

Directions:

1. Mark your confusion.
2. Show evidence of a close reading. Mark up the text with questions and/or comments.
3. Write a one-page reflection on your own sheet of paper.

In My Opinion: Don't lower the bar on education standards

Leonard Pitts Jr./ *miamiherald.com*, November 24, 2012

I take this one personally. Let me tell you why.

As I recall, I scored 960 on my SAT. This was good enough for second best in my class and many congratulations and backslaps from teachers and administrators. Based on that, I thought I'd done pretty well.

So I'm in college, right? Freshman year, and I get to talking with my roommate, this white guy named Reed, about our SAT scores. Reed's kind of sheepish, finally confessing that he scored "only" about 1200.

That's when I realized I had not done pretty well. I had done pretty well for a student of John C. Fremont High, in the poverty, crime and grime of South Los Angeles. I had done pretty well for a black kid.

As it happens, I started classes at the University of Southern California at 15 years of age, got good grades and came out four years later with my degree. So there was nothing wrong with my brain. I've always suspected my modest SAT score and the fact that I was encouraged to celebrate it said less about me than about the expectations others had of me — and kids like me.

So yes, it touches me in a raw spot, this news that two states — Florida and Virginia — have adopted new education standards under which they would set different goals for students, based on race, ethnicity and disability.

Like many other states, Florida and Virginia requested waivers from the No Child Left Behind Act's unrealistic goal of having every child at grade level in reading and math by 2014. But these states used their waivers to create separate and unequal performance standards for their black, white, Hispanic, Asian and disabled children.

Last month, for example, Florida set a goal of having 86 percent of white kids at or above grade level in math by 2018. For black kids, the goal is 74 percent. Virginia is wrestling with similar standards.

In fairness, both states would want you to know a couple of things. First, that these dissimilar standards reflect the achievement gap, the fact that kids do not start toward the goal from the same place. Black kids may have to cover more ground to reach a lower benchmark because they are starting from further behind. The second thing is that these are interim goals and the ultimate goal remains the same: close the achievement gap and educate every child to her fullest potential.

Understood. But if that's what these standards are, can we talk for a moment about what they feel like? The best analogy I can give you is based in the fact that some coaches and athletic directors have noted a steep decline in the number of white kids going out for basketball. They feel as if they cannot compete with their black classmates. What if we addressed that by lowering the rim for white kids? What if we allowed them four points for each made basket?

Can you imagine how those white kids would feel whenever they took the court? How long would it be before they internalized the lie that there is something about being white that makes you inherently inferior when it comes to hoops, Steve Nash and Dirk Nowitzki notwithstanding?

Indeed, for all the talk about the so-called "reverse racism" of affirmative action, I have long argued that the real problem with it — and the reason it needs an expiration date — is that it might give African-American kids the mistaken idea they carry some inherent deficiency that renders them unable to compete with other kids on an equal footing.

We should be wary of anything, however well-intentioned, however temporary, which conveys that impression to our children. I am proof we have been doing just that for a very long time. And it burns — I tell you this from experience — to realize people have judged you by a lower standard, especially when you had the ability to meet the higher one all along. So this "interim" cannot end soon enough.

Because ultimately, you do not fix education by lowering the bar. You do it by lifting the kids.

Possible WN topics

- Are you supportive of Leonard Pitts' (the journalist of this piece) position on standards reform?
- Reflect on what you have noticed about the expectations people have of you or others based on your race, gender, or ability.
- Choose a passage from the article and respond.