

AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Flip a coin. That's the odds that your African- American children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews will graduate from a Tennessee public school. Actually, it is less than that...it is 46%. Graduation rates for whites are 63%.¹

Tennessee ranks 45 out of 50 states in graduation rates.¹ Money is not the issue. In fact, Utah ranks number three in graduation rates and spends \$4,883.00 to Tennessee's \$6,135.00 on per pupil spending. Teacher student ratios are higher in Utah, 22.4 versus Tennessee's ratio of 15.7.^{1,2}

The race to be the best state in the U.S. is a false race. The U.S. is so far behind other countries we may never catch up. American eighth graders ranked 19th out of 38 countries in math and 18th out of 38 countries in science. Twelfth graders ranked 19th out of 21 countries in math and general knowledge.³ Public education is simply not working no matter how much money we spend on it.

There is definitely a disparity of scores between whites and African Americans. According to the Statewide Report Card of 2004, we can see that in year 2003, math scores were:

Below Proficient:	13.8% White vs. 37.5% African- American
Proficient:	48.7% White vs. 51.7% African-American
Advanced:	37.5% White vs. 10.8% African -American

In reading and writing, the scores were:

Below Proficient:	12.6% White vs. 27.0% African -American
Proficient:	50.0% White vs. 57.3% African -American
Advanced:	37.4% White vs. 15.7% African -American ²

There are 686,700 students that are white in Tennessee K-12 grade schools. African-American students number 241,325 or about 24.8% of students. The suspension rate for white students is 5.5% (37,813) but for African-American students the number is 20.5% (49,425). Rates for expulsions are 0.2% for whites (1,107) versus 0.4% (1,081) expulsions for African-American students.²

Crime statistics for African-American juveniles in Tennessee are even more discouraging with 70% of juvenile offenders being African-American. Juveniles transferred to adult courts that were African-American comprised 59% of offenders. Remember that African-American comprise only 24.8% of the juvenile population.⁴

I am not trying to start a race war. In fact, I am white. What I am trying to do is to point out that the schools in different areas of a city or even in an entire city differ in their ability to teach. It should be noted that Memphis has 40 schools which are considered failing or need major improvement.⁵



Some of these schools are in their third and fourth year of trying to improve. Most affluent neighborhoods attract the more qualified teachers due to the better facilities and the lower crime rates. The more affluent schools also tend to receive more money because they have a higher tax base.

What is the answer to fixing these low scores and graduation rates for the African- American community (as well as everyone else)? The answer is simple...school choice. I am talking about real choice. I will give a \$3500 voucher to anyone to send their child to any school whether it is public, private, religious (the Supreme Court has upheld that this is legal) or to anyone who wants to home school their children.

It should also be noted that the race of the student did not matter in the area of academic achievement of homeschoolers. These students typically score 30 to 37 points higher on test scores than the public school students.⁶

There is absolute proof that vouchers work for inner city children and the results among African-American children are tremendous. In New York City vouchers were given to some poorer performing students. African-American students who attended private school for three years tested 9.2 percentage points higher than those who attended a public school. If these students attended a private school for just one year or more these students scored an average of 7.6 percentile points higher than those in public schools. Bear in mind these were the poorer performing students not the best students. These results are typical of other programs such as the Washington, D.C. and Cleveland voucher programs.⁷

I can attest first hand the advantage of attending a private school. In the seventh grade I attended a private school. I tested in the fourth, fifth and sixth grade levels. In one year, I had jumped into the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade levels. My son, who says he hates school (he is not a "book worm") recently tested two grade levels above his own. These results are typical in his school, which is private.

Now it is plain to see that vouchers work but why will our elected leaders not endorse them. Here is an interesting fact. The two largest teacher unions, the NEA and AFT, contribute heavily to the Democratic party. In fact, they are listed as the sixth and seventh among the democratic party's top 5000 donors.⁸ Statistics show it is not necessarily the teachers who vote this way, but their union's leaders. No Democrat in their right mind is going to advance vouchers and risk losing this money. The teachers have a near monopoly on the education progress and will fight tooth and nail to keep it that way.

As long as African-Americans or any other group fail to receive a real education they cannot realize their potential. Society must make sure that every child has the opportunity to succeed in this nation. Education is the key to this success.



REFERENCES

¹ Civic Report No. 31, Public School Graduation Rates in the United States, Table 1, Manhattan Institute.

² Statewide Report Card 2004, Tn. gov.

³ K-12, Issues in Brief, The Heritage Foundation

⁴ Disproportionate Minority Confinement, Tennessee Commission youth and children, State of Tennessee

⁵ No Child Left Behind, Annual Report to Congress, 2005; Appendix B, Ed. Gov.

⁶ Academic Statistics on Homeschooling, Home School Legal Defense Association, October 22, 2004

⁷ What the Harvard/Mathematica Study Says About Vouchers and Low-Income African American Students, by Kirk Johnson, Krista Kafer; The Heritage Foundation.

⁸ Who Speaks For The Teachers, by Hanna Skandera and Richard Sousa; The Heritage Foundation.

