



Opinion

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Somebody Ought To Say Something When Back Row Seats Are the Best in the House!

By L.K. Bass

If you ask anyone what he or she thinks of the Portland Public School district right now, your apt to see rolling eyes, furled foreheads, puzzled looks or dismayed faces. However, the initial response your apt to hear, is common: "What a mess that is!"

The PPS Board may be performing their jobs the best they can, but at the last board meeting on May 21, the best performance was to be found in the Board Student Representative and the supporting cast of what was largely a Lincoln High School constituency and members of the Crisis Team.

What was before the board was a 'procedural glitch' preventing a vote on policies regarding student involvement and participation in school affairs.

The board agreed to approve the policy in principle and stated that they expected to approve them completely at the next board meeting. The Board Student Representative thanked them for their support and expressed indulgence over the occurrence of 'the procedural glitch' but echoed the great frustrations felt and concerns over how the policy process had proceeded. Citing that it was unacceptable for the board not to make a decision after having had three months to review the policies submitted; that many of the students in attendance that night had expected their complete approval. At one point, concluding that this delay, simply exemplified the communication breakdowns that exists in the PPS dis-

trict...

Shortly thereafter, in quiet candor, down the aisles came members of the Crisis Team. Within minutes of lining up before the board, things got loud.

Then louder. Unable to proceed with 'business as usual' the board left and amazingly enough, that's when communication and meaningful dialogue took place. That's when the back row seats became the best in



Lydia K. Bass

the house! We all watched in amazement the interactions between the largely Lincoln High School students, some parents and Crisis Team members. The crisis team echoed their great frustrations and concerns over the ongoing achievement gap of kids across the river. Citing that it was unacceptable for the board not to have made solid progress in closing the achievement gap after three

years. They asked the kids to understand that they were there protesting, not just for equal education but for what comes with that education: opportunities, the right to make a decent living and to compete equitably for jobs; that many of the crisis school students in attendance that night, had been shortchanged by the district.

The students listened thoughtfully. Then countered with their right to speak without interruption, for which the Crisis Team apologized and asked for understanding.

The students not only accepted their apology but also stated that they too believed and supported the mission that all children deserved an equal education and by exchanging phone numbers indicated they may be of support to them in the future.

The meeting resumed with the return of the board. As Lincoln students went right back to work presenting their case for more student involvement and participation in student affairs. They thanked The Board for their courage to return and the Crisis Team for their courage to pull back.

There were a lot of lessons to be learned that night, but the greatest one came from the spirit and moral fortitude of the kids from both sides of the river!

By the way, the board came back and adopted the student's policy for student involvement - unanimously.



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Sullivan Remembered for Civil Rights Crusades

The Rev. Leon H. Sullivan, the civil rights crusader who wrote the Sullivan Principles, an international code of business conduct that helped end apartheid in South Africa, recently died of leukemia. He was 78.

Sullivan, a well-known retired Philadelphia minister, died at Scottsdale Healthcare-Osborn Hospital in suburban Scottsdale, AZ, said his daughter Hope Sullivan Rose.

Sullivan's daughter issued a press statement, which started that at the time of his death, Rev. Sullivan "was surrounded by his family and friends and was at peace. We ask that everyone respect our family's wishes and give us time to grieve privately. We have shared our father with the world; allow us one moment to remember him amongst ourselves."

Sullivan was best known for devising the Sullivan Principles in the 1970's after he became the first Black board member at General Motors Corp. in 1971. He decried them as "a code that companies of America and the world came to follow to end apartheid peacefully, starting with the workplace." Companies doing business in South Africa were encouraged to give opportunities to their Black worker and help local communities. "When I started this program, a Black man had no legal standing in South Africa," Sullivan once said. "Literally, you had to break a whole system of inequity throughout South Africa."

As a Philadelphia minister in the early 1960s, Sullivan organized a non-violent boycott of local companies that would not hire Blacks. The slogan was: "Don't buy where you don't work." The boycotts worked, and jobs eventually were offered to people of all races, but many did not have the skills required for the openings.

Sullivan offered a solution to the challenge in 1964 by beginning Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), a job training program affecting about 1.5 million people in 142 centers worldwide. After retiring active from Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia in 1988, Sullivan moved to metro Phoenix. But he remained active. His Phoenix based International Foundation for Education and Self-Help aided hundreds of

thousands of people in Africa and the United States. He also served as an advisor to the GM board. Beginning in 1991, Sullivan held several well-attended African-African American Summit conferences for Black American and African leaders in Africa. At the time of his death, Sullivan was preparing for the 6th African-African American Summit in Nigeria, which was slated for this month. Sullivan's daughter, Hope Sullivan Rose, said she will lead the conference on her father's behalf, perhaps this fall. In 1992, then-President George Bush awarded Sullivan the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

In 1999, Sullivan and United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced an updated version of the Sullivan Principles to encourage fair employment around the world.

Sullivan was born in Charleston, WV, and educated at West Virginia State University, Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary. In his hometown of Charleston, a street was named after him in August. He recalled his first encounter with racism he was about 8 when he tried to buy a soda from and sit at a drug store counter in Charleston. "That was my first real confrontation with segregation and Black and White," he said. "So I decided... that I was going to stand up against that kind of thing the rest of my life." After conducting a desegregation drive in the city, the owner of the then-segregated restaurant offered him a free meal. Leaders across the country recalled Sullivan's leadership and his world contributions. The Rev. Jesse Jackson said in a press statement: "He was one of my earliest mentors and dearest friends, I loved him... he was a tall giant, he was a selfless giant. He set up training centers all over Africa and Latin America. He was a world leader. With conferences, he did more to bring together African-Americans together than anybody in history."

Kofi Annan recalled: "Reverend Sullivan showed us all how much one individual can do." Rev. Sullivan is survived by his wife, the former Grace Banks; three children, Julie, Howard and Hope; and seven grandchildren and admirers around the world.

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