

COMMENTARY

Hard questions linger about college sports

Rainier Spencer

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Recent weeks have seen renewed quarreling about the NCAA's Proposition 16, which sets minimum standardized test scores for college sports eligibility. The debate surrounding Proposition 16 is fueled by opponents who argue that standardized tests discriminate against African-American high-school athletes, who, if they don't score high enough will then miss the opportunity to attend college. The cutoff for eligibility is 820 out of a possible 1600 points on the SAT, which is not a very high score at all. This is the combined math and verbal

score.

Whether or not the SAT is an accurate predictor of future college success (the evidence is that it is not), it remains the case that there are a minimum number of skills a student has to have in order to operate effectively in the college environment. Although a very high SAT score does not mean that a student will do well in college, a very low score does say something about the skills that student is able to bring to the table.

But isn't it true that standardized tests are geared to suburban white students, and are therefore culturally biased against Afro-Americans? They may be, although it didn't stop me or

many of the other African-American students at my Brooklyn, N.Y. high school from scoring far higher than 820 on the SAT twenty-five years ago (and we never even heard of test-taking services such as Kaplan).

There is some truth to the claim that standardized tests assume knowledge of a certain amount of cultural material that might not be part of the everyday world of many Afro-American students, but no one lives in an environment where they are directly exposed to everything.

Even acknowledging the disadvantage that African-American students may have in this regard, the fact is that

we have known about the problem with standardized tests for several decades. If African-American students still cannot do well on standardized tests, then there are a lot of educators, many of them Afro-American, who ought to be held responsible.

Several decades is more than enough time to ensure that these students are taught the kind of cultural material that is on the SAT. But rather than preparing these students to take culturally biased tests by doing something progressive like teaching them that particular material, people prefer to do the easy thing and just complain about the tests when what they should be doing instead is

demanding and making sure that students do better on these tests.

Furthermore, only the synonym and antonym portions of the SAT's verbal section are culturally based. The reading comprehension and math portions are not. A solid student who does not know the culturally biased material should still be able to score far higher than 820.

Opponents of Proposition 16 say that Afro-American athletes will be unfairly denied the opportunity to attend college if the SAT cutoff is 820. Yet if a student can manage to score only 700 on the SAT, what kind of academic experience is that student going to have in

college?

It is sad that some people are more concerned about getting low-scoring students onto college sports teams instead of making sure those students have the academic skills to easily get high scores on the SAT.

We don't do these students any favors when we admit them to colleges and then, exploiting their athletic abilities, make it even harder for them to attain a degree.

If anything, college athletes need to be even better prepared academically than regular students since they lose so much time to practices, traveling, and games.

(See Rainier, Page 14)

Killers warnings likely ignored because of their color

John William Templeton

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Stepping out of an office building on San Francisco's Market Street, I heard a Black male teen strolling with a group of friends ask, "Isn't that the Federal Reserve Building? I always wanted to see the Federal Reserve."

This was Duke Ellington—returning-from-the-grave-and-playing-the-A-Train-on-church-bells-kind of music to my ears, so I jumped all into their conversation.

"No, it's a few blocks further down the street," I chimed in. "When you get there, they have a fantastic exhibit on the monetary system and they show you how they store the money for this region."

"Thanks," he said with a smile mixed with a quizzical look, wondering I'm sure who I might be. But the light changed and they crossed the street to follow my directions before he could ask.

The incident made me reflect that either

he, or I, for that matter, would have been viewed as an ominous, dangerous person had we stepped on the campus of Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. That assumes that we would have made it as far as the high school without being stopped by the suburban police.

Mounting evidence demonstrates how widespread the practice of racial profiling is around the country.

Whether a jeans-wearing teen or a corporate executive in a Brooks Brothers suit, your schedule can be disrupted at any time.

Chris Darden, one of the main prosecutors in the O.J. Simpson case, told a police gathering in San Francisco after the court proceedings that even he had been stopped numerous times, even after the celebrated trial.

A full three-quarters of all traffic stops on the New Jersey Turnpike, the main north-

south highway between New York and Philadelphia, are Black or Latino. If you make it to Baltimore, the same ratio applies on I-95 going to Washington. Then, we hit the Mason-Dixon Line.

