

# Who's Responsible for the Education of Your Child?



By Chris Stewart | June 3, 2015

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“Who is responsible for the education of your child?”

That’s the question I asked the [Black Education Strategy Roundtable](#) (BESR) in Seattle this past weekend. It’s a simple question to answer, right? Kids have parents who put them in schools. Each classroom has a teacher who reports to a principal. Those principals have a superintendent, school board, state education leader and federal overseers.

Clearly someone (or everyone) in that chain is responsible for getting kids to the very low bar of reading and math proficiency.

As I travel the country, the question of who is responsible is inescapable because in so many places the answer to that question is: no one.

That is a problem. The [effects of blame-shifting are devastating](#):

- Only 14 percent of African-American eighth graders score at or above the proficient level.
- Only 54 percent of African Americans graduate from high school.
- On average, African-American 12th grade students read at the same level as white eighth-grade students.
- Only 4 percent of black students finish high school college-ready in their core subjects.
- The majority of African Americans from middle-class families will fall out of the middle class as adults.

Don’t let me bore you with stats. The punch line here is our kids can’t read, write and compute sufficiently to gain jobs and homes. That is a problem if we want strong families, strong communities, and a self-sufficient, free black race.

Good people are working to “reform” America’s defunct school systems. They labor diligently to revitalize something that defies effectiveness at every turn. But too often these smart, gifted and sometimes moneyed people attempt to fix the system for us, without us.

That’s why it’s exciting to see folks like the BESR—educators, parents, civic leaders, elders—come together to answer the question of who is responsible.

## Two Roads Diverged

I offered one caution to them. As black leaders take on the education issue, they encounter two schools of thought.

The first one views our kids as a collection of pathologies and deficiencies stemming from insufficient parenting, low vocabularies, hunger and social trauma. Our kids are accused of lacking motivation, self-control, the ability to persist through challenging intellectual questions. That dominant narrative lowers expectations for all who serve them.

The second school of thought lifts our children up and sees them as endowed with infinite potential and unsurpassable worth. In this view, the intellectual development of children is not seen as fixed by their out-of-school circumstances, but only by the limits of the adult capacity to teach.

We have far too many examples of the [bad school of thought](#), the one that blames failure on student circumstances; and too few of [the empowering kind](#), the one that bolsters a culture of achievement in places where too few educators believe it can be done.

The only hope I have for freeing our children from broken schools is the emergence of parents, teachers and leaders into a movement for better schools. That movement should include demands for strong teaching, high standards, accountability and options that support diverse learning needs.

If we want the best for our kids, we must answer the question of responsibility for ourselves.

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