

# What the media are missing in terms of test score results

By Jay Matthews  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Mention Gerald W. Bracey's name in any assemblage of educational pundits and you will often hear an awkward silence. Since his first foray into corrective journalism led to his forced resignation as senior policy analyst at the National Education Association 12 years ago, Bracey has often offended self-appointed experts like me by exposing us to the truth, and he is rarely invited to any of our parties.

This makes Bracey, an associate with the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation and an associate professor of education at George Mason University, testy at times. Some of his e-mails to people he thinks are wrong may use words our mothers told us never to repeat in polite com-

pany. But like a stinging cold shower on a languid summer day, he has invigorated the debate over schools. Just look at what he did in the February issue of the American School Board Journal.

His article, "Simpson's Paradox and Other Statistical Mysteries," exposes a great gap in our coverage of test score results. With great regularity, mainstream newspapers like mine, as well as popular magazines and the big networks, report on the lack of improvement in our public schools. We use words like "stagnant" or "sluggish" or "static" or "flat" to describe the achievement levels as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the federal government's most important and most respected measure of U.S. schools. The

NAEP (rhymes with "tape") reading scores for students aged 9 gained only four points — from 208 to 212 — from 1971 to 1999. Thirteen-year-olds gained only four points and 17-year-olds only three. The change in the average verbal SAT score between 1981 and 2002 is even less impressive. It appears to have gone nowhere. It was 504 in 1981, and 21 years later it was still 504.

Pretty disappointing, huh? But here comes Bracey to explain that we are being deceived by Simpson's Paradox. A statistician named Edward Hugh Simpson came up with this a half century ago. It works on all kinds of phenomena. Bracey defined it for me this way: "Simpson's Paradox occurs when the aggregate group score shows one pattern but subgroups show a

different pattern."

When you break down the NAEP and SAT data into ethnic subgroups, for instance, you find that minorities have improved their averages markedly, which is exactly what our increased spending on schools had been designed to achieve. On the NAEP reading test, for instance, non-Hispanic white 17-year-olds had only a small improvement. They went from 291 points to 295 points, while the overall average went from 285 to 288 points. But African Americans in that same period jumped 26 points, from 238 to 264, and Hispanics increased 19 points, from 252 to 271.

The same thing happened with the SAT. Whites showed a modest increase of 8 points, from 519 in 1981 to 527 in 2002, while blacks were up 19 points, from 412

to 431, Puerto Rican Americans were up 18 points from 437 to 455 and Mexican Americans up 8 points from 438 to 446. Asian Americans

increased 27 points, from 474 to 501.

To the math-challenged among us, this makes no sense.

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## 'Breakfast Brothas' make changes



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Terri Avery (left), WPEG's program manager and The Breakfast Brothas.

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who brings me in to this place and then when he leaves he brings me up. Because now I got my own show.

"BJ is a man of God. You see some people say God lives in them. You see half gods walking around. But BJ is a complete Man of God. He's a true example that God exists through people."

Murphy predicted Larry would grow to be successful in radio years ago.

"I remember when I was an intern here back in 1997 and I

worked from 10 p.m. to 10 a.m.," said Larry. "BJ said to me 'Oh you tired now. You haven't seen anything yet. Because if you keep working like this you're going to make it.'"

"BJ is just like (former WPEG personality) Nate Quick. He is willing to help anyone who wants to help themselves. Even when you don't want to help yourself he will try to help you help yourself."

As the hour wound down Murphy spoke specifically to the remaining cast. "Be uplifting to one another," he said. "Say encouraging words to each other when you come to work every morning at 4:30 a.m. Larry, call me if you need me."

"There's one thing I want

everybody to know about me. All I ever wanted was to be is a good brother."

The morning show is the most covenant and financially rewarding spot in radio. So Larry landing the top spot less than five years after graduating from Johnson C. Smith University is a big accomplishment. But it's not a move Larry is taking lightly.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for myself," he said. "I feel like the first day of school. I'm like a new kid at a new school. I got some big shoes to fill. I got a lot of expectations to live up to."

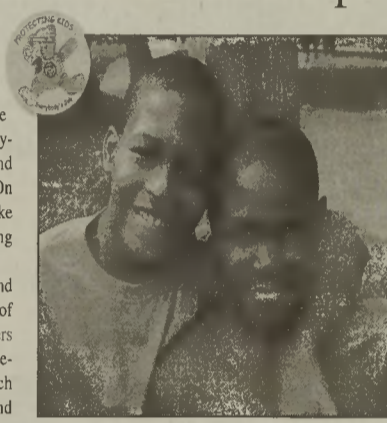
"But this will give me the opportunity to pay back the community for all the things it has done for me. I'm going to bring some freshness and adrenaline to the morning show. It's exciting to have this opportunity. It's like a dream coming true, except I never dreamed of having a morning show. I only wanted to be on radio and maybe have an evening show."

## Brothers celebrate their special talents

Both Taylor, age 12 and his brother Tyquante, age 10 live an active life. They like swimming, skating, playing video games and watching cartoons. On this special day they take time out to just hang together.

Today, we honor and celebrate the lives of these handsome brothers and recognize their special talents, which include drawing and singing. Both Taylor and Tyquante are also avid readers.

Taylor's favorite series of books is Harry Potter and Tyquante's favorite book is Curious George.



Taylor and Tyquante are two of many children waiting to be adopted in Mecklenburg County.

not only in his eye but also in his heart. He is very sweet and lovable."

One thing both boys share in common is their desire for an adoptive family. Taylor and Tyquante live in foster care. They have never lived apart and want to be adopted into the same family. If you are interested in finding out more about these boys or other children awaiting adoption, call Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services at 704-336-KIDS (5437).

"Taylor's most endearing qualities are his smile and his witty behavior," says long-time friend

Christine O'Brien. "Tyquante has a sparkle



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