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Public Education Policy And Progress



GIVEN HALF A CHANCE: Report Highlights Huge Gap in Graduation Rates Between Black Males and White Males

Over the past twenty-five years, the social, educational, and economic outcomes for black males have been “more systemically devastating” than the outcomes for any other racial or ethnic group or gender, according to a new report from the Schott Foundation for Public Education. The report, *Given Half a Chance: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, examines the disturbingly large gaps in graduation rates between black males and white males. It also highlights the resource deficiencies that exist in schools that black males attend.

“This report sheds light on a national crisis and puts valuable information into the hands of public school advocates and stakeholders, who can use it to hold the stewards of the nearly 15,000 U.S. school districts accountable for eradicating systemic failure as well as open avenues of opportunity to millions of black male students,” said **John Jackson, president and CEO of the Schott Foundation for Public Education.**

In examining graduation rates, the report finds a national graduation rate for black males (47 percent) that is 28 percentage points lower than the graduation rate for white males (75 percent). In ten states, the difference in graduation rates for black males and white males is 30 percentage points or more, as noted in the table below.

Largest Gaps in Black Male and White Male Graduation Rates

State	Black Male Graduation Rate	White Male Graduation Rate	Difference
Wisconsin	36%	87%	51%
Nebraska	44%	87%	43%
Illinois	40%	82%	42%
Michigan	33%	74%	41%
New York	39%	75%	36%
Connecticut	51%	83%	32%
Wyoming	41%	72%	31%
Oregon	58%	89%	31%
Indiana	43%	73%	30%
Ohio	49%	79%	30%

In addition to low graduation rates, black males also have “consistently low educational attainment levels, are more chronically unemployed and underemployed, are less healthy and have access to fewer health care resources, die much younger, and are many times more likely to be sent to jail for periods significantly longer than males of other racial/ethnic groups,” according to the report.

Given Half a Chance (Continued from p. 1)

But in a few states the report finds that black males actually graduate at higher percentages than white males, for instance in North Dakota (89 percent to 84 percent), Vermont (88 percent to 75 percent), and Maine (85 percent to 75 percent). According to the report, schools in these states are more likely to have greater resources, such as talented, caring teachers, well-trained and numerous support staff, and protective and supportive administrators. They have challenging curricula, high expectations for all students, and an expectation of success. These states also share another characteristic: they all lack large black populations. According to the report, this is a key factor because black males in these states are more likely to be educated in a diverse educational environment. “This underscores the fact that when black males are given access to schools and resources similar to those given to white males their performance levels improve,” the report notes.

Turning its attention to school districts, the Schott Foundation finds that the worst problems for black students are concentrated in a few large metropolitan areas. In these districts, which contain racially segregated schools and are attended mostly by black students, very few students—of any race—perform well. But the report finds that there are irregularities between white and black students even within these schools. It notes that schools attended mostly by black students “do worse on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, suspend and expel disproportionately more black male students than white male students, and assign more black male students than white male students to special education.” Graduation rates in these districts are tragically low for both white and black males, as shown in the table below.

Lowest-Performing Large School Districts for Black Males

School District	Black Male Graduation Rate	White Male Graduation Rate	Difference
Indianapolis (IN)	19%	19%	0%
Detroit (MI)	20%	17%	-3%
Norfolk (VA)	27%	44%	17%
Rochester (NY)	29%	36%	7%
Pinellas County (FL)	30%	50%	20%

Thankfully, some large school districts, although not many, do a good job of graduating black students. Specifically, the report points out Fort Bend, TX, which enrolls over ten thousand black males and graduates over 80 percent within four years, and two large suburban Maryland districts, Baltimore County and Montgomery County, which have large enrollments of black students and graduate them at a rate comparable to the national average for white male students.

“If black students did poorly in all schools, we would plausibly seek solutions to the problem of their achievement among those students themselves,” the report reads. “The same would be the case if, in schools with majority black enrollments, black students did poorly and the other students did well. But in reality, black students in good schools do well. At the same time, white students who attend schools where most of the students are black and their graduation rates are low, also do poorly.”

The complete report, which outlines the work that the Schott Foundation for Public Education will undertake over the next five years to change the current educational trajectory of black males, is available at <http://blackboysreport.org/>.



