

NATIONAL BLACK EDUCATION AGENDA

www.blackeducationnow.org



"One who does not know can know from learning."

• 451 west street • nyc 10014 •

For Black America- We Are "Still A Nation at Risk"

Common Core is NOT the answer!!!



***The National Black Education Agenda Responds to COMMON CORE
STATE STANDARDS advocated by The Council of State School
Officers and the National Governors Association.***

Prepared for the NBEA by Drs. Donald H. Smith and Sam Anderson

Note: We Originally Published this in August 2010 in an attempt to warn educators, parents and students about the inherent racist and miseducation dangers of the Common Core State Standards. We urge you to not only read and discuss our critique, but to also engage in ACTION to oppose and reject this national policy to dumbdown our children while a few megacorporations rake in billions of our tax dollars in the name of “education reform.”

Send us your reports on your struggles to bring Educational & Cultural excellence to Black Children. Send us your thoughts on how we can build our National Network of Black Education Activists— Email us at blackeducator@africamail.com

The National Black Education Agenda is here for you and your local or regional fightback. We continue in the tradition of Frederick Douglass and other Black Heroes and Sheroes in “Struggling to Learn to Learn to Struggle!”

Historical Overview

In 1983, The Federal Government under President Ronald Reagan issued an educational document titled “A Nation at Risk”.

In military language the document declared: “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre education performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war”.

In its analysis and recommendations “A Nation at Risk” gave no attention to the issues of either large urban cities or of the nation’s Black students.

In response to this neglect not only by “A Nation at Risk” but also by the many education reform documents of the 1980s, The National Alliance of Black School Educators commissioned a group of distinguished Black educators to write a document based on the inseparable linkage of academic and cultural excellence for students of African descent. NABSE issued its report, “Saving the African American Child,” co-authored by Dr. Asa G. Hilliard III and Dr. Barbara A. Sizemore and distributed nationwide in 1984.

Unbelievable to some, “Saving the African American Child” called for even higher standards for children and youth of African descent than “A Nation at Risk” or any other educational reform document of the 1980s demanded for all American students. For example, the NABSE document insisted that:

African American students should master algebra by the sixth grade and calculus by the twelfth grade.

“Saving the African American Child” echoed the central thesis of Dr. Carter G. Woodson’s classic book, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, (1933): education in America was conceived to control the minds and labors of Black Americans.

Dr. Woodson, Ph.D., Harvard, the father of “Negro History” in America, contended that education in the United States was intended purposefully to make people of African descent feel inferior and people of European decent believe in their superiority. That purpose was then and is now still manifested in curriculum, in instruction, in books, newspapers, broadcasting and films and, most importantly, in public philosophy and public policy.

Accordingly, “Saving the African American Child” made explicit that the process of educating African American students requires pedagogy and curriculum whose objective is the combination of academic and cultural excellence. The essential cultural excellence dimension is to correct and reverse the emotional, historical and cultural damage of white supremacist distortions and untruths about students’ African origins, the enslavement of their ancestors, and to renew their self-esteem; to help students of African ancestry understand the deliberately omitted history of the African origins of civilization and the origins of scholarship in almost all the academic subjects studied at the present.

But neither most African American educators nor educators of European, Hispanic/Latino, Native American or Asian ancestry gave much attention to the imperative of the mind freeing cultural necessity for students of African descent.

For example, the African American superintendent of the Nashville Public Schools, at the time of the publication of the NABSE document, and later Mayor of Nashville, stated in the *Nashville Tennessean* that he knew of no relationship between the study of Black history and mathematics and science.

Clearly his own education failed to teach him that the origins of mathematics and science were in Africa, that the first humans were Africans.

Another example of an African American educator with little knowledge of his history and no respect for the work of the African American scholars who wrote “Saving the African American Child”, was the superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools who hosted a major foundation supported conference in Miami at which educators from around the US convened to discuss the implications of the reform documents of the 1980s.

Copies of almost all of the reform documents had been distributed and were on display. Absent was the major reform document of the National Alliance of Black School Educators, in which both of the superintendents cited above held long time organizational memberships. A copy was also presented to the then chancellor of the New York City Public Schools, a man of Hispanic/Latino heritage. He never responded privately or publicly. A copy was also presented in person to the present president of the New York City Public Library, who also never responded.

The distinguished educator, the late Dr. Barbara A. Sizemore, first African American woman to head a major school district, Washington, D.C., and co-author of the NABSE report, once wrote an essay entitled “Hardly Anybody Wants Something All-Black to be Excellent”. Her thesis was supported by the failure of African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Native American or European American educators to give any credence to the reform document which advocated and expected higher standards for Black students than any other reform document of the 1980s.

The Present Crisis

Now twenty-seven years after the publication and public discourse over a “A Nation at Risk”, America is “Still a Nation at Risk”. Dropouts among students of African descent and other students of color are epidemic. For example, the August 2010 Educational Testing Service’s Report: ***The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped*** and the Schott Foundation Report, “*Given Half A Chance: the 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*”, 2008, which documents the tragedy of

Black male graduation rates. Among the lowest performing large school districts in America, the high school completion rate for Black males is 20% in Detroit, 31% in Baltimore and Buffalo and 32% in New York City and Milwaukee. Or stated another way, the dropout rate for Black male high school students is 80% in Detroit, 69% in **Baltimore and** Buffalo and 68% in New York City and Milwaukee.

It is likely that the dropout rates are even higher, due to fudging of data, the administration of testing instruments that are less challenging than national tests and teaching to the tests.

The report “Dropping out of School in New York State: the Invisible People of Color” by the Task Force on the New York State Dropout Problem, cites a New York City Board of Education study which found that in-school experiences are a principal reason students drop out of school. The study, “Interrupted Education, Students Who Drop Out”, reported that for students who leave school there were five major school-related reasons:

1. Personal, cultural and linguistic humiliation.
2. Academic humiliation.
3. Institutional discharge based on the school’s decision to dismiss.
4. Discriminatory high school admissions and dismissal policies and rules.
5. Lack of appropriate instruction for language minority students.

Other reasons cited were family conditions and work/economic factors. It will be noted, however, that all of the in-school reasons for dropping out are directly related to factors that are adult controlled, including particularly how students perceive they are being judged by adults.

Students have keen perceptors, which help them to discern when they are judged capable of excellent achievement, as worthy, valued human beings.

A play by Leroi Jones (now known as Amiri Baraka), “The Toilet,” describes an urban school where bored and disrespected African American males hang out in the toilet, instead of going to class, to escape dull classrooms and teachers who denied their humanity. “The Toilet” was, for many, the last stop before dropping out.

No manner of Common Core State Standards will educationally serve Black males or, for that matter, Black females who do not feel respected by their teachers.

Closely related to school dropouts is the inordinate percentage of incarcerations. The United States imprisons more Americans than any other nation in the world. The majority of imprisoned African Americans are school dropouts. Many African males are imprisoned for drug offenses for which white males are not sentenced. Consequently, incarceration in most states denies ex-convicts the right to vote, the ability to find employment and systemically makes it nearly impossible for them to return to school.

Michelle Alexander in her new book **The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness**, theorizes that the high incarceration rate of African Americans is a deliberate return to the period following the emancipation of enslaved Africans in which the nation established new laws and found new ways to control the minds and economics of newly freed Black People. That study after study, many of them U.S. Department of Justice studies, document the equal or greater use of illegal drugs by whites, further cements the intentionality of the vicious targeting of African American, Latinos and Indigenous Peoples by local, state

and federal criminal justice authorities.

Ira Katznelson's **When Affirmative Action Was White: an Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America** and Douglas Blackmon's **Slavery by Another Name** further document this continuum, in which, well into the 1960s, the U.S. norm was systematic, government-instituted exclusion of African Americans from the Social Security system, barring of African Americans from accessing middle-class (status) in the FHA mortgage, GI Bill higher education programs, the "forcing... thousands of people to live in a state of involuntary servitude -- well into the lives of millions of Americans who are still alive today."

Principal Criticisms of the Common Core State Standards: On the Road to Educational Genocide

Neither the assumptions of "A Nation at Risk" nor the soon to be implemented "Common Standards," both of which assume an American student population embodied with a similar history of freedom and cultural neutrality, is sufficient to educate students of African descent whose ancestors in the United States bore the scars of physical and mental chains of enslavement and who themselves, whether they recognize it or not, are still victimized by a white supremacist culture and school curriculum. No other race came to America in chains to be suppressed and vilified by Americans of European descent who are presently accorded unearned special privileges because of their skin color and heritage.

Although the new standards claim that no specific curriculum materials are being advocated, in several areas that specify common standards in English Language Arts, and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, and Technical Subjects, grades kindergarten through the 12th grade and college, the "sample" of illustrative texts rarely contains any books or writings by Black authors, and, for that matter, of any writings by Hispanic/Latino, Native American or Asian writers! The "illustrative" texts for student reading in grades K-5 contain no readings identifiable as written by or about authors of color.

Yet, as the Common Core State Standards make clear these are only recommendations, not required readings. States are free to choose their own texts and materials. The State of Texas, for example, has already decided to remove such illustrious Americans as President Thomas Jefferson and Justice Thurgood Marshall from its textbooks and curriculum.

The frequent suggestion in 'The Standards' that students be paired for diversity is an implementation deception in schools that are primarily or all of one racial group or where some students are separated into elite "gifted" or "advanced placement" groupings.

"The Standards Movement: Quality Control Or Decoy?"

The assumptions of both "A Nation at Risk" and the soon to be implemented "Common Standards" ignore the history of and ongoing reality of structural racism and white supremacist culture in school curricula and educational practices.

More than a decade ago in a speech at Howard University entitled, "The Standards Movement: Quality Control or Decoy?" the distinguished psychologist and educator, Dr. Asa G. Hilliard III, reminded us that the *many* standards movements in

American education are but decoys rather than attempts to reform education to serve all students:

“I believe the standards movement is generally a decoy. I don’t care whether it’s a Democrat or Republican who calls for it. When people put so much emphasis on standards as a school reform tool, it means that they want to act like they’re performing a reform effort, but they’re actually moonwalking. They look like they’re going forward but they’re going backwards.”

No Emphasis on Education for Cultural Democracy

A principal criticism of the Common Core Standards is that there are no recommendations for honest readings and discussions to prepare all students of whatever ethnicity or gender to live in a cultural democracy, that is, to become divested of cultural, racial, gender or sexual biases. Without honest discussion and understanding of white supremacy racism and cultural domination, the citizens of the United States and immigrants present and future will remain unwitting instruments of an unjust and still unrealized democracy.

Although the new standards claim that no specific curriculum materials are being advocated, in several areas that specify common standards in English Language Arts, and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, and Technical Subjects, grades kindergarten through the 12th grade and college, the “sample” of illustrative texts rarely contains any books or writings by Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native American or Asian authors! The “illustrative” texts for student reading in grades K-5 contain no readings identifiable as written by or about authors of color.

Illustrative readings, grades 6-12, recommend 6 of 32 works of Black writers: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Zora Neal Hurston, Lorraine Hansberry, and Richard Wright. However, if teachers are not prepared culturally and emotionally to help students discover the central theme of all of these writers - - truth and justice in an anti-racist society - - then the readings of even these giants of African heritage will be of little value.

These proposed standards ignore the reality that the majority of African American and Latino/a students attend schools in which they are the overwhelming majority and white (and Asian) students are the “tracked” into gifted and Advanced Placement classes. Therefore, although the proposed standards frequently suggest that students be paired for diversity, how can that suggestion be implemented in schools that are primarily or all of one racial group or where some students are separated into elite “gifted” or “advanced placement” groupings?

Disconnected from the Reality of Racialized Joblessness and Mass Incarceration

A second criticism is that the Common Core Standards approach to educational reform also ignores the reality that massive joblessness has rendered education all but irrelevant. What is needed is a comprehensive approach to education and opportunities for meaningful work that will interrupt the current cradle-to-prison pipeline and give our children a real hope for a future.

The Repetition of Failed Math and Science Education Approach Continues

A third principal criticism of the proposed Common Core Standards is that we find, once again, the inane repeating of a failed math and science education approach that

relies heavily on rote memorization for high stakes tests, rather than inquiry based learning in math, science, and technology. This is coupled with inadequately educated math and science teachers who have to rely on the textbook industry to tell them what and how to teach.

Moreover, mathematics-- and to some extent, the sciences --are the only subjects taught from an ahistorical perspective - - allowing for the total erasure of the roots of math and science. Continuing to omit the historical foundations of math and science in Africa, Asia, and the Americas does not permit Black students, for example, to see themselves in mathematics, the sciences and engineering. This erasure helps to re-enforce the myth of white and Asian mental superiority when it comes to understanding and “doing” math and science.

However, pioneer Black math educators such as Bob Moses and his Algebra Project, Dr. Abdulalim Shabazz, Dr. Everard Barrett and others have established tried and true pedagogy that enable Black students to excel in mathematics (and subsequently, the sciences). As the NABSE document points out, Black educators have demonstrated the effectiveness of teaching and mastery of Basic Algebra BEFORE a student enters high school so that students can complete at least one year of Calculus before high school graduation. However, the “Common Core Standards” proponents have deliberately ignored such successes.

We need to recognize that when it comes to scientific and technological knowledge our Black children are now stuck in the late 19th Century! Our youth are immersed in all kinds of electronic gadgets, but primarily as consumers with little or, no idea about how these technological wonders work!

We see this reality ultimately as part of the general ongoing process of “Educational Genocide”: the deliberate dumbing down of a people while erasing or distorting their history to the benefit of others.

“A Nation at Risk,” “No Child Left Behind,” “Race to the Top,” or “Common Core State Standards” have not and cannot provide the basis for a truthful curriculum and educational excellence for American children and youth who are comfortable with themselves, their own personal histories and culture, who are confident and capable of working well with other Americans like and unlike themselves toward a more perfect union.

Neither “A Nation at Risk” nor “Common Core State Standards” considers the lasting and undermining effects in the educational system of the unique circumstances under which Africans were kidnapped and brought to the shores of the Americas, Australia and to Europe. Neither document suggests any real educational remedy to address history’s greatest crime against humanity.

Without a truthful history of its founding, how this nation acquired its wealth on the backs of enslaved Africans, and the continued denial of the cultural resources African people possess to participate in building a real democracy, the United States will continue to remain a segmented nation, a nation which will soon find white Americans the new minority and still in control.

We are “Still A Nation at Risk.”

NBEA Recommendations

We Need to Take an Effective, Human Rights Road to Education Reform

A National Black Education Summit

A National Black Education Summit should be held to comprehensively document the successful education experiences and student, family and community outcomes and impacts over the past half century. Hundreds of African American-initiated education programs and thousands of educators have successfully educated and nurtured tens of thousands of whole human beings by implementing the “Saving the African American Child” effort and other related recommendations. This is particularly true for scores of African-Centered Education programs that have been established over the past 40 years.

Schools

1. We recommend the cessation of the creation of charter schools. Recent research verifies that charter schools, in spite of significant financial support and the freedom of curricular and instructional innovations, do not result in achievement of students any greater than regular schools. The Federal requirement of removal of the cap on charter schools should be discontinued as a prerequisite for government education grants. The Department of Education should stop promoting the now discredited Promise Academy of the Harlem Children’s Zone as the model for reform for underachieving American schools.

Those charters that already exist be partnered with local non-charter schools and critiqued as to whether or not their education attributes are worth continuing and replicating. If not, these charters should be closed or phased back into the public school system without their charter status.

