



**7 Dominant CORE BARRIERS to Achievement  
With Sample Quotes from Student Focus Groups  
For Student Briefing to MLK Legacy Forum  
1-15-07**

**Note:** Data was gathered from 30 focus groups of AAPS high school students during Fall/Winter 2005-06  
\* These themes were represented in all Focus Groups.  
+ These themes were represented in the majority of the Focus Groups  
*Italics – These themes appeared in March focus groups only*

**See Last Page for Student Intro to the 3 Barrier Sections (Personal-School-Community)**

Statements in Bold are used at Briefings.

**I. Barriers – Personal**

A. **\*Negative peer influence** *(All 1-10 are for Presentation)*

- 1. Friends tempt me. (E.AsianFemales, Af.Am.Females)**
- 2. Drugs (ex. weed) and alcohol are a big thing because everyone around me is doing it. (Af.Am.Males-LI, Af.Am.Females-LI)**
- 3. Friends who aren't doing well try to intimidate and stop me from doing what I'm supposed to be doing. (Af.Am.Males)**
- 4. I always have one friend who's like, "Let's do this, let's do that. Let's go drink." (Af.Am.Males-LI, Af.Am.Females-LI)**
- 5. If my friend is on a bad path, it can affect me. (Euro.Am.Females, Af.Am.Males-LI)**
- 6. Peer pressure forces me to do negative things instead of what I know I should do. Sometimes I don't try hard because I am hanging around with friends. (S.Asian/M.E.Males, E. & S. AsianMixedGender, S.AsianFemales, Af.Am.Males)**
- 7. If I don't want to go to class, I find a friend who will skip and I go with her. (Af.Am.Females)**
- 8. To fit with my friends, I sometimes achieve less than my potential. (E.AsianFemales-UMI)**

**9. De-motivation from friends, like calling me “NERD” . . . for working too hard. (E. & S. AsianMixedGender)**

**10. Some friends say, “You already have an ‘A’, why are you working so hard? (Af.Am.Females)**

**B. \*Stereotyping/lack of cultural understanding (All 1- 7 are for Presentation)**

**1. Friends call me “white” because I work hard. If I act and talk a certain way or are nice to other people, I get labeled. (Af.Am.Females, Af.Am.Males)**

**2. Friendship with white friends can dub me “white.” (Af.Am.Females)**

**3. People who don’t do well (in school) call me “white” to make themselves feel better, especially those who are negative. (Af.Am.Females)**

**4. Given internalized oppression, hearing “stupid” over and over makes me “black & stupid.” This influences my schoolwork, attitude, and goals. (Af.Am.Females)**

**5. There are a lot of pressures. Good grades don’t stand for anything. Instead it makes you a nerd. Stereotypes are linked to certain levels of achievement. People with good grades may lack a social life. (Euro.Am.Males)**

**6. When I’m really close with someone but they don’t know I am Arab, then when they find out, they don’t want to be friends anymore. (M.E.MixedGender-MI)**

**7. Honest to God, I have people sitting there debating me whether I am Christian or Muslim. (M.E.MixedGender-MI)**

## **II. Barriers – School** *(Statements in Bold are for Presentation)*

### **A. \*Lack of encouragement and support from teachers, counselors, administrators, ALL STAFF, (contract limitations and limited time during school)**

#### **\*Limited level of relationship between students and staff [DUE TO RACE/ETHNIC DIFFERENCES]**

- 1. Cultural differences create a barrier between my teacher and me.** (S.AsianMales-MI)
- White teachers don't always understand black students. They accuse you of lying. They say black kids don't participate, but black kids sometimes don't know about activities. Teachers don't know how to work with black students. (Af.Am.Females)
- 3. Administrators stereotype and label African American students. This makes school more difficult for us.** (Af.Am.Females)

