

FORUM

High-performing schools are the best gateway to success



Brian Pauling
Guest Columnist

As the school year winds down, one can't help but think of graduations and where and how students will embark upon

the next phase of their lives.

Unfortunately, the opportunities for far too many will be limited because of disparities in graduation rates and in opportunities for students at high-performing schools compared with their counterparts at low-performing schools.

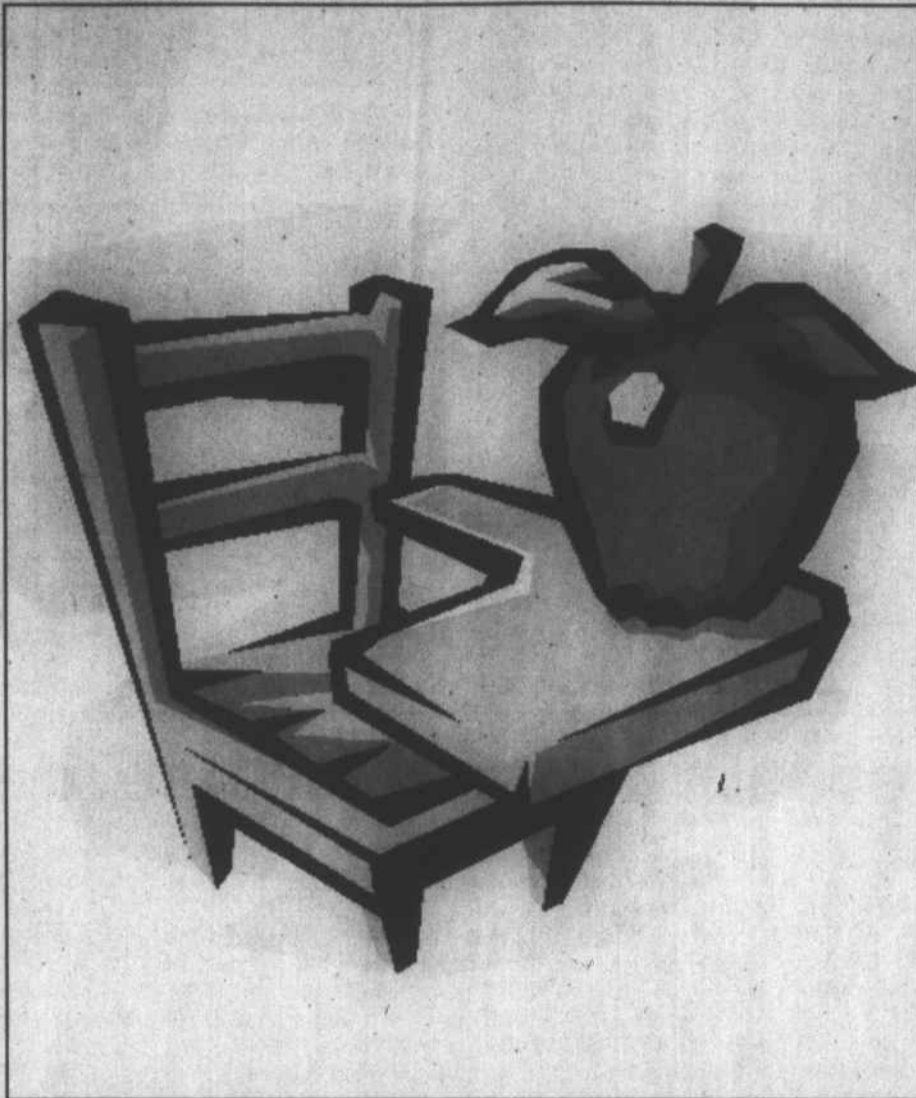
Although U.S. high school graduation rates have significantly improved, U.S. Department of Education statistics show that African-American and Hispanic/Latino students are still graduating 5 to 10 points behind the national average.

Further, students from low-income families are graduating at a rate that's 14.4 percentage points below that of their peers from wealthier backgrounds.

For students to be competitive in post-secondary education and career, they have to be properly prepared. Whether competing for admission to college or entering a career, the student graduating from the high-performing school invariably has the advantage over the one from the low-performing school.

And although each may have a diploma in hand, the student from a low-performing school will more times than not require remedial courses and start behind the curve when trying to achieve long-term success.

100 Black Men of America Inc. strongly believes the remedy to this situation is advocating for and demanding high-performing schools for all students and particularly African-American and poor students.



