

OPINION

Welcoming and Respecting Every Child

Teaching for success

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

As a new school year begins, how do we teach black and other non-white children and youths and all those who are poor or have special needs to ensure their successful readiness for the future? How do educators and all those with primary responsibilities for preparing children for the future understand that every child is sacred and deserves fair treatment? How do we create a pedagogy that respects the unique gifts of our diverse child population and nation of many colors and faiths and become a beacon for our multiracial multicultural world?

Dr. Terrell L. Strayhorn of The Ohio State University and director of its Center for Higher Education, reminds teachers they must begin by making sure all children know they belong and are valued. He explained: "All of us as educators are about trying to inspire students to reach their highest potential to be innovative, to be creative, to move outside the borders, to imagine and connect the dots that aren't even connected yet. They can't get there without first satisfying dysfunction around belonging. That's how central and important it is. How do you



start to build it? . . . The first thing you can start to do is accept students for who they are. Short, tall, skinny, thick, real hair, fake hair. Clean clothes or dirty clothes. Smell like you and don't smell like you. We have to, first of all, love them, embrace them; that is, we accept them—because they can't possibly be free in a place that starts to treat them as different, as outcasts, as outsiders."

Dr. Christopher Emdin, associate professor in the Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology at Teachers College, Columbia University points out that many teachers didn't have all the right role models in school themselves: "There's so many educators who feel like they're doing the right thing and doing the right work for the right reasons, but they have not yet done the deep internal work of healing from the trauma of their own experiences in schools.

He encourages young teachers today to take the time to think about what might have been broken in their own school experience—and embrace the opportunity to reimagine what they want school to feel like for their students.

These two educators discussed these crucial and thorny issues during this year's Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools training dedicated to stopping summer learning loss, creating a love of reading and empowering

children to make a difference in their schools and communities.

Dr. Strayhorn shared a personal story. He always excelled at math until his senior year in high school, when a teacher's ugly comment on an exam changed everything:

"Miss Pitts gave me my test back, and I had made a mistake . . . She circled it and said 'stupid move.' A teacher called me 'stupid' in 12th grade. I went home and told my mother. Long story

ers and college servant leaders that teaching is a calling, "There are young people in this country who need you. Every single day, you've got to wake up to that call, and you've got to be present in the moment about that call."

Dr. Emdin stressed that one of the highest parts of that calling is to create joy—for both children and teachers:

"You know, for me, it's about whatever it is that you can create

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short, before you know it—my grades started slipping in math. Before you know it—I had always planned to go to [the University of Virginia] to major in math; I went to UVA and majored in music and religious studies. But it wasn't until I got in my doctoral program in a stats class years later that I realized, 'Oh, my gosh, I like math.' And then I said, 'Well, wait a second. I always liked math. When did I stop liking math?' It was when Miss Pitts told me I was dumb at math." He warns that words really matter.

He reminded our young teach-

ers in a classroom to allow joy to be present . . . I always tell classes this too: I do hip-hop, hip-hop science, hip-hop STEM not for my students, but for me, because I needed to heal and bring back up who I wanted to be." He added: "It's a battle for you to keep your spirit alive every day . . . and once you do that, they will learn, because joy is the key to learning."

He emphasized that too often students are penalized for their behavior in settings that "are killing the joy before it can happen. We blame them for not being able

to actively engage because of the structure of the classroom, when in reality, we are doing the violence on them . . . Joy first. Anything else second. That's the work."

These are messages many thousands of excellent teachers around the country already carry in their hearts and implement in their actions every day. Let's celebrate and encourage all of them as they start a new school year prepared to recognize and nurture the best in every child, appreciate the gifts each one brings to the classroom, and cultivate the joy and love for learning that so many of our students desperately need. And let us say to those who see teaching as just a job and who do not love and respect every child and aren't committed to ensuring their success to please go do something else.

You can have the best curriculum in the world and as many degrees as you can pay for from the best schools but the foundation for building strong children is respecting and remembering the specialness of every individual child. Educating each of our children is a sacred trust and a noble undertaking. I am so grateful to all those who go into school buildings across our nation every day to build strong educated citizens to ensure the competitiveness and security of our nation.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.

Help Young Men and Women with Careers

Vote yes on 98 to make school relevant

BY GEORGE WEATHEROY

As Portland experiences an economic boom, large sections of our city are on the brink of a youth gang crisis—which is directly linked to a lack of options for employment, housing and stability.

Yet teachers, principals and law enforcement professionals like me are aware of what it takes to help kids stay on or get on a path toward a productive life and good-paying employment. One of the best is investing in education in the form of hands-on learning opportunities. In particular, I'm talking about vocational and career technical classes.

And there's going to be some-



thing you can do that will start bringing about this important change: Vote "yes" this November on a ballot measure that will make these vocational and career technical classes a reality for more of our students.

Everyone in the Portland community should support Measure 98. It gives badly needed resources to schools so they can expand and create vocational and career instruction. These opportunities keep them off the streets, and provide skills and work ethic so they'll succeed.

Before retiring from the Portland Police Bureau and since working in security for Portland Public Schools, I've seen this issue from all sides.

What I know is that students who struggle academically in school, especially our traditionally under-served youth, often don't see any-

thing positive in their future. That's when they get involved with crime. Some join gangs. Others steal. They spiral into a well of hopelessness, too many end up in prison.

For years, in a "one-size-fits-all" approach, our schools have steered students toward college. But college isn't for everyone, and the assumption that everyone should go to college has let a lot of kids fall through big cracks.

Providing career and technical education to high school students not only can put young men and women on a career path; it can also show them a new way to engage in school so they can take advantage of everything high school has to offer. Statistics also show a dramatic link between career and technical classes and graduation rates.

Hands-on learning that career technical classes provide, whether the more traditional courses like metals and wood working or mod-

ern ones like biomedicine, ship navigation and math for medical professionals, connects students to the real world.

They see the results of the work—and they understand the relevance. Often, we'll see these students putting in extra time on their coursework instead of fleeing school as fast as they can.

But schools simply don't have the funds to provide these essential classes at the level that's required to engage enough of our students.

That's where Measure 98 comes in. As Oregon's economy grows, Measure 98 captures new state revenues to be dedicated to public high schools. The schools can expand their career and technical education curriculum so that every student who wants access has it. Schools also can spend the money on college prep classes and dropout prevention.

What I think is really important

about the way Measure 98 is written is that it gives local school districts the ability to determine what they need and gives them the funds to accomplish it.

For instance, in Portland, we are experiencing a shortage of police officers due to a lack of qualified applications. The district and the community could come together to start a career program that allows our students in high school to build the skills they need to become a police officer.

We can't afford to lose a single child to hopelessness, joblessness or gang life. The cost to a family is too much to bear. The cost to society is intolerable.

We can't wait any longer to start saving our youth. Please join me in supporting Measure 98!

George Weatheroy is director of security for Portland Public Schools and a retired sergeant with the Portland Police Bureau.