

**A CALL FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF COLORADO STANDARDS
FOR SOURCES OF DISPARITY:**

**THE SEGREGATION THAT IS MAINTAINED BY CSAP'S RESTRICTION OF
PROGRAMS, DISCRIMINATORY TEST REPORTING, AND
OBSTRUCTION OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITY**

A Report of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association's
Minority Concerns Task Force,
1999 - 2002

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"It is our firm belief that all children can achieve academic success if they are given the opportunity in a disciplined, caring, teaching community." - *C. H. Beady, Jr.*

SUMMARY

This report by the Denver teachers' past Minority Concerns Task Force, raises questions about **enforced academic segregation** in Denver public schools, and its basis in **state school reform law, and District policy**:

* Why did the District **fail to act on its own 1992 findings** about the hidden bias, and system-based racism in specific District policy and practices? (pages 3-4).

* Why did the District **not specify a need for modified CSAP policy** after the Commissioner and legislature produced similarly **biased state policy** and practices. Damaging, discriminatory testing and standards must be made "informed options only" alongside **available** alternatives: for black students, their families, and all students (14-16).

* The 1993-2000 **reform laws prevent teachers and parents from using successful practices** now used in nonsectarian private schools, especially those of Northeast Denver: Newer assessment strategies, school psychology, and technologies expand private program resources and increase student success, while decreasing comparative costs. They are recommended by African American child development scholars (7-8,17).

* CSAP laws are largely responsible for **District restrictions on cultural curriculum by established black scholarly researchers**. Programs of **black child development and African American Studies are excluded** (8-10).

* **The curriculum's unused reforms in testing technology and reading** reduce both racial profiling, as well as accelerated literacy training in CSAP that is incorrect culturally and developmentally (6-7,11)

* **School report cards, and punishments for "failing" schools, "deepen the racial divide"** for students of color. **Why did elders and leaders like Asa Hilliard, Jonathan Kozol and others petition Congress in 2001 to stop these policies (7,9,16,20)? Did you even know?**

* **One portion of CSAP law is misinformed and should be repealed**. It conflicts with ignored professional standards, **increases risks** for students of color, yet forms the basis for the State Board's **highly questionable, high stakes takeover and "chartering"** of Cole Middle and, soon, other schools (9-11,13).

* Researchers in several fields find **standards-based policies of CSAP contribute to obstacles to student learning** that are identical to those which the Civil Rights Commission investigated during 2000-2001 in four Denver high schools (7-9,16-18).

A Call for the Investigation of Colorado Standards for Sources of Disparity:
The Segregation That is Maintained by CSAP's Restriction of Programs,
Discriminatory Test Reporting, and Obstruction of Learning Opportunity

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Background.

In April 2001, the school board restated its commitment to support high achievement for all Denver students. At this time, the board began to address again the disparity of academic success for students of color.

The board's resolution responded to members of the local chapter of Black Alliance for Educational Options. In the previous Fall of 2000, the members petitioned the Colorado Civil Rights Commission to investigate irregularities of academic, and disciplinary procedure for African American students in four Denver high schools. In its response, the board described new steps it would take. They included plans for increasing student achievement with additional test preparation, and an office of community outreach.

This report supports and supplements Dr. Joseph's report for the Civil Rights Commission (Joseph, 2002). In November, 1999, the Association's Task Force began meeting to identify teachers' concerns for students of color. (Although this report identifies specific concerns regarding black students, its findings apply to all populations effected by curriculum bias.)

Part One and the Appendix review the exclusionary biases which District staff previously identified, in 1992 training classes, as being part of teaching practice and school psychology. Yet the pattern of bias remains in District policy, in part due to the 1993-2000 state laws for standards and tests (CSAP).

Part Two examines the accelerated curriculum of CSAP, some alternatives, as well as several proposed affirmative steps for its standards-based approach. The competing reforms are being reviewed across the country, being part of "One of the most vigorous continuing debates in elementary education..." (Clowes, 2001). Yet this debate is silent in Denver.

Extended quotes are used for findings which were eliminated, or are now restricted, in District practice. The report draws from local and nationally known black elder statesmen and women, educators, and leaders in the Black Community. It highlights the alternative teaching and assessment practices of Denver's non-sectarian private schools, especially black private schools in the District's Northeast area.

Part One. The elimination of African American studies, research, and cultural resources within the District.

During a key 1992 training session on racism, called “Power Teaching,” District staff began identifying system-wide prejudices within the policy, and practice, of our curriculum. Preparation for bias-free teaching was begun during this summer week. Unfortunately, the training program was ended before staff could implement a plan of districtwide solutions. One result of the unfinished project was that “cultural/personal learning style” and culturally consistent assessment, important tools used in private schools for addressing racial disparities, were omitted from the district’s next major work. This was the writing of “content standards” for each grade level that would align with the 1993 law requiring state standards. The cultural prejudice of our methods remained in district standards, and we were not able to modify similar biases in the state Model Content standards and test policy before its law was passed.

Bias in our school psychology has been called “Eurocentric.” In 1910, it was called “scientific management.” Our training manual described its effect:

The outcomes of American public education reflect the “sorting” systems of the schools...Teaching and instructional methods are culturally biased, and the methods used in American schools systematically reduce the achievement of some groups of students. Even when various groups are in the same classroom, the [students’] school experience differs predictably and consistently on the basis of social class, race, sex and national origin (emphasis added, McCune and Caruthers, 1992).

Denver teachers today continue to observe the “sorting” system at work as it produces racial profiles of students. Because of state CSAP laws, there now are strong obstacles to removing the ethnocentric bias that remains in the instructional practice of the district. Race has been dismissed as a social or learning factor at the present time. Yet education literature, and private schools, continued to study monocultural bias even as we moved away from its study (King, 2001).

It is helpful, therefore, to develop further the training course’s line of reasoning: by a unifying rationale from different fields, multicultural and Early Childhood educators, Black Psychology and school psychology theorists describe cultural and conceptual biases in public schools, especially in recent reforms of Early Childhood and testing. Black scholars, and others, describe bias in instruction as having a special effect -- one that is highly exclusionary, for the black student. Educational psychologist Dr. Gerald Porter (1995) says this about the state standards movement:

The interests of African Americans and other traditionally disenfranchised

minorities in the United States are already marginalized in the practices of public education and are likely to have their collective interests further marginalized by Goals 2000. The idea that government schooling is a method for reproducing Eurocentric culture and the social inequities implicit to it has been previously explored by theorists such as Althusser...and Apple... There is no reason to assume that Goals 2000 technocrats will produce different results if the same technologies and assumptions are applied again. This tactic is particularly insidious because on the surface it seems fair (decked out with all the trappings of science) but the majority of involuntary minorities and the poor will [continue to] be disadvantaged by these practices.

These experts state that education based on behavioral science is failing black children and families, and will continue to do so. They mention several reasons for this failure: the lack of sustained, high expectations of certain teachers and parents has been the most publicized, and locally this continues to be examined (Ogbu and Davis, 2003); a teaching practice which contains -- and professionals who have, only minimal focus on the cultural needs of black students and their families; the systematic use of grade-level requirements, and compulsory “high stakes” tests, which are inappropriate to a young child’s experience and capacities, especially the child of color (see **Appendix A**).

The continued use of even some of these practices creates another problem. Black Psychologists, and others, identify school planning that uses multiple exclusionary practices as being one cause of systemic, “institutional” racism in the schools.

...Kenneth A. Wesson, a founding member of the Association of Black Psychologists, wrote in a recent essay in Education Week, “Let’s be honest. If poor, inner-city children consistently outscored children from wealthy suburban homes on standardized tests, is anyone naive enough to believe that we would still insist on using these tests as indicators of success?” (Miner, 2001).

The principal function of IQ tests [and their current replacement, “high stakes” state standards programs] is to “objectively” justify, maintain and advance the white middle class life and cognitive style. It is a means by which this class seeks to protect its prerogative, privileges, status, dominance, and a means by which this class excludes and isolates those people whose life and cognitive styles do not serve these ends...(Wilson, 1987).

It is of vital importance that the accountability system specifically addresses the legacy of white supremacy and institutionalized racism legitimated by standardized testing, a legacy that lives on in the present. Institutional racism is manifest not only in disproportionate outcomes [test results], but is built into the instruments and assessment technology itself. Racism, of course, is also about who has power and who doesn’t when basic decisions are made about allocation of resources, curriculum control and teaching methods, eligibility for programs, grade advancement, and awarding of educational credentials. And, most important, who sets the rules, names the

'stakeholders,' and makes the final decisions...The accountability system to be fair and effective must make affirmative efforts to counter the institutionalized racism currently built into the technology of the instruments of assessment (Berlak, 2001).

In education literature, we find the concerns of writers regarding “institutional racism” -- a racism found in the concepts and planning of public education policy (Richart, Brooks, Soler, 2003; Berlak, 2001; Cross, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Miner, 2001; Guinier and Sturm, 2001; Ayers, in Meier 2000; Porter, 2000; 1996b; Peterson, 1999: President’s Initiative on Race, 1998; Akbar, 1996; Berlak, Porter, in Miller, 1995; Wilson, 1993, 1987; McCune and Caruthers, 1992; Kozol, 1991). Pollsters find that racism is not a concern of mainstream culture (Rocky Mountain News, 5/2/2002). Yet efforts at eliminating racism continue to be studied (Barnes, 2002; King & the Commission on Research in Black Education (CORIBE), 2001; Hilliard, 2000).

From his research, psychologist Claude Steele (2001) describes the learning obstacle in formal testing “that can depress the standardized test performance of any group whose abilities are negatively stereotyped in the larger society...” This “stereotype threat,” when added to the cultural bias of testing, and to the decisions of policy-makers which H. Berlak identifies above, is part of the growing number of race-based inequalities in school reform.

Workshops that helped our staff identify multicultural learning styles, and features of organizational racism in our teaching, ended suddenly (above text: Power Teaching, McCune and Caruthers, 1992) . The break in training occurred as the growth of Denver’s diverse communities continued.

The presence of new diversity within the local black and Asian communities was cited by colleagues as a specific reason for concern. There are now in Denver Somalians, Ethiopians, West Africans (Nigerians, Guineans, and Senegalese friends of Oumar Dia), Haitians, and other black groups. These cultures’ differences, and their differences with the black American culture in Northeast Denver, need the awareness of teachers to support their students’ transitions into neighborhood schools.

Review.

1. When we begin examining new research in Black Education, it shows that system-wide bias in methods contributes to academic disparity for black students, and all children of color. We must resume the district’s workshops on multicultural instruction. This will help staff to identify the ethnocentric bias presently in our policy and instruction which we last identified in the 1992 workshops. This will also build district-wide cultural competency by developing a knowledge of each of Denver’s black communities.

Our staff turned from concepts of bias in order to prepare for the new state standards. Yet, education and private school literature continue to examine ways in which ethnocentric science in CSAP has been used for teaching: In 1910, American psychology studied European American adults, factory workers and the standardization of assembly line areas. Psychometric tests of “scientific management” became a central part of screening for officer candidates in World War I. Testing was central to arguments of white supremacy in psychology’s “eugenics” movement (in studies of “racially pure genes,” and “racial hierarchy”). In 1994’s “Bell Curve,” these beliefs reappear.

By 1920, behavioral managers were writing elementary school strategies of direct, formal instruction and testing, which are non-diversified, inappropriate to young children, and potentially damaging (**Part Two**, below). This psychology of management is also the basis of “high stakes” programs (Karp, 2002; Miner, 2001; Coles, 2001). Black Psychologists and other scholars attribute sources of institutional racism to public education’s emphasis of behavioral science and testing technology (see **Appendix A, B**).

...yet all these efforts have not appreciably closed the wide social, psychological and educational gap which separates black and white children. Why is this the case?..American psychology which is based on studies of white children by white psychologists whose only use for the black child is as a deficit model has been a colossal failure when dealing with the black child. White-based educational psychology has not been able to teach the black child how to read. The obvious reason for this is the failure of American psychology to consider black child studies as a unique and important area of specialization...The low achievement motivation of the black child springs from the same roots as do many other problems of black children - poverty, powerlessness, ignorance and most important of all, racism. To speak of black achievement motivation without dealing with these factors is not to deal with the problem at all (emphasis added, Wilson, 1987)

...blacks still express dissatisfaction and distrust because they perceive inferior education as being perpetuated through many subtle devices like “biased testing,” mis-classification, tracking, biased textbooks, biased and inadequate counseling, and so on, and because blacks doubt that the public schools understand their children or their educational needs (Ogbu, 1987).

