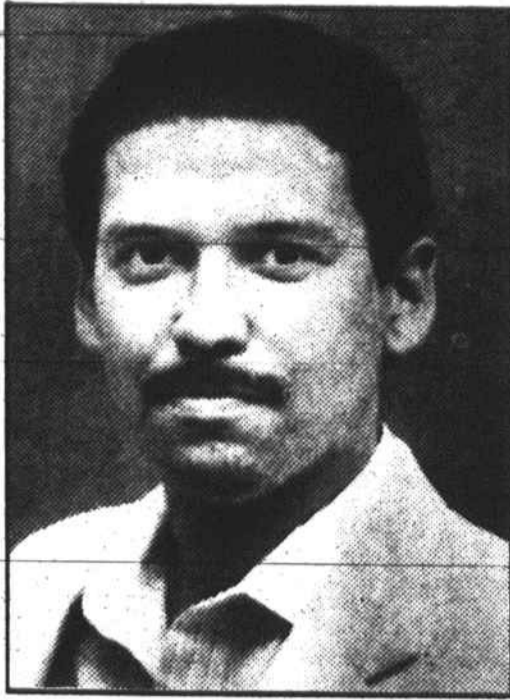


Robinson describes schools of choice as vehicles for change

By TONYA V. SMITH
Chronicle Staff Writer



Vernon Robinson

Opponents to schools of choice say such an institution would prompt resegregation, but educator Vernon L. Robinson said that argument is merely a scare tactic.

Parents should be able to choose the program and school that best suits their children's educational needs, according to the schools of choice concept. There is a bill currently in the state legislature, House Bill 1256, that would permit a parent to place a child in any school system in North Carolina as long as space exists and the change does not bring the schools out of compliance with desegregation guidelines. Local examples of schools of choice are Kimberley Park and Moore Alternative and Petree Optional schools.

Earlier this week, Mr. Robinson - a staunch advocate of schools of choice - made another pitch for the bill at the Southern Regional Strategy Meeting on Choice in Charlotte.

"They think the best way to defeat schools of choice is to scare black people and white people," Mr. Robinson said. "What they are saying is that white people are racists and that, if given the choice, they will put their children in segregated schools. They're saying that black parents are either too dumb or are not informed

two others are planned in Denver and California.

Choice plans are in operation in Minnesota and East Harlem, Mr. Robinson has said, and minorities have shown marked improvements in both systems.

"Choice, coupled with the concept of local school autonomy that strips away administrative crap, gives principals and teachers a set of resources and lets them design programs to meet the unique needs of kids in their care," Mr. Robinson has said. "Such programs have had dramatic results in improving performance on standardized tests, graduation from high school and completion of college."

Giving parents a choice would also increase their involvement in the education process, Mr. Robinson said. He cited the results of an NAACP survey of parents in which they listed the issues most important to them in their children's education. Greater choice, higher numbers of Afro-American faculty and staff members, and equal aspiration levels for black and white children were concerns high on their lists.

"If black parents are given a choice they will choose these things for their students," Mr. Robinson said. "Choice is not an end-in-itself but it is a vehicle to correct a system and an institution that has been ineffective."

enough to make the decision. Both of which are untrue.

"We can count the number of whites who have students at Kimberley Park Alternative School, who made the choice to enroll their children in that school (which is in a predominantly Afro-American community). And even welfare mothers... can make better decisions than those tracking black kids in non-college preparatory classes."

About 300 educators attended the strategy meeting at the Charlotte Radisson Plaza Hotel. The conference was one of five which have been scheduled in cities across the country. Similar events have already been held in East Harlem, N.Y., and Minnesota, and

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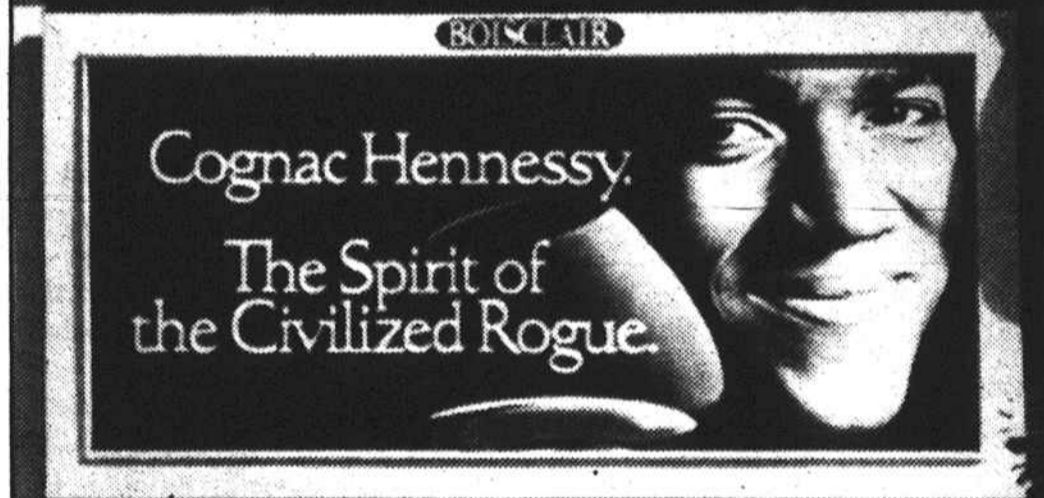
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