



bridging the gap:

sustainability and higher education

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The United States is facing myriad challenges today with the state of the economy, the energy and climate crisis, the lack of equitable healthcare, the increasing costs of higher education, national and global security issues, and the planet's diminishing resources combined with increasing consumption and population. It is critical for higher education to take a leadership role and find novel ways to help address these immense issues.

Educating responsible and informed citizenry as well as the leaders of tomorrow in order to bring about ecological and social equity among the different strata of society is critical to improving quality of life for all people today and for future generations. What would be powerful and effective is a thematic-based education under whose umbrella it is possible to not only address many aspects of the above challenges, but to also integrate instruction across academic disciplines while connecting to real-life experiences. The subject of sustainability is an ideal theme for cross-disciplinary education and workforce development. Sustainability includes

improving the quality of life for present and future generations and encompasses social and racial equity, economic freedom, and health and environmental justice. The Brundtland Commission (1983) defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

The United Nations has designated the years 2005 to 2015 as the decade of education of sustainable development. According to the American Association of Community College's resolution on global sustainability, “Sustainable development means simultane-

ously creating flourishing ecosystems, healthier communities, and stronger economies. Education for sustainable development recognizes that more informed choices as consumers, investors, workers, and community members can improve the quality of life for us and for people around the world. As globalization continues, our students need the knowledge and skills to help build a sustainable society” (AACC, 2007). Higher-education institutions need to prepare our students with a strong educational foundation to be a productive and flexible workforce and to train them specifically for green jobs.

Correlation Between Quality of Life and Educational Attainment

National Trends

In order to improve quality of life among people of all races, U.S. census data was analyzed and compared between African American and White populations. Quality of life can be measured by comparing trends in poverty level and educational attainment between populations. For purposes of clarity, simplicity, and ease of reading, a comparison of the population of Blacks/African Americans and the

population of Whites only will be used in this essay. For our complete analysis, please download the full version of our essay from www.stateofblackaz.org. In short, we find the following:

- A Census 2005 analysis of 30-year data comparison shows only a marginal decrease in percentage of poverty rate of African Americans compared to White Americans (Kruse, 2006).
- When comparing the educational trends from 1975 to 2005 for high-school graduation rates, African American graduation rates are approaching the rates for White Americans for high-school graduation. However—
- The higher education trend for African Americans is improving at a much lower rate.
- While the high-school education rate has improved significantly, the comparative poverty rate has not improved.
- And as William Tate's essay in this volume suggests, the times require individuals to have more knowledge-based education than skills-based education. This is particularly true for African American Arizonans.

Trends in Arizona

Arizona's total population according to Census 2000 (p. 2) is 5,130,632 people. The number of Blacks/African Americans in Arizona is 158,873. Figure 1 illustrates a comparison of household income between the Black/African American and White population in Arizona. Analysis of Figure 1 shows that 44.2% of the Black/African Americans household income is less than \$29,999 as compared to 31.9% of White households. 4.7% of White households make over \$150,000 whereas only 2.1% of the Black/African American households make over \$150,000. A study of the educational attainment data for Arizona demonstrated that 81% of Blacks/African Americans have a high-school diploma or higher and 23.5% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The trend in Arizona also shows that a college education helps improve quality of life for present and future generations.

Figures 2 and 3 provide a comparison of geographic distribution of African Americans/Blacks (Fig. 2) versus Whites (Fig. 3) in Arizona by county. The Black/African American populations are concentrated in Maricopa, Pima, and Pinal counties. There are fewer Blacks/African Americans in rural Arizona.

Since 72% of Blacks/African Americans live in Maricopa County, this essay will focus mainly on Maricopa County. The population of Maricopa County is 3,072,149, of which 2,376,359 are White and 114,551 are Black/African American. For Maricopa County, the Black or African American poverty rate is 20% as compared to 6.3% for Whites (126,343/ 2,006,481). These staggering disparities point to the great economic burden facing the Black/African American community with issues of unemployment, rising energy costs, drought, and pollution. Higher education and training in workforce development could help bring people out of poverty. The community college system provides a bridge for students from poverty to prosperity.

Figure 1. Comparison of Household Income between Blacks/African Americans and Whites in Arizona

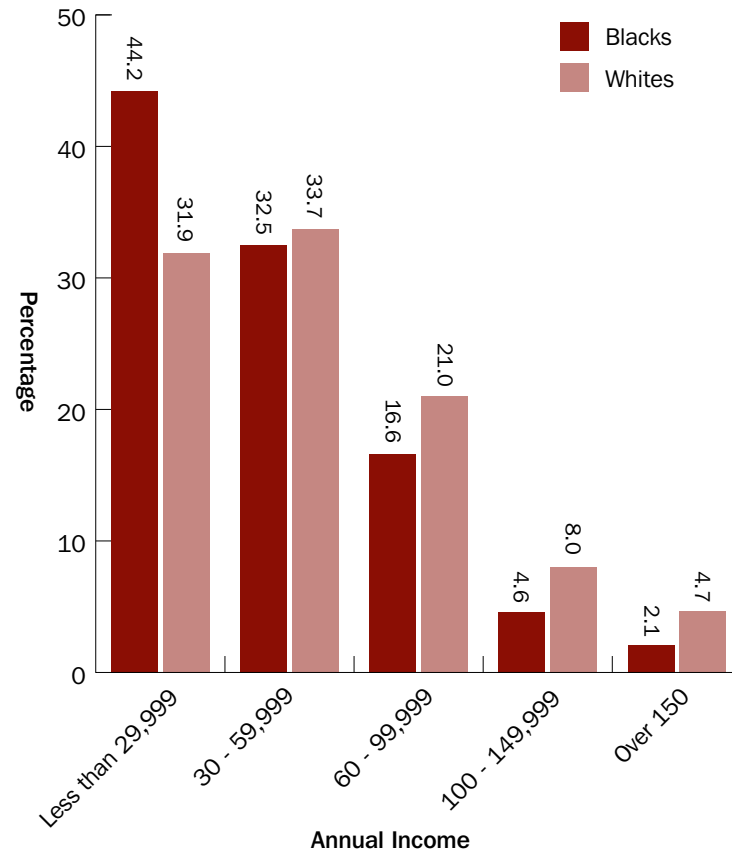


Figure 2. Blacks/African Americans in Arizona by County
 (Source: American Fact Finder - US Census Bureau, 2000)