As one solution, some have recommended science that reaffirms the central importance of culture and developmental study, specifically as it pertains to black children (Hilliard, 2001, 2001b, 2000; Akbar, 1995; Wilson, 1987). They ask, Why do we continue to use a science, teaching strategy, and testing methods which are highly exclusionary in effect, and appear to violate Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act ? What is the best science for the children?

They state **the achievement gap of African American students is an indicator:** of the need to use a culturally responsive education that is

available. The supplementary science which Black Educators and others are developing, and using in small private schools, contains results from specialized studies of black child development; urban counseling, black cultural history and knowledge. They use an option of replacing ethnocentric state achievement tests with nondiscriminatory evaluation practices (King, 2001; Guinier and Sturm, 2001; Kunjufu, 2000; Meier, 2000; Wilson 1987).

Contrary to widely held belief, there is no shortage of systematic evaluation [authentic assessment] instruments for assessing teaching and school learning and for gauging the quality of academic and other forms of school learning. Some of the 'alternatives' are highly developed and have been shown to provide teachers, parents, and local officials with useful information for enhancing student learning and/or making local or internal school policy decisions. Some of these [nondiscriminatory] approaches are more cost efficient than conventional standardized tests because the time spent on assessment is not lost but integral and additive to the teaching and learning process (Berlak, 2001).

Asa Hilliard of Georgia State, and Marilyn Benoit of Howard University Medical School joined Alvin Poussaint, Jonathan Kozol, Alfie Kohn, other educators, and medical doctors in the April, 2001 "Call to Action," for Congress (1) to begin a moratorium on further test requirements for public school students, pending a study of their health risks; (2) to prohibit high stakes test policy from being attached to state standards; and (3) to give states incentives to begin the study of replacing standardized tests with alternative assessment technology (Hilliard, et al, 2001). This assessment is used in the five Denver alternative schools mentioned in Part Two.

Review.

2. We must reconsider the elimination from recent reform efforts of the cultural resources within the black community, as shown by its child development studies specific to black children. The pioneering, research-based study in Black Psychology, and Black Education, is a needed breakthrough in the education of black students (King, 2001). Its resources include:

- (a) cultural learning style, and its history analyzed in Black Studies;
- (b) An extended analysis of school psychology's present strategies that create exclusionary conditions for students of color;
- (c) a landmark study by Black Psychologists of black child development;
- (d) nondiscriminatory technology of authentic, and culturally consistent assessment in place of the state's "high stakes" CSAP tests;
- (e) magnet program options for black families which replicate successful programs in the public and private sector.

(The findings by experts in Black Psychology have broad agreement with developmental standards for learning issued by Early Childhood professional groups.)

Rationale.

The destiny of the African American social scientist is to be responsible for the paradigm shift or scientific revolution in the social sciences (emphasis added, Akbar, 1985).

We have the knowledge that in the existing scientific model, testing practices of behavioral science, and of public schools, consistently disadvantage people of color. Recent writers find flaws and myth in “fair and objective” results and “validity,” of standardized testing or “achievement tracking” (Guinier, Sturm, 2001; Berlak, 2001; King, 2001; Hilliard, 2000).

Our district uses a single behavioral strategy of testing and tracking. Recently, this strategy, long recognized as biased, was reinforced with statewide programs of CSAP, the Basic Literacy Act; as well as a nationwide program of Board Certification for Teachers and for Teaching Standards. All of these use the one rationale only. Right now, a teacher could not access in mainstream information alternative curriculum, or nondiscriminatory strategies of student assessment, even if she had any time to be interested in them.

In its report of three statewide conferences and discussion groups of citizens, The Colorado Coalition of Race Relations emphasizes that

Education does not operate well with one model; different learning styles and experiences require multiple models...[present] instruction is Anglo-based, not allowing for much flexibility for other cultural learning styles...education systems should practice that all individuals learn differently...[districts must] modify curriculum to meet the needs of culturally different children...[must] provide for greater alternative assessments and performance based assessments in measuring student progress...[and should address] the consistent shortage of minority teachers (President’s Initiative/Colorado Coalition of Race Relations, 1998).

Our district must re-open the 1992 study of multicultural school psychology, Afro-cultural learning styles, and specific teaching alternatives, which blacks and other scholars **continue to develop:**

...certain underlying commonalities of diverse cultures of Africa were forged together under the oppression of slavery. This pan-African sensibility differs in its underlying root assumptions from European modernism in some very significant ways. In particular, African worldviews provide a holistic alternative to [Eurocentric social science]...B. A. Allen and A. W. Boykin [1992] have identified nine traditional West African cultural values that have been transmitted to contemporary African Americans: (a) spirituality, a vitalistic

rather than a mechanistic approach to life; (b) harmony, the belief that humans and nature are harmoniously conjoined; (c) movement expressiveness, an emphasis on the interweaving of movement, rhythm, percussiveness, music, and dance; (d) verve, the special receptiveness to relatively high levels of sensate stimulation; (e) affect, an emphasis on emotions and feelings; (f) communalism, a commitment to social connectedness where social bonds transcend individual differences; (g) expressive individualism, the cultivation of a distinctive personality and a proclivity for spontaneity in behavior; (h) orality, a preference for oral/aural modalities of communication; (i) social time perspective, an orientation in which time is treated as passing through a social space rather than a material one (Porter, 1995).

The fact that American blacks perceive academic achievement as “acting white” is corroboration in black folk wisdom of Boykin’s cultural discontinuity hypothesis. If studying hard, getting good grades, and the things one conventionally does in school are defined as “acting white,” the Afro-cultural home and community from which the black child emerges is meaningfully discontinuous with the Eurocentric cultural world of the American classroom. Boykin’s empirical demonstrations of how black children’s learning can be enhanced through the inclusion of Afro-cultural styles in instruction shows that discontinuity is more than folk wisdom; it is a powerful and inadequately considered factor in black academic performance (emphasis added, Porter, 1996a).

