

School advocates combine

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agreement than disagreement because there is no question in my mind they are dedicated to the education of our children."

Said Gantt. "There was only one right person for this job. Along with Dr. Woodward's credentials in the education field, he is a civic leader and a bridge builder with a passion for education."

CMS Superintendent Peter Gorman said the merged

group's singular voice on issues will help communication between the state's largest school district and its constituents. However, he cautions that ultimate change in CMS will come from the school board.

"I expect the board to be my supervisor," Gorman said. "I will work with them and continue to partner on those issues, but at the same point in time, there's another group of folks out there ready to provide some thoughts and

insights. I'm looking forward to working with them."

The board will be made up of 18-25 individuals picked by a nominating committee of "four or five" members from each of the four member entities. Ten will come from the partner organizations, with the rest selected from civic and corporate organizations. "I'm excited they want a broad-based and diverse group of members," Gorman said. "That excites me."

The task force oversaw a

study on management and governance for CMS that was released in December. The panel detailed 21 recommendations, including formation of the civic commission, which will be funded by local and national grants.

Gorman said the commission has the potential to be an independent asset for public education. No one expects total agreements, but that isn't necessary for success.

"I like having a critical friend," he said. "I like someone who's telling me the truth and not giving me filtered water."

Turn-around on desegregation

By Lorinda M. Bullock
NATIONAL NEWSWAPER
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON — Briefs filed last week by the Bush administration to halt voluntary school integration programs have civil rights and progressive legal groups fearful the gains made by the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision will be reversed.

"Brown vs. Board was one of the most significant landmark decisions of the 20th Century in 1954. Now 52 years later in 2006, that battle is still being fought in the schools," said John Brittain, chief counsel and senior deputy director of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law in Washington, D.C.

The administration has sided with white parents in districts in Seattle and Louisville, who claim integration guidelines actually discriminate against White students and violate the equal protection clause of the Constitution.

U.S. Solicitor General Paul D. Clement urged the justices in the briefs to rule "That the use of racial classification to achieve a desired racial balance in public schools" is as unconstitutional as racial segregation.

Along with the lawyers for the Jefferson County and Seattle school districts, Ted Shaw, Director-Counsel and President of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and Brittain will file briefs that argue voluntary integration does not violate the Constitution in October.

"What we're talking about here in these two cases is the question of whether voluntary integration measures are going to be legal and constitutional. This is all that's left of public school desegregation efforts. For the most part, mandatory desegregation no longer is in play. All that's left is voluntary desegregation measures," Shaw said.

The Supreme Court should hear the arguments in December and are expected to rule by next spring, Brittain said.

In the Louisville case Meredith vs. Jefferson County, Crystal Meredith, a white parent said her son was prohibited from attending the elementary school nearest to his home because of the district's integration guidelines developed in 2001. The district's guidelines said that Black enrollment in each elementary school should be at least 15 percent and no more than 50 percent.

In the case of Parents Involved in Community Schools vs. Seattle Schools, a group of parents brought legal action against the district, saying their children were not accepted in to their first choice high school because of their race. Seattle schools adopted their integration guidelines in 1998 to prevent segregation that was caused by the self-segregation in housing patterns in the area.

Help for autism families

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children," she said. That's why Boujlil started the alliance as an advocate for autistic kids. On Sept. 17, WAFCC will sponsor a carnival at 5865 Albemarle Road. Proceeds will go to the alliance's family center, which provides programs for children and support for families.

Getting help for an autistic child often means navigating a maze of agencies and rules, Boujlil said. It's more difficult for parents who lack the financial resources or command of English.

"It took me a little time to get help for him," she said.

For immigrants to the U.S., disabilities are rarely discussed. The center, Boujlil said, helps families cope with autism by offering support and referring families to evaluations and therapy. The center also offers classes in English and other languages as well as after-school care and crafts.

"For some of the families, it's hard for them to hear the big word," she said. "For some cultures, it's taboo."

Boujlil, a native of Morocco who also speaks Spanish, Italian, French and Arabic, believes developing a supportive, nurturing environment is as important to families as their children.

"We don't care about their status or income," Boujlil said. "We just want to offer help regardless of their race or origin."

For information on the alliance or the carnival, call (704) 523-3237; 523-3238 or 618-1489.

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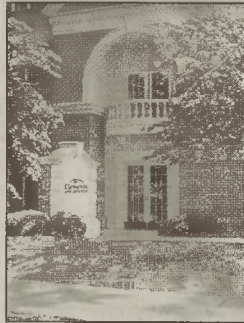
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