



West Meck High accepts challenge

By Shanda C. Ross
SPECIAL TO THE POST

West Mecklenburg High School does not look at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year as a challenge. It is more like an opportunity to make changes.

It is a year for reform. West Mecklenburg High School and AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), an international program serving 2300 schools, are embarking on a journey focused on raising the level of expectations for our students while empowering them to be more accountable for themselves and to each other. We want to equip our students with the strategies and tools to be successful in the classroom and in life.

Why would West Mecklenburg High School choose a program like AVID as a reform? The answer is simple. We believe that by providing the high academic expectations, support and structure of the AVID program to all students, all students will achieve at the highest level. If we prepare every child as a college bound student, we are setting the highest academic standards. Once they are equipped with the tools, students will have more options and choices open to them once they graduate. The purpose of education is to enhance opportunities for the future of all students.

AVID changes the way a student looks at education. It helps them to see their potential no matter what their level of academic achievement is. The program meets them where they are, supports them in where they want to go. School and learning become personalized when a child is a part of the AVID program.

At the core of the AVID philosophy is a strong emphasis on writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading. All four are essential skills that are interwoven into the daily coursework of each student.

Writing skills are the foundation for the other components. As students become better writers, they can communicate ideas, clarify experiences, organize their thoughts, and become better students.

Inquiry touches on the teacher's approach to classroom instruction. By placing more emphasis on questioning techniques and engaging students to clarify, generalize, and evaluate answers, students must really think for themselves and not just want to give a right or wrong answer.

Collaborative learning groups bring students together to become a part of each other's educational process. They are responsible for working as a group, listening to each other, challenging each other, and finding solutions as a group.

Reading is the final key to any successful student. They learn strategies to connect material to prior knowledge, consider the structure of the text, and process text so that they can increase comprehension in reading a range of material.

Beginning this fall, all incoming students to West Mecklenburg will take a course exposing them to the ideas of AVID and give them practice implementing it in their freshman courses. A team of teachers attended a weeklong AVID Summer Institute to help mesh their teaching strategies within the AVID framework. Throughout the course of the year, all teachers at West Meck will receive training on AVID strategies specific to their content area.

Students will have the preparation and confidence to achieve success in the classroom and enable them to pursue more educational options. Nationally, 95 percent of students enrolled in AVID go to college. By implementing an AVID program school-wide at West Mecklenburg High School, we strive to replicate this success with our students. Interested in joining our journey? You could offer support by volunteering as a tutor, or share your college and professional stories as a guest speaker in one of our AVID classrooms. Contact me at (980) 343-6080.

SHANDA C. ROSS is AVID coordinator at West Mecklenburg High School.

OUR VOICES

The blame game: It's black folks' fault

By Kelly Harris
SPECIAL TO THE POST

It seems that Bill Cosby, Juan Williams, and others have emboldened non-blacks and some blacks to hammer the message of personal responsibility.

Mayor Pat McCrory is the latest to exploit that line and place the blame squarely on African-American's shoulders. The assumption being made by McCrory and others is that the system works and its flaws are transparent. Furthermore, if you work hard you can prosper in this system.

While true for some people from all backgrounds, this assumption is still severely flawed.

Theoretically if people were perfect and the free-market capitalist system worked to perfection there would still be an underclass. With that in mind, it is odd to contribute the failures or the reality of the underclass and the black community to low levels of work ethic, criminal behavior, drug use, poor parenting, single parent households, and a lack of education.

Black folk have been disproportionately singled out for a failure to take "responsibility" of their communities. While the aforementioned shortcomings/weaknesses certainly constitutes real and significant challenges for the black community (and America at large), the other side of the ledger is suspiciously missing.

If the system does not work perfectly, which all but a few are willing to admit, then what are the failures of

the system and how can they be rectified?

One would think that above all else a mayor, governor, senator, representative, and councilman/councilwoman, would try to be descriptive about the ways the system fails its citizens and seek ways to alleviate these failures of the system. This can and should be done in tandem with the message of personal responsibility - for all citizens and not just African-Americans.

To be sure however, not many parents and not many people in the black community argue against taking responsibility. Yet personal responsibility seems to be the only message being proffered.

