

Education

“Community asks for school monitoring principal accountability”

A citizen coalition is seeking authority to monitor minority student performance in Portland public schools, and to make student achievement a part of school principal's job evaluations.

The proposal was put before the school board at its September 12 meeting by a coalition of organizations that includes the Black United Front and Coalition of Black Men. The group proposes establishment of a 20-member Citizen Monitoring Advisory Committee with representatives from the African-American, Asian, Hispanic and Native American communities as well as low-income people. Its task would be to monitor the performance of minority students school by school, and to make sure schools are taking appropriate steps to improve performance. It would also hold a series of community meetings to teach parents how to track their children's performance.

A key part of the recommendation is a demand that school principals be held accountable for minority student performance.

“Not to have the principals involved in the education results defeats the whole purpose,” Halim Rahsaan of the Coalition of Black Men

says. “I don't know of another profession where performance doesn't figure in your job evaluation.”

Superintendent Jack Bierwirth called the proposal “a serious offer for help, and we should take them up on this.” However, the coalition and district is still awaiting a more concrete response to the proposal. Bierwirth was unavailable for comment at press time.

Rahsaan notes that the current proposal is basically the same as proposals that have been made since 1980, by the district's Desegregation Monitoring Advisory Committee among others. “There were some really excellent proposals, but none of them was ever acted upon,” he said. In addition, he says, the Coalition of Black Men met last year with Bierwirth, and with the school board's new members. “They've been sitting there for a year, and nothing's happened,” he says. “I'm



Lulu R. Stroud-Johnson

really disappointed in them.”

A key issue in how minority students will do academically is whether they are expected to do superior work or not, Rahsaan says. “When kids of color don't achieve, the system always blames the

parents,” he says. “When caucasian kids don't achieve, it's the system that's to blame. There are variables internal as well as external, but it all gets back to expectations. Some of the kids we're concerned about are really bright; they're just not being challenged.”

Testifying in support of this, Lulu R. Stroud-Johnson, a single mother of three daughters, told about her own experiences with the school district and Grant High School. All three of her daughters were discouraged from taking SAT exams, she said, and she herself had verbal and even physical confrontations with

district personnel. Two of her daughters are now in college, the third a Grant honors student.

She also presented the board with statistics on minority student achievement. She said the average grade point average for black students in Portland high schools is 1.7, ranging from 2.2 for Benson students to 1.3 for those at Madison and Marshall. She called on the superintendent to “condemn racism in all its ugly forms” by district personnel, and offered to serve on the CMAC.

“I don't understand the superintendent and board's reluctance to do this,” she later told the Observer.

Rahsaan says he is seeking additional data from the district, including the number of minority students on college-track courses, their graduation rates by school, and whether they receive standard or “modified” diplomas. The latter indicates that the student did not meet academic standards. “It's basically a certificate of attendance,” Rahsaan says.

“We've been talking about this since 1980, and here it is 1996. Unless we do something drastically different, our kids will go on going to high school and then dropping out.”

Big learning at small schools

Kids usually go for big ice cream cones and giant rides at the fair. But when it comes to school size, research clearly says that kids thrive on small; it's often better for student learning. For parents who sometimes wonder if a larger school might offer more to their child, it looks like bigger is not always better when it comes to the relationship between student learning and school size.

A new report from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory finds overwhelming evidence that students attitudes, behavior, and participation are better when school size is smaller. As for student achievement, small schools get results at least equal to, and in many cases superior to, big schools. That's good news in the Northwest--Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washing-

ton--where 1,500 schools enroll fewer than 138 students, according to one analysis. In Oregon, over 500 schools have fewer than 300 students. And about 11 percent of those schools have fewer than 125 students.

“Research has repeatedly found small schools superior to larger ones on most measures and equal to them on the rest,” says author Kathleen Cotton in the report, School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance. “This holds true for both elementary and secondary students of all ability levels and in all kinds of settings.”

Students in small schools are more likely to participate in activities, less likely to drop out, more likely to attend regularly, less likely to engage in risky behavior, and are more likely to view teachers positively.

Researchers point to a number of reasons for the success of small schools. For one thing, students are less likely to be overlooked or isolated in small schools. To have adequate numbers of students, everybody's participation is needed for clubs, teams, and student government. And people in small schools come to know and care about each other to a greater degree than would be possible in much larger schools.

This caring and inclusive environment leads to a greater sense of personal effectiveness, researchers found. Students tend to take on responsibility when classes are smaller. Furthermore, scheduling is more flexible than in larger schools.

Small schools tend to use innovative teaching methods, among them:

- Mixing students according to skill and readiness levels, not arbitrary age groupings
- Individualizing learning activities
- Grouping students to work cooperatively
- Pooling teachers' skill and abilities for team teaching

Another benefit of small schools, according to the report, is that they are more likely to make learning both active and relevant to the world beyond the classroom. Kids get to be involved in projects and activities that keep them engaged in learning, helping to answer the age-old, grumble-grumble question: How come I have to learn this? Bet I'll never use it. By the way they're organized, and by the way teaching is often carried out, it seems that small schools let students discover early on: Bet I'll use this when I grow up!

