

N.C.'s gay marriage ban to be challenged

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the ACLU of North Carolina Legal Foundation (ACLU-NCLF) announced plans June 9 to challenge North Carolina's ban on marriage for same-sex couples by amending a federal lawsuit filed against the state last year on behalf of six same-sex couples and their children that challenges North Carolina's ban on second parent adoptions. The announcement comes on the same day that the ACLU has filed a federal challenge to Pennsylvania's marriage ban and the ACLU and Lambda Legal have announced a challenge to Virginia's marriage ban.

The ACLU is asking North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper to agree to allow an additional claim challenging the state's ban on marriage for same-sex couples to be added to Fisher-Borne v. Smith, a lawsuit filed last year in Greensboro in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of North Carolina that challenges the state's ban on second parent adoption, a process by which one partner in an unmarried gay or straight couple adopts the other partner's biological or adoptive child. If the Attorney General's office does not agree to the addition of the new claim, the ACLU will petition the court to allow the claim to be added.

The organizations say that marriage would help same-sex couples protect their children by ensuring that all children in the family are covered if one

partner lacks health insurance, that families will stay together and children will not be torn from the only home they've known if something should happen to the biological or legally recognized parent, and that either parent will be allowed to make medical decisions or be able to be by their child's bedside if one of their children is hospitalized.



Brock



Cooper

"The past year has witnessed a sea change in the quest to secure the freedom to marry for all committed couples across the nation and in North Carolina," said Chris Brock, legal director of the ACLU-NCLF. "From President Obama and Senator Hagan's endorsements to the recent landmark Supreme Court decision declaring the so-called Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional, support for the freedom to marry has moved forward by leaps and bounds. Conversations are happening at dinner tables throughout our state, with more and more North Carolinians agreeing that the rights and responsibilities that come with marriage should not be denied to loving and committed couples simply because they are gay or lesbian. Our announcement today is the next step in that conversation."

The move to amend the North Carolina lawsuit comes less than two weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark ruling in another ACLU case, United States v. Windsor, which found that the federal Defense of Marriage Act defining marriage as between one man and one woman was unconstitutional.



Photos by Layla Gams
Left: Cherie Staples leads BELL scholars in a science exercise.

BELL

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Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools system that are devoting the bulk of their summer break to learning and enrichment as part of the BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) summer learning program. The program, presented jointly by the school system and BELL, a Baltimore, Md.-based nonprofit, is offered free of charge to students — or scholars as the program refers to them — who need a little extra support to reach their academic goals. Open to scholars in grades K-8, the program, which was offered in Forsyth County for the first time last year, fuses academic programming with field trips and enrichment opportunities to combat summer learning loss.

"With the BELL program, they are very much into teaching the whole child and making sure that they have everything that they need to be successful in life, and I think the enrichment activities that we have kind of reinforce that," commented Rita Moore McPhatter, an assistant principal at Caleb's Creek Elementary and the program manager at Cash Elementary, one of the county's six BELL sites. "...When they've actually been there and experienced that, I think it just makes learning a whole lot better for them."

McPhatter, who helmed the program at Hall-Woodward Elementary last year, won national recognition for her leadership in the program. The Bennett College alumna was one of three recipients of the program's 2012 Peterkin Education Leadership Award. The longtime educator said she believes wholeheartedly in BELL's approach to supporting children and education.

"What BELL stands for in terms of helping children achieve all they can achieve is wonderful," she remarked. "...I enjoy the experience of being able to interact with the children and spend time with



Below: Rita Moore McPhatter won an award for her leadership with the BELL program last summer.

them and talk to the families and help them grow, because that's our ultimate goal. We want them to be successful."

Scholars in the BELL program tackle academics such as reading and math in the morning, and participate in a variety of enrichment opportunities — from Legos and robotics, to art, Spanish and healthy living — in the afternoon. Drama teacher Gina Hill led her students in grades 3-5 in an animated game of charades at the school on Tuesday. Hill, who teaches reading and writing to fifth graders at Caleb Creek during the year, said she couldn't wait to come back to BELL.

"Last year, I was blessed to be a part of this program and it was such a great program, the kids learned so much," said the UNC Greensboro alumna. "...I just think it's the best program I've ever been involved with or seen because of the positivity that it has in their values and beliefs."

Cash, which is home to 196 children in grades K-5 this summer, also offers a daily Academic Support Group, where enrichment teachers work with students who need additional help in a given subject. Each week is punctuated with a field trip.

For seven year-old Nydia Coppola, the highlight of the day Tuesday was drama class. She and

her classmates in Kayla Lawson's K-2 drama class acted out scenes from "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak. Nydia, a rising second grader at Sedge Garden Elementary, got to play the main character, Max.

"I had to try to be like 'unscareful,'" related Nydia, whose twin sister Carolina is also in the program this year. "It's really good because you actually get to do everything that's in the story. I like ... that we get to learn some new things and we also get to play it out."

Akhi Freeman, a rising fifth grader at Walkertown Elementary, gave the BELL program in its entirety high marks.

"It's really good. I like it. I like how the teacher teaches you and I like how we can go on field trips every week," commented the 10 year-old. "I like everything about it."

Akhi happily reported that his math skills have also improved as a result of the program.

"They help me with math because I was having a little hard time with that," he said. "...Today, I was able to do my first really, really hard math problem. It makes me feel great and happy."

Though some children might lament the prospect of spending the summer indoors learning, Akhi said he doesn't mind at all.

"I'm okay with coming here because it's helping me learn," he remarked. "It's like a camp to me."

For more information about BELL, visit www.experiencebell.org.



Akhi Freeman



Nydia Coppola

The Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership
Invites you to two important PUBLIC meetings for a Proposed

Downtown Business Improvement District

Wednesday, July 17th at 6pm

or

Thursday, July 18th at 2pm

At Aperture Cinema located at 311 W. Fourth Street

There will be a presentation by the
Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership, Inc. followed by
Questions and Answers

NO RSVP Required - both meetings are going to be the same format with the same presentation



For more information contact The Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership (336) 354-1500 www.dwsp.org