The question is why is this the fashionable argument to put forth now? People readily admit that racism exists but fail to say where and how. They are more comfortable believing that it resides in the hearts and minds of select individuals and not institutions.

The sad fact is that economic and political disenfranchisement, poor education, and the values that undergird this city, state, and nation remains a challenge and obstacle for millions of citizens.

I would think finding solutions to these ills are of concern to us all and they cannot and should not be separated from the problems of violence and gangs in our communities.

KELLY HARRIS is director of international studies at Johnson C. Smith University.

We need more face time with our children

I often write in this space about a national or global challenge confronting our children and recommend how readers might support a policy or initiative to address it.

In this week's column, however, I'd like to talk about how each of us can do more to personally develop our own children. As you know, a lot of the things children need to shape them into healthy adults come from those who raise them - love, self-confidence, a set of values and a generous spirit. To do a better job at conveying these attributes, I want to encourage us all to invest more "face time" in our children.



MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Many parents are doing a good job of raising their children while balancing the demands of careers and maintaining a household. But too many children are spending too many hours in counter-productive pursuits, aimlessly watching television or playing video games. I recommend we rediscover how to spend more one-on-one time with the young people in our own families - something I'm afraid many of us have gotten away from.

First, I want to emphasize the basics. Read to your children - starting while they are still in diapers. Sit down to dinner as a family and talk. Get your children off the couch and go on a family outing. Pack a lunch and share the experience of a nature walk or a bike ride through a local park.

A wide variety of family activities that can stimulate intellectual curiosity and personal engagement require little preparation or expense. Feeding times at the zoo are both entertaining and educational. Make children feel at home in museums, too. Show them what special places they are, with all their rooms promising the excitement of discovery - whether that means meteorites, carved dolls from Ghana, the teeth of prehistoric sharks or impressionist paintings. Many museums offer free tours. And don't forget the planetariums.

There is a lot you can do close to home too. Share your hobbies, personal interests and passions. Plant a garden together - flowers in the front yard, vegetables in the back. Help children appreciate the work that goes into growing something the family can eat or decorate their homes with. Plant a tree on their birthdays. It's good for the environment and will give children a sense of continuity and connection with nature. Teach your children how to cook five simple meals. Learning to cook is empowering.

Have a family movie night with films that will fuel discussion. Pop some popcorn and rent films like "Akeelah and the Bee," "Whale Rider," "A Raisin in the Sun," "It's a Wonderful Life," and "Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored." These are the kinds of films that are both excellent family entertainment and filled with valuable lessons about integrity, courage, humanity, service, striving for excellence and the will to overcome obstacles. Take your children to live performances and story hours at your local library. Plays and stories develop a child's imagination and introduce her or him to great literature.

Transform your car into a magic carpet, one that conveys children to places where they will be surprised and enlightened - some of those places might be just down the street. Become tourists in your own town. Contact your local visitors' center or chamber of commerce for the schedules of guided tours of historic homes in your city, like the home of Frederick Douglass here in Washington, D.C.

Some states are truly living history books. Virginia contains the homes of several U.S. presidents, including George Washington's Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Your family can step back into the 18th century at Colonial Williamsburg, a restored village where re-enactors demonstrate printing, shoemaking and wig making as it was done in colonial times. Visit Jamestown, settled 400 years ago, where enslaved Africans were first introduced to the British colonies in America.

There are wonderful history lessons in the Selma to Montgomery National Voting Trail in Alabama. Trace the birth of American independence on Boston's "Freedom Trail," or go to Ellis Island in New York, the port of entry for millions of immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries. Sow the seeds of generosity by volunteering with your children. Make a project of baking cookies and take them to a nursing home - stay and visit for a while. Take your children shopping for an elderly neighbor or clean up their yard. Support a family food or clothing drive for the homeless. If your children are 16 or older, take them to build homes with your local Habitat for Humanity affiliate or join a Christmas in April group to help a needy family with home repairs.

These are just some of the many ways to help children be their better selves. And I'll share a little secret - you'll have the time of your life.

Bennettsville, S.C., native MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council.

There's new interest in a unified Africa

The African Union, the successor body to the Organization of African Unity, has moved forward discussions regarding the question of and possibility for African continental unity.



