

The Free Lance-Star
How to close academic gap

Local residents, educators meet to discuss African-American academic achievement

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By MELISSA NIX

More than 30 people gathered in the gym of the Bragg Hill Family Center for an important discussion last night--how to address shortfalls in the education of African-American children.

Educators, parents and concerned residents met for the third in a series of events put on by the Coalition of Concerned Citizens, a consortium of Fredericksburg city and Spotsylvania and Stafford County schools, local churches, and civic organizations.

The coalition's mission is to improve the academic achievement of African-American students.

"It's well known that African-American students are not doing as well academically as their counterparts," said Mozett Petway, president of Spotsylvania County's NAACP chapter and a leader of the coalition. "How can we improve their academic performance?"

He pointed to data showing the disparity in 2004-05 test scores in English, math and science between black and white children in Fredericksburg city and Spotsylvania County schools--a gap ranging from 15 to 25 percentage points.

Coalition members presented their recommendations for reaching increased academic achievement--ideas that came out of committees called Parental Involvement, Early Intervention, Community Support, Cultural Sensitivity, and Stop Drop Outs.

Speakers made solid recommendations. They also made passionate pleas for commitment and honesty on the part of the community and schools.

"There's a battle out there we have to fight," said Carlos Moore, an art teacher at Chancellor High School. "We can't lose it. We're losing too many kids."

With his public comments, he called out the elephant in the room--the word "race."

"Our school system in the United States is a form of institutionalized racism. Racism is what these kids have to live with--that's part of the history," he said. "We as educators have to be sensitive to what these kids go through."

Melvin Brown, who chaired the Cultural Sensitivity Committee, talked about the success of cultural competence training in his school district--Prince William County.

"Out of 85 schools in my district, 82 of them have been trained in cultural diversity," the associate superintendent said. "This is the kind of thing that could be done here."

The training takes educators and administrators and "gets them accustomed to what students [outside their ethnic groups] are bringing to the table," he explained.

Others noted that the public school teacher population does not reflect the range of ethnic

groups that comprise the student population.

"We have to hire staff that reflects our student population. In my school we have one black teacher and one male teacher," said Melody Lewis, a counselor in a Spotsylvania County school. "Our children need to see us. They need to see our faces."

Nine out of 10 public school teachers are white, and almost 8 out of 10 are female, according to 2001-02 statistics from the National Education Association. The percentage of African-American public school teachers has declined, from 8 percent in 1971 to 6 percent in 2001.

Parental involvement was also touted as key to success.

"We need to dig deep for these children who are struggling--target them and their parents," said Courtland High School Assistant Principal Mary Speight, who chaired the Parental Involvement committee. "Invite them in, make them feel comfortable."

She suggested smaller orientations, workshops, computer classes where the children teach the parents a few skills and expose them to their curriculum.

Many, many other recommendations and tasks came down the pipeline last night from the various committees.

So what's the next step?

"We'd like the superintendents to adopt some of the things we've recommended," Petway said. "On Nov. 9, we'll have another meeting, so that they can come back and let us know how things are going."

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(Please especially note highlighted areas in red or underlined.)

SB168

WWW Version

SB 168 (BR 1907) - G. Neal, E. Scorsone

AN ACT relating to reducing the achievement gaps in the public schools.

Create a new section of KRS Chapter 158 to define "achievement gap" as the difference in academic performance between male and female students, students with and without disabilities, students with and without English proficiency, students who are on free and reduced lunch and those who are not on free and reduced lunch, and minority and nonminority students on each of the tested areas by grade level of the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System; require the Department of Education, by November 1 of each year, to provide each school council, or the principal if a school council does not exist, disaggregated data on its students' performance on the statewide test with an equity