#### **\*Limited level of relationship between students and staff [DUE TO HOW STAFF RELATES TO STUDENTS]**

- 4. Teachers need to have an individual connection with each student by getting to know their students. A closer connection would make it easier to approach teachers for help.** (Euro.Am.Females)
- There is a lack of trust from adults. (Euro.Am.Males)
- 6. Teachers talk about you with other teachers thus breaking confidentiality. They spread rumors about us, using generalizations.** (Af.Am.Females, Euro.Am.Females, Euro.Am.Males)
- There is a lack of personal attention from school staff. Getting to know kids isn't the first priority. (Euro.Am.Females)

#### **\*Teachers are inaccessible. They don't provide enough help.**

- 8. Teachers teach like everyone is American. They talk fast. I never ask for help and they don't ask me if I need help or if I understand it. I have to do essay questions like everyone else and teachers don't help me. I try to answer them, but it is hard and it makes me give up.** (Hisp.MixedGender-LI)
- 9. It's hard not being able to get one-on-one time with teachers. I try to get one-on-one time, but teachers have a different schedule than me during the 7<sup>th</sup> hour and 2 lunches.** (Euro.Am.Females)
- When teachers don't care or are reluctant to explain more than once, I don't want to ask questions. Teachers think it's not worth the time to repeat the information for us. (Euro.Am.MixedGender-UI, S.AsianMales-MI)

### **+Lack of administrator interest in students**

11. Administrators (principals and counselors) are hard to get along with. They are not very thoughtful. They don't understand what's going on in school. They don't care about individuals. (Euro.Am.Females)

**11.5 Some administrators just dish out discipline, suspend or punish without finding out why or solving the problem. They seem to just want problems to go away.** (Euro.Am Males, Af.Am.Males)

### **Unrealistic expectations by teachers and counselors**

12. Teachers can get students to switch out of the class based on looks, actions, and whether they think you can handle the class.

**13. Teachers set expectations, but don't provide what students need to fulfill them.** (Euro.Am.MixedGender-UI)

### ***Teacher favoritism***

14. When teachers choose favorites, it makes me not want to participate in class. (Euro.Am.Females)

**15. Teachers notice loud and talkative students, but if students are too quiet, teachers won't notice them very often.** (Euro.Am.Females)

### ***Feeling unwanted***

**16. Sometimes I feel scared or stupid or embarrassed to ask the teacher for help.** (E.AsianFemales-UMI, Af.Am.Females)

17. In class I feel like an outcast and uncomfortable to the point where I don't want to speak out. (Af.Am.Females-MI)

**18. Being in AC classes feels weird. White students ... stay away from me. When I need help, I have to go to them, but they get in their own groups and help each other and shun me because I am different.** (Af.Am.Females)

### ***Lack of welcoming classrooms / teachers not engaged in student learning***

**19. There is too much emphasis on grades than actually learning.** (Euro.Am.Females)

### **Limited communication and info from counselors**

- Counselors hard to see/ have too many students/ inaccessible

20. With 560 students for 2 counselors, counselors can't give personal attention to students. We need more counselors. (E. & S. AsianMixedGender, Euro.Am.Females)

21. Counselors don't know their students as well as they need to. (Euro.Am.Females)

**22. It is hard to form relationships with counselors when they are inaccessible, insensitive or uncooperative.** (Euro.Am.Females)

- *Unorganized counselors*

23. Counselors don't make sure we can handle our class load or that we are prepared for an assigned class. (Euro.Am.Females)

24. **We only interact with counselors as (student number x or ) schedule jockeys— just for business and not really for counseling.** (Euro.Am.Males)

**B. \*Lack of understanding & sensitivity for cultural factors (religion, gender, ethnicity, race, youth culture, income, etc.)**

**+Stereotyping and discrimination**

1. **Teachers with prejudice are obstacles to my achievement.** (Euro.Am.Males)

2. **A lot of teachers are scared of black people.** (Af.Am.Females, Af.Am.Males-LI)

