

From a 20th century outer-directed student paradigm to a 21st century inner-directed student efficacy approach

How student participation in school-related decision-making can help
the National Council on Educating Black Children attain the goals of
the Action Items of Section II: Students in the Blueprint for Action IV

Summary: The goals of the Action Items of Section II: Students in the Blueprint for Action IV are commendable. They are relevant to many African American families and students. As well, a review of the Blueprint reveals many unintended negative consequences. The action plan may work for some individuals and even some schools, but can it produce systemic change or does it inadvertently enable the perpetuation of the status quo? The NCEBC must offer more than a strategy to navigate our public schools, some of which are detrimental, if they are to meet the needs of all African American students--particularly those economically disadvantaged in urban zip codes who have historically resisted these repressive structures. This paper suggests the missing piece of the Blueprint is involving students in school and classroom democracy, sanctioning student self-determination through student participation in school-related decision-making. This will create a National Blueprint for Action which promotes social justice and community improvement in and through education by helping students not simply navigate the academic challenges and political dangers of public urban education, but question and transform an essentially systematic structural schooling design which has consistently predetermined success for few, and mis-education or failure for many.

Indiana Villages Take Responsibility:
A Blueprint for Educating Black Male Students

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“Is America possible?”

-- Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why we must share the meaning of the movement* (1990, p. 178)

Democratic classrooms and schools offer the best hope for public support of public schools.

-- Institute for Democracy in Education

If we all agreed about everything, we wouldn't need democracy.

-- Deborah Meier, educator

The philosophy in the classroom of this generation is the philosophy of government in the next.

-- Abraham Lincoln

A democratic school is one that above all, tries to enable people to create their own world collectively rather than to fit into one that is created for them.

-- Michael Engel

What does a democratic process look like in a large urban school?

-- Mark Koester, Jefferson Open School, Lakewood, CO

Democracy is like a life raft—it bounces around a lot, your feet are always wet, you're not sure where you are going. But, you never sink.

-- General Colin Powell

Giving children a sense of ownership in the classroom can lead to a kind of open and cooperative learning environment that most teachers just dream about.

-- Michelle G Zachlod, 1st grade teacher, California City, CA

To save the democracy we thought we had, we must take democracy to where it's never been.

-- Francis Moore Lappé

Adults, why do you fear children's participation?

-- The Concerned for Working Children, Annual Report 2003

Listen, create an environment where students feel their voice is taken seriously and acted upon, and then involve them in school decision-making. The positive action and school improvement follows as sure as night follows day.

-- Derry Hannam, School Inspector, United Kingdom

If public schools exist to promote democratic values it would appear that they need to remove hierarchy. Education for democracy thus becomes education freed from authoritarian relationships.

-- C. Winch & J. Gingell, *Key Concepts in the Philosophy of Education*

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We must remove the contradictions in our culture that embrace democratic ends for its schools, but resists the actual practice in schools of democratic means from which the ends cannot be separated.

-- The Institute for Democracy in Education

We need to treat students like citizens now, not citizens in the future.

-- Sheldon Berman, Superintendent of Hudson Public Schools

Although we teach about democracy we rarely practice it in most public schools.

-- H. Jerome Freidberg, Professor of Education, University of Houston

Implementing democratic governance and small democratic groups in a large public school is not only doable; it brings schools closer to their historic mission.

-- Sheldon Berman, Superintendent of Hudson Public Schools

Freedom and justice, however important, can never be enough; learning about democratic citizenship must be more than an academic exercise.

-- *First Amendment Schools*, p. 21

It is up to educators, then, to reconnect the heart of the educational process to the democratic mission of schooling — to reconnect education to democracy.

-- Westheimer & Kahne

What happens in the (public school) classroom (not in Iraq or Cuba) will, in the final analysis, reveal how deep are the roots of (America's) democratic commitment.

-- paraphrased from H. G. Hullfish

It is strange that the schooling system which was created to ensure democracy is the most undemocratic institution in America—except for the prisons which you can avoid by behaving or the military which is avoided by not enlisting.

-- Dr. Donald Glines, *Educational Alternatives for Everyone All the Time*

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the young people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion in schools that are each democracies.

-- paraphrased from Thomas Jefferson

The public schools of the United States of America, the globe's best example of a democratic society, must each be democracies.

-- John Harris Loflin

Once the extent to which childhood drives history has truly dawned on us, we cannot avoid making children's emotional well-being our top social priority.

-- Robin Grille, *Parenting for a peaceful world*

The Unconvinced Generation*

The National Council on Educating Black Children (NCEBC) joins those who, over the last 60 years, have tried to reason, warn, plead, and even threaten youth to stay in school. Among the factors used to persuade youth are health, lifestyle, employment factors, and incarceration numbers, along with yearly messages on TV and radio, buses, billboards, as well as lectures, sermons, or crying parents--each rationale attempts to convince students to get their diploma.

A review of Schott Foundation data (Jackson, 2008) reveals the national 2006 graduation rate for Black males is 47%. And to illustrate the fact the problem is not limited to the African American community, the same report stated the graduation rates for both White and Black males in the Indianapolis Public Schools were an outlandish and tragic 19%.

Yet, what is even more worrisome, a review of international public education situates this as not just an American problem. According to the *International Journal on School Disaffection*, this is a global phenomenon. The working class, minorities, or the disaffected in the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Colombia, Zambia, Brazil, Italy, Mexico, South Africa and most countries express their alienation from their public schools with their non-compliance or by dropping out (Bella & Mputu, 2004). Schools are simply not connecting with students. Japan's "school refusers" have quit public schools and formed their own. Aboriginals in Australia have a 25 percent graduation rate (Beresford, 2004).

The point is it is not that young people are not aware of the messages, it is just that graduation rates for Black males imply these youth are not persuaded they are true. After decades of hearing this slogan, "You've got to have an education," evidently, they remain unconvinced (Evans, J., 2006). Why?

Examples are the glaring cultural, socio-economic and generational disconnect between students and staff illustrated by the daily confrontations between urban culture and urban school culture. The "trials" of schooling, in our present dropout factories--an experience by law students must go through and endure--are not only irrelevant to their everyday lives, they are so unnatural, and psychologically and politically hazardous, it's just not worth it to many students of color and the urban white working class. In 2009, many students of color simply will not

*The "Unconvinced Generation" (see p. 52) is a term coined in order to make old school adults (those born before 1965) realize that talking, reasoning, pleading, or threats are not enough to make urban youth stay in school. Our public schools must convince youth 11-18 years old that schooling is worth their time both psychologically and politically—it is not just about "the cheese." Many urban educators can't accept the idea that their "go along to get ahead" example/advice which worked for them is just not worth the price and thus is not enough as Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) point out to encourage students to invest in school as a viable social institution.

engage public schools if losing a sense of agency, progressivism, and cultural identity by accepting dehumanizing educational conditions is what it takes to gain a credential that will turn into economic capital (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Many adults are dismayed, believing that despite dropout warnings, youth are not listening. This implies the message is out there and youth ignore it. However, youth are not ignoring it — they are listening, yet remain out of school. NCEBC and other organizations have to figure out why, but they won't be helped in their figuring if they think youth are not listening. The real issue is the adults are failing in their responsibility to prepare the next generation for the future.

The concept of the paper

The National Blueprint for Action IV, which intends to keep African American students in school and graduating, is significant and can be enriched by enabling school districts to provide students opportunities through educational policy for meaningful student engagement in classroom- and school-related decision-making.

Gathering all stakeholders, including students, to “consolidate ideas and information” to improve the achievement of African American, as well as all students, is caring and vital.

Section II: Students, of the Blueprint is particularly impressive. Letting students know what is expected, and providing a blueprint for action is an important step adults must take in order to help students reach their potential.

During a September 12, 2008 panel discussion on urban schools co-sponsored by both the Black and the Latino congressional caucuses, Student Engagement in High School as a Dropout Prevention Strategy, Dr. Pedro Noguera stated students drop out because they are *disengaged*, and moreover, become disaffected and apathetic—with no real sense of belonging, ownership, or empowerment.

The current orientation of the Action Items and Implementation Activities are in the form of sentences identified as commands. These sentences begin with a strong verb. Indeed, children and youth need direction and especially warnings from those experienced and wiser. And, where would we be without our elders? Whether students need help and guidance from adults is not the question; everyone knows children and youth need and desire adult attention.

Underlying this is a challenging question: What can NECBC do to support, share, and even advance the stakeholder characteristic of the Blueprint and see that students are also stakeholders in school decisions about their education?

Now, this query begs even more pertinent questions: Where does following others wane and self-determination begin? What can the Blueprint do to respect and enable personal autonomy and responsibility? How is this carried out in our public schools?

The continuum from dependency to democratic self-regulation

The Lonely Crowd, a 1950 sociological analysis by David Riesman, is considered to be a landmark study of American character because he proposes the existence of the "inner-directed" and "other-directed" personalities. Other-directed persons are guided chiefly by external standards or a set of values that is derived from current trends or outward influences as opposed to one's own standards or values guided by a strong sense of self from within.

Inner-directedness is associated with self-motivation, character, service and leadership, breadth in academic and extra-curricular interests, entrepreneurship, stillness, and contentment (Canadian Merit Scholarship Foundation, n.d.). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is the prime example of an inner-directed personality.

In light of these definitions, Section II has an "other-directed" orientation. The Blueprint's actions/activities make it the students' responsibility to "support and implement" (take on and carry out) this section.

The main question

The Action Items and Implementation Activities of Section II: Students are well thought out and necessary directions and advice for students of color. Nonetheless, to advance the possibilities of Section II in greater quality would not the NCEBC desire additives to boost the Student part of the Action Plan IV? As well, what if these additives are within the American democratic ethos of self-government and self-determination? What if a democratic education produces a positive educational climate and student ownership of learning during school in the form of school participation and academic success? And, what if the practice and experience of democracy in the classroom and school creates students who are involved in community social justice actions and increased civic engagement after graduation?

This paper proposes such a paradigm: advancing from a 20th century outer-directed student as adherent stakeholder model to a 21st century inner-directed student as engaged decision-maker policy. This orientation will both challenge and uplift Section II: Students from the National Blueprint for Action IV of the National Council on Educating Black Children.

Students will move from a point of "I should" to "I must!" The democratic appeal to the higher order thinking/being and gradual personal development of inner-

directed self-determination over time will compel students to act on the values and activities of the Action Plan not to please Blueprint authors and concerned adults, but to please themselves and manifest their democratic self-actualization.

The Indiana Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services

For most of 2008, the Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services (2008) met to develop a plan that will, within five years, ensure systems in Indiana concerned with children of color are fully responsive to their unique needs and circumstances in four areas: child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and mental health.