‘A few beers won't hurt anybody...will it?’

The poster announcing the Oregon Liquor Control Commission's third annual essay contest asks: “A few beers won't hurt anybody...will it?”

The essay contest poster poses the question and asks seventh through 12th graders to write an essay on: “What's the best way to get students to recognize and obey Oregon's 21-year-old legal drinking age?” The deadline for entries is Nov. 1.

U.S. Savings Bonds will be awarded to the first, second and third place essayists in two grade categories: seventh through ninth and 10th through 12th grade.

First prize is \$400 in U.S. Savings Bonds. Second place winner will receive \$200 savings bonds. The third place prize will be \$100 savings bonds. Every student who enters will receive a free soft drink coupon from McDonald's.

The maximum length for the non-fictional entries is 400 words. Essays should be neatly handwritten or typed on only one side of a

paper. Your name, address, telephone number, school name and class level should appear at the top of the essay.

Essays should be sent to: Essay Contest, OLCC, P.O. Box 22297, Milwaukie, Oregon 97296-2297. Entries must have a Nov. 1 post mark to be considered for the contest. Winners will be invited to read their essays at the OLCC's annual awards ceremony on Monday, Nov. 25.

More than 850 students entered essays in the previous contests. The top essayists in 1995 were: First prize: Will Anderson, Hermiston High School; Ryan Gordon, St. Mary's School, Medford; Second prize: Cila Warncke, Seventh Day Adventist School, Lincoln City; Tami Botts, Ashland High School; Third prize: Ashley Hansen, Adrian Junior High School, Nyssa; Bridgette Howell, Monroe Middle School.

For more information, contract the OLCC Public Affairs office, 1-800-452-6522 or 503-872-5002.

Grand prize, free year of college

College costs got you down? Here's the antidote. Starting Friday, Sept. 27, students nationwide can register to win a free year of college by participating in “Honda's Free Ride.” The on-line sweepstakes runs from Friday, Sept. 27, to Friday, Nov. 22. One lucky student will be randomly selected to win a free year of school. Other prizes include concert tickets and 10,000 compilation CDs featuring rock acts from Capitol Records.

“Honda's Free Ride” is sponsored by American Honda Motor Co. Inc., Ticketmaster, Capitol Records and MasterCard. The unique marketing campaign is targeted directly to the college market, largely through new media. Information on “Honda's Free Ride” will be posted on campus Web sites and news groups. Some campuses will also be posterized.

The sweepstakes is open to all students attending accredited, four-year colleges in the United States, except for Florida. Entry forms can be accessed through Honda's college Web site, located at

www.hondacampus.com, or through Ticketmaster Online, at www.ticketmaster.com.

At Honda's advertising agency, Rubin Postaer Interactive, George Penner, manager of interactive communications, said, “Honda has been supporting higher learning for years—this is another example of Honda's commitment to education.”

The winner of the “Honda's Free Ride” sweepstakes will have his/her college expenses paid for one year, up to \$20,000. Ten winners will receive pairs of concert tickets. And the first 10,000 entrants will receive the Capitol Records compilation CD.

Participants can learn more about all of the sponsors by clicking sponsors' icons located on the entry forms. On Capitol's site, students will find information on the bands featured on the compilation CD. Honda's new college microsite provides a great trip up the California coastline. MasterCard's sites feature areas devoted to the interests of college students. Ticketmaster's Web site links to thousands of live events.

Dr. Ballard to Give Lecture on Titanic

Dr. Robert Ballard became internationally known in September 1985 when he and a team of oceanographers—using a deep-sea remote viewing system that he developed—discovered the remains of the most famous shipwreck ever, the R.M.S. Titanic. Dr. Ballard will share slides and stories in Portland at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall on Fri., Oct 11 as the second distinguished speaker in the STS Lecture Series.

Dr. Ballard has led or participated in nearly 100 deep-sea expeditions including the use of deep-diving submersibles. The expeditions included the first manned exploration of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge in Alvin, the discovery of underwater hot springs and their unusual animal communities in the Galapagos Rift, the first discovery of polymetallic sulfides, the discovery of high temperature “black smokers” along our own Pacific Coast, the lost ships of Guadalcanal, and the discovery of the historic Bismarck to name a few.

Dr. Ballard has Ph.D. in Marine Geology and Geophysics, eleven honorary degrees, dozens of other honors and awards, and is the Director of the Center for Marine Exploration at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. He is the founder and Chairman of the JASON Foundation for Education exciting young people in science and technology.

We're more than a power company. We're your neighbors, too. That's why it's important for us to actively support education, the arts, community and business development and other events that enhance quality of life and enrich the entire community.

Sheila Holden
SHEILA HOLDEN
GENERAL BUSINESS MANAGER

Carl Talton
CARL TALTON
GENERAL BUSINESS MANAGER

Some of the most important energy provided by Pacific Power doesn't travel along utility poles, flow through power lines or pass through any meter. It's our power to make a difference—something we do year-round by actively supporting programs and special events unique to our community. True, this kind of energy can't illuminate a single light bulb. But over time, it could help our entire community shine.

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