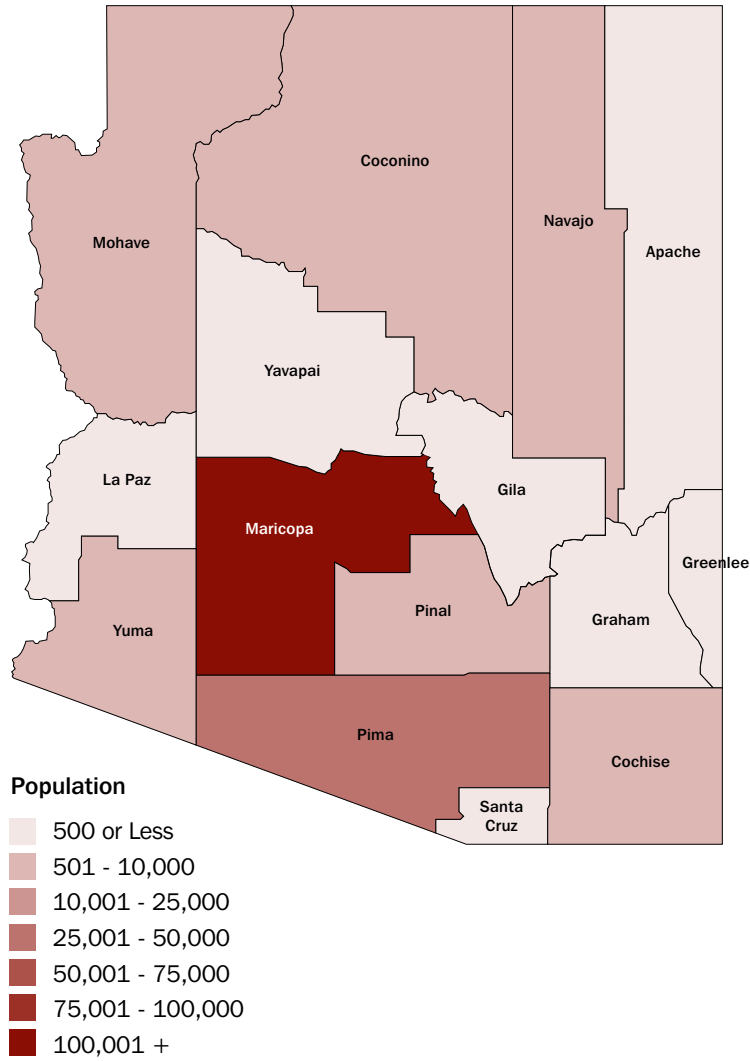
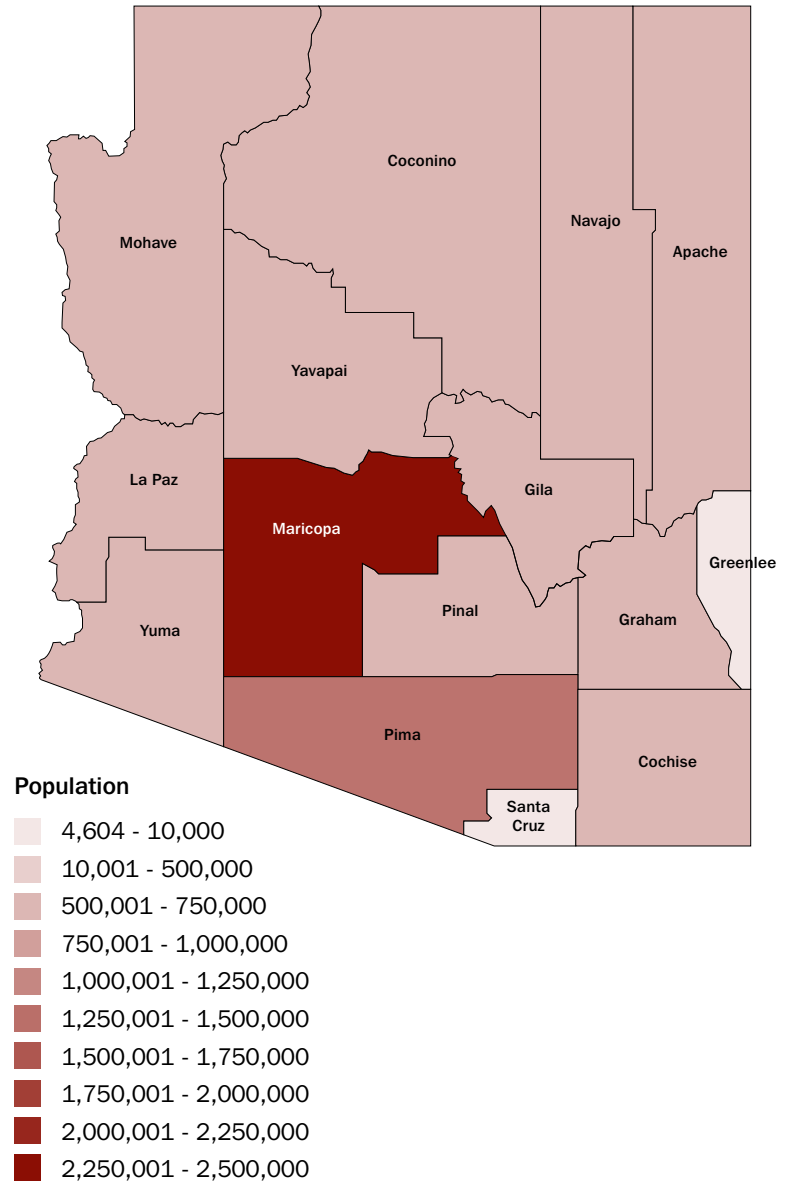


Figure 3. Whites in Arizona by County
 (Source: American Fact Finder - US Census Bureau, 2000)



“As educators, we have a strong moral responsibility to have discussions on environmental justice and social equity issues as a part of education for every student. This will help pave the path to economic freedom for our students. It is our duty to preserve, protect, and cherish our earth for future generations. A Native American proverb states, “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.” Improving the quality of life for our future generations is critical so that we can live on this earth on a sustainable basis.”

Maricopa County Community College District

Maricopa County Community College District, one of the largest community college districts in the United States, has over 250,000 students and strives to bring quality education to all people in an affordable manner. The Maricopa Community Colleges, comprised of 10 colleges, two skill centers and numerous education centers, are dedicated to educational excellence and to meeting the needs of businesses and the citizens of Maricopa County. Figure 4 and Figure 5 compare the poverty rate of Blacks/African Americans and the White populations in the Maricopa service areas.

In the combined areas surrounding Phoenix College, Gateway Community College, and South Mountain Community College, 16.05% of Whites and 25.69% of Blacks are in poverty. In the Estrella Mountain Community College service area, as defined by the college, 9.58% of Whites and 19.17% of Blacks are in poverty.

Such glaring disparities in the poverty level are a call for action. It is a call to help those in the Black/African American community in these areas and across Arizona who are living in poverty. It is a call to end hunger, find affordable housing, educate, train, and help

people get employment. It is to make health care affordable so that no child suffers from treatable diseases, and to help with issues of air and water pollution. In order to create such healthy, vibrant communities, the people living below the poverty level need to be educated and trained for new jobs such as green jobs.

In Arizona, for a family of four, wages below \$20,446 are considered below the poverty rate (Figure 6). Whereas to live life well in Arizona, a family of four needs to make \$55,369. In Maricopa County (Figure 7), for a family of four, the poverty rate is the same as for Arizona, but in order to live well, a family must earn \$61,006 (Living Wage, 2008).

A call to action is required in order to help people move out of poverty wages and into living wages. This requires the creation of green job opportunities through training and education. The majority of green jobs require at least a two-year degree after high school and act as a good stepping-stone for increasing family wages and moving upwards to a livable wage. It is imperative that higher-education institutions work together to offer programs to educate people on green jobs.

Figure 4. Maricopa Community Colleges 2000 Census Black/African American Poverty Rate by Census Tract
 (Source: US Census 2000)

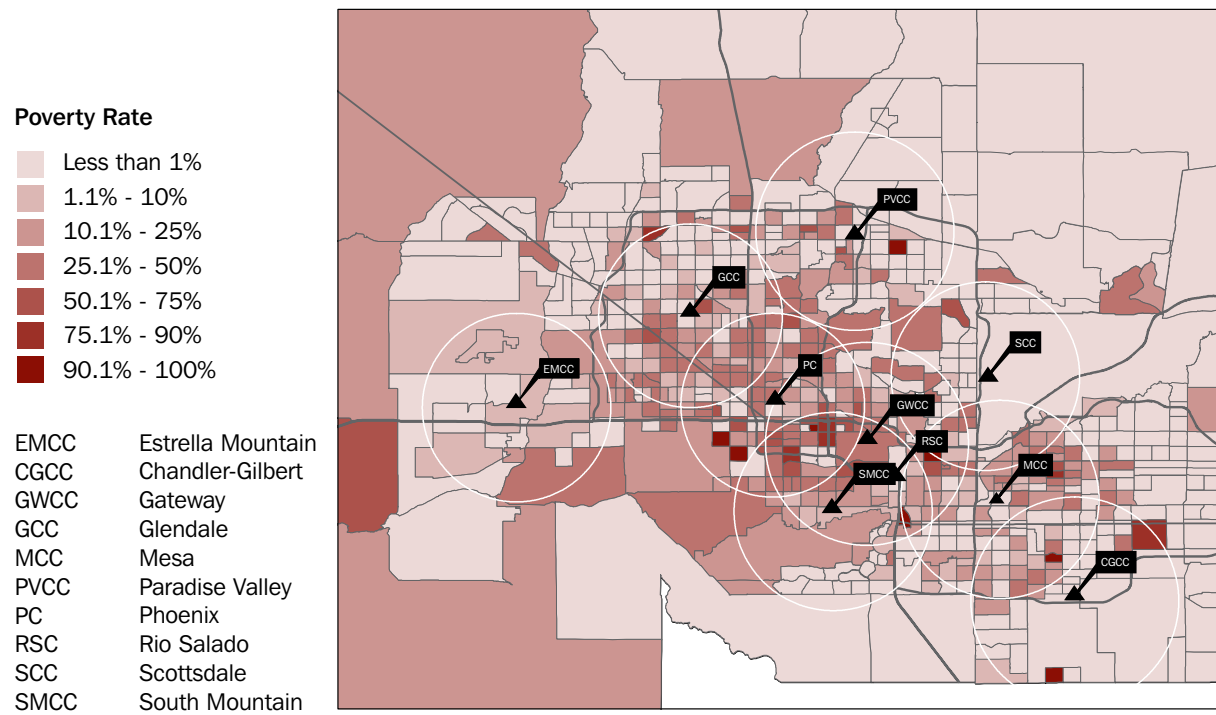


Figure 5. Maricopa Community Colleges 2000 Census White Poverty Rate by Census Tract
 (Source: US Census 2000)

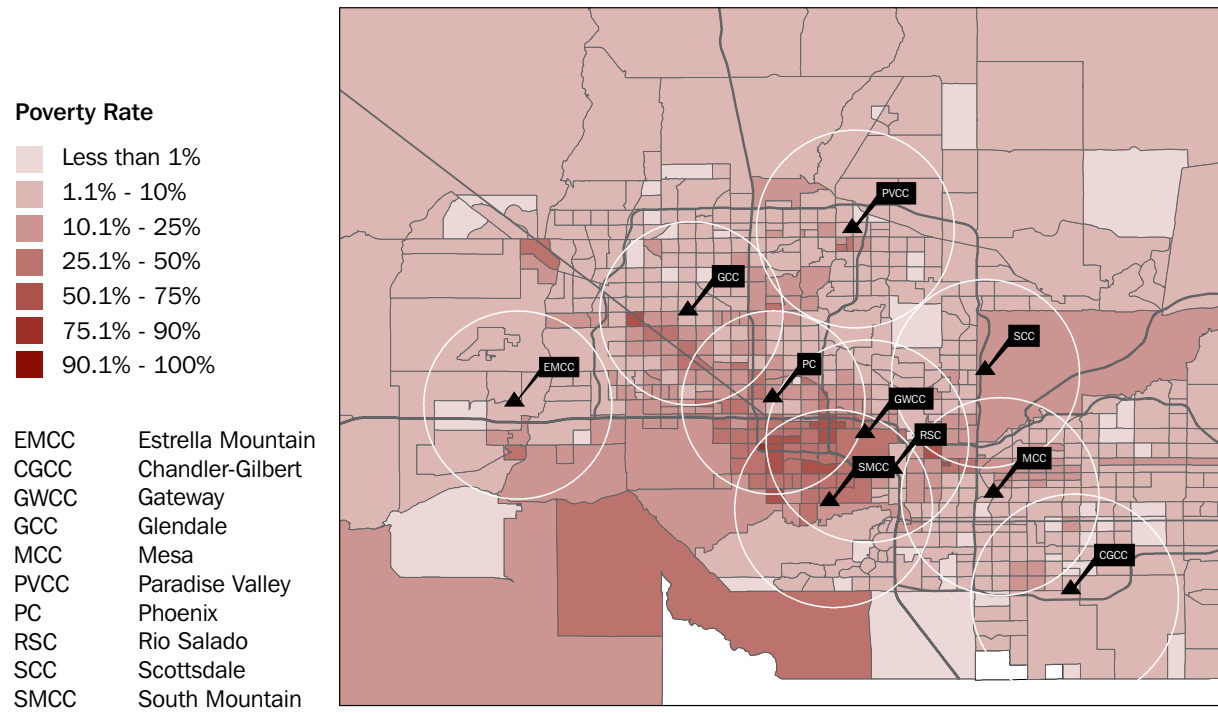


Figure 6. Arizona Wages
(Source: Living Wage, 2008)

