

OPINION

Winston-Salem Chronicle

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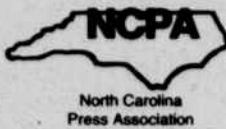
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Why Jamal Can't Read

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools recently released some troubling statistics regarding suspensions. Little more than two out of five students in the system are minorities. Yet, four out of five suspensions involve minority students. And a disproportionate number of those disciplined are minority males — African American males to be specific.

Given the comparatively high incidence of disciplinary problems among minority students, is it any wonder they also lag behind academically?

Something's wrong with this picture. We suspect several factors contribute to the disparity. And, this time, we're not crying racism. Institutional racism can be particularly virulent, but this problem is more than skin deep. Suspensions are up, we believe, because the black community has suspended its involvement with schools.

Children are, in large part, products of their environments. To help students succeed, teachers must bridge the gap between home and school. This can be difficult when the student does not identify with the teacher and the teacher does not effectively relate to the student due to cultural differences or insensitivity. In Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, white females comprise 64 percent of the teaching and counseling staff. In contrast, black males hold only 4 percent of those positions. So, a black student could go from kindergarten to high school graduation without ever having a black teacher. And, odds are, most black male students never get a black male teacher. To teach minority students, the school system should provide intensive training in cross-cultural communication.

The school environment, however, is only half the picture. Children who come to school angry about life are bound to act out in the classroom. And if children receive too much tolerance and not enough tough love, they'll never know their limits. Similarly, if parents can't control their children, schools won't have much luck keeping them in line either. Children won't be able to contain their anger and practice civility in the classroom if they overdose on a steady diet of violence at home, in the community or in the media. They won't know how to express themselves verbally if they have not been engaged in conversation at home. And they won't appreciate the value of book learning if their parents haven't read to them at home. For example, some entering kindergartners can't ever recognize whether a book is upside down or not. And the reason many are not ready for school is that their time at home has been spent channel surfing. Learning requires concentration — something that fast-paced video images fail to cultivate. So, in addition to limiting television, parents must talk to, read with and model behavior for their children. Apparently lacking is what the old folks called "home training."

In a society that seems to have hit moral bottom, how can we expect good behavior of our children? Longtime teachers note that some students can't even recite the Golden Rule. Teaching values was once the job of the home and the church. At a time, however, when many families are unchurched, schools must supplement home training with character education. Research suggests that character education can enhance academic performance by reducing disciplinary problems. That's why character education is gaining momentum in schools nationwide. In North Carolina, efforts are underway to integrate character education into the Standard Course of Study. "Building a Foundation for Citizenship," published in 1995 by the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction, suggests ways teachers can teach concepts such as responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, tolerance, justice and fairness, civic virtue and citizenship. By instilling respect and responsibility, character education could also help reduce excessive tardiness, which often causes suspensions.

While prevention is the best strategy to reduce suspensions, intervention is also needed. Despite the best efforts of the school system, the home and the community, some students' aggressive or disruptive actions will lead to suspension. Even unruly students, however, deserve an education. Winston-Salem LIFT Academy helps suspended students stay in school. Recently chartered by the North Carolina State Board of Education, it provides an alternative environment where at-risk students can get individual attention and gain a second chance. We urge other community organizations to mount programs or propose charter schools for at-risk students. After all, any student can become at-risk given the wrong circumstances.

In "Understanding and Educating African-American Children," teacher/consultant William Jenkins offers teachers several tips, including high expectations, parental contact, leadership and patience. He also warns against blaming racism for failure, suggesting that black children who see themselves as victims do not approach education with the enthusiasm needed for success. And they risk being lured into lives of drugs and crime. So, while we're pressing teachers to alter their approach, let's get a new attitude ourselves. For our children's sake.



The Chronicle Mailbag

Our Readers Speak Out

Baptist proposal advantageous

To the Editor:

I have been reading the Chronicle regularly and have enjoyed it. I was struck by the inaccuracy of some of the information in a front-page discussion of the fate of Reynolds Health Care Center (March 13, 1997).

When I came here in January 1949 to be head of neurosurgery at Bowman Gray School of Medicine at Baptist Hospital, I did not like the fact that the hospitals were segregated. To make up for that, I worked for more than 10 years at the Kate Biting Reynolds Hospital, seeing consultations, operating and doing whatever I could.

Joe Gordon was a great friend of mine. He and his wife were splendid people. I came to know many of the 27 physicians at Kate Biting Reynolds Hospital, and in fact, when Forsyth Memorial Hospital was built, the new Kate Biting Reynolds Hospital was promised to the black community. That hospital was built, but at the same time, both Forsyth Hospital and Baptist Hospital became integrated, and black physicians clearly preferred to go to Forsyth Memorial Hospital and to Baptist Hospital. That necessitated a rather small census at the new Kate Biting Hospital, which was its reason for closure, not the failure of the community to provide for it. Therefore, it was converted into the Reynolds Health Center. I feel strongly, as Gwen Andrews, an R.N., does, that the contract

with Bowman Gray School of Medicine/North Carolina Baptist Hospital would be to the great advantage of the community. I hope it will be so approved.

Eben Alexander Jr., M.D.