We feel that high-performing public schools, whether traditional or charter, are the best gateway to higher education. Coupled with strong parental involvement, quality education options that ensure every child has access to the high-performing school best suited for him or her will help them achieve long-term career success.

Sadly, many of the nation's low-performing schools are in minority and low-income neighborhoods.

Far too many of these public schools have inadequate resources and their classrooms are overcrowded. They often lack the things higher-performing schools take for granted, experienced teachers, coun-

selors, special education services, current-edition textbooks, and access to technology, to name a few and their students suffer. When those conditions are allowed to continue, students' paths can deviate from higher education and career to paths of overwhelming struggle, economic challenge and potentially prison.

This is why we must implore our school administrators on the neighborhood, district, city, state and national levels to do their level best to make public education more equitable in every school. In a Washington Post article, former Education Secretary Arne Duncan called on cities and states to rethink their current incarceration practices and proposed funneling an estimated \$15 billion in savings from incarcerations to substantially raise teacher pay in high-poverty schools. He reasoned that higher salaries could attract better teachers to low-performing schools where the help is most needed.

With a move like this, we would not just make a bet on education over incarceration, we would signal the beginning of a long-range effort to pay our nation's teachers what they are worth, Duncan said. That sort of investment wouldn't just make teachers and struggling communities feel more valued. It would have ripple effects it on our economy and on our civic life.

He gets it. We want to make sure everybody else gets it as well. High-performing schools are the best gateway to success. When our children have access to high-performing schools, it exponentially increases their chances to achieve their full potential.

Brian L. Pauling is president and CEO of 100 Black Men of America, Inc., a global nonprofit mentoring organization with more than 100 chapters reaching 125,000 youth in the United States, the United Kingdom and the Caribbean. Learn more at 100blackmen.org.

Sneaker give-away was well-intentioned but short-sighted



Sam Davis
Guest Columnist

What a wonderful gesture by the Chris Paul Family Foundation to supply more than 200 pairs of shoes to the students at Cook Elementary. That shows there are people in the community who care about the future of our inner-city youth. Great job by Kerry Wiggins and the support

team at Cook to collaborate with a non-profit organization to bring change to the lowest performing school in the state of North Carolina.

However, there are bigger issues that must be addressed if we expect Cook to succeed in its new literacy model. While the intent of everyone involved was well-intentioned, it might prove to be short-sighted. In fact, it might prove to be counterproductive because it might send the wrong message (of entitlement) to both students and parents. Parents of students and other stakeholders of the school must play a bigger role in the success of their children if they want to change the direction in which the school is headed.

The same could also be applicable to schools in low-income communities throughout this county and nation. This is not a personal attack, but people whom the com-

munity produce (i.e. professional athletes, with multi-million dollar contracts) should be held accountable to the people that helped catapult them to their platform of stardom.

As the old proverb suggests, "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, but teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime." That's the strategy that needs to be in place for long-term change in many of our struggling schools. While it is good public relations and a good "feel good" story for superstars to give back to the community with free Nike shoes or other giveaways, the long-term implications of that action is concerning. That's the same strategy that has been used to pacify African-Americans and other minorities for years.

That is also part of the sense of entitlement that many of the youth in inner-city communities have come to embrace. For one, it helps to promote material possessions over substance. Many of our inner-city youth view having the latest sneakers (CP3's, Air Jordan's, KD's, Labron's) as the model of success. Far too many don't value the work ethic that produces academic success in the classroom and beyond (such as that Chris Paul has managed to accomplish). That is one of the biggest hurdles that those who work in schools in low-income areas must deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Rather than promoting entitlement-producing give-

aways, we need to work to promote policies and programs that will benefit the aforementioned individuals long term. We need programs that teach the core principles of hard work and the resulting academic success that come with it. We need to have more team-building programs in our schools (where successful members of the community work with families) and more volunteerism. We need to promote core values and work hard to make sure that students and parents understand them.

We need to build our own brands, rather than promoting brands that fail to measure up to the under-represented in our communities. We need to model our own success rather than waiting on outsiders to build it for us. It is time for us to form collaborations with people who look like us and/or those who have our own best, long-term, interests at heart.

The fact that the Chris Paul Family Foundation was willing to step up to try to solve the problems plaguing Cook is definitely a sign of better days ahead. But let us work together to form more meaningful, long-term, solutions.

Sam Davis of Winston-Salem has been a coach of students for more than 35 years. He also is an ordained minister.