

Report

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bers in impossible situations," he said. "It actually incentivizes criminal behavior."

The Justice Center, the state's leading progressive advocacy and research organization, works to eradicate poverty through a variety of avenues, including litigation, community education and advocacy. The Center is a proponent of the "Ban the Box" initiative, which calls on employers to refrain from inquiring about a potential candidate's criminal history until he or she has a finalist for the position. Shaw believes checking the box denoting a criminal history overshadows job seekers' qualifications and hurts their chances of getting an interview where the potential employer could evaluate them fully.

"If you check that box, nobody looks at your quali-

fications, nobody looks at the totality of you as a human being," he stated.

Helping ex-offenders find employment would benefit the whole community, by lowering crime rates and reducing the cost of jailing offenders, Shaw said.

"The best way to make criminal activities unattractive is if people have a stake in the communities they're returning to," said the Portland, Ore.-native. "...We feel like second chances create better opportunities. A lot of these people would take that opportunity to become productive members of society."

City native Frankie Gilliard knows all too well the challenges having a criminal record can present. Gilliard, 43, who completed a four and a half-year incarceration in 1995, says having a criminal record has made it difficult for him to find employment, a critical step towards the self-suffi-

ciency the father of one says he desires.

"I've had doors closed in my face," he said of the job hunting process. "I just wanted to be given a second chance for employment because I myself have goals for my future."

A graduate of Second Harvest Food Bank's Triad Community Kitchen culinary training program, Gilliard has held several jobs since his incarceration but is currently unemployed and has been for over a year. He believes he's been largely overlooked for quality positions because of his record.

"Whatever a person did in his past, it should not affect the employer's judgement on whether or not this person is qualified or eligible for the position," Gilliard declared. "I'm able and capable of fulfilling that position and doing that position better than the next man because of my skills and

what I'm capable of. I just want to be able to get my foot in the door."

Shaw is hopeful the General Assembly will seriously consider the recommendations when the Committee presents them, which will likely be later this year. Although partisan politics have threatened many important pieces of legislation, Shaw believes the Committee's recommendations have something for everyone.

"This is one of those issues where we feel like we could find some common ground between the Left and the Right," he stated. "Nobody wants an unsafe community. Nobody wants recidivism to skyrocket... If legislators can view it through that lens, then we think a lot of stuff will get accomplished this session."

For more information about the NC Justice Center, visit www.ncjustice.org.

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From left: Stedman Graham, Alternative Education Director Gwendolyn Johnson-Green, Urban League President Keith Grandberry and Superintendent Don Martin.

Graham

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work with students until they graduate by providing leadership training, tutoring, mentoring and job development.

For one component of the Institute, Graham will personally lend a hand by providing training to empower both students and parents. He uses a method called "identity education" aimed at helping people find themselves, identify their passions, set goals and achieve them. Identity education, he said, helps students understand how important education and opportunity is in life.

"So why do we have all these (high) drop out rates?" Graham asked last week during a meeting with local school administrators and Winston-Salem Urban League leaders. "Because there's no connection between education and who you are as a human being."

Graham, whose family is from Lake Waccamaw, NC, is probably best-known for his longtime relationship with Oprah Winfrey, but being Winfrey's boyfriend is far from his only claim to fame. An author, educator and speaker, Graham is chairman and CEO of S. Graham & Associates, a management and marketing consulting firm specializing

in corporate and educational markets. He's authored ten books, including two New York Times bestsellers: "You Can Make It Happen: A Nine Step Plan for Success" and "Teens Can Make it Happen: Nine Steps to Success."

The school systems of Philadelphia and Houston have adopted his nine step "Teens Can Make It Happen" program, as have many other schools around the country.

Graham said his nine step programs to help people find their "core" came from his own search for identity. He said most people spend too much time letting outward things define them and not looking inside themselves.

"The goal is you can't let the outside world define you, you have to define yourself," said Graham.

