

Parent's Corner

BY RON HERNDON



Read at Grade Level by 8 Years Old

Parents Preamble: I will ensure my child receives a quality education. If I don't fight for my child's education, no one else will. It's worth the effort. My child's future depends upon me.

Parents and community, we must ensure our children are reading at or above grade level by third grade. Most children are 8 years old in third grade. We need a massive community RB8 Campaign: Read (At grade level) by 8 years old.

A recent Annie E. Casey Foundation report shared that, "Educators and researchers have long recognized the importance of mastering reading by the end of third grade. Students who fail to reach this critical milestone often falter in the later grades and drop out before earning a high school diploma."

The Casey report further stated that "Third grade is an important pivot point in a child's education, the time when students shift from learning to read and begin reading to learn. Interventions for struggling readers after third grade are seldom as effective as those in early years."

Meanwhile, the National Assessment for Educational Progress, also known as the 'Nation's Report Card,' shows that for 2009, two thirds of students did not finish third grade with essential reading skills and were reading below grade level.

The report also found that the graduation rates for black and Hispanic students, who were not proficient readers in third grade,

lagged far behind those for whites with the same reading skills.

Lastly, the report states, "Black and Hispanic children are not only more likely to live in poverty, they also are more likely to live in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty and low-performing schools. The findings also show that only 42 percent of white students read at the proficient level in fourth grade, and this falls to 16 percent for black students and 17 percent for Hispanics.

Parents, please don't believe school systems or politicians who say they will magically correct this academic house of horrors. Here is their track record for improving education.

In 1983, Secretary of Education Terrel Bell released an analysis of the American educational system, "A Nation at Risk." The report stated, "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people."

"If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre performance that exists today, we might well have viewed this as an act of war."

Twenty seven years later we have spent billions of dollars on school systems, consultants, education reform committees, and high-priced school administrators who never had 90 percent of children performing at grade level in their professional careers.

The result has been abysmal reading and math scores, horrendously low scores for poor children, Hispanic and black children; ever exploding dropout rates; and SAT college entrance exam reading scores at the

lowest level on record.

Parents and community members, it is our responsibility to ensure our children don't fall into this academic bag of tricks.

Pathetically, we have learned that corporations which build prisons carefully examine third grade reading scores for black and

Hispanic boys to help make projections for the number of prison cells needed in the future.

Ron Herndon is a longtime advocate for educational opportunities for African-American children. He has served as director of Head Start in Portland since 1975.

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