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WASL Scores Improve, But Still Nothing To Brag About

By REBECCA COOK

Associated Press Writer

BURIEN, Wash. (AP) - Washington students improved their scores in reading, writing and math on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning last spring, but only about one in three children is meeting state standards.

"We've got to do something about this, and it's a shared responsibility," said state schools superintendent Terry Bergeson, who said schools, teachers, parents and communities will need to make radical improvements to get every child meeting standards. "We're going to have to have a big, breakthrough performance to meet this goal."

Bergeson announced the results of the 2003 test on Thursday. Students in grades four, seven and 10 take the WASL (pronounced WAH'-suhl) in reading, writing, math and listening.

Schools that receive federal Title I money and get low WASL scores will have to make "adequate yearly progress" toward the standards or face consequences under the federal No Child Left

Behind Act.

This year, 436 of the state's roughly 2,000 schools failed to make "adequate yearly progress." Of those, 386 are on alert - they have to improve or face consequences next year.

Fifteen Washington schools have gone two years without making adequate improvement, which means they must allow students to transfer to higher-performing schools if they desire. Thirty-one schools haven't made adequate progress for three years now, which means they must offer tutoring and similar support services to poor students. Four schools have gone four years without improving scores enough, which means a host of changes aimed at completely upgrading the school.

Thirteen schools worked their way off the alert list this year.

Bergeson said parents shouldn't panic if their child's school is on the needs-improvement list. It doesn't mean the school is failing, she said.

"If I were a parent I would go to the school and talk to the principal," Bergeson said. She said parents should ask what their school

is doing to improve, and ideally they should participate in the efforts.

Bergeson said she agrees with the goals of No Child Left Behind, and she thinks the WASL is a good way to test whether schools are

really teaching kids what they need to know. But, she said, she has some problems with the rules in the federal law.

For example, students who don't speak English are expected to

reach the same standards as everyone else. That's good in theory, Bergeson said, but in the real world many schools get a new influx of students every year who speak absolutely no English and can't read

the test. Whatever progress the school makes with one group of students will be rolled back the next year, when new non-English-speaking kids arrive.

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African American Company Participates In High Point Redevelopment Project

By Shrinda Mitchell

The Seattle Medium

West Seattle's well-known High Point housing project is getting a new look and what developers hope will be a new reputation for the impoverished area.

For many years, High Point has been associated with drugs, violence, gangs and the deteriorating look of the buildings made it, what some would consider, one of the most undesirable housing areas in the state.

The Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) is redeveloping the High Point neighborhood. They are undertaking several levels in the two-phase project that will include initiatives such as: deconstruction, solving drainage problems, preserving natural habitats and building healthy homes. Deconstruction is one of the key levels of the redevelopment because it is a new approach to traditional demolition procedures. This approach involves taking apart everything, in order to help save most of the valuable materials such as cedar planks, siding layers, high-quality growth lumber, doors, bricks and appliances. It is a process that will also help save most of the trees within the neighborhood.

Knight Construction & Development Firm, Inc., an African American owned company, was awarded the contract to deconstruct twenty of High Point's 716 Units by SHA after submitting the lowest. The twenty-five year old founder of Knights Construction, Elmore Williams, jumped on the bid when he received the SHA invitation for the redevelopment project.

With a bid contract for a little over \$200,000 and a work crew of fifteen, with four former High Point residents added to the crew, the deconstruction process is in progress. Knight Construction is working under the wings of Absher Construction, which is the general contractor for the project. According to SHA project manager



Crew members of Knight Construction take apart buildings at the High Point Housing Projects in West Seattle, and salvage vital parts. Photo/Shrinda Mitchell.

Tom Phillips, one of Absher's goals is to have minority owned businesses be a part of their contracts.

With the lack of African Americans working on these kinds of jobs, it is not only good to see African Americans being responsible for an important part of a big project, but it is also good to see people that used to be residents in the housing area working on the job. This is one of the reasons why Williams felt it is a good reason to have some of the High Point residents working along side of him and his crew.

"These people lived here their whole life, so it's only right when you have construction projects going on that you include the people that the construction project is going to affect," Williams said.

Rontrell Stiles, who formerly lived in High Point and is on the deconstruction crew, stated that it

has been a fun and heart felt experience so far.

"Growing up here and now deconstructing the place is kind of like a little heart pain, but at the same time it feels good to know you're a part of something you helped build," stated Stiles. "It's really been fun, I get to see my old friends that used to live here. It's just a pleasure being here," added Stiles.

Knight Construction has been in business for two years and High Point is one of their biggest projects so far. Williams' states it is a good learning experience and he is looking to take on more deconstructing jobs like this as well as others such as landscaping and framing. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) president Carl Mack believes it is beautiful for an African American owned company to be awarded the contract.

"It represents opportunity and hope. It is sweet, but at the same time it can be sweeter," said Mack. "Now we want a \$22 million dollar contract for that. It's not to minimize his (Williams) contract because I think it's outstanding news for the African American community. But based on the lack of opportunity we have had for so long we'll celebrate it but we're not satisfied," added Mack.

The first phase of the High Point redevelopment project will not be completed until mid-2005 and the second phase in 2008. When it is all complete High Point will be a new and improved community of houses, townhouses and apartment homes decorated with parks, trails and new public amenities. With a whole new look, West Seattle's High Point is looking to take on a whole new reputation.