MATH PROBLEM: Report Finds That Over Half of Recent High School Grads Aren't College Ready

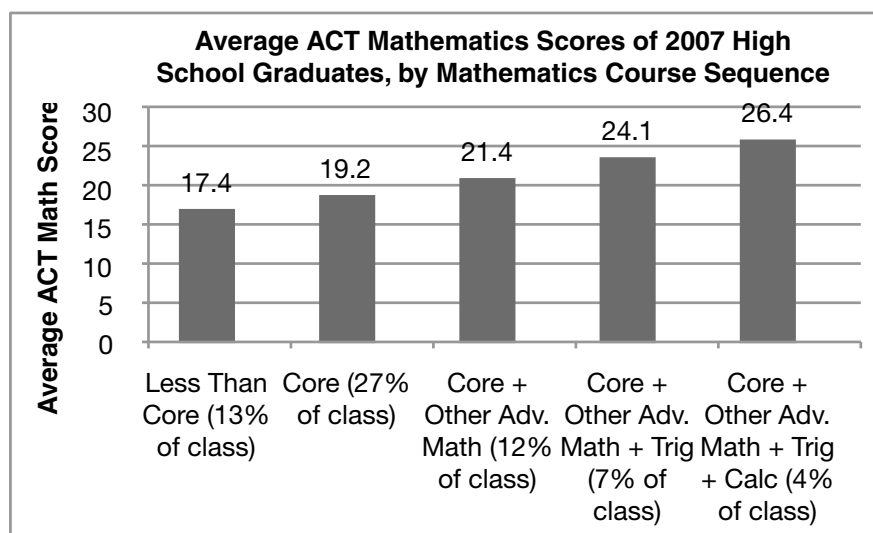
Though slightly more of the Class of 2007 was found to be college ready in math than the Class of 2003, the majority still fell short of the ACT College Readiness Benchmark. So says the recently released *EPAS State of the Nation Report 2007: Mathematics*.

The report, which examines results on research group ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS) math assessments for eighth through twelfth graders, finds that 43 percent of Class of 2007 high school graduates met the benchmark—that is, they earned a score of twenty-two out of thirty-six on the ACT Mathematics test—compared to 40 percent of Class of 2003 graduates. Significantly fewer students of color were found to be ready for college math; just 26 percent of Hispanic students, 24 percent of American Indian students, and 12 percent of African American students met the benchmark, compared to 49 percent of white students.

The average score on the ACT Mathematics test, which is a standardized assessment used for college admission, climbed 0.4 points between 2003 and 2007, to twenty-one. “This increase is particularly impressive,” the report reads, “given that 11 percent more high school graduates took the ACT in 2007 than in 2003.”

However, despite the gains in overall scores and the percentage of students considered college ready, fewer of the Class of 2007 graduates were ready for college math than expected based on their eighth-grade math results. Of the students who took EXPLORE and PLAN (ACT's eighth- and tenth-grade assessments) as well as the ACT Mathematics test, 48 percent of the eighth-graders were thought to be on target to be ready for college math, but by twelfth grade, just 41 percent had achieved that objective. “This finding raises questions about the type and quality of mathematics courses students take in high school,” says the report.

Graduates who studied a minimum core curriculum of Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II were about twice as likely to be college-ready in math as those who did not, with 27 percent and 13 percent of them meeting the ACT benchmark, respectively. As the chart to the right indicates, the more advanced math that students in the Class of 2007 took, the more likely they were to achieve a score of twenty-two or higher on the ACT Mathematics test.



Notes: Percentages of students taking mathematics course sequences are shown; these percentages do not sum to 100 due to other mathematics course sequences not shown. “Core” means the courses of Algebra I, geometry, and Algebra II.

Math Problem

(Continued from p. 3)

Though extolling the taking of additional math courses, the authors of the report add that “students should not have to take more and more coursework simply in order to meet minimum standards for college readiness in mathematics.”

To ensure that all students are prepared for college-level mathematics, ACT recommends that students be encouraged to take the core curriculum and higher-level courses, as only 50 percent of those who participated in the assessment reported taking the core courses. In addition, because only about a quarter of graduates who took the core curriculum were considered college ready, ACT also calls for high school math course content to be reviewed and, in most cases, to be made more rigorous. The mathematics curriculum should also be aligned with high school and college- and work-readiness standards, says ACT, given the “strong association” between preparedness for college and postsecondary academic success. “Being ready for college-level mathematics improves students’ chances of enrolling in college, staying in college, and succeeding in first-year courses, and reduces the likelihood of their needing to take remedial courses,” the report reads.