Created by the 2007 Indiana General Assembly (2007), thirty-three commissioners were appointed by the Governor, Senate, and House of Representatives. Four committees, representing the four areas of concern were formed to research, evaluate, and address disproportionate representation of youth of color in Indiana. Over seventy recommendations were made.

The education committee's concerns and research covered a wide area. Among the twenty-five recommendations were those covering childhood education, teacher recruitment and preparation, funding, student discipline, parents, the number of school counselors, special education, and alternative education.

The education sub-committee placed proposals with respect to powerful student engagement in three (**in bold**) of eight sub-recommendations (*Education: Long Term Recommendations*) as stated below and on p. 43 of the final report:

Recommendation # 44

School corporations, local schools, community- and faith-based organizations, in conjunction with the Indiana Department of Education, should develop programs that can ensure students of color have the resources needed in order to be able to meet high academic and behavioral expectations and become more engaged in their educational program:

- Develop programs to provide and support role models/mentors targeting preschool children of color, ages one through five.
- Create a pilot program through the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) that provides grants and technical assistance to school corporations to utilize proven screening tools to identify more students of color to participate in gifted and talented programs.
- **Develop networks created and driven by students in order to increase meaningful communications between students and staff.**
- **Increase student involvement in school-related decision-making.**
- **Explore models for increasing the democratic participation of students in their education.**

- Offer after-school programs promoting self-awareness through socially acceptable behaviors.
- Develop programs for unattended, or latchkey, children of color.
- IDOE will review a variety of behavior and cognitive models of discipline.

A review of research supporting the benefits of student participation in school-related decision-making

To assist in the understanding of the potential of the 3 suggestions in Recommendation #44, they are developed below:

1. Develop networks created and driven by students in order to increase meaningful communications between students and staff

This suggests efforts by school districts to enable all-student groups, and perhaps student-formed and student-led student/staff or student/community organizations. These groups could be supported by district-wide and/or state-wide networks. As well as Internet websites and communications, bi-annual network meetings could be held. These networks would deter any miscommunications with adults with respect to culture/sub-culture, socio-economic status, language, behavior, or intentions, and with respect to learning styles, assessment, teaching styles/strategies, classroom climate, and relationships (Mitra, 2008). Such student-based networks could also encourage and help facilitate district/school cultural competency, school safety, or community relations initiatives. Many positive results occur when students are trusted and given the power to create their own networks that they know will make the schooling experience better for everyone (Guskey & Anderman, 2008).

2. Increase student involvement in school-related decision-making

The following (A-F) are proven results when democratic practices, such as those proposed to "...ensure students of color have the resources need in order to be able to meet high academic and behavioral expectations and become more engaged in their educational program" are used.

A. Meaningful student engagement in school-related decision-making

Reduces:

- stress caused by a lack of a sense of control over their environment (Kohn, 1993)
- the sense of disenfranchisement—being involved in the decision-making process empowers students and prepares them for citizenship (Loflin, 2004)

- disengagement from the schooling process resulting from the African American schooling experience of mis-education, under-education, or no education (Loflin, 2008)

Promotes

- health and wellbeing in students (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2007; Rose-Kasnor, Busser, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006)
- positive contributions to school connectedness and increased educational outcomes (Shier, 2001; Fielding, 2004; Smyth, 2006)
- an increase in retention rates (Papageorge, 2008)
- higher order thinking skills—evaluation, synthesis, applying (Slater, 1994)
- self-determination—having ownership of learning and sharing in classroom and school decisions (Scherer, 2008) is democratic self-determination (Hecht, 2002)
- self-actualization—a democratic school culture emphasizes the individual and how they are different leading to the full development of each student’s uniqueness (Hecht, 2002)
- self-efficacy--countering the relationship of impotency, apathy, lack of recognition with aggression/violence (May, 1967)
- democratic habits of mind—knowledge, skills, and experiences of democratic peoples (Loflin, 2008)
- reviving/evolving, supplementing, and complementing multicultural education—practicing democracy in classrooms and schools is the (proactive) practice of multiculturalism (Loflin, 2008)
- sustainability—sustainability needs sustainable schools, sustainable schools are democracy schools (Loflin, 2006) See Appendix F
- an increased voter turnout rate (Loflin, 2004)

B. Moving students beyond mere engagement into responsibility for education

Students are currently playing four roles in public schools (Fletcher, 2008).

Students as Planners In a number of schools, students are involved in selecting textbooks, creating classroom behavior guidelines, and designing new buildings.

Students as Teachers Students can help both teachers and others understand technology and also help foster communications between adults and youth.

Students as Professional Development Partners Students are assisting in developing new approaches to differentiating learning, transforming expectations, research projects, data collection and analysis, or planning a school’s facilities.

Students as Decision Makers School curriculum, policy, and climate are more meaningful leadership areas for students. In addition to making decisions that

affect themselves and their immediate peers, students can participate in boards of education, grant making, and school assessment at the district level.

C. Outcomes of Democratic Education in England

In United Kingdom high schools that practiced democracy compared to similar UK schools that did not, for a significant number of students their involvement in school and classroom decisions (Hannam 2001; Tafford, 2003; Davies & Yamashita, 2007):

- Enhanced learning across the curriculum and the full range of academic abilities--sometimes in unexpected and unpredictable ways
- Helped students gain organizational and time management skills
- Supported the learning of communication and collaboration skills
- Facilitated quality outcomes, which both intrinsically and through recognition from others, led to enhanced self-esteem
- Fostered an allover sense of personal and social efficacy
- Brought a greater sense of ownership, and personal empowerment leading to greater motivation to engage in school activities
- Helped both females and males feel more independent, trusted, and responsible--making them feel a part of the school and the surrounding community
- Required students to take the initiative and make decisions
- Significantly lowered disruptive behaviors in classes and hallways were
- Improved attendance for all students, but significantly for the less academic and potentially alienated students
- Significantly lowered suspensions and expulsions
- Made school climate more positive
- Improved the attitudes of teachers and staff
- Significantly lowered school violence
- Real-life benefits enhanced the relationships between students and teachers
- Little anxiety was experienced by parents and teachers

In 2002, as a result of the study, the UK passed the Student Participation Act, *requiring all secondary schools to take into account students' opinions when making decisions and that this be done in ways that are transparent, regular, and accessible.* See: The "Citizenship Order" of the UK's Education Act of 2002 <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

D. Having high expectations for students: Democratic self-determination

Benard (1995) describes the value of high expectations in the schools: Schools that establish high expectations for all students--and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations--have high rates of academic success.

Bernard also reported on research which found that high expectations *and a school-wide ethos valuing student participation* actually mitigate powerful risk factors that influence adolescents' well being.

E. Giving students ownership of learning

The November issue of *Educational Leadership* (EL) (Scherer, 2008) perhaps the most middle of the road education journal in the US, looks at the many ways to instill student ownership of learning in the daily life of school. It is no coincidence *EL's* definition of "ownership of learning" fits perfectly well with Recommendation #44. Giving students ownership of learning makes sure they are given "...the resources needed in order to meet high expectations and become more engaged." According to the November 2008 *EL*:

- Enabling students to make responsible decisions makes them more engaged and task-focused. This is done by allowing students to:
 - a. choose tasks
 - b. choose their learning project
 - c. choose their own pace of learning
 - d. choose work locations
 - e. help develop rubrics
 - f. implement self-led conferences
 - g. help choose class rules
- Enabling student voice
 - h. helps their teachers to
 - i. turn schools around
 - ii. embrace technology –tech savvy students help integrate technology into the curriculum
 - iii. learn new professional skills
 - i. gives students a say and a vote that counts otherwise, they will lose trust in the democratic process
- Enabling student ownership of learning means differentiation: If we were all the same, or if we all agreed with each other, we wouldn't need democracy. The opposite of democracy is the one-size-fits-all paradigm. Discovering and validating the uniqueness of each student enables a democratic culture (Hecht, 2002).
 - j. Differentiated instruction—there is no one best way to learn
 - k. Differentiated assessment--introducing students to authentic public audiences who actually put students' work to use for democratic purposes that help all Americans
 - l. Differentiated study skills—teaching study skills for independent, self-directed learning, and democratic self-determination

3. Explore models for increasing the democratic participation of students in their education.

There are several models out there. The Democratic Education Consortium has collected some (Loflin, 2008). Some examples are direct democracy (New England town meeting), distributive democracy, representative democracy, the Iroquois model of decision making (Mintz, 2003), the concept of sociocracy (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociocracy), and K-5 models for elementary classrooms (Brady, Forton, Porter, & Wood, 2003).

2007 National Blueprint for Action IV SECTION II: STUDENTS

PREAMBLE: Recognizing the important role that schools play in preparing Black students to become intellectually, socially, and economically productive citizens, and demanding that Black students realize their right to high standards, free and equitable education, we jointly pledge to support or implement the following:

ACTION ITEM A: Be responsible and active participants in all activities designed to successfully complete all grades and benchmarks from kindergarten through 12th grade, resulting in high school graduation.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES:

1. *Attend school classes on a regular basis. Become aware of the requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB):*
 - *Students are assessed in grades 3-8 annually;*
 - *Schools/districts issue report cards;*
 - *Students' test scores are disaggregated by race and ethnicity, disability, and limited*
 - *English proficiency;*
 - *All classes must be taught by highly qualified teachers;*
 - *Parents have enhanced choice for selecting school for their children; and*
 - *Schools must use programs/practices that have demonstrated effectiveness through scientific research. (NCLB)*
2. *Clarify expectations for lessons and assignments. Identify and clarify the supports for students to be successful in school (i.e., tutoring, study groups, after-school help)*
3. *Turn in class and home assignments on time*
4. *Actively engage in all classroom activities (i.e., discussions, questions and answers, projects, etc.)*
5. *Complete makeup assignments when absent*

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6. *Participate in extra-curricular activities that do not interfere with primary studies.*
7. *Obtain accurate information about courses and credits needed for graduation.*
8. *At each grade level set yearly goals.*
9. *Set long-term goals, but break them down into incremental steps for achievement.*
10. *Don't drop out of school.*

ACTION ITEM B: Become an active and empowered learner and participate as a stakeholder in the learning community.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES:

1. *Understand the importance of working hard to achieve desired goals (i.e., cultivate a work ethic).*
2. *Request assessment tools and develop a learning style appropriate for that style.*
3. *Understand the connections between education and personal and financial success.*
4. *Avoid behaviors that lead to the "easy way out" or immediate gratifications that may be to the detriment of your long-term goals.*
5. *Establish and maintain status as a constant learner.*
6. *Enroll in classes that encourage a deep understanding of subject and content matter. Constantly improve note-taking and organizational skills by practicing those skills.*
7. *Learn to work independently and to think critically and analytically.*
8. *Develop an appreciation for your cultural heritage by learning about contributions and achievements of Black people: historical, national, and international.*
9. *Determine your rights as a citizen of the United States with all of the attributes afforded to you in a democratic society and exercise your rights. Request and study the student handbook, which includes the rights and responsibilities of your school system.*