WSSU Foundation not 'rogue organization'

To the Editor:

I am writing to clarify statements made in an article on WSSU fund raising, which appeared in the March 20 edition of the "Winston-Salem Journal." The article stated that the WSSU Foundation has raised money for WSSU, "But it has done so largely on its own, without much input or direction from the school." This is totally false and gives the impression that the Foundation is some rogue organization which acts on its own. The Foundation's activities are and have always been the result of planning and direction by the university. The successful Capital Campaign was conducted under a contract between the university board of trustees and the foundation. The development of funds, and planning, have all been done by the university. The Foundation worked very closely with the vice chancellor for development and others in the development office. These positions were vacated in the spring

of 1996 and have not been filled. Without this direction from the university, the foundation has not been able to conduct any supportive activity. The 1995-96 annual fund drive was halted when university planning and direction ceased. The foundation was specifically requested to not conduct an annual fund drive for the current year. The reorganization of the foundation was done at the direction of the president of the N.C. university system and was done not to "punish an administration" but to improve financial isolation and minimize the possible perception that any university official could exert undue influence on the foundation. The foundation did deny a request to pay the premium for the chancellor's life insurance, considering that to be part of his employment contract with the state. The foundation agreed to a request for a loan to be used for the purchase of a new residence. However, the foundation denied a subsequent request that the loan become a donation. No donated funds were used for the purchase of the property. The chancellor also requested that the foundation concur with his decision to destroy the standing residence of the founder of the university, Simon Green Atkins. The foundation did not agree with this position and urged the chancellor to take all possible steps to preserve this structure and the heritage it represents.

The foundation has now been requested to establish vot-

ing rights for ex-officio members, establish a number of director positions which would be filled by direct appointment by the chancellor and establish the vice chancellor of development as the president of the foundation. The foundation is now reviewing this request. These facts have all been documented in the proceedings of the foundation. The view that the foundation acts with little input from the school is fallacious and I believe the promulgation of such a view is almost malicious. I object to the inaccurate representation of the foundation's role.

I firmly believe the situation has deteriorated to a "win-lose" power struggle for control of the foundation. Internal strife of this magnitude will ultimately have a negative impact on the university. I have been a director, and now treasurer, of the foundation for many years. I am committed to the betterment of the university and cannot, in good conscience participate in any action I consider to be not in the best interests of the school. I would like to "sing from the same hymn book" as Mr. Mackey, however we seem to disagree on the version. I do not feel my continued presence on the foundation board will be of value. Mr. Marshall Ball, chairman of the foundation, already has my resignation in hand.

Robert C. Brandquist
Treasurer, WSSU
Foundation Inc.

Baptist proposal 'best choice' for RHC

To the Editor:

I support the petition of Bowman Gray/Baptist Hospital of Wake Forest University to assume management for the delivery of health services which are now provided by the county-run Reynolds Health Center.

I do so for reasons that are well-known about me in our community, particularly in my role as advocate for children and youth through my affiliation with the Best Choice Center.

I also have deeply rooted relationships with people affiliated with the medical center. I also have deep and wide relationships with people who serve as county commissioners and also with those on the present Reynolds Health Center advisory board.

When I examine the full spectrum of the pros and cons, I easily come down on the side of the many respected people here in Winston East who support the Medical Center's proposal.

First, I am keen on the relationship between prenatal care, low birth weight in babies and the implications of these for early childhood learning. At Best Choice Center, we have experiences with middle school-age children who entered the world "too soon, too small and too sick." I am heartened by the fact that Charlie Kennedy, M.D., and his colleagues support the proposal of the Center to the commissioners.

Dr. Kennedy is the standard-bearer for pediatric and adolescent medicine in Winston East. At the Best Choice Cen-



Dorothy Graham-Wheeler

ter, we are proud of our record of advocacy on behalf of children and for their access to top health care. We know that healthy babies become healthier children, making it easier for us to educate them, in spite

of other social and economic factors which can be overcome. We see the proposed enhancement of services through the Medical Center as the first step in the entire process.

I see the Medical Center as an agent of preventative care in Winston East on health issues of critical importance in this community, such as maternal risk factors, nutrition, alcoholism and fetal alcohol syndrome, drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases.

As director of Best Choice, I think that the Medical Center's proposal is the "best choice" for health care in Winston East, and I support it enthusiastically.

Dorothy Graham-Wheeler
President and CEO
Best Choice Center Inc.

Changing the Image of Jesus

I am always amazed when people claim that racism is over and done with and that if people of color just work hard enough, they will succeed in this country. I am always amazed because it seems that every week there is new evidence that racism is alive and well in America. Take the story of the passion play in Union City, N.J.

After 82 years of the Park Theater Performing Arts Center's production of "The Passion Play," this year the center chose an African American to alternate in the role of Jesus. That's when the uproar began.

Not only did the center find that people in this multiracial city were leaving profane messages and canceling tickets, but the actor, Desi Arnaz Giles, found himself facing death threats. "As soon as you're cast

in something like this, you know it may stir some people," Giles said, "But death threats?"

It seems that the image of Jesus as a black man is so threatening to some that their reaction was to promise death to the performer. The irony is that Jesus was born in an area of the world in which most people are darker hued, and that the blond, blue-eyed image of Jesus has only emerged within the past century of so. Indeed, many early Russian Orthodox icons of Mary and the infant Jesus portray them both with dark features.

But Giles found another interesting phenomenon as well. When he played Herod (a negative role) in last year's performance or when he played Lucifer in another production, there was no outcry. "I guess they can accept a black man in a negative

role," said Giles.

It seems that once again racism gets in the way of reality. Once again race brings out the worst in people. But it also

brings out the best as well. The center stood behind its director's decision to choose the best actor for the role, regardless of race. His cast mates also supported Giles.

When black actors can play any role, when black men are



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By BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

accepted in other than negative stereotypes, then I'll know that we are on the road to ending racism in America. But stories like this one let me know we have much work to do and the time has not yet come.

While some threatened and some cursed and some canceled, others called to encourage the center and bought tickets to show their support. "The positive rein-

(Bernice Powell Jackson is the executive director of the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice)