

Coble: Clearinghouse could help mend racial fences

By TONYA V. SMITH
Chronicle Staff Writer

A clearinghouse with a mission of identifying resources, volunteers, businesses and involving parents could solve a myriad of problems between the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County school system and the Afro-American community, said superintendent Larry D. Coble.

Dr. Coble's sentiments were echoed by central office personnel, parents and volunteers in the city-county system during a Human Relations/Cultural Diversity Parent Seminar earlier this week. The seminars,

or alienating another group that happens to be white."

Within the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools there are 4,550 employees and a deep tradition that is far beyond the control of any one man, Dr. Coble added.

"Our concern is the children," Ms. Hall responded. "We're not thinking about getting into politics or going to get the entire community together. We are diverse just as the white community is diverse. I don't think we should have to have the white community on our side for us to say what we want in our schools for our children."

"That's right," Dr. Coble inserted,

low income areas. The program was a success - students' grades improved and so did their attendance, said Ms. White.

The national PTA then gave the schools a \$500 grant to sponsor parenting workshops in Fayetteville's project areas. The parents met with PTA officials once a month, and their meetings covered such topics as building self esteem in children, substance abuse and other topics.

"Do you want to know how we got the parents out?" asked the mother of six. "We bought door prizes. For the children we bought socks, puzzles and coloring books. And for the ladies

they shared with us the types of programs they would like to see."

A true volunteer, Ms. White said she serves as an example of what people who really want to volunteer can do.

"People say mothers can't volunteer," she said. "Well I'm a mother with two school-aged children, and I work full time as a teacher's assistant at Alma O. Easom Elementary School."

Dr. Coble suggested that Ms. Mountjoy and other interested parties form a planning committee involving "possibly businesses, possibly volunteers and let the planning committee work on this thing. I believe if there needs to be a budget, the corporate sector would be so ready that they would fund anything, within reason, to help this come about."

There are also several other projects in the works to better respond to the needs of minority children, Dr. Coble said. They include:

- a workshop on Cultural Diversity and Human Rights for counselors on Dec. 11-12 provided by the Division of Desegregation Assistance of the State Department of Public Instruction.

- Geneva Brown, who will become director of minority affairs Jan. 1, and a committee are making plans to increase student motivation and achievement.

- a study committee to analyze the extent of the problem of student failures and retention and to devise alternatives.

- a study committee to make recommendations to the board as to how to improve Scholastic Aptitude Scores and the reasons behind low scores.

- staff is preparing recommendations on how to eliminate tracking by providing more access to higher math levels for all students.

- A new procedure for making sure all students referred to CDC - in-school suspension - receive proper follow-up counseling to prevent those students from being suspended a second time.

- the PTA is working on suggestions to bring PTA meetings to the community and/or provide transportation for parents to schools.



Student Monica Grooms, Superintendent Larry D. Coble and Annie Hairston, one of his assistants, at a Winston-Salem/Forsyth County schools-sponsored parent seminar.

the second such series sponsored by the superintendent-appointed Community Human Relations/Cultural Diversity Committee, began Nov. 30 and ended Wednesday.

Parents concerned with tracking, drop-out prevention, retention and communication with school and administrative personnel were invited to ask questions of central office workers. During the first seminar, all of which were held in one of the city's four public housing projects, about 10 parents were present at the Kimberly Park Community Center.

Parent attendance didn't improve in subsequent seminars despite the efforts of Lee Faye Mack, chair of the CHR/CDC, and Valerie Hall, vice president of the Concerned Mothers of Forsyth County, who went from door-to-door last weekend inviting community residents to the event. The lack of interest by parents prompted Mrs. Mack, who also is president of Concerned Mothers, to ask those involved to evaluate the effectiveness of the seminars.

"We want to look at where we're at and maybe make some decisions on things," Mrs. Mack said. "Maybe this kind of session in certain areas where we're not having a lot of participation needs one-on-one sessions or some type of special outreach to parents in those areas."

"We need to see if these seminars are really worth the while. In order to help parents, children, this community, administrators and staff, we're going to have to be honest."

After a lengthy discussion between school officials and the Concerned Mothers about what programs the local system should offer teachers to make them more racially sensitive, Dr. Coble said he and his staff are often put in a difficult situation when responding to the requests of special interest groups.

"I think it's truly ridiculous to suggest that the schools are immune to the political arena," he said. "Anytime when there appears to be a division - either in the white community or in the black community - it makes it more difficult for us. Let's maybe not deal with the Concerned Mothers. Let's get the black community together as an initial step, then we can respond in a much better way than by alienating another group that's black

"but I have to keep the balance. We've got to create an army of people - like you Minister Mack - to help us do things, get things done. We can do a better job if we can train some of the concerned mothers and others to go out and do those home visitations for us."

"In my judgment, this community has more resources than any other community I've ever lived or worked in, but it's missing two key things. I'm not sure there has been a pervasive social consciousness to help all children in the community. The second missing ingredient is that we have a collage of resources, but there is not a clear agency, so people like you expect the schools or someone to take on and orchestrate some changes."

"If we can get our business partners, parents and volunteers together to serve as a clearinghouse agency which can facilitate this, act as an air traffic control tower to organize and send business partners and volunteers where they're needed."

Such a clearinghouse could be modeled after a project sponsored by a Parent-Teacher's Association in the Fayetteville City Schools, said Judy Mountjoy, a volunteer at Reynolds High School and vice president of the state PTA.

"They do something like this in Fayetteville through the PTA and they got a grant to do it," said Ms. Mountjoy. "It's a situation in which parents from the area teach people in their areas. So we do have a model for this. They have a video on this if we want to have some type of parent involvement council and we can use the (Wake Forest) university club, parents in the area, Winston-Salem State and other volunteers."

Ms. Mountjoy singled out the Wake Forest University Club, a group of women who are/were faculty members at the college or who are married to WFU professors, because it is trying to teach parents how they can better prepare their preschool aged children for kindergarten.

Clarie Y. White, the PTA's project coordinator in Fayetteville, said the schools' program began with an "at-risk" grant from the PTA Southern Region Council in Atlanta. That money enabled the PTA to hire tutors from Fayetteville State University to assist students who lived in the city's

we bought panty hose, bracelets and a number of things they needed. No junk. That was the key. We gave everybody a door prize and each month we grew."

But isn't that paying parents to be interested in their children?

"I say anything you can use to get parents involved you should do it," Ms. White said. "Once we got them to the center, they were interested and

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