The reforms of the Colorado Coalition of Race Relations, and of Drs. Porter, Hilliard, Akbar, Kunjufu mirror our staff’s 1992 findings, and form the basis for black cultural “pathways.” They diverge from rigid, “ethnocentric” reforms of behavioral school psychology such as accelerated literacy, pay for performance, and CSAP testing -- all of which produce racial inequities.

Public schools have always organized instruction for the convenience of the institution rather than for the needs of the individual children. Curriculum decomposes real life experience into contextually meaningless facts that may be logically arranged but are not at all reminiscent of how a child would naturally learn. In public schooling, how or what a child should learn is not determined by a teacher’s personal attempt to nurture a child’s innate aptitudes, interests, and abilities, but by the external dictates of curriculum or bureaucratically-mandated school practice. With the advance of national curriculum standards and national educational goals, these dictates are even further removed from the classroom...

Goals 2000 [the national plan for state-mandated standards] and similar programs will most adversely impact the traditionally disenfranchised groups within American society: the involuntary minorities and poor people of all races and ethnicities. The OBE/Goals 2000 mindset seeks to covertly eradicate diversity by imposing standards of thought and behavior. It offers the implicit promise that if African Americans conform and succeed with these standards, they can enter the mainstream and enjoy all the material success this implies. This is a promise that cannot be kept; it is the white man’s burden revisited.

Goals 2000 [and state standards-based education] is a false promise to involuntary minorities and the poor because success is contingent upon meeting the Eurocentric modernist standard. It is impossible for many of these people to meet that standard to the extent that they are culturally alienated and self-defined as “other”; the criteria for success are not objective and independent of culture but are the very embodiment of the white middle class sensibility - a sensibility derived from the economically driven modernist vision...

Education as a cultural activity needs to be implemented in a bottom-up fashion. Each constituency needs to design instruction and schooling to serve the goals and vision of its culture. The separation of education and the state would be a step toward the free and independent cultural life advocated by [R.] Steiner. It would also be a substantial gesture of respect for those in our society who are racial/ethnic minorities or those who subscribe to minority viewpoints (Porter, 1995).

The use of small, culturally continuous programs of choice, which help solve learning problems for diverse African American and other communities, is a “pathway” of the continuing, grassroots effort of reforms (Gardner, 2000).

...[S]mall self-governing schools of choice, operating with considerable flexibility and freedom, also resonate with large numbers of people, including many of those who are gathering around charter schools, and even some supporters of privatization and home schooling. They too come from a wide political spectrum and could be mobilized (Meier, 2000).

R. Rothstein now reports to all school board members in the U.S. (October, 2004) that long term literacy disparities exist for social class backgrounds and economic status worldwide, not only in the U.S. He describes factors of multiple causation for disparity which weaken the selective political argument of “no excuses” for the single factors of poor teaching, and weakened family supports. In place of the state’s demand to reverse immediately a century-old demographic law, Dr. Rothstein recommends broad support, community-directed economic and social reform, as well as school reform that greatly de-emphasizes testing for black and other communities.

This information calls into immediate question a “high stakes,” year 2000 CSAP law which is currently set to change Cole Middle School into a charter school due to three years of low scores. Its entire, outdated procedure of detecting “at-risk” learners; of teaching and testing by proven risk-increasing practices; of reporting test results by methods which increase social stigmas for students yet restrict knowledge of year-to-year student progress; of prohibiting the use of recommended, newer professional options for improved learning -- all of these begin to offer the concerned community member a clear example of the multiple features which produce institutional racism in the state’s organization of public schooling. The repeal of certain features of the 1993-2000 CSAP laws is examined in Part Two.

Part Two. The Early Childhood and Literacy programs: their restriction of research findings that question accelerated CSAP standards.

Concerned over the increased use of standardized testing with young children, retired Denver teacher Mrs. J. Rucker said in 1999, “There is no standard starting line for all children.” Yet, when one examines our present curriculum in the lower grades, one finds its wide use of testing diverges from Mrs. Rucker’s experienced view. Denver teachers striving to use high standards have concerns about formal large-group instruction, pace, focus, tracking and sanction practices of the state standards and testing program (CSAP). They also note the state standards’ divergence from other child development, black child development and literacy standards (King,2001;NAEYC,1998;Wilson,1986).

The rival professional standards hold enough merit that a proponent of CSAP-based strategy states that the controversy between approaches cannot be denied (Clowes, 2001). CSAP standards, prepared for in our district’s early childhood and lower grades classrooms, widely differ from the ones used in five local alternative schools: The Institute of Global Scholarship, of Five Points; Stanley British Primary School, of east Denver; Denver Waldorf School, of south Denver; Escuela Tlatelolco, of west Denver; and Jefferson County Open School, in Lakewood. Compared to these successful alternative approaches, our district introduces required literacy goals, formal academic work, report card grades, and “tracking” tests one or more grades earlier to all students.

The current emphasis on teaching reading through formal instruction to five-year-olds is not working, leading many concerned parents and policy makers to assume that reading instruction must start sooner -- at three or four. But that assumption is based on a narrow and thus flawed approach to child development, early education, and the development of literacy. The key to developing literacy -- and all other skills -- is to pace the learning so that it is consistent with the child’s development, enabling him or her to succeed at the early stages. Ensure this initial success and the child’s natural love of learning blooms. Doom him to failure in the beginning by making inappropriate demands and he may well be unable to overcome the resulting sense of inadequacy. This is especially true of children whose families are already under social and economic stress (emphasis added, Alliance for Childhood, 2002).

For the many children who enter school with development and language delays, our district’s accelerated requirements create learning goals that can soon appear unreachable. Our lower grades program draws a standard “starting line” for learning conditions which can seem unrealistic for increasing numbers of young students who now enter school.

