

Task force starts job of winning converts

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Also, in January, four community meetings, in which the task force will have discussions with the general public, are planned.

"Those (community) meetings will start right after the first of the year - after the last (college football) bowl game," said Gantt, the former Charlotte mayor and

Clemson graduate who has a passion for sports.

"We're going to do whatever it takes to have face-to-face, in-depth discussions with the people in this community. We feel that's important, because these are changes that affect everyone in this community. Making certain everyone is educated about the process will go a long way"

The task force, ultimately, needs the endorsement of "stakeholders" - parents, teachers, principals, administrators, elected officials and corporate and civic organizations - in order to see its recommendations put into action.

When the recommendations were introduced last week at the Government Center, how-

ever, not everyone immediately embraced all of them, including parents and public officials alike.



Griffin

School board member Molly Griffin, who represents District 5, said she has encountered skepticism about the recommendations - and she even has some skepticism of her own.

"Absolutely, I think the community meetings will be really good - everybody needs to feel like they're a part of the discussion," Griffin said. "But I'm not sure I believe everything in that report will be adopted. I just have a hard time seeing that happening."

Griffin expressed concern about the task force's recommendation to have one central office but divide into three or four parts with each having its own superintendent, which would, among other things, individually choose how to educate its students.

"Personally, my first reaction is they went a little too far when they started talking about curriculum issues," Griffin said. "That's not their area of expertise. I think that's better left to the educators themselves."

Also, Griffin expressed

doubts about the benefits of adding one appointed member to the school board, as the task force suggested.

"I'm not sure how that would work," Griffin said. "I think there's a strong possibility for tension among board members. It's just a difficult dynamic."

"But again, these really should be decisions based on what everybody thinks; not one person. That's why these meetings are so necessary, so everyone has a voice. And I applaud the task force for reaching out to everyone."

Poorest kids struggle in N.C.

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Child care is an especially difficult hurdle for low-income families, the study found. One in six poor families have had to quit, refuse or change a job because of child care issues in the past year. More than 30,000 N.C. children can't get child care subsidies their parents need to afford child care while they work.

The gap in health care between poor and upper-income children is closing, however. Higher-income families are three times more likely to have private health insurance, access to publicly-financed programs like Medicaid and Health Choice has trimmed the gap to 12 percent of North Carolinians who have any type of insurance. Still, 1 in 5 low-income kids went without health insurance at some point the year before the survey.

"We know that working hard is not enough for half a million families with children in North Carolina to afford the daily basics of life," said Sorien Schmidt, legislative director of the N.C. Justice Center and a member of the

institute's board of directors. The survey is based on a 2003 survey of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of 1,800 N.C. parents.

On the Net: www.ncchild.org

Actor: History month is 'ridiculous'

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Morgan Freeman says the concept of a month dedicated to Black history is "ridiculous."

"You're going to relegate my history to a month?" the 68-year-old actor says in an interview on CBS' "60 Minutes" Sunday. "I don't want a black month. Black history is American history."

Black History Month has roots in historian Carter G. Woodson's Negro History Week, which he designated in 1926 as the second week in February to mark the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

Woodson said he hoped the week could one day be eliminated - when Black history would become fundamental to American history.

Freeman notes there is no "White history month," and says the only way to get rid of racism is to "stop talking about it." The actor says he believes the labels "black" and "white" are an obstacle to beating racism.

"I am going to stop calling you a white man and I'm going to ask you to stop calling me a black man," Freeman says.

Freeman earned three Oscar nominations before winning earlier this year for "Million Dollar Baby"

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