10. *Learn life skills:*

- *Learn how to interact with other people;*
- *Develop a positive relationship with students and teachers;*
- *Avoid conflict with authority figures; and*
- *Learn when and how to approach a teacher.*

11. *Request a learning style assessment to determine what type of learner you are (i.e., visual, hands-on, auditory, etc.)*

ACTION ITEM C: Maintain the status of a positive, cooperative, and well-behaved school citizen.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES:

1. *Understand and obey the rules of the school and classroom.*

Become aware of the requirements of NCLB related to Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (Title IV, Part A—Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities)

- *Specifies principles of effectiveness that require conducting a needs assessment, uses research-based activities, and establishes performance measures.*
 - *Establishes information and reporting system to collect information on school safety and drug use among young people. (NCLB)*
2. *Respect yourself, teachers, administrators, and the rights of others.*
 3. *Avoid disruptive, violent, or criminal behavior. Avoid the use of drugs and alcoholic substances.*
 4. *Know your rights, but don't violate the rights of others.*
 5. *Choose your friends and role models wisely.*

ACTION ITEM D: Become involved in support networks that can assist you and others reach education goals.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES:

In your association with other students:

1. *Learn to work cooperatively.*
2. *Participate in study groups with fellow students.*
3. *Serve as a mentor or tutor to fellow African American students.*

In your association with Experts and Community Resources:

4. *Participate in extra-curricular academic activities with community experts (i.e., chess, debating, team, science and technology clubs, film and video development projects).*
5. *Reach out to community leaders - political, religious, social, and recreational.*
 - *Invite them to visit school and to participate in school activities.*
 - *Seek their help in solving problems related to their fields.*
6. *Participate in arts and recreational activities with community experts (e.g., chorus, bands, sports, crafts, field trips).*
7. *Ask for youthful motivational speakers who believe in the value of staying in school.*

How proven factors, from national and international sources can support and enrich the various Action Items and Implementation

Activities of Section II: Students of the National Blueprint for Action IV

Below are the specific parts of Section II: Students of the NCEBC National Blueprint for Action IV regarding Action Items A-D which can be enriched by the three concepts concerned with student participation in Recommendations #44 of the final Indiana report on disproportionality.

These three concepts have been reviewed on pages 8-13 and are supported by national and international research, public policies, and educational programs). To iterate, these concepts are:

- 1. Develop networks created and driven by students in order to increase meaningful communications between students and staff.**
- 2. Increase student involvement in school-related decision-making.**
- 3. Explore models for increasing the democratic participation of students in their education.**

The Preamble of the Section II: Students of the National Blueprint for Action IV (p. 20) states:

Preamble: *Recognizing the important role that schools play in preparing Black students to become intellectually, socially, and economically productive citizens, and demanding that Black students realize their right to high standards, free and equitable education, we jointly pledge to support or implement the following:*

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Giving students the means to "demand"

Giving students the policy and/or "political" means to carry out what the preamble is commanding (that they, *"realize their right to high standards, free and equitable education"*) through powerful student engagement, such as is suggested in Recommendation #44, will empower them do so--in fact, expected/encouraged to do so by the very policy of state education departments. Students will now be a respected partner in decisions. The term *"...citizens"* (used in the preamble) will come to life because student will be made "citizens" in their own classrooms (Freiberg, 1996) and schools by the policy.

The possibilities of the fulfillment of Blueprint Preamble being sidetracked by issues of NCEBC vs. students; NCEBC vs. the schools; or students vs. the schools will be neutralized. The issue will become: how well this recommendation to make our public schools practice democracy is carried out.

One can interpret the meaning of, *"...develop programs that can ensure students of color have the resources needed in order to be able to meet high academic and behavioral expectations and become more engaged in their educational program:"* as a direct means to empower and enable youth of color to make sure (have the responsibility for) their schools and teachers help them reach the *"high...expectations"* and become an active partner in *"...their educational program."*

Blueprint ACTION ITEMS A-D (Pages 20-24)

ACTION ITEM A. Be responsible and active participants in all activities designed to successfully complete all grades and benchmarks K-12 resulting in high school graduation.

The first 2 parts of Recommendation #44 are directly captured in this first Blueprint IV Action Item of Section II: Students. If the student engagement section of Recommendation #44 becomes a state's education policy, Action Item A, will be indirectly codified and made realized.

As a particular school's student driven network--created by them in order to increase meaningful communications between students and staff--will enable students to be the *"responsible and active participants"* in the school/classroom activities needed for graduation. This network will manifest in a true "partnership" acting as a moderator and making sure both staff and students understand and are actively involved in adequately completing all grades and benchmarks.

Of the various network responsibilities, one can be to fulfill the expectations of IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES numbers 2.) *Clarify expectations for lessons and assignments. Identify and clarify the supports for students to be successful in*

school (i.e., tutoring, study groups, after-school help), and 7.) Obtain accurate information about courses and credits needed for graduation.

Again, “*clarifying expectations,*” “*indentifying the supports,*” or obtaining “*accurate information about courses and credits needed for graduation*” will be the very purpose of the network. These will ease the communications about these NCEBC concerns because there will be a official policy to create and perpetuate a network to do such things

Research by Mitra (2008) shows when student are given the opportunity to “*be responsible and active participants in all activities...resulting in high school graduation*” students move from being clients to actual respected partners in the process. See Appendix D: Letter from Prof. Mitra.

ACTION ITEM B. Become an active empowered learner and participant as a stakeholder in the learning community.

Under a state department of education policy that requires student participation, a viable level of meaningful student engagement as a stakeholder in the learning community will be the norm. As students progress through K-12 situations, they will have a right to be a part of the decision making process that concerns their education, classroom, and school—with involvement determined progressively by age and grade.

Freedom and responsibility are two different sides of the same coin. One is accountable only to the extent they are free to choose. As students grow and progress through school and life, more choice and thus responsibility is their inherent right. It is the duty of the education system to gradually prepare all students for participation in a free and democratic society. Providing students with opportunities to share in decisions about their education, classroom, and school can do this.

A state department of education policy to “Develop networks created and driven by students in order to increase meaningful communications between students and staff” and “Increase student involvement in school-related decision-making” and will have a positive effect on IMPLEMENTATION ITEMS numbers:

2.) *Request assessment tools and develop a learning style appropriate for that style.* The concept of “request” implies it is not provided and thus must be “asked for” if it is to be acquired. This situation can become transformational (creating a staff/students partnership) via both the student network and/or student involvement. The network can make sure assessment tools and learning style inventories are available in the classroom and/or school library and work with staff to make this a normal practice of the school.

6.) *Enroll in classes that encourage a deep understanding of subject and content matter. Constantly improve note-taking and organizational skills by practicing those skills,* 7.) *Learn to work independently and to think critically and analytically,* and 8.) *Develop an appreciation for your cultural heritage by learning about contributions and achievements of Black people: historical, national, and international.*

Through the student/staff communication network and/or student/staff shared decision-making, students can recommend and assist with making sure all classes are built on a foundation of "a deep understanding of subject and content matter." This same democratic partnership can establish a school policy where "note taking and organization skills," learning "to work independently and to think critically and analytically," and an appreciation of the historical, national, and international contributions and achievements of black people, as well as the cultural heritage of all societies and groups, are part and parcel of each curriculum.

9.) *Determine your full rights as a citizen of the United States with all of the attributes of life in a democratic society and exercise your rights. Request and study the student handbook, which includes the rights and responsibilities of your school system.*

Through a state DOE student/staff shared-decision making policy, these "determine-(ing)" actions suggested here will be a natural process and outcome. Being involved in "school-related decision-making" as stated in Recommendation #44 will enable (all) students to "exercise (their) rights" while being prepared for life as a voting citizen after they turn 18. When their K-12 school lives up to its civic responsibilities and replicates our "democratic society," understanding one's "full rights as a citizen of the U.S." will be fundamental to school climates.

In addition, student participation implies student involvement in scrutinizing rights and responsibilities and helping as partners in creating a school/school district's student handbook. When both school staff and students ask and go about answering the questing: What can students do to help run the school? this NCEBC IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITY will be actualized.

10.) *Learn life skills:*

- *Learn how to interact with other people;*
- *Develop a positive relationship with students and teachers;*
- *Avoid conflict with authority figures; and*
- *Learn when and how to approach a teacher.*

What is significant here is that the essence of the purpose and intent of the recommended student created and driven student/staff communication network

and the participation of students in school-related decision-making is to help students, *“Learn how to interact with other people”* and *“Develop a positive relationship with students and teachers.”* Of course this includes the shared experience, wisdom, and advice from staff with respect to students *“Learn(ing) when and how to approach a teacher.”* This is the transformative potential for Recommendation #44 because both students and staff will be changed by participating in the process.

The NCEBC policy advising students to *“Avoid conflict with authority figures”* is very important because it is the crux of the matter with respect to keeping black males in school. Issues of authority point directly to the fact that historically, public education represents a paradox for the African American community—for black males public schools are both a barrier and the solution to full participation in society (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This is the whole issue of *“Too much schooling, too little education”* (Shujja, 1993) and why black youth reject school despite knowing its importance. Many of these students recognize the significance of graduating, but are unwilling to assume the submissive posture in public schools which routinely deny them a sense of autonomy and self-worth (Johnston and Wetherwill, 1998), thus school becomes the enemy.

“Hey, school’s the enemy”

Many African American male students have a negative perception of school. And, they live with parents who have ambiguous attitudes about schools. They know the color of one’s skin acts as a factor inside public schools to give groups systematically different experiences. They realize that society supports property rights over human rights since the quality of educational experience is related to the value of property in various neighborhoods. They know schools invert black values by a depreciation of African American culture and accomplishments, by asking students to endorse individual competition (Fordham, 1991), and by making students endure a context that values breadth over depth and noninvolvement over personal engagement. These characteristics stand in opposition to African American values of kinship and a sense of black nationhood. As a result, public schools are seen as institutions which compete with and are not complimentary to their own cultural identity. Schools then become a source of self-doubt rather than self-development (Hamovitch, 1999).

What happens due to the resulting feelings of alienation and estrangement are problems with authority, the power representing the source of this disaffection. We must understand the logic of their dis-investment, and avoid any temptation to pathologize youth (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Reasoning then, conflict with authority is easily the most common problem in public schools for males. Regardless of the various theories attempting to ascribe the source of young black males’ problems with authority to slavery, or lack of a father or strong father figure in their lives, it is they who are the ones who lose in confrontations

with school authority. *This is the main reason for school problems and why dropping out is greatest for males.* Yet, our common American horse sense, acquired coincidentally from our experiences with rebelling against the authority of pre-revolutionary war England, tells us male students would be less likely to have problems with authority if they had a say in who that authority is and what that authority can do. Remember, "No taxation without representation!"?

"I failed your class 'cause I ain't with your reasoning. You tryin' to make me you"
-- Boogie Down Productions, 1989

Conflicts with authority will be reduced in schools where a variety of black males representing all grade levels and GPAs help determine classroom and school rules, are members of the team that hires teachers and school police, attend departmental planning meeting to give feedback (See Appendix D), and are represented on viable school councils not "sandbox student governments." This is the democratic school climate thoughtful and considerate educators and citizens must create if we are to get the trust we know is the essence of making urban schools work for black males.

And if students are not prepared or qualified to help make such decisions, then it is up to school staff to prepare and qualify them. In other words, make students a part of the authority they may have problems with--which is exactly what Recommendation #44 suggests. This will take time; it will not happen overnight. *This is generational*, and must begin now if we (America) are to live up to our foreign policy rhetoric for global democracy, let alone the democratic promise to ourselves of "We the people..."

This is the problem we can face, not "avoid"

Involving students in school/classroom decision making proactively reduces the chances of conflicts with authority. This is a prime example of an advanced 21st century model of support where black males are prepared to be school "citizens" who share power and accountability through the inner-directed student efficacy of self-determination. This is opposed to the 20th century outer/other-directed student model (asking students to just "*avoid conflict with authority figures*") the National Blueprint suggests. Proactive democratic shared-authority in school-related decision-making trumps reactive avoidance behavior as a means to making our public schools work for black males.

11.) *Request a learning style assessment to determine what type of learner you are (i.e., visual, hands-on, auditory, etc.). See number "2.)" above.*

ACTION ITEM C. Maintain the status of a positive, cooperative, and well-behaved school citizen

Through meaningful school engagement, students will be, "*Maintain-(ing) the status of a positive, cooperative, and well-behaved school citizen.*" And, what is

most important, they will do this “*maintaining*” because they want to--from within, in a self-directed fashion--not only because the NCEB advises them to do so, but because they are trusted and can sense the feeling of empowerment as they act as self-determined and self-governed persons in their own public classrooms and schools.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- 1.) *Understand and obey the rules of the school and classroom*
- 2.) *Respect yourself, teachers, administrators, and the rights of others*
- 4.) *Know your rights, but don't violate the rights of others*

The American Revolution tells us stories of colonists who were not against obeying laws, but who just wanted to obey laws they, not England, created. Enlightened educators and youth advocates understand this instinctively and particularly with respect to teenagers. They know when students of all ages are given an opportunity to be a part of the decision-making process with respect to rules, enforcement, and consequences, the rate of disobedience decreases because students are more likely to obey classroom/school rules they help create. And, this is not some trick by adults to get student to obey, this is democratic self-determination and responsibility in action. Educators Guskey & Anderman (2008) note “Once students [are brought in to help] decide on the rules, they are held accountable for following them.”

When youth of color (and all public school students) are a part of classroom and school decision-making they will, “*Understand and obey the rules of the school and classroom*” because they helped make them. Students will, “*Respect (themselves) and the rights of school staff and the rights of others,*” and “*Know (their) rights, (and not) violate the rights of others*” because the mutual respect (a concept which goes beyond the practice of tolerance or acknowledging cultural diversity) fostered by the student-led communications network and their direct participation in school-related decision-making will require daily recognition and validation of the rights of all learning community members (Pendlebury, 1995).

ACTION ITEM D: Become involved in support networks that can assist you and others reach education goals.

Although recommendation #44 is directed to creating networks that foster student-staff communications, this can also foster other types of student-led “*support networks*” that, “*...can assist (the student) and others reach educational goals*.” What is foundational is this student-student “*support network*” will be a natural outcome of student-student conversations as they work together to make sure school staff understand their student peers.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES:

In your association with other students:

1.) *Learn to work cooperatively.*

Shared decision-making/practicing school democracy is "Learn-(ing) to work cooperatively..."

Commentary

Meeting African American students were they are

Convincing the "Unconvinced Generation"

A review of the National Blueprint for Action IV Section II: Students situates the word "action" as the theme. Almost like commands, action verbs such as "achieve," "determine," "obtain," "complete," "participate," "be clear," "respect," "avoid," "serve," or "learn" begin sentences setting the active, bold, and positive mood of the action plan.

In contrast, a review of the Blueprint also gives the reader a sense that students as individuals or as a group/community are to be somewhat passive in this orientation to everyday school activities. That is, they are seemingly to follow the Blueprint without debate, modification, or rejection.* This makes sense. *The Blueprint is the responsibility and product of adult leadership.* Such relationships are fine and traditional; they work for many.

The Blueprint is an outline on how to navigate the public school system. It is not about resisting and changing the system, *but how to do well in it as it is.*** Advice to students to be, "active and empowered," "think analytically and critically" and "determine" and "exercise" one's full rights as a US citizen is given. However, this is countered by advice to "maintain the status of a positive cooperative and well-behaved school citizen," and "understand and obey the rules of the school and classroom." In light of the above, the Blueprint is providing the clarity needed in order for students to navigate the school/system and avoid trouble--perhaps a 21st century form of the old advice, "...go along to get ahead."

*Now, this is not to deny students, as stakeholders, were not active, from the mid-80s on, in developing National Blueprints for Action I, II, and III. (See page 2 of Blueprint, "HISTORY") Involving students in policies that affect them is wise.

**This is the case as our public schools are presently designed and situated. In "The 14th Annual International Democratic Education Conference" (Loflin, 2006, pp. 66-73), the concept of "Public Urban Free Schools" presents another design and situation which precludes any resistance since attendance is non-compulsory.

Means/Policy to enable all students to carry out actions and activities of Blueprint for Action IV: Part 1

This commentary argues the Blueprint is strong, bringing those concerned with the education of black children to where we are now. This brings new challenges: How to advance the Blueprint through a system to enable the strategy and to expand its orientation so as to appeal to and reach all African American students.

To make this plan of action more viable, this paper suggests a means to carry out the Action Items and Implementation Activities be adopted. Granted, the NCEBC has a legacy of involving students as stakeholders, as it stands the Blueprint has no policy through which these important and caring actions/activities can be implemented other than the efforts of individual students or some unofficial *ad hoc* group of their peers. Remember, this paper suggests the Council *enrich* the Blueprint by pushing forward its belief in students as stakeholders in decision-making through an organized effort to influence education policymakers to adopt meaningful student engagement in school/classroom-related decisions. By supporting a state or national education policy enabling democratic practices as proposed in Recommendation #44 of the Indiana Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services, students *are provided the (official) means* this paper asserts is missing from the National Blueprint for Action IV.

Expanding areas of student participation: From being a stakeholder in the National Blueprint for Action IV to being a stakeholder in school-related decision-making

To widen the scope of this commentary, it is important to note graduation rates (Jackson, 2008) imply traditional approaches to schooling, (that is the orientation of the Blueprint where adults “reason” with students about school and attempt to “convince” them to stay in school and graduate) may not work for all African American students. Thus, a *non-traditional* approach, (or actually it is a more American democracy view) which reframes students as full partners and/or full participants/stakeholders in their educational self-determination (actively preparing for their future roles as citizens engaged in self-government) must also be attempted.

A shift in how adults view young people

According to Dr. Shawn Ginwright (2004) inter-generational organizing (such as is exemplified by the National Blueprint for Action IV), however well intended, requires a enlightened shift in how adults view young people, and this shift is particularly challenging for some adults from the civil rights generation who believe that youth should follow, rather than lead, social-change efforts.

That student voice is not wide-spread in past and/or current schooling policy is curious. It may be due to a lack of awareness for and use of so-called *non-*

From a 20th century outer-directed student paradigm to a 21st century inner-directed student efficacy approach

traditional approaches*** (i.e. school democracy paradigms based on full student participation) to the schooling of African American students by our African American community in the first decade of the 21st century and can be attributed to a disconnect (Ginwright, 2004). This disassociation is sometimes seen as a generational as well as a class-divide between an African American middle class and contemporary urban youth.

Disconnect between the generations as well as social classes

The cultural and social disconnect between the civil rights generation and the hip-hop generation as well as the black middle class and the urban working poor is perhaps the single most important challenge in reaching black youth *who are simply not motivated, interested, or inspired by school reform efforts in which their urban identities are not represented* (Ginwright, 2004)

The civil rights generation's views of poverty, unemployment, and limited job options exacerbate tensions between black urban youth and black adults because these older adults view poverty as simply something many of them overcame. Black middle classes experience both racial exclusion from whites and class criticism from poor blacks--and this in addition to the generation gap between their civil rights era experiences and the hip-hop culture of the youth. As a result, educators who are African American mistakenly develop classroom strategies that are out of sync with the most pressing issues of their black working class students (Ginwright, 2004).

Hip-hop has its own National Plan for Action

Ginwright notes that while progressive hip-hop global culture functions as the voice of resistance for America's black youth, *it also provides its own blueprint for the possibilities of positive social change* for the entire society—helping America live up to its promise of liberty and just for all.

For example, Hip Hop Caucus (HHC): Politics for a new Generation at hiphopcaucus.org has an issues agenda defined by twelve key policy areas for 2009/2010 ranging from environment and energy to economics, social justice, and education. See Appendix H. What is the most impressive about HHC is they are instinctively political and instinctively have the communication skills and network/means to carry out their policies—and not to just the US students, but to a global youth culture. Flickr, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Myspace, Caucus360 seem in the DNA of the post-90s generation.

Additionally, the Hip Hop Congress at www.hiphopcongress.com/ has a well thought out urban-oriented curriculum via its Empowerment Through Education! Initiative: Hip Hop Education (H2Ed) and its *H2Ed Guidebooks 1 and 2*. National

***This is suggested in an effort to supplement, complement, and challenge the traditional schooling scenario which confuses education ("educate") with assimilationism (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Blueprint for Action Plan V leaders may have something to learn from these organizations. Again, see Appendix H.

Is the national Blueprint for Action IV aimed at all students or those who agree with it?

All urban students understand the major factor in their lives leading to dropping out is the school experience:

- ability grouping,
- grade retention,
- college pressures,
- working alone,
- denial of strengths and focus on weaknesses,
- learning that is information rich and experience poor,
- an irrelevant curriculum that students must endure and frequently ignore,
- low expectations and the acceptance of inadequate effort,
- the conflation of low skills with the lack of intelligence, and
- punishing noncompliance.