One reason for declining reading and spelling abilities is that children

now come to school with insufficiently developed abilities to listen to the sounds of words...Unfortunately, structured oral training [to identify, remember, and sequence word sounds] by itself is not a focus in most reading programs (which use workbooks and/or worksheets). When it is, new studies suggest it may be very effective. In one such program first graders did not even get reading textbooks until...[later in the year]. Doing exercises in pure sound awareness in a format designed by Dr. Patricia Lindamood, these students rapidly overtook and passed children in control groups when they finally got their reading books. According to Dr. Lindamood, schools in Idaho, California, Michigan, and Florida have had similar results. The Michigan program reduced intake to special-education classes by 60 - 75% (Healy,1990).

The Lindamood program is one of many interventions for young students that, for one pathway, makes developmental education a priority over earlier “academic literacy,” and which could increase student learning over the long run.

While complying with state trends in reform, our accelerated training and standardized testing practices for young and “at risk” students do not have support of Early Childhood researchers (for the kindergarten and early grades). Specific problems, in student learning and in discipline, have been identified with the accelerated practice (NAEYC, 1987, 1990, 1998; see **Appendix A**). These are the same obstacles for black students which the Commission has been examining within our district.

The Early Childhood studies address overlooked concerns for African American students. Do we continue to dismiss the differing readiness in children, which researchers explain must always be focused on, for effectively engaging each child’s learning? A teacher best guides a child’s skill progress, says Healy, by teaching at the child’s level, and often non-academically, before higher-level conceptual work is opportunely introduced. This is an ECE “basic,” yet our district staff can use very few Early Childhood strategies for individual student pace as it focuses on CSAP standards.

One Source of Controversy in Early Childhood Education: Conflicting Sets of Teaching Standards.

“The current discussions are about examining how we are using the time we have, before we try to expand the time to do more of the same.” (Becky Wissink, president, the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, 1/3/2002; in response to the school board’s approval of “action steps” which would lengthen daily instruction time, and the school year.)

Directing teachers to give earlier-grade instruction of academics, in longer school days, to our “at-risk” young students can appear to be an obvious strategy. Yet, a brief background is needed in examining the policy.

After a review of this controversy, some colleagues and families might decide to continue with the current single policy; others will wish to study the professional options available:

* * *

Our kindergarten and elementary teachers, trained with knowledge of ECE research, discover that our district, like many others, has been overlooking basic, research-based guidelines for Early Childhood learning issued by professionals and organizations. The sources are broadly based. They include Black Psychologists, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the International Reading Association (IRA), private school, and home-schooling organizations. Early Childhood-lower grades guidelines are not closely followed, and are often replaced by our district's own standards, which have been renamed "Early Education."

The present lack of recognition, and use, of these professional standards is not due to errors found in childhood research or theory. Developmental guidelines have been steadily forgotten, in part, because of their standing conflict with local, political aspects of public education. For example, the overwhelming force of CSAP's state standard law requires teachers in all districts to use standards heavily biased by a behavioral (accelerated), non-developmental practice.

Current political decisions in school reform at the state and national level also overlook Early Childhood-lower grades standards for young children. In recent years, they have been omitted from proposed "model" programs, comprehensive state plans, and National Board-certified standards.

The local definition of "student achievement" used within our Association and the district also lacks a reference to these NAEYC, IRA, Black Psychology and Early Childhood standards. Curriculum-writers have taken a position that delays of "at-risk" students require earlier, more intensive academic teaching. Based on CSAP policy, the accelerated standards use a behavioral theory of childhood learning which is often at odds with the findings of Black Psychologists, and child development researchers. CSAP policy conflicts also with brain studies (J.Healy, 1990, 1998), and "metatheory" work in school psychology (Porter,2000, 1996b; Prilleltensky, 1994).

The divergence here must be addressed. At this time, state CSAP standards, and district literacy programs based on them, remain highly controversial, for the school psychology on which they rest has yet to resolve conflicts between them and rival standards. Kuhn states that "competing articulations," and "the expression of explicit discontent," are specific signs of "crisis" in a science (1996).

...the simple cry “*Make them learn*” soon runs afoul of the developmental reality that brains learn in different ways and on different schedules. In olden days, those who did not fit the pattern dropped out and got good jobs in the factories, shops, or on farms. Now these options have diminished. If we want almost everyone to achieve solid levels of academic competency, we must accept the need to diversify instruction for learners with different styles and timetables for mastery (Healy, 1990).

The policy of increasing academic demands on younger students was strengthened by year 2000’s state CSAP policy; and by “action steps” that the school board and administration then enacted, and made public in December, 2001. The school board took these measures, which include a longer school day, in order to comply with the state standards policy, and also so that the young student can be “brought up” to grade-level state standards, at least by grade 3.

State Education Department officials have decided that one “side” of this continuing controversy alone has answers for our students’ learning. The details, and standards, of the alternative scientific positions are little-shared. For example, Early Childhood professional groups continue to advise that no standardized testing be done before at least grade 4 (NAEYC, 1990; NAEYC, IRA, 1998). Some Early Childhood and Black Psychology experts recommend ending the use of this testing, as some private schools have long done. Other private schools restrict the use of the tests to late elementary grades, and even to the high school grades (see the Denver alternative schools on first page of **Part Two**). In place of standardized tests, the schools elect to use alternative assessments; the different pacing of their literacy plans reduces rates of failure (**Appendix B**).

A Basis for Further Review.

Studies show that induced cognitive learning before a child is maturationally ready will reduce his learning potential (Ogletree, 1990).

For the above reasons, our Early Childhood programs, prekindergarten through grade 4, would likely not be able to earn accreditation from NAEYC or other accrediting groups. With CSAP standards straying from decades-old rival professional standards, our accelerated curriculum’s formal testing/tracking approach continues to be viewed by some experts as highly stressful to children’s development. This applies to children of all socioeconomic statuses and, according to Black Psychologists, has special effects on the development of black students (Kunjufu, 2000; Akbar, 1995; Porter, 1995; Wilson, 1987).

If child development and Black Psychology research offers an additional focus on student’s needs, other questions arise:

- * What uniquely is the effect of accelerated literacy on black students?
- * What knowledge would a specialized study of black child development (pioneered by Black Psychologists), and alternate instructional pacing offer to the current study of our black students' learning needs?
- * Do other students of color, and white students, experience effects of inappropriate curriculum practice? Do "privileged" students of all races experience these effects -- in different ways, due to the reinforcing structures of their middle-class culture?
- * Does a pre K-8 curriculum designed to meet each beginning student's development, learning, and cultural needs necessarily involve greater investments in time, resources and staff over the entire K-12+ career? Or, would its "success-for-each"-approach (Beady, 1994) show a "return," of self-sustained student progress in the higher grades?