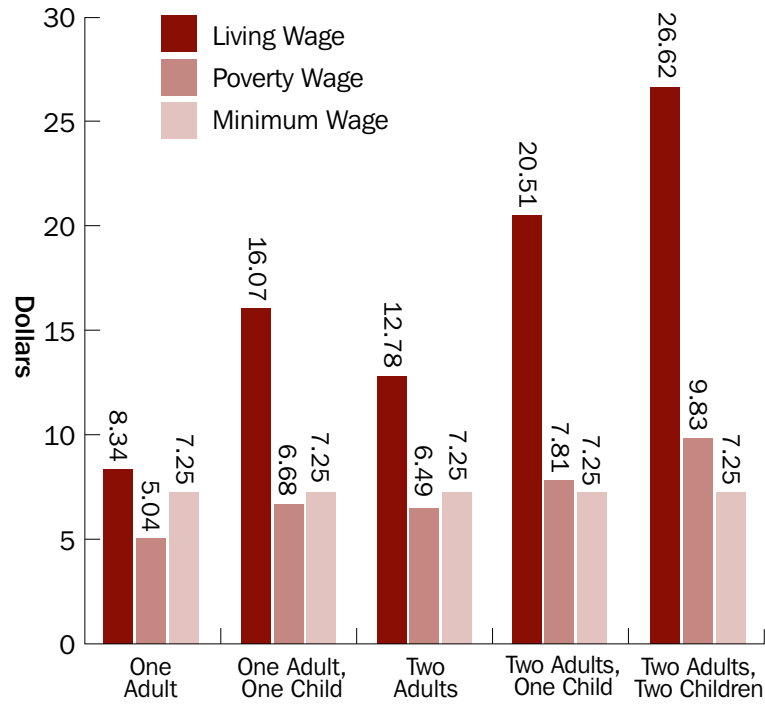
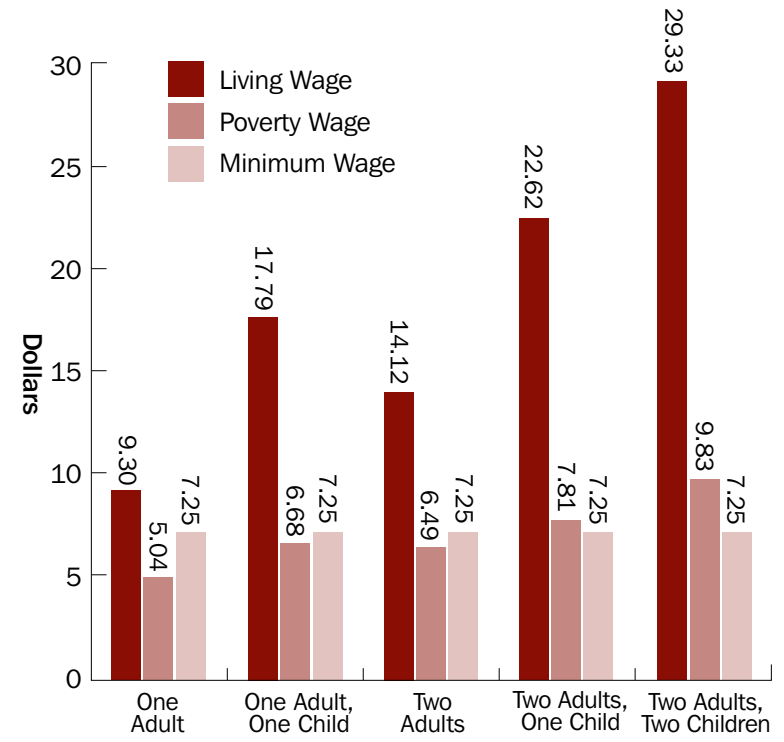


Figure 7. Maricopa County Wages
(Source: Living Wage, 2008)



Excerpts from Grandma's Green:

The key to sustainability in the African American community may simply be in putting it to work to improve quality of life

By George Brooks, Jr., Ph.D.

Since its arrival on this earth, mankind's primary occupation has been to improve its quality of life. Most of the countless innovations and achievements, both good and bad, created over our species' thousands of years of existence have a foundation in this one simple fact. An excellent example of this reality is provided in how African Americans made ingenious use of the resources and tools at hand in order to survive slavery, Jim Crow, and all of related challenges to their progress (Nalebuff and Ayres, 2003; Whitaker, 2005, 2008; Alozie, 2008). To maintain their/our dignity with hope for a better future and higher standard of living, we literally had to "make a way out of no way." Within this history lies the context for us to Flip the Script within the sustainability argument. Consider then the question, what if the goal of Sustainability was changed from its current environmental focus to improving human quality of life?

....The redefinition of Sustainability I propose is not a new concept. It is part of most cultures that our grandmothers knew well and put to good use. Consider what our grandmothers and great grandmothers who lived through the depression did to prosper.... They knew that to survive they had to keep their family and community together, healthy, housed and well fed. They knew how to stretch a dime and turn it into a dollar, plant a garden; reuse, renew, rebuild; and how to do more with less. They knew how to create value. They knew how to sustain. Our grandmothers were green (Brooks, George B. 2008. Grandma was green. Southwest Green magazine. HYPERLINK "[http://www.sw-
www.sw-green.com](http://www.sw-
www.sw-green.com)". 1 (1): 4-5.)

....As did our grandmothers, there are today individuals and agencies that are using these rules to harness the power in sustainability and improve the quality of life within Arizona's African American community. For Example: In November of 2008, Knowledge, Education, Youth and Society (KEYS) launched a garden planting and community center renovation at the KEYS Community Center main site (South Mountain Village, Phoenix). More than 100 youth, residents, master gardeners, and members from local churches attended.

- Starting with a small test garden, neighborhood youth began to learn the concepts of applied sustainability. They were taught how personal responsibility and an eco-friendly strategy could leave a positive footprint on the earth while helping their community and their families at the same time. Some of the vegetables produced were also to go back to the KEYS pantry demonstrating servant leadership. All of these things combined provided the students with the foundations to become the Green Collar workers of tomorrow and to create sustainable value in their communities today.
- The youth participating in this program that were initially very disconnected and uncaring about their neighborhood are now starting to show pride in their work. In addition they are now starting to take the skills learned here back to their homes.

A full version of this essay is available to download at www.stateofblackaz.org.



Training and education for the green job revolution

To help mobilize people out of poverty and prepare them for green jobs, higher-education institutions in Arizona have begun community-oriented education that integrates green concepts and sustainability themes into the curriculum. Curricula are being revised to include problem-based and service learning. Discussions on science, technology, and society are being incorporated in the classroom. Through such programs, instead of just a few leaders and environmentalists talking about the green economy, more people can take the initiative; they can look for educational and training opportunities and find ways to better their quality of life. As environmental lawyer and activist Van Jones said, “We want to build a green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty. We want to create green pathways out of poverty and into great careers for American children. We want this green wave to lift all boats. This country can save the polar bear and people, too” (Jones, 2008, p. 16). The variety and range of green jobs are great and provide opportunities for entry-level positions and significant advancement. People living in low-income neighborhoods are more vulnerable to environmental injustice due to effects of soil,

water and air pollution. According to the Climate of Change Study (Hoerner & Robinson, 2008, p.12), “African Americans are far less responsible for global warming pollution than non-Hispanic Whites. African Americans are responsible for only 9% of carbon dioxide emissions, in contrast to 76% for non-Hispanic Whites.” Though not as responsible for the actions causing the climate change, Blacks/African Americans are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change due to harsher weather patterns, drought, and energy costs in Arizona. One way to combat inequity is through education and awareness of issues about climate change.