2. Public schools must be reformed to serve all children, not a select group in charter or “elite” schools. Administrators and teachers in schools that are all or predominantly African American and other students of color must be required to study the history and cultures of those students. This should be institutionalized by having Black History *and* Multicultural History as basic high school graduation requirements.
3. Teacher training programs, whether at colleges and universities or programs such as Teach for America, must include the history and cultures of students of African descent among their required courses. Teacher and administrator certification must require completion of such courses with at least a grade of “B”.
4. State certification must also require that teachers and administrators give evidence of having taken required courses in the history and cultures of students of African descent.
5. There should be established as a national standard teacher mentorship programs modeled after the successful mentorship program currently functioning in Massachusetts. Teach for America type programs need to be especially connected to this kind of mentorship program

6. Curriculum in grades 6-12 must be revised, including textbooks and materials, to help all students, of whatever heritage, to learn the truth about the origins of humanity and scholarship in Africa. Truthful curriculum must be manifested in English, literature, social studies, mathematics and sciences. In the case of African American students, special efforts should be made to incorporate contemporary cultural interests of the students as inducements to stimulate reading, writing, oral communication and critical thinking. Sports, music, videos, television programs, films, art, celebrities are among the many cultural factors that can bring joy to the learning process.

Responsibility for students' achievement lies within the schools, not with parents. The Federal government, public education officials and critics must stop blaming parents and communities for the low achievement of students of African descent and other students of color whose achievement is not on grade level.

Parents, many who are young and have not been provided an excellent educational experience, and most of whom have to struggle to pay rent and buy food for their children, do not bear primary responsibility for the formal education of their children. That is not to say that schools should not make efforts to bring parents into the educational process, or that parents who read to their children or take them to important educational sites such as museums or libraries are not assets to the schools and the children.

But where that is not possible, educators must not blame parents and the environment for poor test scores and low student achievement. Schools, administrators and faculty are accountable. Do not blame the children and do not blame their parents or community.

In fact, the public school systems must allow for parents to further their own education via adult education courses and free attendance to community colleges and public universities as part of their contribution to their child's educational development.

Most important, do not blame race or class for school failure.

Testing and Other Forms of Assessments

Assessing student progress solely by means of standardized tests is unreliable:

1. Frequently there is a disconnect between what has been taught and standardized testing. Students should not be expected to answer questions about materials they have not been taught.
2. The Harvard psychologist Dr. Howard Gardner has researched and written that intelligence is determined in many ways other than answering questions about information presumed to have been taught.

Gardner posits "*human beings are better thought of as possessing a number of independent faculties rather than as having a certain amount of intellectual power or IQ.*" He suggests that there are multiple indices for determining intelligence. Gardner lists seven such indices:

1. Linguistic
2. Logical – mathematical
3. Spatial
4. Bodily

5. Kinesthetic
6. Interpersonal
7. Intrapersonal

Student achievement should not be judged by tests alone, whether standardized or teacher created, but by many factors and indices such as those articulated by Gardner.

The use of the portfolio method of assessment has been proven to be effective in revealing not only the intellectual development of the student, but also the quality and depth of teaching students are receiving.

Successful schools

While there is not a single school district in the United States that can be said to have been successful in educating students of African descent, there are a number of individual schools that have been highly successful in the past and in the present in providing an education of academic and cultural excellence for students of African descent. Exemplar schools in the recent past include the Robert L. Vann Elementary School, Pittsburgh, which for a decade was at the top or near the top in citywide public school achievements, the Charles Rice Learning Center in Dallas and, for example, the present day Promise Learning Center and Sunnyside High School in Los Angeles, CA, the J.S. Chick Elementary School in Kansas City, Mo.

Those who know

There are extraordinary educators of African ancestry, some still living, who have had great success in educating African American children and youth. These educators such as Dr. Adelaide L. Sanford, Vice Chancellor (Emerita), the New York State Board of Regents, and among several mathematics educators such as Dr. Abdulalim Shabazz, Dr. Everard Barrett and Bob Moses have had notable achievement in educating African American students. They should be among the first and most experienced educators consulted. The works of the late Drs. Asa G. Hilliard III and Barbara A. Sizemore should be standards for improving African American education.

We hope you can join us by signing on and engaging in the Black Education work ahead.

Donald H. Smith, Ph.D.

Former Chair, The New York City Board of Education's Commission on Students of African Descent
Past President, the National Alliance of Black School Educators

Sam Anderson

Retired Professor of Mathematics & Black History
Author of *The Black Holocaust for Beginners*
Co-Chair National Black Education Agenda

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