This report only intends to remind colleagues and parents of forgotten standards. Far more information is needed to answer these questions.

Revisiting professional, "black child-appropriate" standards within the district at the present time would challenge us, considering the drifting from them that is occurring. Yet we must consider making changes in policy, methods and law that permit a better review of this controversy.

Review.

3. We must examine the controversy that CSAP's accelerated Literacy standards create in their conflict with professional standards in Early Childhood, Reading, and Black Psychology for the lower grades. The curriculum must be examined for a developmentally incorrect, as well as an ethnocentric, "bias" that contributes to gaps in student success, especially for black students and students of color.

Review.

4. During the review, both accelerated practices and "high stakes" tests that are used for CSAP standards must be scaled back, and given as an option only, specifically for Black American students and their families. CSAP standards, written without modifications for ethnocentric bias, are uninformed by Black Education and Early Childhood Reading standards, and contradict them. In their effects, they are exclusionary. Their accelerated practices are potentially damaging to all students (NAEYC, 1998), and uniquely so to African Americans (King, 2001; Kunjufu, 2000; Akbar, 1995; Porter, 1995; Wilson, 1987).

(a) Accelerated CSAP practices include: formal, direct group-instruction in early childhood and early grades; teaching to standardized state achievement tests; increasing the instructional hours for each day, and lengthening the school year; escalating academic literacy requirements for ever-lower grades; increasing state literacy tests for earlier grade levels (e.g. the 2001 Basic Literacy Act law); the steady elimination of “non-testable” teaching in art, drama, music, physical education and other nonacademic classes.

(b) High stakes consequences, says Dr. G. Porter, like those of CSAP policy

blame involuntary minorities for their own suffering by locating the cause of underachievement within the person...[family, teachers or culture]...If the cause of the problem can be isolated to factors within the victim, then the greater society cannot be held responsible and no systemic change is required to remedy the problem...Compensatory strategies advocated by proponents of cultural disadvantage typically involve schemes to make blacks fit into the school as it is without any meaningful change at an institutional level (1996a).

According to the emerging supplementary science, CSAP’s high stakes policy causes the following: restricts families’ choices of successful programs; punishes school communities-of-color with sanctions, and with planned state takeover of so-labeled “failing” schools; publicizes demeaning racial profiles based on the grades in school “report cards”; “blames the victims” of exclusionary school policies, and continues society’s centuries-long production of racial stigma for students and families of color (Loury, 2002). Recent reports find that high stakes policy is promoting upper-grade student dropout (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Neill, 2003).

Review.

5. Based on these serious concerns, we can begin planning to include within the early grades instruction those activities and programs of supplementary science which Black Psychology, school psychology, Reading and Early Childhood experts recommend. These are based on teacher-and-specialist-directed speech-language supports, artistic, cultural, dramatic, musical and physical activities for students. Curriculum enrichments such as these -- many of which are found in the black cultural arts, create developmental, sense-integrating, self-discipline and self-affirming foundations for lifelong, successful learning. Instead of only teaching to the content of tests, we must strengthen the ability to guide our teaching by a knowledge of each student’s individual talents, temperament and background needs. There are resources for these enrichment strategies available in local private schools which have continued to rely on them.

Review.

6. Current state reform laws presently block the use of Reviews 2, 4 and 5. With the foregoing information, this begs a revision of the law.

For example, alternative, culturally continuous assessment gives Denver private schools an option to end the use of ethnocentric standardized tests, which are developmentally incorrect, as well as discriminatory-in-effect. Increased successes, academic confidence and engagement for the young child result from the use of this professional option, as the private educators who use it will state.

Yet all alternative assessment is prohibited for public schools since the signing into law of the state test-and-standards bill in 1997. This restriction is due to CSAP's strictly mandated limits on each district's "accreditation plan."

Altogether, such instructional conflicts, the present restrictions, the historical role of standardized tests as instruments of exclusion, student intimidation and failure are matters of great concern. They invite a change in the '93, '97 and 2000 state standards laws.

The state reform mandate requiring the use of CSAP tests only, and its restriction of the freedom to select replacement practices for student assessment, should be rejected and repealed. This affirmative step would enable the District to offer all the recommendations of emerging Black Education practices, including culturally consistent student assessment (**Appendix C**).

Conclusion

Academic disparities of Denver black students are related to Colorado school reform policy which is proven to assess, record, and academically segregate students by their racial and economic identity. In complying with state policy, the District has restricted the many current findings which continue to clarify this systemic prejudice. They are available in Black Education research, Early Childhood, testing psychology, and Black Psychology.

From 1993 onwards, local preparations for state CSAP standards in part kept staff from completing a '92 District study of racial bias in teaching, testing, and tracking; from learning multicultural modifications for local student need; and from reviewing successful programs for teaching culturally diverse children.

Identified by our teachers in 1992 workshops, the District's pattern of institutional racism continues because of identical bias introduced by mandatory state policies. Accelerated CSAP literacy standards continue a pattern of using monocultural, and developmentally incorrect practices. In research findings unpublicized in the District, these have proven to be obstacles to learning. In their effects, they have proven especially so for young black children.

We rely on a testing psychology which, despite the use of year 2000 "score and report" technology, dates back to the 1910's, and which is similarly biased. Especially since the 1954 Brown decision, compulsory policies of public school psychology (and its testing-and-tracking practice) have made, in Colorado, exclusionary conditions commonplace for students of color. Yet, state policy makers regularly reject local adjustments for student need. The 1993-2000 state standards laws prohibit using newer strategies of assessment, used in local private schools, which Black Educators recommend in place of discriminatory tests.

