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DURHAM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL CHAIN AWARDEES - From left to right are: Charles Thurston, Mrs. Carolyn Thurston, Mrs.

Lorraine Stith, Warren Arrinton, Ms. Crystal Leftdwise; and Algin Holloway. See story and pictures on page 7. The Chain honored business people recently for their continued successes.

US teachers nowhere as diverse as their students

By Jesse J. Holland

WASHINGTON (AP) - U.S. teachers are nowhere near as diverse as their students. Almost half the students attending public schools are minorities, yet fewer than 1 in 5 of their teachers is nonwhite.

New studies from the Center for American Progress and the National Education Association are calling attention to this "diversity gap" at elementary and secondary schools in the United States. The groups want more to be done to help teachers more accurately mirror the students in their classrooms.

Teachers are always pushing their students to excel, said Kevin Gilbert, coordinator of teacher leadership and special projects for the Clinton Public School District in Clinton, Mississippi.

It becomes easier for students to believe "when they can look and see someone who looks just like them, that they can relate to," said Gilbert, a member of the NEA's executive committee. "Nothing can help motivate our students more than to see success standing right in front of them."

More than minority students would benefit from a more diverse teacher corps, said Ulrich Boser, the author of the center's report.

"Even in a place like North Dakota, where the students aren't particularly diverse relative to the rest of the country, it's important for our social fabric, for our sense as a nation, that students are engaging with people who think, talk and act differently than them but can also be just as effective at raising student achievement in the classroom," he said.

There were about 3.3 million teachers in American public elementary and secondary schools in 2012, according to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics. It said 82 percent were white, 8 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were black and about 2 percent were Asian.

Students are a different story. In 1993, minority students made up 31 percent of the public school population; it was 41 percent in 2003.

The Center for American Progress' most recent statistics show 48 percent of the students in public schools are nonwhite - 23 percent Hispanic, 16 percent black and 5 percent Asian - and that percentage is expected to continue to increase.

"We project that this fall, for the first time in American history, the majority of public school students in America will be nonwhite," Education Secretary Arne Duncan said last week.

Hispanics have passed blacks as the largest minority group of teachers, just as there are more Hispanic students than African-Americans in the public school system. This tracks with the increases in the number of Hispanics in the United States, with Latinos the largest minority group in the country and the fastest-growing.

Jan Alderson, a science teacher at Shawnee Mission South High School in Overland Park, Kansas, saw the changes at her school.

"We have very few teachers of minority background yet we've gone to about 40 percent minority population," said Alderson, who was inducted into the National Teacher Hall of Fame this past week. "It's a beautiful blending, it's just teachers who don't have that cultural background, I think just that there are more issues."

Teaching used to be one of the only professions African-American college graduates could aspire to and make decent money, said LaRuth Gray, who is scholar-in-residence at the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at New York University.

But as the county integrated and other professions opened their ranks, education lost its "cachet" and fewer African-American students thought about becoming teachers, she said.

"It's not seen as the ideal careers to have, and so therefore our youngsters, our black children tend to move in other directions," said Gray, who also serves as a government liaison for the National Alliance of Black School Educators.

It will take political will to change those numbers, advocates say. Most states already have programs and policies intended to increase the number of minority teachers, "but the yield of new teachers of color is disappointing," the NEA report said.

Condoleezza Rice backs out of Rutgers commencement

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (AP) - Former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has backed out of delivering the commencement address at Rutgers University following protests by some faculty and students over her role in the Iraq War.

Rice said in a statement May 3 that she informed Rutgers President Robert Barchi that she was declining the invitation to speak at the graduation.

"Commencement should be a time of joyous celebration for the graduates and their families," Rice said. "Rutgers' invitation to me to speak has become a distraction for the university community at this very special time."

The school's board of governors had voted to pay \$35,000 to the former secretary of state under President George W. Bush and national security adviser for her appearance at the May 18 ceremony. Rice is now a professor of political science at Stanford University.

But some students and faculty at New Jersey's flagship university had protested, staging sit-ins and saying Rice bore some responsibility for the Iraq War as a member of the Bush administration. Barchi and other school leaders had resisted the calls to disinvite Rice, saying the university welcomes open discourse on controversial topics.

The news of Rice's decision came a day after Barchi spoke with students protesting Rice's planned speech and told them the board of governors would not rescind its invitation.

In her statement, Rice defended her record, saying that she was honored to serve her country and that she had "defended America's belief in free speech and the exchange of ideas." But she said she didn't want to detract from the spirit of the commencement ceremony.

Barchi said Saturday in a statement that Rutgers stands "fully behind the invitation" it issued to Rice. But he said school officials respect her decision.

"Now is the time to focus on our commencement, a day to celebrate the accomplishments and promising futures of our graduates," Barchi said.

The university said it would provide details in the coming days on who would replace Rice as commencement speaker.

Military to review hair rules after complaints

By Jesse J. Holland

WASHINGTON (AP) - The military is reviewing its new regulations involving soldiers' appearance following criticism that the hair requirement is racially biased.

Pentagon spokesman Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby says Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel will make whatever adjustments to the policy are appropriate after the review.

The Army earlier this month issued new appearance standards that ban most twists, dreadlocks and large cornrows. Those are all styles used predominantly by African-American women with natural hairstyles. Sixteen female members of the Congressional Black Caucus wrote to Hagel calling the changes "discriminatory rules targeting soldiers who are women of color."

Kirby says Hagel will have the deputy secretary of defense "work with the service secretaries and military chiefs to review their respective policies" over the next three months.

Crews work to preserve northwest Ala. cemeteries

FLORENCE, Ala. (AP) - Survey crews in northwest Alabama are working to define boundaries of the historic Gen. John Coffee Cemetery and install markers at an African-American burial ground that's home to about 130 unmarked graves.

Chairman of the Florence Historical Board Robert Steen tells the Times Daily the graves will be fitted with markers for the first time, although the names of the people buried there are mostly unknown.

The newspaper reports the cemeteries are in a wooded area that was part of Gen. John Coffee's plantation in the 1800s and came into focus when Wal-Mart planned to build a store near the site.

The company has donated \$25,000 for the maintenance and upkeep of the cemeteries and some of it is being used to help preserve the area.