



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 17, 2013

Alabama Adopts Race-based Standards for School Students

Parents of black or Hispanic students in Alabama's public schools, be forewarned: The state, with the backing of the Obama administration, doesn't think your children can — or will, for the foreseeable future — perform as well as white or Asian kids. In fact, these governments are so sure your kids are inferior that they're setting achievement standards for them far below those of other students.



"Beginning this fall," reported the [Tuscaloosa News](#), "Alabama public schools will be under a new state-created academic accountability system that sets different goals for students in math and reading based on their race, economic status, ability to speak English and disabilities."

The new system, called Plan 2020, "sets a different standard for students in each of several subgroups — American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, black, English language learners, Hispanic, multirace, poverty, special education and white," the paper explained.

"In math, reading and graduation rates — the categories Plan 2020 examines — students who are special needs, in poverty, Hispanic, black and English language-learners have the lowest starting achievement goals of all subgroups in every grade."

For instance, for a school to meet state standards, 93.6 percent of its third-graders classified as Asian/Pacific Islander must pass mathematics. White students are not too far behind; the state requires 91.5 percent of them to pass.

It's all downhill from there. Only 90.3 percent of American Indian students, 89.4 percent of multiracial students, and 85.5 percent of Hispanic students must pass math. Then come students in poverty (82.6 percent) and students who are still learning English (79.6 percent). Blacks come in next-to-last, with the state requiring a mere 79 percent of them to make the grade; only special-needs students are expected to perform worse.

"Some parents and community activists say Plan 2020's 'race-based' standards unfairly set low expectations for black, Hispanic, English language-learner, impoverished and special needs students," wrote the *News*.

The Alabama Federation of Republican Women (AFRW) also voiced its opposition to the standards. In a [statement](#), AFRW president Elois Zeanah said, "Isn't this discrimination? Doesn't this imply that some students are not as smart as others depending on their genetic and economic backgrounds?"

The AFRW noted that Plan 2020 is "part of Common Core," the national education standards being pushed by the Obama administration. Alabama agreed to adopt Common Core in exchange for getting a waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act's requirements. (As is often the case, a Democratic power grab was preceded by a similar Republican one: Passed by a Republican Congress and signed by President George W. Bush, No Child Left Behind imposed federal standards on schools and divided



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students into racial and economic subgroups, though it required the same performance of all subgroups.)

Race-based academic standards seem to be a common theme among these waivers, the *American Interest's* [Walter Russell Mead](#) observed:

In an effort to escape the No Child Left Behind Act's stringent standards for schools, a number of states applied for a waiver, which would allow states to keep federal funding if their schools met a limited number of benchmarks. Of the 33 states granted a waiver last year, 27 now have different achievement goals for different groups of students. And the Obama administration fully supports this measure, "as long as the low-performing students are required to make greater rates of progress, so that the gap between struggling students and high-achieving students is cut in half over six years."

"Ironically," Mead added, "not only are the liberal Democrats of the Obama administration not raising red flags when states ask to do this; they are actively supporting racial profiling in schools."

Proponents of Plan 2020 argue that it would be unfair to expect lower-performing subgroups to achieve the same levels of proficiency as higher-performing subgroups at the outset. "Shanthia Washington, education administrator for the Alabama Department of Education, said the reason they set lower goals for some student subgroups is because they weren't performing as well as others based on 2012's standardized test data," according to the *News*.

Supporters further claim that even though the expectations for the groups are widely disparate at the start and do not converge for the next several years, more is being asked of those in the less proficient subgroups because they are required to improve at a faster rate than those in the more proficient subgroups. "Black third-graders," said the *News*, "are expected to go from 79 percent passing in math in 2013 to 88.5 percent in 2018, while whites are expected to go from 91.5 percent in 2013 to 95.4 percent in 2018."

"It's fair because in the ideal world it shows what we want our children to be doing, which are those end goals," Tuscaloosa City School System superintendent Paul McKendrick told the newspaper. "It's fair because it's helping every child to achieve, instead of pockets of them. This is trying to shrink the (achievement) gap, but you don't do that just by going from 79 to 90 percent. You do it by going to 85 percent, 87 percent and then 90 percent."

Others remain unconvinced.

"There is something repulsive, to me at least, in saying that schools will set targets based on the color of children's skin, their parents' income, or other factors," wrote former U.S. assistant secretary of education [Diane Ravitch](#). "We know that not all kids will end up at the same point by the end of each year, but we should not predetermine what we expect. I think the goal should be to treat each child as a unique human being and be sure they have the opportunity and resources they need to get a sound education."

Common Core, of course, does just the opposite. It treats every child as a statistic to be measured by standardized tests — and ignored as long as enough other members of his designated subgroup are passing. It also presents "numerous" other problems, blogged [Lindsey Burke](#) of the Heritage Foundation: "The loss of classic literature, the mediocre mathematics standards, the significant costs to taxpayers, the elimination of competitive pressure to increase standards of excellence, and, most troubling, the massive federal intervention and further disenfranchisement of parents."



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On top of all that, it divides students into somewhat arbitrary subgroups and announces that those in certain subgroups are expected to perform poorly — and this, former Tuscaloosa City school board member John Gordon told the *News*, is “unacceptable.”

“Set the same goals for everyone, because if you don’t, teachers will go into the classrooms with a preconceived notion and a self-fulfilling prophecy that these black kids aren’t going to learn and these white kids are going to learn,” he maintained.

Or, as Tim Robinson, the father of two black children in Alabama public schools, put it in his remarks to the paper, “I think it’s dumbing our race down and preparing our boys for prison.”

“The teachers aren’t even going to teach all of them anymore. Not the black boys and girls.”

He intimated, however, that all is not lost if only parents and other concerned citizens let their elected officials know they won’t stand for such shenanigans. But, he added, “if we sit by and let this happen, it’s on us.”



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