Black Educators, school psychologists, Early Childhood and other researchers share in a coalition of concerns about the outdated behavioral foundations, and racial prejudice, in "academic growth," federal standards of "yearly progress," and high stakes Colorado "student achievement" tests. They state that some unrecognized privileges of private schools -- their supportive cultural programs of instruction and assessment, must be installed in public schools as much as possible. Curriculum and student assessment designed around black student need, the infusion of Black American cultural content, recognition of cultural learning style, black child development practices, and culturally-related assessment strategy, better serve black young children over their entire school careers. A broad investigation of state policy, and reform law, is necessary.

Appendix A

When experts use the term “Miseducation.”

The District policy of accelerated training -- which the CSAP program imposes by state law, is intended as a strong support especially for children of color, who bring complex issues of language, poverty or culture. Yet accelerated training, although an aid for adult learning, long has been associated with causing both discipline and learning problems for all young students (NAEYC, 1987; also 1998, with the International Reading Association).

In reviewing educational policy, Black Education researchers and others point to restrictions and distortion which behavioral strategies of accelerated education create for children.

Dr. Carter Woodson, back in 1930, wrote a book that was called “The Miseducation of the Negro”. . . Dr. Woodson’s statement in the book was that the main problem facing people of African descent was the fact that we were victims of **miseducation**. He went on to observe that when people are educated to respect the knowledge, the scholarship, the history and the background of everybody but themselves, then those people are **miseducated**. . . Miseducation results from being **trained** rather than being educated. What is training?. . . We are saying that education is a process by which you are more actively capable of manifesting what you are. When you increasingly manifest what somebody else wants you to be - which may or may not be critical to your survival as a life form - you are actually trained. (bold text by author, Akbar, 1999).

The miseducation of young people, so prevalent in the United States today (and traditionally so in Europe in their tripartite systems in England, France, Germany, etc.) ignores the well founded and non-controversial differences between early childhood education and formal education (emphasis added, D. Elkind, in Ogletree, 1990).

Academic training is increasingly replacing imaginative play and experiential hands-on learning in the early years of our children’s lives. Education is now seen as a race, and the earlier you start, the sooner and the better you finish. Yet there is no evidence that this push for early academics, such as the effort to have children start reading by age five, produces any lasting advantage for children. If anything, research and experience point in the opposite direction (Alliance for Childhood, 2002).

In agreement with Black Psychologists, Early Childhood research finds that inappropriate standards of learning for the young child are threatening, stressful and lower a child’s motivation, or expectancy of success. They are standards that are better used in secondary, or adult-age course work, yet they prevail in the elementary and Early Childhood curriculum that uses required, accelerated training, with frequent tests. One possible result: Combined with

its formal “tracking” practices of testing, and remedial training for the student who is “below grade level,” our “high stakes” CSAP strategy does not only reveal, but can also create a learning “disability” and stigma, especially for a young child of color. It can create an incentive for “labeled” upper-grade students to drop out. Developmental curriculum strategies in the early grades, as used in the five alternative schools (**Part Two**, first page), will not always assess a similar student’s skill-level as problematic; it will be a concern that the private school staff addresses, a delay that does not deny the student her present successes, yet it will not become a “problem, “pathology,” or “tracked mark-of-failure.” The alternative or private school knows the gifted center of every child takes different times to develop.

...where tests are linked to decisions about students’ promotion and graduation and to sanctions for schools, increasing drop-out rates for African American and Latino students mean that many are receiving less education than in the past, rather than more. The standards movement has made clear, and in some ways has deepened, the racial divide between the educational haves and have-nots (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

Occasionally sampling other teaching theories, the District has mainly relied on “tracking-testing” strategies of behavioral science for decades. Is the current CSAP policy, based on theories of managing adult workers in industry, appropriate for young children, and especially children of color?

While involved for years in this unexplored curriculum controversy, we have yet to check our practice because we lack a basis for comparison within the district. In 2004, we do not have even one alternative Early Childhood-lower grades program that is based on a strategy separate from Eurocentric behavioral science.

After describing a distortion in the traditional behavioral science, which he calls “grafted knowledge,” Dr. Na’im Akbar continues:

This European-American...psychology which we accept as a universal description of human life is in fact quite limited in its grafted descriptions of the human nature. Even though there is diversity in the various “schools” or approaches to describing human nature, they all carry one of several flaws which make the knowledge base grafted...The grafting is the fragmentation of the total picture and the conclusion that these physical manifestations are the totality of the human nature...

Western psychology’s conclusion that the outer observable nature of the human nature is the best and most accurate picture of the human being has led to many of the faulty expressions so prevalent in European-American life...

The other pervasive quality of Western psychology is its consistent representation of the superiority of Caucasian people. Its focus on the outer

nature and the physical [measurable] form permits them (Caucasian people) to equate their contemporary accomplishments in the material world with their human superiority. Not only do they make selections from history which place them in the most positive light (creating a *grafted* history), but they focus on those human qualities which suggest greater achievement for their particular human group. Much of the early history of American psychology, in particular, has sought to document the psychological, mental and intellectual superiority of Caucasian people over people of color...This quality of white supremacy pervades Western psychology despite the particular school of psychology to which they may subscribe (Akbar, 1995).

Many standardized tests...measure circumstance rather than natural ability. Their dubious validity, coupled with their role of academically disadvantaging [profiling] students of color, builds upon their origins in the eugenics movement and perpetuates false notions of white intellectual superiority...the role of institutions in racial profiling and educational inequity must, therefore, be central to our future work. If the institution is not the focus of criticism, the invisible practices of racial profiling to produce educational inequity will continue. Will we allow this history of racism in education to recreate itself in new ways over and over again to effect generations to come (Cross, 2001)?

“We must have an educational system,” says Dr. Akbar, “that gives our children correct and proper information about themselves and their ultimate human potential.”

Appendix B

“Among the more commonly heard explanations for the gap in standardized test scores is that the tests...are culturally and racially biased. What this has usually been taken to mean is that the bias is lodged in the content or language of individual test items. In the early years of mental measurement, the racism of the test items was blatant. In more recent years, major test publishers have made efforts to review and eliminate items with overt racial and cultural bias...The fact that scores on all commercially produced tests show the same eight to ten percent gap suggests that the gap cannot be fully explained by racial or cultural bias lodged in individual test items. Rather, the bias is *systemic* and *structural* - that is, built into the basic assumptions and technology of standardized testing in the way the tests are constructed and administered, the way results are reported, and in the organizational structure and administrative rules of the accountability system itself...