Taken together, this is a set of acts that disables students: a pedagogy of failure leading to dropping out. (De La Rosa, 1998, p. 268).

In large urban areas around the country, the public schools are failing to fulfill America's promise to African-American families and youth. Hamovitch (1999) reminds us that race continues to be "...the most salient factor explaining different patterns of student achievement," due to the issue that "...race acts inside the school to give groups systematically different experiences."

On the whole, there may be little in the NCEBC Blueprint to attract or get the respect of students who justifiably reject schooling. To iterate, Johnston & Wetherwill (1998) make it clear what we each know: black male children/youth recognize the importance of learning. However, some are unwilling to assume the submissive posture in rigid schools which routinely deny them a sense of curiosity, autonomy, culture, and self-worth. Suggesting students abide by the Blueprint while attending school in a "dropout factory" or a K-8 school that feeds such a failing institution defies common sense and is tantamount to punishment without due process.

Reasoning as the Blueprint for Action does with students to not resist public education in our public schools as they are now situated may not convince them to go to school with the desired actions and attitudes. However, if the Blueprint wants to reach all African American students, the NCEBC must consider

reexamining resistance as oppositional behavior (Akom, 2003) by affirming and validating students' critique and their own experience, therefore making the resistance to educational achievement goals transformational.

Can students following the Blueprint do well in schools where failure is pre-determined?

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) note urban schools are not failing, but "succeeding" in doing what they were designed to do: not work for urban students. They present evidence showing years of funding and structural inequalities between schools surrounded by poverty and those in wealthy communities. This places urban schools inside a systemic structural design which essentially predetermines their failure.

Schools are political sites

Schools are political sites (Giroux, 2001). Today's globally sophisticated student knows this instinctively. The late 80s rap song "Fight the power" by Public Enemy is example enough of youth culture being a politically aware society. Not seeing schools as political sites blinds one to the political idea that at the base of any one approach to education are historical and cultural influences which, of necessity, Giroux notes, "impose an ideological cast."

The National Blueprint for Action IV sends a mixed message as to the political nature of schools. Advising students to "think critically" and also "be cooperative" does not help when urban students experience on a daily basis a public school system:

- that has reproduced the same socio-economic inequalities for over 200 years—and are the stamp of justification on one's position in the labor force and society;
- that denies access to the best education then blames them, implicitly and explicitly, for academic failure;
- where fiscal, political, and ideological policies deliberately undercut and demean urban schooling; and
- where the game of school is rigged to create unfair competition in classrooms where failure for some is pre-determined because certain groups come to school with high levels of the social, economic, cultural, academic--and what is most relevant--the political capital, needed by definition, to succeed in the system (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

And, this is centered on a background of the "rhetoric of opportunity" and the "myth of meritocracy" where each student supposedly has an equal chance to success "if they want it bad enough" and so "work hard enough."

An unintended negative consequence of the Blueprint for Action IV

This sets up an unintended negative consequence of the Blueprint for Action IV: If a student follows the Blueprint exactly and is still not “successful” this may actually feed deficit models where educational failure is due to particular students not working hard enough (they’re lazy) or not really wanting to succeed (they have a bad home culture). This is the same false and biased reasoning supporting the argument that the poor are poor because they are irresponsible. http://agonist.org/forgiven/20071205/the_myth_of_hard_work

Now this is just the 21st century version of the 20th century excuse of genetic inferiority as to why some succeeded and some did not. This plays into the hands of the mainstream who can easily point out the few who “combine fortune and fortitude to succeed in under-resourced urban schools” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008): “They made it, why didn’t you?”

What is even more politically harmful is that failure then can be attributed to deficiencies in African American culture and indirectly implying true educational attainment is attributed to cultural superiority or assimilation into the culturally superior ways that cultural conservative D’Souza (1995) suggests (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Fortunately, common sense tells urban students this is not true. They see on a daily basis the stratified nature of society creates a social/economic pyramid that has no room at the top for the masses. This hierarchical structure requires citizens be sorted and they know the public schools are the way this necessity is carried out (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). They know license plates and zip codes tell them who has the better schools and teachers (Smith, et al, 2008).

NCEBC must offer more than a plan to navigate public schools, some of which are repressive structures, if they are to meet the needs of all African American students--particularly those economically disadvantaged in urban zip codes

Not all resistance is unproductive

It is clear, those who created the original Blueprint and its various editions were not promoting an emancipatory or liberatory blueprint strategy for student success—*one that promotes social justice in and through education by helping students not only navigate but challenge and dismantle an essentially systematic structural design predetermining success for few and failure for most* (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

The term resistance has been used extensively to explain various aspects of African American youth behavior. Commonly referred to as oppositional resistance, scholars use the term to explain school failure, delinquent behavior and violence. Oppositional resistance can be conceptualized as a set shared

values, beliefs and attitudes that reject dominant social norms and contribute to behaviors that make it difficult to achieve (Ginwright, 2006).

As it has been noted in the previous section, much of the critique of urban education by African American students is justified. The question is how to react and/or cope with current and historic "established systems and structures which reproduce these patterns of educational injustice."

The Blueprint for Action IV sets out to give African American students guidelines to do very well in urban schools or at least "survive" schooling until graduation. The strategy advises students (though indirectly) to not be oppositional or critical to the extent that it limits their chances of graduating. Of course this is good counsel for many, even most students, but not all African American students. As is also argued in this paper, there is evidence that some black students identify with progressive hip-hop culture which functions as the voice of resistance for America's black youth. These voices provide youth's own "blueprint" for the possibilities of positive social change for the entire society.

Remember: Youth have their blueprint for action

In many areas of society, today's youth are engaged in addressing issues that most impact their everyday lives--issues such as transportation, childcare, juvenile justice, availability of AP level classes, after-school activities, and smaller class sizes (Loflin, 2005).

Global youth culture is a vehicle for organizing, recruiting, and enabling youth to take action around social justice issues. Many are multiracial organizations motivated by new social action strategies that call attention to their struggles, validate their everyday experiences, and provide a socio-political vision of educational justice. They use hip-hop concerts, flyers with graffiti art, and images of youth themselves, all of which resonate with youth experiences. Today's youth organize, review, research, evaluate, synthesize, theorize, create policy, contact the media, and lobby to make their proposals public policy: this is simply Tavis Smiley's *Covenant in Action* (2007) in action! See Oakland, CA's Kids First at www.kidsfirstoakland.org and Philadelphia's Youth United for Change (YUC) youthunitedforchange.org.

A challenge: Revise the Blueprint for Action IV or disconnect from some African American students

It is simply counter-intuitive for the Blueprint for Action IV to expect all youth to come to school and not be resistive, respect the Action Items, and follow the Implementation Activities when as soon as they leave school they become active critical citizens speaking truth to power as they work in their neighborhood for social, economic and especially educational change. If questioning authority

("Fight the power") is essential to youth as they organize and act for social justice outside of school, the NCEBC can not expect these same students not to question authority ("Fight the power") in their public schools, even if it is problematic.

Types of resistance

What the NCEBC must seriously consider, if they wish to reach all African American students, is to understand that some resistance is transformational. Ginwright uses the ideas of Solorzano & Delgado (2001) who talk about reactionary behavior, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance, and transformative resistance.

Reactionary behavior is when students lack a critique of their oppressive conditions at school and so are not motivated by social justice to change anything at the school--a student who acts up and behaves poorly in class, the schoolyard, or the community. Students who engage in self-defeating resistance may have some critique of their oppressive social conditions but are not motivated by an interest in social justice to change anything at school—a student who gets in trouble with school authorities and ends up getting kicked out or they drop out of school. Students who engage in conformist resistance are students who are motivated by a need for social justice, but do not deeply question their system of oppression or everything that goes on around them in school—a student who does not cause problems, goes to class, turns in assignments, understands and obeys the rules of the school/classroom, is cooperative with other students and school staff, knows their rights, and works hard at doing what it takes to graduate. *Since they have no rigorous critique of the school, after they graduate the school remains the same as it was when they entered.*

Transformative resistance

And finally, students who engage in transformational resistance are students whose behavior illustrates both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice—a student develops a critically conscious response to modern urban schooling conditions. Such a person is able to acquire the mechanical skills necessary to navigate oppressive social conditions and institutions and the critical skills to analyze and resist the hostility they endure and to develop a strong sense of self and community.

This student:

- organizes their peers to form networks created and driven by students to better communications with school staff;
- works with school staff, the community, and classmates to increased student involvement in school-related decision-making;

- organizes efforts to explore decision making models for increasing the democratic participation of students in their education;
- fosters the understanding and everyday application in the school of the First Amendment of the Constitution (Haynes, Chaltain, Ferguson, Hudson, & Thomas, 2003) which protects the most basic cherished rights in a free society--freedom of speech, assembly, religion, press, and petition;
- becomes a justice-oriented active "citizen" in their school and classrooms who critically assess social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes;
- seeks out and address areas of injustice, they know about social movements and how to effect systemic change. An example of this kind of student is a person who explores why some of their peers do not graduate and acts in school and the community to solve root causes; and
- studies hard and does what the curriculum/teacher requires of them in order to "...successfully complete all grades and benchmarks from K-12 grade resulting in high school graduation," but they also work hard to develop a counter-culture in the school, one that normalizes excellence and collective achievement (Ducan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Students whose resistance to oppressive school conditions is transformational believe that in order to solve urban schooling problems and improve society, *they must question and change established systems and structures or they will continue to reproduce these patterns of injustice over time.* (Westheimer & Khane, 2004). So, when they graduate, the school is not the same, the staff is not the same and they are not the same; *all have been transformed.*

Means/Policy to enable students to carry out actions and activities of Blueprint for Action IV: Part 2

It is one thing for the National Blueprint for Action IV to use action verbs like "become," "determine," or "maintain" when advising students what they need to do in order to succeed in school and it is another to remove barriers to the true sense of ownership and responsibility coming from being in charge of one's education/learning—in this case sharing "being in charge" with school staff. Of course this is all enabled by a school staff desiring such qualities in students and prepared to make them self-directed learners and future self-governing citizens.

The missing piece of Blueprint for Action IV Section II: School and classroom democracy: Sanctioning student self-determination

Students watch adults practice running their country via "...government of the people, by the people, for the people..." America is a place where citizens take the responsibility of self-determination and self-government. State education policies such as Recommendation #44 can provide opportunities for America's future citizens to share in school decisions that provide practice in self-determination/governance.

When the 3 sections of #44 become education policy, the students who have the Blueprint for Action IV in their hand will be empowered. *They will realize the adults trust them and want them to learn to gradually share power with them with respect to educational decisions.* This is what they really want from adults—guidance *with trust.* This is the missing piece of National Blueprint for Action IV Section II: Sanctioning student self-determination.

