



Executive Order Creates Race-based Academic Initiative

A [Washington Times article published in 2010](#) suggested that in order to hold onto a Democratic Party majority in Congress, President Barack Obama was exacerbating racial tension by turning his attention to minorities to the exclusion of white voters. The president is quoted in the piece saying, “It will be up to each of you to make sure that the young people, African-Americans, Latinos and women, who powered our victory in 2008, stand together once again.”



There is evidence that in advance of the presidential election coming up in fewer than 100 days President Obama is playing that same card in the high-stakes game to keep his seat in the Oval Office.

In [an executive order signed on July 26](#), President Barack Obama created the “White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans.” The initiative will be administered by the Department of Education.

Citing the “substantial obstacles to equal educational opportunity [that] still remain in America’s educational system,” President Obama announced that improving “all the sequential levels of education will produce a more effective educational continuum for all African American students.”

The latest presidential edict claims,

To reach the ambitious education goals we have set for our Nation, as well as to ensure equality of access and opportunity for all, we must provide the support that will enable African American students to improve their level of educational achievement through rigorous and well-rounded academic and support services that will prepare them for college, a career, and a lifetime of learning.

In order to accomplish these lofty educational goals, the Initiative will concentrate on the following eight objectives:

- (i) increasing general understanding of the causes of the educational challenges faced by African American students, whether they are in urban, suburban, or rural learning environments;
- (ii) increasing the percentage of African American children who enter kindergarten ready for success by improving their access to high-quality programs and services that enable early learning and development of children from birth through age 5;
- (iii) decreasing the disproportionate number of referrals of African American children from general education to special education by addressing the root causes of the referrals and eradicating discriminatory referrals;
- (iv) implementing successful and innovative education reform strategies and practices in America’s public schools to ensure that African American students receive a rigorous and well-rounded education in safe and healthy environments, and have access to high-level, rigorous course work and support services that will prepare them for college, a career, and civic participation;



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- (v) ensuring that all African American students have comparable access to the resources necessary to obtain a high-quality education, including effective teachers and school leaders, in part by supporting efforts to improve the recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of successful African American teachers and school leaders and other effective teachers and school leaders responsible for the education of African American students;
- (vi) reducing the dropout rate of African American students and helping African American students graduate from high school prepared for college and a career, in part by promoting a positive school climate that does not rely on methods that result in disparate use of disciplinary tools, and by supporting successful and innovative dropout prevention and recovery strategies that better engage African American youths in their learning, help them catch up academically, and provide those who have left the educational system with pathways to reentry;
- (vii) increasing college access and success for African American students and providing support to help ensure that a greater percentage of African Americans complete college and contribute to the goal of having America again lead the world in the proportion of adults who are college graduates by 2020, in part through strategies to strengthen the capacity of institutions of higher education that serve large numbers of African American students, including community colleges, HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities], Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), and other institutions; and
- (viii) enhancing the educational and life opportunities of African Americans by fostering positive family and community engagement in education; reducing racial isolation and resegregation of elementary and secondary schools to promote understanding and tolerance among all Americans; improving the quality of, and expanding access to, adult education, literacy, and career and technical education; and increasing opportunities for education and career advancement in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

It is ironic that the president believes that the way to reduce “racial isolation” is by creating new government programs that will discriminate against students of one race in favor of those of another. It is a difficult proposition to convince struggling students that they do not qualify for any of the assistance available under the new initiative because of the color of their skin. This is hardly the “content of their character” quality of the America described by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his famous “[I Have a Dream](#)” speech.

Remarkably, [it was at the dedication of a memorial dedicated to King in October 2011](#) that President Obama declared it was his intention to honor the spirit of King’s speech by “fixing our schools so that every child gets a world-class education.” Judging from the guidelines set out by his executive order, President Obama has decided to amend “every child” to read “every black child.”

Naturally, the president and CEO of the [National Urban League](#), Marc H. Morial, praised the president’s new program, calling it “an important endeavor that will highlight the barriers and challenges to African-American educational achievement, and develop solutions to improve outcomes.” It was at the group’s annual conference held last month in New Orleans that the president announced his intent to issue the order creating the initiative.

In addition to the initiative itself, which will come under the auspices of the Department of Education, the executive order establishes the Federal Interagency Working Group on Educational Excellence for African Americans. This consortium of bureaucrats will consist of senior officials from the Department



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of Education, the White House Domestic Policy Council, the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense, and “such additional agencies and offices as the President may subsequently designate.”

Finally, although the president focuses on the impact of race on the academic performance of students, scholars have suggested that there are more relevant factors influencing the gap in test scores between black and white students.

For example, [in 2002, William L. Bainbridge and Thomas J. Lasley, II wrote:](#)

Significant differences do appear between races and, to a lesser extent, between genders. It is well-established that black students generally perform below their white peers on standard achievement measures. The news media and academic press continue to report this gap and lags in minority achievement.

Almost always, such reports leave the mistaken impression that gaps in performance are related to skin color. No single cause for such disparities has been determined, but no legitimate, concrete evidence has ever been found that a characteristic such as race itself affects students’ abilities.

In fact, many studies of mixed-race children and children adopted by parents of another race suggest that “racial” differences in test performance are perhaps entirely environmental.

What, if not race, accounts for the differences? The answers involve social, family and economic factors.

One hopes that President Obama’s interest in ignoring these other factors affecting poor academic performance is not motivated by his need to secure the support of the nation’s black voters as November approaches.

President Obama [was joined at the Oval Office executive order signing ceremony](#) by the Reverend Al Sharpton, NAACP President Ben Jealous, United Negro College Fund President Michael Lomax, Representative Danny Davis (D-Ill.), and Representative Chaka Fattah (D-Pa.).

Photo of President Obama signing White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans Executive Order: Whitehouse.gov



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