administrators and teachers can

identify areas of weakness and churches can align after school programs and other tutoring services to match that need. Church should also offer summer enrichment programs and schools can help provide the curriculum and resources to help the church organize the programs.

CONCLUSION

These suggestions should be helpful to any church that is interested in improving its educational outreach. There are also many organizations such as Jack and Jill, the Urban League, and the NAACP that can provide assistance and support to churches. It is important that minority churches and other organizations dedicated to improving the standards of living for minorities focus on the issue of education. The fight to provide an equal and sufficient education for minority children is far from over. The *Brown decision* had removed a significant barrier in race relations, but could not fully address the gap in academic performance. Therefore forces must be organized to combat this extremely important civil rights issue. Inadequate public education will continue to create a permanent and growing group of African Americans that will not have any chance at improving their station in life.

I believe the Black church must act on this issue with a greater sense of urgency. The Black community is in a challenging transitional period. The Black community is dealing with the effects of integration over the past forty years and the changing nature of education. The supports systems and resources that were once in place to help children are diminishing within the community as successful African Americans leave the community. In addition to that, education has increased in its value, because the opportunities available to a high school dropout are not as promising as they were forty years ago. Even a high school diploma will not improve your opportunities much, and if a significant number of African American students are not meeting expectations in elementary, middle and high school their chances of going to college become less likely. The Black church has the ability to help ease this transition and bring the resources of the Black community together. This is one of the places where the working poor,

working class and middle class of the Blacks community still gather and function together.

Education used to be the second most important function of the church next to saving souls. The church needs to reclaim that role.

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