3. Staff single out black people and don't understand black families. (Af.Am.Females)

4. **Hall monitors are profiling students. There is a hostile atmosphere in the hallways with hall monitors.** (E. & S.AsianMixedGender)

**+Lack of respect for students from many staff**

5. They treat black kids like inferiors. (Af.Am.Females)

6. White teachers may not assume that you are a good student and say, "There goes another black kid." (Af.Am.Females)

7. A teacher's comments and ignorance of my background lead her to call me "weird." In other words, I was acting outside the bounds of her norms. This is an insult and hurts me especially because I look up to that teacher. Teachers need to be able to deal with people of diverse backgrounds (Af.Am.Females, Af.Am.Females-MI)

8. **Teachers lack respect for students. They also have lower expectations for students of different races.** (S.AsianMales-MI)

**+Lack of respect for youth culture**

9. **Lack of representational inclusion of students and request for their policy input**

a. **There is a lack of collaboration between administrators and students on new school policy.** (Euro.Am.Males, Euro.Am.Females)

b. Principals do not understand the student body. (Euro.Am.Females)

**10. Lack of involvement of youth in own education choices**

- a. **The school environment doesn't support us to OWN our education or be independent with our own learning.** (Euro.Am.Males, Euro.Am.Females)

***Teachers uninformed of challenges faced by immigrant students AND language barriers***

11. Teachers are quick to judge students that look foreign. Teachers will ask, "Do you speak English? Are your parents from out of the country?" We are made to feel stupid and it really hurts us. (E.AsianFemales-UMI)
- a. It is difficult to see the small percentage of South Asians who are low achieving because South Asians are a minority. (S.AsianFemales)
- b. If most students understand English, teachers don't help students who don't know English. Teachers only care about themselves. You can see it in their body language. You can feel it that they don't care. (Hisp.MixedGender-LI, Hisp.MixedGender-MI)
- c. **A friend of mine said his teacher called him stupid once because he didn't understand what the question was. He just didn't understand English that well.** (Hisp.MixedGender-MI)

**E. +Lack of structure and firm standards (counter-productive/ineffective policies)**

***+Weak external structures (easy to skip, tardiness policy, cheating, suspension)***

1. Cheating is out of control because teachers are easily manipulated. (Euro.Am.Females)
2. There is a lack of security structure. Even though there is only one door, it is easy to skip school because nobody cares. (Af.Am.Females)
3. **There is one less person to teach if you skip.** (Af.Am.Females)
4. **Mass blanket decisions are made with poor implementation. Staff doesn't think through the procedures or reasons for policy. There is also a need for more individualized attention.** (Euro.Am.Males)

***Impact of large school population***

5. **Teachers are overwhelmed with lots of students and work.** (Euro.Am.Females)
6. With big classes, the setting of school can be intimidating and it can be hard to make a personal connection between students and new teachers.
7. **There are no study areas in school outside of classrooms.** (Euro.Am.Females)
8. **Standardizing students is far too common.** (Euro.Am.Females)

**Insufficient teacher accountability; district is not holding all staff accountable**

9. **Some teachers lose motivation with job security.** (Euro.Am.Males, Hisp.MixedGender-MI)
10. **Teachers need accountability. Teachers get paid no matter what, which is all many teachers seem to care about.** (Euro.Am.Females, Af.Am.Males-MI)
11. When student-teachers, teachers, or subs don't know about the subject they are teaching or how to explain things, I don't get it and I don't do well. (Euro.Am.MixedGender-LI, Euro.Am.MixedGender-UI)
12. **(Bad teachers,) poor grading techniques, and generally uninspiring teachers are obstacles to my achievement.** (Euro.Am.Males)
13. Grades mean too much. People care more about grades rather than making sure students actually learn the material. (Euro.Am.Females)

