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Summary

- Low income students, particularly boys, are at risk.
- Parents of Afro-Canadian students are concerned.
- The solution is to provide rigorous, structured teaching methods and high expectations.
- Ontario school boards should provide traditional model schools as an alternative.
- KIPP Schools have been successful in meeting the needs of at-risk students.

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Quick Study

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Africentric Schools

by Malkin Dare

Statistically speaking, there are three groups of students most at risk in today's classrooms: poor students, black students, and boys. When all three risk factors are combined into one student – a poor black male – the chance of educational failure is very high.

In Toronto, the parents of poor black students are well aware of their sons' educational peril. As a result, a group of black Toronto parents wants an "Africentric" school. They hope that a school like this, with positive black role models who celebrate black culture, will be enough to salvage their children's education.

Now it may be true that an Africentric school will help to motivate its black students to succeed. Unfortunately however, there is overwhelming evidence that Africentricity is not enough. Similar schools in the US have found that, as long as they stick with modern hands-on, discovery-oriented, teaching methods, their students do not show much improvement.

That's not to say these modern teaching methods are wrong. In fact, they work tremendously well for many students. Modern methods can turn kids on to learning, developing them into eager, confident, capable scholars, the kind professors and employers dream about.

Other students, however, find the new teaching approaches less suitable. And for some, the new methods are a disaster. These students languish in the bottom streams at school and drop out the moment they can.

That's why 57 Africentric schools are using a more traditional approach in their Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). This program provides students with a safe, structured learning environment

All KIPP teachers are subject experts who use rigorous, structured teaching methods. They stand in front of their classes and teach the lessons, and then they have their students practise the new concepts until they have mastered them.

And it works! Although over 90 percent of KIPP students are black or Hispanic, and over 80 percent are poor, their college graduation rate is over 80 percent.

The KIPP schools teach us that Africentricity possesses no magic. Africentric schools that use modern teaching methods may increase their students' desire to succeed but they will probably not make it possible for the students to do so. These students need more direct, structured teaching in order to learn.

Poor black boys are not the only students who benefit from more structured teaching methods. There are many other students, from a variety of backgrounds, who also need traditional teaching if they are to succeed.

Ontario school boards should provide as many traditional schools as is necessary to accommodate every one of these students. It's a matter of social justice.