Youth in urban areas deserve democratic schools

Democratic education fits perfectly in with suggestions for urban school reform initiatives and the characteristics of the hip-hop generation to critique the mainstream. Again, this is why Dr. Ginwright and his fellow hip-hop generation university professors at the Caesar Chavez Institute at San Francisco State (<http://cci.sfsu.edu/>) suggest urban educators use *critical pedagogy* as a way to use urban youth's critique of and opposition to the status quo to get them to succeed academically (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). That is why they know when youth organize for racial and economic justice, they are practicing democracy.

Rethinking educational strategies through a democratic education paradigm opens new and exciting possibilities for reaching all black students

Ginwright's (2006) experiences in working with Black youth, tells him that the conditions they face on a daily basis need much greater attention on the part of educational reformers. Black youth in urban schools want and deserve a better education, and if scholars, educators, and policy makers would simply listen to what they have to say, they would learn that they have analytical capacity, creative energy, and the desire to make good things happen in their schools and neighborhoods. *This is democratic potential of our public urban schools!*

For communities of color, democracy is just another form of colonialism.

This discussion helps in understanding what Indianapolis writer and social justice advocate Mari Evans (2006) notes: for communities of color, democracy is just another form of colonialism. She advises African Americans to become intensely involved in local politics (as was the case with the election of President Obama) or their minority status/level of political power in a majority rules system will be perpetuated.

It follows that the NCEBC must prepare opportunities for youth to learn the democratic way of life and how it might be led—the democratic habits of heart and mind so they will know how to “do democracy” and how to “work the political system.” This can only be done through opportunities to share in classroom and school decisions in our public schools—democracy's training ground and finishing school. The election proved youth want to be involved, and

for some even though they could not vote. This is uncommon and must be encouraged, as Mari Evans exclaimed, especially by those with minority numbers in the political system.

This is why our public schools need a type of "Recommendation #44" as the first step in the process of enabling communities of color to work together so they can be empowered via understanding how power and especially collaboration give them respect in majority rules decision-making systems. As a result of a K-12 experience in classrooms and schools that model the democracy, students of color will acquire the democratic habits of heart and mind and will be able to understand and work "the system" to obtain the social and economic justice their communities deserve.

This is the authentic responsibility of our public schools: If the United States of America is to live up to its democratic promise and its political will that other nations be democratic, our public school must be democracies.

School disaffection

Educators know of the many factors that contribute to low graduation rates. One of the major causes of dropping out is school disaffection. Many black children and youth feel alienated from their own public schools. This leads to apathy and disengagement. With national graduation rates for African American males at under 50% it is time to consider the possibilities of meaningful student engagement as a means to reverse the consequences of school disaffection.

Recommendation #44, and its acceptance by a state-level commission on disproportionality in youth services, is profound and also unprecedented. It is just what the NCEB needs. What is also helpful is American global (hip hop) youth culture has shown through the 2008 election that it wants to be a part of the decision making process. The election of President Obama is a call to move beyond 20th century ideas of student involvement (student councils made up of a select few and with no real power) to a wide range of direct democratic models reflecting shared decision-making with all students.

The problem for NCEBC may be that folks from many points of view will be doubtful and/or against student participation in school-related decision-making for urban students. Their argument is that school democracy is appropriate for college prep schools or middle-class students. Urban students need discipline and control not democracy—or as one inner-city teacher remarked, "If my students are allowed to share in classroom and school decisions, there'll be chaos!"

Summary

Kujichagulia (Self-Determination): To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves.

-- Maulana Karenga, one of the values of The Nguzo Saba

True democracy does not use education to move the worker-citizen from unskilled to skilled. Instead, democracy relies on education to position every citizen to govern. This project of democratic education can be carried out only by educators with the critical commitment to act on behalf of freedom and social justice that serve as a model for their students to discover their own personal power, social transformative potential, and spirit of hope.

-- from the ideas of Antonia Darnier (1997)

"Children growing up today are more likely than in any other generation to face a life of working, networking, loving, and living with others from different national, linguistic, religious, and racial background. The Tensta classroom (a model school in Sweden that has a multi-class/multi-national student body) is a microcosm of the classrooms of tomorrow. Students are challenged to engage and work through competing and contrasting cultural models and social practices, adjusting to and accommodating differences in such areas as kinship, gender, language, and the complicated interrelationship of race, ethnicity, and inequality. Trans-cultural communication, understanding, and empathy and collaboration are no longer ideals. *It is not as simple as the one-way assimilation and accommodation of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious minorities learning the codes of the majority society in order to get along and get ahead.*

-- Dr. Suarez-Orozco, "A New World View: Education in a Global Era" *Phi Delta Kappan*

"What are at-risk children at-risk of doing? In plain language, at-risk children are at-risk of turning the poverty and prejudice they experience against society rather than learning how to conform and take their 'proper' place. The children are maladjusting, and it is their teacher's role to make that maladjustment functional and creative rather than to suppress it."

-- Herbert Kohl, *I Won't Learn from You*

Blueprint for Action V

The 2007 edition of the National Blueprint for Action IV is a large and needed piece of the puzzle of how to engage African American children and youth in their education in their public schools. Its comprehensiveness is remarkable. The hours and efforts put into its creation show caring and a dedication to African American families and communities. Finally, the Blueprint is enlightened and foundational. It is based on the insight of NCEBC founder, the Honorable Augustus F. Hawkins, who realized: As we fashion solutions which help African American children, we fashion solutions for all of America's children.

*From a 20th century outer-directed student paradigm to
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The Blueprint for Action IV has brought us stakeholders this far and now our village is ready for new challenges and the next question: The Blueprint may work for some individuals and even some schools, but can it produce systemic change or does it inadvertently enable the perpetuation of the status quo? This paper contends the answer to this question is yes. In intending to help children navigate an oppressive structure successfully, they failed to see the value transforming these very structures. And this is the challenge of the next edition.

A National Blueprint for Action V would be based on the argument urban educators Prof. Jeffery Duncan-Andrade and Prof. Ernest Morrell (2008, p. 1-2) state as: "This argument is not meant to excuse the academic failure in many urban schools. Instead, it is meant to shake up and radicalize the business-as-usual approach to improving urban schools by shifting the blame from the victims of an unjust system onto the fiscal, political, and ideological policies that deliberately undercut and demean urban schools. It challenges the rhetoric of 'fixing failure' that has driven countless reform measures aimed at improving the achievement of the country's most disenfranchised youth, particularly poor non-white youth. These efforts have produced some individual success stories, sometimes improvement across an entire school, but none of these reforms has produced systemic change in urban schools. Instead, while one school improves, another school that serves a remarkably similar group becomes worse. This virtual zero-sum game—the ebb and flow of failure in schools serving poor communities around the country—is tolerated for two reasons: the politics of failure and the economics of failure. It is important that we analyze these reasons if we are to move toward a set of structures and critical educational practices in urban schools that give young people a reason to invest in the education their schools offer, an education that challenges and transforms social, economic, political, and educational injustices through critical pedagogies that are ideologically, culturally, and locally relevant."

A momentum is building in our youth to have more experiences with democracy. As stressed throughout the paper, the recent election proves today's youth are acting through the political orientation of global youth culture (Loflin, 2007). Most likely for the first time in American history, if children were allowed to vote, many would have voted in the 2008 election. Children and youth want to be involved. They want to help change their schools and their society. This is unique and must be encouraged in all students.

The challenge to the NCEBC is to provide African American students: 1.) "a reason to invest in the education their schools offer"; and, 2.) a means by which they can successfully carry out the Blueprint. This can be done by integrating an ethos of democracy in Section II: Student, empowering students with the self-determination they need to graduate and improve their community. *This is a rare opportunity we must not ignore.*

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Add the term “politically” in the Preamble of Section II: Students

“PREAMBLE: Recognizing the important role that schools play in preparing Black students to become intellectually, socially, economically and politically productive citizens, and demanding that Black students realize their right to high standards, free and equitable education, we jointly pledge to support or implement the following:”

Recommendation 2: Interpreting public education through the lens of student participation, self-actualization, and self-determination will give the Blueprint for Action the intrinsic support it needs from all students, especially the more reluctant or defiant ones. This compels a new Blueprint V or putting a new section in Blueprint IV, or weaving school democracy throughout the various sections amending the Action Items/Implementation Activities in Section I-X based on this paper’s suggestions. Along the way, the NCEBC must introduce school democracy to administrators, policy makers, neighborhood and business partners, and the religious community. This is vital.

Recommendation 3: Each state NCEBC chapter must work on introducing a form of Recommendation # 44 on student engagement which provides youth of color themselves the means to counter the disengagement, disaffection, and apathy they experience. Enabling student-led networks, democratic shared decision making through a variety of decision making models will empower black students, “...to meet high academic and behavioral expectations and become more *engaged* in their educational program.”

Recommendation #44 simply needs the support and collaboration of local, national, and international organizations and individuals in order to prepare a more democratic school culture that will lead to more student engagement in school now as well as civic engagement in society after graduation.

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Appendices

- Appendix A Letter from the Indianapolis Chapter of the NAACP supporting Recommendation #44
- Appendix B Letter from U.S. Representative Andre' Carson, 7th Congressional District, Indiana, supporting Recommendation #44
- Appendix C Letter from City-County Councilor Jose. M. Evans, District 1, Indianapolis, supporting Recommendation #44
- Appendix D Letter from Dr. Dana Mitra, School of Education, Penn State University, supporting Recommendation #44
- Appendix E Letter from the Independent Commission on Public Education (ICOPE), New York City, supporting Recommendation #44
- Appendix F Commentary, "The Unconvinced Generation," Jose' M. Evans, *NUVO*
- Appendix G Sustainable societies need sustainable schools; sustainable schools are democratic schools: Student voices in decisions for a world they will inherit
- Appendix H Hip Hop Global Youth Culture's Plans for Public Education
- The Education Plank: Hip Hop Caucus--National Issues Agenda Platform 2009-10
 - The Education Initiative: Hip Hop Congress



December 10, 2008

Greater Indianapolis Branch NAACP #3053
300 East Fall Creek Parkway, North Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46205
317.925.5127

To Whom It May Concern:

The Greater Indianapolis Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has actively participated in many of the recent initiatives to address the educational ills facing the children of this state, particularly children of color and low income children. With these efforts, we strongly encourage school corporations, local schools, higher education institutions, community and faith-based organizations, policy makers and our Indiana Department of Education, to develop policies and programs that can ensure that all students, particularly students of color and low income students meet high academic and behavioral expectations. This can only be done if there is sufficient focus, sufficient resources and sufficient student engagement.