The higher-education institutions in Maricopa County are well positioned to prepare students for the imminent green job revolution. Arizona State University’s School of Sustainability (SOS) has the first program in the United States that offers a full-fledged degree in sustainability geared for the 21st century. Arizona State University’s SOS program is bringing about multidisciplinary learning approaches and community engagement; students are exposed to innovative problem solving in sustainability through interconnections between research domains and curriculum. SOS works closely with ASU’s Global Institute of Sustainability (GIOS) to provide

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Van Jones, Environmental Lawyer and Activist

a comprehensive program for students that bridges education, research, and partnership with businesses in the community for internship opportunities. Through offerings of a B.A. or a B.S. degree in sustainability, students learn about factors that determine the sustainability of human institutions, organizations, cultures, and technologies in different environments.

In order to build a knowledge-based workforce and help create a better informed citizenry and leaders of tomorrow, the Maricopa Community Colleges are also taking a leadership role for the green revolution. The Maricopa Community College governing board has adopted a sustainability resolution. In addition, Chandler-Gilbert Community College has incorporated sustainability and global learning into the college’s strategic plans for 2007-2012. The colleges have made a commitment to sustainability and built it into the curriculum as well as into campus operations and service to the

community. The Maricopa Sustainability Initiative strives to educate and inspire students toward making the world more sustainable for future generations. It is an ad hoc group that exchanges ideas regarding learning pedagogy, innovative teaching and best practices. Through articulation pathways, students from Maricopa Community Colleges can effectively transfer to Arizona State University programs.

Arizona State University and seven of the Maricopa Community Colleges have joined national initiatives such as the National Teach-In held on January 30-31, 2008, and February 4-5, 2009. The National Teach-In events are important because they foster discussion in a holistic non-ideological manner among millions of students across the nation. Due to the efforts of the Maricopa Sustainability Initiative at the Maricopa Colleges, thousands of students gathered together to discuss solutions for climate change on diverse topics

such as the intersection of race, ethnicity, and sustainability; and understanding our individual and national carbon footprint; and the future of food and energy. Students engage in a multidisciplinary dialogue with a global perspective on key sustainability issues among classes such as biology, economics, English, history, math, political sciences and, women's studies. Through partnerships among the ten colleges, Maricopa County Community College District has worked to energize students about sustainability.

Local political leaders have been invited to the colleges so that students are able to ask questions and dialogue about public policy, energy, and social issues relating to climate change. Many times legislation is drafted without any input from the community, and views of people of color from low-income neighborhoods are not often sought out. Programs where political leaders are brought into dialogue with students in order to answer hard-hitting questions can bring about positive change in the community. Service-learning programs in higher-education institutions can be used to make people more aware of community issues. Community colleges and the communities they serve are interwoven. For example, the service area of GateWay Community College has a Superfund

site. Discussion about the issues related to industrial pollution of ground water systems in college classes and through service-learning projects makes the education more pertinent and beneficial to the students, thus motivating them to learn. Education can empower students with knowledge and help them become agents of broad-based societal change in the community. There are many community-oriented programs that can help one become educated about sustainability and green jobs.

Green jobs

A political mandate for the green economy is the first step in the creation of green jobs. President Barack Obama has created a mandate for change by putting together a new energy plan (Obama, 2008), which will:

- Provide short-term relief to American families facing pain at the pump;
- Help create five million new jobs by strategically investing \$150 billion over the next 10 years to catalyze private efforts to build a clean energy future;
- Within 10 years, save more oil than we currently import from the Middle East and Venezuela;
- Put one million, mostly American-made, plug-in hybrid cars that can get up to 150 miles per gallon on the road by 2015.

- Ensure 10% of our electricity comes from renewable sources by 2012, and 25% by 2025; and
- Implement an economy-wide cap-and-trade program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050.

President Obama said, "Today we begin our work in earnest of making sure that the world we leave our children is just a little bit better than the world we inhabit today" (Obama, 2008). Higher-education institutions need to prepare themselves for the education and training of students for the five million new jobs that are going to be created according to Obama's energy plan. Students in Arizona will need to be ready for the imminent green job revolution.

According to the Maricopa Community Colleges Workforce Development Office (2008), some of the key industry areas where people can get educated and trained for green jobs are alternative energy generation (solar, wind, geothermal, etc.); automotive production, repair, and conversion related to alternative fuels; food production using organic and/or sustainable techniques; green building, landscaping, and retrofits to increase efficiency and conservation; recycling, composting, and use of recycled materials in new products; hazardous waste reme-

diation; manufacturing related to a wide range of sustainable technologies (alternative energy, alternative transportation, sustainable home products, etc.); parks/open space maintenance and expansion; public transportation; and water and wastewater treatment.

This is a great opportunity for Blacks/African Americans to get trained and educated to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for green jobs. Higher-education institutions need to position themselves to retrain the workforce for green jobs such as retrofitting old buildings. Nearly 40% of energy is wasted through old residential and commercial buildings. There is a need for a trained workforce to retrofit old buildings and also to construct new buildings that are energy efficient with renewable energy systems. Companies that produce renewable energy such as solar, wind, and geo-thermal systems create more green jobs and also help conserve energy and put power back onto the national grid. There are companies such as HDR that link students to internships and job opportunities in sustainability (HDR, 2008). Due to the abundance of sunlight in Arizona, solar companies Solano and Starwood Solar, in partnership with the power company APS, are planning to open two of the largest solar power plants in the nation in 2012 and 2113 respectively.

These solar plants are geared to serve over 143,000 Arizona homes. Such investments in solar-energy industries can triple the number of green jobs in Arizona. The Salt River Project (SRP) operates a 200-kilowatt photovoltaic system at the Agua Fria Generating Station in Phoenix, as well as two 100kW PV systems installed at the Rogers substation in Mesa through the SRP's EarthWise Energy program. Partnerships between companies and higher-education institutions can help in workforce development for green jobs.

Recommendations to Create an Economic Engine through an Educational Pipeline for Green Jobs

- Each college will set up a sustainability task force comprised of community leaders and members from feeder high schools and the universities. The job of the task force is to oversee sustainability programs, set the curricula to foster the needs of the workplace, and ensure that colleges adhere to the Maricopa Sustainability Resolution.
- Each college will partner with community groups such as the U.S. Green Building Council, Sierra Club, Green Chamber of Commerce, and professional associations such as the American Institute of Archi-

itects to create service-learning opportunities for students. This will help create an awareness of community issues and integrate it into the educational experience.