BILL FLETCHER

Clear differences exist among and between the leaders of various African nation-states as to whether this is a positive objective as well as how to approach its completion. There is an additional question as to what this will mean, if anything, for those of us in the African Diaspora.

The question of continental unity is one that has been the subject of discussions, debates and struggles going

back at least to the 19th century. Modern Pan Africanism, a development from the early 20th century through the work of various individuals, such as W. E. B. Dubois, Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkrumah, argued for continental unity as well as a close relationship between those of us captured from the continent and those who remained.

In the aftermath of the successful independence movements on the continent in the 1950s and 1960s a debate emerged as to whether the borders created by the colonial powers should be THE borders of the new African nation-states, or, in the alternative, whether new borders should be created that matched the actual demographics of the Continent. Those favoring the existing borders, fearing the possi-

An assault on 1st Amendment and freedoms

John Mitchell Jr., editor/publisher of the Richmond Planet during Reconstruction was mailed cow manure along with death threats by White supremacists who tried to stop him from writing against racism.

The stories have it that he answered the threats by going to their community and riding through on a horse wearing two six-shooters.

I da B. Wells, amidst her heroic campaign against lynching at the Memphis Free Speech in the 1880s, was also threatened with death. But she never let up, continuing her written protests even as a columnist for the New York Age and then at her husband's Chicago Conservator.

Charles Tisdale's Jackson Advocate headquarters was firebombed at least twice and was once assaulted with a hail of more than 3,000 bullets. He simply moved to new Mississippi headquarters and kept right on publishing. The late Tisdale's paper is still going strong.

Chauncey Bailey, editor of the Oakland Post, was killed by an assassin earlier this month, police say. But just as historic threats of death, hideous attacks and firebombs never stopped the truth, even the pellets of a shotgun - which felled our brother Chauncey will not succeed.

Journalists around the world mourn our colleague, a standard bearer for the mission of the global media in general and for the black press in particular. But, even as we grieve, enemies of the First Amendment's, "Freedom of the Press" should be forewarned of what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said best: "Truth crushed to the ground shall rise again. No lie can live forever."

Whether it is the truth of white supremacist oppression that still erodes the fiber of America or the truth associated with the self-destruction of black on black crime, the N-word and self-hatred - that truth will never cease to rise.

Whether it is the truth about raw racism in America, the misguided war in Iraq, police brutality, economic injustice or the conspiracy against the education of black children, the non-violent soldiers of the black press assure you it will always rise.

Therefore, all potential haters, manipulators, enemies and yes, prospective assassins - should be hereby advised and put on notice. Regardless of your weapon, the mission and call of the black press cannot be scared away, threatened away, shot away, or bombed away. Nor can the death of its standard-bearers cause it to die.

This is because the truth that rises against injustice is not contained by any one of us alone. Rather, this truth lives in spirit. And that spirit of truth, which drives the mission, lives within a determined army of us around the world.

Throughout history, we at the black press have vowed to march boldly in spirit of that mission as we "plead our own cause." And even now, in the face of perceived danger within our own beloved communities, for which we have fought and protected more than 180 years, we will not forsake our cause.

Though temporarily distracted with the pain of grief for a soldier so stalwart and brave, we promise that our pens will not rest until we have given our all. As a people with a common cause we will not weaken ourselves. Rather we will hold fast to the integrity, courage, strength and moral fortitude for which our foreparents stood.

The nature of this war may have changed, but the cause of racial justice remains the same.

Therefore, it will not be physical armies or guns or tanks that will ever win. It will be the integrity and the morality of non-violent soldiers of social change and it will be ardent defenders of justice who will continue to stand - even in the face of death.

And if we are ever too weak to be that soldier and to die for our First Amendment rights and for our children's, then our army - hence, our people - will be doomed.

Now, get up, stand up, and speak up.
HAZEL TRICE EDNEY is editor in chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service.

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superpowers of the USA and the USSR - competed for the support of various nations are no longer possible.

The "advance" of globalization has made it more and more difficult for small countries to exist on their own other than as outposts for this or that multi-national corporation. The rise of ethno-nationalism in the post-Cold War world, other words, is paradoxical. Small countries have split off from larger countries, only to find that their political independence has been subverted by economic dependence. The late Kwame Nkrumah warned against this circumstance during the 1960s in his book "Neo-Colonialism."

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