

“Breaking Barriers: Plotting the Path to Academic Success for School-Age African-American Males”

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Main points:

- School-based activities are important factors in positive academic outcomes for African-American males; sports had the strongest effect, but activities involving computers were also significant, as were civic, volunteer, and religious activities
- Food policies affect academic performance; students who eat healthier foods – especially raw vegetables – perform better in school
- While both male and female African-American students are adversely affected when there is no male role model in the home, the effect is much bigger for males
- Feeling that teachers have a personal connection with students – treat them “as a person” – leads to positive academic outcomes

Interesting findings:

- “A black student is almost 500 percent more likely to pass through a metal detector than a white student. However, black students were significantly more likely than white or Hispanic students to feel unsafe at school.” (page 5)
- Hispanic students are the most likely to carry a weapon for self-defense reasons
- “In 2000, the Justice Policy Institute found evidence that more black men are in prison than in college...in 1980, black men in college outnumbered black men in prison 3 to 1.” (page 8)
- Reporting having a poor quality of life and frequently feeling tired in the morning are both indicators of poor academic outcomes
- Smoking cigarettes negatively impacts academic achievement
- The connection between happiness and being positively engaged in school is much stronger for African-American males than females
- African-American males are more likely to report that it is easier to talk to both their mother and father than African-American females
- African-American males in rural areas are the least likely to perform well academically

Suggestions/Implications for policy:

- Mentoring programs and other attempts to make school-age African-American males feel less isolated have positive academic outcomes
- Increased number/utilization of college access programs targeting African-American males
- Peer relationships affect academic success; peer education, peer mediation, character education, etc. can all positively impact academic outcomes
- There is a need for more drug prevention programs in schools
- Policies around equitable access to food, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, are needed
- Parent-involvement in schools needs to be increased and rewarded
- Healthy marriage and cooperative parent initiatives could help reduce the number of African-American males in fatherless homes
- A re-examination of juvenile justice policies, and how they align with educational goals
- Teacher quality should be examined holistically; how teachers relate to students and make them feel is crucial