



## EDITORIAL

# **2012: Demand For Excellence In Education Empowerment**

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The best quality education is one of the most important issues that will determine ones future life, prosperity and destiny. But for Black American parents and students, this is the single most important issue that will affect not only our overall quality of life, but also will determine how we will achieve to the fullest extent actual freedom, justice, equality and empowerment. Excellence in education should not be just a matter for national political debate and dialogue; it should be the cause for urgent grassroots social action, protest and demand.

As we prepare to fully enter into the 2012 national political arena with the coming primary elections, in particular in states where there are determinative percentages of Black American voters, we all must work hard to make sure that the interests of our children, families and communities do not get triaged or sidestepped. The truth is we are not making enough noise and clamor about what is happening to the majority of Black youth in the public schools systems across America. Why are 45 million Black Americans so silent about the failures of the primary and secondary school systems when it comes to the education of our children?

The high school dropout rate for Black students continues to be double that of White students. This statistic has become so common that in many school districts it no longer serves as the subject or predicate for policy change at the school board level. Yet we know

well the direct correlation between low academic achievement and persistent high school dropouts as well as the direct correlation between disproportionate high unemployment and incarceration. Income inequality is directly related to educational inequality! Poverty persists disproportionately in the Black American community because of the absence of economic empowerment that would be fulfilled if we would educate ourselves more fervently and urgently with excellence in every subject matter and discipline of study. The future is in our own hands to the extent to which we demand and achieve the best education in the world without apology or excuse.

A recent statistical study completed by Stanford University's Sean Reardon established that income inequality also predetermines how well a student will do in school. In other words, students from "rich" families potentially do better in school than students from "poor" and working class families. For the first time the study revealed "The achievement gap between children from high and low income families is far higher than the achievement gap between black and white students." According to the Stanford report, the reasons why the income achievement gap has grown include the following: "The income gap between the richest and poorest families has grown over the past 40 years; High income families invest more time and resources into promoting their children's 'cognitive development' than lower income families; High income families increasingly have greater socioeconomic and social resources that may benefit their children; Income inequality has led to more residential segregation by income level rather than race, which in turns means that high income children have access to higher quality schools and other resources."

But it should not be shocking that the academic achievement gaps are determined both by race and economic class status. The question is what can we do about these systemic inequalities? This is why I have joined the ranks of the Black Alliance of Educational Options (BAEO). The mission of BAEO is to increase access to high-quality educational options for Black children by actively supporting parental choices policies and programs that empower low-income and working-class Black families. At a meeting hosted by Representative Laura Hall this month in Huntsville, Alabama, a well-attended town hall gathering was focused on getting an effective charter school bill before the Alabama State Legislature in 2012. Kenneth Campbell, President of BAEO, stated, "We really feel like it's important that organizations take information to the people, so that people can understand it and get their arms around it and determine how they

want to proceed.” There is a growing grassroots movement in Alabama for parental choice and the option for public charter schools to promote a better alternative for excellence in the education of Black children in Alabama. I was also just in Selma, Alabama with State Senator Hank Sanders and Attorney Rose Sanders for a similar BAEO town hall meeting. In Richmond, Virginia I witnessed with the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools a growing statewide interest among local Black clergy and parents around the issues of parental choice. I was really impressed with the leadership of State Senator Louise Lucas to improve the performance of the public schools in Virginia. From Mississippi to Kentucky to Virginia, New Jersey, Missouri, and New York as well as in Alabama and other states, there is a growing national movement of Black parents and advocates for school reform.

We salute the involvement and leadership of some the outstanding performing artists and young emerging leaders in the African American community who have taken a public stand on the crucial education issue. Especially we note the renowned leadership of John Legend. He is a member of the Board of Directors of Stand for Children Leadership Center and the Education Equality Project, two groups that work on education reform. Legend uses his artist genius in music, word and video to encourage students to finish high school and to do well in schools that have proven to be successful in innovation and reform. Legend emphasized, "Half of my fellow students dropped out before graduation, I was one of the lucky ones -- I finished high school and went on to college ... With a different situation, different teachers, maybe I would've been one of those 53 percent of young black men who do not graduate from high school. One of the 53 percent doing the low wage jobs, unemployment and prison." The movement is growing. Join us. Let's make a difference for all our children. Excellence in education is the best key for future progress and empowerment.

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