

# Helping Kids Regardless of Color

## Gonzalez Shares Road to Equality

BY JAKE THOMAS  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of a world where peoples' skin color would act as neither a social detriment nor advantage.

Martin Gonzalez, a school board member and long-time community activist recently named to the Portland School Board, shares King's vision of equality, saying that while we are far from there, the public education system could be the road there.

Gonzalez agrees with the sentiment expressed by King that a quality education can help children obtain true equality, and without it they are relegated to "second class citizenship."

"To me, that's a challenge," said Gonzalez of the problem.

Gonzalez is currently TriMet's limited English proficiency outreach coordinator,

where he helps people with limited English abilities use TriMet's services. Before taking this job he held a litany of positions working in the non-profit sector and as a community organizer.

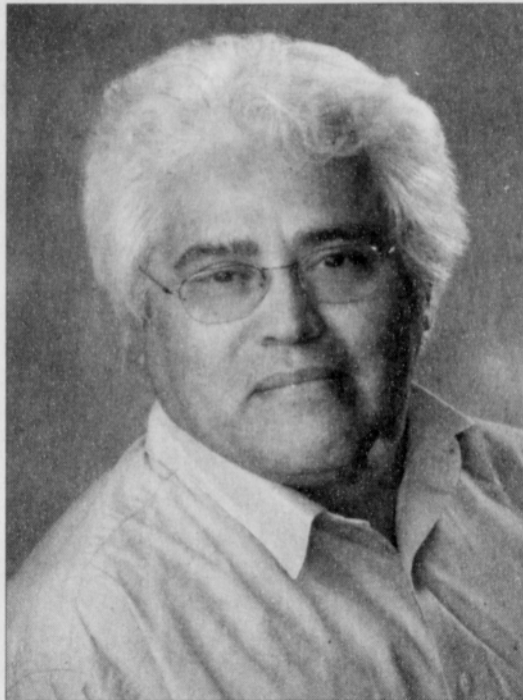
Most notably he served as executive director of the Portland Schools Alliance where he pushed for more immersion language instruction in low-income schools. He proudly states that all of his children attended Portland Pub-

lic Schools, with varying degrees of success. "I have pretty extensive relationships," he said of his various experiences.

He explained that perhaps the biggest problem facing minority and low-income students is the achievement gap. There is a considerable disparity between certain ethnic groups and white and Asian students when it comes to academic achievement.

For instance, in Portland Public Schools only about 40 percent of African-American and Hispanic students met or exceeded reading standards in 2007. For whites that number was over 60 percent.

Gonzalez said that one way to address the issue would be to set concrete and specific goals and milestones for underachieving students and ensure that they are followed through on. For instance, setting a goal that every student can read by third grade and then following up on it would help close the achievement



Long-time community activist Martin Gonzalez reflects on Martin Luther King Jr. as he sets an agenda for Portland Public Schools.

*For me, it's on delivering on the promise of a decent and quality education.*

— Martin Gonzalez, Portland School Board member

gap. "For me, it's on delivering on the promise of a decent and quality education for children," said Gonzalez.

He added that kindergarten could be an important battle ground for combating the affects of inequality in children's' backgrounds. He explained that some children come from

*continued* ▼ on page B12



Trudy Sargent is a member of the Portland School Board.

## School board volunteers tackle issues

BY JAKE THOMAS  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Trudy Sargent says the best way schools can carry on the work of Martin Luther King Jr. is by helping students have the best opportunities regardless of the color of their skin or background.

"It's in the work we do everyday," she said.

A member of the all-volunteer Portland School Board, Sargent worked as a lawyer in San Francisco for five years before transitioning to real estate in Portland.

Representing southeast Portland in Zone 6, she expects change at the national level and is hoping some of it

will trickle down to local schools as part of the economic stimulus package that is likely to emerge from the new Congress.

"Portland has been working hard preparing for facilities work," she said, pointing out that many of our schools are decades old and need renovations. Sargent said that school facilities need about \$1 billion worth of improvements, and getting them done will likely be an ongoing project.

She added that she's hoping that local voters will approve a bond levy to help.

Portland Public Schools has been carefully analyzing its facilities and has been focus-

ing on "figuring out what we need to do with them to really bring our schools into the 21st century for students," she said.

She added that the school district isn't just looking at this from purely a facilities point of view but as a systemic issue with the high schools.

Sargent said she wants schools to be in the best locations so that they can best serve the community and make sure that kids can have access to the programs they need. This will help address the drop-out rate PPS faces, she said.

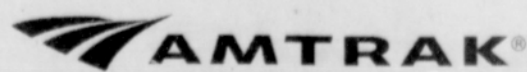
However, Sargent doesn't see any school closures on the

*continued* ▼ on page B11

*Picture your family on Amtrak.*



*Imagine the laughter that fills the air when you challenge your family and win, in a game of Crazy Eights. Or the amazement in their eyes as your children see the countryside for the very first time. Imagine sitting together in the Dining Car and actually sharing a thousand words over lunch. For memories that last a lifetime, get closer and smile — now say "Amtrak." Call 1-800-USA-RAIL or visit Amtrak.com to book your experience.*



OVER 500 DESTINATIONS • SENIOR DISCOUNTS FOR 62+ • KIDS 2-15 RIDE HALF PRICE

Up to 2 children ages 2-15 may accompany each paid adult at 1/2 the adult rail fare. Senior discount applies to coach travel only and is not applicable on Amtrak Auto Train. Fares, routes and schedules subject to change without notice and seats are limited. Other restrictions may apply. Amtrak is a registered service mark of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation.