

An African American Perspective

I've been reading *EW's* coverage of the school choice issue in Eugene, and I am outraged by the incorrect assumptions and outright prejudice in this so-called progressive community! As an African American living in this area, I think it's about time to have a voice on this issue by a parent who is a member of the African American community.

One assumption that continuously infuriates me is the research finding that when poor kids are integrated into wealthier schools, the poor kids do better, with no negative effects to the wealthier kids. I believe that the benefits to the wealthier kids of having students in their classes that have backgrounds different from their own cannot be measured by test scores alone. These are the benefits of having a truly multicultural education. Having grown up in one of the most racially and ethnically mixed neighborhoods in the country, I can testify to how wonderful it is to hear foreign languages spoken, or see someone with a different skin tone than me, or smelling the foods of other cultures — right there in my own neighborhood. From this experience, I've learned the value of appreciating diversity.

Now that school choice is being questioned for contributing to segregation in the Eugene Public Schools, many liberal affluent parents who have their kids in alternative schools are showing their true colors. They say they honor diversity, but now that it's time to desegregate their kids' schools so that they are not so white and affluent, they are balking at the idea of integration. They're afraid that a little color in the school might decrease the quality of their child's education. I think not! Having children mixed in a classroom with different races and socioeconomic backgrounds teaches all kids how to *truly* honor diversity.

My child's education is extremely important to me. And although my child is not quite school-age, I have educated myself on the different choices of schools in Eugene. I would like to have *more choice, not less* in my child's education. I want to choose a school that is in line with my educational philosophies, and one that nurtures each individual child's gifts and capacity for learning. For this reason, I might like to choose an alternative school for my child.

I would like to see the Eugene Public Schools desegregated, and I'd like to keep school choice. It seems that a desegregation policy that focuses on educating minority and lower income parents on the various educational options for their kids would help to bring diversity to south Eugene schools. Also, busing minority and low income kids to alternative schools, and giving those kids first choice in the alternative school lotteries would help to desegregate Eugene schools. In addition, putting more money and teachers in the neighborhood schools, and developing them into business, science, math, or art magnet schools would make those neighborhood schools more competitive with alternative schools for students, funding and teachers.

*Talicia Brown
Eugene*

CHILD'S EYE VIEW

Your editorial on school choice (3/3) paints an idyllic portrait of neighborhood schools as the key to an old-fashioned social cohesiveness that is undermined by alternative schools. This portrayal is fiction: The reality is that more than 1,000 of Eugene's neighborhood school students live outside the neighborhood and are there because of school choice.

4J data show that of all the kids who participate in the school choice program, only 55 percent choose alternative schools. Thirty-nine percent choose other neighborhood schools. Fully 36 percent of Edison's student body comes from other neighborhoods; Parker's lottery population is nearly 25 percent.

Why is choosing a neighborhood school even if it's not your own "more acceptable" than choosing an alternative school? Neighborhood school choice, like alternative school choice, permits a diverse group of families to choose schools based on what works best for their kids.

Neighborhood schools should be strengthened and access to all schools improved. The whole community supports that proposition. But dismantling high-quality, successful alternative schools and displacing hundreds of students who attend them — including about 350 low-income children — would be a giant leap backward. It is tragic that so much of this divisive debate has been based on ideology or inaccurate information.

My son attends a nearby alternative school. Once back home, we play with families on the block. My child belongs in both places, effortlessly, because kids don't make judgments against each other based on school choices. What a great lesson for all of us.

*Margie Kelly
Eugene*

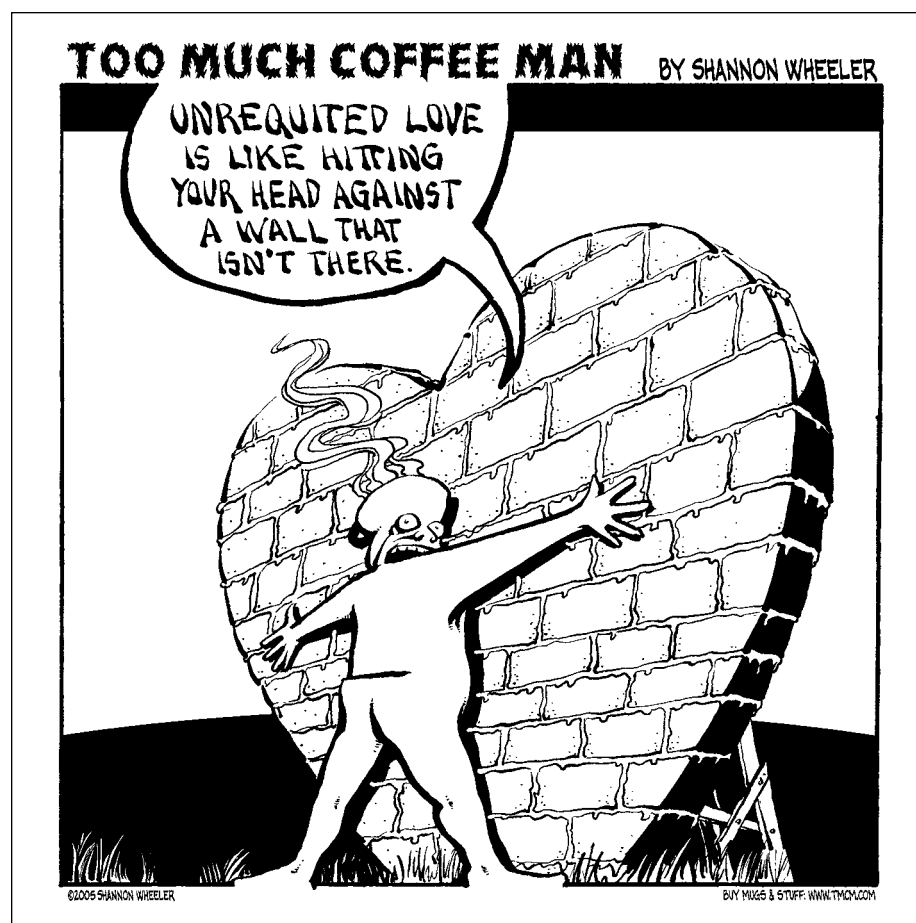
WHO TO BLAME

Neighborhood schools, and not alternative schools, caused the school inequity and achievement gap that exists today. Parents and teachers formed alternative schools because of discontent with the educational methods of neighborhood schools, frequently their indifference to meeting the needs of gifted students. No substantive changes were made in neighborhood school programs in order attract parents, and over time more alternative schools were formed. Since then, achieving students with involved parents have become concentrated in alternative schools and neighborhood schools have been left with most of the low-income, special-ed and non-English speaking students.

I was one of those parents who was driven away from my neighborhood school by the inflexible, one-size-fits-all, square-peg-round-hole educational model that it offered. Although I am grateful that I found a school that offered a more individualized education, I had to sacrifice any possibility of my children walking to school and having neighborhood playmates.

Today's problems were caused by the school district's failure to respond proactively to what their constituents wanted, to regularly review and/or modify all district schools, and to centrally control and ensure equal access to alternative schools. This lack of responsiveness continues today, and it led to the development of several charter schools that are also portrayed as stealing achieving students from neighborhood schools.

The current focus should shift away from blaming and threatening alternative schools to



viewing them as models for the solution. Give consumers what they want and they will not need to look beyond their neighborhood.

*Kristin King
Eugene*

TOUCHING TRIBUTE

I've read a wide variety of eulogies and memorials plus many mixed reactions to the recent death of journalist Hunter S. Thompson.

None even came close to Lance Sparks Wine column (3/3) entitled "Blown Mind," his touching remembrance of and moving tribute to our departed Prince of Gonzo Darkness.

Not anywhere close.

*Jerome Garger
Yachats*

BEING SENSITIVE

In honor of Hatoon Victoria Adkins: Her life and those hurt by her death would like to represent those suffering from either a lack of social skills, or what is commonly known as "mental illness."

Although labels such as these can be damaging because of the myths already surrounding them, they are even more damaging to the mental health of those diagnosed with them. Phrases such as "one who hears voices and sees visions" have been widely abused, seemingly by those creating them.

The point is, can we, as a community be a little more sensitive in what we say about others in our "small talk" conversations? Does anyone care about the feelings of those lonely listeners bored enough to listen to them? Those who have no steady clique or sorority to fall back on? It is sad that we sometimes forget so quickly what we have said so superficially and thoughtlessly, that these lonely listeners such as Hatoon will never forget.

The unfortunate tragedy is in the tendency of those talkers to say, "I don't know what you are talking about." While this may be the truth, could we as human beings pay more heed to the content of what we are saying in our everyday conversations?

*Lora Daskivich
Eugene*

HIDDEN EXPENSE

The Eugene Police Department is not just trampling on people's civil rights — as bad as

that is. They also cost the taxpayers a lot of extra taxes. Cortez Jordan, the young black man who was stopped and harassed for "walking funny" when with a group of white friends, has filed a notice that he is going to sue the city for the illegal police harassment. I don't blame him, and I'm glad he's doing that. Unfortunately, I and other taxpayers will foot the bill.

Then there's our precious "Officer Randy" who spray-painted graffiti on public property telling panhandlers they couldn't "trespass" on public property. Maybe the panhandlers will sue too.

Of course, the worst recent incident is the rape and forcing sex crimes onto women by two of EPD's finest. We'll be paying a lot for those two and their superiors who failed to supervise the cops on the street — or is it on the back seat?

Then there's the famous incident where the cops pulled down the pants of tree sitting protesters and pepper sprayed their sex organs.

Can we please pass a law that requires the offending cops to pay these suits out of their own pockets? At least until they are bankrupt and before the taxpayers get reamed? After all, these idiots are supposed to enforce the law, not break it.

So next time you pay your tax bill, think about the extra cost.

*Ralph Wombat
Eugene*

POST-STONEWALL

"Distraught from facing troubles, smiles yet surface on the face, through the lips. Trash cans and beer bottles fly through the sky. Not realizing the damages we'd done nor did we know of what was to come. We all said 'Oh, well....Screw you.' We needed our freedom."

Thirty years have passed by and yet we face the same battle each day. Instead of the Gay Mafia, the ghetto police harassments and New York's Liquor Authority Committee banning homosexuals to be served in any establishment, we have the Bush administration, red states and all those conservative right-winged Republican church-goers who believe that all the homosexuals must live in hell, have no rights, bury ourselves in our lust and self-destruction.