analysis on the achievement gap between the subpopulations of students; require each school council, by April 1 of each year, to review the data and revise the consolidated plan to include activities and a schedule to reduce the achievement gap among the subpopulations of students and submit the plan to the superintendent and the local board of education to be reviewed in a public meeting; require the local board to establish a policy for reviewing the academic performance on the state tests for the student subpopulations and to set a biennial target for reducing the achievement gaps; require a school that does not meet its biennial target to submit its consolidated plan for the use of the school's professional development and extended school services funds to the superintendent for approval; require a school that does not meet its target for two biennia be subject to intervention by the Department of Education; amend KRS 156.095 to include strategies to reduce the achievement gaps as an area for which professional development funds may be expended; amend KRS 158.805 to require that the Commonwealth school improvement fund be used during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years for technical assistance to schools to reduce the achievement gaps among the various groups of students; amend KRS 160.340 to require the local board of education to adopt a policy requiring each school council to make an annual report describing the school's progress in meeting its goals, including its plan to reduce the achievement gaps; amend KRS 160.345 to conform.

SB 168 - AMENDMENTS

SCS - Retain the original provisions; make technical corrections.

HCS - Revise the original provisions to create a new section of KRS Chapter 158 to define "achievement gap" as the substantive performance difference on each of the tested areas, by grade level, of the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System between the various groups of students, including male and female students, students with and without disabilities, students with and without English proficiency, minority and nonminority students, and students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch and those who are not eligible for free and reduced lunch; require the Department of Education by November 1 in each year, to provide each school council, or principal if there is not a council, data on its students' performance as shown on the statewide tests; require each local board of education by December 1, 2002, to adopt a policy for reviewing the academic performance on the state assessments for the various groups of students; require the school-based decision making council, or the principal if there is not a council, by February 1, 2003, and each February 1 in odd-numbered years thereafter, with the involvement of parents, faculty, and staff, to set the school's biennial targets for eliminating any achievement gap and submit them to the superintendent for consideration; require the superintendent and the school council to agree on the targets before they are submitted to the local board of education for adoption; require the school council, or the principal, by April 1, 2003, and each April 1 in odd-numbered years thereafter, to review the desegregated data and revise the consolidated plan to include the biennial targets, strategies, activities, and a time schedule calculated to eliminate the achievement gap among the various groups of students; require the principal to convene a public meeting at the school to present and discuss the plan prior to submitting it to the superintendent and the local board of education for review; require the local board to determine if a school meets its targets; require revisions to the consolidated plan in the areas of professional development and extended school services by schools that do not meet their targets and submission to the superintendent for approval; require the superintendent to report schools that do not meet their targets after 4 years to the Commissioner of Education; amend KRS 158.805 to require that for the 2002-2004 biennium Commonwealth School Improvement Funds be spent to reduce the achievement gaps in schools not meeting their goals under the statewide accountability system; amend KRS 160.340 to require the local board of education to biennially review in

a public meeting the portion of the schools' consolidated plan that sets forth the activities and schedule to reduce the achievement gaps among the various groups of students; amend KRS 156.095 and KRS 160. 345 to conform.

Feb 4-introduced in Senate
Feb 6-to Education (S)
Feb 13-reported favorably, 1st reading, to Calendar with Committee Substitute
Feb 14-2nd reading, to Rules
Feb 15-posted for passage in the Regular Orders of the Day for Tuesday, February 19,
2002
Feb 19-3rd reading, passed 38-0 with Committee Substitute
Feb 20-received in House
Feb 21-to Education (H)
Feb 22-posted in committee
Mar 13-reported favorably, 1st reading, to Calendar with Committee Substitute
Mar 14-2nd reading, to Rules
Mar 21-posted for passage in the Regular Orders of the Day for Friday, March 22, 2002
Mar 22-3rd reading, passed 76-6 with Committee Substitute ; received in Senate
Apr 1-posted for passage for concurrence in House Committee Substitute for Monday,
April 1, 2002; Senate concurred in House Committee Substitute ; passed 36-0
Apr 2-enrolled, signed by each presiding officer; delivered to Governor
Apr 9-signed by Governor (Acts ch. 302)