

CAREER & EDUCATION

The Myth of Black Children Failing School



Parent's Corner

BY RON HERNDON
News Flash!
Portland's pre-
dominantly black
Woodlawn School

has its fifth grade black students outperforming average white Portland Public School students in math; and also outperforming average white students statewide.

This was not a misprint. In 1996, Woodlawn's fifth-grade students outperformed students in schools throughout the state in mathematics, scoring 12 points higher than the state average.

The next year, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory documented the school's success by printing the following dialogue

between teacher and students in an article, Science and Mathematics for All Students:

1. "Latasha, what's another way of saying 20 one-hundredths?"

"Two-tenths!"

"Right."

2. "Matthew, is 15 composite or prime? How do you know?"

"Composite, because 15 breaks up into threes and fives, not just ones."

"Good."

3. "Melody, what's a rhombus?"

"It's a parallelogram, with equal sides."

For the past 11 years, Jan Gillespie has been the mathematics specialist at Woodlawn, nine years of that time under the leadership of Principal Linda Harris.

Both women are leaders in Oregon's education circles. Their professional achievements are the fruits of a shared philosophy that all children can achieve higher standards.

Woodlawn's students have proved this point. Most of the school's 525 students are from working-class African-American families and are receiving school lunch assistance.

Contrary to the perceived link between poverty and low achievement, Woodlawn's students have scored high in state and district mathematics tests in recent years. Harris gives much of the credit to Gillespie, who co-authored a "hands-on/ minds-on" mathemat-

ics program.

"Disadvantaged kids can do well if given appropriate instruction, and if you believe they can do it," Harris says.

Harris also has high expectations for her teachers. Each spring, they work together to identify goals for the coming year and to schedule teacher training to help teachers achieve those goals.

Harris' own words describe Gillespie's approach to mathematics, which includes an emphasis on problem solving, reasoning, collaboration, visual, mental, and hands-on experiences.

"Daily bulletin board math discussions, which teach basic computation skills through record-keeping, are combined with activities and partner games. Each day, students and teachers update data on the board and discuss the new mathematical relationships which appear. Thus, students at every grade level analyze data, perceive patterns, explore mathematical relationships, and communicate their thinking.

Gillespie and the other teachers are careful to use full and accurate sentences when explaining an algorithm or a grouping concept, teaching students to use language as a bridge from concrete examples to abstract ideas.

There are after-school activities that reinforce the curriculum, such as Math Club and Hands-On Science night. Parents can check out

math videos from the library and are invited to attend family mathematics and science nights throughout the year, as well as a monthly family fun night.

The power of these strategies, combined with good teaching, can spell the difference between lifting struggling students up, so that they can reach their higher potential, and leaving them to muddle through, or drop out, on their own.

All children can achieve if you provide them with a safe and nurturing environment that includes a high level of expertise among your teachers," Harris said.

I strongly encourage all readers to Google this myth shattering document. Mercy me, fifth grade black children achieving at grade level in math, and outscoring the majority of white children in Oregon.

The nagging question for those who were on the Portland School Board during that time is, why didn't you give Ms. Harris and Ms. Gillespie the authority to replicate these gains throughout the system?

Now, the question posed for all the newfound education reformers in Oregon who continually mouth platitudes about the achievement gap is who on your committees has ever had black children achieving at grade level?

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.

LORI GOT A JOB AT PCC'S
**CASCADE
JOB FAIR**



**Tuesday,
April 24, 2012
11 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

Come network with
50 local employers at
this free event!

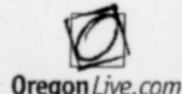
Cascade Campus Gym
705 N. Killingsworth St.
Portland, OR 97217

FREE WORKSHOP

Job Searching with Social Media for Dummies

With author Joshua Waldman 10:30 a.m., Auditorium
Moriarty Arts & Humanities Bldg.

Special thanks
to our sponsors:



www.pcc.edu/cascadejobfair



Portland
Community
College

THE LAW OFFICES OF
Patrick John Sweeney, P.C.

Patrick John Sweeney
Attorney at Law

1549 SE Ladd
Portland, Oregon

Portland: (503) 244-2080
Hillsboro: (503) 244-2081
Facsimile: (503) 244-2084
Email: Sweeney@PDXLawyer.com

Writing from the Heart

St. Mary's students earn honors

Two St. Mary's Academy students have received writing awards from the Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture at the University of Portland.

This year's essay topic was "The Geography of Hope," and St. Mary's Academy junior Catherine Murphy took first place. Junior Tara Johnson received an honorable mention.

"The judging committee was very impressed that both Catherine and Tara did not write careful papers designed to please a teacher, or merely to address the topic of hope in an academic sense, but wrote from the heart, wrote with verve and commitment," said Rev. Jim Lies, executive director of the Garaventa Center.

Murphy, 16, was adopted from China when she was a one year old. For her essay, she wrote about a trip she took in the summer of 2010 to visit the orphanage and foster home where she stayed during her first year of life.

"It was very eye-opening," she said. "To go back to the country that nurtured me as an infant was nice."



Tara Johnson



Catherine Murphy

For her essay, Johnson, 16, delved into social justice issues she observed when visiting India, where her mother is from.

"It means a lot to me that the things I write about that I really care about resonate with other people," Johnson said.

The fact that they were writing about topics and places so deeply important to them helped infuse their essays with spirit and authenticity, said Sara Salvi, chairwoman of the English Department at St. Mary's Academy.