The commission members and stakeholders of the Indiana Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services have devoted considerable time and energy on recommendations for education, in addition to a focus on child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health. The Indianapolis branch of the NAACP wants to be very clear that we are particularly endorsing key recommendations for education. These areas include equitable funding for schools, implementation of the Teach Indiana Center for minority teacher recruitment and retention, strengthening of the cultural competency legislation, retooling of disciplinary procedures that lead to disproportionality in suspensions and expulsions, and meaningful student engagement and democratic practices by students in our public schools.

When disaggregating the most recent ISTEP scores for 10th graders, we see glaringly, that it is our students of color and our free and reduced lunch students

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that are far from reaching the expected standards. Although many stakeholders, including ours, continually advocate for the needed resources, there has been little attention given to the voice of the students. Could this be one of the key ingredients that are seriously missing? Student engagement and democratic practices by students become necessary ingredients for student success and will need to receive much more attention in the schools of our nation. Positive outcomes of meaningful student engagement are well documented, such as in the November, 2008 issue of *Educational Leadership*. Studies show student participation in school decisions has a positive influence on all-over school environment in the areas of attendance, behavior, attitudes, relationships, and academics. School democracy brings a greater sense of ownership and personal empowerment leading to great motivation to engage in school as well as civic activities after graduation.

Although we teach about democracy we rarely practice it in most classrooms and schools. We must remove the contradictions in our culture that embrace democratic ends for its schools but not democratic means. The two can not be separated. Practicing research based models of democracy in classrooms and schools offers the best hope for public support of public schools and the continuation of our democratic society. This becomes exciting in that Indiana could become a national leader in giving students ownership of learning and education for citizenship.

Respectfully,

Cornell Burris
President
Greater Indianapolis Branch of the NAACP

7TH DISTRICT, INDIANA
COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
CAPITAL MARKETS, INSURANCE AND
INVESTMENT SPONSORED ENTERPRISES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL MONETARY
POLICY, TRADE AND TECHNOLOGY
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
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March 19, 2009

John H. Loflin
The Black & Latino Policy Institute
1449 N. Pennsylvania St
Indianapolis, IN 46202

Mr. Loflin:

I write to congratulate the Black & Latino Policy Institute for its efforts to implement Recommendation #44 as stated in the final report by the Commission on the Disproportionality in Youth Services: Findings and Recommendations, October 15, 2008.

I am pleased to know that school corporations, local schools, and civic, community, labor and faith-based organizations, in conjunction with Indiana Department of Education, will be creating programs to ensure students of color have the resources they need in order to be able to meet high academic and behavioral expectations and become more engaged in their educational program through:

- Developing networks created and driven by students in order to increase meaningful communications between students and staff;
- Increasing student involvement in school-related decision-making; and
- Exploring models for increasing the democratic participation of students in their education

I understand the importance of this recommendation. During a September 12, 2008 panel discussion on urban schools co-sponsored by both the Black and the Latino congressional caucuses, Student Engagement in High School as a Dropout Prevention Strategy, Dr. Pedro Noguera stated students drop out because they are *disengaged*, and moreover, become disaffected and apathetic—with no real sense of belonging, ownership, or empowerment.

If students are disengaged, let us engage them with responsibility by means of a school ethos of belonging, ownership, empowerment, and democracy through the student participation proposed by the commission. Enabling student/staff communication networks and participation in school-related decisions through a variety of democratic models will empower Black and Latino students, "...to meet high academic and behavioral expectations and become more engaged in their educational program."

I am also encouraged by the potential of the recommendation to increase civic participation by students at school--democracy's training grounds--and after graduation. One way this can be done is through the opportunities to share in school-related

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decisions. The presidential election proves students of color, at all grade levels, do not want to be disengaged. They want responsibility. This must be encouraged.

Keep up this important work. Our young people need adults who reconnect education to democracy, making sure our public education system lives up to its democratic mission. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at 317-283-6516 if I or my staff may be of any assistance to you on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AC', is centered on the page.

André Carson
Member of Congress

March 2, 2009

John Loflin
Democratic Education Consortium
2455 Shelby ST #1
Indianapolis, IN 46203

John,

A review of the findings of the Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services compels me to support the proposals concerning developing programs that can ensure students of color have the resources needed in order to be able to meet high academic and behavioral expectations and become more engaged in their educational program as stated in Recommendation #44 of the final report.

Although the “resources” involving: a) networks created and driven by students to better communications with school staff; b) increased student involvement in school-related decision-making; and, c) efforts to explore decision making models for increasing the democratic participation of students in their education were unusual at first, they now seem an obvious policy obligation of our public schools.

As a politician and student advocate, I believe, like educators Michael Apple and James Beane in their 1995 benchmark book *Democratic Schools*, the democratic way of life is built upon opportunities to learn what it is about and how to lead it. I believe schools, as a common experience of virtually all young people, have a moral obligation to introduce these future citizens to the democratic way of life. Common sense tells us such a life is learned by experience. It is not a status to be attained only after other things are learned. I believe democracy extends to all people, including the young. Finally, democracy is neither cumbersome nor dangerous, that it can work in societies and it can work in schools.

In fact, teaching students to share responsibility for their learning and school governance while also teaching and learning with them the ways to resolve classroom/school issues and conflicts is to experience life in a democracy.

From a wider perspective, with the current global interest in democracy and the building of a democratic Iraq, Georgia, or Myanmar, one wonders, what part do schools play in these new democracies? In fact, what does a democracy require of its schools? Perhaps the topic has not been brought to the public’s attention the way it can be now that the United States is supporting and in some cases fighting to bring about self-government in various nations.

The American public must realize that if its style of democracy is to be taken seriously as an example by a global audience, it cannot be non-democratic in its own public schools

and Public Square with its own young. We Hoosiers must provide our children and youth the same opportunity for self-determination we desire for each world citizen.

Perhaps the discussions around this recommendation will help us understand why the public schools of the world's strongest proponent of democracy are not, in all aspects, democratic. For those educators or citizens who have strong doubts about student participation, let me rephrase Thomas Jefferson: If we think students not enlightened enough to be involved in school-related decision-making with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to deny them this responsibility, but to inform their discretion. I have evidence democratic participation actually improves educational outcomes. Where is any evidence that it does not?

In conclusion, this recommendation makes sense: One way to help reduce disproportionality for youth of color is to share ownership of the educational processes with them. This is authentic responsibility that comes from being involved in real-world school-related decisions.

I fully support meaningful student engagement as is proposed in Recommendation #44 and encourage school corporations, local schools, educators, parents, politicians, civic, community, labor and faith-based organizations, and the Indiana Department of Education to do so.

Let's make our public schools a public enterprise again.

Jose' M. Evans
Councilor
District 1
City-County Council
Indianapolis



March 1, 2009

John Loflin
Democratic Education Consortium
2455 Shelby Street
Indianapolis, IN 46203

Dear Mr. Loflin,

I am writing to indicate my support for Recommendation #44 of the report by the Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services. My recent article “Amplifying Student Voice” in the November issue of *Educational Leadership* is an example of a growing number of educators and youth advocates who realize the value of student participation in school-related decision-making.

When placed into practice, student voice initiatives provide youth with opportunities to participate in school decision making that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers. Student voice can range from the most basic level of youth sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions, to allowing young people to collaborate with adults to address the problems in their schools, to youth taking the lead on seeking change. Student voice efforts also can raise equity issues that tend to be avoided, such as the problem of blaming failing students for not succeeding in schools, and not examining structural and cultural injustices within schools.

An growing body of research indicates that student voice initiatives have served as catalysts for educational change, including improvements in classroom practice made directly by teachers working with students to co-create curriculum and to engage in dialogues about ways to shape the learning occurring in the classroom/ Youth participation in faculty meetings even can change the tenor of conversations, including reducing unprofessional behaviors such as completing crossword puzzles during staff meetings or openly showing hostility to colleagues. Student voice initiatives have improved curriculum and assessment development, such as by students offering instant feedback during staff development sessions. They also have strengthened teacher–student relations, such as by having students take teachers on tours of their neighborhoods. Student voice initiatives additionally have improved teacher training, such as by having students take active teaching roles in collaborative projects with prospective teachers. Finally, and perhaps most important, youth-adult partnerships have also improved positive youth development outcomes. By providing youth with opportunities to participate in school decision making that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers, increasing student voice in schools offers a way to reengage students in the school

community, increase youth attachment to schools, and increase the civic engagement of youth, including the belief that young people can make a difference in their lives and the lives of others.

What also is powerful about the recommendation is that it will enable the development of networks created and driven by students in order to increase meaningful communications between students and staff. Student networks fostering staff and student communications not only emphasize a real partnership between students and teachers, but actually broaden teachers' concepts of the roles of student in school.

Students need opportunity to influence issues that matter to them. Participation increases students' agency, self-worth, respect, and sense of membership in school. Thus, it is wise of adults in Indiana that they should develop programs that can ensure students of color have the resources needed in order to be able to meet high academic and behavioral expectations and become more engaged in their educational program and that these resources include amplifying student voices. This is why I thoroughly support the student engagement section of Recommendation #44 and the efforts of the Democratic Education Consortium.

Sincerely,



Dana Mitra

March 2, 2009

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www.icope.org

Mr. Cornell Burris
President
Greater Indianapolis Branch
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
300 East Fall Creek Parkway
Indianapolis, IN 46257

President Burris,

The Independent Commission on Public Education (iCOPE) is a volunteer, New York City collective and the founding organization of the *Education is a Human Right campaign*. iCOPE believes that system transformation based on *Human Rights principles*, not merely a change in governance, is needed to create schools that meet the needs of every child and place greater power in the hands of those directly involved.

A finding of Youth Researchers for a New Educational System (YRNES), a student-led New York City action research group with which we collaborate, is that youth want to participate in school decisions that affect their lives. The YRNES report states: We want to participate meaningfully in decision-making and have a say in the changes that will bring about fair distribution of educational resources throughout all New York City public schools.

In a Human Rights-based system, education is a caring relationship between a teacher, a student, and his/her family designed to meet the needs of each child. One of the principles of this system stresses that the meaningful participation of students (as well as parents, teachers, and communities) is guaranteed in decisions that affect their schools and their right to education.

For these reasons we recognize the local leadership of the Indianapolis chapter of the NAACP in endorsing the democratic purpose of public education.

Like you, iCOPE endorses the initiative where Indiana students, and particularly those of color, have a public education policy that establishes and supports student participation in school-related decision-making and the development of networks created and driven by students. This is necessary in order to increase meaningful communications between students and staff as stated in Recommendation #44 of the October 15, 2008 report by the Indiana's Commission on Disproportionality in Youth Services. Students of color will

benefit from these experiences and carry over the democratic habits they learned at school into civic participation in their communities after graduation.

iCOPE's recognition is especially significant on this the 100th anniversary of the NAACP. Congratulations. The NAACP's leadership in the area of civil rights has inspired us to see public education as a human rights issue.

