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Proven Educators Not Called Upon Parent's Corner



BY RON HERNDON

Parents keep a close eye on the Oregon Legislature and Gov. John Kitzhaber. There will be much discussion about closing the achievement gap and school readiness. Given Oregon's deplorable academic outcomes, serious discussion and immediate action is long overdue.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress measures the academic preparedness of American students. Its 2009 report found only 10 percent of black fourth graders read at "proficient level or higher." The preparedness rate was only 11 percent of Latino students, and 33 percent of white students.

These alarming statistics and the life-long suffering accompanying them cry out for assembling the best talent to develop plans to correct this horror.

The national assessment describes educators with best talents as individuals with a track record of consistently getting low-income children to at least perform at or above grade level. Not so in Oregon.

Carefully examine the educational groups in Portland and committees formed by the governor that propose to make marked improvement in low-income children's academic performance. If you asked one simple question, "Who among you has a history of getting low income children to read at or above grade level? Please stand up!" Nearly all, if not all of the various committee members, would remain seated.

When the Los Angeles Lakers had Shaq and Kobe, but no NBA championships, they brought in Phil Jackson to coach. Why? Because he had championship rings with the Chicago Bulls. When Apple ran into problems several years ago, they brought back Steve Jobs. With Phil Jackson coaching the Lakers, the team won several NBA championships. With the return of Steve Jobs, Apple's performance became legendary.

The various educational planning committees developed by the governor are not composed of the Phil Jacksons and Steve

Jobs of the academic world. The overwhelming majority of committee members are not Oregon teachers or principals with a winning record of getting 90 percent of low-income children performing at or above grade level.

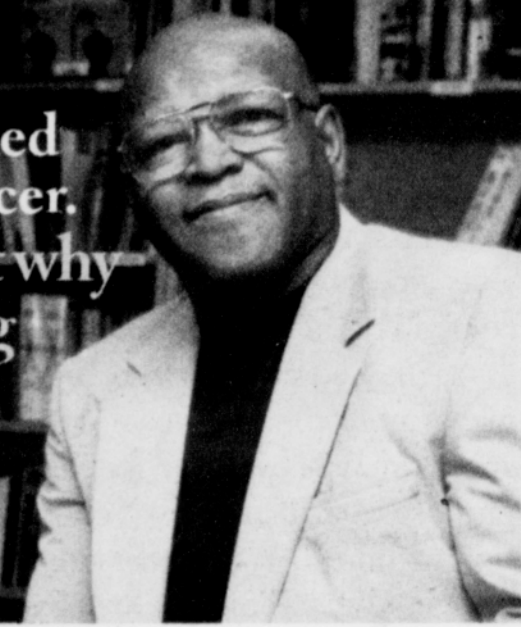
Composing an educational panel with a makeup of members holding less than a proven record of success is a disservice to taxpayers and makes a sham of professed intentions regarding achievement gap and school readiness.

Lastly, follow the money. If the governor's ill-advised proposal becomes law, keep tabs on how many "30 pieces of silver" and well-connected committee members are rewarded from state coffers.

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

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