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FINDING CIVILITY IN THE 'REAL' WORLD

POLITE CONVERSATION & COMMUNICATION

By Carol Randolph

STORY INSIDE ON PAGE 2 >>

MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- > Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- > Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005.
- > Leading the construction and renovation of The Gatepost Center, which will include creating a space for a cyber café to provide hands-on food service and restaurant training for youth in Southeast Washington, D.C. The project broke ground in June 2006. □



'CLEANING HOUSE'
Walter Lundy Jr., executive director of academic support services for DCPS

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: HARM TO CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION? *Part 2 of Two Part Series*

Many of the District's public high schools are undergoing a period of academic transition, one fueled by an expired No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law intended to raise student achievement in the core academics of math and reading while reducing achievement gaps through annual testing. The leader of this change for D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) is Chancellor Michelle Rhee, who has unveiled a restructuring plan for those city schools not making Annual Yearly Progress under NCLB. But as Chancellor Rhee moves forward, some observers are concerned that Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in some District schools are moving backwards. *By Arnesa A. Howell*

Moreover, with this latest wave of change, observers say Chancellor Rhee brought in a team of outside consultants to design new school schedules, and this group did not consult with the DCPS Career and Technical Education staff or program managers at the local school level to sufficiently consider the impact their decisions might have on existing programs.

"While this team made some much-needed changes to core academic schedules to positively impact the quality of teaching and

learning in DCPS high schools, they did not consider the downstream consequences of their decisions on existing—and successful—programs like the Academy of Construction and Design," says Beth Moore, executive director of the D.C. Students Construction Trades Foundation, which manages both the Cardozo Academy of Construction and Design (ACAD) and the D.C. Apprenticeship Academy. "As a result, students who enrolled in Cardozo or other schools where CTE programs are offered were pulled from the classes they came to that

Continued on page 2

In a recent interview before the passage of President Barack Obama's stimulus package, "Nightline" co-anchor Terry Moran asked the President if he wasn't being "too nice" in reaching out to Republicans unwilling to support the bill. The President responded that he was attempting to inject a bit of "civility" into the discussion—something that has been sorely missing in previous debates.

Civility!

By definition, civility is formal polite attention or expression—a concept that has almost been eliminated from today's public discourse. The courtesy of "niceness" has fallen by the wayside and has been labeled as weakness or naïveté, replaced by a "reality" that has been brewing for decades.

This reduction—and in some cases elimination—of civility did not take place overnight. Sadly, it's been a long process that was vividly brought to my attention almost 30 years ago by former national talk show host Phil Donahue.

During his final year as host of his daytime talk show, he visited several local talk shows (including my own "Morning Break," which appeared on the local CBS affiliate) to say goodbye to his faithful TV audience. It was during our interview that Donahue stated that it was perhaps time to leave the career he had loved for so many years because he didn't have it in him to do the types of programs that were becoming so popular on television—the Geraldo- and Jerry Springer-type shows—ones he described as being "confrontational and silly." Little did we, his adoring audience, know that his statement touched on the tip of the iceberg of a new era of warped reality, one shaped by 24/7 cameras and often hidden agendas that permitted—sad to say—too many people their 15 minutes of undeserved fame. Can anyone say, "Joe the Plumber?"

Who knew that one day shows like "Jerry Springer" and "Geraldo" would be considered "tame" when compared to the present genre of reality television that includes questionable programs like the "Bad Girls Club" or conservative talk shows on national and local radio? It seems that there is but one opinion heard on many of these radio programs—that of the host!

Today, civility is neither appreciated nor wanted. Will someone please tell me: When did cursing and fighting as seen on programs such as "Bad Girls Club" become good television? If this is what counts as today's entertainment, I'll pass!

Frankly, the "true reality" guiding television today is this: confrontation sells. And it is easier to attract an audience more anxious to

Continued on page 4



DCPS CENTRAL OFFICES

DCPS CHANCELLOR

Michelle Rhee has gained national attention for her approach to reforming the District's school system.

No Child *Continued from page 1*

school to attend. We all agree on the need to provide the highest quality learning experience to DCPS students, so it is unfortunate that existing programs that we can demonstrate meet those quality standards—where student achievement and graduation rates are higher than in the general school population—were not evaluated."

And once again, Rhee is facing scrutiny in a reform effort for which parents, students, school administrators, and educators are urging collaboration.

A New Vision

Chancellor Rhee did not return requests from *Pathways* for an interview by press time. However, Walter Lundy Jr., executive director of academic support services for DCPS, says he supports Rhee's course of action for restructuring, saying that the core curriculum is most important. And while maintaining that CTE is a "strong focus and priority" within the city's public school system, he is adamant that "CTE programs should never drive the primary decisions of the restruc-

tured high school."

"Students will take up to 30 courses in their high school career. They're only going to take three to four courses in CTE. The core should always be the predominant decision-maker because employers are saying that the basic competencies [reading, writing, critical thinking, and computation] are the most critical pieces," explains Lundy. He says it does no good to be scoring A's in CTE classes, but failing math and reading courses.

"CTE is supposed to be a supplemental program to prepare [students] for post secondary or the job force. If they can't read or write, they're not prepared for the job force," he adds.

