

OPINION

Barriers to College Completion

Struggling students need our support

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In recent years, much attention has been paid to K-12 student performance, and rightly so. The educational foundation our children receive in schools prepares them for life.

We must devote significant resources to ensuring that education is strong and comprehensive. But we must not forget about our students after they leave high school. College graduates are critical to maintaining a successful American economy.

According a report recently released by Public Agenda, a nonpartisan think tank, 2.8 million students enroll in a college or university every year; most of them do not graduate in four years.

In fact, many drop out early in their college careers. These students say that it is often too hard to work and support themselves – and often their families – and go to school at the same time.



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Over a third of the students say that even if they received a grant that helped pay for books and

tuition, returning to and finishing college would tax their already full schedules. This is alarming news, considering that more and more of today's college students are considered 'untraditional' stu-

dents – they have families to support and must work while in school.

Of those who eventually finish school, they are taking longer to graduate. The report notes that only one out of five students who enroll in two-year colleges receive their associate degree, a program that typically takes two years, in three and that only two out of five who enroll in four-year colleges receive their degree within six years.

College graduates provide much needed innovation, analytical reasoning and specialty skills that move our economy forward. Additionally, college graduates earn significantly more money over the course of their lifetime than a high school graduate will, money that will be poured back into the American economy.

Knowing this, the American government has to work to support these already overwhelmed students by building supports into the nation's grant programs for students.

A housing stipend for students who have to pay rent and subsidized day care for those with children are among the benefits would go a long way in making sure fewer students drop out of college because of such conflicts.

Obviously, much can – and needs – to be done. Our lawmakers should view the Public Agenda report as a call to action, taking the disturbing information presented and using it as an impetus to sit down and really think of ways to support our college students.

If a student is motivated, we must do all we can to remove the barriers that stand in their way.

Greg Mathis is a retired District Court Judge and syndicated television show judge.

The Census and Democracy

Accurate count vital for fair share

BY MARC H. MORIAL

As we enter the New Year, we are reminded that on April 1, many of the essential "gifts" of democracy will be determined by our participation in the 2010 Census.

A complete and accurate census count will ensure that your state and community get their fair share of Congressional seats, community services and the distribution of more than \$400 billion in federal funding.

But the undercounting of African Americans in recent years has short-changed hard-pressed communities of color. That is why it is so important for every citizen to participate in the census and for the government to take specific actions to remedy the under-counting of African Americans.

As chair of the 2010 Census Advisory Committee, I recently convened a meeting with Commerce Secretary Gary Locke and a broad coalition of civil rights

leaders in Washington, D.C.

I called the meeting to hear the Department's plans for tackling the issue of African American undercounting and to share our ideas for partnering with the Census Bureau in a coordinated outreach and mobilization campaign to ensure a full count.

Other meeting participants included Benjamin Jealous of the NAACP, Rev. Al Sharpton of the National Action Network, Rev. Jesse Jackson of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., U.S. Rep. Lacy Clay Jr., D-Mo., Melanie Campbell of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, Danny Bakewell of the National Newspapers Publishers Association, John Payton of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and others.



An accurate census count is an essential tool of public policy and citizen empowerment.

As the Black community continues to suffer disproportionately from job losses, foreclosures and the other ravages of the great recession, it is vitally important that we not have a repeat of the 2000 census when about 1.3 million people were over-counted, mostly because of duplicate counts of Whites with multiple homes, while more than 4 million Blacks and Hispanics were never counted.

An accurate census count is an essential tool of public policy and citizen empowerment. It helps determine how many federal dollars are allocated for local schools, hospitals, health care, public transportation, senior centers, job training and a host of other vital community services. It also determines the number of Congressional representatives each state is allowed.

Our coalition recommends a greater emphasis on advertising in the Black community and a stronger partnership with community-based organizations to

get more citizens to fill out their census forms. It should be noted that federal law protects the personal information you share.

The more than 1.2 million African Americans in prisons across the country also represent a built-in undercount. To remedy that problem, we are recommending a change in Census Bureau policy to allow prison inmates to be included in the counts of their hometowns, not where they are being incarcerated.

In our meeting, Secretary Locke acknowledged that "African Americans and other minority communities have been consistently undercounted in past censuses."

I am encouraged by Locke's willingness to work with us to fix the problem and also by the strength of the coalition that will stay focused on this issue right up until Census Day.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.