

OP-ED NOVEMBER 21, 2015 9:56 AM

Are all the smart kids at our daughters' school white?

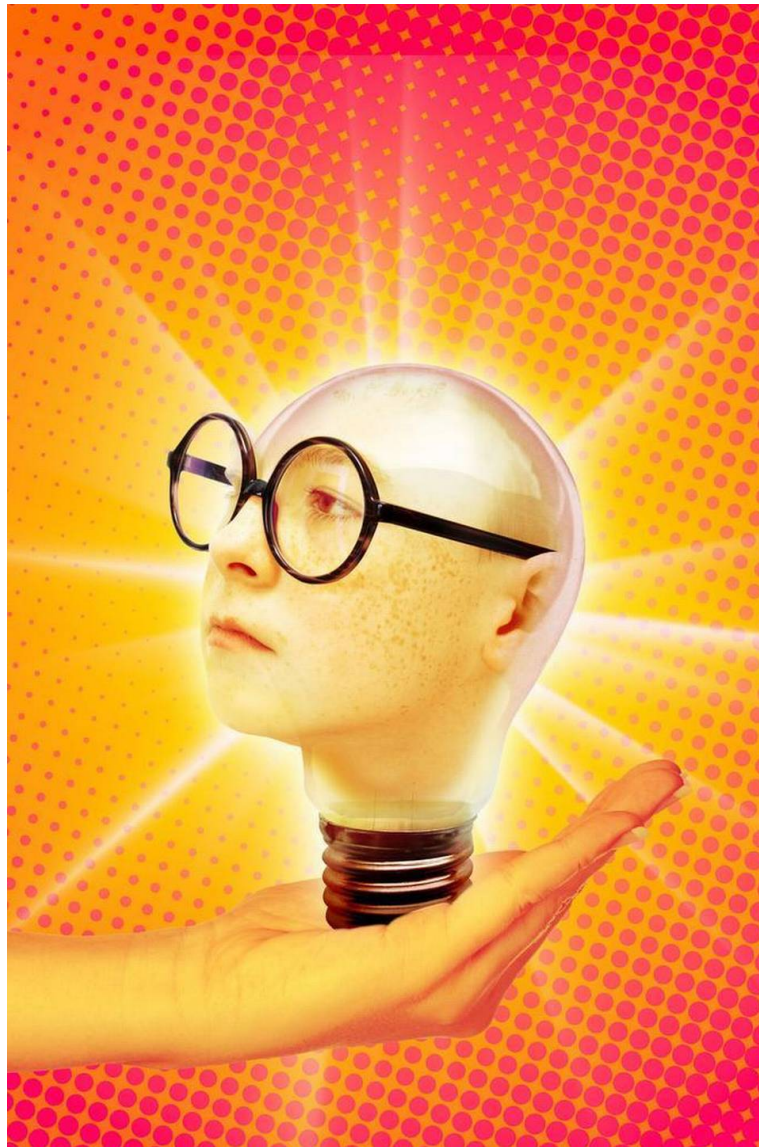
HIGHLIGHTS

Black students shut out of gifted programs

.....

School administrators seem content with status quo

.....



BY ADEYELA BENNETT AND BRADLEY BENNETT

bradleycbennett@gmail.com

We were heartbroken last week when we learned that our twin daughters' teacher sees such little sparkle in the girls' big, wide eyes that her composite score for them was zero on the Creativity and Gifted Characteristics checklists required for them to enter the gifted program at their school.

Perhaps we forgot about America's disdain for black children. How can any child receive a zero in creativity and gifted characteristics?! Children are born with genius and creativity.

After five fruitful years of living, studying and working in the Middle East with people from all over the world, my family excitedly returned to Miami this summer. We researched elementary schools in north Miami-Dade County, then chose the very best one for our 8-year-old daughters to attend. The school is A-rated and has full-time gifted and extended foreign-language programs. To top it off, the school boasts a diverse student population.

We thought, Perfect!

Sadly, that image was shattered on the first day of school. As we entered the third-grade building with our daughters, we couldn't help noticing that most of the students in the Extended Foreign Language classroom are Hispanic or non-Hispanic white. Most of the students in the gifted classrooms are white. And, most of the students in the "regular" classrooms are black.

Students cannot be segregated in public schools in 2015! It's against multiple federal, state and local civil-rights laws.

We immediately sent an email to the Miami-Dade County School Board member for our area. His son, it's worth mentioning, is in the Extended Foreign Language program at the same school. Then, we met with the principal, who said the racial balance of the students in each class is out of his control. He did, however, share that 33 percent of the students at the school are in the gifted program. This is in stark contrast to statistics showing that only a very small percentage of all students in Miami-Dade County schools qualify for gifted programs.

Are the majority of smart kids in the district at this school? And is it purely by coincidence that the vast majority of the gifted students are white? One must wonder.

We asked why very few black students were in these classes.

“I can’t help it that black parents do not apply for the special programs,” the principal lamented. But we both wondered: Shouldn’t an effective school leader proactively work to diversify the pool of students in all programs that his school offers? What efforts has he taken to recruit black students for the gifted and Extended Foreign Language programs? How many black parents have inquired about those programs — and been turned away?

We told him that we definitely want our daughters in one of the special programs, and took steps to get them into one. Sadly, the principal has blocked them from enrolling in both the Gifted and Extended Foreign Language programs. He contends that the Extended Foreign Language program is too advanced for our bright 8-year-old girls (who, by the way, can speak Arabic). May we point out that our eldest daughter — who is now 26 — enrolled in the highly ranked International Studies magnet program at Sunset Elementary at the exact same age? She is now fully literate in Spanish. In fact, she graduated college at age 19 and is now the director of a bilingual garden school.

The principal informed us that there was a long list of students (more than 300 children) waiting to be evaluated by a school-district psychologist in our region. He said we could expedite the gifted-placement process by contracting with a Florida-licensed psychologist to evaluate the girls. A few PTA moms gave us the contact information for the private psychologist who evaluated many of the affluent gifted students at our school, so we hired her to evaluate our twins. This was not a cheap proposition, and would be a financial stretch for most public-school parents — black or white.

The psychologist scored our girls just below the requisite IQ level for Plan A; however, they scored high enough to qualify for the school district’s Plan B criteria, which is intended to increase the number of non-native English speakers and low-income children in the coveted gifted program.

There were two more hurdles to cross for our daughters to qualify for gifted: They had to take an academic achievement test, and their classroom teacher had to fill out the Gifted Characteristics and Creativity checklists. Both of our girls reported that the testing conditions were less than adequate when they took the academic achievement test. One girl was cold, but reported that the test administrator refused to let her go back to the classroom to get her sweater. Our other daughter reported that she asked the test administrator to read the instructions before she started taking the test, but the test administrator refused.

We immediately reported this information to the principal. Despite these poor testing conditions, our daughters still achieved a high score.

Nonetheless, our daughters did not qualify for the program. As we mentioned at the outset, their teacher scored them so low on the Gifted Characteristics and Creativity checklists that the composite score was zero. This was stunning to us, especially in light of the fact that one of our daughters winds down from her homework each night by reading books and writing and illustrating short stories on her own.

Essentially, the school deliberately blocked our daughters from enrolling in the Gifted and Extended Foreign Language programs. It seems that the principal — and perhaps the affluent parents — want the students at this school to remain segregated. Despite multiple requests, the school leader has failed to release exact figures on the racial breakdown of students in the school's various programs, but we know what we saw on the first day of school. Most of the white and Hispanic kids are in the enriched programs for “smart” children, and the black children are relegated to the “regular” program, without ever being tested or otherwise vetted to discover if any qualify for these special programs.

We don't believe that this is the only school where smart black students are being shut out of gifted programs.

Why is the Miami-Dade Public School system content with this discriminatory status quo?

BRADLEY BENNETT IS A FORMER EDITOR FOR THE MIAMI HERALD. ADEYELA BENNETT IS A FORMER CIVIL-RIGHTS COMPLIANCE OFFICER WITH MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS.



MORE OP-ED

YOU MAY LIKE

Sponsored Links by Taboola

Pay Off Credit Cards Years Earlier With A Powerful 2 Step Method
LendingTree