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## **POINTING FINGERS FALL FLAT IN BRISTOL**

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First, let me thank Roanoke City Public Schools for not sending out a letter blaming black and disabled students for holding back the school system.

Their colleagues in Bristol took that tactless route.

The one-page letter sent out last week by administrators at Bristol's Virginia Middle School and attached to students' report cards didn't exactly endear school officials to the community.

Of course not. The letter was bad form.

Nationally, everyone acknowledges that the achievement gap between black and white students is a worrisome trend. But it's rare for a school division to send out a letter pinning the rap on a particular group of kids. Of Virginia Middle's 547 students last year, 62 were black.

Because the middle school failed to meet the benchmarks under No Child Left Behind, the entire district failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress.

You can probably guess what happened at that school the day after the letter came out: The white students looked at the black students with confusion, according to Khristopher Brooks, the Bristol Herald-Courier reporter who broke the story.

Thanks, Bristol school leaders. You're promoting racial division in your schools.

The white students knew something unfavorable had occurred. Without understanding the nuances of AYP testing groups, subgroups and other data, they knew the black students had something to do with it.

The letter stoked the anger of white and black parents. Deservedly so.

It stated, in part:

"Based on the preliminary data released by the Virginia Department of Education, Bristol Virginia Public Schools did not make AYP for 2007-2008 in reading performance by black students."

It also stated that the middle school "did not make AYP in reading performance by black students and math performance by students with disabilities. All other schools within the division made AYP."

Outraged parents will meet Tuesday to draft a letter formally requesting to discuss the issue with school officials before the Nov. 5 school board meeting.

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They have a number of questions for school officials. Why was the letter sent home? Why was it worded as it was?

What would the middle school staff do to improve the failing students' scores?

My pointed question to the parents are: What are they doing to help raise the test scores?

The letter was bush league, but I won't let parents off the hook. Kids need to arrive in class fed, well-rested and ready to learn.

When that happens, school officials will have one less excuse to send out a boneheaded letter that unnecessarily disparages a group of students.

Read and comment on posts by Shanna Flowers on her blog, In the Flow, at [blogs.roanoke.com/shannaflowers/](http://blogs.roanoke.com/shannaflowers/).

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