The full report is available at

<http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/reports/mathematics.html>.



TALKIN’ ‘BOUT MY GENERATION: Report Compares Well-being of Today’s Teens With That of 1970s’ Teens

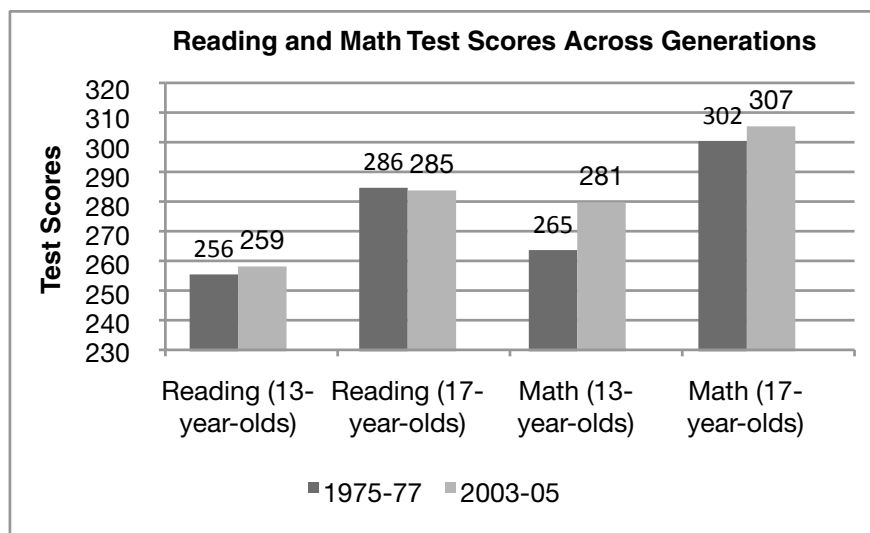
After an upward trend from 1994 through 2002, improvements in the well-being of America’s children and youth have stalled, according to the 2008 Foundation for Child Development Child and Youth Well-Being Index (CWI). The index peaked right after September 11 but has dipped and risen by fractional amounts since then. Overall, the CWI shows less than a 3 percent improvement for kids over the past generation.

“The slow growth of recent years is troubling; we haven’t made enough progress to shield ourselves for the future,” said **Kenneth Land, project coordinator of the CWI and sociology professor and director of the Center for Population Health and Aging at Duke University**. “Our data show us that the economic recession and slowdown of 2001-2002 hurt children. We also expect that the current challenges in the housing, employment, energy and food sectors will have negative impacts on our children’s well-being in years to come.”

According to the report, the slight improvement in children’s quality of life in 2002 was because of a temporary reaction to September 11. “This year’s analysis shows that, rather than signaling an upward trend, the up-tick across indicators in 2002 was more likely a collective—and anomalous—reaction to 9/11,” the report reads. “As America united behind a common purpose, communities and families came together as well. This was reflected in the surge in the Social Relationships and Emotional and Spiritual Well-Being indicators. Those indicators declined in the subsequent years, contributing to an overall stall in children’s well-being.”

This year's report also includes a special focus on the well-being of "echo boomer" teens in this decade and teenagers in the mid-1970s (at least some of whom are probably parents of the teens of today). In its analysis, the report finds that today's youth have slightly better educational outcomes than did those of thirty years ago. For example, the percentage of youth aged eighteen to twenty-four who have earned their high school diplomas increased from 80.6 percent in 1975-77 to 82.7 percent in 2003-05. Similarly, the percentage of young adults aged twenty-five to twenty-nine who possessed their bachelor's degree increased from 23.3 percent in the 1970s to 28.8 percent in the mid-2000s.

Regarding actual course work, the report finds little to no gain in reading scores among today's thirteen- and seventeen-year-olds, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In math, today's thirteen-year-olds score significantly better than teens in the 1970s, but seventeen-year-olds are only slightly better, as indicated in the graph to the right.



Today's teens are also less likely to participate in risky behavior. For example, they are less likely than their counterparts in the mid-1970s to smoke cigarettes (24.2 percent to 38 percent), binge drink (28.1 percent to 37.8 percent), and use drugs (23.5 percent to 34.2 percent). They are also less likely to be teenage parents (22 percent to 34.7 percent) and victims of violent crime (15.2 percent to 33 percent). However, today's teens are more likely to live in poverty (16.3 percent to 15.5 percent) and three times more likely to be overweight (17.6 percent to 5.7 percent).

