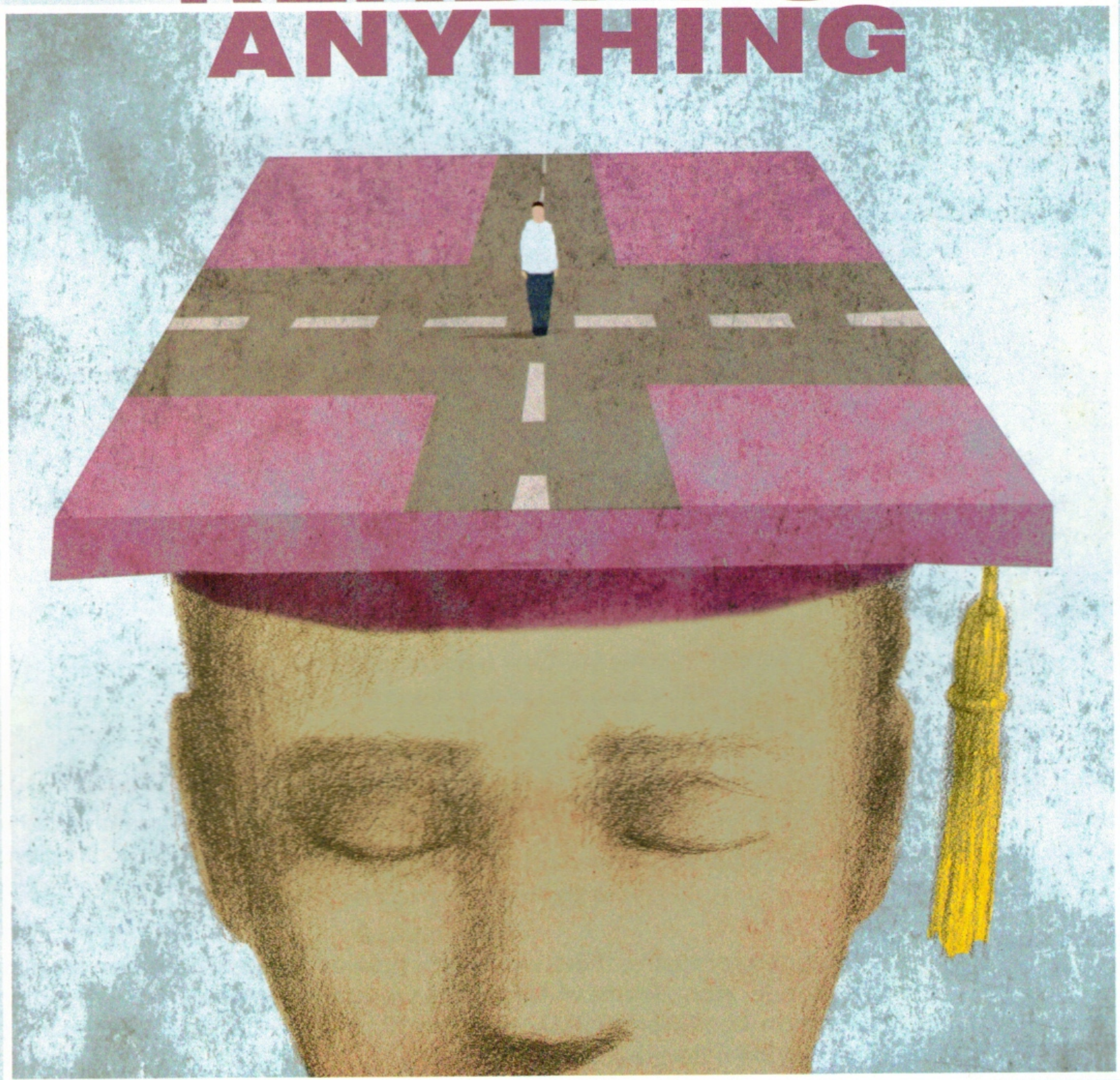


Principal Leadership

**READY FOR
ANYTHING**



**PREPARING STUDENTS TO START—AND FINISH—COLLEGE
ACADEMIC SEMINARS CURE SENIORITIS
PERSONALIZATION AND PURPOSE AT THE MIDDLE LEVEL**

Hold Your Applause

Too many students, particularly Black males, either do not graduate from high school at all or do not graduate ready for postsecondary education.