- Each college will partner with institutions such as the Greater Phoenix Black Chamber of Commerce, Greater Phoenix Economic Council, Greater Phoenix Urban League, Opportunities for Industrial Council and various chambers of commerce for mentoring and internship opportunities for Black/African American students.
- Each college will create interdisciplinary faculty teams across the sciences, economics, business, and social sciences to provide opportunities for relevant student-led projects.
- Each college will encourage the Black/African American youth of Arizona to become active in national organizations such as the Hip Hop Caucus, Step It Up, League for Young Voters, Energy Action Coalition, Power Vote and the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative.
- Each college will create a 2+2+2 educational pathway for students. The sustainability education pipeline creates bridges between the last two years of high school with two





years at a community college, and finally with the last two years at a university. Articulation and transfer pathways between the Maricopa Colleges Sustainability programs with ASU's School of Sustainability will enable a smooth transition for students. Such bridge programs are especially useful to attract students into college classrooms and programs that will allow students to transition into green jobs.

- Each college will identify at-risk Black/African American high-school students and provide internship opportunities for them by partnering with industries. The industry then provides scholarships for students to attend higher-education institutions.
- Partner with businesses to have mentoring opportunities, practicum, guest lecturers, etc.

It is important for educators to use a positive approach to the myriad of issues facing today's society, and to focus on solutions. Higher education and training for jobs can enable people of all races to attain economic independence. Education and economic freedom leads to improved quality of life, the ability to afford rising health-care costs and combat pollution problems.

The interdisciplinary nature of

sustainability education enables students to take action in their own lives, get involved in campus culture and bring about change in the community. It is critical to educate students to become well-informed responsible citizens who want to create a positive impact in this world. President Obama's personal example of using education to get out of poverty is inspiring to all people nationally and globally. With a leader such as President Obama, there is hope for all people of all races. In addition, his energy policy and call for green jobs can help the nation at this time of financial crisis. The creation of five million green jobs under President Obama's plan is a mandate for higher-education institutions across the country to train and educate people for green jobs. President Obama's efforts to bring about sweeping social change can help lift the nation from the crisis that it is facing today.

As educators, we have a strong moral responsibility to have discussions on environmental justice and social equity issues as a part of education for every student. This will help pave the path to economic freedom for our students. It is our duty to preserve, protect, and cherish our earth for future generations. A Native American proverb states, "We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors;

we borrow it from our children.” Improving the quality of life for our future generations is critical so that we can live on this earth on a sustainable basis. In addition to educating students for the green economy to attain economic freedom, it is imperative to educate our students about societal issues and inculcate civic responsibilities to prepare them to make informed decisions about local, national, and global issues.

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confronting the brutal facts of the state of black arizona's health:

**implications for comprehensive health education
and HIV/AIDS prevention education**

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The health disparities that exist in the African American community nationally and in the state of Arizona must be conceptualized as a social justice issue as they weaken a community's overall health, ability to sustain itself, and ability to achieve economic independence and prosperity. Consequently, the nation's educational system, economic prosperity, and overall sustainability are inextricably linked. Given that many of the behaviors that African Americans engage in, which place them at a much higher risk for heart and cardiovascular disease, diabetes, HIV/AIDS infection, and sexually transmitted diseases, begin early in life, the most effective way to decrease their risk is through education.

Accordingly, we must ensure that all African American children and youth have access to culturally responsive comprehensive health education prior to the development of unhealthy behaviors and practices. While comprehensive health education is needed at all levels in the African American community, my focus in this essay will be primarily on PK-12 students.

Notwithstanding many calls

(e.g., Blanchett, 2000; Blanchett & Praeter, 2006 ; Pardini, 2002/03; Rodriguez, Young, Renfro, Asencio, & Haffner, 1996; Skripak & Summerfield, 1996) for all students to receive developmentally appropriate comprehensive school health education including HIV/AIDS prevention education, many students are still not consistently educated in this area and the idea of contextual-

izing these issues within the larger context of social justice is even more foreign for some educators. In recent years much attention has been given to the importance of infusing social justice philosophy into education and the professional preparation of educators (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2000; Murrell, 2006). The social justice discussions, however, have primarily centered on preparing educators to teach for social justice with little attention given to comprehensive health education, let alone sexuality and HIV/AIDS prevention education. Surprisingly, despite considerable emphasis having been placed on teaching for social justice over the last decade, rarely has the field of education embraced or even recognized comprehensive school health education including HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education as critical elements in the quest to teaching for social justice. Astonishingly, many African American communities have done little to advocate for comprehensive health education as a component of the larger struggle for social justice. In fact, in some instances, despite startling health disparities and risk behaviors, some in the African American community have been advocates for abstinence-only health-education curricula.

Comprehensive health education is aimed at increasing students' quality of life by preventing some of the most serious health problems and issues associated with youth (Blanchett, 2008). Thus, comprehensive health education is designed to prevent youth from experiencing lifelong consequences associated with their youthful and unhealthy living behaviors including sexual unintentional and intentional injury (i.e., injuries associated with sexual activity) and death; tobacco, alcohol, and other substance use and addiction; sexual risk activities that result in unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections; unhealthy dietary patterns; and lack of physical activity (Frauenknecht, 2003). To ensure that all students do indeed have access to developmentally and culturally appropriate HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education, educators and the public alike must embrace these issues as components of the larger social agenda of teaching for social justice. Advocates must demand for adequate education preparation programs that ready all school personnel to teach all students — including students of color and students with disabilities.

Access to information such as HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality



education that allows one to take control over his or her life and to make informed decisions is a basic component of social justice in a democratic society (Blanchett, 2008). As illustrated above, comprehensive health education encompasses a wide range of content and targets a variety of skills and behaviors; but for the purpose of this essay, my discussion of comprehensive health education will be limited to the HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education components of comprehensive school health education. Also, for the purposes of this essay, social justice is defined as "... a disposition toward recognizing and eradicating all forms of oppression and differential treatment extant in the practices and policies of institutions" (Murrell, 2006, p. 81). The institution that is the focus of this essay is the institutional practice of teacher-preparation programs. In this essay, I will attempt to situate the need to provide HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education to all students including students with disabilities and students of color within the larger context of teaching for social justice. To do this, I will first discuss African Americans health disparities at both the national and state (Arizona) levels and why HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education is particularly important for African

Americans and other students of color, including students with disabilities. Third, I will make the case for providing comprehensive health education as a component of the larger struggle for social justice. Fourth, practice strategies for moving toward a healthier Black Arizona as a component of social justice preparation for all educators will be offered. Lastly, I will provide policy implications of addressing comprehensive health education in the state of Arizona as a social-justice issue.