"Our analysis shows some areas of real improvement from one generation to the next, but the key measure for America's children is not where they've been or where they are, but where they should be," said **Ruby Takanishi, president of the Foundation for Child Development**. "It's time for America to demand better for our children."

The CWI calculates the overall status of American children for every year since 1975 and is based on a composite of twenty-eight key indicators of well-being that are grouped into seven quality of life areas: economic well-being, health, safety, educational attainment, and participation in schooling, economic, and political institutions.

The complete report is available at http://www.fcd-us.org/usr_doc/2008AnnualRelease.pdf.



“PREPARING ALL STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND WORK”: Alliance for Excellent Education Selects Presenters for Its 2008–09 High School Achievement Forum Series

Earlier this month, the Alliance for Excellent Education announced the six presentations that it has chosen for its upcoming High School Achievement Forum series, titled “Preparing All Students for College and Work.” The presentations, which were chosen from open-call proposals, will take place over a twelve-month period beginning this fall.

“The High School Achievement Forum series will demonstrate that, while there is a crisis in many of America’s high schools, there are solutions,” said **Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia**. “The Alliance has identified successful, replicable programs that are improving student outcomes and the quality of education. It is our hope that this series will help policymakers and the public understand that change is possible and inspire them to support meaningful high school reform.”

The presentations reflect a variety of strategies to improve the nation’s secondary schools and ensure that students are college- and work-ready when they graduate. They include the following:

- An overview of the Stanford University School Redesign Network and a presentation on its implementation by American Institutes of Research. Additionally, principals from Construction Tech Academy in San Diego and the School for International Business of the San Diego School District will speak about their experiences implementing this model in their respective schools.
- A focus on Performance Learning Centers (PLCs), the signature initiative of Communities in Schools. PLCs are small, nontraditional high schools designed for students who have not experienced success in traditional high schools.
- An exploration of collaborations between school districts and colleges by examining the Gates Foundation’s Early College High School Initiative and by taking a look at Gateway to College, a promising model for dropout recovery that creates partnerships between school districts and community colleges.
- The impact of the Cumulative Effect Initiative on recruiting and training math teachers in low-performing schools in Guilford County, NC.
- An exploration of state-level Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) initiatives by presenters from the National Association of State Directors and Project Lead the Way (PLTW). PLTW is a national organization that promotes pre-engineering and biomedical science courses for middle and high school students.
- Research presented by the University of Minnesota and the University of Connecticut on the development and implementation of two dropout prevention programs that could be especially effective for keeping special education students in school: Check & Connect,

an empirically validated model, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), a research-based intervention.

Dates, times, and locations for each session will be announced later this summer.

Alliance President Gearing Up for Olympics

From August 8 to 24, the eyes of the world will be on Beijing, China for the Games of the XXIX Olympiad. For a little over two weeks, America will send its best athletes up against the best of world in sporting events ranging from archery and basketball to track and field and wrestling.

One person who will definitely be watching the Olympics closely is Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia. While Wise will not be competing, he will be reporting “live from Beijing” on the 2008 Summer Olympics and asking viewers to consider the differences in the performance of America’s athletes compared to its middle and high school students in international competitions. These video updates will begin airing on the Alliance for Excellent Education’s website beginning August 5.

Wise will connect the athletic events in Beijing to various international education measures. He will not only cheer on the athletes who are competing against their peers from around the globe but will also emphasize the need for a national commitment to help America’s high school students acquire the skills they need to remain competitive in the global economy.



A Summer Postcard from the Alliance for Excellent Education

Dear *Straight A's* Reader,

With schools around the country out for summer and Congress set to begin its August recess, the Alliance newsletter—although not the Alliance staff—will be taking a summer vacation during the month of August.

The next issue of *Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress* will be dated September 8. In the meantime, continue to check the Alliance website, <http://www.all4ed.org>, for the latest education news and events.

Straight A's: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America’s six million at-risk middle and high school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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In this issue:

- *Given Half a Chance*: Report Highlights Huge Gap in Graduation Rates Between Black Males and White Males
- Math Problem: Report Finds That Over Half of Recent High School Grads Aren't College Ready
- Talkin' 'Bout My Generation: Report Compares Well-being of Today's Teens With That of 1970s' Teens
- "Preparing All Students for College and Work": Alliance for Excellent Education Selects Presenters for Its 2008–09 High School Achievement Forum Series



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