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Examining Race in America: Education

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Examining Race in America: Education



Thinking back to his time as a middle school teacher, Marlon Cummings, [Governors State University](#) Professor of Education, remembers the deflating words of one of his most ambitious students.

“I was working in a low-income, minority-serving school and a student said to me ‘Mr. Cummings, when I come to school, I want to learn but it’s hard in this environment. Even if I’m the valedictorian here, I’ll flunk in a college.’” Dr. Cummings said. “He realized that low-income schools come with low expectations.”

Cummings, who is also the Director of the GSU [Interdisciplinary Leadership Doctorate Program](#), said his memories of the school are still vivid. “There was no school spirit, the students were disruptive and discouraged, the resources were minimal, the cement walls and lack of windows were dreary.”

From this dire scenario emerges patterns that play out across the lifespan of many African American children who historically score lower on standardized tests than white students. This so-called “academic achievement gap” can predict high school dropout and college attendance rates.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) reports the implications reach beyond the Black community.

According to a 2018 report by McKinsey & Company, “The achievement gap is a problem not only for African American students and their families and communities; it affects the well-being of the entire country. Researchers have found that “the persistence of the educational achievement gap imposes on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent national recession.”

Seeing the trend, [Cummings](#) left the classroom after four years to help influence change at the policy level. Before he left the classroom, he picked up valuable lessons at neighborhood schools, especially those serving African American students.

“Schools reflect society, and that even can go down to specific community level,” Cummings said. “The schools in a community reflect the community. Racism in the classroom is a microcosm of the culture. It’s in our national culture, it’s engrained, it’s historic.”

Click [here](#) and watch Dr. Marlon Cummings discuss the impact policy makers and school leaders can have on the achievement gap.

Visit ["Examining Race in America"](#) to view the full multimedia series.

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