

Black Education Strategy Roundtable

CONVENED BY THE WASHINGTON STATE COMMISSION ON AFRICAN AMERICAN AFFAIRS

November 22, 2006

The Honorable Christine Gregoire
Governor
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Governor Gregoire:

Under the leadership of the Commission on African American Affairs, the Black Education Strategy Roundtable was convened as an informal advisory group to advocate for new policies and programs to improve the educational attainment of Black learners at all levels of education in our state. Between May and July 2006, we held four events with more than 250 attendees in all. These events engaged the African American community in conversations about education reform and Washington Learns. On Oct. 30, another 55 of us also met with Dr. Terry Bergeson to share our concerns and recommendations.

We know that education is one of your top priorities. This fact renews our hope for change in our state. The educational attainment of Black learners from kindergarten through twelfth grade is lower than for most groups of students in our state. This failure is a reality, not because our students have less capacity than others, but because our educational system is broken.

The Roundtable (in partnership with the State Commission of African American Affairs) wants to join immediately with you, the State Legislature, the State Superintendent, the State Board of Education, and local educational leaders to turn the achievement tide for Black learners. Before you finalize your biennial budget for the upcoming 2007 legislative session, we urgently request a meeting with you. A core group of Roundtable members would like to discuss the priorities below with you. The parent empowerment and supplemental education priorities below warrant action this session. We also are drafting a related funding proposal for your consideration.

- A statewide strategic plan to close the racial “opportunity and achievement gap,” so that all students in the P-20 education system can meet state standards by 2014.
- A public/private partnership to fund and operate local family engagement and empowerment activities and/or “capacity-building” institutes that equip parents/family/guardians to be effective “first teachers” and education advocates for their children.
- A public/private partnership to fund and operate more community-based, supplemental education for Black youth in math and reading, including before and after school tutoring, Saturday schools, and summer academies.
- A statewide school funding and policy package that increases funding for schools and fundamentally redesigns the school day, week, year, classroom setting, curriculum, and pedagogy practices around the needs and learning styles of students who are not yet meeting statewide standards.

We applaud and express our enormous gratitude to the Commission for establishing and convening the Roundtable to act as a unified voice for this State's Black learners. We are especially grateful for the exemplary leadership of the Commission's Executive Director, Rosalund Jenkins who convened our group.

The late Dr. Ron Edmunds, a wise and renowned educator often said we know all that we need to know to educate all of our children. The fact that we have not is because of our lack of will to do so. We have the will and we believe that you -- as the leader of our state -- do as well. Thank you for putting education high on your list of priorities for this biennium and beyond.

We look forward to meeting and working with you.

Very sincerely,

Black Education Strategy Roundtable
Strategy Development Team



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Enclosure

