

## **Achievement gap in schools focus of county group**

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The Calvary Community Development Corporation is making improving the scholastic performance of minority students a priority in the county.

On Saturday, a group of more than 30 men comprised of elected officials, educators, community leaders and fathers met at Salem Community College in an effort to formulate ideas to bridge the gap in student achievement between minority students and their counterparts.

"We know an achievement gap exists and that children of different races with the same ability don't perform as well," said Calvary Corp. President Harvey Saunders. "Blacks and Hispanic students are not achieving at the same level as Caucasian and Asian students, and we're working on developing ways to close that gap."

Saturday's meeting was an offshoot of a previous meeting held in August of 2005. During that meeting, men and women were separated into groups to discuss ways to solve the problem.

"Both groups generated great discussion, but the men's discussion was so energized that we decided to have a follow-up with just the men where the ideas were redefined, re-discussed, and rehashed," said Saunders.

Those in attendance on Saturday were divided into five different groups, each of which was given one particular topic to focus on.

"Each group focused on plans in their infancy, and we don't know what they will develop into until we develop them further," said group facilitator Ronald Braxton.

"We're also working getting the message out through schools at sporting events and extra-curricular activities."

Saunders's group focused on mentoring.

"There are various reasons for the achievement gap, including economic background, parent participation, and peer pressure," said Saunders.

"One of the major difficulties is in getting the parents to participate in the child's education. One of the ideas we came up with was to develop a speaking bureau."

A speaking bureau would consist of a group of African-American and Hispanic community leaders who would travel around the county and hold face-to-face meetings with students.

"We want to showcase black and Hispanic leaders who have achieved success, and show them that there is an alternative to drugs and the streets," said Saunders.