The business implication of this discrimination is to add a severe degree of uncertainty to such activities as making an appointment, attending a conference or getting to work on time.

A 16-year-old Virginian got three traffic tickets within his first six months of having a driver's license just driving to a suburban school.

The disadvantage presented by "driving while Black," emotional distress and the heightened chance of actually being caught doing something wrong, is enough to justify affirmative action programs. After all, your White competitor doesn't have to worry about being arrested on the way to present a proposal.

While society is being protected against

us "violent Black males," the alleged killers at Columbine High School were actually convicted offenders. They had just completed a diversion program from juvenile court.

One of the apparent reasons for their triggered outrage was the fact that a group of athletes from the school, accused of burglary, had gotten an even lighter sentence.

Although someone sold "weapons of mass destruction" to juveniles, the only person arrested in the first two weeks after the crime was a Black person who falsely claimed to provide bomb-making materials. And the parents of the shooters got the opportunity to decide whether they would talk to the police.

It was similar to the Jon Benet Ramsey case, during which it took almost a year to interview the parents.

Because the media very rarely publicizes White criminals, the Columbine case was a rare look at how difficult it is for a White

(See Templeton, Page 14)

Follow Philadelphia's example, create Freedom Schools

Marian Wright Edelman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

I've written about Freedom Schools, an educational enrichment program of the Black Community Crusade for Children.

They offer summer options to youth ages five-18 who may otherwise be idle, intellectually under challenged, unsupervised, unsafe or unfed.

I want you to know more about them and tell you what is planned for this summer.

Last year, Freedom Schools operated at 32 sites across the country serving more than 2,100 children. This summer, we expect 43 sites will serve over 3,000 children.

Through an activity-based reading curriculum and a superb collection of books,

children spend summer hours with positive images and role models, gain a sense of their own history and culture, and discover and develop their individual identities and talents.

The Children's Defense Fund and the BCCC provide training and support to staff on supervision and management, the reading curriculum, child development, conflict resolution, and leadership development.

The Freedom School program model is unique in that it serves two generations of young people: the students enrolled in the program and the college-aged adults or 'servant-leaders' who staff it. Throughout the summer, college-aged adults act as teachers, role models and mentors and are responsible

for the day-to-day care of the children.

Experienced adults and seasoned veterans serve as sponsors and administrators to the individual programs, providing guidance, leadership and support to the servant-leaders.

In a new expansion of one city's Freedom Summer 1999, the school district of Philadelphia will operate eight Freedom School sites throughout the city serving 700 children.

David Hornbeck, superintendent of Philadelphia's schools, has appointed Kenneth Holdman, director of Service Learning for the school district, to organize and provide oversight for this new collaboration.

Using the highly successful Freedom School

model as a foundation, the school district is coordinating a city-wide youth leadership development initiative that will employ 140 high school students as 'junior servant-leaders,' working alongside 70 college-aged servant-leaders to provide assistance with daily activities, planning, and classroom management.

A certified teacher will be assigned to each site to provide instruction and project assessment.

Children who are enrolled in the program and successfully complete the summer will receive academic credit.

The junior and college-aged servant-leaders serving the sites will receive a stipend for their participation.

Philadelphia's college-aged adults will join others

from across the country at the 1999 Ella Baker Child Policy Training Institute convened at the former Alex Haley Farm in Clinton, Tenn. and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville June 13 thru 20, 1999.

A separate training session will be conducted for the junior servant-leaders May 13-16, 1999 at the farm. Comprehensive training has been designed to ensure that the junior servant-leaders will have an understanding of the Freedom School concept and vision.

This collaborative effort will ensure that three generations of children — school-aged, high school and college-aged — will be safe this summer.

They will have a high-quality summer experience, 210 new servant-leaders

committed to their community and each will emerge under the Philadelphia School District's leadership and guidance.

This Freedom School and High School Youth Leadership Initiative is a city-wide partnership with the Mayor's Children and Families Cabinet, the Department of Human Services, the Private Industry Council, and the School District of Philadelphia.

I would love to see more cities across the country follow this model.

Those interested in Freedom Schools can call Karmen Pinkney, BCCC program associate, 202-662-3501.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.