

'Public schools have failed . . .'

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Pro-choice

There are worse things than being pushy about educational reform. Although he hasn't yet filed for office, Robinson is clearly campaigning. An assistant professor of business at Winston-Salem State, he is the only Republican who has come forward to challenge Democrat incumbent Bob Etheridge for the state's top education office.

From the Democratic side, Etheridge is challenged by High Point school superintendent Dr. Owen Phillips, who charges that North Carolina spends too much on bureaucracy and too little in the classroom.

As for Robinson, his slogan is "resources versus reform." He likes to ask parents pointed questions: "Do you think a bigger school budget will bring African-American history into the classroom? Would you like to receive a \$3500 voucher to use towards your child's education?"

He is pro-choice, but not when it comes to abortion. The choice he favors is a parent's freedom to choose which school his or her child will attend. Give low income parents a voucher or a credit, he says, and let them use it to pay for their child's education at any private or public school.

"We will know very soon which schools are good and bad, and the bad ones will be shut down for lack of students, and the bad teachers will be out of a job," says Robinson. "Rich parents aren't the only ones who should be able to choose private school. This would give the poor, black parent the power to kick a teacher's butt out of the school if the teacher is not doing a good job."

No more discipline problems?

Schools of choice would also solve the discipline problem, according to Robinson. Schools with disruptive students will simply shut down for lack of attendance. "No one's going to send their kids to disruptive schools. Discipline won't be a problem one day beyond the

day we let parents choose schools." School psychologist Dr. Frances Barger begs to differ. "A child's behavior problems will not disappear just because parents are allowed to choose schools, she says. "What about parents who are not involved with the school? We have open houses, and at some schools no parents show up."

Robinson's concept for schools of choice is based on the way private schools operate, but private schools have a built-in advantage over public schools, says associate superintendent Palmer Friende.

"Private schools have a prerogative for accepting and rejecting who they admit and who they don't admit into their program. Public schools don't have that choice. When a person elects to attend a private school, they are initiating that process and inherit a greater responsibility to support that school. I notice that rather consistently, the idea that I am seeking something and it is being granted. Society is wrought with problems, and they invariably walk through the portals of school, and public schools have to deal with that."

Church-run schools

Robinson has a solution to the lack of good schools in the black community.

"What institution is already operating in the black neighborhood and fully equipped to teach children?" he asks. "The black church has always set high standards for black children, and it is the best place to educate them."

"The left" needs to get past its concerns about the separation of church and state, he says. "If the left, the teacher's unions, and those who make their money off the poor would be honest, they would let the poor have the right to choose schools."

Guidance counselors not needed?

Schools don't need more money says Robinson, they need less bureaucracy. "We have 30 percent more teachers than we have

classrooms. We don't need guidance counselors in elementary schools, and all these extra people hanging around."

Dr. Barger disagrees. "We have a guidance counselor in every school, and they are very valuable. They are the right hand person to principals and assistant principals. They work with kids in groups, in classrooms, individually, and they spend an enormous amount of time counseling with kids, in play therapy as well as in very intense work with them."

Palmer Friende also questions Robinson's contention that guidance counselors are not needed in elementary schools.

"Given the problems that kids come to school with, the counselors are doing a great service. If these problems were not addressed at an early stage, they would intensify and further inhibit academic-oriented progress. It's hard to say what condition they'd be in later on."

Change certification standards

One of Robinson's less controversial ideas is to alter state certifi-

cation standards so that local citizens can volunteer their time in schools teaching subjects in their field of experience. An entrepreneur could teach a business course, a scientist could teach science, a writer could teach a writing course.

"This is being done now with coaches, most of whom are not certified teachers," he says. "If the athletic program is that important, isn't the academic program?"

To date, Robinson has raised about \$25,000 towards the \$220,000 he needs to run a statewide campaign, and it's not all Republican money.

"There are prominent Democrats who support reform who are supporting my campaign," says Robinson.

"There are also Republicans in office who have done nothing who should be defeated."

In a press statement he released in December, Robinson is described as "a brilliant education policy strategist...the education bureaucracy's worst nightmare come alive, walking around in a 6'4" frame."

He hopes to get the chance to prove it.

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Black History

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ican Experience" and is published by the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Columbus, Ohio. The center is selling the book to the general public for \$9.95 each.

McDonald's business partners program provided each elementary school with a set of the McDonald's Black Inventors books. Each

set includes seven booklets on black inventors and how their achievements have had an impact on our lives today.

If you would like to ensure that these resources are made available to your child, call the school and ask to speak to the principal or the curriculum coordinator.

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