

Education for the taking

By Jeff Davidson

"The goal of the school district is to identify as early as possible students who are unlikely to meet the standards for progression to the next level of study so that the school can provide appropriate intervention.

Intervention must be provided for any student who does not meet grade level proficiencies established by the State" or so, states Chatham County Schools, Policy 3420, Clause E. on "Intervention for Students Not Meeting Promotion Standards."

This objective brings to mind an observation I made years back. I attended two briefings at East Chapel Hill High School for parents of rising 9th graders. All parents of current eighth graders received the same invitation. The first session focused on what courses students would need to graduate from high school and be prepared for university studies, technical college, or direct participation in the work force.

I listened closely because I found the information presented to be so vital, that had I not attended I would be unprepared to assist my child in course selection in any meaningful way all throughout high school.

At the first meeting, the nearly 200 parents in attendance listened with rapt attention. Graduating

from ECHHS with the new requirements is not going to be a cakewalk. The demands are rigorous. The children of many parents, however, did not attend these crucial meetings. Only one African-American parent was in attendance at the first meeting. At the second meeting where parents got to meet and listen to school counselors, department heads, and teachers, about 275 parents attended, three of which were African-American.

Such poor attendance is another disheartening aspect of our society that bodes well for no one. To me, this spells the future of America. In a decade or so, the 13- and 14-year-olds represented by the parents that night will turn 28 and 29 years old, out of college, ready to buy cars, houses, start families, and participate in the economic mainstream. Yet, why is anyone surprised that African-American academic achievement continues to lag? Those who are not listening will be unprepared at ages 13 and 14 and throughout high school, and will not be major participants in the future economy.

The teachers and the administration locally are among the most caring and socially concerned

group one could encounter. If students can't do well here, where else on planet earth do you suppose they might do better?

Yet, someone will say that education in Orange or Chatham or Wake County is unfair, that it rewards only certain groups and deprives others.

Others will bring lawsuits, if not now then in the years to come. Or they'll seek more government studies or yet more funds. They'll say the teachers are biased or that the educational system favors some and not others. This is not the case. The decades long lack of African-American academic achievement is a do-it-to-yourself proposition, aided and abetted by "do-gooders" who have no inkling of the long-term harm they cause. In 2019, I wonder if anything will be different, and if greater numbers of African-American parents will take time to listen to administrators, teachers, and counselors who hold vital keys to the quality of their children's lives.

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SCHOOLS

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construction project at Northwood that will be ready when students return in the fall. Additional classroom space and a gymnasium expansion are highlights of this campus improvement. A new middle school in northeast Chatham County is also underway and scheduled to open in the fall of 2010.

This fall every high school student in Chatham County Schools will be issued a laptop computer. In November of 2008, an \$800,000 grant from the Golden LEAF Foundation provided for the purchase of a laptop for every student at Jordan-Matthews High School for the 2009-2010 school year. iBook laptops currently in use at Jordan-Matthews will be re-distributed to the other high schools in the district. This will allow every high school to fully participate in the 1 to 1 Laptop Learning Program by providing a laptop for every high school student in the district.

Two high schools from Chatham will be participating in a study of how best to teach Algebra I, conducted by researchers at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at The Johns Hopkins University. More than 300 ninth graders at Jordan-Matthews and Northwood will participate in the federally funded study, continuing in five districts (representing 18 high schools) across the country in September. The 2009-2010 school year will constitute year three of a four-year study.

Most of all we have August 25 go look forward to. That is when we will see the smiling faces of our students as they return to us for a new adventure in learning. With them as our focus, it takes very little to go "from lemons to lemonade."

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