

Have Black girls been overlooked: Why are 40 percent of Black females dropping out?

Written by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu
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Why has America and the Black community been silent about this epidemic? We hear so much about the 47 percent dropout rate among Black males, but I believe a 40 percent dropout rate among Black females is outrageous and unacceptable. Black males may be on life support, but Black females are in critical condition.

What are the factors causing so many Black girls to leave school? Could one factor be that only 18 percent of Black girls by eighth grade are proficient in reading? Could another factor be that only 13 percent are proficient in math by eighth grade? What about the fact that 21 percent of Black girls are retained at least once? How does retention affect the psyche of Black girls? What effect does Black girls' suspension rate of 12 percent have on their dropout rate? Black girls' pregnancy rate had been considered a factor in their dropout rate. But then in-school and alternative school programs emerged.

Are these programs succeeding at helping young Black mothers join the ranks of college students?

Are some schools hostile environments for Black girls? Do schools like Black girls? Do they respect Black females? Do they understand and appreciate Black female culture? Do they appreciate Black females' hairstyles? Do they encourage Black female expression? Are Black females dropping out or being pushed out? Why are so many suspended Black females being moved to the juvenile justice system? Black girls should be treated like students, not criminals.

When Black girls encounter hostile, unrewarding school environments, what awaits them if they drop out? What is their likely short- and long-term future? Can they access highly paid jobs? How will they acquire skills for jobs? How will they access housing in safe, multi-functional communities? What means will they have for establishing their own businesses, accumulating a financial portfolio and building toward their retirement years?

Black females are crying out for help. So much attention is being given to our males while our girls are being overlooked. Black girls need more Black female teachers. They need all teachers to give them higher expectations. They need schools to treat them fairly. Their suspension and dropout rates are four times greater than those of White girls. Black girls need Black female mentors. They need to be taught the beauty of their history. They need an education that

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embraces all determined efforts to keep Black girls in school, including: mediation, schools that feature alternative learning styles and STEM careers, all-girl schools that demonstrate high success rates of graduation and college entrance, and a change in school culture. Black females need to be encouraged not to drop out.

These issues and more are discussed in my latest book, "Educating Black Girls."

*Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu is the author of more than 30 books including the national best sellers **Raising Black Boys** and **Understanding Black Male Learning Styles**. He has been a guest speaker at many universities and has been a consultant at most urban school districts. His work has been featured in **Ebony** and **Essence** magazine, and he has been a guest on **BET** and **Oprah**.*