Graham made a presentation about his nine step program last Friday to Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools Superintendent Don Martin, Alternative Education Director Gwendolyn Johnson-Green, Winston-Salem Urban League President Keith Grandberry and others.

Martin said Graham's approach made "complete sense."

"Motivation is a major issue," said the superintendent.

Though the Institute will

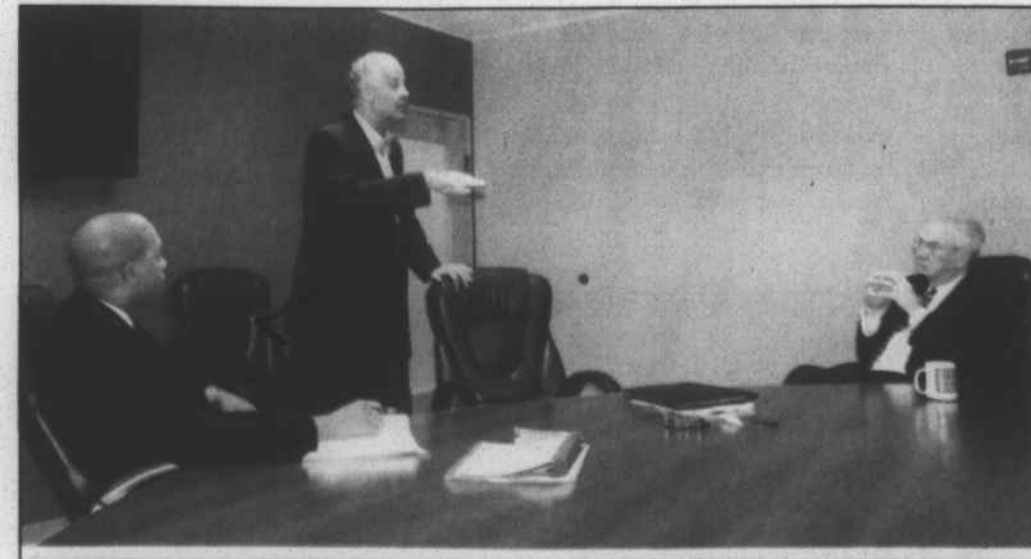
start with only 20 students, the Urban League hopes to eventually expand it to all students in alternative school programs. The main goal of the Institute is to get students to graduate, which is an uphill battle. Those who enter alternative schools like Griffith in ninth grade have only a 10 percent chance of graduating, according to school system statistics. According to Johnson-Green, the Urban League's program is the first to tackle this issue.

"This is one of the most important initiatives that we can undertake," said Grandberry.

Though Graham will teach the initial leadership development sessions with students and parents, he'll be training others involved in the Institute to teach his nine steps. The Institute will also offer one-on-one mentoring, job development skills and college visits. Students will also have skill assessments performed and have access to certification programs at Forsyth Technical Community College. Grandberry hopes the Institute will encourage students to not just graduate from high school, but to also get the necessary higher education to land a good career.

"These kids are going want to be involved in it, they're going to want to learn...because it's a pro-

gram that really cares about the student," said Grandberry.



Stedman Graham explains his nine-step process to Superintendent Don Martin (far right) as UL President Keith Grandberry listens.



Our budget's on the wrong track.
We need your input!

Winston-Salem is facing growing budget gaps over the next five years. The Citizens' Budget Advisory Council is holding community-wide meetings to gather citizens' thoughts on what to do about it.

- Tell us what city services should or should not be reduced.
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| <p>Monday, Jan. 24, 6 - 7:30 p.m.
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Old Town Neighborhood Recreation Center
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| <p>Tuesday, Jan. 25, 6 - 7:30 p.m.
Georgia E. Taylor Neighborhood Recreation Center
1471 W. Clemmons Road</p> | <p>Thursday, Jan. 27, 6 - 7:30 p.m.
Sedge Garden Neighborhood Recreation Center
401 Robbins Road</p> |

Attend a meeting and give us your opinion!