Taking a Look Behind the Curtains: National and Arizona African American Health Disparities

For decades now, we have seen health disparities in the United States on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, education level, disability, geographic location, and income with some of the most disturbing disparities being associated with African Americans. For example, even though the infant mortality rate in the United States is down considerably, the infant mortality rate for African American infants is more than double that of White babies (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2006). Similarly, African Americans' death rate from heart disease and all combined cancers is 40% and 30%, respectively, higher

Excerpts from Better Than Surviving...Celebrating Life! The Untold Stories of Heroes

By Ngozi Ogbuawa, Misha Williams, Wanda M. Thompson
Center for African American Health Arizona (CAAHAZ, pronounced "cause")

Africans and African Americans have long been a people of stories. Stories have been told by the shaman in the village, the self-appointed historian/elder in the family circle, or the neighborhood orator. Storytelling is an art to be valued and shared. It is the vehicle many of us use to learn and teach our most revered lessons. The CAAHAZ hopes that by sharing vignettes of brave and courageous individuals who triumphed over disease, you will be inspired to take additional measures to ensure your own good health and be more aware of your options. These stories show that we truly are fighters, survivors, and heroes.

MiAsia Pasha (Phoenix, Arizona)

MiAsia Pasha is a vivacious woman with an indomitable spirit. Upon meeting Ms. Pasha, no one would surmise that this glorious vision of beauty and health is HIV positive. MiAsia's first husband, unbeknownst to her, was living on the "down low." He died in 1991, and his partner died in 1986; however, her husband had been sleeping with men since the age of 16! After her husband died, she took an HIV test. It was positive, but she had no symptoms and was quite healthy, so she lived in a state of denial for 10 years.

In 2001, she developed complications after having a tooth pulled. She lost weight, and antibiotics were ineffective. Tests revealed that she had approximately 4 T cells. MiAsia essentially gave up and went back to the Midwest to be with her family and die. By the time she returned home, she had withered to 120 lbs. She refused to take her HIV medication.

MiAsia's best friend motivated her to fight for her life. That Christmas, she said to MiAsia, "God told me there is no room in heaven for you." Her overwhelming love and support pushed MiAsia to fight for her life, change her attitude, eat properly, and take her medications.

Initially, MiAsia wanted to die rather than confront the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. She also had negative experiences with her medical care. One doctor told her to continue taking medication that made her sick. Lacking strength to argue, her family found her a much more compassionate doctor.

In 1991, she was not aware of the impact HIV/AIDS had on the African-American community. Now she is fully aware of the impact and has this to say about the disease:

" HIV has made me aware of my purpose on this earth, to be an advocate for the disease. It has made me aware of the need for advocates within our community. I think people need a role model who is both positive and a survivor that they can look to and say 'she is doing well.' To the African-American community, I would say let go of the stigma and ignorance. HIV is not a death sentence, get tested and LIVE! Dare to be Aware! You only have one body, take care of it!"

A full version of this essay is available to download at www.stateofblackaz.org.

than Whites. What is even more disturbing is the fact that African American men's death rate from prostate cancer is double that of Whites. African American women have a higher breast cancer death rate than White women, African Americans' HIV/AIDS death rate is seven times that of Whites', and the African American death rate from homicide is six times the rate for Whites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "... Of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States, HIV and AIDS have hit African Americans the hardest. The reasons are not directly related to race or ethnicity, but rather to some of the barriers faced by many African Americans" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007) in our society and their continued oppression.

This increased susceptibility for HIV/AIDS is associated with living in poverty, higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases, and the social and cultural stigma associated with negative attitudes, beliefs, and treatment aimed toward African Americans living with HIV or AIDS and/or individuals who are perceived to engage in behaviors that might place them at risk for HIV infection (Centers for Disease Control and Preven-

tion, 2007). As a result of these conditions, African Americans are more likely to experience more illness and health problems. While African Americans make up only 13% of the U.S. population, they account for 49% of all individuals who get HIV and AIDS (CDC, 2007). Additionally, once African Americans contract HIV, they are more likely to not receive proper treatment and to die from an HIV-related illness. Unfortunately, we have seen similar trends in African Americans' death rates when the national data is disaggregated by states, as is the case in Arizona.

The leading causes of death for Black Arizonans mirror the top two leading causes of death for African Americans nationally, and reflects that Blacks are more likely to die from heart and cardiovascular disease followed by cancer. The third leading cause of death for Black Arizonans is accidents, while the third leading cause of deaths nationally for Blacks is stroke. Black Arizonans also have the highest rates of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted disease infection in the state.

Why is HIV/AIDS Prevention and Sexuality Education Important for All Students?

Today's youth have a number of risk factors that increase the likelihood that they experience future

health problems and a decreased quality of life (Blanchett, 2008). Therefore, comprehensive school health education is critical to increasing their very survival. Further, the marginalized social positioning of African Americans and other students of color, as well as that of students with disabilities in our society coupled with specific risk factors and behaviors, underscores the importance of addressing these issues within the framework of social justice. Risk factors and behaviors that place young people at risk include, but are not limited to, substance abuse, family and social violence, sexual activity, and teenage pregnancy (Baker, 2005; Frauenknecht, 2003). Although the percentage of American youth who are sexually active decreased slightly from 54% in 1991 to 45.6% in 2001, a large percentage of youth are still sexually active prior to adulthood, and it appears that many of them may not be receiving the information that they need to make safe and informed decisions (Pardini, 2002). However, only slightly over half of sexually active youth reported using condoms in previous studies of risk behavior (Kann, Warren, Harris, Collins, Williams, Ross, & Kobe, 1996). The findings of these sexual risk behavior studies highlight the need to consistently provide developmen-

tally and culturally appropriate comprehensive health education including HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education to all students as a component of their PK-12 curriculum. Because "comprehensive school health education can help youth obtain the greatest benefits from education and become healthy and productive adults" (Frauenknecht, 2003, p. 2), the Department of Health and Human Services, through its Healthy People 2010 campaign, is trying to increase the proportion of all high schools that provide comprehensive health education to their students (Frauenknecht, 2003). Unfortunately, even with such targeted campaigns, students with disabilities are often not included at all and African American students, though often included, may not be able to fully access the information offered because it lacks cultural relevance for them.

The Case: HIV/AIDS Prevention and Sexuality Education Is A Social Justice Issue

Providing HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education to students with disabilities, African American students, and other students of color, is a social-justice issue because social justice purports to eradicate educational disparities and the



impact of prejudice and discrimination (Blanchett, 2008). Failure to consistently provide HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education to all students privileges those youth who do receive it and better prepares them to participate in all facets of life while at the same time oppressing students who are not consistently provided information (Blanchett, 2008). If information is provided, but is not accessible to students due to their learning characteristics, the cultural disconnect between students and the curriculum and/or between students and teachers further oppresses these populations. For example, while there are not great disparities between the rates at which adolescents are sexually active on the basis of race or ethnicity, as illustrated earlier, there are indeed, great disparities in African American students' risk for HIV/AIDS and their White middle-class peers (Blanchett, 2008). There is also little being done in teacher preparation programs to help educators more effectively teach this population (Blanchett, 2006). Failure to provide students of color with culturally responsive HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education limits their ability to protect themselves from HIV infection, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other health problems while

privileging their White middle-class peers whose cultures and learning styles are indeed reflected in existing curriculum. Also, African American students' continued high rates of sexual activity, sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, and HIV infection may reinforce prejudice and discriminatory perceptions that many Whites have of them. Above all, these practices keep African American and other students of color oppressed.

