

# TODAY'S SUNBEAM

## **It takes a community to bridge an achievement gap**

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The achievement gap between black students and their peers won't be closed in one day or by one teacher. Rather, it will take a community working together to bridge the gap, the theme of a conference held Saturday at Salem Community College in Carneys Point Township.

"Bridging the Gap," a two-hour event sponsored by Calvary Community Development Corp., brought parents, agencies and members of the sports, political, education and religious communities to reach a common goal.

"The schools can't do it alone," said Patricia Braxton, a public school administrator and coordinator of Saturday's event.

In a presentation, Braxton showed how black students fared when compared to whites, Asians and Hispanics. In a year to year comparison, 30 percent of black eighth-graders passed a statewide math test in 2004.

The number was unchanged this year, while the other three groups reported gains. She said the achievement gap, true around the state, is "very much alive and well in Salem County."

She saw Saturday's event not as one time thing, but as the beginning of something permanent in the community.

During the morning, the audience broke off into two groups to discuss what can be done.

Marc Jackson, a professional basketball player for the New Jersey Nets, was the keynote speaker for the day.

At 6 feet 10 inches tall, Jackson did not come to talk about life in the National Basketball Association.

Rather, he spoke of growing up in North Philadelphia without a father.

He stressed the role parents play in bringing up their children, emphasizing the importance of education.

"It starts in the home," Jackson said.

"You do the teaching of right and wrong."

Jackson initially went to college in Virginia, but returned to Philadelphia when his family needed him.

It was up to Jackson to bring up his then 2-month-old brother; he even brought him to school with him at Temple University.

Later in the day, Jackson helped lead a basketball instructional clinic for the youth in attendance.