Ellen Raider
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INDY'S WEEKLY ALTERNATIVE NEWSPAPER HIGHLIGHTING ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The unconvinced generation

October 25, 2006 p. 4

Our current discussions about IPS/Indiana dropout/graduation rates need a shot of honesty (Cover, Sept. 20-27). Over the last 60 years, adults have tried to reason, warn, plead and even threaten youth to stay in school. Presenting health, lifestyle and employment/wage factors, along with incarceration numbers, year after year messages on TV/radio, buses, billboards, as well as lectures, sermons or crying parents attempt to persuade students to get their diploma.

Many adults are dismayed, believing that despite dropout warnings, youth aren't listening. This implies the message is out there and youth ignore it. However, youth are not ignoring it — they are listening, yet remain out of school. Why?

Part of the problem is educators and others who can't accept that youth remain so unmoved, so they say kids aren't listening. Evidently, the truth is, one in five IPS male students would rather take their chances without a diploma.

And, this will continue to happen despite warnings, discipline actions or alternative schools. Many youth will do anything not to give into "schooling" and the passivity and in-authenticity it requires of them.

What is interesting is that this is not just a local problem. According to *International Journal on School Disaffection*, this is a global phenomenon. Schools are simply not connecting with students. Japan's "school refusers" have quit public schools and formed their own. Aboriginals in Australia have a 25 percent graduation rate. The working class, minorities or the disaffected in most countries express their alienation from their public schools with their non-compliance or dropping out.

IPS and others have to figure out why, but they won't be helped in their figuring if they think youth aren't listening. The real point [is]: The adults are failing in their responsibility to prepare the next generation for the future.

Examples are the glaring cultural, socio-economic and generational disconnect between students and staff illustrated by the daily confrontations between the

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hip-hop culture and IPS culture. The "trials" of schooling, in our present dropout factories, an experience by law students must go through and endure, are not only irrelevant to their everyday lives, they are so unnatural, and psychologically/politically hazardous, it's just not worth it to many IPS students.

Our suggestions encompass support for the IPS small schools. However, they cannot do it alone. NUVO must begin to systematically inform the public about small schools development. When the public is informed, this will put pressure on IPS since everyone will know what is happening compared to what is expected.

This will inform teachers — although they have been informed and trained, 90 percent of teachers still don't get small schools. Thus, IPS has small schools, but large high school oriented teachers.

This will also help each small school to be unique and self-governing, and not micro-managed by IPS campus and/or downtown administrators.

Finally, students will know what is to be expected, and this will be talked about more at home and on the street. We simply can't trust IPS to do small schools without constant public awareness and scrutiny. The discussions and critiques that have heretofore been much too private must become public; there is too much at stake.

It's not that our media-savvy young people are not aware of the messages. Yet, the recent 2006 Schott Foundation's report of incredibly low state (Florida 31%) and district (Indianapolis 21%) graduation rates for black males imply these youth are simply not persuaded the messages are valid. After decades of hearing this slogan, "You've got to have an education," evidently they, and others, remain unconvinced.

Jose Evans
Chairman
Black & Latino Policy Institute
Indianapolis

A sustainable world needs sustainable schools; Sustainable schools are democratic schools: Student voices in decisions for a world they will inherit (Loflin, 2008. p. 117-119)

The decade 2005-2014 is the UN's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)—a global effort to ensure the future for “every one, every where, every when.” Sustainability involved much more than environmental initiatives. From a better pillow to help us sleep to reducing poverty, sustainability is an all-encompassing concept.

Burton & Smith explain sustainable schools as a means to carry out the DESD initiative. These schools:

- Require changing the way we think, live, and work
- Are about:
 1. Learning for change
 2. Learning to make informed decisions
 3. Widening our capacity to take action and make practical change

They listed the values for sustainable schools:

- Freedom (to think, associate, express, choose, self-regulation)
- Open (clear about what constitutes learning, how it takes place)
- Diversity
- Inclusion
- A philosophy that reflects international human rights laws
- Individualization/customization (respect the uniqueness of each person, enable self-actualization)
- High expectations (being in charge of one's learning, protecting excellence, enabling continuous empowerment)
- Responsibility
- Participation/ Collaboration
- Critical thinking, action, and reflection
- Future thinking/Visioning
- Cross-cultural connections
- Multi-stakeholder dialogue
- Organizational/Social change
- Holistic thinking
- Exploring the process of change
- Participation and the knowledge/skills for participation
- Local community/workplace orientated action and learning
- Recognizing local knowledge and capacity
- Facilitating the growth of leadership qualities in everyone
- Education that questions our thinking, our assumptions, practices, and education approaches

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The relationship between Sustainability Education and Democratic Education is:

- Students must be informed and given the opportunity to share in classroom and school decisions that directly/indirectly involve the values, practices, and goals of global DESD efforts.
- This would involve them in the process of:
 - a. Deciding what issue, problem, or task they, the class, school, or community wants to study, research, solve, or carry out
 - b. How, where, when they want to study/research/solve it
 - c. How their DESD efforts will be assessed

Relevance: Sustainability is also the goal of Blueprint for Action IV

The argument that there is a relationship between sustainable schools and democratic schools is a solid one. It makes sense that not only must our public schools prepare students (our future generation) to create and maintain a sustainable world, but that students must be an integral and equal part of the decision-making process covering all aspects of our sustainability efforts.

Characteristics of both sustainable education and democratic education require the use of lower, middle, and higher order thinking skills. They also require application processes that rank from the simple task of distributing information to applying solutions to real world situations, and on to the complexities of public policy formation. These are also the skills and experiences the NCEBC seeks for black children.

Inherent in both sustainability and classroom/school democracy is teaching for social justice—having students list, research, and solve social/economic issues that affect urban students on an everyday basis. To some so-called urban minorities and working class youth, schools represent the power structure (Polite, 1994; Watkins, 2001; Duncan-Andrade, 2005). When educators enable students to use their time in school to do something about the injustices they experience, the school will seem less of an obstacle. Respect for teachers and administration will come when students see that staff are on their side and want to educate them in the own interests, not the interests of some other entity.

Sustainable schools/democratic schools collaboration would be broad, all encompassing, fundamental, and powerful. As well as being relevant and urgent, it has emotion, challenge, and it is filled with hope. *To top it off, this is not just a local or national concept, but also a global initiative.* With world communications available for students to talk and collaborate across borders and oceans, the possibilities are remarkable.

NCEBC must see that which they want for black children is what others around the globe want for their children. Thus, the Blueprint for Action IV is a global children's rights initiative. Congratulations!

DESD website: www.EducationForSustainableDevelopment.com.

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Hip Hop Global Youth Culture's Plans for Public Education

"Hip Hop could revolutionize education tomorrow."

-- Quincy Jones

The Education Plank: Hip Hop Caucus--National Issues Agenda Platform 2009-10

Education

- Support teachers in urban schools
- A living wage, as a minimum, for all education support professionals
- Adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding for schools;
 - Making taxes fair;
 - Funding targeted to schools with the highest concentrations of poverty
- Smaller class sizes to improve student achievement
- Expand early childhood education
- Mandatory full-day kindergarten
- Making High School graduation a national priority by investing in dropout prevention programs
- Stop government funded abstinence only sex education programs
- Expand targeted programs that support special needs students and schools - such as
 - English Language Acquisition,
 - Impact Aid,
 - rural schools and
 - American Indian education

Access to Higher Education:

- Simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- Increase Support for the Pell Grant
- Increase Undergraduate & Graduate Student Aid
- Make Student Loans Manageable

Go to: <http://hiphopcaucus.org/issues#education>

The Education Initiative: Hip Hop Congress

Hip Hop Congress, as a national and international organization that is dedicated to its mission, is constantly looking to develop and work with those developing experimental and pedagogically proven methods of using Hip Hop as a positive

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motivational and academic tool. That's why HHC has picked up Education as an initiative and centralization point for its artists, chapters, partners, and donors. See: www.hiphopcongress.com/

Education

The mission of the Hip-Hop Association is to facilitate critical thinking, foster constructive social change and unity to instill tolerance, civic participation, social reform, and economic sustainability, while advancing Hip-Hop's culture through innovative programming. See: www.hiphopassociation.org/partners/hhc.php

Empowerment Through Education!

H2Ed [Hip-Hop Education] is the education initiative of the H2A. Formed in 2003, H2Ed was founded under the premise that Hip-Hop, one of the most influential cultural forces today, has the ability to educate, inform and empower today's youth. We are advocates for education alteration and support educators that use Hip-Hop to reach the youth through Hip-Hop culture by combining a creative mix of standard educational formats and the popularity of Hip-Hop.

How can we utilize the energy and creativity of Hip-Hop music and culture to make schools and classrooms more engaging? The H2Ed Guidebooks 1 and 2 provide answers. The H2Ed Guidebooks addresses the tenets of a critical Hip-Hop pedagogy, framing the issues of concern and strength within Hip-Hop culture by providing in-depth analysis from parents, teachers and scholars. And most importantly, the H2Ed Guidebook offers an array of innovative, interdisciplinary standards-referenced lessons written by teachers for teachers. See: www.netvibes.com/hiphopassociation#H2Ed_Education_Initiative

Urban Teachers Network

Hip Hop Congress, a 501 (c) 3 Non Profit Corporation, represents the merger of artists and students, music and community. The Hip Hop Congress mission is to use Hip Hop culture to inspire young people to get involved in social action, civic service, and cultural creativity. It achieves this mission in a variety of ways.

As the educational system continues to fail American students (particularly low-income and students of color), alternative curriculum and solutions are needed to address the current education crisis.

From this emphasis, HHC is working to organize and support an Urban Teacher Network (UTN) where educators of youth in urban communities can form networks to share ideas, curriculum, and build after-school extracurricular and mentor programs for the youth they teach. The UTN is also designed to be a space where teachers facing the daily challenges of their field can find comfort in the company and support of colleagues with similar experiences. UTN members

will create regional support groups and meet regularly in order to build alliances and power in like-minded educators wanting to connect and build a movement to enrich the lives of urban youth inside and outside of the classroom.

Objectives include:

1. Creating an ongoing database of educators working directly with the youth in our communities.
2. Sharing effective ideas: curriculum, classroom management, strategies, extracurricular activities etc.
3. Creating digital classroom resources online where ideas can be shared with UTN members across the country.
4. Creating regional support groups where UTN members can meet on a regular basis.
5. Organizing UTN events outside of the classroom for students' enrichment and ongoing mentoring.