Similarly, students with disabilities have a long history of being oppressed and marginalized by our society, and unfortunately, African American students are disproportionately identified as having a disability (Blanchett, 2008). For students with disabilities, marginalization has taken on a variety of forms including, but not limited to, denial of their sexuality and sexual rights through involuntary sterilization and denial of their right to participate in all facets of life without needing to be "fixed" (Blanchett, 2000). Although, for the most part, involuntary steriliza-

tion, involuntary institutionalization, and denial of educational rights for students with disabilities have been eradicated, inadequate access to HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education because of discrimination and prejudice concerning their sexuality constitutes further social injustice. Lack of information potentially diminishes these students' quality of life and may make them less able to protect themselves from HIV infection, sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. Moreover, such practices maintain the marginalized position of students with disabilities in our society and allow them to continue to experience further prejudice and discrimination.

Are Educators Prepared to Address the Health Education Needs of Today's Youth?

Many teacher-preparation programs have yet to fully understand and embrace social justice even in its most basic form of preparing candidates to confront and decon-

struct their own privilege, racism, sexism, classism, and biases around issues of sexuality (Ferri & Conner, 2005). To be sure, it is impossible for teachers to address inequities and oppression of any kind in the lives of others without looking internally at their own roles in contributing to and maintaining inequities and oppression. In fact, Sleeter (1996) asserts that teachers who are committed to social justice must adhere to at least four principles of operation. While these principles are applicable to all teachers, she believes they are especially useful to White teachers who may not have ever engaged in social activism or confronted the realities of oppression. According to Sleeter (1996), teachers who teach for social justice must: 1) "Recognize the aspirations oppressed groups have for their children and the barriers, both interpersonal and institutional, that persistently thwart their efforts"; 2) "Seriously learn to work as an ally with the community"; 3) "Advocate for children from these [oppressed] communities in the

“... Of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States, HIV and AIDS have hit African Americans the hardest. The reasons are not directly related to race or ethnicity, but rather to some of the barriers faced by many African Americans.”

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007

broader civic life”; and 4) “Seriously teach children and youth to act politically, to advocate both individually and collectively for themselves and for other marginalized people” (p. 246). If all teacher-preparation programs were committed to these principles, that would be a step in the right direction. Given that most preparation programs do not include issues of sexuality at all, it is reasonable to conclude that even in those rare instances when issues of sexuality are infused into teacher-education curriculum and programs, these issues are not addressed within the larger context of teaching for social justice.

Although educators agree that the most effective way to prevent the spread of HIV infection is to provide comprehensive health education to all students prior to them becoming sexually active, and no later than seventh grade, it appears that teachers might not be equipped to meet this challenge due to their poor preparation in this area (Blanchett, 2008). Even though elementary health education is most commonly provided by regular classroom teachers, only 31 states require elementary teachers to complete health coursework for certification (Stone & Perry, 1990 as cited in Skripak & Summerfield, 1996), and it seems that few teacher-

preparation programs are even addressing this issue in their program curriculum. In their study of 169 teacher-education programs, Rodriguez et al. (1996) found that only 14% required a health education class for all of their pre-service teachers and none of the programs required a sex education class for all pre-service teachers. Additionally, only 61% of programs studied required their health-education certification students to take sexuality courses and only 12% offered courses that even mentioned HIV/AIDS in the class at all (Rodriquez et al., 1996). By the few indicators available, it appears that educators are not prepared to address these issues with any group of students, let alone with African American youth.

Moving Toward a Healthier State of Black Arizona: Practice Recommendations

Building upon Blanchett & Prater (2005) and Blanchett (2008), I propose that classroom teachers and teacher educators must be knowledgeable about eight major areas in the context of teaching sexuality and HIV/AIDS prevention to all students as a component of social justice:

The importance of addressing the HIV/AIDS prevention education needs of all students including

students with disabilities, African Americans, and other students of color as a component of teaching for social justice.

The learning characteristics of all students including those with disabilities and students of color and their particular HIV/AIDS risk factors and behaviors, as well as how disabilities and cultural differences can affect HIV/AIDS prevention instruction.

How issues of race, class, culture, and gender can impact all students, including students' with disabilities sexuality risk behaviors and access to appropriate HIV/AIDS prevention education.

Comfort discussing and addressing issues related to HIV/AIDS prevention such as death and dying, sexuality, disability, and the intersection of sexuality with disability, race, class, and culture.

Familiarity with developmentally and culturally appropriate HIV/AIDS curriculum and instruction for all students.

Expertise in adapting and modifying HIV/AIDS prevention education curricula and instructional materials and strategies for students with varying abilities and

cultural frames of reference.

Skills in forming and maintaining collaborative relationships with professionals, parents, families, and communities essential to educating all students.

Willingness of teacher candidates to deconstruct their own biases and perceptions regarding students' behaviors, risks, and issues of sexuality including students with disabilities, African Americans, and other students of color.

Moving Toward a Healthier State of Black Arizona: Policy Recommendations

To ensure that African American youth are more knowledgeable and better prepared to make lifelong decisions that will move us toward a healthier state of Black Arizona, I propose the following policy recommendations:

Mandatory developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive comprehensive health education including HIV/AIDS prevention education for all PK-12 students including African American students and those with disabilities.

Inclusion of comprehensive health education knowledge, skills,



and disposition standards (such as the one described in the proceeding section) in state and national professional educators' standards for certification and licensure.

Mandatory developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive comprehensive health education including HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education training for all community-based youth educators and service vendors (e.g., after-school programs, Boys and Girls Clubs) to ensure that African Americans and other youth consistently receive recent and accurate information in this area.

The allocation of resources to develop, implement, and evaluate effective developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive comprehensive health education curriculum including HIV/AIDS prevention and sexuality education.

Mandatory healthy meal and wellness programs in all settings including schools that serve African American children and other youth.

The allocation of resources to develop, implement, and evaluate effective developmen-

tally appropriate and culturally responsive community-based wellness programs and activities for African American children and other youth.

In conclusion, if social justice is indeed as Powers & Faden (2006) claim "The Moral Foundation of Public Health and Healthy Policy," it is reasonable to expect that a concerted effort would be made to ensure that those most vulnerable, marginalized, least privileged, and most in need would have access to appropriate health education, services, and resources (Blanchett, 2008). Our African American children and youth, as well as students with disabilities, are some of the most vulnerable in our society so we must develop and implement practices and policies that will ensure their safety and the overall sustainability of the nation as a whole and the African American community in particular. Let us start by improving the health of Black Arizonans. ■

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