And Lundy waves away worries that vocational education may again be falling by the wayside. He offers that "world class" CTE programs are on the horizon in restructured and newly built high schools as part of a two-year strategic plan

Continued on page 3



BETH MOORE (at right, beside ACAD Manager Shelly Morrison) with the D.C. Students Construction Trades Foundation points out that restructuring has consequences for the students.

JOBS TASK FORCE TO RAISE QUALITY OF LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

As the JOBS Coalition Ex-Offender Task Force moves forward in its discussion of job retention for returning citizens, the group has undertaken the task of developing proposed standards to ensure that this population receives “quality” life skills training that would better prepare them for the workforce. *By Arnesa A. Howell*

“D uring each of our meetings, comments have been made about the lack of comprehensive standards covering the training of individuals in life skills programs and the varying quality of training offered by some vendors,” explained Carol Randolph, adviser to the JOBS Coalition.

In the third meeting of the task force, Marcus Robinson with the Excel Institute was appointed chair of this working group charged with developing standards. The hope, according to those attending the Feb. 24 meeting at Holland & Knight, is to elevate the quality of training in life skills programs being offered to returning ex-offenders and other individuals.

“It is the goal of this ad hoc committee to develop a process somewhat akin to a ‘Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval,’ which will connote to future employers that the person bearing this ‘seal’ has successfully completed training in a quality program,” added Randolph, who heads the Branding and Marketing Committee, which will likely play a key role in the dissemination of these standards once adopted.

By raising the quality of such training programs, task force members said they are aiming to improve on-the-job performance that can keep individuals gainfully employed. For example, Robinson noted that developing strict standards and regimens could help eliminate negative behaviors, such as not returning to work after picking up a check.

After the meeting, Randolph told *Pathways* that among the issues the working group will likely be considering are whether all individuals should be required to complete high school or a GED program, and whether program training needs to be extended beyond the generally accepted

No Child *Continued from page 2*
by the Office of Academic Services that oversees the CTE programs within D.C. Public Schools. Consequently, even more changes can be expected for career and technical education programs.

Possibly as early as fall 2009, students citywide will be able to get on the CTE track as early as 9th grade, an endeavor Cardozo had attempted before being thwarted by the restructuring plan. And although having just over a year under his belt in his current position, Lundy admits he is dedicated to “cleaning house,” which includes scaling back or cutting out CTE programs that don’t meet the demands of the workforce for 2014.

“The numbers are high now, but they are going to be lower when I get done in the next month or two,” he says of CTE programs across the school system. “We want to be lean and mean and credible.”

Programs focusing on the areas of information and technology, hospitality/ management and

customer service, health care/health care systems, and construction and trades are the ones safest from the chopping block, Lundy says. The base-line budget is about \$2 million, a small portion of what will be needed to implement such sweeping changes.

The Future of NCLB

While aiming to improve the nation’s educational system from its core, NCLB could be in for a tune-up with the new Obama administration, as the law is up for reauthorization. At this point, the impact this would have on Rhee’s plan for D.C. schools—and its students—is uncertain. But this is clear: changes will continue at those academically struggling high schools facing overhauls to meet the objectives of NCLB. And in the midst of these fixes, CTE programs housed at these schools are likely to be impacted as well, whether as a direct result of restructuring efforts or not. □

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Continued on page 4

Finding Civility *Continued from page 2*

witness an in-your-face shouting match than one eager to listen to commentators calmly discussing both sides of an issue. I guess this is why programs that present two sides of an issue are still mainly seen or heard primarily on public access television and radio.

And while I am on the subject of the media, I cannot ignore the issue of television's influence on young people. This topic has long been a subject of controversy—with the media absolving itself of any wrongdoing by stating that it is just giving the public what it wants. In addition, the media's position continues to be that it is not its job to determine what children watch on television or listen to on the radio. That job, unfortunately, is left to oftentimes overworked parents who are now additionally stressed by trying to control their children's access to profanity-laced lyrics performed by the latest popular rapper.

So with all these factors at play, who is respon-

sible for the behavior of female students who became embroiled in a physical fight that took place recently at a local D.C. high school, allegedly over a hair weave issue? It's an event that could have been a segment on a badly produced reality show, a la *Bad Girls: Teen Edition*.

President Obama's campaign was based on change, with the mantra "Yes We Can!" And while the nation's attention is focused—as it should be—on the economy, I can only hope that: the President continues to inject civility into the process of political debate; that Congress, on both sides of the aisle, puts the good of the nation before ideological agendas; that the media finds reasons to produce programs that promote good behavior; and that young people begin to make polite conversation and communication, whether in person or online, a lasting trend.

What better time than now to bring back civility and end decades of "confrontation and silliness?" □

JOBS COALITION MISSION STATEMENT

We will work together to develop a long-term strategy that creates an environment where aspiring District residents will have unprecedented opportunity to succeed. We strive to create a fair and open system, supported by government, industry, employers and the education and faith-based communities, which seeks to properly train today's apprentices while making an unparalleled commitment to educating students and others not yet in the workforce.



JOBS Task Force *Continued from page 3*

three to 12 weeks to be effective in reducing or eliminating "bad behavior." As for what makes a *good* program, she said: "One trait would be the ability to offer potential employers an extended period during which the training program would remain connected to the newly-hired individuals, continuing to offer or extend any social services that may be needed in order for that person to remain gainfully employed." □

The next task force meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 31 at 8:30 a.m. at the Holland & Knight offices located at 2099 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. in Washington, D.C.

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JOBS COALITION