By Eleanor Renee Rodriguez

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Please hold your applause until the end" has been heard numerous times before the names of graduating seniors are read. The statement is usually followed by a shout of "that's my baby" or the sound of a forbidden noisemaker.

All too often, the applauding comes too soon. More students than ever before are entering community colleges and universities unprepared. Many freshmen need remedial English and math before they are able to register for credit work. The parents and relatives who applauded at a high school graduation are arranging to pay tuition for something that supposedly was already paid for with tax dollars—their share of the free K–12 public education.

All students should have an opportunity to learn and have access to a rigorous and high-quality education. *Yes We Can: The 2010 Schott 50 State Report on Black Males and Education* (Schott Foundation for Education, 2010) presents a state-by-state analysis of the graduation rates of Black males across the United States, and it revealed dismal results. In a nutshell, the report shows that the overall graduation rate (2007–08 cohort) for Black males in the United States was only 47%, and half of the 50 states have graduation rates for Black and White males that are below the national averages. If you have not seen your state's results, take a moment to review them. They will easily refresh your sense of urgency.

The only bright side of that report is that we can assume that the 50% of students who do graduate are potential college students. Parents and educators must prepare them to *stay in college* after they get that far.

The bottom line is that student

readiness will not change until we change the distribution of resources, address equity and access issues, and ensure that there are high-quality teachers for all students. Certainly incremental steps can be taken in the meantime to provide an education for the kinds of students we have, not the kinds of students we used to have.

Challenges

We educators must prepare students for what they will learn next by teaching them how to think. We do not have access to what they will need to know even two years from now because of the rapid pace of technological changes. We do know that the current job market will require more students to participate in postsecondary education for even entry-level positions. Fewer students will be exempt from the experience.

College readiness must be embedded into the curriculum. It must be designed backward—starting from the goal and designing from there. Check to see how far your state is from adopting a curriculum with college readiness indicators embedded in the high school requirements. Check college admissions requirements and your high school graduation requirements for discrepancies or a gap.

We need to know what college readiness looks like and be able to observe it in the classroom. All educators must ask themselves, Have we prepared students well, or are we exacerbating the problem by distributing certificates of attendance and minimum competency instead of high school diplomas?

The challenge is that although students may be the bravest and brightest in their graduating classes, they are not ready to recognize and utilize their

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own talents. Only after they arrive at college do they learn that in terms of expectations, achievement, and access, there is a big gap between high school and college.

Don't let the applauding come too soon.

Steps to Success

Incorporate an "each one teach one" philosophy and practice into your school to monitor individual students' progress in middle level and high school. Encourage every stakeholder to be responsible for students' success. (See National Council, 2007.) Don't wait until a student is accepted into college to determine potential deficits.

Prepare students for what they will need to learn next: teach students to think and to become internally motivated.

Look for ways to share what works. Keep in mind that for a program to work, the people involved

have to work together. Collaboration among staff members, students, parents, the community, and colleges is ideal. Any program that will increase parental engagement is a step in the right direction.

Offer dual enrollment and college credit courses in high school so that students can get a feel for the college culture, system, and practices.

Help teachers identify those things that are enduring—things that are important for life. Then identify those things that students are required to know and be able to do according to state standards. Focus on both sets of components throughout the entire school year.

Teach financial literacy and time management: they are both needed for college. Students should learn to use some type of personal planner before leaving high school.

Use projects, performances, and other active learning to increase depth of

learning. Avoid fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice, and true-false assessments.

Identify student deficits before graduation; use assessments that are built into the junior year at the latest. Some states have early assessment programs to reduce remediation rates for incoming college freshmen. In addition to identifying deficits, base educational opportunities on students' assets with the following four practices:

- **Recognize.** Educate yourself about asset-based learning and look for students' assets and strengths to build on as well as addressing their weaknesses.
- **Acknowledge.** Recognize students' strengths. Use inventories; surveys; and classroom, school, and community observations to help determine and share students' assets.
- **Utilize.** Find a way to use each student's asset in class (i.e., a student who loves basketball or football has an indirect understanding of measurement).
- **Enhance.** Find a way to make each student's assets stronger; help students recognize which habits of mind are their strengths.

For Reflection

Think about a student you know who is currently enrolled at a college or university but who is taking remedial classes. Did that student's high school make efforts to highlight his or her assets? Did the school help the student develop self-reliance, self-confidence, the ability to think and work independently, and the ability to transfer knowledge beyond where it was learned?

Look at your classroom floor plans. Are they teacher-centered, with desks

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