### **III. Barriers – Community**

#### **A. \* Lack of information and access to resources and opportunities**

##### **Transportation issues**

- 1. There is a lack of transportation and inadequate means of transportation. When I find transportation, I still have to pay. There is also a lack of bus routes or convenient bus routes.** (Euro.Am.Females, S.Asian/M.E.Males, Euro.Am.Males, Af.Am.Males, Af.Am.Males-MI, Af.Am.Males-LI, Af.Am.MixedGender-UI, Hisp.MixedGender-MI, Af.Am.Females-LI, S.AsianMales-MI, E.AsianFemales-UMI, E.AsianMales, S.Asian/M.E.Females)
- 2. Before I didn't have my own source of transportation, I was not able to do many extracurricular activities.** (Euro.Am.Males)
- 3. I am afraid to use the city bus alone.** (M.E.MixedGender-MI)
- 4. I have no transportation sometimes because I can't drive past certain limits and my dad can't take me somewhere I have to go.** (E.AsianFemales-UMI)
- 5. My parents don't have time to give me rides.** (S.Asian/M.E.Females)

##### **Need money**

- 6. Money and social status are issues.** (Euro.Am.Females, Hisp.MixedGender-MI, Af.Am.Females-LI, Af.Am.Females, S.Asian/M.E.Females)
- 7. Since I'm not rich and things aren't handed to me, I have to work, which makes everything harder.** (Euro.Am.MixedGender-LI)
- 8. I have to provide financially.** (Euro.Am.Males)
- 9. As students, we need \$400-\$500 for driver's education.** (Af.Am.Females)

##### **Library resources & computers & tutors**

- 10. If you don't have access to the Internet at home, you have to compute at school or the public library, but you don't have time to go to the public library and the school library is closed at lunch and after school.** (Transportation to public library is long and difficult.) (M.E.MixedGender-MI, S.Asian/M.E.Males, S.Asian/M.E.Females)
- 11. I need a regular tutor, not one who doesn't know what my teacher is doing, and I don't have money for one.** (Af.Am.Females, S.Asian/M.E.Females)
- 12. We need to have more and better books and new technology that is actually used in society.** (Af.Am.Females-MI)

### **Time issues**

13. **There is not enough time and information. Life is so hectic. No time to relax after school and sports. I lack energy.** (Euro.Am.MixedGender-UI, Af.Am.Males-MI, S.Asian/M.E.Females, Af.Am.Females, Euro.Am.Females)
14. **It's a question of sleep or schoolwork.** (E.AsianFemales, S.AsianFemales, Euro.Am.Males)

### **Need jobs**

15. **I need a job, a source of income but I cannot commit to a job because don't have time for it.** (Euro.Am.Females)
16. It would be easier if there were jobs available for Spanish-speakers. (Hispanic.MixedGender-MI)
17. I would like to have a job, but I don't have time with sports and academics. (Euro.Am.Males)

## **C. \*Stereotyping by adults (stores, police, media, others)**

### ***Low receptivity and respect from adults***

18. **People look at me crazy as if I'm speaking a foreign language. I feel unsafe because of who I am.** (Af.Am.Females, Af.Am.Females-MI)
19. People tell us, "you're lazy, not good enough." They only see our bad side and focus on the negative. Because we're not on our own, adults underestimate us. (Af.Am.Females, Euro.Am.Males)
20. Respect only goes one way. We're always supposed to listen to adults. (Af.Am.Females)
21. **When adults talk down to me and disrespect me, I stop valuing their opinion. I don't care about those adults because they obviously don't care about me.** (M.E.MixedGender-MI, Af.Am.Females-LI)
22. If adults treat me like a little kid, I'm prone to act like one. (Euro.Am.MixedGender-LI)

### ***Low receptivity and respect from media***

23. **The media disproportionately shows that blacks can either be rappers or basketball players.** (Af.Am.Males)
24. **You can't really judge people by their color. And that's what's wrong with our society today. Black people get judged like that.** (Af.Am.Males-LI)