“A major goal of social reformers of the 20th century was the elimination of legalized segregation. We still live in a society that is separate and unequal. To achieve social and economic justice, the goal for the 21st century must become the elimination of institutionalized racism in all sectors of social, economic, cultural, and political life - in business, housing, employment, law enforcement, the courts, health-care institutions, and, of course, schools. What makes institutionalized racism so pernicious and difficult to eradicate is that racist practices are often invisible because they are accepted as standard operating procedures within our institutions.

“Standardized tests are a particularly invidious form of institutionalized racism because they lend the cloak of science to policies that have denied, and are continuing to deny, persons of color equal access to educational and job opportunities. An educational accountability system based on standardized testing, though predicated on ‘standardized’ measurements which are purportedly neutral, objective, and color-blind, perpetuates and strengthens institutionalized racism.”

-- H. Berlak, 2001.

Appendix C

The Role of Affirmative Steps for K-12 Public Schools (Draft)

Due to public information efforts made by the Black Community of Denver, helpful meeting space is being created -- and because of it, people are recognizing biased policy in everyday systems that imposes exclusion, and labels of “failure.” Public schools, particularly now, have to uncover and address any practice still present which discriminates by race.

Is there policy to uncover? Can decades of student failures be connected to racially biased urban school practice? The connection already was made in our District training years ago -- we just stopped discussing it.

Recent national reports continue to confirm a discriminatory pattern in forty years of public school policy (1). Locally, this information mostly is censored, in practice; the District has not reported or discussed it since the 1992 staff training in multicultural instruction. In Denver as elsewhere, there is in place the three-year old state program of “standards based” education and tests, the Colorado Student Assessment Program, (CSAP). Because of it and its design phase which had limited community input there is, in effect, a 12-year restriction on the knowledge in multicultural instruction that the District now shares regarding issues of disparity. A District and community Coalition is forming around problems with disparity, and with the gap of knowledge placed around their solution. There is justification for this group to renew the study of multicultural education, and to promote affirmative steps:

1st Affirmative Effort: *The review of policies in the state standards program (CSAP) that restrict strategies of multicultural and developmental instruction; that prohibit, by law, the use of their practices, such as non-accelerated methods of literacy, alternative student evaluations; and that limit culture-and-arts-based learning - all of which Denver private and home schools successfully employ.*

The state program discriminates directly against the use of successful alternative strategies. It discriminates in effect against the student groups that immediately benefit from their use. The indifference to beneficial strategies of private schools, and to replicating these programs, appears to be deliberate. It is part of a culture, and a pattern of exclusion, which maintain an ineffective environment for children of color, and poverty, in neighborhood public schools. This long term “failure to help” is one central expression of systemic racism in public schools (2).

2nd Affirmative Effort: *Repealing the state law which now requires that only the current CSAP test, and “high stakes” punishments, be used with students of black families, families of color, and families of poverty.*

These three groups consistently are identified -- and, in the planning stages of CSAP clearly were identified, as being ineffectively served by decades of similar, standardized test-driven models of teaching.* Also, these groups most likely show a research-identified outcome of poorer performance on tests, or an overall disengagement from learning in culturally biased, test-and-data-driven practices. (C. Steele's "stereotype vulnerability").

3rd Affirmative Effort: *Beginning the legal work needed to change CSAP tests into an informed "option only," for these populations especially, and all students.*

Our school board was the only one, statewide, to endorse the state CSAP law in April, 2000. The District now is saddled with a biased system. Before exploring further school "revitalizations," charters, and private school vouchers, we must recognize how the current state system has promoted academic segregation.

A District Coalition should now reconsider whether CSAP practice is a model practice for these particular populations. Several private schools, and established research in several education-related fields, identify practices of CSAP -- using accelerated curriculum and standardized testing, as harmful to young children. Yet it is especially harmful to the above populations, for multiple reasons. In working to correct this practice, important steps of a Coalition will be addressing unmet multicultural needs of these stigmatized groups.

Following the lead of private and home school strategies that reject using these adult education practices with children, a Coalition must examine the developed teaching practices, and culturally connected assessment in Black Education scholarship for yearly, as well as the ongoing, student evaluation (King, 2001). These evaluation technologies include high standards and a curriculum that aligns with them; here, the CSAP standards could still be referenced. Yet the newer practices of assessment can give labeled, stigmatized children, and communities, the same protections that innovative private schools now give their children (3,4).

-- prepared for the Denver Classroom Teachers Ethnic Minority Advisory Council.

1.) Hilliard, Dr. A. (2001). "Standards: Decoy or Quality Control?" In K. Swope & B. Miner (Eds.), Failing Our Kids: Why the Testing Craze Won't Fix Our Schools. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools. Available: www.rethinkingschools.org;

King, Dr. Joyce E. (chair). (2001, June). Facing the New Millennium: A Transformative Research and Action Agenda in Black Education. The AERA Commission on Research in Black Education. Available: www.coribe.org

2.) Sue, Dr. D. W. From a speech at the University of Denver's "Bridges to the Future" program, April 22, 2004. Available: www.bridgestothefuture.us

3.) Hilliard, et al, in Alliance for Childhood (2001). High Stakes Testing: A Statement of Concern and a Call to Action. College Park, MD: Available: www.allianceforchildhood.org

* In 1997, a Denver newspaper analysis predicted at least 12 Denver inner city schools would score no higher than "failing" in the upcoming CSAP tests. The prediction later proved true; yet it was not based on then-current academic evaluations of every student enrolled in the schools. It was based on the numbers of children of color and poverty in these neighborhood school communities, and their group history of poor test performance. To those who nurture the innate

intelligence of children of color, this suggests that a well-recognized bias in tests contributes to the problem, and makes them at this time the wrong instruments for evaluating these populations. However the state Board of Education has refused to acknowledge the bias, or recognize the existence, and excellence, of newer alternative assessments that private and home schools use successfully with the children (Rocky Mountain News).

4.) The Hope Academy, Escuela Tlatelolco, Institute of Global Scholarship, Stanley British Primary, Denver Waldorf, The Jefferson Co. Open School, all of Denver, CO.

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