

NEWSPOINTS

Facts & Figures

Separate But Equal?

Less diversity means fewer resources for black students

By Aisha I. Jefferson

A recent study by the Harvard University Civil Rights Project reports that minority students who attend schools with a predominantly minority student body receive an inferior education when compared with minority students in predominantly white schools. This negatively affects their academic performance, the report concludes, and contributes to the decreasing number of blacks who go on to college.

The study, *A Multicultural Society with Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?* looks at patterns of racial enrollment and segregation in American public schools at the national, regional, state, and district levels. It reports that students in an intensely segregated minority population are almost six times more likely to be in a poorer school than those attending a school where 90% or more of the student population is white.

Why is this the case? According to Gary Orfield, professor of education and social policy and co-director of The Civil Rights Project, the causes include an underrepresentation of gifted and advanced courses, inexperienced teachers, lower levels of competition, a less demanding curriculum, and an overrepresentation of remedial courses. "There are some wonderful black elementary schools, and some great teachers in inner cities. There are always some exceptions, but the general pattern is one of pervasive inequality," says Orfield.

Theodore Shaw, associate director and counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, says improving the quality of education requires becoming more visible within the school and its board, working with students on a daily basis, and electing officials who make education a priority. "If we're truly going to make sure no child gets left behind," says Shaw, "then we need to provide resources."