Auburn Police Investigating Death Of Man While In Police Custody

The Auburn Police Department is investigating the circumstances surrounding the death of Jason Lee Tucker, 23 of Tukwila, who died on Aug. 24 after being taken into custody by Tukwila Police. Pursuant to a Mutual Aid agreement between several Valley Cities, outside agencies are routinely called in to investigate certain types of incidents, including those involving persons held in police custody.

According to Police Reports, Tukwila Police responded to a domestic violence call at approximately 9 p.m. on Saturday Aug. 23.

A responding officer observed Tucker driving in the area of the residence where the alleged assault occurred and stopped the car. Tucker was taken in custody without incident, and was taken to the Tukwila Police Department for processing on 4th degree assault

charges.

While in the holding cell at the Tukwila Police Department, Tucker had what appeared to be a medical emergency. Tukwila Fire Aid and Medics were dispatched and transported Tucker to Harborview Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead at 4:09 a.m. on Sunday Aug. 24.

The body was turned over to the King County Medical Examiners office to investigate the cause of death. The investigation is looking into information that Tucker possibly ingested some type of narcotic prior to his arrest.

The results of the investigation is pending the completion of a toxicology report. According to police officials, the results of the toxicology report might not be available for about 1 to 1-1/2 months.

Religious Leaders Struggle To Support Black Gays—But Not The Lifestyle

By Hazel Trice Edney

NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA)—For years, it was an issue that many African-Americans were uncomfortable discussing. But now that gay rights is out of the closet, many Blacks are struggling with how to support gays as people without sanctioning their lifestyles.

There is no question that Black gays and lesbians are out of the closet. Last week, Atlanta, like 18 other cities around the country, hosted its annual Gay Pride Week, with an expected attendance of more than 15,000. Openly gay men, such as E. Lynn Harris, have published widely read books that discuss their homosexuality.

Despite the books, parades, coming out parties and "proms," many African-Americans have mixed feelings on the subject.

"It is a wedge issue. It is a very divisive issue. But, it is an issue that up until most recently in the last four or five years, would not even be approached," says Rev. Timothy McDonald, president of the People

for the American Way's National African-American Ministers Leadership Council, a group of more than 700 ministers. "We've always dealt with it behind the scenes. I think more recently in the last three to five years we've started having more and more conversations about it."

Those conversations may have multiplied after the recent March on Washington. At that event, Martin Luther King III, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), Democratic presidential candidate Al Sharpton, and Coretta Scott King linked the rights of homosexuals with the struggle that African-Americans face in the United States.

"We are here because our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers are being subjected to persecution, discrimination and violence because of their sexual orientation," Martin Luther King III told the crowd. "Let me say this. Homophobia is nothing but fear and hatred. That has no place in the beloved community."

Few Black churches are willing to go that far.

For example, the Council of Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), the governing body of more than 7,000 predominately Black congregations in more than 30 nations, reaffirmed last month at a special session in Dallas its official position against openly gay clergy.

"The Bishops reaffirmed again that the official position of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is not in favor of the ordination of openly gay persons to the ranks of the clergy of our church," states Bishop Richard Franklin Norris in a letter that he ordered read in every AME church. "This position reaffirms our published position papers, public statements and prior rulings, all of which indicate that we do not support the ordination of openly gay persons."

While the AME Church makes its position clear, some denominations remain curiously silent.

Rev. William J. Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention USA, which claims a membership of 6.5 million, refused NNPA's request for a comment on the issue. Rev. Roscoe D. Cooper, former general secretary of the organization, says the subject has not been debated by the organization.

Cooper's personal view coincides with the official position of the AME bishops.

"I think one of the things that's happened with the Civil Rights Movement is that it has been broadened to include so much that what it has done is effectively put the Black issue to the side," says Cooper, pastor of the Metropolitan African-American Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. "I think that there are some folks who, because they need public attention, grab a hold of every issue and want to be politically correct."

The Bible is clear on the evils of homosexuality, says Hasani Pettiford, author of "Pimpin' from the Pulpit to the Pews: Exposing the

Spirit of Lust in the Church."

In his book, Pettiford points to Leviticus 18:22 (King James Version) as a key scripture: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination."

He also cites I Corinthians 6:9-11: "...Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [homosexuals], nor abusers of themselves with mankind...shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of God."

Sylvia Rhue, director of the Equal Partners of Faith, a national advocacy group that included the rights of gay and lesbian Christians, says scriptural interpretations are often misleading.

For example, as Leviticus uses the word "abomination" in the King James Version, she says, "There is no Hebrew word for abomination. The word is 'toevah' or 'toebah,'" she says. "It means ritually unclean

to enter to the temple as were any women when they were menstruating."

However, other translations of that verse command abstaining from homosexual acts without referring to the word "abomination." The New International Version reads, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable."

Rue argues that some of the confusion is because the term homosexuality is not used in the Bible because the term wasn't invented until 1869 and didn't become a part of the American lexicon until the 1900s. However, there are references to "effeminate" behavior, such as I Corinthians 6:9.

McDonald, pastor of First Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta, understands both sides of the argument.

"There are those who are in the ministry who just blatantly, unequivocally, define homosexuality as sin. There are others in the ministry, who are still struggling with that," McDonald (Cont'd. On Page 2)